

Report to the Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee

22 February 2018

Illicit Tobacco – “Keep it out” Campaign

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Purpose of Report

1. To update the Committee on the latest activities relating to the control of illicit tobacco.

Illicit Tobacco

2. Illicit tobacco comes in three forms; -
 - Smuggled – This is tobacco produced by legitimate companies that has been diverted from its intended market and sold in the United Kingdom.
 - Counterfeit – This is tobacco, whether cigarettes or hand rolling tobacco, marketed illegally in packaging simulating legitimate brands.
 - Cheap whites – Tobacco produced in factories with no legitimate retail market purely for the purposes of evading taxation and other laws.
3. Between July and August 2012 Fresh North East, a body funded by the 12 regional local authorities, ran a campaign called “Keep it out” aimed at raising awareness of the harm of illegal tobacco and inviting members of the public to report sales of illegal tobacco. The campaign was very successful and a second “Keep it out” campaign has just been run.

Keep it Out Campaign

4. The campaign started at the end of October and ran through November 2018. Activities included a leaflet drop in target areas, press releases and advertising. Local authorities were supplied with materials to distribute and messages for social media. There was coverage on regional television as well as in the regional press.
5. The information given to the public and retailers explained the damage that can be done by the sale of illicit products. Access to cheap cigarettes from illicit sources makes it affordable for children to smoke. The people organising the smuggling of tobacco on a large scale are organised criminal groups, tobacco being only one source of their money. The cheapness of illegal cigarettes enables people to continue smoking, at risk to their health, when they might otherwise quit.
6. A Freephone number 0300 999 0000 and a web address allowing confidential reporting, keep-it-out-.co.uk was provided on all material circulated. The

intention being to gather as much information on the trade in illegal cigarettes as possible. Local authority trading standards could then use that information to carry out enforcement and advisory activities. Whilst individual, anonymous pieces of information are not proof of illegal activity, several sources giving the same information can build up a picture or verify information already held.

Outcomes for Trading Standards

7. One of the key desired outcomes for the campaign was to supply intelligence to the Trading Standards sections of the local authorities in the region. Across Tyne and Wear there were over 100 separate intelligence reports made relating individuals, both at residential addresses and online as well as retailers.
8. Raising awareness of the issues surrounding illicit tobacco was another objective of the campaign. Local press and television covered raids by Newcastle City Council, including the Tyne Tees report on a raid by Newcastle officers on a retail premises where the tobacco was concealed in cornflake and soap powder boxes.
9. The intelligence received has led to a number of enforcement activities. Newcastle City Council undertook 17 enforcement visits that netted just over 142,000 cigarettes and 23 kilogrammes of hand rolling tobacco. In Sunderland over 10,000 cigarettes were found at a retailer's shop and his residential address and a raid on an online seller discovered a further 26,000 cigarettes. In addition to the counterfeit cigarettes Newcastle seized 74 bottles of alcohol and Sunderland seized a significant quantity of other counterfeit goods found on the same premises as the counterfeit cigarettes.
10. It is expected that further activities will be undertaken on the intelligence reports received.

Recommendations

11. The Committee is asked to note the information contained within this report.

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