

MINUTES of the meeting of the **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL JOINT TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE COMMITTEE** held at 10.00 am on 22 September 2021 at Oculus, Gateway Offices, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP19 8FF.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Thursday, 24 March 2022.

Elected Members:

(*present)

- Nick Naylor (Co-Chairman)
- Mark Nuti (Co-Chairman)
- Sir Beville Stanier (non-voting) Buckinghamshire Council
- Scott Lewis (non-voting) Surrey County Council

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
Andy Tink, Senior Principal Accountant, Surrey County Council
Nigel Dicker, Head of Housing, Environment & Community Services, Buckinghamshire Council
Councillor Mark Winn, Deputy Cabinet Member for Homelessness, Buckinghamshire Council

15/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

There were none.

16/21 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING [24 MARCH 2021] [Item 2]

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

17/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

Councillor Lewis declared a personal interest as a Member of the Impact Food Group which had been involved in the development of Natasha's Law.

18/21 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS [Item 4a]

There were none.

19/21 PUBLIC QUESTIONS [Item 4b]

There were none.

20/21 PETITIONS [Item 5]

There were none.

21/21 ACTION TRACKER [Item 6]

RESOLVED:

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

22/21 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 7]

Actions:

Item to be included at the next meeting reviewing upcoming legislation that would impact the responsibilities of the service.

RESOLVED:

Members agreed the forward work programme.

Members were encouraged to contact Steve Ruddy or Amanda Poole if they had any other suggested additions to the forward work programme between the conclusion of the meeting and the next meeting.

23/21 PERFORMANCE AND JOINT SERVICE BUDGET [Item 8]

Witnesses:

Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards, Steve Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards

Key points from the discussion:

1. The Officers introduced the report and the following key points were noted on service performance:
 - The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had continued to disrupt general service performance into Q1 of 2021/22.
 - Pandemic-related disruption to the courts had severely impacted conviction rates. Members were informed that no convictions had been made in Q1 due to hearing dates being postponed and delayed as late as 2023.
 - Savings for residents in Q1 (£54,359) were down from last year, due in large part to a reduction in the number of Proceeds of Crime Act compensation orders issued as a result of court disruption.
 - A pilot scheme utilising doorbell cameras to pre-emptively combat rogue traders had seen a positive impact, both in the reported wellbeing of residents and a reduction in financial losses on the doorstep. It was hoped that further funding from National Trading Standards could be secured to expand the scheme.
 - Work continued to respond to complaints made against second-hand car dealers and to combat the supply of illicit tobacco.
 - The National Trading Standards Impact of Scams Interventions Calculator had estimated £431,651 had been saved for residents in avoided health and social care costs during Q1 as a direct result of the work surrounding scams intervention by the service.
 - The Office of Product Safety and Standards had continued to work closely with Trading Standards in signposting prospective partnership

businesses toward the service. The number of Primary Authority partnerships had increased to 131 in Q1.

- Services such as 'Eat Out Eat Well', 'Traders4U' and the partnership with 'TrustMark' continued. It had been agreed with Surrey Public Health that funding would be provided for a part time officer to expand Eat Out Eat Well in the Surrey area.
 - 8,642 unsafe or non-compliant goods had been prevented from entering the country in Q1. This was a lower total than last year, though this was due to the unprecedented levels of unsafe PPE that had been seized at the beginning of the pandemic in what were unusual circumstances.
 - £1,797 worth of illicit alcohol and tobacco had been seized from properties with the help of trained detection dogs. It was confirmed that HMRC would pay for the use of these dogs for the ensuing year.
 - As the disruption from the pandemic eased, work could resume on market surveillance projects. Members' attention was drawn to the case study in the report involving non-compliant safety shoes that had been sold to people undertaking dangerous construction work.
2. A Member asked if the lost income caused by the reduced numbers of Proceeds of Crime Act compensation orders would be recovered as pandemic-related disruption eased. Officers informed Members that this would be the case for some of the lost income, however, due to a reduction in the numbers of crimes (particularly doorstep scams) during the initial lockdown, there were fewer cases in the backlog from which the totality of the difference could be expected to be recovered. Members were also informed that 13 defendants were scheduled for trial between November 2021 and May 2022.
 3. A Member asked to what extent the Police had acted as a partner in the doorbell camera pilot scheme. Members were informed that the Police had not been a partner in the pilot scheme, however the service worked closely with them regardless and that many of those targeted by doorstep scammers during the scheme were talking to the Police alongside Trading Standards as part of the ongoing investigations. Members' attention was drawn to the example given in the report where footage obtained by one of the doorbell cameras was being used by the Police as part of their investigation into the suspect.
 4. A Member informed Officers that he found it encouraging to see businesses actively seeking out Primary Authority partnerships with the Trading Standards service and wanted to thank the officers for their work with partnership businesses. Officers were proud of the work undertaken to ensure that businesses were actively supported by the service to maintain good business practices and high standards whilst continuing to grow and succeed.
 5. There was recognition of the work undertaken by Linda Crowley in partnership with the Sunnybank Trust, which had been acknowledged by their Unsung Hero Award.
 6. A Member questioned the place of Traders4U in the wider market alongside the many similar, commercially available alternatives and

