



Brent & Harrow Trading Standards

Annual Report
2016-2017

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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 2016 to March 2017.

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

The Service Manager reports to an Operational Director, Aktar Choudhury who responsible for the 'Standards and Enforcement' team which includes Trading Standards, Food Safety and Planning Enforcement. This team sits within the wider Regeneration and Environment directorate.

The Service has sadly lost three valued, long term members of staff during this period with a fourth being off from 2017 on maternity leave. Recognising the current financial challenges faced by the public sector, the Service has operated throughout 2016/17 with reduced levels of staffing following these departures and existing staff vacancies in order to assist achieving required departmental savings.

This has inevitably effected the performance of the Service in some areas of work. Nevertheless, staff have worked hard throughout the year to deliver a range of successful outcomes.

The Trading Standards profession has been subject to several national reviews during this period many of which recognise the resourcing difficulties faced by local authorities. The broad consensus of these reports, is that regional working is the way the profession to find economies of scale and to match the skills its offers, to the needs of an area.

Our joint consortium offers a micro example of the sort of regional working that is being suggested. I am certain that the continued partnership 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.

Consumers in the UK take a lot for granted such as the products they buy being safe, not be defrauded, the things they buy by volume or weight are correct and that businesses trade in a fair environment. Our work is central to creating a well-placed, confident and prosperous market. I hope the work in this report evidences our commitment and contribution to making this happen.

Budget

The joint partnership between Brent and Harrow, means that the consortium is able to share many of the costs associated with providing the Service to help provide efficiencies. Throughout the year, all expenditure was kept to the absolute minimum following a forensic review of all budgets throughout the whole of the Regeneration and Environment directorate and income opportunities were maximised.

The table below shows the consortium budget since 2008/2009:

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	£ 379,600
2016/17	£ 313,710

It should be noted that the budget from 2014/15 is not a like for like comparison due Brent Council changing the way it accounts for overheads. Prior to 2014/15 costs such as accommodation, financial support, HR support, IT, telephones, printing, copying and administrative support were included in the services' budget costs. These components of the services' costs are now centrally accounted and this has made comparison of budget prior to 2014 difficult.

In addition, the service commits to meet the cost of providing our financial investigations team through a net contribution to the service from proceeds of crime of £250,000 p.a. This saw each Borough receiving £125,000 following the end of the financial year.

There was no change in the contribution to Brent from Harrow for these service costs for 2016/17.

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

We continued throughout the year to promote the Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Primary Authority scheme to businesses offering assured, tailored advice to help businesses ensure that they comply with the law. The scheme enables businesses to form a statutory partnership with one local authority, providing robust and reliable advice for other councils to take into account when carrying out inspections or addressing non-compliance.

This helps reduce businesses costs and assures those in trade, that what they are doing will not be subject to challenge elsewhere. This is advice and support above that normally offered and local authorities are permitted to charge for the service to cover the costs of providing it. The charge for 2016/17 was either £54 or £68 per hour depending on the type of contract a business opted for.



An officer checks this Primary Authority Customer's Stock

I am pleased to report that during 2016/17, we recruited the national producer of beers and spirits, Diageo, to the scheme. We provided our other members with a total of 248 hours of Primary Authority advice. This is up on the previous year of 177 hours but is still below the 311 hours provided in 2013/14 which was the first year that we introduced this work.

We continually look 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. In January 2017, an article offering our Primary Authority service was published in the 'Brent Business News' publication and we will continue to engage with business groups to market this service.

Inspections

All of our business inspections are conducted in 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 intention to carry out an inspection unless a specific exemption exists.

