SUPPORTING BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES-
CONSUMER ADVICE AND ENQUIRIES POLICY

1. Strategic Overview

Cambridgeshire County Council's Supporting Businesses and Communities service carries out a wide range of statutory functions protecting residents and supporting local businesses.

The service contributes to the Council’s vision to:

- Develop the local economy for the benefit of all
- Help people live healthy and independent lives.
- Support and protect vulnerable people

2. Introduction

This policy document sets out how Supporting Businesses and Communities, through its Trading Standards function, seeks to advise local consumers on their legal rights in relation to consumer goods and contracts.

This document also offers guidance on how consumer enquiries and disputes with businesses will be handled to ensure consistency and safeguard the interests of all consumers and legitimate businesses.

3. Background

This Authority’s Trading Standards function sits within the Supporting Businesses and Communities Service which is within the Economy, Transport and Environmental Services Directorate of Cambridgeshire County Council. The Service has responsibility for a wide range of legislation intended to protect both consumers and businesses.

The Council’s long term vision for Cambridgeshire is, ‘Making Cambridgeshire a great place to call home’. To support this vision, the Council has a number of strategic priorities that include “Supporting and protecting vulnerable people” and “Developing the local economy for the benefit of all”.

The vision of the Supporting Businesses and Communities service is “Supporting the needs of communities and businesses by working together to help them achieve their goals”.

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4. Service Delivery

All consumer advice for Cambridgeshire residents will be provided by our partner organisation The Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACS) via their dedicated telephone and web based service. Fully trained advisors will take details of every enquiry and where possible enquiries will be answered on the first call.

The Citizens Advice Consumer Service is a national helpline introduced and funded by government and run by the National Citizens Advice Bureau. A national service means that a nationwide information and intelligence database is created, this allows local Trading Standards departments to view complaints made all over the country and to focus their enforcement activity appropriately.

The Citizens Advice Consumer Service shares intelligence with Trading Standards and details of all local enquiries are shared on the same day as they are received.

Members of the public who make direct contact with the Supporting Businesses and Communities Service requesting consumer advice will be directed to contact CACS in all cases.

Where there is an allegation of a criminal offence the cases will be referred to Trading Standards for information or possible action.

Selected consumer advice is available on the AdviceGuide website and via the County Council website.

5. Advice to Cambridgeshire consumers

The Citizens Advice Consumer Service will offer consumers:

- A clear explanation of their legal rights and/or obligations
- Practical consumer advice tailored to their enquiry
- Access to appropriate written materials designed to help resolve consumer problems
- Advice on how to avoid future consumer problems, if appropriate
- Signposting to any other relevant agency that can assist with their query

The Supporting Businesses and Communities team are not able to offer any further advice and assistance.

6. Cambridgeshire consumers reporting criminal offences

Consumers who do not require advice about their rights but wish to register a complaint against a company should also contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service. This allows complaints about traders to be recorded on a national basis.
7. Third Party Advice

It is Council policy not generally to give advice to consultants or third parties acting on behalf of a business. This is to ensure there are no conflicts or miscommunications between parties.

8. Investigation of criminal complaints

To ensure effective use of resources this service has adopted an intelligence led approach to our work.

Intelligence led investigation of criminal activities benefits the whole community by focusing resources on those businesses and/or activities that are causing particular problems in the community. The aim of this work is to reduce unfair trading practices and promote a level playing field across Cambridgeshire.

This approach means that it is not always appropriate to investigate individual complaints about businesses or trading practices. We will, however, record all information supplied to us as a vital part of our intelligence gathering. Our intelligence led approach enables our officers to deal with the most serious complaints as well as those trading issues that affect all consumers within our communities.