



Trading Standards Joint Advisory Board

Minutes

**Held as an online meeting at 6pm on
Wednesday 2 March 2022**

Present (in remote attendance):

Chair: Councillor Janice Long

London Borough of Brent

Councillors:

Keith Ferry

London Borough of Harrow

Promise Knight

London Borough of Brent

Daniel Kennelly

London Borough of Brent

Hitesh Karia

London Borough of Harrow

Angella Murphy-Strachan

London Borough of Harrow

1. **Election of Chair**

RESOLVED: That Councillor Janice Long (London Borough of Brent) be elected as Chair for the meeting.

2. **Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests**

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting - 9 June 2021**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

4. **Matters arising**

The following matters were raised in relation to the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2021:

Minute 4 – Matters Arising - Outstanding Delegations

In response to the request for an update on progress regarding the outstanding delegations Simon Legg (Head of Regulatory Services, Brent & Harrow Trading Standards) advised these were in the process of being reviewed with Emma Phasey (as the newly appointed Head of Licensing and Enforcement, Harrow Council) with a further update to be provided at the next meeting.

5. Deputations (if any)

No requests for deputations had been submitted for the meeting.

6. Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Annual Work Plan

The Board received a report, presented by Anu Prashar (Senior Regulatory Service Manager, Brent Council) outlining the proposed Annual Work Plan for Brent & Harrow Trading Standards in 2022/23.

In considering the report, the Board were advised that the Work Plan had been developed to reflect the impact of the pandemic and Trading Standards budgets for 2022/23. The Plan set out the main priority areas for the service along with expected levels of performance whilst also retaining some flexibility to adapt service delivery to meet any emerging or unexpected demand or respond to major investigations.

In terms of development of the service priorities it was noted that these had also been designed to reflect the priority areas of work identified by the National Trading Standards Board, London Trading Standards, Office of Product Safety and Standards Control Strategy and local priorities identified with the Corporate Plans agreed by Brent and Harrow.

The proposed priorities identified for the Brent & Harrow service had been detailed within the Work Plan attached as Appendix A of the report, which had been categorised as high, medium and low priority areas. In addition the work plan included projected work volumes for each team during 2022-23, although it was noted these would remain subject to change given the variable nature of the work undertaken by the service.

In reviewing the priorities identified, the Board noted:

- The inclusion of priorities identified through the National Trading Standards Board in relation to doorstep crime and scams, estate agency and lettings, illicit and counterfeit tobacco products (including vapes and underage sales), energy related fraud;
- The inclusion of priorities identified through London Trading Standards in relation to illicit tobacco products, doorstep crime, product safety, fair trading and scams;
- The fluid and flexible nature of the work programme, which had also included (as a low priority) single use carrier bag recharges

The following issues were then raised by members of the Board in response to the report:

- Further details were sought on the monitoring of single use carrier bag charges and whether it would be possible for voluntary groups and organisations such as Friends of the Earth to support the process. In response members were advised that whilst it would be possible to engage with different organisations it had been the Town Centre Managers who had taken the initial lead in terms of promoting and monitoring the impact of plastic free initiatives within high streets.
- Whilst supportive of the inclusion of energy related fraud and energy certification for letting of properties, members were keen to explore how this activity could be linked to the wider objectives in tackling the climate emergency. Members were advised of the type of activities covered under each priority area, which included inspecting energy rating certificates when visiting premises and in relation to energy fraud including sales of solar panels. Enforcement and inspection activity in relation to rental properties in the private sector was more difficult and would need to be undertaken as part of the work focussed around Estate and Letting Agents. Members were also advised on the arrangements being established to monitor and issue energy certificates for public buildings.
- Support was expressed for the focus on doorstep crime and proceeds of crime as a high priority with further details sought as to how these would be monitored and enforced. In terms of tackling doorstep crime, members were advised of the arrangement in place with Citizens Advice to respond and investigate where specific cases were reported, although cases involving cash payments were more difficult to track. The Council had also partnered with the 'Scam Hub' initiative and also participated in national days of action throughout the year designed to engage and educate residents on ways to identify and avoid doorstep crime and scams. In terms of proceeds of crime, members were advised of the proactive work being undertaken in seeking to recover funds relating to the proceeds of crime.

Having considered and commented on the report the Board **RESOLVED** to note and endorse the Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Annual Work Plan for 2022/23. and priority areas identified as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report.

