



Brent & Harrow Trading Standards

Annual report
2017-2018

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Introduction

This Annual Report highlights some of the key work outcomes delivered by the Trading Standards Service for the period of the April 2017 to March 2018.

The Service is managed by Simon Legg with Anu Prashar and Samuel Abdullahi covering the two Team Leader roles for all of the year.

During the time of this Annual Report, the Service Manager reported to the Operational Director, Aktar Choudury. The team has since been subject to a departmental reorganisation and is now under the remit of our Operational Director for Environmental Services, Chris Whyte. The team sits within the regulatory hub and within the wider Regeneration and Environment directorate.

The Service had a retirement of a long serving member of staff in April 2017. This meant we continued to operate throughout 2017/18 with reduced levels of staffing as none of the previous vacancies were advertised or filled. This has assisted the department in achieving its required savings.

The Service has a wide range of responsibilities including weights and measures, product safety, trademarks, unfair contract terms and unfair trading practices, price marking and price comparisons, supply of age restricted products, licensing and inspection of explosives storage facilities.

We are a small Service which provides advice and regulatory services that protect both consumers and honest businesses as well as creating safer communities and a fair economic environment that allows new and small firms to both start and thrive. The joint consortium between the London Borough of Brent and the London Borough of Harrow has made the Service more resilient to some of the demands placed upon us during the year and has contributed to some of our successes.

Our work is continually evolving especially in the difficult economic conditions within local government. There has been an increase in internet shopping across local, regional and national barriers, scams designed to take advantage of the vulnerable are becoming more and more sophisticated and criminals are using highly sophisticated methods to launder money. This has meant the job of the Trading Standards Service has become more complex and yet increasingly central to most people's lives. I hope the work in this report evidences our commitment and contribution to making this happen.

Budget

The Service budget for the preceding 10 years is provided below for comparison purposes. It should be noted that in addition to the general decline in budget, the Service has been required to make further annual savings from these budgets as part of each Borough's austerity measures

Savings were achieved during 2017/18 by holding empty staff posts with six of the 19 positions, being kept vacant all year. In addition, one member of staff was on maternity leave for the majority of the year and no arrangements were made to backfill this post to maximise savings.

Fortunately, the joint consortium arrangements, provide some resilience to this as well as offering the opportunity to share knowledge and expertise between officers acting within the two Borough teams.

Throughout the year, all expenditure was maintained at minimum level whilst at the same time, we took opportunities to exploit our income levels. One such example of this, was the successful award of £18,000 from the National Trading Standards to assist us with the costs of conducting a large investigation.

| Date | Budget |
|-------------|---------------|
| 2008/09 | £1,772,000 |
| 2009/10 | £1,702,000 |
| 2010/11 | £1,673,000 |
| 2011/12 | £1,274,000 |
| 2012/13 | £1,274,000 |
| 2013/14 | £1,299,000 |
| 2014/15 | £ 864,000 |
| 2015/16 | £ 379,000 |
| 2016/17 | £ 313,000 |
| 2017/18 | £ 380,000 |

There was no change in the contribution to Brent from Harrow for these service costs for 2017/18 which remained at £625,000. However, Harrow was not paid the usual annual contribution of £125,000 to offset the cost of our financial investigations team due to Harrow's lack of use of the service.

Supporting Business

The Service has continued to contribute towards both Borough's objectives of supporting business growth by delivering effective regulation for the benefit of legitimate businesses. Some examples of us achieving this are summarised below:

Primary Authority

During 2017/2018, we continued to provide businesses support and advice through the Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Primary Authority scheme. We provided our Primary Authority businesses a total of 180 hours of advice and support to help assist with their legal compliance and reduce business' costs.

This represents a drop in hours from the previous year of 248 hours. One of the challenges faced by the service is that the more we assist businesses and make them compliant, the less the businesses will approach us for assistance. Whilst this is a good thing, we are continually looking for new members to recruit to the scheme and strive to attract larger contracts to generate a higher number of hours of support which we offer a business.

The charge for this advice during 2017/18 was either £55.89/hr or £69.91/hr depending on the type of contact a business opted for.

