

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE

AGENDA



Monday 4 November 2024

at 10.00 am

**in the Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Clayton, Cook, Little, Male, Oliver, C Wallace and Young.

Parish Council Co-opted Members:

S Smith (Greatham Parish Council)

L Noble (Dalton Piercy Parish Council)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

3.1 Minutes and Decision Record of the meeting held on 17 June 2024 (previously circulated and published).

3.2 Minutes and Decision Record of the meeting of the Emergency Planning Joint Committee held on 24 September 2024 (previously circulated and published).

4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS

No items.

5. KEY DECISIONS

No items.

CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone.

The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.

6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

- 6.1 Elizabeth Way Crossing – *Assistant Director (Neighbourhood Services)*
- 6.2 Trading Standards Service Plan 2024/25 – *Assistant Director (Regulatory Services)*
- 6.3 Update – Audit and Governance Committee Investigation – Derelict Land and Buildings – *Chair of Neighbourhood Services Committee*

7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

No items.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Monday 27 January 2025 at 10.00am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool



NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE

4 November 2024



Subject: Elizabeth Way Crossing

Report of: Assistant Director (Neighbourhood Services)

Decision Type: Non-Key

1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

Hartlepool will be a place:
- where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives.
- where those who are vulnerable will be safe and protected from harm.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of Neighbourhood Services Committee of the consultation results in relation to a proposed zebra crossing on Elizabeth Way, Seaton Carew.
- 2.2 To request Members consider the consultation response and decide whether to proceed with the proposed crossing or not.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following requests for a zebra crossing to Ward Members from residents of Seaton, a consultation exercise was undertaken to determine the level of support for such a scheme.
- 3.2 Approval in principle for the scheme was obtained in the Local Transport Plan Programme report which was approved at Neighbourhood Service Committee in February 2024. While the previous report identified a funding source, this further report is being brought to Committee for consideration in view of the consultation results.

4. PROPOSALS/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 Two indicative locations were provided to residents for consideration. Option 1 located the crossing close to the junction with Westerdale Road. Option 2 located the crossing midway between Westerdale Road and the entrance to the shops car park (see **Appendix 1**). A third option of 'do nothing' was also offered which would maintain the status quo i.e. no crossing.

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

RISK IMPLICATIONS	No relevant issues.
FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	The scheme is estimated to cost £25,000, and would be funded from the Council's Local Transport Plan if approved.
LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS	No relevant issues.
CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY	No relevant issues.
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS	No relevant issues.
STAFF CONSIDERATIONS	No relevant issues.
ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS	The crossing would be added to the Council's asset register, if approved.
ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS	<p>Sustainable methods of travel are promoted by the Council. The school bus provides a suitable method of sustainable transport, especially if passengers walk to the bus stop.</p> <p>When planning school bus routes, consideration is given for how the pupil would access the bus which includes minimising the number of road crossings on route.</p>
CONSULTATION	As is standard practice when proposing road safety measures, residential properties in the immediate vicinity of the scheme were consulted along with the nearby shops and the flats above.

	<p>In addition to this, Ward Members shared the consultation on social media which generated further responses. While all feedback is welcomed, the views of social media responses are from people who live further afield from the proposed crossing location, with some respondents not providing their addresses at all. Therefore these responses carry less weight than comments from residents directly impacted by the proposals.</p> <p><u>Properties Consulted Directly</u></p> <p>Option 1 – 1 Option 2 – 2 Option 3 (no crossing) - 8</p> <p><u>Additional 'Social Media' Responses</u></p> <p>Option 1 – 3 Option 2 – 29 Option 3 (no crossing)– 24</p> <p><u>Totals</u></p> <p>Option 1 – 4 Option 2 – 31 Option 3 – 32</p> <p>The results show that a significant majority of those residents directly consulted are in favour of no crossing at all.</p> <p>When taking into account the additional responses, no crossing remained the preferred option however this was closely followed by the location proposed in Option 2.</p>
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6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 That in view of the consultation responses received, the installation of a zebra crossing on Elizabeth Way does not proceed.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 From 11 responses received from residents living in the immediate vicinity of the proposals, 8 did not wish the crossing to proceed. The other 3

respondents each want the location which is outside other houses rather than their own.

- 7.2 The majority of responses all favoured no crossing as the preferred option and so there is little public support for any proposal.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 None.

