

2<sup>nd</sup> October 2012

**Agenda Item: 6**

## **REPORT OF THE GROUP MANAGER, TRADING STANDARDS**

### **UPDATE ON KEY TRADING STANDARDS MATTERS**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To update the Committee on key Trading Standards matters.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. **Illegal Money Lending – ‘Loan Shark Event’** – officers recently joined up with the national Illegal Money Lending Unit to host a multi-agency event to raise awareness of the impact of loan sharks, and to develop new ways to protect our communities. Attendees included housing associations, Nottinghamshire Police, Nottingham Credit Union, Citizens Advice Bureaux, children’s centres and safeguarding colleagues. An intervention plan is being developed.
3. Following the event, a month of action for November is being planned, to include numerous initiatives to raise awareness and encourage calls to the loan shark hot line in the pre-Christmas lending period. Other initiatives will include an open day in Mansfield market, agency training events, and work to contact higher risk groups such as housing association tenants, drug rehabilitation centre clients, and prison visitors.
4. **Electric Blanket Testing** – last winter, Trading Standards ran 6 test days at venues around the county testing 300 electric blankets for older and vulnerable people; issuing a replacement blanket for the 66% that failed. Officers are working with Fire & Rescue to run 3 more test days in October in Worksop, Carlton and West Bridgford. In addition to reducing the risk of house fires by removing faulty blankets from use, the work will promote the importance of regularly checking all electric blankets, and replacing any over 10 years old.
5. **Product Safety** – at the time of writing, no further unsafe counterfeit air fresheners have been discovered for supply in the County. Officers have been using lessons learnt to support other authorities in the region who are still facing issues.
6. **Safeguarding the vulnerable** – Trading Standards continues to focus efforts on protecting those most in need. Recent work includes:
  - In July, the team joined the Office of Fair Trading’s Doorstep Crime campaign to warn residents of the dangers of buying goods and services on the doorstep. One

vulnerable resident spoke out about being bullied by a bogus driveway company into paying £3,500 for an incomplete and already subsiding drive.

- Trading Standards Officers continue to attend social care team meetings to raise awareness of issues affecting vulnerable residents, and to advise on spotting and reporting potential scams and doorstep crime.
  - Officers are working with social care colleagues and the Carers Federation to protect an older financially vulnerable resident, who is confused, and falling into debt to high interest door-to-door lenders.
7. **Underage Sales - Alcohol** – a recent test purchasing survey used an 18 year old volunteer to assess the effectiveness of retailers' age verification systems. Because of the difficulty in judging ages accurately, retail good practice recommends a 'Challenge 25' policy, where anyone appearing under 25 and asking to purchase alcohol is asked for identification.
  8. The volunteer carried a fake identification card, which contained a cartoon face instead of a photograph, and the date of birth for a seventeen year old. Unfortunately, 13 of the 22 shops visited sold alcohol to the volunteer. Seven retailers failed to ask to see any identification, while 6 sold after 'seeing' the fake identification.
  9. Officers have written to all the shops that sold to flag-up concerns, and have also issued media releases to highlight the problem. This survey has identified a significant issue, and the team will follow up by continuing to promote an effective Challenge 25 policy, and by delivering appropriate support such as targeted training packages. Further checks will be made to ensure the effectiveness of the team's interventions.
  10. **Newark Livestock Market** – officers have been working to help the market obtain formal veterinary approval to deal with a wider range of animals during markets. In order to do this, the Market has implemented stricter segregation measures for disease control purposes, right through from arrival to departure. Trading Standards Officers continue to attend each market to ensure welfare standards are maintained along with disease controls, animal identification compliance and vehicle inspections.
  11. **Counterfeiting** – Counterfeiters have seized upon the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Charlie and the Chocolate Factory film to supply counterfeit "Wonka" bars. It is believed that low value bars are being repackaged to replicate the bar from the film, and sold for £5. The counterfeiting of food products can have serious implications, due to the loss of important hygiene and traceability safeguards. Officers seized a number of bars from a local retailer and have traced the supply back to the West Midlands.
  12. **Illicit Tobacco & Alcohol** – in response to recent publicity campaigns, the Service continues to receive useful tip-offs from the public – the investigation into the seizure of 24 bottles of counterfeit Jacobs Creek wine from Mansfield continues. Samples of counterfeit alcohol, seized in previous cases, have been supplied to a university to conduct and identify, through analysis, the number and output of counterfeit operations. Research will be shared to assist enforcement operations.
  13. **Trading Standards Internet Web Log - "blog"** - in July, the Service launched a "blog" on the County Council's internet site, and have been posting news items to keep residents

informed. It is also being developed to invite intelligence reports to inform the work, and can be found at:

