

MINUTES of the meeting of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL JOINT TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE COMMITTEE held at 2.00 pm on 18 May 2023 at Woodhatch Place, 11 Cockshot Hill, REIGATE.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 9 November 2023.

Elected Members:

(*present)

- * Denise Turner-Stewart (Co-Chairman)
- * Mark Winn (Co-Chairman)
- Beville Stanier
- Scott Lewis – attended online

In attendance

Steve Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service
Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service
David Pickering, Team Manager – Regulation, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service

1/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Beville Stanier and Scott Lewis attended remotely.

2/23 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 22 NOVEMBER 2022 [Item 2]

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

3/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were none.

4/23 PROCEDURAL ITEMS [Item 4]

a MEMBERS' QUESTIONS [Item 4a]

There were none.

b PUBLIC QUESTIONS [Item 4b]

There were none.

c PETITIONS [Item 4c]

There were none.

5/23 ACTION TRACKER AND FORWARD PLAN [Item 5]

RESOLVED:

The Joint Committee noted the Action Tracker and Forward Plan. There were no outstanding actions to be considered.

6/23 2022/23 SERVICE REVIEW INCLUDING KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS [Item 6]

Key points from the discussion:

1. The Head of Trading Standards presented the annual report for 2022/23 and highlighted the following aspects:
 - a) Using case studies detailed some of the Scam work undertaken using a range of investigative work.
 - b) Technology used for door cameras, for example there was not a need for wi-fi. Door cameras were good for the elderly and were funded from income from enforcement work.
 - c) Call blockers were explained
 - d) Scam marshals volunteer programme was explained, and the work undertaken by them.
 - e) There had been a high level of sentencing which was an acknowledgement of the seriousness of the crime by the courts.
 - f) 71,000 unsafe products had been stopped from entering via Heathrow.
 - g) In response to a member query, work to stop the selling of unsafe products on Ebay and Amazon was explained. This work was particularly difficult because as soon as one product was taken down another one popped up. Members were encouraged to lobby Government about legislation.
 - h) There had also been much work around ensuring the avian influenza outbreak was contained. Members recognised the diverse range of services provided by trading standards.
2. A Member asked about managing budgets and prioritisation given the breadth of services provided. The Head of Trading Standards explained that the scale of demand was limitless and the need for an appropriate balance was key. Priorities were based around statutory duties and corporate priorities.
3. The Assistant Head of Trading Standards explained:
 - a) how external sources of funding were being sought
 - b) the service tries to get involved in legislation as it is being written
 - c) where there was significant legislation it may mean that there was additional Government funding for the first few years
 - d) there was an ability to give monetary penalties rather than prosecution in some cases.

Actions/ further information to be provided:

None.

RESOLVED:

The Trading Standards Joint Committee noted the Service's performance.

7/23 WORK TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS DURING PRESSURES CAUSED BY COST-OF-LIVING PRESSURES [Item 7]

Key points from the discussion:

1. The Assistant Head of Trading Standards introduced a report that set out activities undertaken to support communities through significant increases in the cost of living. This had become a priority mid-year, causing the service to undertake activities that weren't planned at the start of the year. The following were highlighted:

Product Safety

- a) Products were identified where financial stretched residents may be tempted to buy unsafe products. These included heaters and electric blankets. There was an 80% failure rate in electric blankets brought in. These were then exchanged for free with brand new blankets donated by one of our Primary Authority partners. Work was undertaken with libraries and the fire service and would take place again in the autumn.
- b) In response to Member questions officers reported that they tried to use a range of different venues for this activity and would do so again in the autumn.
- c) Members gave several ideas for consideration which included community centres and supermarkets. They also suggested that officers could explain to residents what to look out for with electric blankets.

Scammers

- e) The Service has aimed to raise awareness of potential scams as widely as possible and held monthly webinars.

Fair Trading

- f) The Service aimed to ensure Fair Trading and to ensure people get what they pay for. This could include at petrol pumps ensuring the correct quantity, with letting agents ensuring charges were legal and terms were fair, and that illegal goods weren't sold. It was reported that compliance with some legal requirements in the letting industry had been low but after interventions compliance was improving. A variety of illegal and unsafe goods were available for Members to view and to see how it would be very difficult for the consumer to spot that they were not genuine.
- g) In response to Member questions officers reported that intelligence was being developed around illegal goods to target interventions.