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

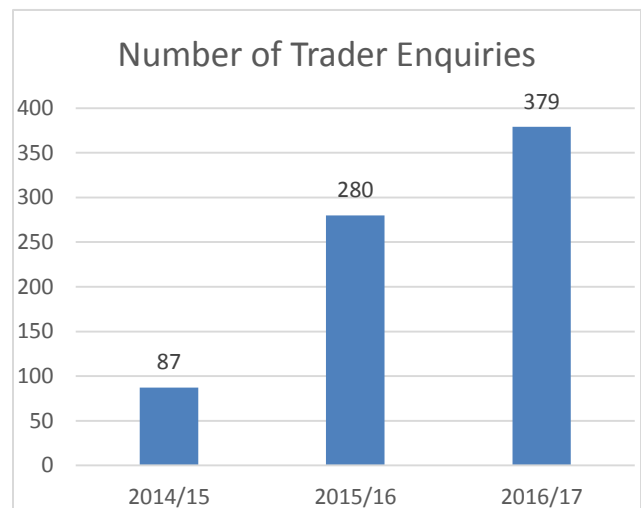


In our experience, it is a common myth that businesses find regulatory visits a burden on them. We find quite the opposite, with inspections providing a good opportunity to provide face to face contact, build relationships and for us to fully be able to understand what is happening in the borough’s businesses.

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 the rise in the number of these enquires. The greater number of requests received over the last two years is a clear reflection on the Service’s emphasis to better engage and offer greater support to our local business community. We aim to contact to all such enquirers within 48hrs of their enquiry being received (excluding weekend contacts).



Responsible Trader Scheme

The Service continued to promote the Responsible Trader scheme to all businesses in Brent & Harrow selling age restricted products following the scheme's refreshed training materials which were updated early 2016. 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 36 members received audit visit to ensure the scheme's terms and conditions were being adhered to and standards maintained.

Responsible
Trader Scheme



Trading Standards Webpage

During the summer of 2016, the Brent Council Trading Standards webpages were updated making them more eye-catching and user friendly. Importantly the Service was given its own link to our pages from the 'business' section of the website and a new page explaining the different levels of business advice available was created with increased options for making direct contact with us.

The advice page now includes a link through to the Chartered Trading Standards Institute's 'Business Companion' web tool which provides numerous quick guides and videos to support businesses understanding the law.

Special Treatment Workshop



Harrow officers assisted colleagues in the Harrow Licensing team deliver a workshop to holders of special treatment licenses during September 2016. The event provided us an opportunity to speak to multiple local business owners on rules regarding the supply of cosmetic products.

Assisting Consumers

Responding to Service Requests

Responding to consumer complaints about business 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.

The Consumer Rights Act 2015 provided a new set of consumer rights such as a 30 day time period to reject faulty goods and also introduced rights in relation to digital content for the first time. This required officers to learn new legislation and pass this onto to consumers and businesses who often would have otherwise been very much unaware of these changes and still applied the old law.

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 we will investigate further. During 2016/17, we investigated 704 complaints received from members of the public, 399 from Brent residents and 305 from Harrow residents.

Loan Shark Awareness Event

In September 2016, we invited a speaker from the National Trading Standards Illegal Money Lending Team to speak at an event to raise awareness of loan sharks in our community. The idea behind the event was to inform people of what to look out for, provide confidence that concerns would be taken seriously and importantly, explain some of the work to make our communities safer and ensure that if people have to borrow money, they do this only after having sought proper advice from legitimate lenders.



Loan Shark AWARENESS

DON'T GET BITTEN BY A LOAN SHARK!!!

TUESDAY
6 SEPTEMBER
BRENT CIVIC
CENTRE
10.30AM-1.00PM
(Register from 10.00am)
Contact: Denise Brewster
on 020 8937 4339

Loan sharks lend money illegally. Come to a free session to learn how to spot one, how to report one, and to find out what other lending and advice options are open to you.

Brent and Harrow Trading Standards Service working in partnership

Brent Harrow COUNCIL Stop Loan Sharks

Attending local Crime Reduction Events



The team have attended various events during the year supporting Neighbourhood Watch 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 two events focusing specifically on fraud and scams. It was pleasing to see that HSBC and Barclays banks each supported one of these events.

