



# LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

## MINUTES OF THE TRADING STANDARDS JOINT ADVISORY BOARD

Monday, 7 December 2009 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Jones (London Borough of Brent) (Chair) and Councillors Hashmi (London Borough of Brent), Ferry (London Borough of Harrow) and Hall (London Borough of Harrow)

Apologies were received from: Councillors Baker (London Borough of Brent) and Weiss (London Borough of Harrow)

Officers in Attendance were: Bill Bilon (London Borough of Brent and Harrow), Michael Read (London Borough of Brent) and Ash Shah (London Borough of Brent)

### 1. **Appointment of the Chair (amongst Brent Members)**

Councillor Jones was appointed to Chair the meeting.

### 2. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 July 2009 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### 3. **Matters arising**

None.

### 4. **Half Yearly Report: Six Month Report on the Operation of the Service - April 2009 to September 2009**

Bill Bilon (Head of Trading Standards, London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow) introduced the report which updated members on the work which had been carried out by the Trading Standards Service for Brent and Harrow over the last six months. He invited members of the Board to raise any questions that they had regarding the report.

Following a request for an update regarding the progress of the member of staff who had started her training to become an Accredited Financial Investigator, Bill Bilon stated that she had now passed her exams. He added that the next stage was for her to be mentored by a police officer for six months to a year. After completing some investigations, she would then, he stated, be a fully accredited financial investigator. In response to an enquiry as to why financial investigations could take a long time to conclude, Bill Bilon explained that it was because Trading Standards were unable to make a financial case against someone until the primary investigation into the original trading offence had been carried out.

In order to protect residents, especially elderly people, the Board noted that there was a need for a scheme that could recommend trust worthy and reliable tradesman. It was asked how long it would take to implement such a scheme. Ash Shah (Assistant Head of Trading Standards, London Borough of Brent) explained that they were currently looking into the possibility of using the well established 'TrustMark Scheme'. As part of the scheme, traders were vetted, references sought and complaints investigated. He added that relevant complaints would be passed onto Trading Standards. He explained that they were looking at the possibility of using the scheme in conjunction with Building Control services, partners and other Trading Standards services. Following a concern regarding cost, Bill Bilon explained that it was unlikely that they would need to ask for additional money as the initial outlay from Brent and Harrow Council would be small due to the fact that traders had to pay to join the scheme. The Board requested that more information be provided to the Board regarding the 'TrustMark Scheme' at the next meeting.

It was noted by the Board that the fraudulent use of International Calling Cards had become a serious problem. Bill Bilon explained that Trading Standards were aware of the problem and had been taking action. However, he added that the number of companies selling these fraudulent phone cards kept increasing. He explained that they were aware of the need to work with the Office of Fair Trading as prosecuting the occasional company was not enough. In response to an enquiry into the use of tablet computers, Ash Shah explained that tablet computers were small notebook type computers which allowed officers to gain access to all their records when they were out in the field. He stated that they were hoping that in the future they would be able to use mobile printers as well.

It was noted that Harrow Council could also run the Ma Kelly event that was successfully held in Brent. The money required from Harrow Council in order to do this, Ash Shah explained, was £1,200. He added that in Brent the money had come from three of the council's Neighbourhood Working schemes. The Board concluded their discussion by noting that the service had completed some excellent work over the last six months.

RESOLVED:-

- i. that the Six Month Report, for the period ending 30 September 2009, be noted;
- ii. that more information on the 'TrustMark Scheme' be provided to members at the next meeting of the Joint Advisory Board.

## 5. **Trading Standards Budget for 2010/2011**

The Head of Trading Standards for Brent and Harrow presented a report which provided the Board with information on the Trading Standards budget required for 2010/11 that had been forecast in accordance with Clause 23 of the Consortium Agreement. He explained that as part of the agreement he was required, as the Head of Trading Standards, to produce a report detailing the implication of budget changes for members' consideration and discussion.

