

Public Protection - 2014/15 review

The Public Protection division consists of (1) Trading Standards & Animal Health, (2) Licensing and (3) Environmental Health. This newsletter highlights some of the work carried out in 2014/15 for the benefit of residents, visitors and local businesses. Services contribute significantly to the Council's strategic aims such as 'people

(1) TRADING STANDARDS & ANIMAL HEALTH

Joint Action with Gwent Police

Monmouthshire Trading Standards team coordinated a successful action with Gwent Police against rogue traders in Monmouth. Two teenagers were locked up for conning a vulnerable Monmouth man out of £47,000 for home improvements he didn't need.

Between September and October 2014 they took advantage of this vulnerable Monmouth resident, aged 61. The victim was walking home from work and stumbled. A car stopped and he was asked if he needed any work doing to his house. Unfortunately he advised he needed some work doing to his roof. They took his address and arrived at his home half an hour later, giving fake names and pressed the man to draw out more and more sums of money over coming weeks. They charged him £1,000 for guttering, £5,000 to pay labourers, and £20,000 to repair the entire roof.

More 'work' was undertaken to the garden and path costing a further £15,000. The defendants said they discovered a crack in the base of the house and would require a further £20,000. The victim also received a call from a fake solicitor who said that if he did not pay they would remove the work. A Council Surveyor estimated that the value of the work undertaken was no more than £2,200.

Charlie Lee, 19, of Justin Caravan Park in Northampton, and his 17-year-old accomplice both pleaded guilty to counts of fraud. Lee was sentenced to 19 months' custody his co-accused received a detention training order and 18 months in custody.

Pupils from Chepstow School reach UK Final of Young Consumer Competition

Fastest finger on the buzzer and a treasure hunt around London all part of the Young Consumer of the Year Competition.

Young Consumers Eleri Williams, Clara Zarab, Merrick Stanley and James Wooster are all students at Chepstow School volunteered for the competition. Hours of revision and buzzer practice took place in the lead up to the competition. At the Welsh Final which took place in March at the Welsh Assembly - Senedd, Cardiff, the team were runners up to Porthcawl High the winners of the Welsh final and secured a place in the UK final.

The UK Final in June took place in London at the Houses of Parliament, the competition was set into various tasks and really made pupils think outside the box – not just a first on the buzzer questions which they were used to in previous rounds. The team took part in a treasure hunt across London, a series of short tests that really tested their consumer knowledge and provided them with valuable life experiences. From budgeting to life at university, booking a holiday to making a complaint they were all things the pupils will experience at one point in their lives. With the final round being a buzzer round. The team did themselves and Monmouthshire proud in coming third and were very pleased that fellow Welsh finalists Porthcawl High were crowned UK Champions.

The team were supported by Mr Elias and all agreed that 'Without Mr Elias we wouldn't have been able to make it happen' The team agreed that the whole experience was brilliant and the best thing about it was the friendships that have been made. Both within the team and with the other teams in the competition.

The school is on the lookout for pupils to take part in the 2016 Young Consumer competition. The team has some handy advice for those looking to emulate their success.

'Don't panic, embrace the experience and have fun!'

Monmouthshire Farmer Pleaded Guilty to TB Offences

Llangattock Park Farm, near Abergavenny, were found guilty of various Animal Health and TB Order offences. A lengthy investigation by Animal Health found numerous cattle being moved illegally between premises subject to TB restrictions. The trading company, B E Baker and Sons, were subject to a Proceeds of Crime Order for £112,500 with £13,000 costs. Conditional discharges were given for each offence.



Weights and Measures

Two significant issues were identified that could have resulted in potential health implications for service users and business reputation damage. Metrological equipment checks at hospitals and doctors surgeries identified a number of items that were used to determine medication levels that were outside tolerance allowances. The other situation involved a manufacturer's system failing to identify non-compliance which, whilst not resulting in consumer detriment, would have caused considerable reputational damage and related consequences had Officers not identified and advised.

Unroadworthy Car

A Dorset car dealer pleaded guilty to Consumer Protection offences after falsely advertising a vehicle as 'in showroom condition inside and out'. Detailed examination found significant accident damage and sub-standard repairs rendering the car in a dangerous condition. The company Director was fined £1600 and ordered to pay £1000 costs. The victim expressed his appreciation that our Trading Standards team had investigated and pursued the case.