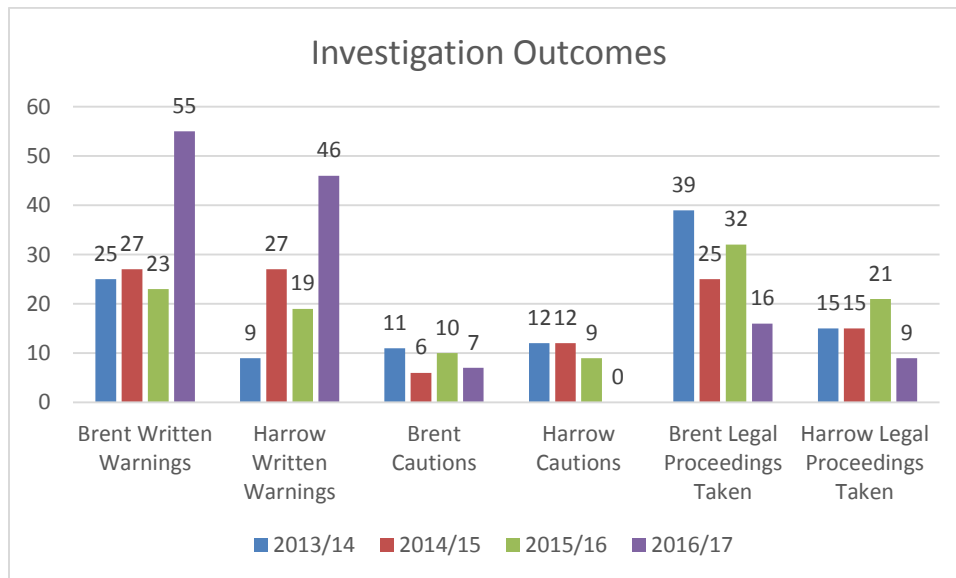
Investigations

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 35 investigation reports and the Harrow Team a total of 22. This represents a reduction of investigations, down from 50 in Brent and 42 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 £20,785, down from £37,675 in 2015/16 and £39,630 in 2014/15. A total of £15,081 was awarded to us in prosecution costs, down from £28,560 in 2015/16 although ahead of 2014/15's total of £6,947 and £17,379 awarded in 2013/14.

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 £3,460.

The lowest fine was £175 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 2016/17, with an overall comparison to the previous year indicating a decline in the number of businesses selling age restricted goods. Whilst this decline is positive, these figures always vary year on year with early indications looking ahead to 2017/18 showing a rise in illegal sales, particularly in Brent.

Product	Test purchases (no.)		Sales (no.)		Failure rate (%)	
	Brent 2016/17	Harrow 2016/17	Brent 2016/17	Harrow 2016/17	Brent 2016/17	Harrow 2016/17
Alcohol	38	58	2	2	5	3
Tobacco	53	31	0	0	0	0
Knife	21	20	2	0	9.5	0
Fireworks	12	27	0	0	0	0
Spray Paint	0	0	0	0	0	0
E-Cigarettes	1	0	1	0	100	0
Video	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lottery	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total 2016/17	125	136	5	2	4	1.5
Total 2015/16	125	141	6	6	5	4

Rogue Cold Callers

During the year 10 '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 £56,000 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.

However, on many occasions, it is just not possible to get the homeowners their money back. In April 2016, a Harrow resident paid a cold caller £2,100 to repair her porch. For an unknown reason, he dug her driveway up and was never seen again.

A callout in February 2017 took officers to a house in Brent where the homeowner had agreed to pay £15 to a cold caller to clean his gutters. This work escalated to £15,000 for a replacement roof and a 50% payment of £7,500 in cash was made which saw some work to the soffits taking place. The builder wanted full payment before completing the job and phoned the victim whilst officers were at the premises. Once he found out we were involved, the trader cut the call off and has not been contactable since.



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 during 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 abscond if they are still at the homeowner’s premises.

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.

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. A separate report is to be presented to the Joint Advisory Board detailing our work in this area.

Shisha

The Service has worked alongside colleagues in the Food Safety Team and Community Safety assisted by the Police in a Brent borough-wide crackdown on illegal shisha venues. Of the 47 known shisha venues in Brent, 39 were not compliant with the applicable laws. The smoking of shisha poses the same health risks as cigarette smoking, illegal venues have been found to create smells and noise nuisance and be places where there is an increased risk of anti-social behaviour taking place.

We have offered businesses advice on achieving compliance with the law and carried out some of the late night visits to venues across the borough to monitor whether our advice has been complied with to prevent the smoking of tobacco in enclosed places.

This has resulted in multiple prosecutions of the offenders and several premises being forced to shut down following the receipt of closure orders. Following this work, the Leader of Brent Council, Cllr Muhammed Butt, wrote to the Home Secretary calling for the introduction of new legislation providing local authorities the better powers to regulate and enforce problem shisha businesses effectively.

