North Lanarkshire Council
Report

Environment and Climate Change Committee

Does this report require to be approved? ☐ Yes ☒ No

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Trading Standards – doorstep crime and related scams – enforcement and prevention work

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Executive Summary

This report highlights the ongoing commitment of the Council's Trading Standards service to protecting vulnerable residents from doorstep crime. This is achieved through a combination of proactive measures, enforcement actions, and community engagement. These efforts aim to safeguard the overall health and wellbeing of our community.

The report details various activities undertaken, often in collaboration with external enforcement partners, to ensure the Council fulfils its statutory consumer protection duties related to doorstep crime and scams.

The success of these initiatives is evaluated using outcome-based models and reports, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation to emerging threats.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Environment and Climate Change Committee:

(1) Supports the Trading Standards preventative doorstep crime and scam initiatives; and

(2) Endorses the work plan to increase the availability of call blocking technology available to those potentially vulnerable to scam telephone calls.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority	Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities
Ambition statement	(14) Ensure the highest standards of public protection
Programme of Work	All Programmes of Work

1. Background

1.1 Trading Standards, in collaboration with Police Scotland, aims to proactively safeguard residents from doorstep crime incidents. Doorstep crime disproportionately affects vulnerable individuals due to factors such as age, infirmity, illness, disability, poverty or

bereavement. Criminals exploit these vulnerabilities by cold-calling and coercing victims into agreeing to unnecessary property repairs or maintenance work.

1.2 Nearly a decade ago, our Trading Standards service began working closely with Police Scotland colleagues to take robust enforcement action against organised crime groups involved in doorstep crime. We embedded a member of staff within a Police office, in the first initiative of its kind in Scotland: Collaboration - TS Today (cpl.co.uk)

1.3 Following the conclusion of Operation Doric, we have continued to collaborate with the Police to report criminal offences to the Crown and develop new preventative approaches to stop crimes before consumers become victims.

1.4 In many of the recorded doorstep crime incidents, large cash deposits have been taken by criminals for work which may be fraudulently deemed necessary, for the completion of sub-standard work, and even for works which are never undertaken. Doorstep criminals pressurise vulnerable consumers and exploit them for financial gain. They often persuade victims to withdraw cash from bank or building society accounts whilst they wait nearby to collect.

1.5 Elderly victims face severe consequences from doorstep crime. Research indicates a direct cost to Local Authorities, as victims often lose their confidence and independence, suffer from depression, and require intervention. This may include providing sheltered accommodation and Social Services support. Studies show that older victims experience faster health declines compared to non-victims of a similar age and are 2.4 times more likely to be in residential care within two years of being targeted.

1.6 The UK government's "Fraud Strategy: Stopping Scams and Protecting the Public" emphasises the need to empower citizens against scams. Of particular concern in this strategy document, published in 2023, is the statement that fraud now accounts for 40% of all crimes, making this issue critical.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fraud-strategy/fraud-strategy-stopping-scams-and-protecting-the-public

1.7 The Scottish Government's 'Scams prevention, awareness and enforcement strategy: 2021 to 2024' Scams prevention, awareness and enforcement strategy: 2021 to 2024 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) states that "scamming is a criminal offence" and that we must tackle scams in the same way that we do any other type of criminal activity, through enforcement, public education, resilience building and stakeholder coordination. The Plan for North Lanarkshire aims to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities through the highest level of public protection and by improving preventative approaches and supports at home.

1.8 Trading Standard have developed several proactive measures to better protect vulnerable residents, working in partnership with Police Scotland including:

- The introduction of designated No Cold Calling Zones (NCCZs)
- Provision of telephone call blocking technology to prevent scam and nuisance calls;
- Provision of video doorbells;
- Joint roaming patrols with Police Scotland across the area with a focus on doorstep crime hotspots;
- Shut out Scammers campaign;

- Awareness raising visits to supermarkets, post offices and town centres to raise awareness amongst staff of common scams (following visits in previous years to banks and building societies); and
- Responding to National Trading Standards scam referrals.

