

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

TYNE AND WEAR TRADING STANDARDS JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, 2 March 2023

PRESENT: Councillor K Dodds (Chair)

Councillor(s): Councillor J Fletcher, C Buckley, I Patterson, Heron, P Walker, Councillor J O'Shea, Hunter, Mulvenna and Councillor M Lawson

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor(s):

APOLOGIES: Councillor(s): C Rowntree, Councillor S Graham, S Dean, J Keegan, ALamonte and Lovatt

TW79 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

TW80 MINUTES

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 23 June 2022 be approved as a correct record.
 - (ii) that the notes of the inquorate meeting held on 24 November 2023 be noted subject to it being noted that Councillor T Mulvenna and Councillor J Hunter were also in attendance.

TW81 REPORT AND STATISTICAL RETURN FOR PERIOD TO MARCH 2023

The Committee were provided with an update on the current position at the Metrology Laboratory. The lab is currently operating at full staff, with a Senior Trading Standards Officer post recently being advertised.

Submissions to the lab are consistent and in fact slightly up. There is some business improvement going on in the Saltmeadows area and a share access car park, some car park improvements have been made to make safe for customers and visitors.

The public weighbridge continues to bring in a regular stream of income and the weighbridge test unit is booked in for May when all weighbridges in each of the 5 local authorities are tested.

The annual UKAS audit has been undertaken with a few minor points raised with overall positive feedback on the day.

The lab have been successful in another bid from the OPSS funding, a separate report has been submitted to the Committee.

RESOLVED - That the information contained within the report be noted.

TW82 PROJECTED OUTTURN AS AT 31 JANUARY 2023 - DRAFT BUDGET FOR THE 2023/24 FINANCIAL YEAR

The Committee received a report to provide an update on the Projected Outturn for the Metrology Laboratory and the draft budget for 2023/24.

The UKAS fees have increased by 3%, it is important that the laboratory remains competitive, there is a 3% increase in contributions from the 5 Local Authorities.

It was noted that there has been an increase in utilities as with everywhere else. It was also noted that the budget for next year will be balanced.

RESOLVED - (i) That the projected outturn for 2022/23 be noted.
(ii) That the proposed budget for 2023/24 be noted.

TW83 UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEASEHOLD REFORM (GROUND RENT) ACT 2022

The Committee received a report to inform them of the implementation of the Leasehold Reform Act (Ground Rent) Act 2022 ('the Act').

The act puts an end to ground rents for most new long residential leasehold properties in England and Wales. Royal Assent was granted on 8 February 2022 and the Act was brought into force on 30 June 2022.

As of 30 June 2022, landlords of regulated leases must not require a leaseholder to make a payment of prohibited rent.

The Committee were advised that this was something which Trading Standards which would be responsible for enforcing.

RESOLVED - That the information presented in the report be noted.

TW84 LGA PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICES - A HANDBOOK FOR COUNCILLORS

The Committee received a report which informed them of an online publication that is available for Councillors which provides an overview of council Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing Services.

The handbook sits alongside related LGA handbooks on different areas of licensing and is intended to assist all councillors in understanding the key functions of these important but complex services and how they can be used to support a wide range of key council priorities.

Through their work, often although not exclusively with local businesses, public protection services protect different aspects of local life, including:

- Local businesses and the economy
- People, in their different roles as local residents, consumer, tenants, employees/workers etc
- Communities, as places where people live and work, and
- The environment, including animals

However public protection services are arranged there is value in them working collaboratively within or across organisations, as joining the dots between different elements of them is key to optimising practise and maximising increasingly scare resources.

It was suggested that this be circulated to all councillors in each authority.

RESOLVED - that the information contained within the report be noted.

TW85 UPDATE ON THE SUCCESSFUL FUNDING BID TO OPSS JANUARY 2023

The Committee received an update on a successful funding bid to the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) to conduct a safety information activity.

In January OPSS announced there was funding available to support public safety information projects relating to produce safety or legal metrology. They encouraged bids for funding aimed at the most vulnerable consumers, specifically the digitally excluded and those particularly impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Funding was for short-term projects that could be completed within this financial year and could have been for either:

- Reports on the organisation's current activity
- Scoping proposals on future activity
- Conducting consumer awareness and education activity

After discussions with the 5 Tyne and Wear authorities, the laboratory submitted a scoping proposal.

Within the current financial climate there has been an increase in the use of food banks and other community-based groups to collect and distribute products other than food such as toys and small electrical products, possibly without understanding the safety implications of sharing such products.

The bid submitted to the OPSS was for Trading Standards staff from the 5 local authorities to visit both registered food banks and other community hubs during March 2023 and simply ascertain exactly what goods are being distributed.

Staff will be given a short questionnaire to complete for each site which will be used for returns to OPSS. This project give TS staff the opportunity to engage with community groups, build strong working relationships. Further work could include product safety talks, consumer advice or information on loan sharks or illicit tobacco.

At this time OPSS cannot guarantee further funding, but it is hoped that the scoping project can lead to more in-depth work within the community targeting product safety and those most vulnerable.

RESOLVED - That the information contained within the report be noted.

TW86 VAPING - CALL FOR CHANGE BY LGA AND ASH

The Committee received a report to inform them that in early February of this year, the Local Government Association issued a press release call for changes in the way vapes are packaged and sold in shops.

It has been reported to Committee previously and members of the Committee have previously express that vapes need to be 'out of sight and out of reach' to tackle underage sales.

LGA are seeking strict new measures to regulate the display and marketing of vaping products in the same way as tobacco to crack down on a rise in stores selling to children.

LGA is calling for:

- Vapes to be in plain packaging and kept out of sight behind the counter
- Mandatory age of sale signage on vaping products – it's currently voluntary
- A ban on free samples of vaping products being given out to people of any age

Sanctions should also be in line with those breaching the rules similar to those handed out under the tobacco display regulations.

In a survey by the Chartered Trading Standards institute, 60 per cent of local trading standards services reported high street shops selling illicit vapes or vaping products to children was the enforcement issue that most concerned them. Teams reported a significant rise in underage vape sales last year.

Data from ASH Smokefree GB Youth survey of 11 to 18 year olds in England showed that current vaping prevalence was 8.6 per cent in 2022, compared with 4 per cent in 2021. It was also found that over a fifth of youngsters bought vaping products from newsagents while 16.3 per cent bought them from a supermarket.

RESOLVED – that the information contained within the report be noted.

Chair.....