

<p>London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham</p> <p>COMMUNITY SAFETY, ENVIRONMENT AND RESIDENTS SERVICES POLICY & ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE</p> <p>20 November 2017</p>	
<p>LONDON TRADING STANDARDS WEEK</p>	
<p>Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Residents Services – Councillor Wesley Harcourt</p>	
<p>Open Report</p>	
<p>Classification: For information Key Decision: No</p>	
<p>Consultation: <i>None – this report is for information</i></p>	
<p>Wards Affected: All</p>	
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of the Trading Standards activities carried out during London Trading Standards week and outlines the aims of the week, what the Council did during the week and how effective the week was in achieving its aims.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the Trading Standards activities carried out during London Trading Standards week are noted by the committee and that the meeting provide comments and/or feedback as it sees fit.

3. PROPOSAL AND ISSUES

London Trading Standards Week

- 3.1. London Trading Standards Week, took place between Monday 25 September and Friday 29 September 2017 and the theme was 'Protecting Consumers; Safeguarding Businesses'.
- 3.2. London Trading Standards (LTS) is a membership organisation that represents and co-ordinates work on behalf the 33 Local Authority Trading Standards Services across London. They maintain a website at www.londontradingstandards.org.uk.
- 3.3. The aim of LTS week was to promote and raise awareness about the wide range of work carried out by Trading Standards Services locally and to highlight the following priorities for London:

DAY OF THE WEEK		THEME	DESIRED OUTCOMES
Day 1	Monday 25 September	Underage sales of knives	<i>To help prevent people being killed through knife crime</i>
Day 2	Tuesday 26 September	Lettings agencies	<i>To stop private tenants being ripped off by rogue landlords</i>
Day 3	Wednesday 27 September	Scams and Doorstep Sales	<i>To help protect the vulnerable from fraudsters</i>
Day 4	Thursday 28 September	Support for Businesses	<i>To help businesses to thrive and grow</i>
Day 5	Friday 29 September	Product Safety	<i>To help prevent people being killed by unsafe domestic goods</i>

- 3.4. A large part of the campaign was the publicity and several press releases were sent out leading up to and throughout the course of the week.
- 3.5. The council's communications team were engaged from the start and were provided with a press pack which contained embargoed press releases and suggested tweets.

Activity on Day 1 - Underage sales of knives

- 3.6. In preparation for this theme, the Trading Standards team developed a campaign, with police input, aimed at retailers of knives and strong acid products of the sort that could be used as a weapon. The main campaign messages were that:
- both types of product should be removed from open display, to make it easier to control supply and harder to steal; and
 - retailers should consider a voluntary prohibition on selling acids to anyone under the age of 21.

- 3.7. As part of the campaign, advice and guidance was given, free training was offered to the businesses and posters were developed to help businesses to notify their staff and customers.
- 3.8. Trading Standards Officers and the Police visited retailers of knives and strong acids, which were targeted at high priority knives sellers i.e. those deemed most likely to sell to a child.
- 3.9. The visits were planned to coincide with dates for the Police's Operation Sceptre – a Met campaign to combat knife crime and included:
 - a mixture of 'Challenge 25' test purchase visits using someone just over the minimum age of 18, to see if they were challenged about their age;
 - an introduction to the knives and strong acid campaign;
 - an audit of the businesses' existing procedures; and
 - underage test purchases were attempted at those premises that sold to the overage purchaser without requiring proof of age.
- 3.10. Appendices 1-4 include; (1) the Retailers' letter to introduce the campaign, (2) the Customer notice and posters, (3) the Knives guidance and (4) Strong Acids and Ammonia guidance.
- 3.11. The person in charge was strongly advised to move knives and the strongest acids (e.g. drain cleaners) behind the counter / away from open display, to prevent thefts or the products being used as weapons on the premises. All businesses welcomed the advice that they received.
- 3.12. For the 'Challenge 25' test purchases, different volunteers were used and the results varied considerably, but 12 sales out of 17 were made. The businesses that sold without requiring proof of age were then used for test purchases, using an underage volunteer for those that declined to book the free training.
- 3.13. The free 90 minutes training session was focussed on avoiding underage sales (both when serving and when managing staff), the safe storage of knives and strong acids and on minimising confrontation. Businesses that attended received a certificate of attendance.
- 3.14. Six businesses attended the training, four who had failed the 'Challenge 25' test purchases (three of whom have since passed) and two who didn't. The feedback received from attendees was that it was 'Very Useful' ('Reasonably Useful' Slightly Useful' and 'Not Useful' being the other options).
- 3.15. After London Trading Standards week, officers made follow up visits to reinforce the advice, encourage sign-up to training and to assess the changes made and found that there had been some improvement. There were 22 'Challenge 25' test purchases, resulting in 15 sales. 13 of the businesses that 'failed' the 'Challenge 25' test purchases were tested again with a child volunteer and no sales were made.