9. CONTACT OFFICERS

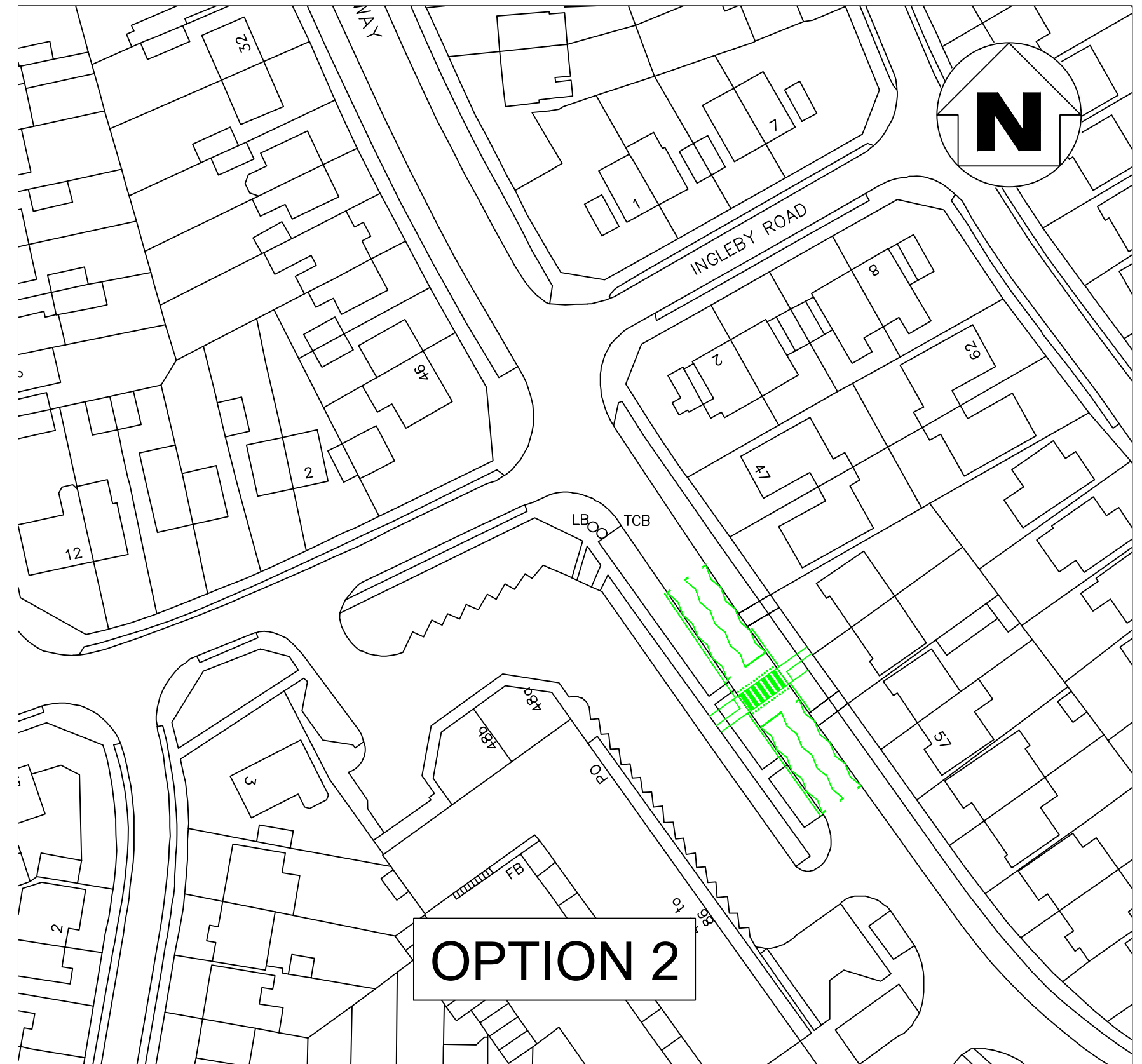
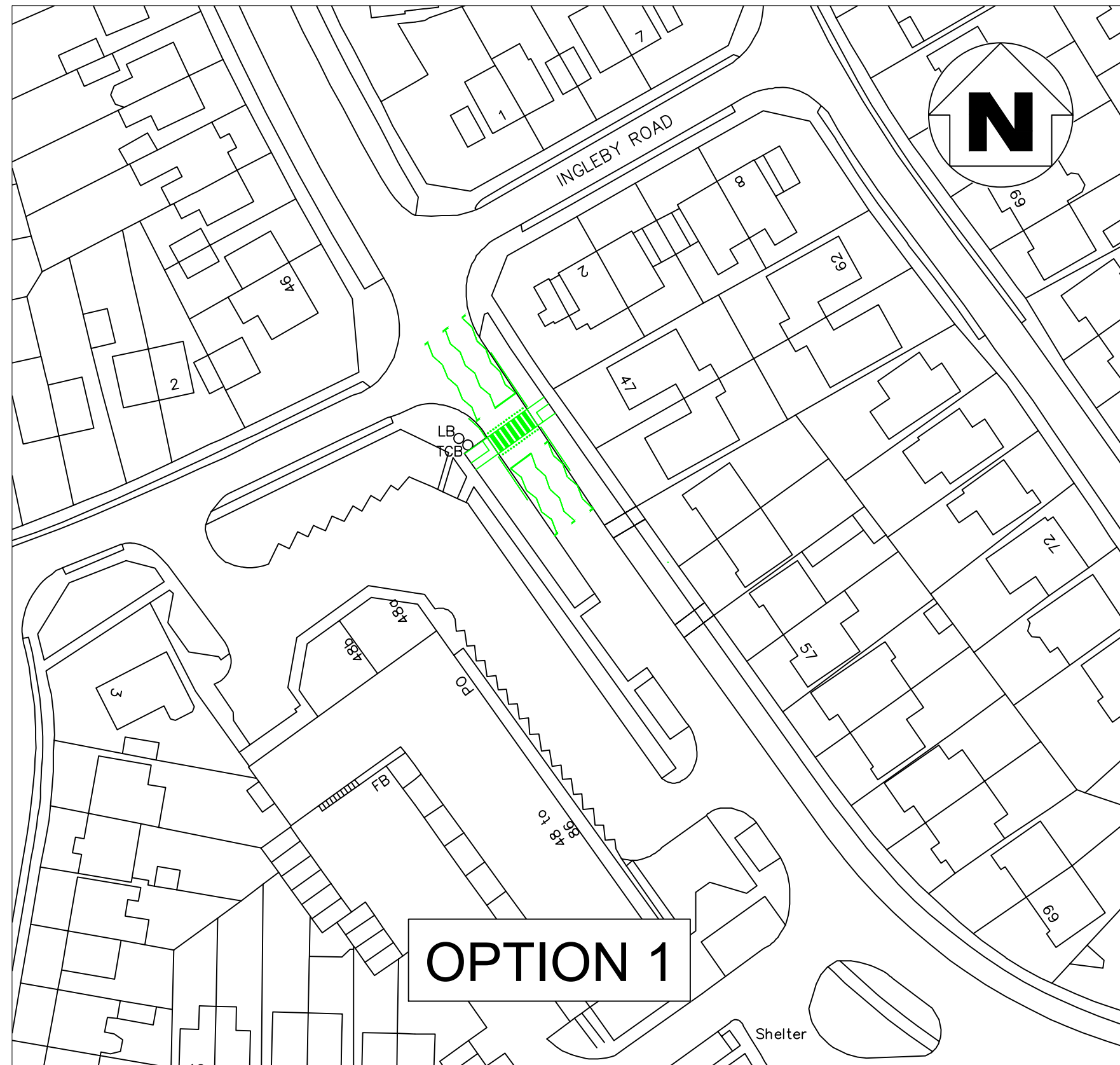
- 9.1 Kieran Bostock
Assistant Director (Neighbourhood Services)
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AUTHOR OF REPORT

Peter Frost
Highway Infrastructure Manager
Tel: (01429) 523200
E-mail: peter.frost@hartlepool.gov.uk

Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 14/10/2024
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 14/10/2024
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 14/10/2024



OPTION 3 Situation remains the same ie. no pedestrian crossing

Suffix	Description	Date
AMENDMENTS		
HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL NEIGHBOURHOODS & REGULATORY SERVICES DEPARTMENT PLACE MANAGEMENT Kieran Bostock, BEng (Hons) - Assistant Director Civic Centre, Victoria Road, Hartlepool TS24 8AY. Tel: (01429) 266522		
Elizabeth Way Possible Pedestrian Crossing Options		
Scale nts	Date July'24 Drawn BC Checked PF	Drg.No. Drawing no.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE

4 NOVEMBER 2024



Subject: TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE PLAN 2024/25

Report of: Assistant Director (Regulatory Services)

Decision Type: Non-Key Decision

1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

Hartlepool will be a place:
- where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives.
- where people will be safe and protected from harm.
- that has an inclusive and growing economy.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To approve the Trading Standards Service Plan for 2024/25.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Trading Standards operates within the Public Protection section and has a wide range of enforcement responsibilities including product safety, underage sales, weights and measures, and counterfeiting. It also plays a significant role in, amongst other things, the detection and prevention of doorstep crime, illicit tobacco, cowboy roofers and builders, and other scams.
- 3.2 Trading Standards publish an annual Service Plan detailing the previous performance of the Service, the main challenges facing it and a plan of work to be undertaken in the forthcoming year.

3.3 The Service Plan details the Trading Standards priorities for 2024/25 and highlights how these priorities will be addressed.

3.4 The Service Plan for 2024/25 is attached as **Appendix 1**.

4. PROPOSALS/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 The Service Plan for 2024/25 has been updated to reflect last year's performance and reflect changes in Service demand.

4.2 The Plan covers the following:

- (i) Service Aims and Objectives;
- (ii) The scope and demands on the Trading Standards Service;
- (iii) Service delivery, including intervention programmes, service requests, complaints, advice, liaison and promotion;
- (iv) Resources, including financial allocation, staff allocation and staff development; and
- (v) A review of performance for 2023/24.

5. SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES RAISED IN THE PLAN

5.1 Prioritising Service Delivery – Resources are allocated in accordance with identified priorities. In 2024/25 these will be:

High Priority

5.2.1 *Rogue Traders* – Doorstep crime, cowboy builders and other types of scams can cost local residents hundreds, or even thousands, of pounds. Trading Standards work closely with a number of agencies to help protect the vulnerable from this type of crime.