Actions/ further information to be provided:

None.

RESOLVED:

That the Trading Standards Joint Committee noted the Service's work outlined in the submitted report.

8/23 TRADING STANDARDS VAPES ENFORCEMENT [Item 8]

Key points from the discussion:

- 1. The Team Manager explained that there had been an unexpected large uptake of vaping from younger people. Some areas of the world including the USA had banned products, some of which end up in the UK. The Service were liaising with public health to get the message out to schools and ask schools to share information where they know they are being sold. There was also to be some government funding, announced recently, but it was not known how it would make its way to local authorities.
- 2. Members advocated as much work as possible in this field and likened the situation to that of alcopops in the 1980's. They also spoke of the difficulty in recycling vape equipment and the potential harm to the environment.

Actions/ further information to be provided:

That this be a standing item on future agendas.

RESOLVED:

That the Trading Standards Joint Committee noted how the new funding may be used and considered any local approach it wished the Service to take.

9/23 TRADING STANDARDS COMMUNICATIONS [Item 9]

Key points from the discussion:

1. The Head of Trading Standards gave a precis of the submitted report that outlined the different channels and methods used to communicate the work and advice for residents and businesses, as well as giving examples of the Services communications.
2. There was a discussion on communications and their effectiveness. It was noted that public awareness of trading standards had waned as some consumer advice is now provided by Citizen's Advice. Officers also explained that in terms of consumer education, there wasn't an effective consumer education policy programme strategy nationally to ensure that people were as informed as they could be about their rights and what to do when things go wrong as well.
3. The Committee discussed the possible resources for a dedicated communications officer. Officers reported that the coverage of press releases was high.

Actions/ further information to be provided:

None.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Service's work to communicate its' activity was noted.
2. The Committee considered ways in which the reach and impact of the Service could be extended further.

10/23 JOINT SERVICE BUDGET [Item 10]

Key points from the discussion:

1. The Assistant Head of Trading Standards gave a precis of the submitted report and highlighted:
 - a) That the outturn budget for 2022/23 was overspent by £150k or 5.6% of the budget and the reasons for that were outlined
 - b) The new burdens grant money from central government helped reduce the overspend.
 - c) The proposed budget for 2023/24 was £2.9m which the Committee were asked to approve.
2. In response to Member questions about the impact of savings and budget changes the Assistant Head of Trading Standards explained that the impacts had been discussed throughout the process and believed that the service was set up to manage any impact.

Actions/ further information to be provided:

None.

RESOLVED:

1. That the outturn for the joint service budget for 2022/23 was noted
2. That the budget for 2023/24 as set out in Annex B of the submitted report was agreed.

11/23 TRADING STANDARDS TOBACCO WORK [Item 11]

Key points from the discussion:

1. The Team Manager presented a statutory report on underage sales which had been extended to cover the wider work on tobacco. He highlighted that:
 - a) There had been increased activity around illicit tobacco
 - b) This was a regional and national problem
 - c) Various methods of DIY sophisticated storage was making detection more difficult and easier to get illicit goods out.
 - d) The service was using user intelligence to target shops and there had been three prosecutions over the last year.
 - e) Different methods of disruption were being considered.
2. Members recognised that the criminals were very organised and sophisticated.
3. In response to a Member query about joint operations officer described a national joint operation with HMRC. However, it was recognised that sufficient resources were not there nationally to deal effectively with this problem.
4. Officers also explained that there was likely to be pilots around greater use of administrative fixed penalties where that was possible which would free up resources to tackle significant cases.
5. There was some discussion around communications and social media and Members encouraged officers to put information into digestible format and get it out without necessarily waiting for communications approval.

Actions/ further information to be provided:

That some of the examples of fake or illegal products provided be shared with Scott Lewis.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted as a reflection of activity over the financial year 2022–2023 and that enforcement activities which will be undertaken in 2023–2024 be endorsed.

12/23 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 12]

The date of the next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 22 September 2022 but was likely to be changed. It would be hosted by Buckinghamshire Council.

Meeting ended at: 3.34 pm

Chairman

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