

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 14 SEPTEMBER 2005**

#### **CONSUMER SUPPORT NETWORK**

##### **Report by Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise the Community Services Committee of the launch of the East Ayrshire Consumer Support Network (CSN).

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Consumer Support Network which has developed throughout the United Kingdom aims to join up the services of Trading Standards and advice agencies, including the Consumer Direct helpline, to meet the needs of today's consumers. The aim is to ensure that consumers get the help and information they need, when they need it, regardless of which body in the network they contact.

#### **3. DISCUSSION**

- 3.1 The CSN is a new concept for East Ayrshire which brings together the Trading Standards Service and the Citizens Advice Bureau, two organisations which have an interest in creating confident, informed consumers as well as fair-trading environment and a prosperous local economy.
- 3.2 East Ayrshire's Trading Standards Service and Citizens Advice Bureau will work together to provide joined-up, quality assured consumer advice.
- 3.3 This will be complemented by Consumer Direct, a new national helpline providing consumers with the quick, accurate and expert advice they need to 'fight for their rights' on a wide range of issues.
- 3.4 The intention is that the programme will expand to include East Ayrshire Local Offices and Libraries as certificated information providers under the Quality Mark Scotland Scheme. It could further expand to include local community groups as well as representation from the business community in East Ayrshire.
- 3.5 Participating organisations will work in partnership across the community to help consumers access the information and advice that they need.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The embryonic Consumer Support Network received a start-up grant of £5,000, most of which was spent on consumer research conducted by i2i Solutions. The balance was spent on training and administrative costs.

When the East Ayrshire CSN was registered with the DTI, a further funding of £12,200 was approved in line with an Action Plan contained within the local Network Development Plan. This funding was granted on the basis of specific projects, the costings of which were approved by the DTI.

As no further funding will be forthcoming from the DTI for the Consumer Support Network any savings on those costed plans will be conserved to support the further development of the CSN. When this money is exhausted further CSN costs would have to be met from internal budgets but it is anticipated that the actual financial implications will be neutral.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/AUTHORITY**

- 5.1 Nil

#### **6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The development of the Consumer Support Network supports the aims and objectives of the East Ayrshire Community Plan e.g. consumer advice and education (promoting community learning), consumer safety initiatives (improving community safety), action on under-age sales (improving health), money advice and debt counselling (eliminating poverty).

By raising awareness of the functions of the CSN partners the community will be assisted in these and other areas.

#### **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The East Ayrshire Consumer Support Network was formally launched on Thursday 21 July 2005 recognising the ongoing partnership between East Ayrshire Trading Standards and the East Ayrshire Consumer Advice Bureau, complimented by the Consumer Direct helpline. It is intended that other organisations including East Ayrshire Libraries and Local Offices will join the network as information providers.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 The Community Services Committee is invited to note this report.

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19 August 2005

WS/JD/JM

### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**Nil**

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