5.2.2 *Scams and Cons* – Unscrupulous traders routinely prey on the vulnerable and elderly by taking advantage of their goodwill. Most people regularly receive unsolicited letters telephone calls or e-mails offering services that are 'too good to be true'. Sadly, on some occasions, consumers are drawn into these scams and pay for goods or services that either never arrive, or are not what was initially described. In many cases, making one purchase opens up the consumer to many other scams and therefore problems can escalate even more. Trading Standards aim to identify common scams and notify consumers through press releases and other mass media.

- 5.2.3 *Product Safety* – Consumers are entitled to assume that all products they purchase will be safe. Trading Standards is responsible for the monitoring, sampling and testing of consumer products to ensure they do not pose a risk.

5.3 Medium Priority

- 5.3.1 Those subject areas identified as 'medium priority' are still cause for significant concern, but are considered to offer a lesser degree of harm (to health and/or wealth) for the general public than those other issues identified as 'high priority'.
- 5.3.2 *Tackling Underage Sales* – The illegal sale of alcohol and other age-restricted products to children not only contributes significantly towards anti-social behaviour in Hartlepool, but can also represent a serious risk to the health and well-being of the children involved.
- 5.3.3 Underage sales has moved from being a high priority to a medium priority following a reduction in complaints from the general public and a significant investment of time and resources over recent years to educate retailers about their obligations and the consequences of non-compliance.
- 5.3.4 *Counterfeiting and illicit tobacco* – The illegal copying and distribution of intellectual property such as computer software, designer clothing and jewellery continues to be a significant issue in Hartlepool. Counterfeiting is bad for business – it takes money away from local retailers who sell genuine products and puts it into the hands of local and national criminals – with little or no local benefit for the Borough. Counterfeiting is often carried out by large organised crime units who are also engaged in other types of criminal activity such as drugs and smuggling.
- 5.3.5 Trading Standards works closely with HMRC, the Police and trade mark holders to identify and prosecute those who sell counterfeit products.
- 5.3.6 *Animal Welfare* – The Trading Standards Team is responsible for carrying out animal welfare checks at farms and other similar establishments. This work is important both for the welfare of the animals, and also for public health, as many of the animals are bred for human consumption.
- 5.3.7 In addition, there has been a significant local, regional and national increase in complaints about illegal puppy farms. Puppies can now cost more than £2,500 each and have become a focus for organised crime groups as well as others who simply see the profit to be made from breeding and selling as many litters as possible.
- 5.3.8 Dog breeding is a licensable activity, administered by the Council's Licensing Team, but as the element of criminality has increased, it is now appropriate for Trading Standards to take an investigative role to identify those illegally profiting from this trade.

5.3.9 As such, animal welfare is a priority area for the Trading Standards Team in 2024/25.

5.4 Low Priority

5.4.1 *False Descriptions* – Most consumer purchases are made on the basis of the description they are given by either the manufacturer or retailer. In some cases descriptions are deliberately or negligently misleading – causing consumers to make purchase decisions that they may not have made otherwise. Once money has been handed over it can, on occasion, be very difficult to get back other than to go through the court system. Trading Standards investigates complaints about traders who falsely describe goods and look for the accuracy of descriptions during routine interventions.

5.4.2 *Weights and Measures* – Many products are still sold by either weight or by length and consumers expect that they will receive the quantity stated. For some products, such as petrol, the value of goods is so high that even a small error in the accuracy of a measuring machine may lead to significant consumer loss.

5.4.3 Trading Standards officers are 'Weights and Measures Inspectors' and routinely carry out checks on weighing and measuring equipment with the support of officers from Durham County Council.

5.4.4 *Misleading Pricing* – Most products are now sold with no price marking on them – bar codes having replaced price stickers. This has made it extremely difficult to check whether the price stated on a shelf is actually the price charged at the checkout. For some purchases, there may be 'hidden extras' that can significantly inflate the final price of goods or services.

5.5 Responding to Change

5.5.1 As the retail environment continues to change, Trading Standards is required to remain vigilant and respond to new threats and challenges. The continued growth of internet sales means that Trading Standards must now monitor the *virtual* High Street and ensure that consumers remain protected.

5.6 Social Media

5.6.1 Whereas counterfeit goods were once only found at car boot sales or from the 'back of a lorry', social media has now become a significant source of illegal goods.

5.6.2 Trading Standards in Hartlepool has its own social media profile whereby sites that are suspected of selling counterfeit goods receive a Trading Standards 'post' informing the account holder, and anyone visiting the site, that Trading Standards are monitoring the site.

- 5.6.3 While this approach usually has an immediate positive impact, some social media users have responded by changing the way in which their accounts operate and interact with potential purchasers. Trading Standards has, in turn, had to adapt its approach in order to continue its monitoring of this growing sales platform.
- 5.6.4 The Trading Standards Service has a 'standalone' computer that can be used to monitor social media and other websites without giving away their identity. Where problems are identified traders are contacted and, where appropriate, test purchases can be made to establish whether legal requirements are being complied with. In some cases, this is followed up by the seizure of criminal property and other evidence.
- 5.7 Protecting the Vulnerable
- 5.7.1 Trading Standards has continued to promote No Cold Call Zones as a means of reducing the number of traders that visit people on their doorsteps. Since 2016, the number of zones has increased from 7 to 56 and over 11,000 'Say No to Doorstep Traders' stickers have been issued, free of charge, to local residents.
- 5.7.2 The Service has been working closely with other Council departments and external organisations such as banks and post offices, to ensure that they are aware of the risks that rogue traders can pose to their clients and what can be done to help them.
- 5.7.3 A significant amount of work has also been undertaken in relation to mail order and telephone scams with free 'call blockers' being supplied to those considered most vulnerable.
- 5.7.4 As victims can sometimes become repeat targets, Trading Standards Officers can install covert CCTV cameras into victim's homes in order to provide some reassurance and help identify any rogue traders who return.
- 5.8 Public Health
- 5.8.1 The Trading Standards Team undertakes a range of activities designed to protect public health.
- 5.8.2 The sale and supply of counterfeit or smuggled tobacco continues to be a significant issue in Hartlepool and the North East as a whole.
- 5.8.3 During 2023/24 Officers have continued to enforce a wide range of legislation around the sale of counterfeit or otherwise illicit tobacco. Officers played an integral part in removing 303,500 illegal cigarettes and 12.9 kg of illegal tobacco from the market with a combined street value of approximately £77,500.

5.8.4 The Trading Standards team will continue to focus on premises suspected of selling counterfeit and illicit tobacco premises and take formal action where needed.

5.8.5 The team also monitors the sale of alternative tobacco products. There are strict rules governing the composition and marketing of 'nicotine delivery devices' such as e-liquids and vapes (which are age restricted products) and the team has been working with local retailers, and several manufacturers to ensure legal compliance.

5.8.6 During 2023/24 officers removed 2,122 illegal vapes with a street value of £21,220 from the market.

5.9 Enforcement Action

5.9.1 On some occasions, formal legal action is taken against traders. During 2023/24 the following formal legal action was taken:

- Two prosecutions under The Fraud Act 2006 and The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008.
- One prosecution under the Trade Marks Act 1994
- Four Closure Orders imposed by virtue of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/IMPLICATIONS

RISK IMPLICATIONS	No relevant issues
FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	No relevant issues
SUBSIDY CONTROL	No relevant issues
LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS	No relevant issues
CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY	No relevant issues
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS	No relevant issues
STAFF CONSIDERATIONS	No relevant issues
ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS	No relevant issues

ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS	No relevant issues
CONSULTATION	No relevant issues

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That Neighbourhood Services Committee approves the Trading Standards Service Plan for 2022/23.

8. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The Trading Standards Service Plan sets out the priorities for, and methods of, service delivery in 2024/25.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 There are no background papers for this report.

10. CONTACT OFFICERS

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Rachael Readman
Trading Standards & Licensing Manager

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Email: Rachael.readman@hartlepool.gov.uk

Sign Off:-

Managing Director	Date: 14/10/24
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 09/10/24
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 08/10/24



Hartlepool Borough Council

Trading Standards Service Plan

2024/25

TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE PLAN 2024/25

INTRODUCTION

1. SERVICE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Overall Vision
- 1.2 Service Aims and Objectives
- 1.3 Links to Corporate Objectives and Plans

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Profile of the Local Authority
- 2.2 Organisational Structure
- 2.3 Scope of the Trading Standards Service
- 2.4 Demands on the Trading Standards Service
- 2.5 Intelligence Operating Model
- 2.6 Enforcement Policy

3. SERVICE DELIVERY

- 3.1 Proactive Work
- 3.2 Trading Standards Interventions
- 3.3 Advice & Guidance
- 3.4 Acting as Statutory Consultee
- 3.5 Local programmes/initiatives
- 3.6 E-Crime
- 3.7 Sampling
- 3.8 Test Purchasing
- 3.9 Reactive Work
- 3.10 Complaints and Requests for Service
- 3.11 Liaison Arrangements
- 3.12 Regional Enforcement
- 3.13 Primary Authority Scheme

4. RESOURCES

- 4.1 Financial
- 4.2 Staffing Allocation
- 4.3 Staff Development
- 4.4 Equipment and Facilities
- 4.5 Working with Others

5. QUALITY ASSESSMENT

6. PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2023/24

- 6.1 Overview
- 6.2 Public Health
- 6.3 Underage Sales
- 6.4 E-Crime
- 6.5 Sampling

- 6.6 Promotional / Campaign Work and Publicity
- 6.7 Doorstep Crime
- 6.8 Serious Violence and Knife Crime
- 6.9 Formal Enforcement Action
- 6.10 Responding to Complaints
- 6.11 Complaints against our Staff

7. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT / KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2024/25

INTRODUCTION

This Service Plan details how the Trading Standards Service will be delivered by Hartlepool Borough Council.

Whilst focussing primarily on the year 2024/25, longer-term objectives are identified where relevant. Additionally, there is a review of performance for 2023/24 and this aims to inform decisions about how best to build on past successes and address performance gaps.

The Plan is reviewed annually and previous plans have been approved by the Neighbourhood Services Committee.

1 SERVICE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Overall Vision

The Council's overall vision is that Hartlepool will be a place...

- Where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives;
- Where those who are vulnerable will be safe and protected from harm;
- Of resilient and resourceful communities with opportunities for all;
- With a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community;
- That has an inclusive and growing economy; and
- That is sustainable, clean, safe and green.

1.2 Service Aims and Objectives

Hartlepool Borough Council aims:

- To carry out our enforcement duties and deliver high quality services through the efficient and effective use of resources;
- To supplement our enforcement role by providing targeted education and advice;
- To encourage innovation through actively seeking out best practice and working in partnership with other agencies;
- To actively contribute towards achieving nationally agreed strategic aims and objectives; and

- To ensure our actions are consistent, proportionate and targeted and that we are transparent and open about what we do.

In its delivery of the service the Council will have regard to directions and examples of best practice as disseminated by Local Government Regulation, Chartered Trading Standards Institute and Central Government.

1.3 Links to Corporate Objectives and Plans

This service plan fits into the hierarchy of the Council's planning process as follows:

- Hartlepool's Community Strategy - the Local Strategic Partnerships (the Safer Hartlepool Partnership) and the Health and Wellbeing Board
- Hartlepool's Council Plan 2021/22 – 2023/24
- Trading Standards Service Plan - sets out how the Council aims to deliver this statutory service and the Trading Standards Service's contribution to corporate objectives.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Profile of the Local Authority

Hartlepool is located on the north-east coast of England to the north of the River Tees. The Borough consists of the main town of Hartlepool, the seaside resort of Seaton Carew and a number of small outlying villages. The total area of the Borough is 9,390 hectares. The residential population is 92,338 of which ethnic minorities comprise 3.5% (2021 census).

Hartlepool is a unitary authority, providing a full range of services. To the south of Hartlepool is the wider Teesside conurbation which includes the boroughs of Middlesbrough, Stockton on Tees and Redcar and Cleveland, and which together with Hartlepool and Darlington makes up the Tees Valley sub-region. Bordering Hartlepool to the north is the administrative area of County Durham.

The borough has a long and proud history, with the original settlement of Hartlepool dating back to Saxon times. Originally an important religious settlement the town's early development resulted from the existence of a safe harbour and its role as a port for the city of Durham and subsequent grant of a Royal Charter from King John in 1201.

The main phase of Hartlepool's expansion took place from the mid 19th Century with the building of a new railway and docks to serve the export of coal. The town continued to expand over the next 100 years as port trade increased and the development of heavy industries including steel making, shipbuilding and manufacturing. Like most industrialised towns in the north of

England, Hartlepool has suffered over the last half century from structural reform of these industries and the town has had to look for new opportunities to diversify the economy.

Over the past 20 years Hartlepool has experienced some transformational changes through public and private investment. This has included the transformation of the former South Docks area into a fabulous 500-berth marina where the town hosted The Tall Ships Race in 2010 and repeated the well-received successful event in 2023.

2.2 Organisational Structure

Under the Council's governance arrangements, most day-to-day decisions are taken by five Policy Committees. These Policy Committees cover the following main service areas: -

- Finance and Policy Committee
- Adult & Community Based Services Committee
- Children's Services Committee
- Neighbourhood Services Committee
- Economic Growth and Regeneration Committee

The Neighbourhood Services Committee provides political oversight for Trading Standards law enforcement.

The Council is made up of four Departments:

- Children's & Joint Commissioning Services
- Adults & Community Based Services
- Development, Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services
- Legal, Governance and HR

The Trading Standards Service Plan is delivered through the Public Protection Section contained within the Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services division, which is contained within the Development, Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services Department.

2.3 Scope of the Trading Standards Service

Service delivery broadly comprises:

- Investigating complaints relating to consumer protection issues;
- Carrying out programmed test purchase exercises to monitor trader compliance with relevant legislation – including underage sales;
- Taking samples of consumer products for testing and analysis
- Carrying out programmed interventions;
- Providing advice and information to both consumers and traders;
- Taking action (formal and informal) to ensure compliance with legislation;

- Acting as a statutory consultee for applications made under the Licensing Act 2003;
- Ensuring appropriate standards of animal welfare at farms and other relevant premises; and
- Enforcing smoke free legislation in public places;

To achieve its strategic aims and objectives it is necessary to work in partnership with other organisations and agencies such as local authorities, Cleveland Police, Her Majesties Revenues & Customs (HMRC) and local businesses. The Council aims to ensure that these joint working arrangements are in place and that officers of the Service contribute, and are committed to, the ongoing development of these arrangements.

2.4 Demands on the Trading Standards Service

The Trading Standards Service is the principal enforcing authority for approximately 500 statutory instruments relating to consumer protection.

With limited resources it is necessary to prioritise proactive work. Prioritisation takes account of a range of factors including public concerns, business concerns, degree of risk to the public, complaint trends, government concerns at a national level (as expressed through the National Trading Standards Board) and local councillors concerns – each of which helps establish which enforcement areas should take priority over others.

