



## Q&A with Rob Abell, Trading Standards Team Leader



### 1. What are the aims of Trading Standards and what areas of regulation do you cover?

We are a law enforcement agency, similar to the police or Health and Safety Executive, but we enforce mainly criminal consumer protection legislation and trading laws. The aim is twofold – to ensure consumers get a fair deal, that they can confidently purchase goods and services and are only sold legal, safe products; but also to ensure legitimate businesses get the support they need to navigate the complicated trading laws so they can be successful and operate on a level-playing field unaffected by unfair or illegal competition.

### 2. If I go to a bar, restaurant or other hospitality business to buy a drink or food, how do you help ensure I'm treated fairly and get what I pay for?

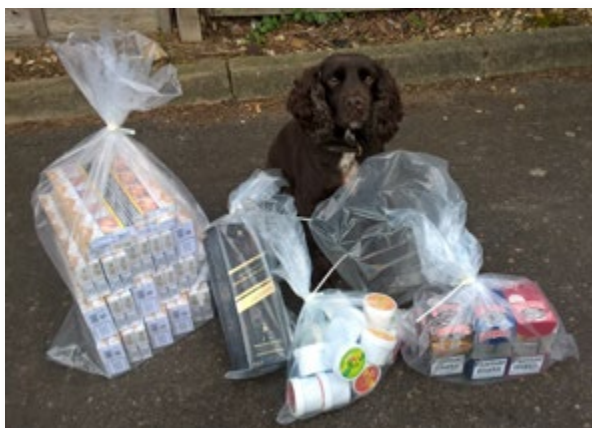
One of the earliest forms of consumer protection was contained in 'weights and measures' laws which were designed to ensure people get the measure of goods they are paying for. This actually dates back to the Magna Carta. Weights and Measures Departments were renamed Trading Standards in the 1960s. During inspections at hospitality businesses, we are ensuring there are sufficient and accurate price lists so consumers can make informed decisions; we also check the authenticity and strength of the spirits and accuracy of wine/beer/cider measures. In relation to food we now work in partnership with the Environmental Health Commercial Services team – between us we check behind the scenes that the food in the kitchen matches the descriptions on the menu – for instance 'Scottish Smoked...', 'Fresh', 'Organic', 'Berkshire-Reared...', etc.



### **3. I've heard about Natasha's Law. Can you tell me more about product labelling rules around food allergens?**

This was a final change in legislation to ensure all retail food now needs to have full ingredient labelling with any of the 14 recognised allergens particularly highlighted. It is named after teenager Natasha Ednan-Laperouse, who sadly died after eating a baguette which contained an undeclared allergen. To help businesses navigate through the changes they would need to make to food labels, we set up a business advice page on the council website and pro-actively visited small businesses to give them the templates and tools they needed to understand and introduce the changes.

### **4. What work do you do to tackle the sale of fake goods in shops, such as counterfeit tobacco products, fashion items and cosmetics?**



We have conducted some announced inspections with a sniffer dog which helps us locate illicit tobacco products (smuggled or counterfeit cigarettes). Fortunately we can all have confidence that the vast majority of shops in the borough follow the rules, and it is relatively uncommon for us to find these types of breaches – however we can target our attention to that minority and deal with them robustly. With other types of fake goods, we cannot constantly monitor shop stock and online sellers so do rely on complaints and tip-offs to target our attention. Fake fashion and cosmetics can be dangerous to

consumers as well as harming to the genuine economy, so we do not tolerate their sale and have powers to enter premises to seize illegal goods and prosecute offenders.

### **5. What work do you undertake to address underage sale of alcohol, tobacco products and fireworks?**

We conduct several spot-check operations throughout the year with trained (volunteer) child agents to see whether shops sell to underage children such products as knives, alcohol, fireworks and cigarettes. We consult Community Wardens to find out which areas are affected by anti-social behaviour from young people, and share information with our Licensing Team and Police Licensing Officer to ensure we target visits to off-licences and other shops most likely to be selling these harmful items to children. Conducting our own controlled test-purchasing in this way allows us to gather sufficient evidence to take further action when needed. We often conduct these operations with the police to share expertise and achieve better outcomes. Please report any underage sales concerns directly to us at [trading.standards@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:trading.standards@rbwm.gov.uk)

## 6. What do you do to tackle rogue traders or scammers who target vulnerable people and what action can people take themselves?

We support vulnerable people who have been targeted or fallen victim to scammers by providing them with our advice packs, working with their family members or carers. We may put in further measures such as fitting telephone call-blockers, a 'we do not buy at the door' sticker, and we have been fulfilling a recent project to install video doorbells. This work makes residents feel safer and more empowered to remain in their homes. For rogue traders, where there is a significant pattern of offending and fraudulent behaviour we may disrupt their offending (in a number of ways) to stop it, open criminal investigations, or take a civil injunction against them to stop. People can report general fraud and scams information to the Police Action Fraud Team, or report consumer scams to Trading Standards via the national call centre run for us by Citizens Advice Consumer Service. The numbers are 0300 123 2040 and 0808 223 1133 respectively.



## 7. How do you ensure I pay the right price at the fuel pump and what are the rules around storing fuel at home?



One of the functions Trading Standards fulfil is to be the 'Petroleum Enforcement Authority' at the council. This mainly involves administering the licences for petrol stations and other organisations which store petrol in the borough, and then inspecting those premises to ensure safety procedures are in place and being followed. Storing fuel at home is dangerous and should be avoided if possible, but if you need it for a mower (or similar) then store it carefully in a secure outbuilding, well ventilated and away from ignition sources. Contact us if you need any advice. You can store up to 30 litres in an approved container without having to legally notify us. Any more than that we either need

official notification, permission, or a licence depending on how much you store. More information is available on the council website.

To ensure you get the fuel you pay for, we conduct weights and measures checks at petrol stations and respond to any complaints to ensure the pumps are delivering accurately. We have recently conducted 'verification' tests on new pumps at a marina, used for fuelling boats, as they had to be tested and passed as accurate by us before they can be used. This work constantly goes on behind the scenes to ensure residents and visitors are protected without them even knowing.

## 8. I started a home business during lockdown. How can I get advice to ensure I fully follow the Trading Standards rules?

We have seen a large increase in innovative and home-based businesses start-ups during the Covid period including crafters, home bakers, candle-makers, clothing importers, party businesses and more. General information is available on the Trading Standards Business Companion pages here: [www.businesscompanion.info](http://www.businesscompanion.info)

We give tailored, free, expert, independent legal advice on which trading laws apply, and how to comply with consumer protection legislation. It can be a complex legal landscape and we can help businesses navigate with some tips and tools. The laws that affect businesses are constantly evolving, so please get in touch if you are a business in the area so we can help you on your journey to success: [trading.standards@rbwm.gov.uk](mailto:trading.standards@rbwm.gov.uk)

## 9. How can I report a business I suspect might be breaking Trading Standards law?

If you need consumer advice, have concerns about a business or want to report someone not playing by the rules, the trained advisors at the national call-centre is the best place to start. 0808 223 1133. This is run for us by Citizens Advice Consumer Service, and their website also has a lot of useful information: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/) They record all the details accurately, provide initial advice and pass it over to our dedicated team if more detailed advice or investigation is required.



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