General

Cold Calling Control Zones -

The year saw a further increase of these popular zones. 30 now exist providing some comfort for over 7,400 homes.

Explosives Licence – a licence was revoked for persistent non-compliance.

Talks – 8 general talks were undertaken to different groups.

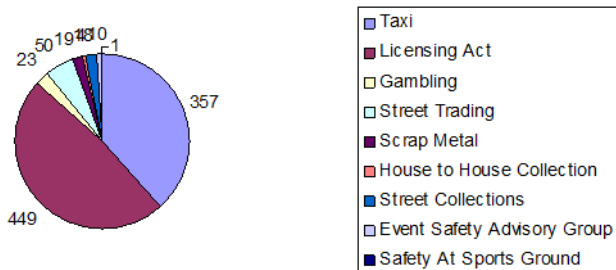


SCAM Victims

Work began on visiting potential scam victims that had been identified on a 'Suckers List'. A list had been supplied by the National Scams Hub which contained over 150 Monmouthshire residents, and further priority referrals have also been received. Work includes visiting victims and offering support, developing working relationships with colleagues in adult safeguarding and educating carers, bank and postal workers, as well as the public at large.

(2) LICENSING

1st April 2014 - 31st March 2015 Service Requests/Complaints



Licensing Team

The Licensing team deals with the licensing and enforcement of Taxis, Alcohol, Entertainment and late night food outlets. We also administer Gambling, Street Trading, Scrap Metal, Street and House Collections.

In 2014/2015 the team dealt with 931 licensing enquiries and complaints. The chart shows the most frequent requests for service:-



Alcohol, Entertainment and Late Night Refreshment

Licensing interventions assist in reducing anti-social behaviour in relation to late night drinking. This year hospital Accident & Emergency statistics were provided, after partnership working with Public Health Wales and Gwent Police. This will assist us in identifying crime hot-spots and seeking ways to address problem areas.

This is supplemented by our 'Responsible Authority' group, consisting of all the main partners, which ensures swift action is taken against those premises who are not managing their premises correctly. Interventions are consistent with our licensing objectives, ie. preventing crime and disorder, preventing public nuisance, protecting public safety and children from harm.



Unlicensed Taxi Campaign

Licensing have noticed an increasing amount of people advertising a taxi service using Facebook or Twitter, without the required licence and many people are unaware of the risks. In this year we launched an online unlicensed taxi campaign at www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/taxi. Licensing had 1,305 views on Facebook and 3,859 views/impressions on Twitter on this campaign. The campaign makes the public aware that-

- If you use a vehicle for taxi or minicab services without the correct licence limitations, the vehicle insurance will be invalid.
 - Advertising a taxi service online without an operator's or Hackney licence is illegal.
 - Using a non-licensed vehicle for taxi or minicab purposes is illegal.
- Acting as a taxi or minicab driver for financial gain is illegal.

Keeping Children Safe

Joint operations were carried out between Licensing and the Passenger Transport Unit, checking vehicles and their drivers on early morning school runs. It was found in this year that most complied. However, an operator who had a contract to drive school children sent an unlicensed vehicle and driver to convey children to school. This would mean no checks were made on that driver as to their suitability, no criminal checks made, no medical checks and it would also mean the insurance on the vehicle would be void, which could have huge implications. The Courts also supported the seriousness of this and it resulted in the Operator being fined £1,000 and order to pay £660 in costs. Work has begun to safeguarding children further. We are looking to introduce safeguarding training to taxi drivers as part of their licensing requirements.

Vehicle Inspections

170 spot checks of vehicles were undertaken on licensed hackney carriage/private hire vehicles, in order to ensure their roadworthiness when carrying passengers. A joint operation was carried out by Licensing and the Police and out of the 27 vehicles stopped, certain faults were discovered including defective tyres, bulbs out and expired fire extinguishers. Fines or points were put on licences for the offences discovered.



Criminal Convictions



Scrap Metal – new regulations were introduced to licence scrap metal collectors and sites, the aims being to prevent crime and protect public safety. A scrap collector application was determined by the Cabinet Member, after full consideration at Licensing committee. The application was refused for failing the 'fit and proper person' test due to the seriousness of convictions.

