



**Brent and Harrow Trading
Standards Service**

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report 2023/24

Introduction

This Annual Report has been written to highlight some of the key outcomes delivered by the Trading Standards Service from April 2023 to March 2024. The Service is managed by Anu Prashar with Samuel Abdullahi covering the Team Leader role.

The Service Manager reports to the Head of Regulatory Service, with the team working as part of the wider Regulatory Services provision within the Environment and Leisure, now known as the Public Realm directorate.

Over the years the Trading Standards team has suffered from the continued local authority austerity measures however, with 3.5 Enforcement Officers for Brent and 2.5 for Harrow the team's work continues to focus on protecting residents, communities, and businesses from harm and financial loss, and maintaining a confident marketplace supporting businesses and the local economy growth. The Service fulfils the local authority's statutory role of a 'weights and measures authority' tasked with enforcing more than 250 pieces of legislation.

Service Requests

The Service continues to work with our partners Citizen's Advice Consumer Service. Any enquiries they receive that concern either a Brent or Harrow resident or business are referred to us if an alleged criminal breach is identified. Unfortunately, we cannot investigate or deal with every request received, so we prioritise the most serious ones to ensure our resources are applied to those situations where they are needed the most.

Citizens Advice Consumer Service provides first-tier advice to members of the public giving them the ability to resolve their disputes or enforce their contractual rights in the marketplace.

The Service received 4297 service requests from all partners including the Ports Teams, Police, other Trading Standards Services, trade industries, consumers, and businesses. 1143 were further analysed by the Brent team and 718 by the Harrow team, which resulted in 331 service requests in Brent and 169 service requests in Harrow being investigated.

Supporting Our Businesses

Businesses continue to need advice and support from Trading Standards to navigate the wide range of laws that govern how they trade.

We have provided almost 200 hours of advice to businesses through our Primary Authority Partnerships covering areas such as Product Safety, Fair Trading, age-restricted sales, and Trade Marks. We have maintained the number of partnerships which include IKEA and River Island who have a partnership with Brent and Premier Decorations who have a partnership with Harrow. Brent delivered 174 hours and Harrow 20 hours of Primary Authority advice. This is a 36% increase on last year and was due in part to issues arising regarding the supply of goods onto the European market.

The Service continues to contribute towards both borough's objectives of supporting business growth by delivering effective regulation for the benefit of legitimate businesses and officers have responded to 100 separate requests for advice and information from our local businesses (Brent 55 and Harrow 45) a 24% increase from the previous year, and conducted 274 compliance inspections (Brent 138, Harrow 136).

As part of our ongoing engagement with local businesses and in support of Operation Sceptre, we provided local retailers who sell knives with a training pack to try and prevent knife sales and other age-restricted products from getting into the hands of children.

A follow-up test purchase operation was carried out using child volunteers and all the shops where the children attempted to buy knives, refused to sell them. This is a great result.

We have signed up and audited 22 Businesses to our Responsible Trader Scheme, to further support our business community and protect young people from accessing age restricted goods.



The scheme provides guidance to assist our businesses with the training of their staff regarding age restricted products.

It promotes best practice and allows businesses to demonstrate a commitment to protecting our young people.

The training pack provides advice on a whole range of age restricted products including knives, vapes and corrosive substances.



We discovered an importer of non-compliant food grinders in terms of its labelling and instructions for use. The product was safe, but posed some risks to users as the instructions and labels were missing. Whilst we have powers to force cessation of the supply of the goods, the business showed it was willing and able to co-operate with us and we were able to give detailed advice on how to bring the products in to compliance. Following a rework, the grinders met the necessary obligations and the removal of 600 units was not necessary. This saved the business approximately £30,000.

Working Together

We continue to participate in enforcement operations on Wembley Stadium event days to deliver a strong message that illegal sellers and counterfeit merchandise will be targeted. Working in partnership with the Metropolitan Police, the FA and brand protection teams, we seize goods, issue warnings, and where necessary, prosecute.



We have seen a huge improvement in compliance levels on event days, with a substantial decline in the number of illegal street traders, making the events much more pleasurable for all who attend.

We contribute to the Weeks of Action in Harrow working alongside the police, Environmental Health and Community Safety teams. We have conducted checks on local businesses to ensure compliance with the sale of knives and vapes and provide information concerning our responsible trader scheme.

Three separate teams from Regulatory Services tackled a major fireworks issue in November when a joint inspection uncovered over 600kg of illegally stored fireworks. Formal undertakings were obtained from the business which resulted in the immediate return of the fireworks back to the wholesaler and the business surrendered their license.



