



# Dorset County Council

## News Release

27 February 2014

Trading Standards 275/ PR3832

For Immediate Release

### **Company in court to answer for ‘cold calls’**

A home improvement company with sales offices in Dorset and across the South has been prosecuted for subjecting Dorset residents to unwanted ‘cold calls’ by telephone and on the doorstep.

The company was fined over £36,000 following an investigation by Dorset County Council Trading Standards Service.

The company is Apple Group Holdings Limited, which owns companies selling windows, doors, conservatories and solar panels from 12 offices across Dorset, Devon, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The company, which trades under names including Larkin Windows and Conservatories and Apple Home Improvements pleaded guilty to 11 offences of engaging in unfair commercial practices, contrary to the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008. These included six offences of making sales visits to people’s houses having been asked not to do so and five offences of persistently making unwanted telephone sales to consumers.

They were sentenced at Weymouth Magistrates’ Court (26 February 2014) and fined a total of £36,663 and ordered to pay prosecution costs of £1,329.

The court heard about complaints that went back to May 2012 that had been investigated by trading standards officers. There were several instances where written advice was given to the company about the improvements that needed to be made. Complaints continued to be received by the trading standards service, the citizens’ advice consumer helpline and the information commissioner’s office.

In mitigation the company outlined steps they had taken to improve matters including buying software from the telephone preference service to properly screen for numbers that should not be called, new procedures for sales staff and customer complaint procedures.

During sentencing the chair of magistrates, Mike Owen, took into account the company’s lack of previous convictions and their early guilty plea but pointed to the lack of improvement despite intervention by trading standards. He said: “We believe that this shows a culture of disregard for consumers’ rights and a systemic lack of managerial control.”

Ivan Hancock, trading standards service manager for Dorset County Council, said:

“Consumer law gives people a very clear right to expect that businesses selling goods and services will not visit them or telephone them when they have made it clear they do not want a sales call. Of course we understand that mistakes can be made but any sales force should be working to systems to ensure their business is not a nuisance or unnecessary inconvenience to

people in their own homes.”

Cllr Peter Finney, the county council’s Cabinet member for community services, said:

“Unwanted sales calls can be an irritation to everyone but particularly distressing to more vulnerable residents or those living alone. Our trading standards officers regularly intervene with consumer problems like this by using advice and guidance to put businesses on the right track. Where that advice is ignored and problems continue to be a concern to Dorset residents then formal action is always a consideration.”

If any Dorset business is unsure of their legal requirements I would urge them to contact trading standards for advice and guidance using the trading standards business advice line on 01305 224702.”

ENDS

Notes for editors:

1) For further information, please telephone Ivan Hancock (trading standards service manager) on 01305 224956 or contact the county council’s communications team on 0305 224491.

2) To make a complaint about goods purchased or about a business consumers can call the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 08454 04 05 06. Citizens Advice is the first point of contact for consumer advice and complaints requiring investigation are passed to the trading standards service for action locally.

3) To download and print a Trading Standards uninvited doorstep caller sign visit:  
<https://www.dorsetforyou.com/386846>

4) The county council, through its trading standards service has a duty to enforce the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008.

5) The Telephone Preference Service (TPS) is a free service. It is the official central opt out register on which you can record your preference not to receive unsolicited sales or marketing calls. It is a legal requirement that all organisations (including charities, voluntary organisations and political parties) do not make such calls to numbers registered on the TPS unless they have your consent to do so. See: <http://www.tpsonline.org.uk/tps/index.html> .

6) More information on Dorset’s trading standards service is available online at [www.dorsetforyou.com/tradingstandards](http://www.dorsetforyou.com/tradingstandards) .

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