

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF CABINET MEMBER – HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES**

**5 April 2016**

Report of the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

**USE OF CALL BLOCKERS TO PREVENT FRAUDULENT UNSOLICITED  
TELEPHONE CALLS**

- (1) **Purpose of Report** To update the Cabinet Member on the deployment of telephone Call Blockers to prevent fraudulent and nuisance phone calls to vulnerable local residents.
- (2) **Information and Analysis** Local intelligence suggests that older people living on their own, in their own home, are more susceptible to being taken advantage of by rogue traders. The most insidious rogue trader is the one that calls, unannounced, on the doorstep; purportedly to offer helpful services, but in reality looking for any opportunity to take advantage. Not all doorstep traders are rogues, but many local people have fallen victim to the unscrupulous trader who provides no or false paperwork and thus is difficult to trace. Often the starting point to gain access to potential victims is an unsolicited phone call. In addition, many householders are bombarded with unwanted telephone calls offering a bewildering range of ‘opportunities’. Examples of the types of nuisance and fraudulent telephone calls and the potential risks are provided in Appendix 1 to this report.

Call Blockers are designed to filter out unwanted calls but enabling the householder to maintain contact with family, friends and local services. They work by allowing the telephone subscriber (or a friend, relative or carer) to programme the telephone numbers of family and friends so that these calls are connected as normal. Other trusted callers can be given a two digit pin number to enable them also to connect. All other callers receive one of two pre-recorded messages depending on the type of blocker. Either the caller is simply informed that the telephone subscriber does not take unsolicited calls. Alternatively, some products have the facility to have a recorded message inviting the caller to contact a carer, for example, a family member or other trusted person – via an alternative telephone number.

The Trading Standards Division received Cabinet Member approval in September 2013 (Minute No. 35/13 refers) to provide Call Blockers to local vulnerable people. Working in partnership with Adult Care, Police, Community Safety and now Derbyshire Scam Watch colleagues, the Division has installed

36 Call Blockers throughout the County. Collectively, the Call Blockers have prevented in excess of 11,000 scam telephone calls over a period of 2 years. The following data has been provided by True Call who provide the Call Blocker technology:

- Since first installation, the Call Blockers have monitored some 23,473 incoming telephone calls of which 11,696, or 50%, were assessed as 'nuisance calls'.
- 21% of the nuisance calls were international calls; 10% the caller information was unavailable and 19% of the calls the caller information was withheld.
- Five householders were receiving 39 nuisance calls per month, over five times the national average.
- During the month of December 2015, 122 calls 'in the middle of the night' were prevented.
- Calls blocked included those from fraudulent accident claims, lifestyle surveys and energy switchers, 37 calls from a particular number associated with a Microsoft scam were also blocked.

Examples of local people who have had a Call Blocker installed is provided in Appendix 2. The technology appears to be effective and feedback from recipients and their family and friends remains very positive. The Division retains a small stock of Call Blockers and will continue to support Derbyshire Scam Watch and the Trusted Trader Scheme, both of which are designed to prevent local people from becoming victim of rogue traders.

(3) **Financial Considerations** There are no financial considerations associated with this report.

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity; and environmental, health, human resources, property and transport considerations.

(4) **Key Decision** No.

(5) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(6) **Background Papers** Held on file within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department. Officer contact details – Robert Taylour, extension 39830.

(7) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION** That the Cabinet Member notes the report.

**Mike Ashworth**  
**Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment**

## Appendix 1 – Types of nuisance/fraudulent telephone calls

### Examples of nuisance calls

- Finance – debt consolidation, insurance, pensions, Personal Protective Insurance (PPI), personal injury claims, etc.
- Energy – switching gas/electricity supplier, solar panels, insulation, etc.
- Home improvement – double glazing, kitchens, bathrooms, loft conversion, etc.
- Survey/Market research.
- Scams – e.g. Computer virus scam, Courier scam, BT scam.
- Debt collection calls.
- Telecoms – switching landline and mobile phone provider.
- Mobility aids, health products, wills, etc.

There is a spectrum of harm from annoyance to the risk of being persuaded into paying for goods and services that are not wanted and at worst, being conned into parting with money for non-existent goods and services. Nuisance calls can be broadly categorised as follows:

### Categories of nuisance call

Call type	Problems
Legitimate calls	Legitimate products are being sold in a legitimate way over the phone, maybe offering you a better deal on your gas or electricity.
Mis-selling calls	There is a legitimate product, but the sales techniques used are illegitimate. This may involve misleading or exaggerated claims for the product or service, a 'hard sell' approach, the targeting and exploitation of vulnerable consumers, etc. There is some financial risk or unnecessary inconvenience involved for the consumer.
Scam calls	There is no legitimate product or service, the whole purpose of the approach is to deceive in order to get money or personal information from you.

## Appendix 2 – Examples of local residents in receipt of a Call Blocker

**Mrs A**, who is 72 years old, receives nuisance phone calls 2 or 3 times a day. Previously, the scammers had somehow got hold of her bank card details and asked to confirm the security number and expiry date over the phone. Luckily she realised that this could be a scam and blocked her card with her bank so no monies were taken. But since this episode the companies concerned constantly call her and are harassing her into giving her number out. She does have Caller ID, however, but has poor eyesight and does not always see who is calling.

- Amber Valley Community Safety Referral

**Mr B**, who is 90 years old, (an Arnhem veteran) received a 'cold call' on 15 November 2013 and agreed to purchase a pro call blocker for £79.99 and paid by debit card. He cannot remember doing this and so cannot remember if he was advised of the 7 day cooling off period. Complaint reference: C238363

- Complaint initially made by his daughter

**Ms C**, who is 58 years old with learning disabilities, has told her care worker that she gets telesales calls and is scared by them because she does not know how to tell them she does not want to buy anything.

- Adult Care referral

**Mrs D**, who is 90 years old and has dementia, keeps receiving phone calls from different mobility companies and they offer her scooter, stair lifts, baths, and other disability aids. Some mobility companies have called at her home and demonstrated the goods, however, she has no money. C240183

- Complaint initially made by her daughter

**Mr E**, who is 75 years old with Alzheimer's, gets a lot of unwanted telephone calls and has been caught out by a will service and has lost £3,500 which the Police are investigating. He has also been the victim of rogue traders previously.

- Adult Care referral

**Mrs F**, who is 94 years old, received a call from a scammer stating they were from Telecommunications and understood she had been receiving silent and nuisance calls. They advised that for £85.00 they would send a device that would screen these calls and that they would only charge £1.50 for each call screened. She provided her bank card details. C238990

- The Consumer's son contacted Adult Care – referral received; he also contacted Citizens Advice Consumer Service.

**Ms G**, who is 91 years old and disabled, was mis-sold a chair five years ago. Little could be done due to time limits. She was advised she would be a candidate for trueCall to prevent further telesale calls. C241929

- received initial complaint from Councillor Bennett on behalf of the Consumer.

**Mrs H** has dementia and, whilst away for a couple of days, had 20 answerphone messages from telesales companies. She has fallen victim in the past to solar panel salespeople and paid £2,000 for them.

- Received details from her daughter via Adult Care

**Mrs I**, who is 83 years old, received information from Dundee Trading Standards that the Consumer may be a money mule for a money scam. The Consumer sent £6,300 in cash and cheques to various address in the UK – recipients of money linked to this scam all elderly and vulnerable. C245081

- Referral received from Dundee Trading Standards