

British Healthcare Trades Association

Audit May 2017

Background Information

The British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA) can trace its history to 1917 when it was established to support mobility aids for the war-wounded. It comprises several product service sections, which operate under a joint Association. All members are required to comply with the BHTA code for their consumer transactions, but many members also have direct contracts with local authorities and the National Health Service. BHTA market penetration varies depending upon the sector. BHTA members dealing in prosthetics, for instance, account for nearly all of the market, whereas those dealing with stair lifts probably for over half of the market.

Audit Process

The desktop audit was carried out by a trading standards practitioner from the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI).

The audit focused on the following areas:

1. Outstanding actions/observations from last audit.
2. Any planned changes to the code or to the operation of the code?
3. Member application process including checks carried out on prospective businesses
4. Member auditing - content and process (including general compliance with the code, staff training and dealing with consumer complaints)
5. Sanctions for non complaint member businesses
6. Any disciplinary cases in previous year
7. Consumer complaints process (including ADR)
8. Customer satisfaction, information/complaints from enforcement agencies, and how this information is used to develop and improve the code.

Audit Summary

The pre-audit questionnaire was comprehensively completed by BHTA and all evidence was supplied as requested. A number of questions were posed to the key contact during the desk-top audit and were answered promptly.

Recommendations from last audit

BHTA carry out extensive checks on all companies that apply to become members of the BHTA. It is recommended that all these checks are recorded and preserved.

BHTA report that they have added checks of ASA rulings and potential member Company's websites to the New Member Checklist and that these checks are recorded and preserved. The new member's applications provided for the audit confirmed this.

Member Application Process

The auditor was provided with examples of two new member applications as requested.

The member applications for both companies were examined. All applications are thoroughly considered, with an initial screening check and a more thorough check for those applicants that progress to formally submit their application. The applicant is required to complete a detailed assessment and audit. The membership application process is comprehensive and well structured.

The two applicants represented applications from Mobility North London, a high street store for mobility aids and Mobility Vehicle Hire Ltd who specialise in specialist vehicle rental.

The auditor noted the membership enquiry form and the application process. The application process specifically highlighted the deposit protection approach being adopted by the applicant (which varied depending upon the type of business and their operating method). Mobility North London indicated on their application form that they do not take deposits from their customers, but the Ts & Cs on their website indicate otherwise. If this is the case then deposit protection measure should be put in place by the company to comply with the BHTA code.

Similarly with Mobility Vehicle Hire Ltd, their website FAQs indicate that a deposit is required from the customer. In addition the application form for this business says that less than 5% of their business activity is selling to members of the public. However their website and Facebook page seem to be aimed at members of the public.

Recommendation:-

BHTA carry out extensive checks on all companies that apply to become members of the BHTA. It is recommended that the above issues are investigated and resolved as required.

Existing Member Inspections/Audit

BHTA currently has 476 member companies plus the National Federation of Shopmobility UK which incorporates 121 shop mobility schemes. BHTA has recently added the 121 Shopmobility Schemes to its audit schedule.

BHTA aims to visit one third of member businesses which sell to consumers, Shopmobility schemes are included in the schedule of visits that BHTA have recently commenced. The Shopmobility schemes are almost all charities relying on donations so they do not “sell” to consumers, but as the BHTA principles around behaviour etc apply they will be included in the audit schedule.

For on-site audits BHTA notify businesses that the auditor will be in touch to make an appointment. The audit takes 1 to 2 hours onsite. In 2016 69 on-site audits took place, the remainder of the required yearly audits are self-declaration paper audits. Earlier in 2016 one of BHTA’s experienced auditors took retirement so the numbers of audits were lower than planned. BHTA are in the process of replacing the auditor. BHTA hope, in due course, to achieve the target number of audits on-site.

Observation:

Once the new auditor has been recruited BHTA’s monitoring programme will be back on target. This will be reported at the next CTSI Audit (Spring 2018).

BHTA supplied completed audit sheets for members as requested. The audit reports were reviewed and the audits were found to be comprehensive and well recorded. They follow a set procedure with additional comments by the auditor as appropriate. There are a number of outstanding issues on the audit reports that do not have a date for resolution and no details of follow-up have been supplied.

Recommendation:

Where there are issues raised during an audit, the member should be given a target date for resolution which is followed up by BHTA in due course.

The BHTA five yearly paper-check of manufacturers was due in 2016. To ensure the team is not overwhelmed with paperwork BHTA is processing the work in batches. The response is slow. Currently there are minor concerns in relation to the contract used by members in relation to the handling of warranty claims, product recalls etc.

Recommendation:

The BHTA five yearly paper-check of manufacturers is completed in time for the next CTSI Audit (Spring 2017) and the results reviewed and discussed.

Information and Training for Code Members

BHTA is in the process (currently with the designer) of introducing a new advice sheet called “The Legal Stuff” for new members and their employees. This sheet summarises the main points members need to understand. BHTA regularly hold information sessions within their Section meetings that cover the Code. A session about the Code features in the BHTA Healthcare & Assistive Technology Awareness course.

BHTA is developing some interview style video snippets for members who struggle to get to meetings to watch covering aspects of the Code.

Membership Termination/Withdrawal and Sanctions for Non Compliant Member Businesses

Non-compliant members face a range of sanctions including suspension of membership, closer scrutiny or expulsion.

There have been no members subject to disciplinary proceedings since the last audit.

In the last year 61 members have left the BHTA. The exit documents for three of those members have been examined and their websites checked. No unauthorised use of the BHTA logo was noted.

Consumer Complaints Process

BHTA provides arbitration via Lord Martin Thomas of Gresford OBE QC, who is not currently a certified ADR provider.

The use of a registered ADR scheme will become compulsory for Code Sponsors from July 2018. The current provider of ADR, Lord Thomas, previously confirmed he is willing to apply for registration to continue to provide the arbitration for BHTA. This will be updated in the next CTSI audit.

Customer Satisfaction and Feedback

BHTA provides an online route for customer feedback at www.bhta.net <http://www.bhta.net/consumers/your-opinion.html>. This will be moved shortly, as the BHTA website is being gradually migrated to www.bhta.com.

Additionally BHTA member companies provide feedback forms which can be returned to BHTA via a freepost address. The feedback forms also alert members' customers to the option of completion online.

Conclusions

BHTA continue to fulfil their obligations as a code sponsor. Their member monitoring programme has slowed this year due to the loss of an auditor. Once a replacement auditor is appointed the member monitoring can recommence.