As of the 1 October 2017, Primary Authority expanded to allow more businesses to participate in the scheme so that pre-start-up businesses and a business operating from only one local authority may also join. With this came further changes to the new Primary Authority terms and conditions and a new national database. This meant that officers needed to discuss the changes with our Primary Authority businesses, re-register them and sign on to the new database in order to accept the new terms. It was also necessary to review the data held about the business and information provided to them by us. This exercise needed to be achieved in order for the partnerships to continue otherwise existing Primary Authority partnerships would no longer be recognised by BEIS. I am pleased to report that all of our existing member businesses bar two, renewed their agreements in time. The two who did not renew, were no longer actively using the scheme.

Inspections

All of our business inspections are conducted on a risk based approach. They are not routine, instead being based on need determined by intelligence, risk and a trader's past compliance history.

On some occasions, the Consumer Rights Act 2015 applies to our officers which requires them to give two days written notice to business owners of their intension to carry out an inspection unless a specific exemption exists.

The numbers of inspections and comparisons to previous years, are shown on the table below:

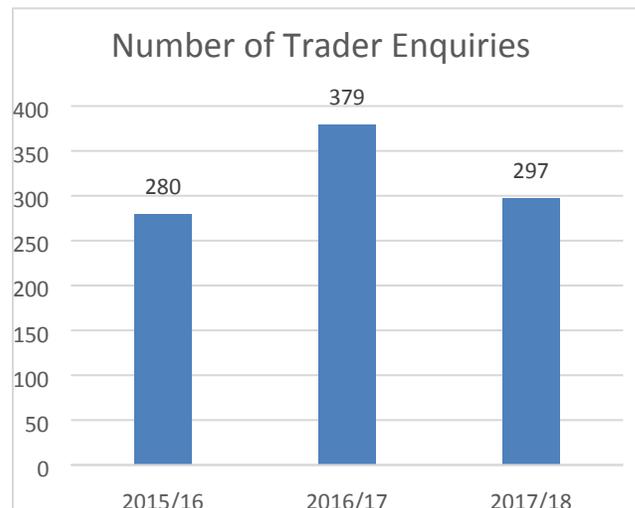


The number of high risk inspections has remained consistent over recent years as we prioritise these to ensure they are done. You will note a spike of 10 high risk visits in Harrow compared to the previous year which is due in part, to an increased number of problem car traders in the borough whereas the number of other inspections in carried out in Harrow dropped, which is directly attributable to the reduced staff numbers. There is no specific reason for the rise in the number of Brent other inspections although it is likely that the increased intelligence about businesses supplying illicit tobacco or alcohol and joint visits carried out with the HMRC, will have contributed to this.

Trader Enquiries

When we are contacted by local businesses asking for our assistance or if a Primary Authority customer requests us to carry out some work for them, these requests are logged and recorded on our system as ‘Trader Enquiries’.

The table opposite shows there was a fall in the number of these enquires from the previous year which matches the decline in the amount of primary authority advice offered during the year. This has no reflection on the quality of advice given and this was still a rise from 2015/16. We aim to contact all such enquirers within 48hrs of their



enquiry being received (excluding weekend contacts).



Responsible Trader Scheme

The Service continued to promote our Responsible Trader scheme to all businesses in Brent & Harrow selling age restricted products. The scheme is still free to join and provides businesses with training, advice and marketing materials to use with their staff and customers.

A total of 80 members received audit visits to ensure the scheme's terms and conditions were being adhered to and standards maintained.

Landlord Forum

In May 2017, officers attended and spoke at the Harrow Landlord Forum. This event was attended by over 200 landlords, managing and letting agents and other property professionals from Brent and Harrow and neighbouring boroughs. Officers gave a short update on recent legislation and refresher on old legislation that are still relevant within their fields.



Fireworks Licensing

In Harrow, Trading Standards are responsible for the issuance of firework license to retailers. During 2017/18 there were 30 business premises that were licensed to sell fireworks within the borough, 14 of these were major retailers and 16 independent retailers. Four of these premises are licensed to sell fireworks all year round.

Assisting Consumers

Responding to Service Requests

Responding to consumer complaints has always been an important role for the Trading Standards Service in delivering its key priorities. Providing relevant and timely advice is fundamental to ensuring that members of the public are informed, more confident and have the ability to resolve their own disputes or enforce their contractual rights in the marketplace.

We continue to work closely with Citizens Advice Consumer Service who provide the first tier of advice to members of the public before sending us daily referrals via a secure computer system when consumers require further help to resolve an issue where there is an allegation of criminal law having been breached.