Online Commerce

In previous years, Members have specifically enquired about the amount of time that is spent regulating the growing online marketplace. This is difficult to answer as many of our investigations involve some form of ecommerce but our database for recording work does not capture information that allows us to easily determine if goods or services were purchased in person or online.

What we are able to confirm is that when we specifically check advertising or terms and conditions belonging to an online trader, this work is recorded in a manner that enables us to report the amount of work undertaken. During the year, 104 Brent based websites were checked and 40 Harrow websites. This compares with 58 Brent-based websites and 53 Harrow websites the previous year.

In reality, I expect that we actually checked a much higher number of websites than this as it would routinely form part of an officers investigation to search for a business website and have a look at it when investigating allegations made against a businesses along with cursory checks on review sites to see what sort of feedback has been left a bout a trader.

Financial Investigations

A report specifically looking at our performance under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) was presented to the Joint Advisory Board in May 2017. The legislation provides a power to confiscate 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.

Since using POCA the team, consisting of two qualified Financial Investigators, Lee Wenzel and Alpa Shah have secured 73 confiscation orders worth £7.5m.

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, whilst 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 2016/17 Brent Council received £369,435.80 from the Home Office as part of this incentivisation scheme.

Below are details of the confiscation orders the team secured during the financial year 2016/17.

During July 2016, an order was made against a landlord for £64,000 who converted a house in Brent into 7 self-contained dwellings without planning permission. I am pleased to report that the order has since been paid in full.

Another planning case followed in October 2016 when an order was made against a landlord for £80,080. On this occasion, a house in Brent had been converted into 5 self-contained dwellings without planning permission which had each been rented. Again, this order has now been paid in full.

In November 2016 an order was made in a Trading Standards case against a counterfeiter for £15,809. The trader, who sold illegal DVDs, was given 3 months to pay the order or face serving 7 months in prison. This order has also been paid in full.

Another case followed shortly afterwards in December 2016 when an order was made against a company for £250,000 after a planning breach had continued for a number of years. The single dwelling had been converted to eight self-contained flats and a flat in the garden. The company was registered in the British Virgin Islands and its Directors lived in Dubai but once a restraint order had been granted on the property, the individuals in control of the property came forward and the company was prosecuted. The property was in terrible state of disrepair as can be seen from the photos below:



We continue to work with and see more cases being referred from other London Councils who have requested our services for financial investigations. 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

2016 started with string of convictions against convenience store owners who stocked illegal cigarettes which did not display the correct health warnings and in some instances, oral tobacco, which is prohibited altogether in the UK. The highest penalty awarded was a fine of £1,600 and payment of costs totalling £1,081. In another case, the shop owner was fined £1,000 and ordered to pay costs of £961. This type work was very prevalent during 2016/17 as it followed the funding provided the previous year by Public Health to reduce the availability of illicit tobacco.

In August 2016, we concluded an investigation dating back to February 2015 against a Wembley Market trader. He was fined nearly £3,000 for selling fake branded luxury bags and purses from the now defunct Wembley Market. The Court heard how the defendant had been left in charge of the stall whilst the owner was away on holiday during which time he used cash from the stall takings to buy nearly 300 counterfeit bags and purses, containing brands which he then sold at a knock-down price.

The owner of a shop in Wembley High Road was fined £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 addition he was ordered to pay costs of £557. The same trader has since been caught selling doggy tobacco again suggesting the penalties imposed by the Court have not acted as any deterrent from his wrong doing.

In February 2017, a tyre company and its Director, were fined just under £2,000 after fitting a part-worn tyre costing £25 to wheel supplied by an undercover Trading Standards officer which was below the legal standard, and for possessing a further supply of unsafe tyres for sale. The illegal tyre was supplied despite the business being given comprehensive advice by Trading Standards on selling part worn tyres.

Harrow Team Investigations

A student funding his lifestyle through the sale of dodgy DVD boxsets was handed an 18 week prison sentence and ordered to carry out 80 hours of community service and pay prosecution costs of £2,766. The trader has been selling counterfeit discs from his bedroom via eBay and Gumtree since 2009, generating profits to more than fund his studies. When officers searched his house, they found an illegal stock of more than 900 DVDs, with an estimated value of £35,000.

