

Meeting:	Safer Bromley Partnership Strategic Group
Date:	2nd December 2013
Subject:	Safeguarding Vulnerable Scam Victims
Author:	Rob Vale, Head of Trading Standards & Community Safety.

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report introduces to the Safer Bromley Partnership the work being carried out by Bromley Trading Standards to identify victims of mass marketing fraud.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The Strategic Group is asked to:

- Note and comment on the information contained within the report
- Consider the options available for taking the project forward

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Bromley Trading Standards has a responsibility to protect older or otherwise vulnerable consumers from unfair trading practices. This includes protection from mass marketing scams and fraud.

3.2 Earlier this year Bromley Trading Standards signed up to a new intelligence hub which was formed to utilise intelligence from key partners, predominantly the Metropolitan Police, to identify potential serial victims of scam mail and provide a referral mechanism for these victims to get advice and support from appropriate agencies.

3.3 The hub, known as the Scams Hub, and funded by the National Trading Standards Board, was set up to co-ordinate a joint strategy for sharing information and tackling mass marketing scams. This project is of national interest and benefits both consumers and trading standards services across the country. In essence, details of victims that have fallen foul of scams have been shared with local agencies to either further investigations, or educate and protect the victim from further scams or financial abuse.

3.4 In September this year the hub sent through the first batch of data detailing residents in the borough whose names and addresses featured on a list used by mass marketing fraudsters. The list contained around 100 names and addresses of residents living in the BR1 and BR2 post code areas. This information was shared with colleagues in Adult

Safeguarding services who identified consumers who were already known to social services, or were deceased or moved to residential care. Duplications and out of borough residents left a target list of 70 consumers who were then visited by officers from Trading Standards. If no reply was received at the door, an information pack was left and then a further personal follow up visit was made by an officer leading on the project.

3.5 Results of the first wave of visits:

3.6 Of the 70 residents on the list there remains 9 who have not yet been contacted by the authority (following two visits by officers). 33 residents have admitted to sending money overseas to suspected mass marketing frauds but no longer send money, or had done so once or twice only and were not considered to be at risk

3.7 We have identified 5 chronic victims of mass marketing frauds – 2 of these were known to us. A telephone call was received from a resident who informed us that the previous owner had died but for months they had received a huge amount of scam mail and there appeared little doubt that the previous occupier, an older woman, had been a scam target. Another resident informed us that scam mail still arrives for the previous owner who they described as 'an old lady'. Enquiries are on going in an attempt to contact her son as the new occupier believes she is still alive but has no forwarding address.

3.8 An email was received from a resident following our visit who informed us that a large amount of scam mail was still being received at the address and it had been established when the previous owner had died that bags of scam mail and trinket type items had been discovered and destroyed.

3.9 A further address supplied also related to a known chronic scam victim, now in a care home. It is known that she lost at least £50,000 to lottery scammers from Spain.

3.10 Under current investigation is one consumer that appears to be a chronic scam victim with a huge number of letters being stored at her home. At present we have initially persuaded her that she is being targeted and she has responded positively. She has stated that due to our involvement she may not now be forced to sell her home. She has no immediate family. We suspect her losses run into thousands of pounds.

3.11 A further scam victim was discovered that had lost over £28,000.00 to timeshare scammers and had also been tempted to send responses to various scam letters. The man is in his seventies and now realises he has been scammed but follow up work will involve several further revisits.

3.12 A further chronic scam victim died two months before our visit. His wife explained that this only came to light after his death as they had separate bank accounts. He was in his eighties and she said he was always sending off responses to scam mail and receiving trinkets and in one example a year's supply of pasta. It is thought he sent off thousands of pounds over the last two years. His wife is now receiving threatening letters and the scam mail continues. She is in her eighties as was her late husband.

3.13 A number of the residents have been referred to Adult Safeguarding. Although not all scam victims, officers were concerned for their well being and considered a referral to be an appropriate precaution.

3.14 Four consumers spoken to are actively involved in various groups and charity work and were pleased to be able to look out for potential scam victims as were two residential wardens.

3.15 All residents who are identified as victims of scams or at risk of mass marketing fraud will be supported. As a result of the this project Trading Standards has nominated as officer as a single point of contact for adult safeguarding referrals who will be responsible for setting up a formal referral protocol which will recommend safeguarding strategies aimed at identifying a support network for victims of scams. Other partners will include local police, voluntary groups and Age UK.

3.16 The Scams Hub has recently sent through a further list of Bromley residents believed to be targets for mass marketing fraud. It contains 400 names and addresses. This project has high resource implications but there is limited support available from the Scams Hub project team. However, in order that the victims can be contacted over a short period it is proposed to seek support from Bromley Police to assist in the initial visits.