Bill Bilon informed members of the Board that there was little scope for increasing income. He explained that deregulation had enabled manufacturers to verify their

own equipment, which had led to a reduction in this source of income for the service. He stated that main source of income for the service was now from costs awarded against defendants following successful court convictions. He emphasised however that the cost of undertaking prosecutions had increased, particularly in cases where there was no alternative but to use barristers in matters that were heard in the Crown Court. Bill Bilon explained that The Proceeds of Crime Act allowed prosecuting authorities to seize assets of those who benefit from criminal lifestyles, such as counterfeiting. However, he stressed that sufficient resources were needed to investigate this type of criminal activity and to conduct complicated financial investigations.

Bill Bilon stressed the need for prioritising the work of the service. He then informed the Board as to the required budget for the consortium for 2010/2011. He stated that, including an inflation increase of 0.75% from the previous year's budget, the required budget was £1,714,046. This, he added, equated to £891,264 for Brent and £822,782 for Harrow. Bill Bilon explained that the Consortium Agreement required him, as Head of Trading Standards, to provide alternatives to the proposed budget for consideration by the respective councils. However, he stated that, in recognition of the current financial situation with both councils, he was not proposing to seek any growth in the Trading Standards Budget apart from the inflationary increase already mentioned. Similarly, he added that a decrease in the 2010/11 Trading Standards Budget would lead to a significant reduction in the service's ability to respond to customer complaints, to deal with trader enquiries, to carry out proactive work and to achieve the upper threshold standard with respect to the new national performance indicator. Nevertheless, in order to comply with the requirements of the Consortium Agreement, he highlighted several options that should be considered along with the impact of any such increase/reduction in the 2010/11 Trading Standards Budget. Bill Bilon concluded by asking members of the Board to take note of the report and to discuss it with the main committee in each borough.

In the discussion which followed, a concern regarding the detrimental impact that a budget reduction could have on the service was raised by the Board. The Board noted that Trading Standards was operating an excellent service, as highlighted in the six months report, and that a reduction in budget could seriously affect the service's ability to provide such a high standard of service for the residents of Brent and Harrow. However, it was also recognised that due to the financial climate, budgets in all service areas were under considerable strain and that reductions may be unavoidable. In acknowledgment of this fact, the Board requested that information be made available on what the potential impact on the service would be if a 5% budget reduction was introduced, so that the implications of such a reduction could be considered by the main committee for each borough. It was suggested by a member of the Board that the Chair may wish to write a letter to the relevant committees stating their consideration of this matter.

The high reputation of the service was noted by members of the Board. Bill Bilon informed the Board that a very positive article on the service, provided by Trading Standards, had featured in the Willesden & Brent Times and the Harrow Times. The reporter who wrote this article, he added, was also currently doing a follow up to this report for the next issues of these newspapers. It was asked whether any progress had been made in marketing the skills of financial investigators. In response Bill Bilon explained that no progress had been made with regards to this

issue, but that a London wide approach to this was currently being looked at. He added that he would feedback to the Board when he had more information on this. He explained, in response to another enquiry, that the £70,000 income, mentioned in the report, related to the costs awarded against defendants following successful court convictions. The proceeds of crime, he added, was separate to this as the proceeds of crime related to the seizing of the assets of those who benefit from criminal lifestyles.

The need to update the Consortium Agreement between Brent and Harrow Council was noted by the Board. In response, Michael Read (Assistant Director of Policy & Regulation) explained that Legal Services were currently working on this issue.

RESOLVED:-

- i. that the report be noted and implications considered;
- ii. that information be made available on what the potential impact on the service would be if a 5% budget reduction was introduced, so that the implications of such a reduction could be considered by the main committee for each borough.

**6. Any other urgent business**

None.

**7. Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Trading Standards Advisory Board was scheduled for Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2009 at Harrow Civic Centre.

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm

L. JONES  
Chair