The Service issued 34 fireworks licences to businesses to store and sell fireworks. The team has a statutory duty to carry out market surveillance and enforcement activities concerning the storage and sale of fireworks and is responsible for enforcing the legal provisions requiring that fireworks sold in the boroughs are manufactured to the relevant standard and that they are not sold to minors (under 18s).

Ensuring the Safety of Consumer Products

We continue to undertake a wide range of activities to protect our residents and promote the well-being of our communities. A few examples of some of the work we have delivered in this field are detailed below.

We investigated a line of child swim vests/buoyancy aids deemed to present a serious risk of drowning. We met with the product importer and examined the documents to evidence compliance with Regulation (EU) 2016/425 on personal protective equipment. Test certificates were incomplete and poorly drafted, and the products themselves failed to bear the necessary labels and warnings. As a result, the importer was instructed to remove 16,000 units from supply and a recall was successfully instigated by the importer.

We managed to provide advice on three other swim lines imported by the business which required re-working to bring them into compliance, as a result, this saved the business over £100,000 in potential losses.

Button and coin batteries pose a significant risk to children due to the hazards presented by their ingestion, such as severe tissue damage from chemical burns.

We have offered extensive advice to a manufacturer of a light, operated via two-coin batteries which formed part of a teeth whitening kit.



The product did not bear any warnings regarding the presence of the coin batteries. Also, the battery cover could be removed by simply turning the handle allowing access to the batteries. Our engagement and support resulted in the necessary changes being put into place and thereby safeguarding our more vulnerable consumers.

6 Brent businesses were inspected following intelligence that an electrically operated hotplate that posed a serious risk of electric shock to consumers, was available to buy.

Most of the shops had already removed the products but one had 14 still in stock.

These were removed from sale for return to the supplier and each shop was issued with a Recall Notice to display to alert customers who had already purchased the products.



We have acted on intelligence provided by the Ports Team on items including baby walkers, cosmetics, toys, electrical hair products, and kitchen appliances. We always act on this intelligence to ensure the products people buy, are safe. As a last resort, we will take formal action such as prosecuting but where we can work with businesses to bring a product into compliance, we will always seek to take that path.

Tackling Criminal Behaviour

One of the key functions of Trading Standards is to protect consumers and support legitimate businesses. We have an array of penalties available to us where businesses deliberately break the law, ignore our advice or cause serious harm. This ranges from monetary penalties and undertakings to fines and imprisonment.

We continue to deliver operation CeCe across the boroughs to tackle the sale and supply of illicit tobacco products such as cigarettes, hand-rolling tobacco, and shisha. There hasn't been much change in the quantities we seized from last year, but we have noticed lower amounts of stock are being held on the business premises. This year we seized over 40,000 cigarette sticks, 25 packs of hand-rolling tobacco; and over 100 kg of Smokeless/oral tobacco in Brent, and over 5,700 cigarette sticks, and 7.72kg of chewing tobacco in Harrow. The approximate value of the illegal tobacco was £24,500.



In Brent we issued four simple cautions and one letter of warning to businesses and individuals found to be in possession of illicit tobacco. In Harrow, we issued two simple cautions and seven letters of warning.

In Brent three businesses and their directors were prosecuted with fines totalling £4,800 issued and costs of £4,600.

In Harrow, a butcher on Greenford Road was fined £900 and was ordered to pay costs of £750 for supplying illicit tobacco. The director was also fined £900 and was also ordered to pay £750.



We seized a range of counterfeit phone cases and lanyards with a retail value of £7,330 from a mobile phone accessory shop in Harlesden.

There was no history of previous non-compliance with this business and following our seizure, the business was reinspected and found to be compliant. As a result, the owner was issued with a Simple Caution.

Age Restricted Products and Sales to Minors

As part of our ongoing commitment to protect consumers and our communities, preventing children from accessing age-restricted products is one element that feeds into that. Throughout the year we provide training and advice to businesses selling products such as vapes and alcohol online and in-store and we run a test purchasing operation using child volunteers to test businesses processes when selling these goods.

This year we have conducted 85 visits using our volunteers to try and purchase products such as alcohol, cigarettes, vapes, fireworks, knives, solvents, and butane. 42 visits were carried out in Brent and 43 visits in Harrow. 85% of businesses tested, did not sell to our children, this is a positive increase of 5% from last year and is excellent in comparison to national figures which estimate a 43% failure rate across age-restricted products in general.

	TPs	Sold	% Sold
Brent	42	6	14.29%
Harrow	43	7	16.28%
B&H	85	13	15.29%

In Brent, we tested 17 shops for vape sales, and 4 sold. In Harrow, 12 businesses were tested and 4 out of these sold a vape. Across both boroughs, none of the shops sold cigarettes.



A Brent business was prosecuted for selling a can of Butane to our 15 year old volunteer.

