

**London Boroughs of Brent and Harrow  
Trading Standards Joint Advisory Board**

23 November 2017

**Report from the Service Manager**

**FOR INFORMATION**

**UPDATE ON NATIONAL TRADING STANDARDS SCAMS  
TEAM PARTNERSHIP**

**1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The Trading Standards Joint Advisory Board supported a proposal made on 24 October 2016, for the Service to work in partnership with the National Trading Standards (NTS) Scams Team in respect of the sharing of information and receiving referrals from them.
- 1.2 As requested by the Joint Advisory Board, this report provides an update on the partnership a year on from its formation.

**2.0 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That the Joint Advisory Board notes the work undertaken and supports the continuation of the partnership.

**3.0 Detail**

- 3.1 The NTS was set up by the Government to provide leadership, influence, support and resources to help combat consumer and business detriment nationally, regionally and locally. Their Scams Team focuses on tackling mass marketing scams bringing disruption to the perpetrators. The team works closely with scam campaign Think Jessica, the Metropolitan Police, Citizens Advice, Royal Mail and other mail providers, the Financial Ombudsmen Service and the National Crime Agency
- 3.2 Scams are frequently targeted at the vulnerable members of our community such as the elderly or those who are lonely or might be already in debt. As well as being a nuisance receiving cold calls and unsolicited mail in the post, scams are a serious problem which cause not just a financial loss, but can also lead to mental health deterioration of the victims.
- 3.3 Recognising the importance of protecting vulnerable local residents and following a trial period of working with the Scams Team, the Service agreed to formalise its partnership by signing a Service Level Agreement with them.

- 3.4 This agreement provided for an agreed number of referrals to be sent through to the Trading Standards Service on a monthly basis. The referrals identify local scam victims who we would seek to make contact with to advise them they had been deceived, offer help and advice and importantly make sure they had the required support to avoid becoming repeat victims. The Scams Team required feedback 4 weeks after sending a referral along with any further updates as necessary once we have advised the victim/s.
- 3.5 As well as the Trading Standards role providing an important intervention for scam victims, it also satisfies the Council's statutory responsibilities under the Care Act 2014. This legislation puts local authorities under a duty to prevent individuals being subject to financial abuse and to take suitable steps to prevent or delay adults needing long term care or support. This work directly assists preventing people becoming repeat victims and is a key element of maintaining longer term health and wellbeing in later life.
- 3.6 Since the Joint Advisory Board Meeting in October 2016, the Service has received 61 referrals from the Scams Team, 32 for Brent and 29 for Harrow. This represents a lower number than expected and experienced in our previous trial of this work.
- 3.7 A referral typically consists of a report that a local resident has entered anything from one to five or more, scam prize draws. These draws require a fee to be paid in order to either enter it, or to claim prize money. The fees demanded are usually low in value as this encourages a higher return rate to the scammers.
- 3.8 Once a victim engages with the scammer, they might send another prize draw a period of time later, but this time try to illicit a slightly higher fee. Worryingly, evidence shows some victims passing scammers their bank account details, whereas other send cheques or even cash in the post, to guarantee their part in the draw.
- 3.9 Of the referrals that we have received, £295 has been returned between nine victims, six in Brent and three in Harrow.
- 3.10 Officers receive a mixture of responses when they make contact with the victims. On some occasions, victims acknowledge their wrong doing, even suspecting they had been conned, are prepared to accept their mistake and put the experience down to learning not to respond again.
- 3.11 In other circumstances, our contact comes as a total surprise with victims embarrassed or uncomfortable of their actions and not wishing to discuss things any further.
- 3.12 We are most concerned when we meet victims who are in denial of their mistakes. Some are adamant the draws are genuine, others will not admit they are regularly responding to the competitions whereas some, will not engage with us at all. This is necessary for an assessment of their understanding and the extent they have been scammed to be assessed.
- 3.13 One recent case concerns a resident who shall be identified as "Mr A", aged 72

who lived with his wife. He had been a repeat victim of prize draw and clairvoyant postal scams paying out over £5,000 during years of communication with the various scammers in hopeful return of prizes and good fortune. During a home visit, officers identified that Mr A had also fallen victim to a scam via an unsolicited telephone call.

