

## **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

**COUNCILLOR JIM SMITH**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING  
DIRECTOR: MARTIN EDEN**

**DATE: 24 MARCH 2022**

### **Illicit Tobacco Prosecution**

Following two trading standards raids which netted approximately £177,000 of illicit tobacco, two men have pleaded guilty at Preston Crown court to offences relating to the possession and supply of that tobacco.

Sarhad Rashid pleaded guilty to one count of possessing over 8000 counterfeit cigarettes for supply at a storage unit in Blackburn in March 2018; he was sentenced to 12 weeks imprisonment, suspended for 12 months. He must also undertake 80 hours unpaid work and 15 activity days under a rehabilitation order, and pay £750 towards costs.

Alan Ahmad pleaded guilty to nine offences relating to illicit tobacco which was found at his shop in Blackburn in November 2018, including fraudulent trading. He was sentenced 12 months imprisonment for each of 7 offences, to run concurrently. He was also sentenced to 3 months imprisonment, again to run concurrently, for two other offences. The imprisonment was suspended for 18 months. He must also undertake 150 hours of unpaid work and rehabilitation activity.

A Proceeds of Crime application relating to Ahmad was made and confiscation proceedings will take place on 24th June 22; costs for him will be decided at this point too.

This outcome is the result of a great piece of partnership work between trading standards, Legal Services, the police and Blackpool Trading Standards (who supplied the financial investigator). Crown court cases involve a huge amount of work for the investigating officer and Legal Services, and this outcome has made that worthwhile.

### **Driver Training**

Each year the service trains 2 of its refuse and recycling collection operatives to become qualified LGV drivers, however due to the national problems associated with LGV driver availability, the service has moved quickly to ensure that we are not compromised with service delivery. Within the last 9 months the service has sent 4 staff through their LGV training, with 2 more staff being identified for the training.

It is a credit to the Council that its refuse and recycling services have continued during the pandemic and also during the current lack of LGV drivers, with Blackburn with Darwen delivering services when other councils have had to suspend services due to a lack of staff.

The problem of driver availability is also affecting the street cleansing service, as the vehicles used also require drivers to hold at least a category C1 on their licence. The street cleansing service has struggled to recruit to its vacant posts. However, with the agreement of the Trade Unions, the environment service has developed a career grade approach to attract interest from applicants from both within and outside of the council, who have a normal car licence (category B) and will arrange for suitable applicants to be put through category C1 or category C training.

### **Additional Investment**

Following the Finance Council approval for additional investment in Environmental Services, the service is recruiting to the newly established posts, with a view to having staff available as soon as possible from the beginning of April in a number of posts, ranging from litter clearance, parks, environmental education, tackling ash dieback and mechanical sweeping. The Saturday caged collection service will commence from April with each Ward being visited by three caged vehicles, on at least 2 occasions in the year, to collect waste presented by residents.

The Council will also be establishing a shrub team to tackle overgrown shrubs on Council land, plus also the removal of any litter in the shrub beds. This team will be operational from the beginning of April.

### **Waste and Recycling**

One of the main environmental campaigns in 2022/23 will involve colleagues from Environment and from Communications and Engagement highlighting the significant impact of food waste. The team is developing a communications campaign around food waste minimisation and donating what we do not need to use, to community organisations such as Food Banks. UK households waste 6.5 million tonnes of food waste every year, 4.5 million of which is edible. National research shows that a family of four can save just over £60 per month by reducing their food waste.

The Council undertook a waste analysis across Blackburn with Darwen in October 2021, the analysis showed that 44% of the waste in the burgundy bins was food waste, of which half was still edible and in date.

Food waste is a problem for the environment, it affects climate change and reducing it would save households a substantial amount of money. Food takes a lot of energy to grow and cultivate, plus, when placed in bins, it ultimately uses energy to dispose of it.