- 3.16. The guidance and other materials will be sent by post to the lower priority businesses, over the next few months.
- 3.17. Our work on knives and acid demonstrates the council's ongoing commitment to help reduce knife and gang crime and sharing service delivery with the police.

Activity on Day 2 – Lettings Agencies

- 3.18. It is a legal requirement for all lettings agents and property management companies to join one of three Government approved redress schemes. They must also display a comprehensive list of fees, penalties and charges on their website and on their premises.
- 3.19. The requirement to join a redress scheme means that tenants and landlords in the private rented sector and leaseholders and freeholders dealing with property managers in the residential sector can complain to an independent person about the service they have received. Ultimately these requirements will help with identifying possible rogue agents and property managers and provide better standards for private renters and improve tenant satisfaction.
- 3.20. As part of London Trading Standards Week officers checked business websites and sent 'Notices of Intent' to three businesses to fine them £5,000 each for not displaying fees on their website. They were given 28 days to respond and make representations to us. Officers are now reviewing these cases to either confirm, amend or withdraw the fine. The businesses were in the following wards: Askew, Shepherd's Bush Green and Fulham Reach.

Activity on Day 3 – Scams and Doorstep Sales

- 3.21. Officers held a Fraud, Scam & Digital Safety Awareness Event in the Town Hall, in support of LTS Week and gave a presentation about the Friends Against Scams campaign.
- 3.22. [Friends Against Scams](#) is a National Trading Standards initiative, which aims to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams by raising awareness about scams and those who fall victim to them.
- 3.23. The event was planned in conjunction with the Police, Barclays Bank and Age UK, who sent out invites, within the branch network. Hammersmith BID also advertised the event to all their members and on Twitter.
- 3.24. The response and feedback that we received was very positive. One resident said that a comment about never feeling bad about being a victim was really poignant to her.
- 3.25. Due to the success of the event, there are plans to work together again in the future to continue to support and help our residents.

- 3.26. On the actual scams and doorstep sales themed day, the Deputy Leader and the Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Residents Services met with a representative from the National Trading Standards Scams Team to help promote and raise awareness about the Friends Against Scams campaign and their SCAMBassador status. SCAMBassadors are MPs / senior officials who will use their influence to raise the issue of scams at a local, regional and national level. A photograph was taken with promotional banners in the Town Hall and tweeted the next day.

Activity on Day 4 – Support for Businesses

- 3.27. The first of a series of regular training sessions for retailers of age-restricted products took place during London Trading Standards week. See paragraphs 3.13 and 3.14 above for details of the business support activity.
- 3.28. This is an alternative delivery model to the traditional interventions used to help businesses comply with the law. By making this training and available and easily accessible we have found a more efficient way of working. This change in culture has received positive feedback and a high level of business satisfaction and the subsequent test purchase results were excellent i.e. no sales.
- 3.29. Whilst we have worked with many large businesses in the borough including; Disney, Car Giant, L'Oréal, we were not able to obtain a quote from any of the businesses that we have a relationship with to showcase the added value and support that they get from the Trading Standards team. This is largely due to the short timescales for response and the holiday period and so is something that we are keen to pursue and improve over the next six months.

Activity on Day 5 – Product Safety

- 3.30. Visits were carried out to retailers of second hand electrical goods in the weeks leading up to London Trading Standards week, to publicise the results as part of a pan-London safety campaign.
- 3.31. Officers focussed on retailers of white goods and businesses that had not been visited before.
- 3.32. There were three visits in total: one premises had lamps and heaters on display that hadn't been checked and had a few old plugs. Although they said that they cut the plugs off but officers advised that they need to do this before displaying the items. They will be sent an advice letter after a follow up visit. One new business was compliant and the other premises was compliant but will be sent a product recall advice letter, as they were the only one selling white goods.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE SUCCESS OF LONDON TRADING STANDARDS WEEK

