

## COMMUNITY WATCHDOG SCHEME

### ANNUAL REPORT

2010 – 2011

#### **Community Development Team**

For the last 12 months staffing within the Community Development Team has remained largely the same. The team is made up of Nicola Wilson, Community Development Officer and Sarah Byrne, Community Liaison Officer.

From 1 March 2010, Vikki Clayton worked as part of the team whilst completing the Business Administration Apprenticeship Scheme. Vikki's apprenticeship came to an end on 28 February 2011 and she was eligible to look for permanent employment either within Staffordshire County Council as a redeployee or within other organisations. Vikki has been an asset to the team, and not only has she fulfilled all that has been asked and expected of her within the office environment, but she has completed a level 2 NVQ in Business Administration and a technical certificate, amongst other qualifications, to prove competency.

#### **Watchdog Scheme Membership**

2010/2011 has seen massive growth in the membership of the Watchdog Scheme. Within less than 12 months numbers have increased from 614 to **793** Watchdogs, with more interest being received every day. The team set the Watchdogs the task of helping to increase membership numbers to 700 by the end of 2010 and this target was reached easily.

A push in the advertising and marketing of the Scheme has generated lots of interest, along with the Scheme helping to launch the Volunteer Staffordshire Campaign during 2010. Involvement in this campaign has helped increase numbers, particularly within staff groups. The table below shows the number of Watchdogs in each area, and how we maintain contact with them.

<b>Watchdogs by Area</b>	<b>Contact by Email</b>	<b>Contact by Post</b>	<b>Total</b>
Staffordshire Moorlands	41	42	<b>83</b>
Newcastle	67	63	<b>130</b>
Cannock	29	63	<b>92</b>
Lichfield	32	38	<b>70</b>
Stafford	134	57	<b>191</b>
South Staffordshire	31	34	<b>65</b>
Tamworth	35	38	<b>73</b>
East Staffordshire	43	46	<b>89</b>

The team have set a further goal of reaching 1000 members by October. This is to coincide with the Scheme's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday on 3 October 2011.

Work is underway to encourage sheltered housing schemes and social landlords who operate within Staffordshire to receive Watchdog Alerts, along with Citizens Advice, Icare (Meals on Wheels provider) and Community Development workers from other organisations, particularly those who work with BME and other hard to reach groups.

### **Forums**

During 2010 / 2011 the Scheme once again held quarterly Forums in each of the eight districts. Attendance fluctuated throughout the county, and work has been carried out to try and address why some areas have seen a decrease in numbers.

Throughout 2010, Watchdogs received information sessions regarding the Sale of Goods Act, Package Travel Regulations, timeshare and holiday insurance. For the January 2011 Forum, the Community Safety Officers attended each district to provide an update on the work they carry out regarding under age sales and test purchasing. An emphasis was also put on encouraging Watchdogs to report intelligence regarding under age and proxy sales. Feedback received from Watchdogs regarding these updates was very positive, with 99% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Forums were useful with 97% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the information provided was relevant.

As part of ongoing improvements to ensure Watchdogs receive timely feedback, a standing item has been added on to the Forum agenda for staff to feedback regarding recent prosecutions. All of the information given has already been released into the public domain via press release. This has been met with positive feedback from Watchdogs who detailed this as one of the barriers to moving the Scheme forward during the 2008 evaluation carried out by Staffordshire University.

Following on from this, a request was received from a Watchdog to be kept informed of issues affecting the rest of County. A query/outcome matrix has been developed following the January 2011 Forums, which details all queries raised at all Forums, along with the outcome. This will be distributed to all Watchdogs who receive minutes. This also serves as an 'action sheet' for staff, to ensure that all queries are dealt with timeously and that Watchdogs receive adequate feedback.

Requests have been received from Watchdogs who would like further information about Loan Sharks and Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act. The Scheme already has strong links with the Illegal Money Lending Team within Birmingham Trading Standards and an information session around illegal money lending is to be incorporated into the July 2011 Forums. Staff within Social Care and Health have contacted the team with a view to promoting the Staffordshire Cares agenda at the April 2011 Forums.

