



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE TRADING STANDARDS JOINT ADVISORY BOARD Monday 25 March 2013 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Jones (LB Brent), Hashmi (LB Brent), O'Dell (LB Harrow) and Ferry (LB Harrow) and Mithani (LB Harrow, alternating for Hall)

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Hall (LB Harrow)

Officers in Attendance were: Bill Bilon, Michael Read and Hashith Shah

1. Election of the Chair

RESOLVED:-

That Councillor Jones be appointed as Chair for the duration of the meeting

2. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 March 2012 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. Matters arising

Members noted that a meeting of the Committee had not been held since March 2012 due to the Olympics and omissions from the Harrow calendar. It was requested that officers liaise with each Council to ensure all meetings are placed in the calendar.

5. Trading standards budget for 2013/14

Bill Bilon, Head of Trading Standards, introduced the report on the 2013/14 Trading Standards budget, highlighting the reducing budget over the past five years and the implications this had caused, such as increased health and safety issues, increased anti-social behaviour and increased scams in the area. The Trading Standards Officer continued to highlight the work that was no longer able to be undertaken due to cuts, including doorstep crime initiatives, proactive investigations into car traders and one day sales. The Service had provided £50,000 income for each Council from the Proceeds of Crime incentivisation money with Harrow Council

hoping to receive £75,000 in 2013/14 along with a reduction of £140,000 from their base budget. It was highlighted that the income generated could not be predicted, with larger sums only achieved by undertaking larger investigations. It was explained that Planning enforcement cases were a good source of potential income if both authorities could encourage planning investigations and prosecutions although, it was clarified that Harrow had reduced their planning enforcement team to two officers, making the income forecast unachievable.

During discussions the impact of not undertaking underage alcohol sales work was queried despite money being generated from investigation works. It was explained that this work was still being carried out but at a reduced level with work being prioritised to ensure income was achieved through higher level investigatory works. It was clarified that cases were needed to allow the financial investigator to carry out investigations under the Proceeds of Crime Act. Bill Bilon informed the Board that the Service prided itself on being one of the best in the country as evidenced by the Accredited Financial Investigator recently winning the national individual award for Excellence in Financial Investigations. Members discussed the implications of the reduction of Planning enforcement officers, potentially leading to a lack of case, lack of income and the possibility of planning applications not being submitted due to the overall lack of enforcement. Harrow Council Members informed the Board that they were currently undergoing a restructure and felt that it would be appropriate to make a business case to retain and increase the current Planning enforcement team as a means to increasing income and to protect the future of Trading Standards. Officers appreciated the support of the Harrow Members and felt that discussions should be taking place by the summer to find a suitable direction to ensure the future of the Service.

It was clarified that the Brent and Harrow teams each received over 800 complaints per year which were investigated according to priority and, whenever possible, a joined up enforcement approach was undertaken with other partner organisations. Members felt alternative funding streams should be explored such as underage sales work being funded by Public Health England with a view to reducing health issues and pressure on the Health Service. It was explained that where alternative funding options were available, these were always explored and contributions had been received in the past for specific projects from the Tobacco Control Alliance. In response to a question, officers confirmed that service specific savings would not be achieved through moving to the Civic Centre.

It was queried what skills and knowledge could be traded to increase revenue. Officers explained that statutory legislation allowed the Councils to charge business for advice and assistance, with Ikea and Wicks already choosing to sign up to the scheme as 'Primary Authority' businesses. It was further explained that the team could charge by officer time or have a standard contract in place so that consistent advice and assistance could be provided to businesses that operate on a nationwide basis in line with the Government's agenda for reducing burden on businesses. It was hoped that a report would soon be available to take to the Executive detailing the proposal. Members expressed concern that there were not adequate staffing levels to enable further works to be undertaken. It was explained that the income from this initiative could be used to employ temporary staff for advising 'Primary Authority' businesses which would enable the permanent staff to continue to undertake the day to trading standards duties, i.e. inspections of trade premises, underage test purchasing and investigations. Following queries it was

clarified that weights and measures testing was still being carried out with the team testing equipment for numerous authorities.

The team were pleased to inform the Board that they kept prestigious records and continually sought to find income streams, including participating in national trading standards cases and in a recent example two raids had resulted in seizure of goods valued at over £150,000. The project will shortly receive national coverage on the BBC's Fake Britain programme and it was felt that the team was one of the best local authority teams in the UK.

Members commemorated the high level of work undertaken by officers in a climate of reducing budgets, particularly the drive to increase income and work with various partners. Members felt that the Service should be invested in to ensure a viable future.

RESOLVED:-

Members noted the report

6. Trading standards work plan for 2013/14

Bill Bilon, Head of Trading Standards, introduced the report which detailed the work that was proposed to be undertaken in 2013/14. During discussions Members noted the importance of planning and setting targets but queried whether there was adequate staffing resource to complete the work planned. It was clarified that the report was realistic with what was achievable, enabling work to be undertaken with what staffing resources were available. Following queries it was explained that each unit represented approximately an hour, with a particular number of units assigned to each task enabling the officers to manage their time effectively. It was further clarified that the team was performance managed with the plan being used to discuss workloads and future work during appraisals. Members queried the effect of the risk rating scheme. It was explained that the scheme was currently in its infancy, due to come into effect from the summer and therefore had not yet affected the plan for the current year. It was explained that the scheme was activity based rather than premises based and would now include web based activities which would change the direction to focus much more on e-commerce and e-crime. Following queries regarding Enterprise Act complaints, it was clarified that this was not a criminal matter and therefore the team did not need to undertake this work. However, this legislation allowed civil injunctions to be taken out if significant consumer detriment occurred to prevent further damage and to stop the business from trading in a manner that affected the economic wellbeing of consumers.

RESOLVED:-

Members noted the report

7. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was to be confirmed following approval at the Councils' Annual Full Council meeting.

8. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

L. JONES
Chair