



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Communities Scrutiny Committee

11 October 2022

Trading Standards Overview

Cabinet Member:	Cllr Richard Overton - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Housing, Enforcement and Transport
Lead Director:	Dean Sargeant - Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement
Service Area:	Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services
Report Author:	Anita Hunt – Public Protection Group Manager
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Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Report considered by:	N/A

1.0 Recommendations for decision

Members are asked:

- 1.1 To endorse the approach adopted by the Trading Standards in the previous twelve months.
- 1.2 To agree and approve identified priorities and areas of focus for the year ahead and suggest any areas of focus for further consideration.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Communities Scrutiny Committee on the remit and activities undertaken by the councils Trading Standards team during the last 12 months.
- 2.2 The report seeks approval of the current priorities and areas of focus for the coming year while giving opportunity for Committee to suggest areas for further consideration.

3.0 Background

3.1 Telford & Wrekin Council has a statutory responsibility to provide a Trading Standards Service; as part of the council's wider enforcement activity, the trading standards team undertakes enforcement of a wide variety of consumer protection legislation to protect and support our residents, businesses as well as those who visit the borough.

3.2 Trading Standards covers a wide remit covering over 200 pieces of legislation including:

- Weights and Measures
- Consumer and construction product safety
- Counterfeit and illicit goods
- Sale of age restricted products
- Rogue traders and doorstep crime
- Proceeds of Crime and Money Laundering
- Scams
- Fair Trading – misleading descriptions of goods and services
- Estate Agency and letting agents in relation to property descriptions, tenants fees and deposits
- Animal Health & Welfare, disease control, illegal imports and animal feed
- Licensing of fireworks storage and safety

3.3 Activity and areas of focus is based on intelligence through evaluation of information from many sources. This can include complaints from members of the public, businesses, regulators, intelligence reports, projects and analysis of current trade practices. In some cases this is supported by information from local, regional and national regulatory teams and partners.

3.4 This approach allows the team to focus resources on activities that pose a risk to residents that has the potential to have detrimental effects on either their finances, health and wellbeing. It also helps to ensure that our local businesses can trade fairly by tackling rogue traders.

3.5 During the last 12 months, the team received over 2,500 contacts from Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACS) who provide consumer advice on faulty goods and services. Over 500 of these contacts are referrals regarding complaints that may have breached criminal laws. Common themes are identified which informs priorities and enables Trading Standards to focus on tackling specific businesses or identified trading practices affecting our communities.

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- 3.6 Earlier this year, the Council secured a successful prosecution following an investigation into the trade practices of a local seller of puppies. The seller was fined £25,000 by the Crown Court and ordered to pay a proceeds of crime confiscation order of £50,000, for breaching consumer protection regulations.
- 3.7 Working with internal and external partners, the Council continues to support and actively engage in '*Multi Agency Targeted Enforcement*' activity (MATES) across a wide variety of settings, including serious and organised crime.
- 3.8 During the last 12 months, Trading Standards have led 7 operations working with West Mercia Police to tackle the illicit tobacco trade, unsafe and illegal vaping products, age restricted products including knives and vapes and investigations relating to the motor trade.



- 3.9 Such operations has resulted in 30,000 cigarettes and over 16kg of illicit/counterfeit tobacco products being seized from premises with operations continuing over the next 12 months. Recent targeted operations on illegal vaping products resulted in 1500 being seized with some containing over 4 times the amount of nicotine permitted.
- 3.10 In addition, a large separate operation has been completed on a retail business selling counterfeit clothing and footwear with over 500 items seized.
- 3.11 These operations have removed £70,000 of illegal goods/products from the borough and resulted in one business losing its alcohol licence as a result.
- 3.12 To protect the health and wellbeing of children and young people while creating safer neighbourhoods, regular test purchases are carried out with recent exercised

including purchase of knives (as part of a national campaign) as well as vaping products.

- 3.13 During the last 12 months, the team received over 50 complaints from residents about door step cold calling. These contacts were about home improvement work being carried out on properties that was unsafe or extremely poor work, excessively overpriced and in some cases traders demanding money for work that had not been done.
- 3.14 To assist residents in choosing a reputable trader, the Council operates a trader scheme called Trading Standards Accredited <https://www.tsaccredited.co.uk/>. This scheme has been in operation 2007 and has 66 members in a variety of home improvement services. Traders sign up to a code of practice and agree to provide written quotes for a fair price, not engage in high pressing selling or cold calling, carry out the work with professional care and skill and in a reasonable time. Work continues to promote this service to both residents and businesses.
- 3.15 Trading Standards work in partnership with the National Trading Standards Scams team who are set up disrupt the operations of mass marketing and mail scams. This work helps educate our residents to be savvy when it comes to responding to unsolicited scam mail and alerts them to current scams. In April 2021, Action Fraud reported that more than £2.3bn was lost in a year on scams. This was an increase of 33% on the previous year.
- 3.16 In September 2021, the council secured funding to work on identifying and supporting scam victims in the borough. This 6 month programme included:
- Advice provided to 30 residents on how to protect themselves against scams while offering face to face support.
 - A workable referral process, which includes other council services and the police, to support scam victims was developed.
 - A written resource pack sent to all local community groups & libraries providing advice on the types of scams residents may come across and how they can keep themselves safe.
- 3.17 The Council recognise the need to engage with residents to provide preventative information and advice. This ensures residents are empowered to make informed decisions when it comes to purchasing goods and services. The use of social media enables the council to reach a large number of residents, and businesses, providing information on latest scams, posting safety alerts on products and informing them on the work undertaken to protect them.