It remains the case that we do not have the capacity to respond to every complaint that we are referred so a complaints matrix is applied to prioritise those that will investigate further. During 2017/18, we investigated 403 complaints received from members of the public, 228 from Brent residents and 175 from Harrow residents.



Attending local Crime Reduction Events

The team have attended various events during the year supporting Age UK or other community groups. This offers important educational work and raises awareness of the Council's role protecting members of the public.

Events like this also provide a good opportunity to build relationships with other community groups.

With the growing awareness and increasing number of victims, we have attended five events focusing specifically on fraud and scams. One of these events was hosted by Age UK which brought together a range partners to give presentations to residents, and our officers sitting on a panel of experts answering questions on doorstep crime and

scams.

Working with NTSB Scams Hub

During the year, the Service formalised its work with the National Trading Standards Board (NTSB) Scams Hub by signing a service level agreement pledging to visit victims of scams. These visits allow us to assess whether the person is a repeat victim and if necessary to alert the appropriate agencies to provide the required support.

Despite attempts to raise awareness of scams, there are still a steady supply of referrals from the Scams Hub detailing local Brent or Harrow victims who had responded to unsolicited literature tempting them to win non-existent prizes.

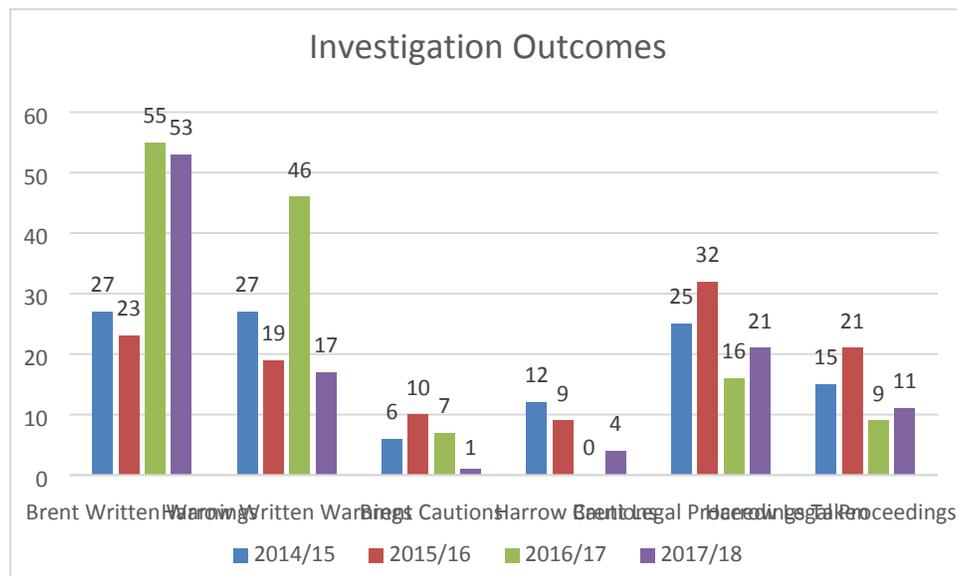
Investigations

Investigation reports are prepared and submitted by officers following allegations which have led to compelling evidence to prove the commission of a criminal offence(s). The outcome of investigation reports can include:

- No further action
- Re-inspection/advice
- Letter of warning/advice
- Simple Caution if the trader accepts their guilt
- Legal proceedings

During the year, the Brent Team submitted a total of 32 investigation reports and the Harrow Team a total of 16. This represents a reduction of investigations, down from 35 in Brent and 22 in Harrow the previous year.

The table below shows the number of formal actions taken last year alongside previous years for comparison. *The figure showing the legal proceedings can appear higher because in some cases, we may prosecute the company and its director. This would show as two examples of legal proceedings although it is only one business or case.*



Traders were fined a total of £26,783, up from £20,785 in 2016/17 but down from £37,675 in 2015/16 and £39,630 in 2014/15. In 2017/18 there were four defendants that received suspended sentences totalling 168 weeks and 800 hours of unpaid work

A total of £56,661 was awarded to us in prosecution costs. This was up £15,081 awarded in 2016/17 and up from £28,560 in 2015/16. This was due to several cases from the previous year being concluded in the Crown Court.

