



Surrey County Council Local Committee

Trading Standards Service Report

8th February 2008

KEY ISSUE:

The service provided by Trading Standards in Runnymede and the challenges and issues faced by the service.

SUMMARY:

Community Safety is the essence of this work. Following the Business Delivery Review undertaken by Surrey County Council, Trading Standards has emerged with approximately a 15% reduction in staff numbers. This has inevitably forced some changes in service delivery.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

To note the initiatives being taken by the Trading Standards Service.

THIS REPORT IS FOR INFORMATION.

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1. FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE OUTBREAK

- 1.1 Trading Standards was heavily involved with the outbreak in Surrey in summer 2007. Its key roles and responsibilities on confirmation of a notifiable disease outbreak were to:
- Activate the local authority's Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) plan.
 - Open the emergency control centre.
 - Provide local authority personnel at gold, silver and bronze command as required.
 - Provide dedicated helpline numbers for Surrey farmers and local residents.
 - Cascade information to neighbouring local authorities.
 - Close rights of way within the Protection Zone (with permission).
 - Erect and maintain road signs on the edge of the surveillance zone and protection zone on highways.
 - Provide current information from inspection database and local knowledge in relation to livestock keepers to the Government Ministry (DEFRA).
 - Hand delivery of information packs to livestock keepers in the protection and surveillance zones.
- 1.2 Trading Standards also assisted Defra with measures to contain the disease and prevent further spread, including:
- Enforcing the protection and surveillance zones with police assistance.
 - Enforcing the rights of way closures.
 - Providing rapid response to, and investigation of individual reports of contraventions of movement restrictions and rights of way closures.
 - Identifying livestock keepers, linked premises and possible dangerous contacts.
 - Providing additional support at culls as required.
- 1.3 Communication was vital to the operation, and included:
- Dealing with national and local media requests.
 - Cascading information to neighbouring councils and key partner organisations.
 - Ensuring all local farmers and residents were kept informed through press releases, website and letters.
- 1.4 The County Council contributed to local community leadership through:
- Elected members,
 - Support for the local communities affected on numerous levels,
 - Dealing with local sensitivities and key issues as a priority.
 - Support for farming community and related industries.
- 1.5 Trading Standards also co-ordinated the local authority response by:
- Activation of local plan and local authority emergency response.
 - Establishment of lead authority.

- Establishing key roles and responsibilities for each department.
 - Cascade of information.
 - Specialist advice to local authority departments and partners e.g. bio-security
 - Mutual aid from neighbouring authorities.
 - Support from Districts and Parish Councils.
 - Provision of adequate personnel.
 - Elected member briefings.
- 1.6 As the disease outbreak was brought under control and is being eradicated the next phase involves:
- Investigation of criminal offences and prosecution of offenders.
 - Advice to farmers and local residents.
 - Lifting of rights of way closures.
 - Support to the farming community to 'get back to normal'.
 - Increased surveillance of high risk activities
- 1.7 During the FMD outbreak Surrey County Council, neighbouring local authorities and key partners achieved the following:
- Provided a 24-hour service to DEFRA and the public during the initial stages of the outbreak.
 - Manned 6 additional FMD dedicated phone lines 7 days a week, with a 24 out of hour's emergency service.
 - Dealt with over 500 additional enquiries in the initial stages of the outbreak.
 - Trading standards were represented at NDCC by LACORS.
 - Shut over 300 rights of way. This equates to 250 km of rights of way.
 - Hand delivered 2250 packs to livestock keepers in the protection and surveillance zones.
 - 250 staff working on FMD related tasks 7 days a week including all 60 Surrey trading standards staff.
 - Mutual aid from 12 other local authorities.
 - Co-ordinating and liaising with 20 outside agencies and key stakeholders.
 - Provided 500 hours of rapid response on the ground enforcement and surveillance by animal health specialist staff accompanied by uniformed police officers and patrol cars.

Service Impact

- 1.8 The impact on the service of the FMD work was significant. All business plan targets were reduced by 25% except for those targets affecting Comprehensive Performance Assessment targets.

Liaison with Districts and Boroughs

- 1.9 Borough Council and other stakeholder liaison across the County was excellent. During the second phase involving the Runnymede area, there

was a definite shift in DEFRA's approach to the outbreak. Borough Councils were very helpful in delivering information packs to all farmers.

The Challenges

- 1.10 Within the more rural community the public were willing to avoid footpaths in the Protection zone, but in more urban areas this was definitely not the case. Around the tourist areas of the Magna Carta and the J F Kennedy memorials there were multiple transgressions of closed footpaths. Joint patrols with the police, and co-operation from National Trust wardens in the second phase helped this situation. Liaison with schools helped to reduce transgressions on footpaths which would normally provide a safe route to school for young people.