A Harrow Market trader who was selling fake designer handbags and jewellery was fined £1,441 and also ordered to complete 100 hours community service. Our investigations found that she was carrying out the same illegal business in Hammersmith and Fulham where the Trading Standards there seized 150 items. When interviewed she claimed it was a hobby of hers, blaming the people who sold her the items for which there was no proof of purchase. A joint prosecution was taken to include offences from both local authorities.

In November 2016, another man who ran an illegal DVD business from his home, was given a 6 month suspended prison sentence, ordered to complete 100 hours community service and pay costs of £7,500. The Judge also made a confiscation order of £15,809.95 under the Proceeds of Crime Act. During the investigation, officers went undercover to meet the defendant in a car park, where he sold them the illegal discs. This was then used as evidence to apply for a warrant to search his home where they found a further supply of fake DVD boxsets ready to be dispatched to unsuspecting consumers.

In December 2016, we conducted a license review of a shopkeeper who was caught with almost a thousand litres of illegal alcohol for a second time. Harrow officers had been working with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs officers who seized the alcohol, on which he had paid no duty, and hundreds of packets of tobacco which didn't carry the required health warnings or English labels. The Licensing Panel decided to completely revoke his alcohol licence.

Another prosecution for dodgy DVDs followed in December 2016 after an inspection of the defendants businesses premises uncovered 519 rogue titles which were either counterfeit or contained no age classifications. The business director and manager received a fine of £800, and they were each ordered to pay £815 in costs.

In addition to these investigations, the Harrow team have worked proactively with other colleagues from Harrow supporting multiple 'Days of Action' in Wealdstone, Queensbury, Rayners Lane, Harrow, Burnt Oak and South Harrow. These events provide a good opportunity for us to visit high street business premises on the lookout for illicit tobacco and alcohol which are readily available and at the same time, promote our Responsible Trader Scheme to businesses where everything is found to be ok.

Performance

Complaints of Dissatisfaction about the Service

During 2016/17, there were six formal complaints of dissatisfaction received about the Service. Whilst we would have preferred not to receive such complaints, this level of dissatisfaction is very low given how many customer contacts the Service carries out each year. None of the complaints were upheld.

These complaints are summarised below:

A resident made a complaint to Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACS) who passed on advice and referred the matter to Trading Standards for our information only, with no commitment to contact the complainant. However, a technical error caused an automated email to be sent to hundreds of members of the public who had recently been added to the Service database, including this complainant stating that Trading Standards 'would be in contact'. The mistake was spotted and a follow up email was sent to those effected explaining that there had been a problem and apologising for the mistake that was made. The resident did not receive this follow up email and understandably, was annoyed that nobody had been in contact with them. Whilst we had to accept responsibility for the original email being sent, it was not our fault the second email was not received by the complainant and furthermore, the CACS had advised us there was no need to contact the complainant. The **complaint was not upheld**.

The complainant lived in Lambeth and was complaining about a business located outside of our area of jurisdiction. The complainant was unhappy that we would not investigate their complaint which we would not have done for a non Brent or Harrow resident. This was an **unjustified complaint**.

In similar circumstances to the above, the complainant lived in Edinburgh and was complaining about business who we had previously prosecuted but was now located outside of our area of jurisdiction. The complainant was unhappy that we would not investigate their complaint which we would not have done for a non Brent or Harrow resident. This was an **unjustified complaint**.

A landlord was unhappy that we would not investigate the letting agent who allegedly owed them rent. This was a civil dispute and the Service's civil advisory service was cut many years ago. The landlord also claimed the agent was not a member of a redress scheme but as the landlord and agent were based in Harrow and Trading Standards had not yet been delegated the enforcement of this function, the landlord needed to speak to Harrow's Housing Team. This was an **unjustified complaint**.

A consumer was unhappy that we would not assist with a civil claim to obtain a refund. The matter had already resulted in a criminal conviction following our investigation and subsequent prosecution but the complainant has not provided us with the required assistance to obtain compensation/a refund at the time. As we do not offer a civil advisory service and the complainant chose not to assist our criminal investigation, this **complaint was not upheld**.