The highest fine was £5,000 against a company convicted of selling counterfeit sew on badges online. This is comparable with the highest fine awarded the previous year which was for an online company selling counterfeit clothing who were fined £5,000.

The lowest fine was £300 imposed against a company director who illegally sold tobacco products which did not display the required statutory health warnings.

Underage sales

Our mystery shopping exercises continued throughout the year on the lookout for the small number of traders who think it is ok to sell age-restricted goods to children.

The following table shows the results of our test-purchasing in 2017/18, with an overall comparison to the previous year indicating an increase in the number of businesses selling age restricted goods. Both boroughs have shown an increase in illegal sales, which highlights why it is important to continue with our mystery shopping exercise.

| Product | Test purchases (no.) | | Sales (no.) | | Failure rate (%) | |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| | Brent 2017/18 | Harrow 2017/18 | Brent 2017/18 | Harrow 2017/18 | Brent 2017/18 | Harrow 2017/18 |
| Alcohol | 69 | 18 | 4 | 3 | 5.8 | 16.7 |
| Tobacco | 15 | 41 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Knife | 21 | 34 | 3 | 4 | 14.3 | 11.8 |
| Fireworks | 3 | 27 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Spray Paint | 7 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| E-Cigarettes | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| Video | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lottery | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total 2017/18 | 115 | 93 | 15 | 7 | 13 | 7.5 |
| Total 2016/17 | 125 | 136 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 1.5 |

Rogue Cold Callers

During the year 7 'rapid responses' were provided to victims of rogue trading. Victims typically are taken in by the rogue's sales pitch which often starts with an agreement to complete works at a very reasonable price. Once the rogues start work, the price immediately rises due to 'unforeseen problems' or works are carried out which were not agreed. Often these works leave the homeowners property in such a state, they feel it necessary to commit to it continuing in order to put things back and repair the damage.

Our intervention in these call outs saved the victims an estimated £45,340 based on the sum being demanded by the rogues. Had we not intervened when we did, there is no doubt that this figure could have potentially risen much higher.



A callout in May 2017 took officers to a house in Harrow where the homeowner had already paid £10,000 for work on his driveway and patio to a cold caller. The trader wanted another £32,000 to finish the work. In another callout in Harrow, the victim had paid £10,000 for unnecessary roofing work. When officers arrived at the home the traders ran off.

In another case the victim was quoted £60 for their driveway to be cleaned. The trader then told the victim that her roof needed repair and quoted £5,000 and they would need the money for materials. The victim withdrew £4,300 which the trader gave back after Trading Standards involvement.

It is reassuring to see that the Police are now starting to become more involved with this type of crime and we work with them on many of these callouts. This is largely due to the 'banking protocol' that was introduced last the year. The protocol is an initiative is hosted between the banks, Trading Standards and Police aimed at identifying customers who are in the process of being defrauded and implementing safeguarding procedures to prevent their repeat victimisation and further loss of funds. The protocol provides a method for bank staff to contact the Police when they have concerns about a customer withdrawing a large sum of cash which guarantees an immediate Police response.

This initiative has meant the Police are responding to many more rogue trader type of complaints than they have done previously, reducing the need for us to provide our repaid response service and reducing the chance of the rogue traders being able to make off if they are still at the homeowner's premises.

Partnership working is also important as several of our partners have referred complaints to us of rogue trader activities when they have visited their client's homes.

Both boroughs supported the national Operation Liberal during the year. This is a joint national Trading Standards, and Police initiative that runs annually to combat rogue builders and doorstep criminals. We conducted patrols with the Police and HMRC who were interested to identify whether people working as builders are paying their taxes correctly.

Work with the Safety at Ports and Borders Team



The Service receives referrals from the Safety at Ports and Border Teams about consumer goods which have come into the UK that are potentially unsafe and non-compliant that could cause harm to consumers, including electrical goods, cosmetics and toys. In one such case, officers from the Brent team were informed of an

importation of radio controlled toy, battery operated cars that were imported by a company in Brent. These goods were found to be unsafe and officers worked with the company to ensure that these cars did not entered the supply chain.