- 4.1. H&F has shown strong leadership throughout this campaign by initially identifying the local priorities that formed the basis of the five themes for the week.
- 4.2. The collaboration with other Trading Standards services across London resulted in a very cohesive campaign, which made best use of officer expertise and resources.
- 4.3. Other external partners and stakeholders were also key and included:
 - the Chartered Trading Standards Institute's press team and their media contacts, who provided support in dealing with media queries;
 - the contribution and support from the LTS lead officers for each theme;
 - the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime for the knife press release;
 - the National Approved Letting Scheme (NALS) and coverage in the lettings industry press; and
 - Lynn Faulds Wood, celebrity consumer champion, as an LTS Ambassador who had invaluable media contacts.
- 4.4. In terms of the publicity received London Trading Standards has been viewed as a resounding success for a first-year campaign and is likely to be repeated next year.
- 4.5. LTS secured coverage in a number of national media outlets as well as support for the #LTSweek on Twitter. A schedule showing media coverage is attached with this report, as Appendix 5.
- 4.6. The knife crime and acid attack work was particularly popular with the media and attracted articles in the Evening Standard and Metro newspapers. However, no press coverage (other than borough websites) was received for the scams and doorstep crime, business and product safety press releases.
- 4.7. The campaign has highlighted the need for media training and social media training in particular and the key role that local authority communications teams can play in getting key service messages out to the public.

5. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The Council, when making decisions in relation to any of its functions, must comply with its public-sector equality duty as set out in s149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Act).
- 5.2. The work activities during LTS Week had low relevance in relation to its impact on the areas under the statutory duties contained in the equalities impact assessment for the Trading Standards service, but contributes towards the corporate priorities of the council, set out in the H&F Business Plan 2017/18.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are no direct legal implications associated with this report. Any indirect legal implications, arising from any enforcement activities are managed as part of the team's internal management and monitoring of legal processes.
- 6.2. *Implications verified by: Tasnim Shawkat, Director for Law, 020 8753 2700.*

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. This campaign programme was delivered as part of the Trading Standards Business Plan, using existing budgets and staffing resource. Any new activities arising as a result of this work will be managed within existing budgets.
- 7.2. *Implications completed by: Kellie Gooch – Head of Finance – Environmental Services, telephone 020 8753 2203.*

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

- 8.1. The motivation for LTS Week was to raise awareness about the work that Trading Standards carry out and to act as a conduit for businesses to approach the Service for advice and guidance.
- 8.2. Where businesses have not obeyed the law, enforcement action and other interventions have or will be taken, in accordance with our enforcement policy, to help businesses comply.
- 8.3. Experience has shown that publicity about enforcement action can act as a deterrent to rogue traders and also informs our residents that this type of enforcement activity is happening, leading to a higher level of reporting. Collectively, the range of interventions used can help to rule out any unfair business advantages.
- 8.4. More work is needed in the area of business engagement and there are plans to work more closely with Economic Development and Town Centre Managers to improve the Trading Standards offer of help and support for our local businesses.

9. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The Failure to meet new and existing statutory requirements is specifically addressed in the Environmental Health Service Group's risk register. Controls in place to mitigate this risk include training, internal auditing, periodic updates of the scheme of delegation and the business planning process.

10. BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. In November 2016, the Trading Standards team were successful in winning a contract to manage the regional business intelligence service for all Trading Standards services in London.
- 10.2. The role of business intelligence is becoming increasingly more important in our work, to help identify the areas where our resources should be focussed to improve our efficiency and effectiveness.

11. HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Our work in relation to scams is aimed at assisting members of the public who are most at risk of financial abuse. This work will continue, so that we can improve the council's support for our older residents, either through the Older People's Commission and/or the Safeguarding Adults Executive Board, as appropriate.
- 11.2. People who are scammed often experience loneliness, shame and social isolation. National statistics from the National Trading Standards Scams Team indicate that elderly victims are 2.5 times more likely to die or go into a care home than those who are not scammed. Our work in this area can contribute to improving life chances and the team are keen to explore the use of joint social care and GP hubs to support our vulnerable residents who may be suffering from a cognitive impairment such as dementia and/or social exclusion.
- 11.3. The activities surrounding knife and acid attacks were aimed at retailers to act as a first line of defence in ensuring that these potentially dangerous articles are not sold to minors.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT

NONE

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Retailers' letter to introduce the campaign
Appendix 2 – Customer notice and posters
Appendix 3 - Knives guidance
Appendix 4 - Strong Acids and Ammonia guidance
Appendix 5 - LTS Week Media Coverage