2. Report

2.1 Trading Standards have worked in partnership with Police Scotland for several years on reactive doorstep crime initiatives. Intelligence suggests that active crime groups have in the main moved out of North Lanarkshire, and this is thought to be as a direct result of the proactive and collaborative approach we have taken to doorstep crime in recent years.

2.2 Two joint investigations dating back to 2018-2019 resulted in 4 prolific doorstep crime offenders being found guilty of fraud and Trading Standards offences at the Sheriff Court in April 2024. The perpetrators failed to carry out works, falsely claimed Council grants were available for roofing works / free boilers and signed victims up to loans for thousands of pounds. All 4 offenders received substantial custodial sentences of between 18 and 36 months. Two cowboy builders jailed after string of frauds that included swindling one man out of £56k - Daily Record and Conmen jailed after Lanarkshire householders lose thousands of pounds in heating scam - Daily Record

2.3 A joint report to the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service has been submitted against a problem trader for both common law fraud and consumer protection from unfair trading offences. The consumer detriment is in excess of £91,000. In addition, the service is pursuing a civil Enforcement Order against the subject, to prohibit any future repeat behaviour.

2.4 On 8 August 2024, at Airdrie Sheriff Court, an Order was granted prohibiting a Cumbernauld car company and its Director from engaging in several unlawful trading practices. This action followed a significant number of complaints regarding the sale of unroadworthy vehicles, misleading statements in respect of vehicles, and refusal to provide consumers with their statutory right to redress when vehicle faults were identified. An Interim Enforcement Order had been obtained from the Sheriff Court in October 2023. The Enforcement Order places conditions on the business and its Director. The service will monitor compliance and pursue any breaches of the Order. Trading Standards take action against car dealer | North Lanarkshire Council

2.5 At the time of preparing this report, 40 areas across North Lanarkshire have been designated “No Cold Calling Zones” in Shotts, Cleland, Wishaw, Motherwell, New Stevenston, Newarthill, Uddingston, Bellshill, Salsburgh, Chapelhall, Airdrie, Cumbernauld, Coatbridge, Kilsyth and Moodiesburn. The zones include 33 out of 34 Retirement Housing Complexes run by North Lanarkshire Council and 7 out of 9 Bield Housing & Care run premises https://www.bield.co.uk/about-us/.

2.6 The zones have been identified as suitable for intensive intervention and joint patrols by Trading Standards and Police officers. The initiative is designed to allow residents to feel safer in their homes and help prevent doorstep crime. The zones follow requests and consultation with residents in areas considered to be doorstep crime hot spots

and/or with a high number of elderly residents. Residents in the NCCZs have received information on scam prevention and nuisance and scam telephone call blocking technology.

2.7 Scam telephone calls pose a significant threat to residents. Bogus callers impersonate a wide range of individuals and organisations including Council staff, charity collectors, meter readers, and financial institutions. Their goal is to obtain sensitive data, money, or other valuable assets. We work in partnership with trueCall to provide specialised call blocking technology designed for older and vulnerable individuals. The service has seen an increase in demand for call blockers with 50 new requests for units in the last 12 months.

2.8 North Lanarkshire Trading Standards has installed 158 trueCall call blocking units over the past 10 years, with 43 units installed in 2024 alone. These units aim to protect vulnerable residents from nuisance and scam phone calls. According to trueCall's data, the project is estimated to have prevented 323 scams over its lifetime, resulting in a benefit of £1,838,869 to both individuals and the public purse.

2.9 The call blocking units collect data on blocked calls, which is useful for law enforcement. It contributes to identifying patterns and trends in fraudulent calls. Units fitted identified that residents in the area receive 29 nuisance calls per month compared to the UK average of 9 per month. Additionally, 34% of incoming calls received by the units (and blocked) are nuisance and scam calls.