3.18 Building on work undertaken in 2021, the priority areas of work for the next 12 months include:

- Illegal and counterfeit tobacco and vaping products
- Consumer and construction product safety
- Door step crime, rogue traders and scams
- False and misleading trading practices
- Animal health & welfare, disease control and animal feeds
- 'Back to basics' projects – goods sold by weights and measures.

3.19 These priorities are constantly reviewed and take into account emerging issues such as rise in food and fuel prices and utility bills. Therefore, projects that focus on ensuring our residents 'get what they pay for' are important particularly against a backdrop of the national cost of living crisis.

3.20 The changing consumer landscape over the last 10 years has proved challenging for Trading Standards. The increased digital nature of consumer markets has changed the way consumers buy goods and services. While this has opened up opportunities it has increased the risk for our residents as sellers can hide their identity and whereabouts more easily.

3.21 The increased digital presence through mobile phones, email, web browsing and social media accounts has made it easier for fraudsters and scammers to operate. The pandemic has strengthened this digital market place and opened up more avenues for scams and rogue practices.

4.0 Summary of main proposals

4.1 This report outlines the work and successes of the Trading Standards team in the last 12 months to support and protect residents, businesses and visitors to the borough. Communities Scrutiny Committee is asked to endorse the intelligence led approach taken in delivery of Trading Standards as part of the council's priority to Protect, Care and Invest.

4.2 In setting out the data and intelligence led approach, Communities Scrutiny Committee is asked to endorse identified priorities and areas of focus for the year ahead while suggesting areas of focus for further consideration.

5.0 Alternative Options

5.1 Telford & Wrekin Council has a statutory duty to enforce consumer and business protection legislation. This report provides an overview of the activity undertaken in the last 12 months to protect residents, business and visitors to the borough and fulfilling the statutory duty.

6.0 Key Risks

- 6.1 As outlined above, the Council has a statutory duty to enforce consumer and business protection legislation. The areas of priority identified within this report have been developed based on current data and intelligence to protect residents, businesses and visitors.
- 6.2 These priorities may evolve in response to new data/intelligence or other factors such as the cost of living crisis. The team will adjust focus accordingly in order to ensure its duties are fulfilled.

7.0 Council Priorities

- 7.1 Trading Standards activities support the following council priorities:
- Every child, young person and adult lives well in their community
 - Everyone benefits from a thriving economy
 - All neighbourhoods are a great place to live
 - Our natural environment is protected, and the Council is taking a leading role in tackling the climate emergency
 - A community-focused, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The Trading Standards function is delivered within existing budgets with opportunities for external funding sought wherever possible.

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Council has a number of statutory duties with regard to consumer and business protection legislation with the responsibility to enforce under numerous pieces of legislation. Enforcement powers are delegated under the scheme of delegation detailed within the Council's Constitution and then further delegated to officers, as appropriate, in order that statutory obligations are met.
- 9.2 Specialist legal advice is sought in relation to any investigations carried out and subsequent legal proceedings. The council aims to recover all costs associated with criminal investigations and where appropriate consider Proceeds of Crime confiscations.

10.0 Ward Implications

10.1 Trading Standards is borough wide and therefore impacts on all wards.

11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

11.1 Trading Standards impacts on the health and wellbeing of our residents. Key work around tackling illegal and counterfeit tobacco and ensuring that our young people do not access restricted products, such as vapes, cigarettes and alcohol, contributes to the council's wider public health and wellbeing strategy. Doorstep crime and rogue trading activity has a significant impact on our resident's health and financial situation. If left unregulated it can cause significant long term effects on resident's confidence and independence, resulting in more pressure on adult social care services. This work also contributes to protecting the economic interests of our legitimate businesses.

11.2 The cost of living rise is a real issue for our residents. Ensuring that our residents are getting what they pay is for when buying basic food and petrol is important to protect them from short weight or measures.

12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

12.1 The majority of doorstep crime and scams victims are older people. Social isolation, health and mobility issues increase their likelihood of becoming repeat victims of crime. Therefore, Trading Standards work around disrupting and offering real time advice is vital to ensure our residents are supported.

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

13.1 Trading Standards has an impact on both climate and environmental matters through enforces legislation on essential packaging, green and energy efficiency claims and energy performance of commercial buildings.

14.0 Background Papers

- 1 Building Safer, Stronger Neighbourhoods through the appropriate use of our enforcement powers – 19 May 2022 Cabinet report

15.0 Appendices

None

16.0 Report Sign Off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Director	05/09/2022	07/09/2022	DRS
Legal	07/09/2022	09/09/2022	SH
Finance	07/09/2022	08/09/2022	PT