A homeowner was complaining about their property management agent alleging that they had used false details to register with one of the redress scheme providers. Enquires showed the agent had valid membership and there was nothing to evidence any fraudulent membership so we concluded no investigation was necessary. This upset the homeowner causing them to complain about Trading Standards. This **complaint was not upheld**.

Compliments about the Service

On a positive note, I am pleased to report that we have received numerous letters of appreciation for the work we have carried out. Some examples of which, I have highlighted below:

'I regularly work with Trading Standards authorities from around the country, and rarely have I dealt with an officer with the commitment and passion for his work as Amar, who truly went above and beyond to find a quick resolution and kept us informed every step of the way'.

'I had asked for help through ATOL, ABTA and others with no help given. I then turned to trading standards and within 24 hours of the initial contact with Andrew, the travel agent phoned me and promised my refund. I have received the money and cannot express my gratitude strongly enough for the help provided by Andrew. I had been very stressed about the loss of a large sum of money and although I appreciate trading standards have many complaints to investigate, am convinced that I would not have the refunds without Andrews help'.

'I would like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention the very professional and highly valued support of two of your esteemed colleagues during our work with Trading Standards in Wembley yesterday. My German colleagues.... work in Brent was superbly assisted throughout the day by Andreas.....who tackled all of the sometimes difficult technical jargon with real gusto and contributed a great deal to the successful completion of this important work. Christine is fast approaching sainthood status within our company. Her tenacity and determination to conclude this difficult case has been a true inspiration to us all. Christine has a very professional and very dedicated approach which has, without doubt, kept this case on track throughout, at times, some rather challenging episodes'.

'Thank You Michael- most impressed with your speed of processing and issuing of License'

'Whilst writing it gives my wife and I the opportunity of thanking both of you {Paul and Paul} for all your time, advice, and assistance you have given us. As you know we are both Senior Citizens and sometimes circumstances take us out of our comfort zone. Without both of your intervention as part of the Brent Trading Standards Department we're not sure how we would have coped both financially and health wise. The stress and anxiety over the last few days has been immeasurable and both of you have taken so much weight off our shoulders'.

Freedom of Information Requests

The Service received 18 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, up on the 8 requests received the previous year. I can confirm that all were responded to within the statutory timescale.

These requests related to a ranges of subjects broken down as follows: 1 request about underage sales, 1 request regarding skin lightening products, 3 requests concerning letting or estate agents, 2 requests enquiring about counterfeit alcohol or tobacco, 1 enquiry asking about a particular businesses, 4 requests about our procurement of goods, 1 general enquiry, 2 requests about building services, 1 request about scams, 1 request about secondary ticketing and finally a request about a subject not relevant to the Service.

Training and Qualifications

A variety of training was provided to Officers during 2016/2017, most of which was delivered at little or no cost other than staff time and travel. The majority of the training was facilitated by London Trading Standards (LTS). Training included the subject areas of; mandatory data protection and freedom of information courses for all staff, doorstep crime, Regulation of Investigatory Powers, Firework Licensing, Conducting Major Investigations, Memex (an intelligence database used by officers), Primary Authority, Safeguarding and Scams.

In total, 333 hours of training was provided to officers, equivalent to 46 days. 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, 11 from Brent and 8 from Harrow. Whereas most of our releases attract local media interest, it is always pleasing to see when they grab the attention of a national news outlet.

During 2016/17, our intervention of a rogue builders who targeted an elderly couple, demanding £40,000 to fix a few loose tiles was featured in The Sun whilst The Mirror covered the conviction of an illegal loan shark following an investigation with the National Trading Standards Illegal Money Lending Team.

In November 2016 we contributed 16 tweets to the national #Ourday event, seven of which were used as part of the event increasing the profile of our work and demonstrating to the public, the range of services delivered by the Council.



Staff Member Highly Commended

The Service has always maintained a good relationship with members of the Anti-Counterfeiting Group who represent more than three thousand brands and are a leading authority on the global trade in counterfeit goods.

It was a welcome surprise when their members highly commended Officer Ali Bandukwalla for 'Individual Excellence in Anti-Counterfeiting Excellence' at the annual Trading Standards Conference in Harrogate.