2.10 A survey of those residents recently provided with a scam and nuisance call blocking unit highlights a significant improvement in their sense of security and peace of mind. Many users expressed relief from the anxiety and worry caused by scam and nuisance calls. They appreciate the system's effectiveness in blocking unwanted calls, allowing them to answer the phone without fear. The service has made their lives more relaxed and comfortable. Overall, users are very pleased with the service, noting that it has made their daily lives easier and more peaceful. The compelling feedback can be viewed in appendix A.

2.11 Trading Standards team members monitor the call blocking devices to identify any unusual activity. A review of a recent referral from the family of a resident with Alzheimer's revealed that within the first three days of installation, the device successfully blocked 47 scam and nuisance calls. These calls originated from various phone numbers known for selling domestic appliance insurance, personal alarms, and healthcare services, as well as conducting surveys.

2.12 Video doorbells are provided by Trading Standards in very limited circumstances to vulnerable victims of doorstep crime where the provision is deemed likely to reduce the likelihood of reoccurrence. Funding for video doorbells was provided through the Community Partnership Team, Local Development Programme, Partnership Funding and the National Trading Standards team.

2.13 A complaint was received from the family of a vulnerable resident who received a cold call at their front door, to have their roof washed and sealed. The perpetrator had the consumer sign a waiver to have the work started right away. The resident in question had Alzheimer's and was terminally ill. The trader was known to our service and had a previous criminal conviction for fraud. A same-day joint visit was made by Trading

Standards and Police colleagues. The trader drove into the street but quickly left when they became aware of our presence at the locus. The family was supplied with a video doorbell to offer protection, and the Police agreed the household would receive an immediate response to any related 999 call and to carry out extra patrols in the area.

2.14 It was recognised that greater awareness was needed to alert members of the public to the most common scams. As part of the 'Shut out Scammers' campaign, Trading Standards staff attended town centre locations with Police Scotland. During the campaign, members of the public registered with the mailing preference service and telephone preference service and were offered trueCall telephone call blocking devices where this was identified as being of potential benefit.

2.15 A high number of gift voucher scams have been reported in the area. The scams have involved cold callers claiming to be from the Police, Local Authority, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency or HMRC, claiming their intended victim must pay a fine or tax. They instruct the member of the public receiving these calls to purchase gift cards and pass over the unique code as means of payment. Visits were made by the Police and Trading Standards to supermarkets and town centres to carry out an input to tellers, asking that they alert consumers to the fraud when buying a high value quantity of gift cards.

2.16 The National Trading Standards team make referrals to local authority Trading Standards services from mailing scams they are investigating or mail that they have intercepted. Some referrals include the return of cheques the consumer has sent when they have been duped. A visit is made to the consumer to return the cheque and provide scam prevention information, assessing if the consumer would benefit from further interventions. The service has received 20 scam referrals in this year.

3. Measures of success

3.1 No Cold Calling Zones will continue to be rolled out to doorstep crime hot spots and areas where evidence supports their introduction.

3.2 We have introduced an outcome based model for service response to complaints and interventions. The model details:

- the number and value of outcomes that prevent financial detriment,
- ensure legitimate businesses are not disadvantaged through unfair competition,
- bring business into compliance with applicable legislation,
- safeguard the health and wellbeing of consumers,
- prevent inappropriate access to restricted products, and
- reduce consumer exposure to unsafe products.

The outcome data in respect of preventing financial detriment and safeguarding the health and wellbeing of consumers will assist the service in monitoring the impact of our proactive measures.

3.3 TrueCall offers a report detailing the number of units installed, the number of nuisance calls prevented and an indicative figure of the reduced public service costs as a result of the scam and nuisance telephone calls blocked. The report details the top 10 nuisance and scam callers to residents in the area, providing valuable data for enforcement purposes and targeted publicity campaigns.

