

Buy with Confidence - Your questions answered

1. How is the Buy with Confidence Scheme awarded to traders? Does the council vet traders to ensure they are legitimate?

Traders have to apply to become members of the scheme. The applications are checked first to ensure there are no known issues with complaints etc. and basic financial records are obtained. After this, all applicants that go into homes and gardens are asked to obtain basic criminal records checks for us to see. We then visit the applicant and carry out an audit to ensure compliance with consumer law and other legal requirements. Assessments include things such as terms and conditions, cancellation rights, insurance, qualifications for certain trades, websites and paperwork. We then take pick out at random, several customers from their list of previous jobs to obtain references. If all the conditions of the scheme are met then they are permitted to join the scheme.

2. Will trader's suitability to the scheme be reviewed on a regular basis?

Traders have to renew every year and it is requirement of the scheme that every customer is given a feedback card for the customer to fill in and return to trading standards. These are used to assess customer satisfaction and if we don't receive many cards about the trader we will visit and ask them why. We also have the right to check on any trader at any time to ensure the scheme's code of practice is being adhered to. Any complaints against the trader will be investigated.

3. Will there be somewhere were people can review the experience of other users of a particular service?

Unfortunately, reviews about BWC traders cannot be posted online at this time but customer satisfaction is monitored and any complaints investigated. Traders can be suspended or removed from the scheme at any time by trading standards should concerns arise.

4. Would you provide a guarantee of their work?

No, the council cannot guarantee any trader's work; the purpose of the scheme is to allow consumers to make a more informed decision about who they employ to carry out a service for them. We still recommend that consumers obtain a range of quotes for work.

5. Not clear what the council responsibility is as the 'regulator' of the scheme. What happens if something goes wrong with the services of an approved trader?

Trading Standards is a regulatory service that each local authority has and their officers are responsible for enforcing a wide range of consumer protection legislation. They also give advice to businesses on a wide range of consumer issues and trading law. If a trader breaches the terms of the scheme they can be suspended or removed from the scheme very quickly. Conditions can also be put on their future membership if it is deemed appropriate. All complaints about traders will be investigated. The council cannot of course guarantee that complaints will never arise but it makes it less likely as traders will know what their legal obligations to consumers are and the standards that the scheme expects from them.

6. What 'Real' protection can this scheme offer and how will it hope to achieve this?

The scheme doesn't offer 'protection' as such but it minimises the risks involved when deciding who to choose to employ for a service. The scheme offers the reassurance that the traders are known to trading standards and officers have carried out as many checks as possible on their backgrounds including criminal records checks. There is also someone to turn to if things did go wrong and Trading Standards is also independent and not linked to a trade association or commercial body.

BWC is designed to reduce the risk of consumers falling foul of doorstep/bogus callers and rogue traders and supports reputable local businesses that give good service.