Street Vendor - A successful prosecution was taken against an unlicensed ice-cream vendor, who had operated without a consent at a car park in Abergavenny. The vendor was fined £300 and ordered to pay £100 costs.

Supporting Businesses and the Economy

Licensing was approached by Chepstow Town Council to find a way for them to introduce groups of street traders. A new licensing regime was introduced to allow consents to be issued on a daily basis and to allow block consents. This enabled Chepstow Town Council to have a number of stalls trading for shorter periods of time and at significantly reduced cost, whilst still complying with the requirements of a Consent. Others are also taking advantage of this form of licensing, including Abergavenny Food festival and one-off traders at cycling events.

To assist business, you can also now apply online for most licensing applications as part of GOV.UK requirements (currently GOV.UK do not require online applications for Taxi and Gambling Licensing). On-line applications can be made at www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/licensing



(3) ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH — COMMERCIAL

Food hygiene training - local food businesses can benefit from basic and higher level hygiene training, provided by the food safety team. In 2104/15 we provided level 2 training to 170 people, and 26 undertook our level 3 training, which is a 3 day highest level course. A specific course for 31 butchers was provided in November 2014, which proved very popular.

Quote from an attendee –

“ its like an open door policy for queries to ensure we are doing the right thing without prejudice and provided areas to focus on”

Ben Powell – Country Taste Butchers and H J Edwards

"An economical process that helps to break down the barriers between our EHO and staff members that results in a healthy dialogue and interactive session that really focuses upon the central issues that our EHO has with our individual business. Our session provided simple and practice guidelines of how this can be achieved. To have our EHO directly communicate with our staff was also a great addition for management due to the direct communication channel. As a result I expect to observe improved standards throughout our business. I will also be looking at the potential of an annual continuation program where one of these sessions is scheduled annually."



Primary Authority Partnerships

Two more signed up for proactive, rechargeable, food safety advice – Welsh Water and Carillion. Both approached the MCC food team through the recommendation of other businesses that had benefited from their participation in this scheme.

Grant

Obtained £5,000 from Food Standards Agency to provide assistance to MCC businesses towards improved compliance.

Promotion – we tweet food premises that obtain a five (the highest) score. We also ‘thunderclap’ national promotional activities which have included advice on safe handling of raw chicken and campylobacter.

**Food hygiene rating scheme (FHRS) and promotion**

In January 2014 66% of our food businesses were rated as 4 or 5 (out of 5) in the rating scheme. This had risen to 77% by January 2015, so there's a significant improvement in standards over this period.

**Bakery Prosecution**

394 food safety inspections were carried out in this year and EHO's work with these businesses to secure improvements. Very occasionally, however, it is necessary to take formal action.

In July 2015 Wigmore's Bakery in Monmouth was prosecuted for 5 breaches of food safety regulations. Magistrates fined the proprietor £2000 and ordered him to pay £1000 costs. Two other separate prosecutions involved possession of unsafe meat and the condemnation of three tons of meat.

FOOD SAFETY**(3) ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH — PUBLIC HEALTH****Housing Above Takeaways (HAT) Project**

Our Environmental Health team deals with a wide range of issues but many of the most serious issues facing our residents go below the radar and need our Officers to be proactive and diligent in bringing them to light. We have prioritised the finding and inspection of ‘Housing Above Takeaways’ – HAT Project. We know that many of these flats provide rented accommodation and can contain potentially very dangerous living conditions such as fire safety issues and overcrowding. In 14/15 we visited most of the takeaways in the county and carried out 17 full inspections of flats above. These risks were particularly high in some of these premises with regards to fire safety and their means of escape. We have worked closely with these vulnerable tenants and their landlords to implement works to reduce these risks and raise standards to an acceptable level.

Landlords and their agents will soon need to become registered and licensed under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 all aimed at improving the standard of the private rented sector in Wales. Enforcement of this will be with our Environmental Health team.

Throughout this project, we developed a successful joint working approach with South Wales Fire and Rescue Service. As a result we were invited by them to organise a joint training session at their headquarters, attended by officers of the fire service and all local authorities in South East Wales. One of our EHOs gave a presentation to show how successful our joint working with the Fire Service has been in making a real difference.

See if you can spot the hazard in the photo opposite taken in a rented flat – its quite shocking!

