

Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Mid-Year Report 2024/25

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Service's performance mid-way through the year highlighting some of the key achievements and some challenges faced. This is to provide some easily to digest information of what the Service has been doing without having to wait until the publication of the annual report.

This report is intended to be concise and easily digestible.

Service Requests

The Service received 2,163 service requests during this period from various sources such as consumers, businesses, other local authorities, the ports, and enforcement bodies such as the Police. Each service request is assessed and scored to determine whether it will be investigated further. 548 were investigated by the Brent Team and 367 by the Harrow team.

Business Advice/Visits

The Service has always aimed to support local legitimate businesses by ensuring that they are compliant with the relevant legislation that governs the business and protects consumers. The Service has responded to 69 business enquiries or requests for advice. 32 of these have been for the Brent Team and 37 for the Harrow.

The Service has delivered 25.5 hours of tailored advice to businesses in connection with the statutory Primary Authority Scheme administered by the Office for Product Safety and Standards. This is related to physical and online compliance on clothing, electricals, and homeware covering trademarks, product safety, and fair trading.

During the ongoing cost of living crisis, Trading Standards continue to enhance the safety of products and promote a fair trading environment within their boroughs.

One of the areas of concern is within the supply and sale of second-hand tyres (part-worn tyres). Businesses that supply and sell part-worn tyres were written to last year providing written advice and guidance which provides practical steps they should adopt to ensure that they comply with the consumer protection law relevant to their business. 7 of these businesses have been visited in the coming months, more businesses will be visited to ensure compliance.

Also, as part of the cost-of living crisis, the service is committed to visiting businesses to test weighing scales across both boroughs 5 businesses have been visited so far this year with a commitment to do more in the year.

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. During such visits, officers have also inspected and provided advice on specific products not priced and the need to ensure that all products are priced.

Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Mid-Year Report 2024/25

In addition to the visits/advice mentioned earlier, the team has visited 31 businesses (17 in Brent and 14 in Harrow) that are considered as High Risk or are amongst the most complaint about businesses within the boroughs. This usually includes visits to second hand car dealers where recently, one of our officers secured a refund of £1,500 from a dealer in Harrow following a complaint we had received concerning the vehicle description. Our officer engaged with the business and facilitated a refund, much to the gratitude of the consumer.

The team's intended target for the year is to carry out a total of 56 High-Risk visits (31 in Brent and 25 in Harrow).

Product Safety

We have received referrals from the Office for Product Safety and Standards and our colleagues at the Ports. Visits have been carried out to businesses selling cosmetic products to conduct market surveillance on the presence of butylphenyl methylpropane (BMHCA) which is reprotoxic and skin lightening cream to ensure the products do not contain products such as Hydroquinone. Officers have also been working with a Harrow based company concerning one of their products a Climbing Arch which has been identified as presenting a risk of injuries and strangulations to children. The company has carried out a product recall and currently working with the team to ensure that the replacement being put on the market is safe.

Letting Agents Compliance Work

The Service continues to pro-actively conduct online audits of agents actively advertising rental services as well as respond to complaints. We have created new partnerships with our housing colleagues and share intelligence to provide a meaningful response to local businesses and residents. We have examined the websites of 15 (10 Brent and 5 Harrow) businesses and inspected 6 agents (2 Brent and 4 Harrow). 2 of the agents visited, 1 in each borough have been issued with a Notice of Intent (NOI) to issue monetary penalties against these agents as they have been found not to comply.

We are currently investigating 4 allegations against Brent based agents, of breaches under the Tenant Fees Act 2019 and continue to respond to all complaints and intelligence regarding letting work.

All Information from the Mayors Reporting Line gets assessed, triaged, and, where appropriate allocated to officers for further investigation.

OP CeCe (Illicit Tobacco Enforcement)

Op CeCe commenced in 2021 to tackle the sale and supply of illicit tobacco products such as cigarettes, hand-rolling tobacco, and shisha. The Service remains committed to carrying out this work.

A total of 22 businesses have been visited during this reporting period 15 in Brent and 7 in Harrow. We are pleased to report no illicit tobacco products were found at the businesses in Harrow despite using a tobacco sniffer dog to find hidden tobacco and conduct thorough

Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Mid-Year Report 2024/25

searches. However, in Brent officers seized illicit tobacco from 10 of the businesses visited but found nothing in the other 5.

The following were seized by officers:

- Cigarettes 2,546-unit packs (50,902 sticks,)
- Hand Rolling Tobacco 1.21kg, 25-unit packs
- Tobacco shisha 36.47kg, (145-unit packs)
- Non-tobacco shisha 2.6kg
- Smokeless 5.4432kg (1,105-unit packs)

Further dates have been scheduled for additional OP CeCe operations during the final half of the year.

