

30 June 2016**Local Authority Roundup**

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Purpose of the report

To inform the committee of some of the work undertaken by Trading Standards across the Tyne and Wear region.

Gateshead

1. Trading Standards led an investigation in relation to a retailer exposing for sale food which was unfit for human consumption. This was in fact Kommisar Vodka which when tested did not contain the correct alcohol content of 37.5% in fact the alcohol content was only 23.3% ABV. The retailer was fined £2000 for the offences. The court also heard that the trader was selling the vodka for £7.99 which meant that the sale was less than the permitted unit price for alcohol which should have been £8.89, a breach of a condition on their licence conditions. They were fined an additional £1200 for this offence. This has gained much interest nationally as it is the first of its kind.
2. The authority continues to deal with sales of illegal tobacco from private houses and sales of counterfeit goods on Facebook. A recent seller of Turner hand rolling tobacco that failed to comply with the correct labelling and health warnings, was fined £1000. Another seller was prosecuted for selling and having in their possession Turner hand rolling tobacco and was sentenced to a community order (8 week curfew) and costs of £325.
3. In attempts to help protect vulnerable people an officer is working with Northumbria Police to visit victims of online and postal fraud such as repeat scam mail etc. The officer is linking in to the referrals we receive from the National Trading Standards Scams Team and their current data from Action Fraud or complaints direct.

South Tyneside**Tackling Underage Sales**

4. We improved the way we record and analyse intelligence about underage sales to ensure that our resources are directed at problem traders. This targeted approach led to us taking action against two businesses which, on the basis of information received, were suspected of being persistent sellers of age-restricted products to young people. One business sold alcohol to an underage volunteer and we applied for a review of the premises licence. This resulted in a three-

month suspension of the licence and the attachment of a number of conditions to the licence aimed at preventing further underage sales. The second business sold cigarettes to an underage volunteer. Legal proceedings were instituted against the seller who was fined for the underage sale and was also convicted for breaching the tobacco display ban in what was one of the first prosecutions of its type in the country. In both cases local press publicity was generated, reinforcing the message that Trading Standards will take action against those businesses that flout the law and encouraging members of the public to report any concerns they may have about underage sales to us.

Scams Project

5. We continued our work on the National Trading Standards Scams Team project to identify and support scam victims who reside in South Tyneside. So far, over 130 visits have been carried out to local residents who have all been given advice and assistance on what to do about unwanted contact by post and/or telephone. 40 'priority referral' residents have also been visited. In the case of priority referrals, post destined for scammers has been intercepted and people who have sent money away are able to have it returned to them. A pilot project to assess the effectiveness of telephone call blocking devices was also completed last year. The findings were very encouraging and we purchased a further two devices, increasing our capacity to four. Scam and nuisance telephone calls to high-risk victims are minimised by means of a unit installed in the victim's home by Trading Standards for a three-month period. The unit allows the resident to continue to take calls from friends and family. Ten residents have had a unit installed so far and, in all cases, analysis of call data has shown a significant reduction in the number of scam and nuisance calls which continues after the unit has been removed. Over 1500 such calls have been blocked in this way so far.
6. A member of the Trading Standards team received an Outstanding Employee Award earlier this year as a result of her efforts to tackle scams and address other consumer issues.

Evaluation of No Cold-Calling Zones

7. In order to tackle doorstep crime and to provide reassurance to residents, South Tyneside Council Trading Standards team operates 13 No Cold-Calling Zones (NCCZs). These zones protect over 1100 residential properties, the majority of which are occupied by older or more vulnerable residents. In 2015/16, we conducted a survey to evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of the zones by sending a short questionnaire out to every address located within a zone. It was very encouraging to find that 86% of respondents indicated that they have felt safer since the introduction of the NCCZ, with 80% reporting a reduction in the number of unwanted doorstep callers they receive. Furthermore, 88% of those who replied reported that being in an NCCZ had given them the confidence to send any such callers they do receive away.

Sunderland

8. A cowboy builder who ripped off clients across the region was jailed for four years after action by Sunderland Trading Standards. In some cases the builder completed work that a surveyor described as being to a poor DIY standard. In

other cases he took money and did little or no work. There were over 40 complainants about the builder and Sunderland Trading Standards worked with the North East Scambusters Team to bring him to justice.

9. There have been a number of tragic cases where toddlers have become trapped in the cords from blinds and been strangled. Sunderland Trading Standards attended an event for the Landlords Forum in Sunderland highlighting the risk presented by blind cords and demonstrated devices designed to prevent the strangulation risk. The advice was well received and the landlords made a commitment to child proof their premises.
10. A North Tyneside car dealer was prosecuted for selling a car to a consumer without informing them that it had twice been a category C write off. The consumer would never have bought the car had she known its accident history. The trader had previously been advised of his responsibilities by officers from North Tyneside Council. Following a not guilty plea and a trial the trader was found guilty, fined and ordered to pay compensation to the complainant.

