

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee
<b>DATE</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> September 2024
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Update on the Progress in the Establishing of a Trusted Trader Scheme in Aberdeen City
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	CORS/24/241
<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Andy MacDonald
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Vikki Cuthbert
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Graeme Paton
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1.2 and 1.1.5

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks to update Elected Members on the progress made by officers of the Trading Standards Service (“the Service”) in establishing the Aberdeen City Trusted Trader Scheme (“the Scheme”), the plan for which was set out in Committee Report Number RES/23/272 and approved by this Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Notes the contents of the report and the progress made and welcomes the forthcoming launch of the Scheme.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The current position is that the Scheme will launch during the Scottish Trusted Trader Week scheduled for 1-7<sup>th</sup> September 2024, organised by the Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS) Trader Directory Services (TDS), and coordinated through the Media Team in Aberdeen City Council (ACC). There are 18 city businesses who have been vetted, or are going through the vetting process, which will form the initial tranche of members.
- 3.2 Elected Members will recall from the original committee report referenced above that the purpose of the Scheme was to provide city residents with access to a list of city-based home maintenance and improvement businesses who are vetted by Trading Standards to confirm that they are aware of their rights and responsibilities under consumer protection and trading standards law, and those of the consumer. The intention is to promote good business practice; increase consumer confidence through access to a list of trusted traders in a

market that has been, and continues to be, a difficult one for consumers to navigate; and with the benefit to member businesses of an increase in market size and business opportunities.

- 3.3 After permission was granted by this Committee in September 2023, an officer was tasked with leading on this project. Most of their time has been spent communicating the purpose and benefits of the Scheme to the business community to encourage membership. This has involved either direct contacts with businesses via email; targeted Social Media campaigns; seeking the support of trade associations such as the Federation of Small Businesses in advising their members; and garnering the support of colleagues at Business Gateway, the City Growth Team, and Police Scotland to do likewise.
- 3.4 Officers have also sought to coordinate the development and promotion of the ACC Scheme with colleagues at Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils who are developing their own Schemes, along with SCOTSS. This is to ensure consistent methods of engagement with and vetting of businesses, along with advertising materials and publicity.
- 3.5 As anticipated, it can be difficult to attract members as there is no history of such a Scheme in Aberdeen. Officers have also found that several businesses have full order books for months in advance, and so have no compelling business reason to join the Scheme. That said, officers will continue to explore opportunities to publicise the Scheme with a view to attracting new members. We will do so in concert with the Media Team, TS colleagues locally and across Scotland, in concert with SCOTSS.
- 3.6 The home improvements market is still an issue for consumers and businesses alike. This remains one of the most complained about sectors in the local economy. On average, Trading Standards receives approximately 190 complaints per year from consumers, with approximately 90 complaints having been received this calendar year already. The long-term hope is that this Scheme will have a positive impact on these complaint levels.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The financial implications for this Service remain the same as was set out in the original report: there is no financial burden on the TS budget in terms of maintaining and supporting the Scheme.
- 4.2 The only change was that we expanded the offer of reduced membership fee from the first 10 applicants to the first 20 for their first year. This was in the hope it would encourage more businesses to sign up, which has encouraged an additional 8 businesses to sign up. This means foregoing £1400 in income instead of the original £700.
- 4.3 A total of 18 city businesses have joined, or are in the process of joining, the Scheme. This leaves two reduced rate memberships still to be taken up after which the Service will generate £70 income for each new member.

4.4 Although there is no financial commitment from the TS budget, use can be made of the income generated from membership fees to promote the Scheme locally to increase membership whilst also working with SCOTSS to secure external sources of funding promotion, which they have been successful at doing in the past.

## 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 A contract with TDS to provide the platform and back-office administration of the Scheme remains in place.

## 6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## 7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	No significant risks identified			<b>N/A</b>
<b>Compliance</b>	No significant risks identified			<b>N/A</b>
<b>Operational</b>	The risk is the scheme creates a demand for TS officer time.	This has already proven to be the case as the officer leading the development of the Scheme has dedicated more and more of their time over the past year on task of setting up the Scheme. However, it is anticipated that once the Scheme is in place, the only requirement on officer time will be the process of vetting new applicants. As with the impending launch, it is	<b>L</b>	<b>Yes</b>

		anticipated that TDS and SCOTSS will lead on the promotion of the Scheme Scotland-wide.		
<b>Financial</b>	The risk is the scheme does not become self-sustaining	There is no financial commitment from the ACC Trading Standards budget to support the Scheme, only officer time in terms of vetting new members. As has been the case in other authorities, Schemes have become self-sustaining.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Reputational</b>	The risk of the scheme not being used by either traders or residents, and the scheme fails.	This was identified as a risk in the original report, and it remains so. Officers continue to work with partners to ensure the Scheme is widely publicised. The launch of the ACC Scheme and those of other new members during the week 1-7 <sup>th</sup> September 2024 will help promote the Scheme to city residents and businesses. No such TS-led Scheme has failed in Scotland.	L	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	No significant risks identified			<b>N/A</b>

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b><a href="#">Council Delivery Plan 2024</a></b>	
<b>Impact of Report</b>	
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>  <b><a href="#">Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</a></b>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement:</p> <p>Seek to make Aberdeen Safer City by promoting confidence in the householder when they are choosing a tradesman to work in their home.</p>
<b><a href="#">Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</a></b>	

<p>Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>As was stated in the original report, the impact of this Scheme meets the overarching ends of the Prosperous Economy section of the LOIP because it is primarily aimed at increasing consumer confidence in a problematic sector of the economy. If this is successful, it should increase market demand and increase business opportunities for reputable businesses, particularly those who are members of the scheme.</p> <p>The scheme empowers consumers to make informed decisions when contracting with traders within the home improvements sector by providing access to a list of local businesses who have been vetted by Trading Standards. This vetting process promotes regulatory compliance so that member businesses are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities when contracting with customers.</p> <p>With higher levels of consumer confidence comes increased demand and more business opportunities for scheme members.</p> <p>These consumer informed choices will also reduce the risk of having to carry out equally expensive remedial action where a job goes wrong. And if it does, contracting with a Scheme member means that the consumer has a dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism to fall back on.</p> <p>With better information on reliable, legally compliant businesses, consumers will be more confident in entering a market they may previously have been wary of.</p>
<p>Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p><b>Regional and City Strategies</b></p>	<p>Trusted Trader Schemes were promoted as a scam prevention tool in the Scottish Government's (SG) 2021 Scams prevention, awareness, and enforcement strategy.  <a href="https://www.gov.scot/publications/scams-prevention-awareness-enforcement-strategy-2021-2024/">https://www.gov.scot/publications/scams-prevention-awareness-enforcement-strategy-2021-2024/</a>          Developing an ACC Scheme adds to the network in Scotland and helps achieve the aims of the SG's scam prevention strategy.</p>

## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	The original Integrated Impact Assessment relating to the establishing of the Scheme in Aberdeen City has been reviewed and no changes are required.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	A DPIA assessment was completed for the original report submitted in September 2023.
<b>Other</b>	None

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Original Committee Report of 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023: [Establishing a Trusted Trader Scheme in Aberdeen, Report Number RES/23/272](#)

## 11. APPENDICES

11.1 None

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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