

**MINUTES OF THE TRADING STANDARDS  
JOINT ADVISORY BOARD  
Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2006 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Jones (Chair, London Borough of Brent), Councillors Baker and D Brown (London Borough of Brent) and Councillors Ferry and Mithani (London Borough of Harrow)

Officers in Attendance were: John Taylor (Director of Trading Standards, London Borough of Brent), Bill Bilon (Deputy Director of Trading Standards, London Borough of Harrow) Gareth Llywelyn-Roberts (London Borough of Harrow).

Councillor Hashmi was also in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Benson and Weiss

**Appointment of Chair (from amongst Brent members)**

RESOLVED:-

that Councillor Jones be appointed as Chair for this meeting.

**1. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2006**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2006 be approved as a true and accurate record.

**2. Matters Arising**

It was agreed that the Trading Standards Operational Plan for 2006/07 be circulated, for information purposes, to the new Members of the Advisory Board.

**3. Trading Standards Service – Annual Report**

John Taylor introduced an item about the Trading Standards Service's Annual Report for the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006. He explained that as a Weights and Measures authority they are required to submit an annual report detailing their work and statistics but that they take the opportunity to expand on this report to provide a rounded view on the work of the service.

John Taylor highlighted that the Trading Standards Service was unique in London as a partnership between two boroughs (Harrow and Brent) and was a very successful service that had received a number of awards and certificates including being the first Trading Standards

Service to receive a UK Business Excellence 'Recognised for Excellence' Award.

It was explained that the Trading Standards Service was divided into Brent and Harrow Teams and that each side was further divided into a Metrology/Safety team and a Fair Trading team. The Metrology/Safety teams were responsible for verifying metrology equipment used by traders and for enforcement works following investigations or complaints from the public. The Fair Trading teams were responsible for enforcing a wide range of legislation and dealt with many criminal and civil enforcement issues.

It was reported that new procedures were now operating to attempt to recycle confiscated evidence and that 3460kg, or 93%, of last year's evidence had been recycled.

It was noted that the Service was going through a period of change with new government initiatives that were being launched such as the national consumer helpline service Consumer Direct and that these had resulted in an increased workload and some staff re-organisations and that it was consequently important that the Service maintained its staffing rota and ensured all staff were fully trained.

Significantly an Officer was now trained as an accredited Financial Investigator and it was hoped that this would enable the Service to utilize the provisions of the Proceeds of Crime Act which allowed for the confiscation of assets obtained through certain criminal activities. It was also noted that the Service used its in-house team to perform all prosecutions and that this was a significant cost-saver.

It was explained that complaints raised by the public were vital in highlighting issues and that this meant that it was important that the Service's public profile was maintained and this was done using a number of methods including road-shows, press releases, visits to schools and colleges and participation in local events such as the Respect Festival and 'Under One Sky'. In this way the public were encouraged to actively support the work of the Service. Regular events were also held such as electric blanket and child car seat testing and that these proved popular and effective. It was explained that the website was also a vital information tool and contact point for the public.

Officers proceeded to report on aspects of the Harrow and Brent teams' work covered in the Annual Report. Areas highlighted included work the number of cases handled including large numbers requested by members of the public and that despite this the Service had successfully inspected 100% of high risk properties as required by the CPA assessment.

A number of examples of specific issues raised by the public were highlighted including problems with plumbers, an educational establishment, car dealers, sofas and private car clamping firms. It was noted that more complaints had been received within Brent than in Harrow but that all complaints were investigated.

Officers also highlighted other issues noted in the Annual Report and these included the safety of electrical fans, metrification of food sales, sales of halogen heaters, dangerous skin lightening creams and misleading advertising. The prosecution of car traders, counterfeit cigarettes, underage purchasing of cigarettes, tour operators without insurance, jewellery cases involved the lack of hallmarking were also noted.

It was reported that various operations had been carried out in the past year including doorstep crime and on the sale of counterfeit goods.

It was noted that the Licensing Act had also introduced an extra workload for the Service but that it was generally felt that the Act was working well from a Trading Standards point of view.

It was also reported that the Service had expanded its Approved Motor Trading Scheme. Local and national motor dealers were part of the scheme and it was hoped the initiative could be spread right across the borough.

During discussion the Chair asked that the Advisory Board's thanks and congratulations be recorded for the hard work performed by the Trading Standards Service. She noted that it was considered that Brent and Harrow had one of the most successful and efficient Services in the country, as indicated by the awards and certifications collected.

It was noted that it could be beneficial for the new Members of the Advisory Board to visit the Service to gain a better idea of its work, including visiting their Willesden Green Park facilities (including the weigh-bridge) and also possibly accompanying Officers on raids and inspections.

In response to a question on staffing levels it was explained that the Service had 34.6 posts which included one in Harrow that was currently unfunded and that the majority of staff are 'on the road' as opposed to office based. As always, staffing levels were affected by continuing tight budgets and the UK-wide shortage of trained Officers.

With regard to a question on illegal DVD sales, it was noted that this was a problem in many locations but that it had recently moved up the Police's priorities which was helping in tackling the issue and that prosecutions and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were now being considered on several individuals. Pub licensees were also helping in the crack-down.

It was noted that the deputy director from Brent and the opposite number from Harrow had recently performed a job swap in order to gain wider experience. The Advisory Board welcomed this idea and suggested that this option be used for all staff where possible as a career development tool.

In response to questions Officers explained that the Trading Standards Service actively sought out partner organisations both for general support and also on specific projects, partners included other Council departments, business groups, the police, town centre managers and others.

Other issues raised during discussion included problems involving counterfeit goods such as clothes and drugs, telephone targets and the new Consumer Direct and consumer support network. Officers promised to keep the Advisory Board updated on these and other issues, including pending court cases, at future meetings.

**6. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Trading Standards Advisory Board was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2006 at the Civic Centre, Harrow.

**7. Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9:10 pm

JONES  
Chair