Due to a significant increase in both the number and seriousness of complaints regarding ‘scams and cons’, and a reduction in the number of complaints about ‘underage sales’, scams has now moved from being a medium priority to a high priority issue whilst underage sales has moved from high to medium.

In addition, the responsibility for enforcement against loan sharks has moved to the national Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) and local Trading Standards no longer have a direct responsibility in this year. As such, ‘loan sharks’ was withdrawn from the list of priorities in 2022/23 and has been replaced with ‘animal welfare’.

‘Animal welfare’ applies to the welfare of animals on places such as farms where Trading Standards Officers have a statutory duty to carry out inspections and also includes other areas such as the illegal breeding and sale of dogs and puppies which has become an increasingly serious issue in recent years.

The current priority areas for the Trading Standards Service are: -

High Priority

Rogue Traders – Doorstep crime and cowboy builders can cost local residents hundreds or even thousands of pounds. Trading Standards work

closely with a number of agencies to help protect the vulnerable from this type of crime.

Scams and Cons – Unscrupulous traders routinely prey on the vulnerable and elderly by taking advantage of their goodwill. Most people regularly receive unsolicited letters, telephone calls, text messages or e-mails offering services that are ‘too good to be true’. Sadly, on some occasions, consumers are drawn into these scams and pay for goods or services that either never arrive or are not what was initially described. In many cases, making one purchase opens up the consumer to many other scams and problems can escalate. Trading Standards aims to identify common scams and notify consumers through press releases and other mass media.

Where a company can be identified, formal action would be commenced against them.

Product Safety – Consumers are entitled to assume that all products they purchase will be safe. Trading Standards is responsible for the monitoring, sampling and testing of consumer products to ensure they do not pose a risk.

Medium Priority

Tackling Underage Sales - The illegal sale of alcohol and other age-restricted products to children not only contributes significantly towards anti-social behaviour in Hartlepool but can also represent a serious risk to the health and well-being of the children involved.

Trading Standards and licensing officers work closely with Cleveland Police and other agencies to target premises that are thought to sell to children and uses underage volunteers to identify where offences are being committed.

Counterfeiting and illicit tobacco – The illegal copying of computer software, designer clothing and jewellery continue to be a significant issue in Hartlepool. Counterfeiting is bad for business – it takes money away from local retailers who sell genuine products and puts it into the hands of local and national criminals with little or no local benefit for the town. Counterfeiting is often carried out by large organised crime units who are also engaged in other types of criminal activity such as drugs and smuggling.

Trading Standards works closely with HMRC, the Police and trade mark holders to identify and prosecute those who sell counterfeit products.

Animal Welfare – Trading Standards Officers are responsible for carrying out inspections of farm premises to ensure that animals that may end up in the food chain are looked after correctly. There has also been a significant increase in the illegal sale of puppies as a result of the very high prices that are now being charged (commonly £2000 per puppy for many breeds).

Low Priority

Weights and Measures – Many products are still sold by either weight or by length and consumers expect that they will receive the quantity stated. For some products, such as petrol, the value of goods is so high that even a small error in the accuracy of a measuring machine may lead to significant consumer loss.

Trading Standards officers are 'Weights and Measures Inspectors' and routinely carry out checks on weighing and measuring equipment.

Due to the specialist nature of weights and measures compliance, an arrangement has been entered into with Durham County Council for them to undertake inspections at factory sites and other premises in Hartlepool where specialist testing equipment is required.

Misleading Pricing – Most products are now sold with no price marking on them bar codes having replaced price stickers. This has made it extremely difficult to check whether the price stated on a shelf is actually the price charged at the checkout. For some purchases, there may be 'hidden extras' that can significantly inflate the final price of goods or services.

Trading Standards staff routinely check the accuracy of price indications in shops and respond to complaints about misleading price indications.

False Descriptions – Most consumer purchases are made on the basis of the description they are given by either the manufacturer or retailer. In some cases descriptions are deliberately or negligently misleading – causing consumers to make purchase decisions that they may not have made otherwise. Once money has been handed over it can, on occasion, be very difficult to get back other than to go through the court system. Trading Standards investigates complaints about traders who falsely describe goods and look for the accuracy of descriptions during routine interventions.

2.5 Intelligence Operating Model

In addition to the identification of local priorities, the Trading Standards Service also contributes towards the development of regional and national priorities through Regional and National Tasking Groups.

The purpose of these groups is to identify those specific areas of concern that have a cross border impact and which, if tackled on a regional or national level, can benefit consumers everywhere.

The Intelligence Operating Model introduces a national intelligence framework to support regional and national enforcement through the collection and utilisation of information and data to inform work planning processes. Hartlepool Trading Standards will continue to both contribute and benefit from this Model.

2.6 Enforcement Policy

Hartlepool Borough Council adopted its current Enforcement Policy in 2021. Supplementary to this, there is a Public Protection Enforcement Policy that deals with those enforcement issues specific, or unique, to the service.

The Trading Standards Service will take account of the 2014 Regulator's Code when carrying out its interactions with the business community.

3 SERVICE DELIVERY

3.1 Proactive Work

3.2 Trading Standards Interventions

As pressure on the Service has continued to grow in areas such as doorstep crime, the ability to maintain a high level of routine inspections has been seriously challenged. As such, proactive inspections will be targeted where consumer risk is considered to be high because of intelligence received; a high numbers of complaints etc; or where new businesses have been established that may well not be fully aware of their duties and responsibilities.

On-line retailing continues to flourish and therefore it is necessary to monitor internet retailers to ensure consumers are receiving a fair deal and that products are safe.

Opening a line of communication with new businesses early will ensure that they can set up their operations as efficiently and effectively as possible without having to 'catch up' with their legal compliance at a later date.

Information on premises liable to Trading Standards interventions is held on the APP computer system. An intervention programme is produced from this system at the commencement of each reporting year.

It is anticipated that consistent, high quality programmed interventions by the Service will, over time, result in a general improvement in standards, reducing the frequency for recourse to formal action.

Revisits will be carried out to check compliance where contraventions have been identified.

3.3 Advice and Guidance

The Trading Standards Service works closely with the national Consumer Advice helpline which is now being operated by the Citizen's Advice Bureau, to provide a comprehensive advice and guidance service. Consumers in need of advice regarding the civil law will be serviced by Citizen's Advice but where

issues are raised that may have a broader local impact, or there may be a criminal element to the complaint, the local Trading Standards Service will be alerted and, if appropriate, an investigation commenced.

In most cases the Trading Standards Service will look to work in partnership with local businesses to ensure they are fully aware of their legal obligations and how best to achieve legal compliance. Such advice is offered free of charge and can be made available at a time to suit the trader.

Trading Standards staff also regularly provide advice sessions to local community groups on issues such as doorstep crime, rogue traders and 'the work of Trading Standards'.

Recent surveys carried out by the Government have indicated that businesses and retailers value visits by Trading Standards staff as being an important source of up to date advice and information.

The Council considers that assistance to business, in order to help them to comply with the requirements of legislation, is one of our core activities. For Trading Standards issues the Council has a policy of offering comprehensive advice to any business for which it is, or is likely to become, the enforcing authority.

Advice will be available during the course of routine visits and interventions, through information leaflets and booklets, in response to queries and through the Council's website.

3.4 Acting as Statutory Consultee

Trading Standards is a statutory 'Responsible Authority' under the Licensing Act 2003. This means that every application for a licence to supply alcohol or offer other regulated entertainment must be submitted to the Trading Standards Service who will consider the application in terms of its likely impact on the Act's 'licensing objectives'. For Trading Standards this primarily means the protection of children from harm and officers use their expertise in detecting and preventing underage sales to work with prospective licensees and ensure operating procedures are put in place to prevent the sale of alcohol to children.