Letting Agents

The Consumer Rights Act 2015 creates a legal requirement for letting agents to display details of fees they charge on their premises and websites. It is the responsibility of the Trading Standards Service by virtue of our function as the 'Local Weights and Measures Authority' to enforce the provisions of this legislation. The purpose of the legislation is to increase transparency of fees and highlight avenues for dispute resolution for tenants and landlords. Failure to adhere to these requirements can result in a financial penalty of £5k per omission where Trading Standards evidence, on the balance of probabilities that someone who is engaged in letting or property management work has failed to comply with these requirements.

Last year, we commenced a project to tackle the high level of non-compliance identified among letting and property management businesses. A comprehensive advisory letter concerning the requirement for letting agents to publicise fees and other information was sent to 161 agents.

Officers started to follow up the letters with visits and have reported that a significant number of agents continue to flout the law. Towards the end of the year, the Service issued two notices of intent, a statutory procedure ahead of issuing a business a penalty charge notice. More will follow in this work in next year's annual report.

Financial Investigations

The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) is a powerful piece of legislation in relation to confiscating money that have been acquired as a result of crime. The Act can be used to recover benefit made from all sorts of criminal conduct including benefit fraud, planning and environmental infringements and breaches of consumer protection laws.

The team dealing with proceeds of crime work is headed by Anu Prashar and two Financial Investigators, Lee Wenzel and Alpa Shah

Since using POCA the team has secured 77 confiscation orders worth £7,899,717.00.

When a confiscation order is paid, the money is divided in accordance with the Home Office Asset Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (ARIS), which means that 50% will go to the Government. The remaining 50% is divided between the prosecuting authority (18.75%), the investigating authority (18.75%) and the court service (12.5%).

During the financial year 2017/2018 we received £258,349.45 from the Home Office as part of this incentivisation scheme.

Below are details of some of the confiscation orders that the team secured this year.

In June 2017 a restraint order was obtained under POCA for an ongoing case relating to a house in multiple occupation which was overcrowded with safety breaches. This restraint order was secured to prevent assets being dissipated prior to the conclusion of confiscation proceedings under POCA.

An order was made against a convicted counterfeiter in July 2017 at Harrow Crown Court for £19,604.03. The trader had sold illegal printer cartridges and memory cards.

In July 2017, an order was made against a landlord for £116,140.39 for a planning breach which continued for a number of years in his own back garden in Brent. He had constructed a rear extension to form two self-contained flats. The rental income was calculated from tenancy agreements and council tax information and credits flowing through his bank accounts. The order has been paid in full.



The next case concerned a property management company in August 2017, who were ordered to pay £300,650.77. The order followed a conviction for a planning infringement which saw a property in Brent which had been converted from a hotel into 26 self-contained dwellings without planning permission. The picture shows the poor standard of accommodation offered. I am pleased to report the order has since been fully paid.

A POCA order was made against a landlord during September 2017 for £52,000.00 and has now been paid in full. This related to the breach of an enforcement notice for turning a warehouse into a place of worship, without planning permission.

During October 2017 a POCA order was made against a company for £145,000.00. This related to another planning infringement whereby a property in Brent had been converted into 5 self-contained dwellings without planning permission. This order has subsequently been paid in full.

In January 2018, we secured order on behalf of another authority who use our services against a landlord, for £95,920. The case concerned the construction of the roof extension which was larger than the planning permission allowed. The space was then converted to two self-contained flats. The order has since been paid in full.



Another case in January 2018, saw us secure an order against a landlord in Brent. The case was unusual as it concerned the conversion of business units in an industrial estate. Part of the ground floor was being used as a workshop for mechanical repairs, the first floor the units were being used as self-contained flats. The planning officer found tenants occupying bunk beds, kitchen

facilities, bathrooms and eight bedrooms in total. The landlord was ordered to pay £20,000 with a default sentence of one year being set. The landlord was granted a three month extension to the original three months granted, but he has still failed to pay his order. The matter is now in the hands of the Enforcement Court at Westminster Magistrates. Below is a photo of one of the rooms which shows the inadequate space the tenants had in some of the units.

We continue to work with and see more cases being referred from other London Councils who have requested our financial investigation services. We intend to further promote the service we provide in the hope of securing more financial investigations and using our expertise to assist other local authorities using this powerful legislation.

Brent Team Investigations

April 2017 started with the sentencing of a counterfeiter selling illicit football programmes in Wembley. He had already been found guilty in January after a six day Crown Court trial. The defendant tried to argue his publication was a newspaper and the way he had used the trade marks, did not breach the legislation, yet we argued he publications were clearly misleading to the football fans attending the Wembley even. The Court sentenced him to 14 months in prison, suspended for two years and he was ordered to wear an electronic tag and comply with a curfew from 8pm to 7am for six months.

