

JOINT COMMITTEE

22nd November 2012

Information Report on service activity relating to Scrap Metal Dealers

Recommendation

That members note the report

That members agree to lobby local MPs to support the private members bill on this issue sponsored by Richard Ottaway MP

Contribution to Priorities/ Recommendations

NA

Introduction/Summary Background

The service has received a number of complaints in relation to the activities of itinerant scrap metal collectors operating in all parts of the county. Generally these are raised as noise nuisance issues. The attached report outlines the current legislative background to this area and the problems that we face in addressing it. The report includes a data section which shows members where the hotspots for these issues are but members should note that, in the scale of things; these volumes of complaints are limited compared with other potential sources of nuisance. The report outlines the proposed provisions of a private members bill aimed at improving local authority's ability to deal with these issues and some of the potential next steps that could be taken, many of which rely on the ability of West Mercia Police to respond.

Report

Few elected members will be unaware of the activities of itinerant scrap metal dealers who driver around in flat bed transit type vans collecting along the same lines as the old "rag 'n' bone" men of Steptoe and Son fame. You will either have heard their cries, or their bugles or you will have received complaints from residents about this activity.

The aim of the attached report, produced by Leanne McLean one of the Service's Trading Standards Officers, is

to outline the legislative background for members so that you have a clear understanding of the limits to which the service can act. Also, it identifies a number of potential legislative improvements, one of which, the private members bill sponsored by Richard Ottaway MP, would give local authorities significantly better powers to regulate these activities. It also gives a clear indication of the main areas where the public are reporting these activities to us. It shows the main hotspot areas as being Worcester and, to a lesser extent Redditch. But even here, the actual numbers of complaints received are quite small, at 9-10 per month across the whole county. The total number of nuisance complaints received for Worcestershire is around 4500. Members should also note that the complaints arise from a relatively small number of individuals who seem to find this activity particularly problematic.

The service will continue to develop the intelligence picture of this activity. We will also continue to feed the information we receive into the regional intelligence system so that we can track the activities of these individuals and their vehicles. This can then be used to target proactive operations like some of those highlighted in the report.

Whilst the service could undertake one-off interventions or we could look to do more proactive work, these would continue to be of limited impact due to the limitations of the law and they would be expensive. Officers cannot stop moving vehicles on the highway, this is a power limited to the Police, so we would need to at least work with our colleagues at West Mercia on such projects. They too are having to prioritise resources so, unless there is a good intelligence case and a potential solid outcome, they are unlikely to want to participate unless we fund the work required. A recent estimate for the cost of police operational involvement, for vehicles and officers, in a stop-check exercise was £1368. Obviously the cost of WRS staff would need to be added onto this and other ancillary costs such as vehicle storage, should anything be seized. So it is probably safe to say that each operation will cost in the region of £1500 to £2000 to put on at each location that was chosen, with a likelihood of catching one or two traders who may, or may not, be doing anything wrong.

At this point in time there is little that the service can do to resolve resident's problems in relation to itinerant scrap dealers. Officers would ask elected members to lobby local MPs to support the private members bill from Richard Ottaway as this would improve our ability to deal with the problem, but we would not be able to stop this legitimate activity as long as traders continue to abide by the law.

Financial Implications

None

Sustainability

The recycling of metals and other materials does contribute to sustainability goals, however, it is difficult to measure the contribution that these particular traders make, and there is, according to some complainants, a general negative view of their presence in the local community.

Contact Points

Simon Wilkes

Background Papers

Operation Titan Report