The business was fined £1,000 by Willesden Magistrates court and the director £500.



A sole trader in Wealdstone was prosecuted for selling two vapes to a 15-year-old girl, even after asking the volunteers' age and she responded 15!

The Magistrates gave him a fine of £646 and he was ordered to pay £258 victim surcharge and our costs of £1,136, a total of £2,040.

In addition to the prosecutions, a further three simple cautions and five letters of warning were issued in Brent and Harrow issued two simple cautions and three letters of warnings.

We continue to face challenges in executing these operations due to a lack of child volunteers, but we are promoting our work internally and encourage our colleagues to consider putting their children forward to assist.

The Service is committed to the protection of children from harm and underage test purchasing operations remains a priority area of work.

Ensuring a Level-Playing Field

The crisis around the cost of living has had a huge impact on our residents and businesses. We delivered several projects in response to this which aimed to support our legitimate businesses and raise consumer confidence in the goods and services they buy.

We are intelligence-led and have focused resources around our high-risk and most complained-about businesses, from used car dealers and cosmetic importers to small convenience shops. We have conducting compliance visits, providing detailed advice and information to 56 of these businesses (25 in Harrow, 31 in Brent) and where necessary seized goods and investigated.

Following a product recall last year concerning plug in wall heaters, we undertook additional market surveillance work with online retailers to identify whether these products had made there way back on to the market. The items are marketed as "cost saving" and "low energy" and naturally appeal to consumers looking to save money. We have found that many have a sheathed earth pin, no safety testing and pose a serious risk of electric shock. In worse case scenarios, these items could catch fire in the home.



Earlier this year, we were able to identify these items back on sale and our intervention resulted in the removal of hundreds of these dangerous items from the online marketplace.

We continue to pro-actively deliver enforcement around the lettings industry. With the general cost of living, increased mortgages and property maintenance costs, there is a concern that landlords may attempt to increase revenue through hidden charges to tenants.

A total of 15 Notice of Intent (NOI) to issue monetary penalties against agents that have been found not to comply in the past

12 of the NOIs issued have resulted in monetary penalty notices officially known as Final Notice being issued to a total of £26,850.00 (£12,250 for Brent & Harrow £14,600)

We have created new partnerships with our housing teams to share information and intelligence and conduct in-person and online inspections of agents actively advertising property rentals.

Earlier in March, we manned a stall at a private renters fair to engage with landlords, agents and tenants and provide advice and information on tenant fees, redress scheme membership and client money protection.



Private Renters Fair Event

To reassure consumers who are making price-focused purchasing decisions that what they pay for, is in fact what they receive, we have continued to deliver our project around accurate weighing, testing the scales in use for trade in our local shops and grocers. 88 weighing scales have been tested across both boroughs where 32 have so far been found to be non-compliant, they were either unstamped or out of tolerance at the higher end.

Four have been taken out of service in its entirety, four have been verified and the remaining are in the process of being verified which requires officers to revisit the businesses to ensure they are compliant.



Thus far, any of the scales that have been not within the permitted tolerance are in fact to the benefit of the customer in that they are weighing less than the actual weight. 26

businesses have been visited in Brent and 22 businesses have been visited in Harrow concerning weights and measures visits.

We remain committed to ensuring safety standards continue during these difficult times and consumers seeking more economical purchases may be inclined to buy second-hand tyres (part-worn tyres) rather than new ones.



We wrote to over 20 businesses that supply and sell part-worn tyres to provide guidance on practical steps they should adopt to ensure that they comply with the consumer protection law relevant to this industry. 4 businesses (2 in Brent and 2 in Harrow) have also been visited and their tyres inspected. Further visits will be conducted in the 2024/25 year.

Financial Investigations

- 11 confiscation orders totalling - £1,165,409.00
- 2 restraint orders
- 15 new case referrals
- 36 production orders

The confiscation orders were nearly double than the previous year and this is also reflected in the total confiscation amount being nearly double.

Case study

A landlord who used a fake name to evade detection was hit with £485,000 in fines after illegally renting out a shed as five flats. The owner of the sheds which were located in Sudbury also previously pleaded guilty to letting a house at the same premises as two flats without planning permission. Brent Council was tipped off by neighbours who reported the property back in 2013. Officers served a planning enforcement notice to stop the premises being let as seven flats, but the landlord failed to comply.

Tenants told officers their landlord was called Barry Jacobs but officers were only able to locate "Barry" in 2016 and were unable to prove who he was. The premises was later registered with the land registry under the name of the defendant (not Barry). In 2020, officers tracked down the defendant and took him to court, prompting three years of hearings.

The defendant was ordered to pay £60,000 in costs to the council, £1,000 fine to the court and a £424,000 confiscation order to the government for the criminal profit he made over several years.

