

To:	PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT (PROTECTIVE SERVICES) SUB-COMMITTEE	Subject:	NATIONAL CONSUMER WEEK: 18 TH – 22 ND OCTOBER 2004
From:	DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT		
Date:	5 TH OCTOBER 2004	Ref:	^

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of North Lanarkshire Council initiatives in support of National Consumer Week: 18th – 22nd October 2004.

2. Background

- 2.1 Over the last thirteen years the Trading Standards Institute has annually promoted National Consumer Week with the main aim of raising consumer awareness on a range of issues that impact on their daily lives.
- 2.2 The theme of this year's National Consumer Week is " **Get Real – say no!** " and will focus on a variety of scams that take advantage of unsuspecting consumers. These include postal and telephone scams, counterfeiting and food scams.

3. Considerations

- 3.1 The Council's Trading Standards Service receives hundreds of enquiries and complaints each year about postal and telephone scams so this will be the focus of the department's activities for this year's campaign. Other advice agencies such as the local Citizens Advice Bureaux also report an increasing rise in the number of "scam" complaints received.
- 3.2 The scams involved include prize draws where the "winners" have to phone a premium rate telephone number to claim their prize, those involving timeshare or holiday club presentations, and Home Working scams, which seek to exploit vulnerable unemployed people.
- 3.3 As well as consumers, sole traders and small businesses often fall victim to bogus schemes that charge fees for unnecessary registration for Data Protection and Health & Safety purposes. Scams that target consumers and businesses are often run on a global scale, with recent high profile cases being the Canadian Lottery scam that targets the elderly with more than 80% of its victims being over 65 years of age, and the Nigerian 419 frauds, often sent by e-mail, that require the victims to give bank account details in order to transfer money out of the country.
- 3.4 The campaign in North Lanarkshire will consist of a series of posters produced by the Trading Standards service backed up with consumer leaflets provided by the Office of Fair Trading. The first poster will raise consumers' awareness of current scams in operation and how they are targeted. The second poster will provide practical advice on how to identify a scam and what steps to take on receipt of a postal or telephone scam. The third poster will advertise organisations that in addition to the Trading Standards service can help with various aspects of scams, such as the mail and telephone preference services to cut down the amount of unsolicited material and calls received, as well as other regulatory partners such as the Office of Fair Trading and the Advertising Standards Authority.
- 3.5 The national launch of the week's activities takes place at the DTI in London attended by the Consumer Minister, Gerry Sutcliffe MP. In addition to national press releases issued by the Trading Standards Institute, local releases highlighting the issues being focused on by North Lanarkshire Council will be sent to local media organisations.

4. **Corporate Considerations**

4.1 There are no legal, financial or property implications in this report and the recommendations are consistent with policy.

5. **Recommendations**

5.1 The sub-committee are asked to note the contents of this report.

C. Morgan

DP David M. Porch
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

For further information please contact David Roderick, Trading Standards Manager on 01236 616415.