We continue to revisit traders who have been subject to previous formal actions to ensure that they are not reoffending. Towards the end of April 2017, one such trader who had been subject to previous formal action, was found with illegal cigarettes which did not display the correct health warnings. He was fined £2,850 given the and payment of costs totalling £1,000.

In another case where the trader had been previously convicted of possessing illicit tobacco, the court issued a six week custodial sentence for each charge to run concurrently suspended for 12 months. The court had previously given the defendant a fine of £660 and ordered to carry out 100hrs of community service for his second offence of selling banned oral tobacco products and cigarettes without adequate health warnings and counterfeit cigarette lighters.

In third, similar case, the shop owner was fined £1,500 and ordered to pay costs of £844. This type of work was very prevalent during 2017/18 as it followed the funding provided the previous year by Public Health to reduce the availability of illicit tobacco.

As detailed on page 11 above, we investigate sales of age restricted products. In one such case, a known offending business, sold an eleven inch carving knife to two 15-year-old children. The trader had even previously sold a knife to our volunteers before. The trader was fined £2,700 and ordered to pay costs of £941.

In June 2017, we concluded an investigation dating back to November 2015 against a Travel Agents based in Brent. The Court heard how more than 30 holiday goers were led to believe they had booked flights only to end up out of pocket and devastated when they found that these flights had not been booked at all. The defendant pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 12 months in custody.



In July 2017, we concluded the case of an on-line trader selling counterfeit printer toners, mobile phone accessories and memory cards. Over 3,000 items were seized from the counterfeiter's home, car and storage unit. A calculation of the loss to the industry was estimated as £226,541. The court gave him a six months sentence suspended for 12 months and ordered to complete 180 hours of unpaid work. He was also ordered to pay costs of £12,500 and a confiscation order of £19,674 forfeiting his criminal profits after pleading guilty to the possession and sale of

counterfeit items at Harrow Crown Court.

In September 2017, an eBay business operator who was featured on BBC's Fake Britain for selling counterfeit headlights, was fined £3,500 and ordered to pay costs of £5,500.

In November 2017, another counterfeiter was sentenced to 12 month sentence, reduced to 46 weeks suspended for two years, and 250 hours of unpaid work. He was also ordered to pay £12,000 in costs and a victim surcharge of £100 for his crimes. The counterfeiter was selling counterfeit automotive goods on-line. During the search of the counterfeiter's home, 19,500 branded items were seized and sent to their respective trademark owners for testing, where they were found to be counterfeit. This represented a potential loss to industry would have been more than £100,000.

Three cases were referred to the Advertising Standards Authority due to their misleading claims that that consumers had won a prize and promotional claims on nictone products. All the complaints were upheld.

Harrow Team Investigations



In August 2017, an online Harrow based company selling counterfeit products was fined £5,000 and its director was given an 18 months suspended sentence following an investigation by the team. An online test purchase was conducted for some of its products which was subsequently confirmed as counterfeit by the experts. A warrant was executed at his home address and warehouse in Harrow and over 30,000 counterfeit items estimated to be worth over £125,000 were

seized.

During a day of action in Harrow, officers seized over 1,000 toys and games from a business in Harrow. The toys were found to be counterfeits and were potentially dangerous. The owner of the business when interviewed claimed to have inherited most of the products when she

purchased the business but then also admitted to buying more of the products from a total stranger few months earlier who walked into her shop. The owner of the business was fined £2,000 in September 2017.

A rogue trader who used aggressive practices to get his customer to hand him over £3,000 in advance, for work that he failed to complete. Within days of receiving the money in his hands he promptly disappeared and did not complete the work that should have taken him a week. 6 offences were laid in court, the rogue trader pleaded guilty to two of the four offences and he was subsequently found guilty in November 2017 for the remaining. The rogue trader was fined £3,288 in total, ordered to pay £3,000 compensation to the victims, £2740 costs and a victim surcharge of £66.

Performance

Complaints of Dissatisfaction about the Service

During 2017/18, there were six complaints of dissatisfaction received about the Service, which coincidentally was the same as the previous year. Four of these were informally dealt with, one was a corporate Stage 1 complaint whereas the other progressed to a Stage 2 complaint. None of the complaints were upheld.