- 3.14 The caller had previously persuaded Mr A that he could process a PPI claim for him, following which he would receive a large sum of money. The scammer persuaded Mr A, that in order to pursue the claim, he needed £2,000 worth of voucher codes which could be obtained from cards used to download music. Mr A went ahead and purchased these cards with various amounts of credit on them which he showed to the officers. The scammers would then periodically contact Mr A to take the codes over the phone enabling them to be used or sold on by the scammers.
- 3.15 Once an assessment has been made to establish the vulnerability of victims and we have established the level of support that person may or may not receive, they are provided with advice as to what to look out for to avoid being duped again, encouraged not to respond to independent or unknown draws and importantly, are left with contact details so they know who to contact should further advice or support be required.
- 3.16 In this instance, we were able to make contact with a family member who has been able to assist with Mr A and his wife's future wellbeing. Obtaining the contact details of a family member or somebody who the victim is in regular communication with and alerting them what has happened is an effective way of us being able to provide advice and to make sure that the victims is not isolated and left to deal with things on their own.
- 3.17 Where no family member or other person is available, or in cases of significant vulnerability, we pass the victims details onto the relevant Adult Safeguarding team who will make contact and carry out an assessment to ensure the resident has access to the relevant Council or other support services available to them.
- 3.18 The Service actively takes part in awareness campaigns to highlight scam issues and to educate the public. This included participating with Scams Awareness Month in July 17, which is an annual campaign bringing together organisations and consumers across the country to take a united stand against scams and fraud.
- 3.19 We have presented at several community events in Harrow including attending a meeting of Northwick Park Neighbourhood Watch group, speaking at the 'Scams, Fraud & Staying Safe' forum organised by Harrow's Adult Safeguarding Team, officers provided training to HSBC bank staff about how to identify potential scam victims, spoke at the Harrow Senior Residents Association meeting about scams awareness and took part with Age UK's Brent Scam Awareness event held in the Civic Centre.
- 3.20 In addition, we have actively promoted and taken part in a London scheme, known as the 'Banking Protocol', which is aimed at ensuring banks and police are more active in protecting customers. All bank staff are told to look out for specific signs that customers may be the victim of a scam or a fraud. If they have suspicions,

staff are encouraged to call the police quoting the protocol which instigates an immediate priority response from them.

- 3.21 The Service attends both the Brent and Harrow Safeguarding Adults Board meetings through which we have been identified as a key partner in assisting the Council's statutory responsibilities under the Care Act 2014. The Boards have provided a conduit for us to liaise and work alongside other healthcare professionals.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 This work costs the Service in both officer time and the expense of staff travelling to meet the victims. Some interventions take longer than others but on average, each visit will require an hour of officer time plus their travel. Wherever possible, visits are arranged to coincide with other duties so as to make effective use of that travelling time. This work has been included in the Annual Service Plan so as long as the number of referrals remain within the levels expected, it can be carried out using existing resources.
- 4.2 It would be more cost effective not to visit each victim as this would save significant time. However, home visits are highly recommended for this type of work as it is necessary to build the trust and establish a rapport with the victims. This also provides a valuable opportunity for officers to assess any further safeguarding issues and to determine whether the victims require follow up either by Trading Standards or another Council service,

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

#### **6.0 Equality Implications**

- 6.1 The proposals in this report have been screened to assess their relevance to equality and were found to have no equality implications.

#### **7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders**

- 7.1 Ward Members do not need to be consulted about this report as safeguarding is a statutory requirement for the local authority that applies to all wards.

#### **8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications**

- 8.1 There are no staffing implications other than those referenced in points 4.1 and 4.2 above.

Any person wishing to obtain more information should contact Simon Legg, Senior Service Manager, Standards and Enforcement, Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley Middlesex HA9 0FJ or [simon.legg@brent.gov.uk](mailto:simon.legg@brent.gov.uk).

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