

2 July 2020		ITEM: 5
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
The Work of Trading Standards		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: No	
Report of: Gavin Dennett – Strategic Lead, Public Protection		
Accountable Assistant Director: Leigh Nicholson – Interim Assistant Director Planning, Transport and Public Protection		
Accountable Director: Andy Millard – Director of Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report has been prepared at the request of the Chair of Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee so they can be informed on the work that Trading Standards undertake on behalf of the Council.

The Council's Trading Standards Service enforce over 200 individual pieces of Consumer Protection legislation all of which ensure a fair and equitable trading environment.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the contents of this report.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Trading Standards team work to protect consumers from illegal trading practices and support Thurrock's business community comply with consumer protection legislation.

2.2 The majority of Trading Standards work is intelligence led and project based. This allows the team to focus on consumer protection issues and problems in the borough which are identified by intelligence gathered from members of the public, partner agencies, the officers themselves and other sources. The projects enable Trading Standards to tackle problem areas by, for example, legislation or business sector. The benefit of this method is that officers are able to concentrate their wide portfolio of skills and knowledge on one

problem area at a time and provide consistent messages to businesses sectors.

- 2.3 The Trading Standards team is currently made up of five qualified and experienced officers and three newly appointed trainee officers. Within the core Trading Standards team there is a Ports Team which is funded by National Trading Standards for the delivery of the Product Safety at Ports Project. This team consists of three Import Surveillance Officers who have been enrolled on apprenticeships to upskill and build resilience within the team.
- 2.4 The team receive funding from Public Health to deliver on Tobacco Control. Work in this area focusses on the illegal tobacco trade and the sale of non-duty paid and counterfeit tobacco.
- 2.5 The team are required to work not only in accordance with the Council's Corporate Priorities, but the priorities of the National Trading Standards, Office for Product Safety and Standards, DEFRA and the Food Standards Agency also need to be met.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Trading Standards team in Thurrock is one of the busiest in the country in terms of the demand placed on it by having three container ports in the Borough. Figures from National Trading Standards indicate that EU Exit could increase the team's workload by 189%. This was addressed by the recruitment of two additional officers to the team in June 2019. This extra resource has gone some way to futureproofing the team in terms of being able to meet the demand of the work at the ports and ensuring it remains properly resourced ahead of such changes to the import market.
- 3.2 In addition to routine inspections and investigations and providing advice to Thurrock residents and businesses, key successes for the team for the first six months of 19/20 include:
 - Achieved a Proceeds of Crime Award against a counterfeit handbag selling ring of a total of £271,171.47. Half of this money goes to the Crown with the remaining half being divided into thirds. The amount that should come back to the team can then be used for reinvestment into further enforcement work such as contributing to legal fees for prosecuting offenders or funding projects tackling consumer detriment in Thurrock.
 - A prolific illicit tobacco seller was fined £10,000 with £3,081 costs and a £100 victim surcharge after seizing 17,000 cigarettes from them over a six month period. Five more prosecution cases are in progress against five other individuals at the moment. This work will continue as we work towards eradicating illicit tobacco from the Grays Town Centre. We are working in partnership with the Police Town Centre teams and HMRC

- Seized over 30,000 illicit cigarettes;
- Prevented 50,952 unsafe items and 557,561 non-compliant items from entering the UK. This represents a saving of £19.7 million to the UK economy; the items stopped at the border range from unsafe toys containing choking hazards and dangerous chemicals, to electrical goods posing electrical shock hazards for the end user to cosmetics containing cancer causing ingredients. It is proven to be more efficient to tackle such goods at the border where whole containers of unsafe goods can be intercepted rather than taking small number of items off sale when found on sale at retailers. This approach also ensure that such dangerous items never make it to the hands of our residents.
- 1155 food premises were advised on their responsibilities with regards to food allergens;
- 53 scam victims visited and advised on their rights and how to avoid falling prey to scammers and rogues to prevent further detriment. These victims were mostly vulnerable and elderly;
- 76 retailers of age restricted items such as alcohol and tobacco visited and advised of their duties and 35 premises tested to see if they would check for identification of customers to prove they are over 18;
- Delivered on a part worn tyre project and warned three traders about the sale of dangerous second hand tyres.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 This report has been prepared at the request of the Chair of Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee so they can be informed on the work that Trading Standards undertake on behalf of the Council.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 None

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The work of Trading Standards impacts on two council priorities, the people priority around the safety of people and the prosperity priority to provide opportunities for business.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**
Interim Senior Management Accountant

There are therefore no financial implications concerned with this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Courage Emovon**
Principal Lawyer / Manager – Contracts Team

The current work of the Public Protection Service of the Council is governed by the legislation detailed in the body of this report and Legal Service will advise appropriately on any identified legal implications arising thereof from this report as and when required.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Strategic Lead: Community Development and Equalities

There are no diversity or equality implications associated with this report.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. Appendices to the report

None

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Public Protection