Issues around equality and diversity should also be addressed during the 2011 Forums, following complaints regarding hate crime made by a member of the Moorlands Forum. The complaints relate to comments made before a Forum between two Watchdogs, which were overheard by a third. A formal complaint was made regarding two separate incidents and the decision was taken to try and resolve these using the Scheme Code of Conduct and Constitution. An extra ordinary meeting of the Countywide Watchdog Forum (CWWF) was called to address these issues with support from an Equalities Lead for the Directorate. The CWWF found that neither incident constituted a hate crime or hate incident, and should be dealt with by way of a training or information session to raise awareness around various

issues regarding equality and diversity. A training package has been researched by Becky Murphy, who at the time was the Equalities lead. Due to cost implications, it is uncertain whether any of these packages could be used, however the team have a duty of care to ensure this is carried through and so are investigating whether an informal information session could be facilitated in-house.

The Moorlands Forum has suffered a number of problems over recent years, however, these have not stopped this from becoming a strong and vibrant Forum which is often one of the best attended meetings around the county. The Watchdogs who attend all remain extremely supportive and dedicated to the Scheme.

Planning is currently in the very early stages looking at the possibility of an event to celebrate the Watchdog Schemes 10<sup>th</sup> birthday in October. It is proposed that an afternoon tea style event take place in County Buildings, with attendance by the lead cabinet member and the Chairman of the County Council to thank Watchdogs for their continuing support and dedication to the Scheme. It is also proposed that Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government be invited to address the group regarding the Coalition Governments plans for 'Big Society' and how the Watchdog Scheme can fit into this vision. It is envisaged that there will be an opportunity for Watchdogs to feedback about their time with the Scheme and how they see it developing in the future.

If it goes ahead, the celebration event will take the place of the October Forums in order to keep costs to a minimum.

During late 2010 the Team were asked to look at the venues used for the Forums and whether these were cost effective. There was also a request made to make better use of the County's libraries. The team were also approached by Watchdogs in Lichfield who noted that dwindling numbers in attendance at that Forum may be due to the location of the venue, which is situated out of the town centre. A venue was found in a more central location, and the first meeting there saw a 75% increase in the number of attendees.

From January 2011, venue changes were made in those districts where it was deemed to be most cost effective. The venues in each district are as follows:

<b>District</b>	<b>Old Venue</b>	<b>New Venue</b>
Staffordshire Moorlands	St Edwards Church	N/A
Newcastle	Chesterton Salvation Army	Newcastle Library (subject to approval from the Forum)
Cannock	Mill Street Methodist Church	Cannock Community Fire Station
Lichfield	Curborough Community Centre	Lichfield CVS
Stafford	Gatehouse Theatre / Rising Brook Baptist Church	County Buildings

South Staffordshire	Codsall Village Hall	Codsall Community Fire Station / Wombourne Library
Tamworth	Tamyouth Centre	N/A
East Staffordshire	Burton Caribbean Association	N/A

Venues in Staffordshire Moorlands, Tamworth and East Staffs have remained the same. The majority of the Moorlands Forum have expressed their wishes to remain at St Edwards Church following various concerns that this venue is not inclusive. Tamyouth Centre make no charge to the Scheme for the use of their facilities, and Burton Caribbean Association is a venue representative of the local community in Burton and ensures people from BME communities are included. Burton Library are unable to accommodate the Watchdog Forum on a Friday afternoon due to other, long standing, bookings.

### Alerts

Throughout this period, the Community Development Team have sent out **83** alerts via the Watchdog network. These range from warnings about pets for sale scams, bogus callers operating in the South of the county, the closure of a local furniture store and rogue traders operating in Staffordshire, amongst many other topics.

In November, the team sent out an alert advising residents of the changes to the EnergySure Code of Practice, which states that energy company cold callers will *'not call on any premises where there is a message prominently displayed in the form of a visible, clearly worded and unambiguous notice indicating that a consumer does not wish to receive uninvited doorstep sales callers'*. The alert offered residents a free 'we say no to all doorstep callers' card. We have received numerous phone calls asking for cards, and have used this as an opportunity to sign people up to receive regular alerts.

During 2010 work was undertaken to invite all Doctors Surgeries and Health Centres within Staffordshire to receive Alerts as it was felt that these were excellent outlets to display information. Letters were sent out, explaining about the Watchdog Scheme and what our aims are. Although the initial response was positive, work still needs to be carried out to ensure all surgeries and health centres in Staffordshire have been given the opportunity to receive alerts.