3.5 Local programmes/initiatives

Trading Standards will be conducting a range of projects and surveys during 2024/25 in order to improve consumer protection and to raise consumer confidence. These will include: -

Protecting the Most Vulnerable – Complaints continue about rogue roofers, cowboy builders and telephone/postal scams that have targeted the elderly and vulnerable and scammed them out of money for poor quality or, sometimes, non-existent work and non-existent prize money.

Trading Standards officers will continue to work to raise awareness amongst targeted groups and identify and prosecute the traders involved.

The Team continues to work with the Police and local banks to promote the national 'Banking Protocol'. The protocol involves training bank staff to recognise when their customers may be the victim of an ongoing scam and where appropriate they can dial 999 and the local Police force has committed to treat the incident as an emergency – sending officers/Trading Standards Officers direct to the bank to assist.

The Trading Standards Team will also continue to promote No Cold Call Zones and set them up where there is an identified demand. At the end of 2023/24 Hartlepool had 56 NCCZ's (an increase from just 7 in 2016) and there is a target that five more will be created during 2024/25.

Officers will continue to offer awareness raising presentations to neighbourhood and community groups and will promote the 'No Cold Calling' stickers that are available free of charge.

The Trading Standards Team works closely with the National Scams Team which provides details of Hartlepool consumers who have been found on scammer's databases. Trading Standards Officers will continue to contact and offer support to victims identified this way.

3.6 E-Crime – Using the internet to buy goods and services is now commonplace and rogue traders have used this as an opportunity to sell counterfeit and dangerous goods to the unsuspecting public.

Trading Standards secured national funding to purchase specialist equipment that allows local officers to identify and target rogue e-traders operating in Hartlepool.

Officers will be conducting regular monitoring of internet sites that have a Hartlepool connection and, working with other agencies, specifically the Regional Investigations Team, test purchases will be made to generate evidence for formal legal action where such steps are considered appropriate.

Social media sites have become a popular forum for the sale of counterfeit goods and, in response, the Trading Standards Service has created a Facebook 'profile'. Suspected sellers of counterfeit goods receive a 'post' from Trading Standards advising that their activities are being monitored.

This acts as a deterrent for those sellers who had not considered the potential consequences of their activities. For those who ignore the warnings, Trading Standards is able to have sites 'taken down' by Facebook. For those who continue to trade using alternative pages, investigation and prosecution will follow.

3.7 Sampling

In order to protect the public it is essential that potential problems, particularly safety related, can be identified before they cause damage or harm.

One way of achieving this is through the sampling of consumer products to ensure they comply with relevant safety standards or with the descriptions being applied to them.

Product Safety – Trading Standards will be purchasing a wide range of consumer products to test for compliance with appropriate safety standards. Products to be tested are usually identified as a consequence of national issues or on products that have a history of problems. Testing during 2024/25 will concentrate on product safety.

3.8 Test Purchasing

Trading Standards (or underage volunteers under the supervision of Trading Standards officers) will carry out test purchases at premises where there is reason to suspect that illegal activity may be taking place.

Test purchasing establishes whether a trader is engaging in a certain activity, the way in which they do it and provides the best possible evidence for potential formal action.

3.9 Reactive Work

3.10 Trading Standards Complaints and Service Requests

It is intended that every complaint/request for service is responded to within two working days.

The majority of consumer complaints are forwarded to the Trading Standards Service via the 'Citizen's Advice Consumer Service' (CACS) – a national consumer hotline funded by central government. CACS provide scripted advice that can resolve many of the simplest complaints but the more complex matters, or those requiring a potential criminal investigation, are referred on to the local Trading Standards department.

The initial response is determined after assessment of the information received, and is based on the risk arising from the conditions that are the subject of the complaint.

The potential actions that are available vary from the provision of advice, often after liaison with the business, to full prosecution procedures in line with the Public Protection Enforcement Policy.

3.11 Liaison Arrangements

The Council actively participates in local and regional activities and is represented on the following:

- Tees Valley Public Protection Heads of Service Group
- North East Public Protection Partnership (NEPPP)
- North East Trading Standards Association (NETSA)
- Various multi-agency intelligence networks

3.12 Regional Enforcement

Hartlepool's Trading Standards manager sits as an executive member of the North Eastern Trading Standards Association (NETSA) and contributes to the regional enforcement activity planned by it.

In addition there is a National Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) which is now directly funded by a levy on the Banking industry and a Regional Investigations Team (previously 'Scambusters'), funded via the National Trading Standards Board, that targets criminal activity at a regional and national level.

To assist with the work of these two teams NETSA also manages the work of a Regional Intelligence Analyst whose role is to gather and disseminate intelligence to NETSA members, the IMLT and the regional Investigations Team.

3.13 Primary Authority Scheme

It is the Council's policy to comply with the Local Better Regulation Office's Primary Authority Scheme.

In particular the Council will contact the Primary Authority and liaise over:

- any proposed formal enforcement action
- service of Notices
- shortcomings in the companies policies that have wider implications

In Hartlepool, there are currently no formal Primary Authority arrangements in place with a Hartlepool based trader however the service works closely with some local businesses on an informal basis.

The level of resourcing will have to be reviewed if an opportunity to enter into a formal Primary Authority arrangement arises.

4. RESOURCES**4.1 Financial Resources**

The annual budget for the Consumer Services section in the year 2024/25 is:

	£	000
Employees	693	693
Other Expenditure	59	59
Public Health Grant	(300)	(300)
Other Grant Funding	(34)	(34)
Income	(11)	(11)
Net Budget		407

This budget is for all services provided by this section including Food, Health & Safety, Animal Health and Trading Standards with resources being allocated in accordance with service demands.

4.2 Staffing Allocation

The Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services has overall responsibility for the delivery of the Trading Standards Service in accordance with the Service Plan.

The Assistant Director (Regulatory Services) has responsibility for planning service delivery and management of the Trading Standards Service, Food, Licensing, Public Health, Private Sector Housing, Water Quality, Health & Safety, Animal Health and Welfare, Environmental Protection, Emergency Planning and Community Safety as well as general management responsibilities as a member of the Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services department.

The Trading Standards & Licensing Manager has responsibility for the day to day supervision of the Trading Standards and Licensing Service and, having the requisite qualifications and experience, is designated as the authority's Chief Inspector of Weights and Measures.

Senior Trading Standards officers are responsible for carrying out the Trading Standards premises intervention programme as well as the delivery of all other aspects of the Trading Standards service and will undertake complex investigations.

The Graduate Trading Standards officer post is held by an officer who is currently undergoing the Trading Standards professional qualifications to enable them to become a qualified Trading Standards Officer.

Administrative support is provided by a dedicated Support Services team.

All staff engaged in Trading Standards law enforcement activity will be suitably trained and qualified and appropriately authorised in accordance with guidance and internal policy.

The resources determined necessary to deliver the Trading Standards Service in 2024/25 are as follows:

1 x 0.2 FTE Assistant Director (Regulatory Services)

1 x 0.5 FTE Trading Standards & Licensing Manager (with responsibility also for Licensing)

3 x Senior Trading Standards Officers

1 x Graduate Trading Standards Officer

4.3 Staff Development

The Council is committed to the training and personal development of its employees and has in place Personal Development Plans for all members of staff.

The Staff Training Plan allows for the formal identification of the training needs of staff members in terms of personal development linked with the development needs of the service on an annual basis.

