

26 November 2015
Trading Standards and The Care Act 2014

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Purpose of the report

To inform the Committee of the contribution that the Trading Standards Services makes to safeguarding older and vulnerable people across Tyne and Wear.

Information and Analysis

1. The Care Act 2014 has consolidated existing care legislation and set out the local authority's responsibility for both older people and people who care for them. It sought to improve communication between all agencies that have a role to play in terms of safeguarding older and vulnerable people who may be at risk of harm – whether through deliberate act or by neglect. The definition of Adult Safeguarding is given as, 'working with adults with care and support needs to keep them safe from abuse or neglect'. Safeguarding is aimed at people with care and support needs who may be in vulnerable circumstances and at risk of abuse or neglect. Local services are required to work together to spot those at risk and take steps to protect them.
2. Trading Standards already works with partner agencies such as Adult Social Care, Community Safety, Public Health and the Police to protect older residents, but this Act also requires the services to evidence that they have acted on intelligence about Safeguarding issues; that they are making appropriate referrals and have processes, procedures and records to evidence that steps have been taken to protect those people at risk from abuse or neglect.
3. All trading standards services have sought to prioritise support for older and vulnerable people living in Tyne and Wear in a number of different ways.

Registered Trader Schemes

4. Some authorities have registered or trusted trader schemes that were initially set up in conjunction with community safety that provide an alternative to local residents, particularly older and vulnerable people, to the unsolicited call from itinerant traders offering home and garden maintenance-type services.

Doorstep Crime

5. 'Doorstep Crime' is the name given to fraudulent transactions that are perpetrated in people's own homes, often – but not always – by itinerant traders that arrive unsolicited 'on the doorstep' offering to sell a variety of goods or

services that might be particularly appealing to older residents. The initial approach might be an unsolicited call to the property or following an unsolicited telephone call. Whilst direct selling is perfectly legal, there are a minority of rogues who will seek to take advantage of vulnerable householders by selling goods (tarmac/block drive ways, mobility aids, double glazing, etc.) or services (garden maintenance, energy assessments) at inflated prices and following pressurised selling techniques.

6. Some of the doorstep incidents that authorities have dealt with include serious overcharging for roofing work and extortionate amounts charged for small garden work.
7. A key part of the Trading Standards response to doorstep crime is to raise awareness amongst older householders and their friends, neighbours, relatives and carers about the potential harm. Alert messages were issued as well as press releases to warn consumers about scams and rogue traders.

Scams

8. Raising awareness about the potential harm from 'scams' has formed part of trading standards activities for many years. Older residents in particular are targeted by scammers via telephone, mail and internet communication. Whilst most people recognise these communications for what they are, a significant minority are misled into parting with thousands of pounds. The scams come in a variety of guises. Some claim to be investment opportunities or lottery winnings, others offer goods or services. Relatively small sums of money are requested, but once successfully targeted the scammers will relentlessly pursue their victims some of whom become addicted.
9. The Care Act 2014 makes it clear that all those agencies that have a role in protecting older and vulnerable people from harm should have effective engagement mechanisms. The Trading Standards Services have regular engagement with Police and Community Safety colleagues and some attend the Safer Communities Portfolios. We should consider regular liaison with Adult Care regarding the Registered Trader Schemes and training has been provided for Adult Care managers about the role that trading standards staff play in supporting and seeking to prevent older people from becoming victims of scams. Discussions are also on-going with Public Health colleagues over areas of mutual interest such as supporting food-banks and protecting local people from loan-sharks

Recommendation

10. The Committee is asked to note the information.

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