### Events and Talks

Once again the Watchdog Scheme has attended numerous community events arranged by other organisations as a way of raising awareness of the Scheme and the Service as a whole. These total **86** for the year, the majority of which have been supported by Watchdogs. Events attended include:

International Older Persons Day, Sloppy Slippers events in Lichfield and South Staffs, Kings Bromley Show, County Neighbourhood Watch Conference and RESPECT Action Days for Stafford and Rural Homes residents.

Sarah and Nicola have continued with a programme of free talks offered to local community groups. These have totalled **64** over the course of the year, and bookings have already been received for 2011 / 2012.

Organisations visited include Women's Institute, Probus, Homestart Mums Groups, Community Partnerships, Towns Womens Guild and carers groups.

Through carrying out talks and attending events, it is estimated that approximately 3500 local residents have had contact with the Watchdog Scheme and received information.

Through links made at the Learning Disability Partnership Board talks have also been carried out at Chase Day Service to their carers group and service user advocacy group. The service user group are all vulnerable adults, many of whom live alone in their local community. It was interesting to hear their views of how they are treated by doorstep callers and the talk followed the layout of the easy words and pictures document produced by Trading Standards entitled Doorstep Selling, Know Your Rights. It is hoped that work will continue with these groups to reinforce the messages put forward during the initial sessions.

### **Electric Blanket Testing**

The ever popular annual electric blanket testing campaign returned in 2010 and once again saw the Watchdog Scheme working in partnership with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service. 20 sessions took place countywide with 38 drop off points for those people unable to attend a testing venue. This saw 1856 blankets tested over 17 days, with an average failure rate of 38.5%

38 volunteers helped out at testing venues during the campaign, volunteering a total of 184 hours.

Compared to 2009 there was a 16% drop in the total number of blankets tested, however, the number of blankets tested in 2009 was 28% higher than those tested in 2008. This increase was attributed to Moorlands Area Command placing hourly adverts on local radio throughout their testing days in 2009. Central Risk Reduction asked that this not happen in 2010 to ensure the Analysts were able to meet with demand.

The main drop on numbers of blankets tested was seen in Stafford and concerns have been raised by Watchdogs regarding two testing days being held in the Stafford town area, and not spreading around the district. In previous years, testing has taken place in Stafford and in either Stone, Eccleshall or Gnosall. The Analysts also noted that Stafford Fire Station saw a significant number of old, therefore direct failure, blankets. New venues always seem to catch higher numbers of older blankets, despite there having been drop off points or testing venues in those areas in previous years.

### **No Cold Calling Zones**

Staffordshire currently has 68 No Cold Calling Zones, located in the Staffordshire Moorlands, Newcastle, Stafford, Cannock and Tamworth districts. Work has been undertaken to map these zones in relation to population of older people and crime rates. A separate report has been produced looking at and evaluating the effectiveness of the No Cold Calling Zones in Staffordshire.

As part of the work carried out in the Staffordshire Moorlands setting up No Cold Calling Zones, Nicola has recently been awarded The Divisional Commanders Team Achievement Award recognising her part in supporting the work of The Moorlands Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership.

### **Food Enforcement**

Following numerous complaints from Watchdogs in the Tamworth area, a food enforcement session was conducted during the summer of 2010. This was to try and identify any shops who were selling food items passed use by dates. A total of 15 shops were visited by Enforcement Officers and Watchdogs. Only one shop sold one item that was out of date, with a second shop refusing to sell three items that were out of date. All premises were advised accordingly. It is anticipated that food enforcement sessions will continue.

## **Projects**

- Cash for Gold Survey  
Watchdogs were asked to complete a questionnaire about any experiences they may have had using Cash for Gold services to form part of a regional survey being conducted by Centsa. Unfortunately the response to the survey was quite poor, however this was taken to mean that only a small number of Watchdogs had used these services.
- Food Labelling Legibility Survey  
During 2010 the Team received a complaint from a Watchdog who had purchased a ready meal from Sainsburys, but found the cooking instructions difficult to read, due to the size of the font and colour of print used. This was fed back at the Food Co-ordination Group meeting, who suggested there may be a piece of work that Watchdogs could be involved in looking at the legibility of food labels. Throughout July, August and September 2010 any interested Watchdogs were asked to collect what they felt were bad examples of food labelling. It was felt that this could have some impact on the Mandatory Food Information legislation currently being discussed at European level, which will require a font height of a minimum of 1.2mm and also details requirements regarding font and background colours.

