

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**HIGHWAYS AND NEIGHBOURHOODS
CABINET MEMBER**

TRADING STANDARDS APPROVAL SCHEME

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To approve the creation of a Trading Standards Approval scheme to replace the current Motor Trade Partnership and Home Services Directory schemes.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Motor Trade Partnership (MTP)

2.1.1 The MTP was established in 1998. It aims to address rising complaint levels relating to motor trade businesses within North Lincolnshire.

2.1.2 Local motor traders were invited to join the partnership scheme for an annual payment. In return, Trading Standards carried out either annual or bi annual comprehensive audits on all aspects of the business. Part of the audit focused on addressing complaint issues. Members control the direction of the scheme based on a majority vote. Trading Standards act as chair to the partnership.

2.1.3 Members are generally supportive of the scheme. However, attendance at meetings is declining. This makes partnership led decisions relating to the scheme less inclusive.

2.2 Home Services Directory (HSD)

2.2.1 The HSD was originally conceived by Age Concern in York. The purpose is to help vulnerable consumers find a reputable local trader to carry out work on their home. In 2005 the Yorkshire & Humber Trading Standards Group developed the scheme further. The scheme now includes the ten surrounding local authorities. North Lincolnshire Council is now included.

2.2.2 Trading Standards comprehensively vet traders (including CRB, references and complaint levels) to ensure they meet and maintain the high standards of the scheme.

2.2.3 Currently there are only three surviving local authorities (LA's) participating in the scheme. These are York, North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire Councils.

2.3 Combining the Trading Standards Schemes

2.3.1 Combining the existing and any future schemes under one brand with a simple meaningful message, such as Trading Standards Approval, allows for the promotion of a strong local brand. The reduction in the number of differing schemes also assists consumers in understanding the purpose of the scheme.

2.3.2 A single Trading Standards Approval scheme will also allow for creating any future schemes under the same branding. This will help to reduce initial setup, artwork and running costs.

2.3.3 Combining the schemes will allow Trading Standards to take full control and provide direction to a single scheme.

2.3.4 The term 'approval' is widely used by other Trading Standards Services who operate similar schemes. Trading Standards feel confident that the checks and audits currently carried out for both the MTP and HSD are sufficiently robust to allow for the use of the term. These same checks and audits will apply under the new scheme.

2.3.5 The aim of both the HSD and the MTP is to protect consumers, increase confidence in the member businesses and reduce consumer detriment. Combining the schemes will maintain this ethos whilst allowing for future expansion.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 The Cabinet Member is asked to approve the creation of a North Lincolnshire Council Trading Standards Approval scheme. The option is to retain the existing schemes.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 Approval of the proposed Trading Standards Approval scheme will 'future-proof' current schemes and thereby create a template for any future schemes.

- 4.2 Combining both current schemes under one 'brand' that includes the words 'Trading Standards Approval' helps identify the purpose of the scheme more easily than the current scheme titles.
- 4.3 Rejection of the proposals will mean that the two existing schemes will continue to operate separately. This will limit the opportunity to create any future schemes and the range of enforcement work carried out in relation to on-line trading.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 Both current schemes require an annual fee from members. Switching to one scheme will have no increased financial impact. It is anticipated that in the long term, administration and promotional costs will reduce.
- 5.2 As the schemes are externally funded there are no additional costs to the council. Any additional minor set-up costs for the launch of the Approval scheme will be contained within the Trading Standards budget.

6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

- 6.1 Not applicable.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

- 7.1 There are no conflicts of interest to highlight.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the Cabinet Member approves the merger of existing schemes to form a new Trading Standards Approval scheme.

DIRECTOR OF PLACES

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None