The Training Plan clearly prioritises training requirements of individual staff members will be developed and reviewed bi-annually.

Detailed records are maintained by the service relating to all training received by officers.

As part of its succession planning, the Team's Graduate Trading Standards Officer will soon complete his training to become a qualified Trading Standards Officer with qualification being likely in December 2024. This should ensure that the team can maintain a full complement of qualified officers for the foreseeable future.

4.4 Equipment and Facilities

A range of equipment and facilities are required for the effective operation of the Trading Standards Service.

The service has a computerised performance management system, Authority Public Protection (APP). This is capable of maintaining up to date accurate data relating to the activities of the Trading Standards Service. A documented database management procedure has been produced to ensure that the system is properly maintained, up to date and secure. The system is used for

the generation of the intervention programmes, the recording and tracking of all Trading Standards activities, the production of statutory returns and the effective management of performance.

4.5 Working with Others

Durham County Council undertakes the majority of Hartlepool's weights and measures inspections and maintains the specialist equipment necessary to meet statutory metrology requirements.

The Team agreed to participate Operation Zernius which is a national Trading Standards project aimed at identifying and addressing non-compliances in the Estate and Letting Agents Sector. The project included both an inspection of the physical premises and any social media / website publications to ensure compliance with legislation including the Consumer Rights Act and Tenants fees legislation to ensure consumers are fully informed of charges or fees and helping to provide a level playing field for agents. This Operation was established in 2023/24 with the inspections and partnership working continuing into 2024/25.

5. QUALITY ASSESSMENT

The Council is committed to quality service provision. To support this commitment the Trading Standards Service seeks to ensure consistent, effective, efficient and ethical service delivery that constitutes value for money.

A range of performance monitoring information will be used to assess the extent to which the Trading Standards Service achieves this objective and will include on-going monitoring against pre-set targets, both internal and external audits and stakeholder feedback.

Specifically the Trading Standards & Licensing Manager will carry out accompanied visits with officers undertaking interventions, investigations and other duties for the purpose of monitoring consistency and quality of the intervention as well as maintaining and giving feedback with regard to associated documentation and reports.

6 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

- 6.1 Overview** - It is recognised that a key element of the service planning process is the rational review of past performance. In the formulation of this service plan a review has been conducted of performance against those targets.

This service plan will be reviewed at the conclusion of the year 2024/25 and at any point during the year where significant legislative changes or other relevant factors occur during the year.

It is the responsibility of the Assistant Director (Regulatory Services) to carry out that review with the Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services.

The service plan review will identify any shortfalls in service delivery and will inform decisions about future staffing and resource allocation, service standards, targets and priorities.

Any relevant amendments to the Council's Corporate Plan will be incorporated into the service plan.

6.2 Public Health

The Trading Standards Team undertakes a range of activities designed to protect public health.

The sale and supply of counterfeit or smuggled tobacco continues to be a significant issue in Hartlepool and the North East as a whole.

During 2023/24 Officers have continued to enforce a wide range of legislation around the sale of counterfeit or otherwise illicit tobacco. Officers played an integral part in removing 303,500 illegal cigarettes and 12.9 kg of illegal tobacco from the market with a combined street value of approximately £77,500.

The Trading Standards team will continue to focus on premises suspected of selling counterfeit and illicit tobacco premises and take formal action where needed.

The team also monitors the sale of alternative tobacco products. There are strict rules governing the composition and marketing of 'nicotine delivery devices' such as e-liquids and vapes (which are age restricted products) and the team has been working with local retailers, and several manufacturers to ensure legal compliance.

During 2023/24 officers removed 2,122 illegal vapes with a street value of £21,220 from the market.

The Team also carries out checks on the safety of products made available for sale to the general public. These may be visual checks of the product and its labelling or the purchase of the product for testing at an accredited laboratory. Examples of consumer products that have been submitted for formal testing during 2023/24 are a home hire sunbed and an electric blanket, further information can be found in **6.5**.

Trading Standards have been commissioned by Public Health to inspect medical weighing equipment used within the community, during 2023/24 the team tested over 90 pieces of equipment

Targeted Product sampling and testing will continue to take place throughout 2024/25.

6.3 Underage Sales

During 2023/24 a range of underage sales operations took place. The focus of these operations were age restricted items including vapes, alcohol and knives.

Operation Sceptre, is a national campaign which takes place twice a year, supporting the work Cleveland Police carry out all year round to ensure residents are safe from knife crime in the community. In May 2023 the Trading Standards team in conjunction with Cleveland Police carried out a targeted Test Purchasing operation focusing on the underage sale of Knives. Eight premises were visited and two premises sold knives to the underage volunteers. The sales were followed up with enforcement activity and liaison with the premises Primary Authorities.

Underage sales test purchasing will continue in 2024/25.

6.4 E-Crime

Officers have continued to monitor websites during 2023/24 and social media, such as Facebook, continues to be a significant source of counterfeit goods.

Counterfeit sellers can either sell directly from their own site or advertise their goods through a 'Selling Page' operated by a third party.

The Trading Standards Team continues to have a Facebook presence which allows it to interact with other Facebook users and this is used to identify where social media sites are being used to sell counterfeit, or otherwise illegal, goods.

In addition to social media, the internet is also increasingly being used for the sale of general goods which can create its own difficulties when faulty goods are delivered or goods fail to arrive. Complaining to 'virtual' traders is often not as easy as returning to a shop and, where difficulties arise, consumers are generally referred to the Citizen's Advice Consumer Service for advice and guidance.

On those occasions where criminal offences may have been committed by internet sellers, Trading Standards Officers must undertake investigations that can be far more complicated than when dealing with traditional, fixed site

retailers. Internet sellers can be based anywhere in the world and even obtaining the genuine name and address of a trader can be a challenge.

National and regional relationships have been, and continue to be, established with larger internet retailers and service providers to allow for the effective investigation and resolution of criminal and civil matters.

6.5 Sampling

Trading Standards carried out a range of sampling which included testing an electric blanket following receipt of a complaint from a member of the public. The electric blanket had overheated and burnt their mattress, the department purchased a number of the items and sent them to a Public Analyst for testing.

The Public Analyst concluded that the items failed to meet basic electrical safety requirements. The information obtained was forwarded to the Trading Standards where the importer of the blankets is based under the Home Authority Principle. The Home Authority and Manufacturer are working closely to resolve the matter.

Following a complaint from a concerned member of the public the team submitted a sunbed for testing. The sunbed failed to meet the requirements of The Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 2016. During formal testing it was identified that the units poor build quality posed a risk of fire and/ or electric shock. The Limited Liability company who manufactured the sunbeds failed to take action despite the concerning risks, resulting in a Formal Product Recall Notice being served by the Authority.

6.6 Promotional/Campaign Work and Publicity

Three presentations were given to community groups in 2023/24. Presentations are an integral part of promoting the work we do and we welcome further promotional opportunities throughout 2024/25.

The Sunbed Product Recall received both local and national publicity and the notice was published on the Office of Product Safety and Standards Website, and can be viewed here: <https://www.gov.uk/product-safety-alerts-reports-recalls/product-recall-tanarife-solarium-limited-home-hire-wooden-tanning-unit-2311-0189>

Press releases are generally published following legal action including but not limited to Prosecutions and Closure Orders.

6.7 Doorstep Crime/Scams

The Team continues to focus resources on preventing the vulnerable from becoming victims of unscrupulous traders and identifying and prosecuting those found to be responsible.

