

MINUTES of the meeting of the **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL JOINT TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE COMMITTEE** held at 11.00 am on 22 November 2022 at online via Teams.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Tuesday, 4 April 2023.

Elected Members:

(* Present)

- * Denise Turner-Stewart (Co-Chairman)
- * Mark Winn (Co-Chairman)
- Sir Beville Stanier
- * Scott Lewis

13/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

An apology was received from Councillor Sir Beville Stanier.

14/21 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING [4 MARCH 2022] [Item 2]

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

15/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were none.

16/21 PROCEDURAL ITEMS [Item 4]

17/21 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS [Item 4a]

There were none.

18/21 PUBLIC QUESTIONS [Item 4b]

There were none.

19/21 PETITIONS [Item 5]

There were none.

20/21 FORWARD PLAN AND ACTION TRACKER [Item 6]

Resolved:

That the forward work plan and action tracker be noted.

21/21 PERFORMANCE, HALF YEAR SERVICE REVIEW AND JOINT SERVICE BUDGET [Item 7]

Key points from the discussion:

Steve Ruddy (Head of Trading Standards) and Amanda Poole (Assistant Head of Trading Standards) introduced the report. The following key points were made regarding the service budget:

- a) A shared service budget overspend of £218,000 was forecast for the financial year 22/23. This was down from the previous years' prediction of a £263,000 overspend in 22/23. Forthcoming changes to the rate of National Insurance may further alter that figure, but this had not been incorporated into the budget, due to the way in which each authority accounted for and planned their budgets around factors such as National Insurance and Pay Inflation this forecast leads to an overspend in Buckinghamshire and an underspend in Surrey.
- b) The overspend reduction had come in part due to a £43,000 government grant issued to carry out work related to the introduction of legislation regarding allergen labelling on foods pre-packed for direct sale (known as 'Natasha's Law'), as well as a reduction in spending related to legal costs with numerous cases adjourned due to pressures on the court system. A plan was in place to further reduce the overspend over the following 2–3-year period.
- c) A Board meeting would be held in January, at which the details of the 23/24 budget would be discussed including changes to the income and expenditure of the service, as well as the proposed plans to further reduce the overspend.

The following key points were made regarding the performance and service update:

- d) A process was underway to review and assess the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) against which the future performance of the service was assessed. Further details would be provided at the January Board meeting with an opportunity for members to provide feedback.
- e) £1,342,971 had been saved for residents as a result of Service interventions during Q1 and Q2 of financial year 22/23. This put the service on track to exceed each of the previous three financial year's total savings should the same rate continue throughout Q3 and Q4. This figure was an estimated saving based on the average loss incurred by various scams per person in accordance with national research conducted by Trading Standards National Scams Team working with economists. Further funding had been secured from the Police and Crime Commissioners locally and the Home Office nationally for additional call blocking units to assist with this intervention work, and communications were being circulated to encourage members of the public who could afford to, to purchase their own call blockers and doorbell cameras. Those issued by the service itself were free of charge and taken from an allocation given as a result of a regional funding bid.
- f) It was estimated that for every £1 spent on a call blocker, £32 would be saved. For every £1 spent on a doorbell camera, £39 would be saved.
- g) The service continued to work closely with a wide range of partners in both local authority areas to ensure that the residents most vulnerable to scams were known to the service and could be contacted for support.
- h) The service provided SCAMchampion training for those wishing to support the work of the Friends Against Scams Team initiative by hosting their own awareness sessions and encouraging others to join up. As of the meeting, over one million people nationally had taken the Friends Against Scams training. Councillors Winn and Turner Stewart both expressed an interest in

becoming SCAMBassadors, and would spread scam awareness messages to the wider community and act as role models.

- i) There continued to be significant delays in getting cases through the courts due to the Covid-19 backlog and the more recent barrister strike. Three defendants had pleaded guilty to offences between April and September 2022. Five further convictions had occurred in October and early November 2022. National Trading Standards had produced guides of best practice when handling large-scale prosecutions to ensure that lessons that had been learned from previous cases nationally could be shared.
- j) The service had also utilised the Enterprise Act (as a route of civil justice) as an alternative to criminal proceedings in some instances.
- k) The number of Primary Authority Partnerships (PAPs) had increased to 158 from 147 at the start of the year. This included some coordinated partnerships (largely trade associations) who would pass on advice received from the service to their membership. This was the highest number of PAPs by any Trading Standards service in the country. It was stressed that the priority for the service was to remain a reliable and responsive partner to those in PAP arrangements and not to overstretch its resources.
- l) The Business Advice helpline continued to provide additional support to local businesses with many issues including supply chain disruption due to Brexit changes and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- m) It was yet to become clear what impact the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill would have on the ongoing work of the service in relation to its support of businesses.
- n) Between April and September 2022, 180 consignments of goods had been examined compared to 319 during the entire previous fiscal year, putting the service well on track to surpass its previous year's workload. The work was fully funded externally by the Office for Product and Safety Standards as part of the wider effort to improve the UK's border security on a national scale.
- o) It was agreed to provide an update at the January Board meeting discussing the service's work to combat the sale of illicit tobacco products including vapes.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Service's performance be noted.
- 2) That Councillors Winn and Turner-Stewart would agree to become Friends Against Scams SCAMBassadors.
- 3) That the current forecast outturn for the joint service budget for 2022/23 be noted.

22/21 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 8]

The Committee noted that its next meeting will be held on 4 April 2023.

Chairman