

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
TYNE AND WEAR TRADING STANDARDS JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING
17 SEPTEMBER 2020

PRESENT: Councillor K Dodds (Chair)
Councillors: T Graham, I Patterson, C Burdis,
Councillor S Graham, Councillor J Blackburn, J-
P Stephenson, L Wright, Councillor M Lawson and Lovatt

TW30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors M Foy (Gateshead) and Councillor J Fletcher (Sunderland).

TW31 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13 February 2020 were approved as a correct record.

It was noted that the launch of the Responsible Retailer Scheme in Sunderland had been delayed due to the pandemic.

TW32 FINAL OUTTURN FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2019/20

The Committee has considered the final outturn for the financial year 2019/20, subject to the audit of Gateshead Council's accounts.

It was reported, in response to a question raised at a previous meeting, that the constituent councils' contributions were based on their respective populations. These figures were last revisited in 2013/14 and it was intended that these would now be refreshed.

A member asked about the expansion of the service and ways it could increase its income. The Committee was advised that the future development of the service was tied into the structure of the laboratory premises. A report on this matter was being prepared by Gateshead Council's Property Services and this would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee to align it with the budget setting.

RESOLVED - That the information be noted.

TW33 REPORT AND STATISTICAL RETURN FOR THE QUARTER ENDING SEPTEMBER 2020

The Committee has considered the work and operational duties of the Joint Metrology Laboratory for the period up to August 2020.

RESOLVED - That the information be noted.

TW34 COMPETITION AND MARKETS AUTHORITY: THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC, CONSUMER CONTRACTS, CANCELLATION AND REFUNDS

The Committee has been advised of the publication in April 2020 of a Policy Statement on Consumer Contracts, Cancellation and Refunds by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

During the pandemic and lockdown, the CMA received a significant number of complaints from consumers that apparently businesses were not following the legislative provisions in respect of consumer contracts and the requirements for businesses to consider cancellations and refunds.

There was a wide range of contracts that have been affected due to the pandemic. The Policy Statement sets out the CMA's general views about how the law operates in this area to help consumers understand their rights and to help businesses treat their customers fairly.

RESOLVED - That the information be noted.

TW35 COMPETITION AND MARKETS AUTHORITY: JOINT STATEMENT AGAINST PRICE GOUGING - JULY 2020

The Committee has been advised of the publication in July 2020 of a Joint Statement Against Price Gouging by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

During the early stages of the pandemic and lockdown, trading standards services received a number of complaints from consumers that apparently a number of shops were allegedly exploiting consumers by raising the prices of certain key products, so called 'price gouging'.

As a result of all the concerns raised on 3 July 2020 the CMA issued a joint statement with a number of organisations. This made it clear that the CMA remained concerned about the behaviour of a small number of organisations at that time. If customers have been affected by price rises, they can report poor business behaviour to the CMA using its online form to report them. In addition, it has urged retailers to report examples where prices are being raised because of increases in supplier costs through the same form.

The CMA is keeping all evidence it receives under review and will not hesitate to take enforcement action where there is evidence that the law has been broken.

The Committee considered that representations should be made to appropriate Government Minister to legislate against this type of behaviour by retailers and suppliers in future. The representations to be forwarded to all MPs in Tyne and Wear and the Leaders, Elected Mayor and Chief Executives of the Tyne and Wear Councils. It was suggested that any examples of 'price gouging' should be shared with the Chair.

RESOLVED - (i) That the information be noted.

(ii) That representations be made as outlined above.

TW36 PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT: FACE MASKS AND COVERINGS

The Committee has been updated on the publication by the Office for Product Safety and Standards of guidance to enforcement authorities on the implications of the Personal Protective Equipment legislation on Face Masks and Coverings during the Pandemic.

RESOLVED - That the information be noted.

Chair.....