The challenges continue to be many in this area of work, not least in protecting Officer time to be able to get out and find these very serious, often life threatening, situations. Enforcement of the new Housing (Wales) Act 2014, aimed at improving private rental sector standards, will rest with our Environmental Health team.



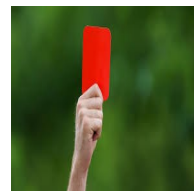
Working with Industry and Agencies for quality air

We monitor the air quality in Monmouthshire to try to ensure that standards set out in Regulations are not likely to be exceeded. We have successfully engaged with Natural Resources Wales and the Environment Agency to install an air quality monitoring station on the A40 in Monmouth in response to local residents concerns regarding traffic pollution. The Station started operating in the latter months of 14/15 and the study has recently finished. The final report from the Environment Agency will give us a clearer

understanding of the levels of vehicle pollution in this part of Monmouth. Prevention of pollution is key and we continue to work with 30 potentially polluting businesses in the County to help ensure they can operate whilst making minimal impacts on our environment.

Give Dog Fouling the Red Card

That's the brand message of our campaign run with our colleagues in Waste and Recycling and currently 12 Town and Community Councils are participating across the County including Monmouth and Usk. Resources made available include signs, spray paint to highlight the mess left by irresponsible dog owners, some free 'pick up' bags etc. The key element of the campaign is to encourage residents to report incidents of dog fouling via <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/home/streets-parking-and-transport/recycling-and-waste/dogfouling/> Continual pressure and awareness raising of how unacceptable this type of littering is will hopefully develop a social conscience making it less acceptable to leave dog mess on our paths and streets.

**Safe Water to Drink**

February 2015 was an important date for local authorities in Wales to complete risk assessments of all known private water supplies categorised as large supplies and small shared domestic supplies. Why? Because such supplies are known to be variable in water quality and often contain pathogenic (disease causing) micro-organisms particularly after heavy rainfall. They often fail to meet water quality standards and safe drinking water is an essential ingredient to a healthy life.

So a huge amount of work has been undertaken to identify, classify and risk assess the supplies. 3.5% of the population in our County are served by private supplies as well as approximately 50 businesses, many involved with tourism and food production.



We met our inspection target but work is ongoing as the vast majority of the supplies inspected – 54 large and 110 small shared domestic—are in the high risk category. Our Officers are continuing to work with the owners and users of the supplies to ensure they undertake the appropriate remedial measures. The pictures show a borehole supply prior to risk assessment – note open and risk of contamination entry – and post assessment. The source is now protected from contamination and suitably treated.

**Matters that are prejudicial to health or a nuisance**

Our Environmental Health team has responsibility for meeting the authorities duty to investigate and address Statutory Nuisances. "Statutory nuisance" relates to matters that are

"prejudicial to health" and/or "a nuisance" and include complaints of noise, smoke, odour and artificial lights. A total of 632 complaints were received relating to 539 separate cases. 88% of the service requests generated received a response within

3 working days. Most of these complaints relate to noise (408) received concerning 341 cases) As a result of the actions of our Officers the vast majority were resolved without legal action – 67% resolved within 3 months.

**Working with Developers**

There are a couple of multi-million pound transport projects which started earlier this year in Monmouthshire – Section 2 of the A465 Dual Carriageway Scheme along the Clydach Gorge, and the electrification of the main rail line from the Severn Tunnel junction towards Cardiff and Swansea.

What often goes unnoticed is the substantial engagement that our Environmental Health staff have had with the developers. Since mid 2014 we have been involved in order to ensure that these projects are undertaken with the minimal disturbance to the nearby residents. This covers matters such as working hours and methods of work. Difficult to properly show the worth of this engagement and the time/effort spent by our Officers, when of course success for us involved is in keeping the number of complaints as low as possible.

Fly Tippers will be Prosecuted

We have been mobilised to try to bring to task some of the persons who continue to fly tip and blight our wonderful countryside. Where evidence is available officers have been carrying out formal interviews of the suspects at local Police stations. Two successful prosecutions followed, resulting in fines in totalling close to £2000. Investigations in 14/15 will result in further prosecutions being taken in 15/16.



A detailed performance report, covering all Public Protection activity in 2014/15, was supplied to the Council's Strong Communities Select committee on 14th September 2015, and can be viewed via the meetings calendar.