

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**MEETING WITH CABINET MEMBER, HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES****30 September 2014****Report of the Strategic Director, Health and Communities****TACKLING NUISANCE CALLS****1 Purpose of the report:**

To inform the Cabinet Member, Health and Communities of the stress caused to some elderly local residents from nuisance calls and the availability of products to block such calls. To seek the Cabinet Member's approval to use £5,000 'Proceeds of Crime' monies to pay for a pool of such call blockers.

2 Information and analysis:

2.1 For most people the telephone is a key communication tool and for many elderly people living on their own an essential way of keeping in touch. However, some people are plagued by 'nuisance calls' which can be anything from an intrusive call from an over-eager sales person to a scammer seeking to trick people into parting with money. There are ways – such as the Telephone Preference Service¹ – of limiting unwanted calls, but unfortunately the rogue operators – often based abroad – will ignore such schemes. However, there are relatively new products now available on the market, that are proving to help block unwanted calls whilst allowing the telephone subscriber to keep in touch with friends and family.

2.2 Examples of nuisance calls are as follows:

- 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

¹ Visit the following website for further information about the Telephone Preference Service:
<http://www.tpsonline.org.uk/tps/index.html>

- Telecoms – switching landline and mobile phone provider
- Mobility aids, health products, wills, etc.

2.3 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. |

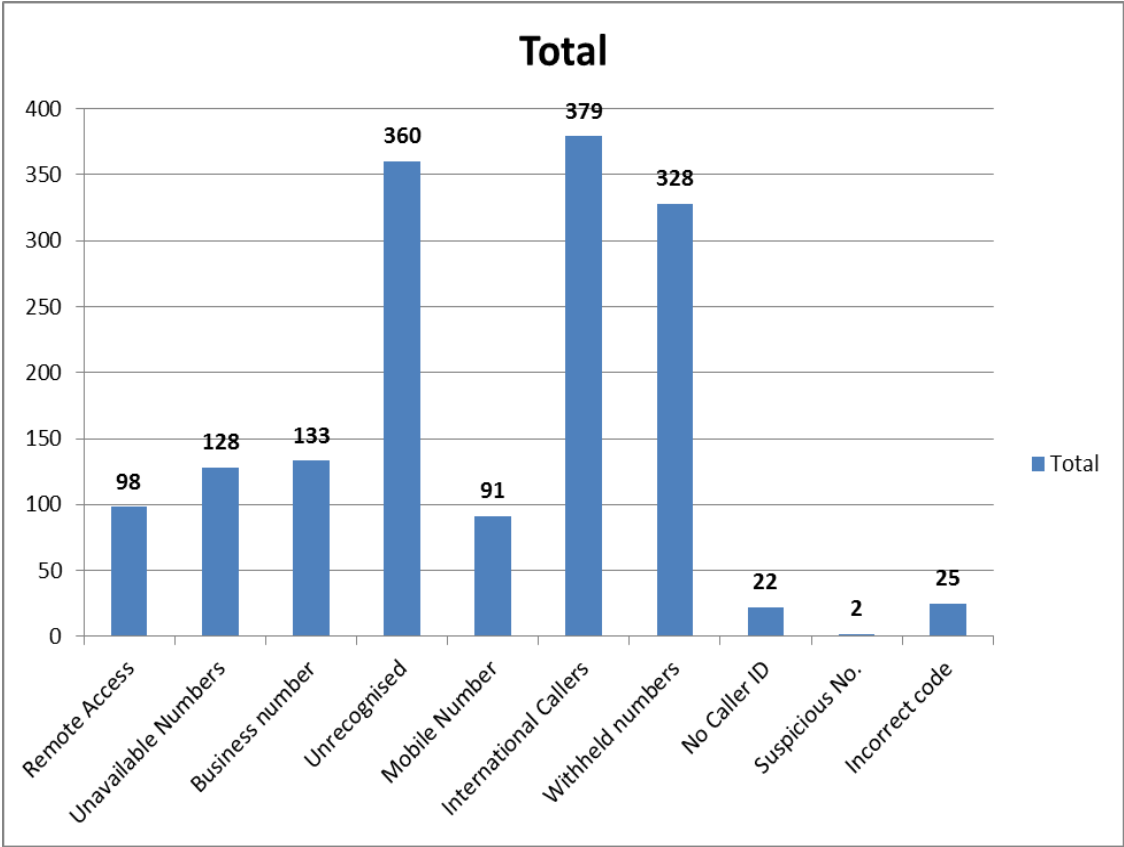
2.4 Call-blockers are designed to enable the telephone subscriber (or a friend, relative or carer) to programme the telephone numbers of family and friends so that these calls are connected as normal. Other trusted callers can be given a two digit pin number to enable them also to connect. All other 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 – a family member or other trusted carer – via an alternative telephone number.

2.5 Further to the CabCo report dated 30th July 2013 'Supporting Local Consumers', the Trading Standards Division has been working with Adult Care, Police and Community Safety Colleagues to identify local residents who might benefit from a telephone call-blocker. Nine local residents were selected and an appropriate device installed with further details shown in Appendix 1. Those include elderly and vulnerable adults; some of whom who had already lost money as a result of scam telephone calls.