Age Restricted Product Sales

23 businesses have so far been visited to check compliance with regard to the sale of age restricted products to minors. 12 of these have been Brent and 11 in Harrow. Out of the 11 businesses in Harrow, 2 of these have sold to the child volunteers. This is a 18.18% failure rate so far; both of these have been for sale of vapes to a minor. The failure rate in Brent currently is at 16.67% with two businesses out of 12 businesses visited to check compliance. These were concerning the sale of an alcoholic beverage and vapes to our child volunteers.

Knives work

13 advisory (5 Brent and 8 Harrow) visits were made to businesses within both boroughs that were identified as selling knives. The purpose of these visits is to advise and ensure that the businesses are storing and displaying knives safely and securely so they cannot be stolen or used as a weapon against staff or someone else.

As part of knives awareness week, an officer in Brent attended a forum on discussions on knife control.

Results in Court

A total of two cases were concluded in court during the reporting period both cases were concerning the sale of an age restricted product to a minor.

In May at Willesden Magistrates court regarding a sale of a Nicotine inhaling product (vape) by a Brent based business to a person under the age of 18 even one of the sellers asked the age of the volunteers, (15 and 16), and still sold the vape.

The judge fined the company £600 and ordered a victim surcharge of £240 and costs of £800 to be paid.

In June at Willesden Magistrates court regarding the sale of alcoholic beverage to a person under the age of 18, a business based in Harrow pleaded guilty to the charge and was fined £300 and ordered to pay £300 costs and a victim surcharge of £120.

Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Mid-Year Report 2024/25

The Service is committed to the protection of children from harm and will continue to work on this area during the course of the year.

Intelligence

The team has generated/inputted 59 intelligence reports on the National Intelligence Database (IDB) to help assist in identifying any local, regional, or national emerging trends and joining our information with other law enforcement professionals across the country,

Doorstep Crime & Scams

The team is set to deliver a rapid response service to our residents to prevent, disrupt, and deter doorstep criminals. To date, we have received a total of 3 callouts (2 in Brent and 1 in Harrow) which has led to a total savings of £9,000 in Brent.

In April, a Harrow resident saved a total of £28,000 after being cold called by a rogue builder posing as a surveyor who falsely identified some work that they claimed needed to be carried out. The resident was quoted £30,000 for the job and paid a deposit of £2,000 before our involvement. Officers assisted and advised the resident. Such cases are very difficult to investigate due to lack of evidence and paperwork and typically, payment being made in cash.

The Service has received complaints about building and substandard renovation works which it has looked into further. Officers have supported residents by arranging for the council's Building Control and surveyors to visit and assess work carried out, to assist with civil routes of redress.

The Service has been scheduled to provide talks on scams to a group of elderly residents and Mencap later in the financial year.

The outcome of this will be reported in the 2024/25 Annual Report.

Work Volumes

The table below shows the projected performance of the respective Brent and Harrow teams during 2024/15 against what has been achieved so far. It should be noted the nature of Trading Standard's duties is variable and therefore these figures are subject to change.

The projected work volumes are based on both teams having a full complement of enforcement staff 3.5 Enforcement Officers for Brent and 2.5 for Harrow.

The work areas have been kept on constant review with the teams having regular meetings to assess where they are and then put in place action plans to ensure that they achieve the maximum output of work by the end of the year which will be reported in the Annual Report for 2024/25.

Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Mid-Year Report 2024/25

Action	Brent Planned	Brent to Date	Harrow Planned	Harrow to Date
Complaints (Service Requests) Completed	366	170	250	66
Trader Enquiries/requests for advice	78	32	54	37
High Risk / Most Complained-about Trader Inspections	31	17	25	14
Port Referrals	5	2	1	1
Other Business Inspections/Visits	66	25	71	43
Weights & Measures, Average Quantity or Verification visits	4	5	3	0
Primary Authority Hours	117	10.5	36	15
Underage Test Purchase Visits	62	12	57	11
Infringement reports (average 50 work units per report)	31	13	21	4
eReports (average 7 work units per report)	9	9	7	2
Prosecutions completed – Crown Court	1	0	1	0
Prosecutions completed – Magistrates' Court	8	1	6	1
Licensing Condition Reviews	1	0	1	2
Simple Cautions Signed	6	4	4	2
Letters of Warning	9	12	10	7
Fixed Penalty Notices Issued	8	0	7	0
Local and Regional Projects Completed	2	(2)	2	(3)
Service Improvement Work (Hours)	97	45	53	25
Approved Trader Scheme New Recruits or Audits	10	10	10	10
Doorstep Crime Rapid Response Actions	3	2	4	1
Number of Scam Victims Contacted c/o NTS Scams Hub	40	0	43	0
Partnership or Area-Based Working Events/Weeks of Action	8	37	6	7
Samples, Mileage & Websites Checks	58	68	54	16
Number of intelligence Logs Input on Regional Database	64	47	60	12
Press Releases Issued	6	2	4	2