

Briefing for upcoming adjournment debate on nuisance calls 26/10/15

This briefing has been prepared for MPs by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute ahead of the upcoming adjournment debate on nuisance calls on 26 October 2015.

Nuisance Calls: The facts

A recent study conducted by Angus, East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire trading standards services measured nuisance calls using call blocking technology. They found that:

- On average households receive 7 nuisance calls per month.
- Older and vulnerable individuals often receive 4 times as many nuisance calls as the average household (this amounts to an estimated 27 nuisance calls per month but in some instances the number is far higher).
- Types of nuisance calls include: PPI, loans and home improvement.

Nuisance calls often hide under assumed numbers which locate the number in the UK when they could come from the other side of the world.

Since January 2013 trading standards teams up and down the UK have recognised the benefits of call blocking technology and have installed call blockers in the homes of over 850 elderly and vulnerable residents.

In this period over 306,000 nuisance calls have been blocked. However, teams have noted a significant increase in the overall number of calls received by residents.

The latest figures indicate that individuals are now receiving an average of 53 nuisance calls a month (a 96% increase in just two years from 2013-2015).

Furthermore, when compared to a control group, clear and worrying evidence has emerged to suggest that elderly and vulnerable residents are being specifically targeted over other individuals.

Scam Calls: The underlying threat

The issue of nuisance calls has an underlying sinister side, scam calls. Scam calls differ from nuisance calls as they are conducted with the intention of defrauding the recipient.

The Angus, East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire study found that roughly 40% of calls to vulnerable consumers were nuisance calls and of these an estimated 10-15% were scam calls.

Scammers can often veer between friendly and highly aggressive tactics when approaching consumers and can cause vulnerable and elderly residents to fear picking up the phone.

These scam calls often co-ordinate with other forms of criminality such as mass marketing fraud and doorstep crime. In some instances details of the vulnerable are sold on to others for mail targeting.

Once someone has fallen victim to a scam they are often repeatedly victimised. This undermines not only their finances, but also their health and psychological well-being. This hampers their ability to live independently, putting additional

demands on social services and the NHS. Some individuals are hounded relentlessly until they are drained of all their savings or die. In such cases individual losses can often amount to six-figure monetary sums.

The trading standards response

Trading standards are the enforcing body charged with enforcement of consumer protection law that covers mis-selling and scams.

Where local resources allow, trading standards officers safeguard the vulnerable and disrupt criminals. This could include installing call blocking technology to block out nuisance and scam calls or attempting to shut the bank accounts of known scammers.

The trading standards situation

Investigations into scams are resource-intensive. Often scams are multinational, well concealed and under-reported by victims.

As with other local authority services, trading standards have had to adapt to austerity measures which have left services with [budgets half of what they were five years ago and staff numbers diminishing by an average of 40%](#) (and in some authorities up to 80%).

Criminals are known to adjust their activities to target areas with less trading standards enforcement.

With over 250 pieces of statutory legislation to enforce on everything from underage sales and animal welfare to rogue traders and product safety. Departments enforce against rogues while also attempting to guide legitimate business through regulation. However, resource pressure means trading standards are a department under pressure.

Trading standards are currently under review by the government and the LGA - we would encourage all parliamentarians to contribute to the reviews from their constituency experience of issues such as scams.

Who we are

The Chartered Trading Standards Institute is a professional membership organisation representing trading standards professionals in local authorities, the business and consumer sectors and in central government. We set standards and organise qualifications for the education of members and to improve trading standards practice. We provide information, evidence and policy advice to support national and local stakeholders.

CTSI exists to promote and protect the success of a modern vibrant economy, and to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of citizens by empowering consumers, encouraging honest business and targeting rogue traders.

Contact us

Want to know more? Get in touch with the policy team (policy@tsi.org.uk) who will be happy to provide you with further information or set up a face-to-face briefing.