7. **Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Fees and Charges Report**

The Board received a report presented by Anu Prashar (Senior Regulatory Services Manager) which detailed the proposed level of fees and charges to be made by the Brent & Harrow Trading Standards Service during 2022/23.

Members noted the three categories of Trading Standards fees which related to statutory fees, Retail Price Index (RPI) linked fees and discretionary fees with the proposed changes detailed in section 3.4 of the report. In terms of RPI linked fees it was noted that these had been based on the figure provided for December 2022 which had been 4.8%. This had resulted in a proposed increase in the hourly rate for primary authority fixed fees from £63 - £67 per hour and for pay as you go fees from £78 - £83 per hour. Members were supportive of the aim to minimise other increases in fees and charges in order to continue supporting businesses as part of the ongoing recovery from the pandemic and to reflect the impact arising from the cost of living crisis.

In terms of the Financial Investigator fees it was proposed to keep these at the same level as 2021-22 in order to remain competitive with other local authorities offering a similar service, with confirmation provided that these fees would apply in relation to referrals by Harrow.

Members noted the reduction in income across the service for 2021-22, which had reflected the reduction in overall budget received by the service although activity remained on track relating the target set for the year.

Having noted the report, the Board **RESOLVED** to endorse the proposed level of fees and charges for recommendation and adoption in relation to the Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Service for 2022/23.

8. **Benefits of Brexit Policy Report**

The Board received a report presented by Anu Prashar, providing Members with an introduction to the Prime Minister's policy paper 'The Benefit of Brexit: How the UK is taking advantage of Leaving the EU' and its potential impacts on Trading Standards.

In considering the report, the Board were advised that this area of work would be kept under review, with relevant updates related to legislative and regulatory frameworks to be presented to the Board moving forward.

Members were advised that the proposed approach set out within the policy paper was focussed around ensuring the UK's regulatory system was set up to maximise the opportunities available as a result of legislative freedoms arising from the UK's withdrawal from the EU and to ensure those laws and regulations which had been retained were right for the UK. As a result, the policy had set out four main objectives relating to the UK's approach towards regulatory reform (as detailed within section 3.5 of the report) supported by five new regulatory objectives (as detailed within section 3.6 of the report). These included creating a sovereign approach in regards to regulation in the future whilst also recognising what worked well and the need to maintain high standards both at home and globally.

The policy included (as detailed in section 3.7 of the report) a focus on different business sectors, including a number of areas relevant to Trading Standards functions which included weights and use of imperial measures; use of the crown stamp; product safety regime, control of chemicals; Aviation consumer policy; vehicle zero emission mandates; pet imports; online safety; tobacco control; low emission industrial practices and the approach towards minimising single use items.

Specific reference was also made to the role of local authorities as being key in delivery of any changes on behalf of their residents.

In reviewing the priorities identified, the Board made the following comments:

- In relation to online safety members were keen to explore how regulation might work and be enforced on which it was advised further guidance and legislation was awaited in terms of European wide engagement.

- Members also highlighted concern regarding potential costs associated with any change in relation to the introduction of weights and imperial measures.
- Clarification was also sought in relation to Aviation Consumer Policy with members advised of the current measures in place to tackle complaints relating to package holiday providers and online sales.
- In recognising the overall focus of the policy in relation to Trading Standard activity, members were supportive of the reference to measures designed to support tackling the climate emergency, single use culture, sale of illegal tobacco and other counterfeit goods and to address puppy and pet smuggling, although concerns were identified in relation to the impact on mobile roaming charges.

Having considered the report the Board **RESOLVED** to note the update provided and intention to monitor and review the subject areas in order to respond to any proposed changes or developments and with the Board to be updated as required.

9. **Date of Future Meetings**

Members noted the following provisional dates identified for meetings during the 2022-23 Municipal Year, which would be subject to final confirmation by each respective authority as part of the approval of their 2022/23 calendar of meetings:

- Wednesday 8 June 2022 at 6:00pm to be hosted by London Borough of Harrow
- Wednesday 12 October 2022 at 6:00pm to be hosted by the London Borough of Brent.
- Thursday 9 March 2023 at 6:00pm to be hosted by the London Borough of Harrow

10. **Any other urgent business**

As this was the final meeting of the Board prior to the local council election in May 2022 the Chair took the opportunity to thank all members for their support of the service and to wish those not standing in the elections (including Councillor Ferry) all the best for the future.

There were no other matter or urgent business.

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm

COUNCILLOR J. LONG
Chair