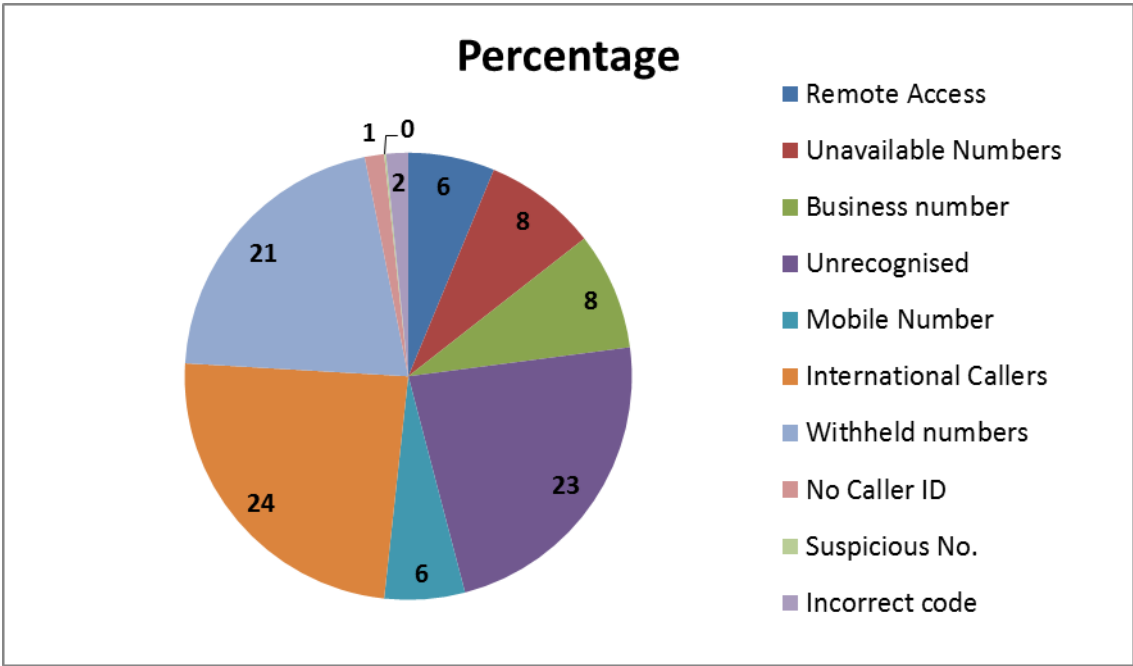
2.6 Not all of the devices have been installed for long enough to capture meaningful data, but calls have been monitored for seven of the residents over a six month period from February this year. In total they received

1,566 telephone calls over the period of which 1,300 (83%) were unsolicited or cold-call telephone calls blocked by the device. The breakdown of the calls is shown in the chart below.

2.7 Graph Showing total number and type of calls blocked



Graph Showing total percentage of different types of call blocked



- 2.8 There are a range of telephone call-blockers on the market but not all have the facility to inform the caller that unsolicited calls are not being taken by the subscriber. It is important that legitimate callers with an urgent enquiry – or simply wanting to get hold of the telephone subscriber – should be able to contact the person via other means – such as telephoning a friend or relative.
- 2.9 The number and proportion of unwanted calls that have been prevented in the trial to date and feedback from protected vulnerable adults and their carers from elsewhere in the country suggest that telephone call-blockers are a helpful contribution to supporting older people to continue to live independently in their own homes with a reduced risk of them becoming victims of fraud or simply unwanted telephone calls.
- 2.10 As a result of applications to the Courts on conviction of ‘lifestyle’ crimes, the Trading Standards Division has been able to recover monies from convicted criminals. Give the results of the trial it is proposed to set aside £5,000 to purchase further telephone call-blockers (at a cost of around £150 per unit) to be made available via referral from Adult Care, Community Safety or Police partners. These would be procured in line with County Council procedures.

3 Other considerations:

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

4 Background papers:

Supporting Local Consumers - CabCo Report dated 30th July 2013.

5 Key Decision:

No

6 Call-in:

Is it required that call-in be waived for any decision on this report?

No

7 Officer's recommendation:

That the Cabinet Member, Health and Communities notes the stress caused to some older residents and the availability of call blocking technology; and agrees to the use of £5,000 allocated to the Trading Standards Division from funding recovered from convicted criminals.

**David Lowe
Strategic Director
Health and Communities**

Appendix 1

Mrs A who is 72 years old received nuisance phone calls 2 or 3 every day. Previously the scammers had somehow got hold of this her bank card details and asked to confirm the security number and expiry date over the phone, luckily she realised that this could be 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 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 - was cold telephone called on 15th November 2013 and agreed to purchase a pro call blocker for £79.99 and paid by debit card. He can't remember doing this and so can't 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; She has told her care worker that she gets telesales calls and is scared by them because she doesn't know how to tell them she doesn't want to buy anything.

- Adult Care referral

Mrs D who is 90 years old 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 come to her home, demonstrated the goods, however she has no money. C240183

- Complaint initially made by his daughter

Mr E who is 75 years old with Alzheimer's, he gets lots 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, a scammer phoned stating they were from Telecommunications and understand she had been receiving silent & 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

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

Ms G who is 91 years old and disabled, mis-sold a chair 5 years ago, little could be done due to time limits. She was advised she would be candidate for trueCall to prevent further telesales calls. C241929

- received initial complaint from Cllr Bennett on behalf of C

Mrs H has dementia and whilst away for a couple of days had 20 answerphone messages from telesales companies. 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 info from Dundee Trading Standards that C may be a money mule for a money scam. C 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