

NOTES OF INQUORATE MEETING OF THE TRADING STANDARDS JOINT ADVISORY BOARD

Tuesday 18 March 2008 at 7.30 pm

Present

Councillor Weiss (Chair, London Borough of Harrow)
Councillor Ferry (London Borough of Harrow)
Councillor Hashmi (London Borough of Brent)

Officers in Attendance

Bill Bilon (Director of Trading Standards)
Gareth Llywelyn-Roberts (London Borough of Harrow)
Simon Legg (London Borough of Brent)
Simon Martin (London Borough of Brent)
Ash Shah (London Borough of Brent)

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Jones (London Borough of Brent)
Councillor Benson (London Borough of Harrow – received after the meeting)

Inquorate Meeting

The Director informed the Board that the minimum presence of Members for the meeting to be quorate was two from each borough. As the meeting was inquorate, it was agreed to hold an informal discussion. Members present expressed their disappointment that the meeting was inquorate.

Appointment of Chair (from among Harrow Members)

Councillor Weiss was appointed to chair the meeting.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 27 November 2007

Members noted the minutes of the previous meeting.

2. Matters Arising

No matters were raised.

3. Report No 5/07 from the Director of Trading Standards

Trading Standards Budget for 2008/09

The Director of Trading Standards briefed Members on the Trading Standards budget for 2008/09 and the implications for service delivery. He reported that major restructuring of the service had resulted in substantial savings in 2007/08. Both Councils had made further reductions in 2008/09. These would mean the loss of two vacant enforcement officer posts, one in each borough. Despite the resulting

effect on delivery, the service was expected to achieve the upper threshold in relation to relevant national indicators.

Members regretted the reduction in service delivery, in particular the effect on the service's ability to conduct complex financial investigations relating to the seizure of criminal assets under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. Members noted that increasing amounts of the service's work needed to be conducted outside office hours as a result of increased trading hours and other significant pressures, for example, preventing under-age drinking.

In answer to a question from a Member about Wembley Market, the officer reported that, in addition to responding to complaints, making occasional visits and taking appropriate action, the service was working with the market's operators to reduce the amount of illegal trade.

4. Report No 6/07 from the Director of Trading Standards

Trading Standards Work Plan for 2008/09

The Director of Trading Standards briefed Members on the service's work plan for 2008/09, pointing out that the aim was to visit all high risk premises, with no visits planned to medium and low risk premises unless they were the subject of a complaint or part of a project conducted by the service. The officer explained how the service prioritised its work, based on an assessment of the hazard posed to the community and the impact on consumers. Members noted that key areas, for example, age-restricted sales (of alcohol, knives, butane, fireworks and tobacco) and unsafe goods, were the focus of the work of the service, with lower risk areas treated as low priority. However, all complaints concerning breaches of the law would be investigated, with vulnerable consumers treated as higher priority.

Members noted that some aspects of the work of the service, for example, the safety of goods and toys, went unnoticed, but were important in protecting the safety of the public, including children. Members were also concerned that the number of complaints might go up in response to the reduction in the number of investigations. Members were committed to being more proactive in protecting the budget in future years.

5. Any Other Urgent Business

Status of the Board

Members discussed various ways of highlighting the issues raised by officers and of increasing the profile of Trading Standards within the decision-making bodies of both Councils.

The issues discussed as potential ways forward included the following:

- inviting the relevant Portfolio Holders to meetings

- inviting the host Portfolio Holder to chair meetings within each borough
- increasing the membership through the inclusion of the Portfolio Holder.

It was agreed that this issue was best dealt with by undertaking a high level Service Review of the existing service provision, which would include finalisation of the Service Level Agreement between the two boroughs, the outcome of which would be submitted as a formal report to the Cabinet of each borough, to include the formal agreement of the Service level Agreement.

It was agreed that the next meeting would be dedicated to agreeing the content, format and process for the review and agreeing the key roles and responsibilities of officers and Members with a view to drawing up a detailed project plan for agreement.

6. Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of the Board was scheduled to be held at Brent Town Hall, Wembley, the date to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm.

Councillor Weiss
Chair