There remain some difficulties with infected land - in Runnymede there are seven infected premises. DEFRA has conveyed a message that all FMD restrictions have been lifted, but infected premises remain closed and may remain so for up to a year (because the disease can exist in the soil for that length of time) and there are ongoing problems in getting this message across locally. This is despite issuing press releases and signage on every affected footpath. Trading Standards is considering prosecution of one individual for repetitive breaches, and has issued seven cautions and advice to numerous others.

Lessons learnt

- 1.11 Surrey's Trading Standards service has submitted evidence to the Anderson Inquiry which is looking at the outbreak. The main issues highlighted were:
- Poor databases of premises.
 - No single database for all authorities to use
 - Licensing of movements (horses, carcasses, meat products, manure, fodder) was far too complicated
 - Legislation was overly complicated to deal with in an emergency situation.
 - Footpaths could not be closed unless the local authority was given permission to do so by the Secretary of State. This was cumbersome and Central Government should trust local authorities to act in an emergency, in protection and surveillance zones.
 - Road signage - there is a need to review provision of road signs, as the public certainly did not understand the implications.
 - Dogs not under control made the legislation difficult to enforce.
 - Economic consequences locally have been very significant, but the only compensation for farmers relates to livestock that have been culled. This issue needs serious review – particularly in the light of the other recent disease outbreaks;
 - Communications were poor especially at first, although Trading Standards had a presence in the Local Disease Control Centre (LDCC). With no facilities to access Surrey County Council databases at the LDCC, information was obtained mainly from BBC News 24. Changes were made without reference to the implications for the local authority

- Local communications should be improved as getting information out was extremely difficult, despite using the SCC website, information at libraries, through Borough Councils, through the media, and posters/notices, public awareness remained insufficient. A general meeting in Elstead village hall engaged some of the community but was an isolated example.

At the end of the outbreak DEFRA reduced funding for Surrey Trading Standards by 12%!

2. Recognition

- 2.1 Surrey Trading Standards Service is widely recognised as being an excellent Trading Standards service and is looked to as a national leader both from within and outside of the profession.
- Municipal Journal awards short listed 2007
 - Daily Mirror Hero of the Year 2006
 - Trading Standards Institute Brindley Medal short listed 2005
 - Team of the Year short listed Surrey County Council 2007
 - TSI media awards on three occasions in last 4 years
 - Consumer television programme – Scam Squad (2007)
 - Press team of the year (2005)
 - Campaign of the year (2004)

3. Consumer Direct

- 3.1 Since the last report to the Local Committee, Consumer Direct South East has continued to support the service and now deals with all first tier advice to Surrey consumers.

4. Under Age Sales

- 4.1 Trading Standards contributed 2 full time staff to the 4 Surrey Together Teams last year. The Team has been extremely proactive in reducing antisocial behavior of young people. In 06/07 we carried out 220 undercover test purchases within the County, to reveal whether shopkeepers were illegally selling alcohol to young people. The results were that 39 shops (17.75%) were found to sell to youngsters. For Runnymede the sale rate was 1 out of 18 visited (5%). This year to date the sales rate is running at approx 15% for the County and 16% for Runnymede. We applied to the local BC for a licence review after one premises made 2 sales of alcohol. The result was that its alcohol licence was suspended for 2 weeks.

5 Door Step Crime

- 5.1 The Rapid Action Team tackles the scourge of rogue traders who operate by cold calling on elderly and vulnerable residents. The Team meets the threat posed by these traders by confronting them and disrupting how they work. In Runnymede, the Team was called on 9 times in 2006/7 to assist local residents in respect of transactions totaling £16,000. Countywide, the team provided immediate responses and support for residents in their own

home on 100 occasions (47 physical interventions and 53 verbal interventions), saving them approx £190,486.

6. Buy With Confidence: Trader Approval Scheme

- 6.1 Following the public launch of the *Buy with Confidence* approved trader scheme, membership is continuing to rise steadily and there has been increasing demand from local business and residents. There are currently 20 businesses from Runnymede in the scheme.

7. Enforcement activity

- 7.1 There have been some excellent enforcement successes;
- Out of 258 investigations initiated in 06/07, 10 were in Runnymede. One of these was a successful prosecution of a doorstep rogue who was fined £700 and made to pay £1000 costs.
 - Surrey still hosts the regional “Scambuster” team, which has just received notification that it will be extended for another 3 years.
 - The Service has also provided proactive educational work, which has helped reinforce the message that residents should not buy at the door. 6 performances of “Trickster” the educational musical were held around the county in partnership with Surrey Police. The one in Runnymede was held in Englefield Green.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 All of the above has been achieved in the challenging climate of post Business Delivery Review and the continuing budget pressures.