### **Results**

29 labels were sent in. 19 of which were sent in as bad examples and the remaining 10 good examples. Two of the 19 bad labels submitted did comply with the FSA Clear Labelling Guidance and the draft Mandatory Food Information legislation. The remaining 17 labels did not comply with the FSA Clear Labelling Guidance or the draft Mandatory Food Information legislation. Eight of the 10 'good' examples also did not comply with the FSA Clear labelling Guidance or the draft Mandatory Food Information legislation.

### **Outcomes**

Two products submitted were felt to be in breach of current legislation due to legibility. These were John West Tuna Chunks – text very hard to read, gold on shiny green background and Pilgrims Choice Extra Mature Cheddar – text printed on speckled background making it hard to read. Home Authority Referrals were made for both of these products.

A report of the findings was submitted to Defra, who will be lobbying for the change in legislation on behalf of the UK and a press release was sent out to raise awareness of the work carried out by Watchdogs and the impact this may have in influencing a change of legislation.

## **Work with Young People**

The team were invited to hold sessions at the Friary School in Lichfield as part of their Citizenship lessons. Information was provided about the Sale of Goods Act and

Counterfeit Goods. The team have been invited back to the school to hold similar sessions during 2011.

In June 2010 the team assisted the Community Safety Team in providing a quiz about Trading Standards at the South Staffs Safety Quiz. The quiz took on the form of an information session around age restricted sales and toy safety, followed by a short paper based question and answer session.

The team once again supported the Staffordshire Heats of Consumer Challenge Quiz, with assistance from Watchdogs who act as 'helpers' for each team. Five schools entered the 2010/2011 heat which saw Two Rivers from Tamworth win. They will go on to represent Staffordshire in the National Final in Bournemouth in June 2011.

### **Library Surgeries**

During early 2010 work was undertaken to introduce monthly or bi-monthly library surgeries around the county, as way of raising awareness of the work of Trading Standards within local communities. These have continued throughout 2010/2011, and are now almost solely organised and run by Watchdogs, with minimal support and input from Sarah. Some libraries have proved more successful than others and this is mainly due to footfall within particular libraries, and the amount of advertising libraries are willing to carry out on behalf of the Watchdogs. On the whole, the Library Service has been supportive of the surgeries, which in some areas has helped them to thrive. There are currently 9 regular surgeries that take place. These are in the following areas:

- Stafford
- Stone
- Eccleshall
- Tamworth
- Penkridge
- Lichfield
- Burntwood
- Loggerheads
- Shenstone

With another four surgeries due to be set up during 2011 in:

- Brewood
- Codsall
- Uttoxeter
- Burton

### **Volunteer Staffordshire Campaign**

During 2010 the Scheme helped to launch the Volunteer Staffordshire Campaign. The year-long campaign put the spotlight on local people across Staffordshire making a real community contribution, and encouraged others to do their bit for where they live. The Scheme used the campaign as an opportunity to raise awareness amongst staff and proved useful in recruiting new members.

### **Other Authorities**

The Scheme has received interest from Lancashire and Suffolk looking to set up their own Watchdog Schemes. This is great news as it allows us to build links with other authorities and widen the network of information sharing to outside of the county.

### **Rogue Trader Day**

Operation Rogue Trader took place on 30 June 2010. The Watchdog Scheme was asked to raise awareness amongst local communities regarding the targeted activity within Staffordshire. During the afternoon of Rogue Trader Day, so as not to compromise the operation, an email alert was sent out to 285 Watchdogs to raise awareness of the day. This included information about what had been happening, why this was taking place, useful contacts and where to get more information. In turn Watchdogs shared this information with their local communities (for example in Loggerheads, the information was forwarded to over 600 local residents on their Community News distribution list).

This was seen as a very efficient way of communicating with local residents, and hopefully any further communication regarding operations of this nature will be promoted in the same way.

### **New Database**

During early 2010 the Watchdog Scheme commissioned Staffordshire ICT to design and build a new database to store the contact information of Watchdogs. This was with a view to further ensuring the security of people's personal information, along with making it easier to communicate with Watchdogs.

