

Trading Standards – who are we and what do we do

About the Trading Standards Service

Trading Standards has responsibility for dealing with unsafe or unfair trading practices and applying regulations in relation to quality, quantity, safety, description and price. We also enforce regulations covering the composition, labelling and advertising of food and ensuring animal health and welfare on farms, minimising the risk of spread of animal disease.

We support and educate reputable businesses, providing information and advice on consumer and regulatory issues.

We tackle rogue traders and deceptive business practices, protecting all Surrey residents, particularly the most vulnerable from doorstep deception, scams and other illegal practices. We have a dedicated Vulnerable Persons Officer, Linda Crowley (formerly Cobbett)

Current Major Projects and Initiatives:

Business Advice and Support:

Surrey Trading Standards operates a business advice line 5 days a week for businesses based in Surrey. We offer free initial advice on consumer protection legislation and free signposting to other sources of information, including trader advice leaflets.

We also promote the Better Regulation Delivery Office (BRDO) Primary Authority Partnership (PAP) scheme to businesses, which offers them the choice of more protection from inconsistent advice or even prosecution by other Authorities from around the country. We have signed up 39 businesses including many household names such as Shell, British Gas and Robert Dyas, with another 15 in active negotiation.

We also support local businesses with other support such as an approved trader scheme

Doorstep Crime/Rogue Trading:

We operate a Rapid Action Team made up of dedicated officers who respond to calls for help from consumers and other organisations by offering advice and attending the scene of alleged doorstep crime. Surrey Police are always in attendance as part of partnership arrangements. Our work featured on an ITV 1 TV show (Hunting the Doorstep Conmen) in July last year and showed the challenges of confronting doorstep traders and the executing of warrants at addresses where suspects were arrested for rogue trading incidents concerning fraudulent building work and money laundering.

Between 1st November 2013 and 31st October 2014 we assisted 297 residents who have been cold called at their doors. In October we assisted a resident of Reigate and Banstead who had paid £270,000 to suspected rogue traders.

No Cold Calling Sticker Scheme:

Surrey County Council Trading Standards were one of the first authorities in the country to develop a no cold callers sticker scheme. We work closely with Surrey Police and other agencies to help reduce incidents of distraction burglary and rogue trading. Our sticker initiative is designed to empower residents, giving them the confidence to deal with cold calling traders. "Stop Cold Calling" leaflets with "Superstickers" for display on front doors and porches have been distributed to over 150,000 properties in Surrey.

Scam Hub project:

The Trading Standards Service is taking part in a major project nationally, known as the "Scam Hub". Working closely with the Metropolitan Police we are dealing with a list of over 700 scam victims who live in Surrey. As part of the project, the service is making contact with all of these people who have been identified as receiving "scam" mail and we are offering support to those identified to be at risk of financial abuse.

Of the 235 who had responded to scam mailings and who we have contacted, we have written to 27 in Reigate and Banstead. In the last couple of months we have also received further priority referrals and in October we visited 1 person in Reigate and Banstead and returned a cheque to them which had been intercepted by the Police and the National Scams Team. Those scammed ranged in age from 55 to 94.

We have also devised a scam pack which comprises of stickers for cheque books and the telephone to remind residents not to part with money or information if it could be a scam.

Social media

Trading Standards issue regular information about our service on facebook, twitter and through TS@lerts.

@surreyts has 2284 followers on twitter. We have 405 'likes' on Facebook. Earlier in the year an @surreyts tweet about flooding repairs reached over 75,000 users and we have now sent out 6393 tweets.

TS @lert is our weekly email news bulletin that contains information on rogue traders, frauds, scams, product recalls. The latest bulletins can be found at <http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/latest-news-for-business-and-consumers>. Evaluation of the TS @lert service showed that our initial mailing to approx 3000 people in Surrey is then disseminated to many thousands of residents. To sign up to TS @lert please contact trading_standards@surreycc.gov.uk.

Animal Health:

Animal health legislation exists to protect both human, through the food chain, and animal health. This prevents the introduction of serious diseases such as Foot and Mouth and includes requirements for maintaining records and ensuring livestock are identified. Measures also exist to protect the welfare of livestock, whether on farms, in transit or at abattoirs.

Petroleum and Explosives:

Trading Standards have responsibility for the licensing and registration of all petrol stations and many of the explosive stores to reduce the risk of both fire and explosion. In Surrey there are 191 petrol stations, 190 firework retailers and 34 larger explosive stores (November 2013). Recently, we have also been working closely with the Environment Agency to monitor and advise retail petrol stations at risk of flooding.

Age restricted products such as alcohol and cigarettes

Premises are targeted for advice visits on the basis of intelligence and risk assessment. We aim to work closely with local businesses providing advice and support to assist them to comply with their legal responsibilities in relation to age restricted products. In addition, intelligence led test purchasing is carried out in partnership with Surrey Police in accordance with the Code of Practice for Regulatory Delivery for Age Restricted Products. We have recently conducted an operation with a sniffer dog to detect illicit tobacco being sold and intend to repeat this exercise.

Food Standards:

Surrey Trading Standards is responsible for enforcing food standards e.g. the labelling and quality of food, to ensure consumers are not misled. We carry out this function in partnership with our colleagues in Environmental Health who are responsible for food hygiene and safety. As well as giving advice and dealing with enquires and complaints we also visit food businesses to ensure they are trading fairly.

Working with the Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT):

The national IMLT has been set up to tackle loan sharks who lend money without the appropriate license.. Loan Sharks rarely, if ever, give any paperwork and if payments are missed they often use intimidation and violence to get money from their 'clients'. We work in partnership with the IMLT including taking part in targeted campaigns, publicity and training with other groups and organisations to make them more aware of loan sharks and money lending.

The IMLT collated evidence that using loan sharks is cyclical in families and are currently educating children about the dangers of loan sharks by providing them with better money management skills via the provision of teacher guidance and classroom resources for children and young people aged 5 – 19. The take-up of these packs in Surrey schools has been very high.

Together with local partners, the IMLT has completed Education and awareness activities in a number of including Reigate and Banstead.

Further Information: www.surreycc.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/trading-standards

Investigating trading standards complaints

Every year the service receives thousands of complaints and enquiries. Unfortunately, we can't investigate every complaint but we do prioritise the most serious cases and use all the others to help us to plan our intervention and prevention work.

Need help with a consumer issue?

Our partner organisation, Citizens Advice Consumer Service, is now the first point of contact for all consumer complaints and enquiries. They provide free advice and assistance and can be contacted on 03454 040506 or through the website: www.adviceguide.org.uk. As well as providing advice Citizens Advice Consumer Service also provide information and intelligence to us. The complaints that this service receives from them are reviewed regularly in order to identify repeated patterns of behaviour by businesses operating in Surrey.

A business that needs help or advice?

For more information, see our website (using the link shown above) or contact the Business Advice Line: **Tel:** 01372 371737 **Email:** business.advice@surreycc.gov.uk

District and Borough Liaison Officer for Reigate and Banstead, David Bullen, Tel. 01372371743

For other matters or further information please contact

Steve Ruddy , Community Protection Manager

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