

Report to: Lead Member for Community Services

Date of meeting: 14 December 2016

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: East Sussex Against Scams Partnership

Purpose: It is proposed that Trading Standards and the Safer Communities team will establish an East Sussex Against Scams Partnership. The partnership will raise awareness about the different forms of mass marketing scams currently being experienced by many East Sussex residents and will help protect people in vulnerable circumstances against scams.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Agree to the establishment of the East Sussex Against Scams Partnership; and**
 - (2) Agree that East Sussex County Council become one of the flagship “Friends Against Scams” local authorities and that Members are invited to become an East Sussex “Scambassador” as part of the Friends Against Scams network.**
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1 Background Information

1.1 The East Sussex Against Scams Partnership (‘ESASP’) project will be supported by the National Trading Standards (‘NTS’) Scams Team, as East Sussex is a pilot area for ‘Against Scams’ Partnerships. The NTS Scams Team is funded by central government and is hosted by East Sussex County Council.

1.2 Scams cause victims to part with their money and personal details by intimidating them or promising cash, prizes, services and fictitious high returns on investments. Scams are fraud.

1.3 A mass marketing scam is a misleading or deceptive business practice where the person receives an unsolicited or uninvited contact (e.g. by letter, email, phone or advertisement) and false promises are made to con the victim out of money. Each year scams cause approximately between £5 and £10 Billion worth of detriment to UK consumers. Scams also have a substantial impact on economies and markets by undermining consumer trust and confidence in legitimate businesses.

1.4 The NTS Scams Team has recently selected East Sussex as a pilot area to roll out the ESASP initiative. The project is being led by the NTS Scams Team and East Sussex Trading Standards with assistance from the Safer Communities Team. There are two other partnerships in the UK: one in the Isle of Wight and the other in Wales, and more will follow. The ESASP is planned to be the flagship pilot project, one that can be rolled out to other UK local authorities with whom the NTS Scams Team already has partnership agreements in place.

1.5 The aim of the ESASP is to bring together organisations from the public and private sectors, the voluntary sector, community groups and residents. It aims, over the next six months, to raise a concerted and heightened awareness about the different sorts of mass marketing scams being experienced by many East Sussex residents and to help protect people in vulnerable circumstances against scams. Each organisation will be asked to sign up to a Charter, indicating their willingness to work together in partnership. The Charter commitments are at appendix 1 and the Charter to be signed is at appendix 2. The ESASP will work with Charter partners to share key messages and avoid duplication. The partnership will then be imbedded in organisations into the future.

1.6 The ESASP also aims to reach people in vulnerable circumstances, especially those who are the most socially isolated. To help facilitate this, ESCC Trading Standards will use several tools, which are also being used nationally, to help deliver and support the work of Charter partner member organisations. A major feature of the ESASP will be to deliver “Friends Against Scams” training. This is designed to inspire action in partners, highlight the scale of the scams problem, change the perceptions of why people fall for scams and make scams a community, regional and national topic. Further information can be found at www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk

1.7 Another key element of ESASP will be to encourage MPs, Councillors, and community leaders to become ‘Scambassadors’ as part of the Friends Against Scams initiative. ‘Scambassadors’ will help raise

the profile of the problem of fraud and financial scams at a local and national level. The initiative aims to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams by empowering communities to take a stand against scams.

1.8 The project supports the County Council's priorities of keeping vulnerable people safe and helping people help themselves.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 As part of the Sussex Older People's Commission "Big Conversation", 6,160 concerns were captured. One of older people's main concerns in Sussex was Scams and Nuisance calls.

2.2 East Sussex has an elderly age profile with 23% of the population of pensionable age in 2010, compared to 17% in England and Wales. Nearly 12% of the population is aged 75+, compared to 8% regionally and nationally. Most of the projected population growth (2010-2026) is in post-retirement age groups. The over 65s may represent 31% of the total population in 2026 and the very elderly aged 75+ may account for 17% of the population.

2.3 The average scam victim is 75 years old. Isolation and lack of communication with family and friends or lack of reporting channels can make older people more vulnerable to scams and fraud. A lack of physical mobility and other disabilities can also increase vulnerability. The ESASP aims to build resilience and prevent people from becoming victims in the future. If scams are not reduced in the County, the County Council could see a huge burden being placed on the local authority to support these victims of fraud and financial abuse. There are intrinsic links with Adult Social Care in this field. The Care Act requires local authorities to consider what can be done to prevent, delay or reduce individuals social care needs now and in the future. If people are financially abused within their own homes e.g. people are scammed, local authorities are required to make enquiries. If someone is defrauded in their own home they are 2.5 times more likely to go into residential care within a year than their non-defrauded neighbours.

Community Safety Issues

2.4 Research by Age UK estimates that 53% of people aged 65 plus have been targeted by criminal scammers. Of the East Sussex population, this would mean circa 72,093 people.

2.5 Financial losses, however, do not fully reflect all of the costs that scam victims often bear. For some victims, the risks extend well beyond loss of personal savings to include physical risks, loss of their homes, depression, and even contemplated, attempted, or actual suicide.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 The ESASP is a community pledge asking East Sussex residents to take action in helping to protect people in the County from scams. Scams are fraud and fraud is a crime. Organisations and groups will be asked to sign up to a Charter as partners and help deliver initiatives to "take a stand against scams". The problem is immense and it needs a multi-agency approach to tackle it, and to protect our communities, specifically consumers who are made vulnerable by their circumstances.

3.2 The Lead Member is therefore recommended to agree that East Sussex County Council become one of the flagship "Friends Against Scams" local authorities and that Members are invited to become an East Sussex "Scambassador" as part of the Friends Against Scams network.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

* Current population 544,100. It is estimated that a quarter of these people are over 65, which equates to 136,025. 53% of 136,025 is 76,093. www.eastsussexinfofigures.org.uk