

**Decision Maker:** PUBLIC PROTECTION AND SAFETY PORTFOLIO HOLDER  
For Pre-decision scrutiny by the Public Protection and Safety PDS Committee on

**Date:** 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

**Title:** APPROVED TRADER SCHEME PARTNERSHIP

**Contact Officer:** Rob Vale, Trading Standards Manager  
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**Chief Officer:** Nigel Davies, Executive Director of Environment & Community Services

**Ward:** All

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1. Reason for report

This report informs Members of the proposals by Trading Standards and Community Safety teams to engage with a national approved trader scheme to replace the existing Safer Bromley Trader Register which has been operating within the borough since 2009.

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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The Portfolio Holder is asked to consider and approve the proposals, in particular the use of the Bromley logo with the Checkatrade advertising material.

### Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy:
  2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council Safer Bromley Supporting Independence Vibrant, Thriving Town Centres:
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### Financial

1. Cost of proposal: No Cost:
  2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
  3. Budget head/performance centre: Public Protection and Community Safety
  4. Total current budget for this head: £2.178m
  5. Source of funding: Existing revenue budget 2014/15
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### Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional):
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
- 

### Legal

1. Legal Requirement: None:
  2. Call-in: Applicable Not Applicable: Further Details
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### Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): 55,000 current
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### Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

### 3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 In 2009, the Safer Bromley Partnership entered into an agreement with the Trader Register in order to provide local consumers in need of property repairs a list of suitable local Bromley based traders. The register advertised traders who had made a commitment to excellent standards of work and customer service.
- 3.2 The register was free for local traders, who could join on-line by submitting three references which were processed by the Community Safety Team. One of the references would be verified and other checks were made against in house data, as well as any claims of membership to other trade associations. The Trader Register was not an approval scheme as it relied on feedback from consumers to promote the quality and reliability of the trader's work.
- 3.3 The Safer Bromley Partnership Trader Register has been very successful over the past few years with over 100 local businesses signed up to the scheme. Regular promotion of the scheme was taking place through Trading Standards and Community Safety events.
- 3.4 The Council was charged £1,250 per annum for the maintenance of the website [www.traderregister.org.uk](http://www.traderregister.org.uk) and the Bromley site received on average 400 hits per month.
- 3.5 Following the reduction in resources within the Community Safety Team earlier this year priorities were re-assessed and as a result the Trader Register was reviewed. A decision was made that the scheme was not being administered to its full potential. For example, longstanding members had not been re-visited for follow up references and the feedback from customers was not being used regularly. The scheme was not receiving the support necessary in order that both businesses and consumers could fully benefit from it and accordingly a decision was made cease the partnership and to look for other options.
- 3.6 A number of local authorities were already looking to replace local schemes and in depth market research was being carried out across the south east to explore options for partnership working with a market leader. Discussions with colleagues across the south east of England prompted a meeting with Checkatrade.

#### Checkatrade

- 3.7 Checkatrade is a free service to consumers offering a directory of businesses that have been vetted and performance monitored. Checks include:
- Must have a fixed abode and proof that they live/work at that abode
  - Will be interviewed at their company office or personal home
  - Must supply 6-10 customer references
  - Must supply photo identification (driving licence or passport)
  - Must have Public Liability Insurance and evidence of
  - Must have qualifications if government regulations require them and evidence of
  - Will agree to have a Credit check undertaken (limited companies)
  - Must consent to allowing us to contact TS if requested
  - Must sign an Indemnity form if the trade sub contracts work
  - Members must sign a code of conduct
- 3.8 Results of the vetting are made known to customers and businesses agree to be monitored. The business has been operating since 1998. Retention rate of members stands at 90% and the company is committed to tackling dishonesty among tradesmen.
- 3.9 Cost of membership is £600 per year and for this fee the business will receive a profile page on the main Checkatrade web site, with the facility to upload pictures of their work, company

logo, team photographs, what type of work they do and where. In addition they are able to benefit from Checkatrade advertising, a dedicated customer services support team, marketing materials and are encouraged to contribute to the development of the scheme.

- 3.10 All current members of the Trader Register will be invited to join Checkatrade for a six month period for £275. On renewal, traders will have the choice to continue the level of membership at a cost of £619 or a lower affiliate membership for £250. Enhanced membership includes inclusion in a local directory. There is no cost to the local authority.

#### Partnership working with Bromley

- 3.11 The key objective of this proposal is to provide an enhanced level of protection for consumers and a network of reliable traders in the Bromley borough. There are currently 50 Bromley traders registered with Checkatrade who until now have not been fully vetted by trading standards.

- 3.12 The partnership will ensure enhanced vetting is conducted by Trading Standards on any Bromley business currently registered with Checkatrade, and any future applications. This will include:

- Search on the national consumer complaints database
- Search on 3 intelligence databases
- Identify high risk areas and check applicant's compliance
- Search on local database
- Search on prosecution register
- Open Source checks

- 3.13 Traders who opt for the full "Trading Standards Approved" status will also have to agree to a criminal records check.

- 3.14 The final decision on acceptance to the scheme will remain with Trading Standards. The intelligence officer within the team will be able to recommend approval or refusal, or in appropriate cases removal from the scheme if there is information which suggests the trader is unsuitable. This may include behaviour which is dishonest, misleading or otherwise unfair. It may also include an unreasonable number of complaints made against the trader in a given period. Conditions of membership will include a promise not to demand cash payments, not to be aggressive and not to cold call.

- 3.15 There will be a demand on our intelligence function in order that all existing Bromley members of Checkatrade can be fully vetted. Additional demands will be monitored and there is scope to consider a reasonable charge in the future if it is appropriate. This is currently being explored by a number of authorities who have signed up to the scheme.

- 3.16 The checks we conduct are vital in order that we can build our own intelligence picture and will enable us as a service to focus on rogue and non-compliant traders with the confidence to refer consumers to a choice of reliable businesses. We currently conduct around 90 intelligence checks on Bromley businesses per year for other authorities. If the numbers for new businesses to the Checkatrade scheme exceed this annual figure then we will review the partnership and consider charging a reasonable fee for additional officer time.

- 3.17 In the past 12 months there have been 54,536 consumer searches for traders in Bromley on the Checkatrade website, and between Aug and Sep 2014 there were 7,768 searches.

**4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 This proposal will contribute to ensuring consumers in Bromley have access to reliable builders and other service providers.

**5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this proposal.

5.2 Should the intelligence checks exceed the current level, Officers will review the partnership negotiate with Checkatrade with a view to charge a fee for each check conducted by the authority.

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	Legal and Personnel Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	[Title of document and date]