3.4 In January 2024, it was identified that Trading Standards had fitted 35 trueCall units per 100,000 North Lanarkshire population. The Scottish average is 105 units per

100,000 population. Increasing the availability of call blocking technology to potentially vulnerable residents was identified as a key priority for the service, and we will continue to deploy units as vulnerable residents are identified.

3.5 In August 2024, the service was awarded funding from the Community Partnership Team, Local Development Programme, Partnership Funding to purchase 40 call blocking units and 3 video doorbells. The service sourced an additional 50 units from the Society of Chief Trading Standards Officers and Trading Standards Scotland.

3.6 In the first 11 months of 2024, our service has fitted 43 call blocking units providing additional protection to residents vulnerable to scams. Appendix C illustrates that as of October 2024, the new units had blocked 2,446 calls and were estimated to have prevented 4 scams. Over the lifetime of the units, it is estimated that they will block 33,730 nuisance calls, of which 9,238 will have been scam calls. This is calculated to lead to a reduction of £149,456 in NHS, social care and Police costs.

3.7 A trueCall unit and associated information has been placed in the Tech flat (Housing and Social Work's Assistive Technology Team) which has generated further requests for the provision of this call blocking technology to residents.

3.8 Information on scams, no cold calling stickers and the availability of call blocking technology has been sent to 44 Sheltered Housing Complexes.

4. Supporting documentation

4.1. Appendix A - trueCall, call blocking technology survey response returns

4.2 Appendix B - table showing number of trueCall units fitted per 100,000 population

4.3 Appendix C - infographic detailing the impact of the 40 units fitted between January and October 2024.

Lyall Rennie
Chief Officer (Community Operations)

5. Impacts

5.1	**Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty** Does the report contain information that has an impact as a result of the Public Sector Equality Duty and/or Fairer Scotland Duty? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? If Yes, has an assessment been carried out and published on the council's website? https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/your-community/equalities/equality-and-fairer-scotland-duty-impact-assessments Yes ☐ No ☐
5.2	**Financial impact** Does the report contain any financial impacts? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, have all relevant financial impacts been discussed and agreed with Finance? Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.3	**HR policy impact** Does the report contain any HR policy or procedure impacts? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, have all relevant HR impacts been discussed and agreed with People Resources? Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.4	**Legal impact** Does the report contain any legal impacts (such as general legal matters, statutory considerations (including employment law considerations), or new legislation)? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, have all relevant legal impacts been discussed and agreed with Legal and Democratic? Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.5	**Data protection impact** Does the report / project / practice contain or involve the processing of personal data? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, is the processing of this personal data likely to result in a high risk to the data subject? Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, has a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) been carried out and e-mailed to dataprotection@northlan.gov.uk Yes ☐ No ☐
5.6	**Technology / Digital impact** Does the report contain information that has an impact on either technology, digital transformation, service redesign / business change processes, data management, or connectivity / broadband / Wi-Fi? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?

	Where the impact identifies a requirement for significant technology change, has an assessment been carried out (or is scheduled to be carried out) by the Enterprise Architecture Governance Group (EAGG)? Yes ☐ No ☐
5.7	**Environmental / Carbon impact** Does the report / project / practice contain information that has an impact on any environmental or carbon matters? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.8	**Communications impact** Does the report contain any information that has an impact on the council's communications activities? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.9	**Risk impact** Is there a risk impact? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the key risks and potential impacts, highlighting where the risk(s) are assessed and recorded (e.g. Corporate or Service or Project Risk Registers), and how they are managed?
5.10	**Armed Forces Covenant Duty** Does the report require to take due regard of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty (i.e. does it relate to healthcare, housing, or education services for in-Service or ex-Service personnel, or their families, or widow(er)s)? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the provision which has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the particular needs of the Armed Forces community to make sure that they do not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services.
5.11	**Children's rights and wellbeing impact** Does the report contain any information regarding any council activity, service delivery, policy, or plan that has an impact on children and young people up to the age of 18, or on a specific group of these? Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact and the provision that has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the relevant Articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). If Yes, has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) been carried out? Yes ☐ No ☐

Appendix A

Telephone call blocker survey results received from residents who have received a call blocker in 2024.