North Tyneside

Illicit tobacco

11. On 3rd June 2016 a North Tyneside retailer pleaded guilty to 8 Consumer Protection offences at North Tyneside Magistrates' Court. He was fined a total of £630. The case came to court after two specialist sniffer dogs helped find a hidden stash of illegal tobacco in an off licence in North Shields. The dogs, which can detect counterfeit or illegal tobacco, were used in a joint operation with Northumbria Police. They are trained to locate tobacco in hidden concealments, such as in ceiling areas, behind panels and under floorboards.
12. Based on intelligence received, searches were carried out at the premises. Two hidden compartments beneath shelving under the store's counter were discovered. Inside were dozens of packets of Super King and Mayfair cigarettes as well as hand rolling Turner tobacco. The seized items were a mixture of counterfeit products and those that had no duty paid. The cigarettes were also tested by the Gateshead laboratory to see if they would pass the reduced ignition propensity requirements for cigarettes (This is a safety requirement that requires all lit cigarettes to extinguish when put down). All of the cigarettes failed.
13. At present, the Tyne and Wear Metrology Laboratory is one of only a few Local Authority Laboratories conducting Reduced Ignition Propensity testing for cigarettes. The cigarettes were ordered by the court to be forfeited and destroyed.

Scams awareness event

14. North Tyneside Trading Standards worked together with Northumbria Police and Nat West Bank to host a Scam awareness event held in the Whitley Bay Nat West branch in May. NatWest Bank have been working with trading standards staff across England to educate the bank staff and customers on doorstep crime, scams and other frauds.

15. The team at NatWest Bank has worked hard to help their customers gain a greater understanding of consumer fraud and they have started to implement a referral policy for safeguarding and fraud prevention purposes.

16. Officers were present to offer advice/information on all sorts of scams etc. to the public.

Newcastle

Licensing Reviews.

17. Following the work conducted with commercial dog teams under Operation Beagle 4 and Operation Henry 2, where significant quantities of non-duty paid alcohol and tobacco were seized from four off-licences across the city; Reviews of the various Premises Licences were initiated. The details and outcomes as subject potentially to appeal, are as detailed below:

Premises	Dates of Seizures	Goods Seized	Date of Hearing	Outcome
JA Mini Market, 813-815 Welbeck Road, Walker.	3 February 2016	37 bottles of "Glen's vodka" and 25 bottles of "Smirnoff vodka".	12 April 2016	Warning to be placed on Premises Licence.
Best on the West Road, 160-162 West Road, Fenham.	2 December 2015.	172 bottles of "Glens Vodka", 121 bottles of "Smirnoff Vodka" and 50 bottles of "High Commissioner whisky" 2,040 Illegal cigarettes.	26 April 2016	Revocation.
Continental Deli, 56 Shields Road, Byker.	2 December 2015 & 14 March 2016	Seizure 1. 10,380 illegal cigarettes Seizure 2. 51 x 5 litre red 'wine' 4 x 5 litre white 'wine' 5 x 5 litre empty cartons & 1,620 illegal cigarettes.	1 June 2016	Revocation
VG Foodstore, Kingston Park.	September 2014. HMRC operation. Conviction for offences March 2016 as published in the "Chronicle".	Two vans outside premises, found to contain 709 litres of illicit spirits. Plus 23, one litre vodka bottles seized from premises.	1 June 2016	Convicted individual not to be involved with operation and management of business. Suspension of Premises Licence for 3 months.

18. Press coverage following the decisions made by the Licensing Committee can be found at: <http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/booze-ban-west-end-shop-11251846> & <http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/byker-deli-illicit-tab-drink-11418131>

No Cold Calling Zones.

19. Consultations with residents on proposals to implement No Cold Calling Zones continue to progress. Two new zones in North/South Jesmond and Dene ward and an extended zone in Fenham ward have now been implemented after the positive responses received from residents to the related proposals. Sixty six zones have now been implemented, covering some 37,005 households across twenty two wards in Newcastle.
20. Recent intelligence from residents in one established No Cold Calling Zone, where representatives from one home meal delivery business were calling on doors in the zone, led to a referral through to the Home Authority of the company.

Local Government Association Research project.

21. Following a request made from the LGA, the Trading Standards service recently hosted for a day, Professor John Raine from INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham. Newcastle has been selected as a case study to illustrate the work of Trading Standards which will appear in a publication, which will be sent through to all elected Members in England.

Recommendation

22. The Committee is asked to note the information.