The work was completed during the summer of 2010 and the new database enables the Team to email large numbers of people with just the click of a button, thus saving time and making it much easier to send out batches of information. Work has also been undertaken with current Watchdogs to encourage them, where possible, to receive information via email in order to save time and money. We have seen a large increase in the number of people wishing to receive information via email, and work is ongoing to try and increase this further.

The new database also allows the Team to specifically target Watchdogs on a district by district basis and also to run regular reports on membership figures. The Team are also able to keep a regular check on those Watchdogs who require up to date CRB checks by running monthly reports, thus enabling us to ensure that checks do not lapse, and Watchdogs are covered for the work they do for us.

### **Digital Switchover/Census**

Work is currently underway to ensure that Staffordshire residents are kept up to date with any news regarding the upcoming Digital Switchover and Census.

Watchdogs have been briefed about both at Forums and Alerts were distributed regarding the Census, due to take place on 27 March, which will be followed with a reminder alert and a press release through the Corporate Communications Team.

The Watchdogs will be informed via alert and press release about the Digital Switchover, as and when each district is affected. A factsheet has been produced which has been distributed to all Watchdogs, and on their request has also been sent to libraries for inclusion in their community folder.

The Scheme has been contacted by the Community Council of Staffordshire to recruit volunteers in the Newcastle and Moorlands areas to help out with their digital outreach project, which aims to ensure that vulnerable members of communities are aware and kept up to date with information about the imminent changes. Work is currently underway to recruit interested Watchdogs to take part in this project.

### **New Ways of Communicating Information**

As part of the Annual Report for 2009/2010, it was reported that a blog had been set up as a new way of distributing Watchdog Alerts. Unfortunately, due to changes in the Council IT system, the blog could not be supported and has, for the time being, had to be put on hold.

Work is currently taking place with Corporate Communications to set up a regular Twitter feed for the Scheme, thus enabling us to send alerts out quicker, to people who may not necessarily be Watchdogs, but who will benefit from seeing the information. It is hoped this will in turn boost membership numbers, and allow us contact with hard to reach groups, such as 25 – 45 year olds and those people who may not feel comfortable signing up to part of a Scheme such as ours. Staffordshire Council currently has 1322 followers on Twitter, who wouldn't otherwise receive the information, sent out in Watchdog alerts.

### **Summary**

2010/2011 has been another extremely busy year for the Watchdogs and the Community Development Team. Volunteer hours for this 12 month period have totalled a massive 1,859.5.

Work is currently underway to ensure an equally successful year for 2011/2012. It is anticipated that membership of the Scheme will continue to increase, especially with the launch of a regular Twitter feed, hopefully reaching different groups within local communities.

Work is ongoing to ensure that social housing providers and GP surgeries/health centres are all given the opportunity to receive regular Watchdog Alerts. The potential for signing up the county's Post Offices as Watchdogs is also being investigated.

Links have been made with the Community Council of Staffordshire and it is anticipated that the Scheme can work alongside their Village Agents project to ensure communities and vulnerable people are kept well informed.

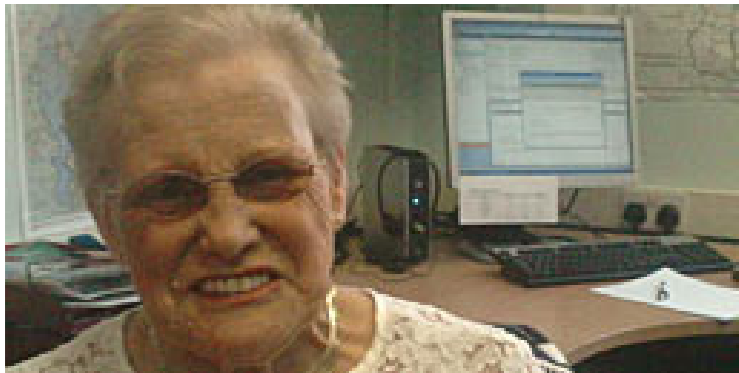
Overleaf are a couple of photos showing some of the work the Scheme has been involved in during the last 12 months.



The winning team from Consumer Challenge Quiz



Watchdogs helping out at Consumer Challenge Quiz



Honra, Chair of the Staffordshire Moorlands Watchdog Forum, helping to launch the Volunteer Staffordshire Campaign.



Nicola, with Watchdog Patrick and Councillor Ben Adams helping to launch the Volunteer Staffordshire Campaign.