

# **NOTES OF AN INFORMAL TRADING STANDARDS JOINT ADVISORY BOARD MEETING**

**9 December 2010 7.30 pm**

## **Inquorate Meeting**

The meeting was declared inquorate as only one Brent Member was in attendance whereas the Consortium Agreement requires a minimum of two Members from each Authority to be present at the meeting.

## **Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests:**

There were no declarations of interest made.

## **Minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 July 2010:**

The minutes would be subject to formal approval at the next Trading Standards meeting.

## **Matters Arising:**

In response to a question, officers advised that:

- there had been no date set to submit a report on Section 75 of the Local Authority Act 2007 to the Executive of each Council;
- Legal teams from Brent and Harrow were working closely together to agree a way forward. The introduction of this legislation would require all mail forwarding businesses to register with the Council and keep records of all clients who use their services. A mail forwarding business was one where a postal address was made available to a person for the receipt of letters and postal packages that were held for collection or forwarded on to them;
- the fee to register for this would be approximately £85, which was consistent with neighbouring boroughs.

## **Half Yearly Report: Six month Report on the Operation of the Service - April 2010 to September 2010**

The Director of Trading Standards introduced a report which provided Members with an update on the operation of the Trading Standards Service over the past six months.

In response to questions, the officer advised that:

- there were currently three vacant posts within the Trading Standards Division. These posts had been purposely left vacant due to the current economic climate;
- the surplus obtained from the efficiencies made with vacant posts would be returned to Brent and Harrow at the end of the financial year;

- money obtained under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 was ring-fenced, and had to be used within the Trading Standards Department. It was difficult to forecast how much money would be obtained through the Act on an annual basis, and was not included in the base budget or any financial forecasts;
- officers would consider the possibility of initiating a contingency pot, so that, for example money recovered through the Act would be kept to pay for legal fees and for conducting further financial investigations;
- costs incurred by the Service as legal fees are paid to Barristers at the conclusion of the case. However, costs awarded to the Service by the Courts following successful prosecutions can take years to recover, if at all. Another potential issue with the costs awarded by the Courts was that the amount might not cover the full costs incurred by the Service in undertaking the case;
- as a result of previous budget cuts there had been a reduction in training and professional qualifications that could be offered to existing staff.

### **Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and the consumer landscape:**

The Director of Trading Standards introduced a report which provided an update on the Government's recent announcements relating to the proposals for the new consumer landscape and the future of the consumer protection services.

He advised that:

- Government proposals were likely to place a greater emphasis on Local Authorities for the provision of trading standard services. Although the Localism Bill had not yet been published, Members would be kept informed of the progress;
- the public awareness of the Trading Standard Service had increased as had the demands and expectations of service users.

In response to a question, the officer clarified that officers would welcome feedback and suggestions on the Localism Bill when it had been published. A co-ordinated response, having been considered by lead Executive Members from Harrow and Brent, would be compiled and sent to the Government for consideration.

**Note: The Informal meeting of the Trading Standards Joint Advisory Board, having started at 7.30 pm finished at 8.50 pm**