'No Cold Calling' stickers continue to be made available that can be placed in a front door or window advising prospective callers that they are not welcome. The sticker also provides the homeowner with a valuable 'aide memiore' on what to do if a cold caller ignores the sticker. Over 11,000 have been issued to Hartlepool residents since the initiative began in 2015.

As detailed in paragraph 3.5 above, 56 No Cold Call Zones (NCCZ's) have been created with a target to establish a further five more in 2024/25.

The Trading Standards Service also works closely with the National Scams Team which routinely sends details of Hartlepool consumers who have been found to be on scammer's databases.

Officers contact, and subsequently visit, these victims to provide help and support. Where appropriate, other agencies, such as Adult Safeguarding Teams, are brought in to provide ongoing professional support.

6.8 Serious Violence and Knife Crime

Knife crime continues to be an issue of serious concern and whilst Hartlepool has not been as seriously affected as some other areas of the country, the sale of illegal knives and the sale of knives to children are issues that must not be ignored or overlooked.

The Trading Standards team will be monitoring the retail market for illegal knives (such as 'zombie knives') and will take action if anything is discovered.

The Trading Standards team will continue to support National Campaigns such as Operation Sceptre as covered in **6.3**

6.9 Formal Enforcement Action

In line with our enforcement policy on some occasions it is necessary to prosecute for serious or repeat offences.

In early 2023, Jordan Tierney, who operated Hartlepool Groundwork Services Ltd, pleaded guilty to offences under the Fraud Act 2006 and Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 following an investigation by the department. Tierney took over £13,000 from ten residents for landscaping work and in most cases never returned to complete it. Tierney received a 9 months suspended jail term and was also ordered to undertake 100 hours of

unpaid work. He was also ordered to pay £12,825 compensation to his victims, £2,695 in prosecution costs and a £156 victim surcharge.

In August 2023, Lyndsey Smith was successfully prosecuted for being in possession of and also selling counterfeit cigarettes and designer clothing which breached the Trade Marks Act 1994 and the tobacco plain packaging legislation. Smith was ordered to complete 200 hours of unpaid work plus 10 rehabilitation activity days. She also had to pay a £2,316 costs and a £114 victim surcharge.

In December 2023, Hartlepool Borough Council issued a product recall for vertical wooden tanning units supplied by Tanarife Solarium Ltd. The recall was due to the units not meeting the requirements of the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 2016. The units were recalled because of their poor build quality, which could pose a risk of electric shock or fire.

Hartlepool has been subject to a range of premises that are intent on supplying illicit tobacco products. In 2023/2024 greater emphasis was placed on Closure Orders made possible by virtue of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. These orders can be applied for at the Magistrates Court and if granted force that problem premises to close for a period of time (typically 3 months) the following premises have been subject to Closure Orders:

- 115 Raby Road
-
- 35-37 Murray Street
-
- 45 Murray Street
-
- 29 Murray Street

Two other premises were subject of closure order proceedings but closed prior to the need to attend court for the Order to be granted.

6.10 Responding to Complaints

111 complaints were received in 2023/24 which is a decrease on previous years. Trading Standards enforcement landscape has dramatically changed in recent years, the team focus their resources on lengthy complex criminal investigations. Previously all consumer enquiries including civil matters would have been recorded on our complaints database, due to service pressures these complaints are now retained on the Citizens Advice Portal and thus the figures are not produced within our service plan.

6.11 Complaints against Our Staff

No complaints were made against our staff during 2023/24.

7. KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT & KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2024/25

1. The Public Protection Service continues to face significant financial pressures due to ongoing Council savings and, as such, the need to prioritise service delivery and maximise effectiveness remains paramount.
2. There are significant changes taking place at a national level as the Government presses forward with regulatory reform. The National Trading Standards Board has been established which identifies national priorities and increases Regional and Sub-Regional co-ordination including the funding of the North Eastern Regional Investigations Team. The Trading Standards & Licensing Manager sits on the management board of this Team which, due to tightening budgets, remains under pressure to reduce costs and contribute towards national projects as and when required.
3. Serious doorstep crime continues to be a major concern and responding to complaints is extremely resource intensive. Due to the significant consumer detriment involved, tackling rogue traders remains the highest of priorities which may mean that responding to other areas of responsibility has to be delayed.
4. The Trading Standards Landscape has changed dramatically over recent years and events such as EU Exit, the COVID-19 Pandemic and the cost of living crisis have altered the Trading Standards working regime:

COVID-19 – The coronavirus pandemic fundamentally altered our lives, including how we interact with one another. Lots of small business struggled during pandemic but also a lot of home based traders flourished. Trading Standards were required to establish a relationship with these new and evolving traders to ensure compliance. Trading Standards services need to get behind small honest traders who want to help build the UK economy and deal with rogue traders who are acting illegally and are undercutting genuine UK businesses.

EU Exit – Trading Standards need to provide support, advice and guidance to businesses through the transition period and as new legislation and opportunities arise. As a service we need to support businesses to diversify and adapt to the new circumstances and legislative framework.

Cost of living - Trading Standards is key to protecting people especially the most vulnerable, during the cost of living crisis when every penny counts and they cannot afford to lose money through fraud or scams. The Cost of Living crisis will likely exacerbate consumer problems in some areas where individuals seek out to find the cheapest products which could be unsafe imports, illicit tobacco, or counterfeits.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE

4 NOVEMBER 2024



Subject: UPDATE - AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
INVESTIGATION – DERELICT LAND AND
BUILDINGS

Report of: Chair of the Neighbourhood Services Committee

Decision Type: Non Key

1. COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITY

Hartlepool will be a place:
- where people are enabled to live healthy, independent and prosperous lives.
- where those who are vulnerable will be safe and protected from harm.
- of resilient and resourceful communities with opportunities for all.
- that has an inclusive and growing economy.
- with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To receive the Audit and Governance Committee's report, following completion of its investigation into Derelict land and Buildings in Hartlepool, and update on the next stage of the process.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The final report (accessed via the following link <https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/downloads/file/9568/derelict-land-and-buildings-investigation>), outlines the overall aim of the scrutiny investigation, terms of reference, methods of investigation and findings. Particular attention is drawn to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations, as outlined on pages 1 – 4 of the report.
- 3.2 The Neighbourhood Services Committee is asked to receive the report, consideration of the recommendations / findings contained within it to be deferred to allow consideration alongside a detailed action plan. The report's recommendations and action plan to be presented, for consideration in full, by the Neighbourhood Services Committee at its meeting on the 27 January 2025.

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 No options submitted for consideration other than the Committee's recommendations.

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS / IMPLICATIONS

RISK IMPLICATIONS	None.
FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	To be outlined in the Action Plan to be produced in response to the recommendations of the investigation
LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS	None.
CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY	None.
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS	None.
STAFF CONSIDERATIONS	None.
ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS	None.
ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS	None.
CONSULTATION	The Committee undertook an extensive consultation and engagement exercise to seek residents' opinions and lived experiences. The consultation was undertaken via a public survey. Details of the consultation process are outlined in the final report (accessed via the link in Section 3.1 of this report).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 That the Neighbourhood Services Committee receive the report for full consideration at its meeting on the 27 January 2025, alongside a detailed action plan in response to each of its recommendations.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To identify opportunities to reduce levels of derelict land and buildings in Hartlepool.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 The following background paper(s) were used in the preparation of this report:
- i) Audit and Governance Committee – Evidence, reports and minutes
 - ii) The final report (accessed via the following link https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/downloads/file/9568/derelict_land_and_buildings_investigation).

9. CONTACT OFFICERS

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