

8 July 2021**Update on the Response to Rogue Door to
Door Fish Sellers**

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Purpose of the report

1. To update the Committee on the regional response to the important issue of Rogue Door to Door Fish Sellers.

Context

2. One of the most identifiable issues related to doorstep crime for Trading Standards services/Environmental Health services and also the Police Services, is the illegal activities of certain rogue individuals, going door to door targeting the most vulnerable and selling quantities of fish.
3. When buying fish from door to door salesmen, the consumer very often has no way of knowing how the fish have been stored and whether they are safe to eat. These type of businesses commonly use non-refrigerated vans, and there may be issues with the labelling, quality, and descriptions of the fish.
4. It can also be difficult to know whether door to door traders are registered as a food business operator, which is a legal requirement, or if they are adhering to all food safety and hygiene regulations.
5. There are also concerns that the traders may pressurise residents to buy more than they actually need. The best place to buy fish is from a reputable fishmonger at an established shop or stall or even with a trader with a regular pre-arranged round.
6. Following concerns about these illegal activities both locally and indeed national the Regional Investigations Team hosted by Redcar & Cleveland BC and funded by the National Trading Standards Board continues to undertake a complex investigation into these illegal activities.
7. In November 2019 officers reported to Committee on the conviction of a number of individuals involved in these type of rogue business activities. As a further update:

Case Study

8. Three mobile fish sellers who defrauded and knowingly misled elderly and vulnerable consumers out of £325,000 have been jailed.

9. Matthew Dudding, 32, Paul Dudding, 60, and Daniel Whitley, 44, all from County Durham, used aggressive sales practices to pressure more than 100 elderly victims out of buying excessive quantities of poor-quality fish at exorbitant prices.
10. The fraudsters deliberately targeted vulnerable and older people living in the North of England and the Midlands, including people with serious health conditions, in the belief they were less likely to question the sale or complain.
11. Some victims felt threatened in their own home if they challenged the price of the fish or couldn't afford to pay.
12. A 90-year-old victim described feeling bullied and pressurised into purchasing a large volume of fish, after one of the fraudsters entered her home uninvited. Despite agreeing to pay £56.00, she was charged £156.00 without her knowledge. The experience has left her feeling vulnerable.
13. A significant amount of the produce sold by the trio was such poor quality that it was unfit for human consumption. With food safety management procedures were often ignored, including monitoring the temperature for storing fish. One victim became unwell with vomiting and sickness within a few hours of eating the fish supplied by the defendants.
14. On sentencing at Teesside Crown Court, Judge Jonathan Carroll said the crooks were "*like wolves descending on weak, vulnerable and elderly*". He told the defendants there was a "*clear conclusion you are all crooks and fundamentally dishonest in how you behaved*".
15. Matthew Dudding, who was the principal beneficiary of the fraud, pleaded guilty to fraudulent trading. He was sentenced to five years, 11 months, and two weeks in prison.
16. Paul Dudding and Daniel Whitley pleaded guilty to contravening professional diligence, contrary to consumer protection legislation. They were sentenced to 13 months each
17. Lord Toby Harris, Chair of National Trading Standards, said: "*Elderly and vulnerable customers were viewed as soft and easy targets by these unscrupulous fraudsters who have, over a number of years, demonstrated a callous attitude towards their victims. "Those who fell for the scam were left feeling angry and ashamed. In addition to the dishonest practices demonstrated by these criminals, some of their crimes took place during a period when clear social distancing requirements were in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Those requirements were flagrantly ignored by the defendants in order to make money, with little, if any regard to the risks to their victims"*".

Recommendation

20. The Committee is asked to note the information.

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