These complaints are summarised below:

1. The Stage 1 complaint was from a landlord who was claiming a letting agent had amongst other things, falsified his signature on a tenancy agreement, was not passing on the full rent, they owed him money and the agent was not correctly registered in a redress scheme. This was a complex complaint which had no Trading Standards remit as it was mostly a civil matter. The only criminal allegation was the lack of redress scheme membership but in Harrow, this legislation was delegated to their Residential Licensing team and not to Trading Standards. Nevertheless, as the agent was known to us, we did try to mediate between the parties to remedy the dispute but whilst doing so, we made it clear to the complainant, that this was not a Trading Standards matter. The complaint was not upheld as it was evidenced that our officers had acted appropriately. Dissatisfied with this response, the complainant complained again, as he was unhappy with the way the Stage 1 enquiry was conducted. Following a thorough review of the case, **complaint was not upheld** in any part.
2. The Stage 2 complaint was regarding our decision not to investigate a consumer's allegation that a national supermarket's £3.00 meal deal was misleading as the drink he had tried to purchase was not included in the offer. An officer made contact with the consumer but after reviewing the evidence and considering the facts of the case, decided not to take the matter any further. A review of the case was carried out and the officer's course of action was agreed to be appropriate in the circumstances. The **complaint was not upheld**.
3. A consumer was unhappy that we would not assist with a civil claim to obtain a refund or replacement lock from a locksmith. Again, officers had tried to mediate between the two parties carrying out extensive communication, even though the matter was civil. The matter was concluded with there being no wrong doing on behalf of the Trading Standards Service although it was observed that on occasions, some of the communications between parties could have been responded to in a timely manner. This **complaint was not upheld**.

4. This matter was concerning our decision not to investigate a complaint about building works. The reason for reaching this decision was because the complainant had carried out remedial work before we got involved, therefore all evidence was lost and would have been too difficult for us to prove the allegations. This **complaint was not upheld**.
5. The complainant lived in Haringey and whilst the business was located in our area of jurisdiction, the alleged offence relating to non-delivery of herbal diet pills, took place out of area. Accordingly, there were no powers available to us to investigate and it was not clear that a criminal offence had actually taken place. The complainant was unhappy that we would not investigate the matter for her. This **complaint was not upheld** and as it happens, during the course of this enquiry, we were able to get the business to send the delivery again and offer a refund for the items they did not have in stock.
6. The final complaint also concerned substandard building works. The officers had visited the complainant with a representative from Harrow Council's Building Control to look at the work and review the builders paperwork. Our findings were the same as the Police's who had also reviewed the alleged offending which was that this was a civil dispute concerning alleged substandard workmanship and potential breaches of contract. As Trading Standards have no statutory duty or powers to intervene with civil disputes we had decided not to investigate any further. This **complaint was not upheld**.

Compliments about the Service

As usual, despite the above complaints about our service, it is always heartening to hear of all the positive comments made about our officers. I have highlighted some of the comments received showing appreciation for the work we have carried out:

'I would much appreciate it if you were able to pass on our thanks and congratulate [the officer] for his wonderful work, wonderfully done. Perhaps you could also mention it to his boss, as good work is often the result of good leadership'. This followed a case where we prevented an 89 year old from being deceived out of £16,000 for unnecessary rooking work.

'I would also like to express my grateful thanks to the smashing people that I met in Brent TS and for their tremendous dedication involved in securing this great outcome'. Received from a brand owner after a large seizure of goods.

'Without your remarkable work with helping us solve this issue, we would not have not got anywhere and would have potentially lost a large sum of money. Once again we both appreciate the hard work and your efforts in helping the general public solve such complicated issues, without your support we would have lost this horrific case and a great deal of life savings'. Received after assisting a consumer with a dispute he had with a main card dealer.

'I cannot believe it after all these months of not hearing a single word, this morning [we] received a partial order and a partial refund is due back to my bank account. I'm certain this would not have happened without your intervention the turnaround is astounding and all we can do is voice our heartfelt thanks and appreciation. You're stars!' Sent to the Chief Executive after we resolved an online dispute over delivery of goods.