What impact has the call blocker had on your day to day life?

“I feel a lot safer, and don’t have to worry about scammers.”

“Don’t worry now when phone rings”

“Causes me less worry and anxiety when I hear the phone ring as I know it won’t be a cold call or scammer.”

“Peace of mind. Absolutely terrific”

“I have peace of mind”

“Made life more relaxed and comfortable. So grateful to the two ladies who installed the system… First class”

“As the moment no calls are getting through. The hall phone rings once but doesn’t go any further and the answer machine has been very quiet. This sits in the background, iv had no issues.”

“I am very pleased with the service, life is easier with the blocker.”

“Gives me peace of mind that scammers won’t get through”

“Its bliss I never get a nuisance call now”

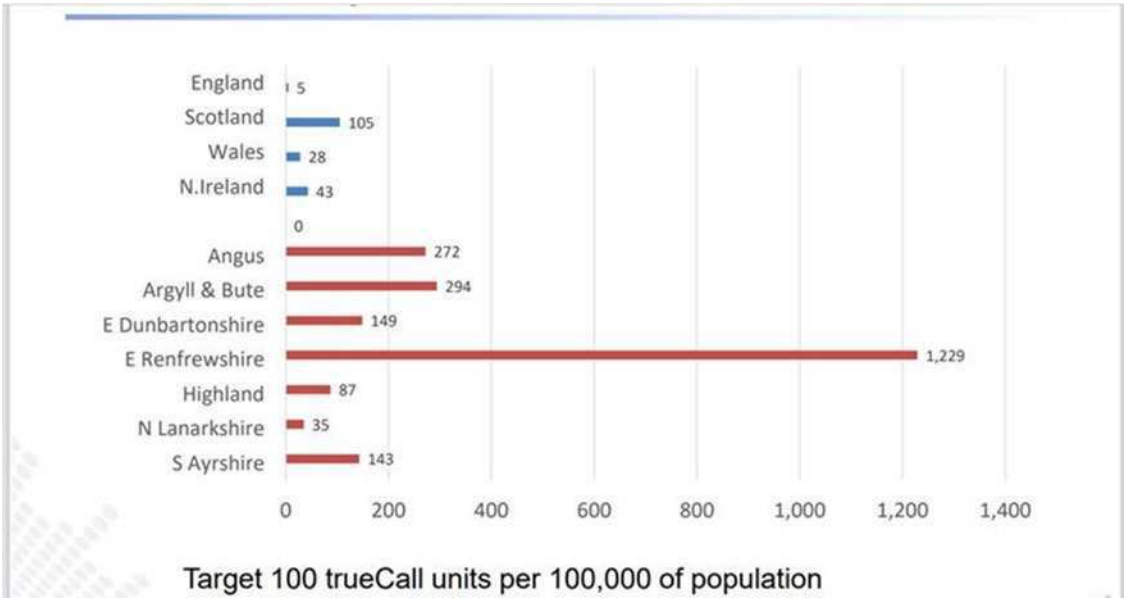
“The fact that it blocks these calls you can answer the phone knowing it’s a friend or family and you don’t get these calls that call you before 9am.”

“PEACE OF MIND knowing I will get peace from nuisance calls at all times of the day. Since I had the blocker I have had no bother with unwanted calls”

“I now answer phone calls”

Appendix B

The table below shows as of January 2024, NLC had fitted 35 Truecall units per 100,000 population. We seek to increase this number in 2024/25 and beyond to proactively protect North Lanarkshire residents.



Appendix C - infographic detailing the impact of the 40 units fitted between January and October 2024.