questioned if this congestion could explain the lower uptake in users than had been hoped when the service first launched. Members were informed that the service had initially been brought in to replace a partnership with Checkatrade which ended following a change in ownership. Officers acknowledged that some other existing services had lower standards required of potential members which could confuse residents, and thus felt it appropriate to develop an independent Trading Standards approved service to combat this. The service was designed to be affordable to potential members whilst having a high threshold to prevent rogue traders using the platform to advertise. It was confirmed that a review of the service would take place later in the year and that an update on this could be brought before a future Board Meeting of the Joint Trading Standards Service. This was supported by Members.

7. A Member asked if the service had identified new emerging scams and trends. Members were informed that changes had been identified in certain areas, particularly relating to selling products marketed as being environmentally friendly to elderly and vulnerable people. Between 16,000 and 20,000 pieces of intelligence were locally reviewed and assessed each year by the Service to construct a strategic risk assessment identifying consumer harm issues and ways to best direct Trading Standards resources to combat these emerging trends. This sat alongside similar work carried out nationally to develop a national strategic assessment. Other emerging scams and malpractices identified included illegal puppy breeding, and Covid-related scams in the midst of the pandemic. Trading Standards' prevention team was also able to raise public awareness of scams to residents, including vulnerable individuals in areas where ongoing scams had been made known to Trading Standards.
8. Officers also gave a brief update on the budget. The following key points were noted:
 - There had been an overspend of £69,000 (2.6%) at year end 2020/21 due to reduced income as a result of the pandemic.
 - Claims for lost income were made against the local government income compensation scheme, however this had not offset 100% of lost income.
 - As well as some additional Covid-related spend, there were some small reductions in expenditure in 20/21 as a result of paused activity and operating online, including reduced legal fees and travel expenses.
 - The service expected around £176,000 in Covid-related lost income for 2021/22. £66,000 of this had been offset by a Q1 claim to the local government income compensation scheme, however this scheme had been discontinued beyond June 2021, leaving fiscal pressure on both Local Authorities.
 - The service would reduce spending where possible to mitigate the impact of the fiscal pressures of the ensuing year.
 - Surrey County Council's share of lost income would likely be covered by its Covid Reserve Fund. Buckinghamshire Council's Covid pressures were identified as 'risks' and it remained to be determined how it would approach the lost income.

Actions:

Update to be given to a future Board meeting following the review of the Traders4U service.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Service's performance be noted.
2. That the joint service budget for 2021/22 and the identified pressures be noted.

24/21 TRADING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT POLICY [Item 9]

Witness:

Steve Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards

Key points from the discussion:

1. Officers introduced the report and the following key points were noted:
 - The enforcement policy had been updated to include the capacity of the service to issue fixed penalty notices to offenders. This update had been made in anticipation of future legislative change permitting local authorities to issue fixed penalty notices for moving traffic offences.
 - There had been changes to various titles and acronyms within the enforcement policy to ensure they remained up to date.

RESOLVED:

That the amended Enforcement Policy be endorsed.

25/21 TRADING STANDARDS SCHEME OF DELEGATIONS [Item 10]

Witness:

Steve Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards

Key points from the discussion:

Officers introduced the report and the following key points were noted:

- The Scheme of Delegations had been updated to remove references to 'Buckinghamshire County Council', which had since become part of the new 'Buckinghamshire Council'

RESOLVED:

That the Scheme of Delegation be approved.

26/21 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 11]

The date of the next meeting was Thursday 24 March 2022 and would be hosted by Surrey County Council.

Chairman

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