[www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/living/business/tradingstandards/tradingstandardsblog](http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/living/business/tradingstandards/tradingstandardsblog)

14. **New Fireworks Storage licence** - A business involved in organising professional firework displays was recently granted an explosives storage licence at Stanton on the Wolds having met strict safety guidelines, including minimum separation distances. The Service worked closely with Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue to ensure it was appropriate to grant the licence.
15. **Metrology** - Officers tested and verified rail weighbridges at the E-on Power Station at Ratcliffe in June, and at the EDF site, West Burton in early August.
16. **External Audit Success** - To retain our Approved Body status to undertake certain weight and measures testing, such as rail weighbridges, the Service is accredited by the National Measurement Office, and is subject to an annual audit.
17. Having focused on standards, verification and competence this year, and having only found one minor 'non-conformity', the Service passed the audit in early August. There are fewer authorities with this accreditation now, yet the demand for the work is expanding, and is also chargeable.
18. **'Real Deal'** – Ashfield District Council has now formally signed up to this National Charter agreeing to work in partnership to prohibit the supply of illegal products on the markets they both licence and organise.
19. As part of the authority's commitment to the scheme, officers visited Thoresby Market in July, seizing counterfeit razor blades, tobacco and unsafe telephone chargers from one stall. The market organiser has now banned the trader from the market. Investigations continue.
20. **Regional Operations Unit ('Scambusters' Team)** – The Team is currently involved in an investigation of national significance concerning a multi-million pound fraud. Central Government provided additional resources to fund the criminal investigation last year, and the Team applied again for support this year. After a thorough two day review by two Barristers, and a financial investigator, a grant offer in excess of £300,000 has now been made.
21. The review was complimentary of the team, praising its professionalism and management of the case. This grant represents the first one under the new funding regime, and the authority is seen as a pioneer of the new model.
22. **Environmental Weight Restrictions and Lorry Watch** – Of the 30 vehicles being investigated from April to May; 3 have been warned, 18 were found to have a legitimate reason to be in the area and 9 are still under investigation. Eleven more checks have been conducted since 1<sup>st</sup> June resulting in 1 warning with 43 still being investigated. One exercise found that all 13 vehicles checked had a legitimate reason to be there.
23. Enforcement of the new restrictions at Keyworth, Plumtree, Cotgrave, Tollerton and Kinoulton have identified a number of potential breaches which are currently under investigation.

24. A parish council and another community group are interested in being part of Lorry Watch; officers will be working with them to launch the schemes in the future.
25. **Cold Calling Controlled Zones - Rosegrove and Briar Close** - Following requests from residents in Keyworth, a Zone has been set up in Rosegrove and Briar Close. This joint initiative with the Police creates an area where residents make it clear that they do not want traders to call by displaying door stickers. Signs on lamp posts tell people that they are in an area where residents do not buy at the door from uninvited traders. Traders can still call on houses where a sticker is not displayed, and the scheme does not prevent people from buying from established national companies who leave a brochure.
26. The local Police contact is acting as a champion for the scheme in the area and will collect information and coordinate action on any unwanted cold calling.
27. **Legal Action Update** – Maxwell Stuart Alvey, who had previously pleaded guilty to committing a number of fraud offences for reducing the mileages on vans, was sentenced on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2012 to two years in prison for each of ten fraud charges, all to run concurrently. He was also sentenced to two years in prison for other offences that are to run consecutively, making a total of four years. An investigation under the Proceeds of Crime Act has now commenced.
28. Carl Mould of Nottingham was sentenced to four months in prison on 12<sup>th</sup> September for breaching an injunctive court order made under the Enterprise Act. Mr Mould had persisted in mis-selling mobility aids to vulnerable people despite a previous warning from the Judge that he would go to prison if he didn't stop. Unfortunately, Mr Mould did not heed this warning. A similar case against Mr Mould's former partner John Cooney will be put before the Court by the authority in October.
29. In the case of Graham/Jarvis Jenkins, the matter has been committed to the Crown Court and there is a further hearing on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2012.
30. James William Thomas of Mansfield was sentenced at Nottingham Crown Court to 100 hours community punishment order. This case was in relation to the sale of counterfeit cigarettes and tobacco. An investigation under the Proceeds of Crime Act has now commenced.
31. A further case has been listed for the 17<sup>th</sup> September at Nottingham Crown Court, regarding the sale of counterfeit DVDs at a 'car boot' event.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

32. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

It is recommended that:

- 1) the Committee notes the contents of this report.

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### **Background Papers**

None.

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

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