'A big shout out to our wonderful Financial Investigator, who showed her amazingness once again and fought our corner. Great job'. Received from a Prosecutor following a confiscation hearing.

'The event on the scams and fraud awareness was a tremendous help in highlighting the issues and both [officers] were brilliant. Thank you for supporting the event and I do hope we can look to developing more awareness activities next year'. Received from a charity following an event we partnered with them.

'Our Primary Authority partnership has given us a clearer understanding on the laws involved in our field of business.....I am absolutely delighted that the service exists.....I feel that the Trading Standards officers appointed to our business helped us create a better structure in our company model which has given us a smoother sales process leading to happier customers'. Received from a satisfied Primary Authority business.

'Your team were thoroughly professional in working with us'. A quote from the HMRC

'Your presentation was excellent and attracted a lot of interest. Please pass on our gratitude'. Received from a trade association who following a presentation we carried out at a conference.

Freedom of Information Requests

The Service received 13 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, down 5 from the previous year. They were all responded to within the statutory timescale.

The most popular subject for these requests related to letting agents with 3 separate enquires being made. 2 enquires were about specific businesses, 2 request were regarding tobacco legislation and sales. Other singular requests covered the subject areas of imported puppies, skin lightening creams, underage sales of knives, car clocking, our budget and energy performance investigations.

Training and Qualifications

A total of 535.5 hours of training was provided to officers, which equates to approximately 74 days. 270 of these were for three officers who commenced their professional qualification in July 2017 and each had to sit 3 exams in November which two of the officers passed all three exams with a distinction and a couple of merits between them.

The remaining 265.5 hours were for training that were delivered at little or no cost at all. These training were mainly delivered or arranged by London Trading Standards (LTS), Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) and Brent. Four officers successfully had their training accredited as 20 or more CPPD hours by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute.

Publicity

19 press releases promoting the work of the Service were produced during the year, 13 from Brent and 4 from Harrow. The press releases were mainly from the cases which were heard in court. The year started with a sentencing of counterfeit football programmes. This was also reported in the Sunday Mirror and included a quote from Brent's Cabinet member. The Sunday Mirror also carried an article on the travel agent who received 12 months custodial sentence for false airline flight tickets, which was featured in an episode of Fake Britain. Fake Britain also showed the searches of trader's homes who sold fake headphones in one case and fake headlight bulbs in another case.

Many of our press releases give information which is useful to our consumers and businesses, such as selling acid and scam awareness. These are usually picked up by the local media.

Trading Standards Week of Action

In September 2017, London Trading Standards (LTS) introduced a week long campaign to promote and raise awareness about the wide range of work carried out by Trading Standards service. The main areas for priorities were;

- Day 1: Sale of knives to minors under the age of 18
- Day 2: Letting agencies; checking compliance with information requirements
- Day 3: Scams and Doorstep Sales; how to avoid falling prey to scammers
- Day 4: Support for businesses; helping businesses thrive and support local economy
- Day 5: Product Safety: Highlighting how everyday products can pose risks

As part of the campaign LTS sent out several press releases prior to and during the week. This service also participated and was active to ensure the week was a success. The press team assisted by sending out tweets every day promoting the priority of the day and highlight what trading standards are doing locally within the boroughs. A total of 13 tweets were sent out during the week which in its entirety had 16,581 impressions and 412 engagements .

The number of "impressions" means the number of unique people directly reached with/who actually saw our tweet. The number of "engagements" is the total number of times a user interacted with a Tweet. Clicks anywhere on the Tweet, including retweets, replies, follows, likes, links, cards, hashtags, embedded media, username, profile photo, or Tweet expansion..



Brent Council @Brent_Council
Our Trading Standards officers are out today speaking to businesses about selling knives to anyone under 18 <http://ow.ly/HGAW30foMnT>
#LTSweek
pic.twitter.com/Sht1B1f9gR

Brent Council @Brent_Council
There's no room for rogue traders in Brent and our TS team are working hard to protect consumers in the borough: <http://ow.ly/qme730fvYi8>

Brent Council @Brent_Council
It's London Trading Standards week & our officers are out bright and early ensuring customers & reputable businesses are protected #LTSweek



Brent Council @Brent_Council
Test purchase by Trading Standards with the Police saw this knife sold to a 14 yr old . They are now being investigated #LTSweek
#saferBrent
pic.twitter.com/5Nm7png2rF