

Background

The Public Fundraising Regulatory Association (PFRA) is the nationally recognised self-regulator for face-to-face fundraising (F2F) activity – direct debit solicitation or data capture – conducted in public spaces by charities and good causes in the UK. Our aim is promote responsible fundraising practices and to do this we work in partnership with councils, business improvement districts etc to provide and enforce a free, self-regulatory regime. All charities and fundraising organisations that do this type of fundraising activity are members of ours, which is why we can offer this regulatory model.

Our work is supported by the Local Government Association, who we entered into an agreement with us in November last year. “Making the Pledge” supports the use of our self-regulatory model to control F2F activity in council areas. We also have the support of a number of other professional bodies including the National Association of Licensing and Enforcement Officers (NALEO), the Institute of Licensing (IoL), the Association of Town and City Management (ATCM).

Review of the Site Management Agreement

We first entered into a site management agreement (SMA) with Bracknell Forest back in 2008. The conditions contained within the original SMA allow for 4 fundraisers plus a non-fundraising team leader to work in each of Bracknell, Crowthorne and Sandhurst one day a week. We approached the council earlier this year to see how they felt the arrangements were working.

Together, we have looked at the levels of fundraising in each of these areas, their population, the areas available for fundraising and their likely footfall as well as comments from our members and yourselves. Our aim is to try to find the balance between charities’ duty to ask for support and the right of the public not to be put under undue pressure to give.

We understand you have some concerns around the use of Crowthorne and Sandhurst for fundraising activity. We know that our members do visit both these towns fairly regularly and have concerns that to remove them from the SMA would unreasonably affect their ability to ask members of the public to support the causes they represent within the council area and ultimately could have a negative impact on charities’ income.

Improvements to our practices

We have made a number of improvements to how our SMAs look and the information contained within them since 2008. They are now simpler and clearer and aim to make it easier for both councils and fundraisers to use them. Beyond this we have introduced a comprehensive penalties and sanctions regime – contained within our Rule Book. This was introduced in August 2012 and sets out the expected standards of behaviour for fundraisers. It covers a wide range of behaviours and conduct and we regularly review it to ensure this continues to be the case.

Each of the rules is associated with a number of penalty points, either 20, 50 or 100, which are then issued to our members when they have broken a rule. Once a member's penalty points total 1000 across the whole of the UK, they become a monetary fine for the member, with each penalty point equating to £1. We will be publishing our compliance benchmark in November, however initial trends show that the number of penalty points we have been issuing has decreased, with no associated decrease in compliance activities, suggesting an initial improvement in fundraiser behaviour.

As our co-regulatory partners within the SMA, you are able to let us know when you see anybody contravening the rule book or the conditions within the SMA, we will then not only work to fix it live (about 30 minutes to an hour) but also issue penalty points to our members based on what you've told us. Therefore if you became aware of fundraisers working in the wrong place in any of the towns in the SMA and let us know, we can fine our members, which can be expected to result in greater compliance next time they work in your area.

An SMA therefore not only dictates when fundraisers can come to your area, where they can operate and how many of them can work there, it also gives you the reassurance of our penalties and sanctions regime, which is key to improving fundraiser behaviour.

However, we do understand your concerns about Crowthorne and Sandhurst and have therefore redrafted the terms of the SMA. The re-drafted SMA would reduce the levels of fundraising in each town and the numbers of fundraisers that can operate at any one time. Our new proposals are that F2F activity should only take place in each town 2 days out of 4 weeks with only 3 fundraisers. To help with compliance etc we have also included a map in the new SMA and written into the site delineation that fundraisers should avoid narrow pathways. Hopefully this should mitigate any of your concerns about these areas being used inappropriately, and if you do see any fundraisers not abiding by the delineations, the numbers of fundraisers set out etc. you can tell us, we can fix it live, and issue penalty points to our members.

Conclusion

Our work seeks to create a balance between the duties of charities and the needs of local people. We would not wish to facilitate fundraising in areas where it would be inappropriate or overly disruptive, however we do know that our members visit both Crowthorne and Sandhurst and by taking these out of the SMA altogether it would have a potentially negative effect on charities' income. In order to address your concerns we have limited the number of visits and reduced the number of fundraisers and hopefully this compromise will answer your concerns whilst maintaining sustainable levels of support for our charity members.

If you continue with the SMA you would also get the benefit of our penalties and sanctions regime, which continues to help drive up standards and improve fundraiser behaviour.