



WOKING JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE: 9 MARCH 2016

LEAD OFFICER: PHILIPPA HATLEY
SENIOR TRADING STANDARDS OFFICER

SUBJECT: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND SURREY TRADING STANDARDS
WORK IN WOKING – 2014/2015

AREA: ALL WOKING DIVISIONS

SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

A report to provide an update on Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards work affecting the borough of Woking for the period 2014/2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Woking Joint Committee is asked to note:

- (i) The content of the report and provide feedback to help us enhance our understanding of, and response to local needs and issues.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

This report is for information only and does not contain any recommendation for decision.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

1.1 Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Joint Service:

Following eighteen months of preparation and planning, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards merged to form a new joint service on 1 April 2015. Both Buckinghamshire County Council and Surrey County Council have a similar political, strategic and operational ethos, and whilst a common boundary is not shared, there are many similarities between the two counties in terms of respective population profiles and the mix and profile of businesses. As such, both counties were ideal candidates for a Trading Standards joint service.

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As a joint service we will:

- provide a better quality service to consumers, businesses and our partners,
- build on the strengths and successes of the current teams,
- provide additional expertise and capacity to create a stronger, more resilient service,
- have greater impact and influence locally, regionally and nationally,
- reduce our delivery costs, offering better value for money, and
- be more innovative in developing new services and protecting residents.

The central challenge for the year ahead (2015-2016) will be to enhance the services provided for residents and businesses, maximising the benefits from the creation of the new joint Trading Standards service. This will bring together the skills, experience and innovation of the existing services in Surrey and Buckinghamshire to create a stronger more effective service, whilst reducing the cost to residents. A growing challenge is also to work with others to tackle organised cross border consumer crime, rogue traders, scams, and the growth of internet crime. In doing so we need to ensure we protect the most vulnerable in our communities who are often deliberately targeted and exploited.

Trading Standards have 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 also tackle rogue traders and deceptive business practices, protecting all Surrey and Buckinghamshire residents particularly the most vulnerable, from anti social behaviour, doorstep deception, scams and other illegal practices.

Our Trading Standards service exists to:

- protect individuals, communities and businesses from harm and financial loss,
- help business to thrive by maintaining a fair trading environment,
- improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities, and
- fulfil the council's statutory responsibilities to deliver consumer and public protection services.

2. ANALYSIS:

2.1 **Business Advice:**

Business advice and education is a vital part of Buckinghamshire & Surrey Trading Standards service. Our Trading Standards Officers provide advice to businesses to ensure that a business is fair, competitive and legal. We operate a dedicated business advice line which is open five days a week and we offer free initial advice for the first half hour.

Our services are available through a flexible modular approach enabling businesses to choose the elements they need to achieve the right level of support. For example, we provide:

- start-up advice for new businesses,

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- face to face meetings to talk businesses through consumer protection legislation, statutory defences for criminal law, etc,
- provide information on changes to legislation,
- free signposting to other essential sources of information, including trader advice leaflets,
- detailed advice about printed and online marketing materials including labels to ensure businesses aren't misleading customers and breaking the law,
- compliance assessments to identify potential areas for improvement or ways to strengthen a business's procedures, and
- advice and information relating to animal health matters which remains free of charge.

During the last year we dealt with 1915 enquires from businesses based in Surrey, of which 79 were from businesses in the borough of Woking seeking advice on such things as product labelling, complaints from businesses about business scams and a business asking for advice on the Consumer Rights Act 2015.

We also promote the Better Regulation Delivery Office Primary Authority scheme to businesses which offers them tailored advice and helps to ensure that they comply with the law. Primary Authority allows businesses to be involved in their own regulation. It enables them to form a statutory partnership with one local authority, which then provides robust and reliable advice for other councils to take into account when carrying out inspections or addressing non-compliance.

We currently have 72 Primary Authority Partnerships in place with Esso, Colgate-Palmolive, MRH Retail, Dairy Crest, EA Games, Coca Cola Enterprises Ltd, Shell, Krispy Kreme, Robert Dyas and Waitrose Limited to name a few. Out of our 72 Primary Authority Partnerships, 3 are currently within the borough of Woking, these are KFC, Innovate Services Limited and Goodnesse Limited.

Recent talks carried out in the borough of Woking include talks in October 2015 at the H.G. Wells Conference and Events Centre on the Primary Authority scheme for Surrey Chambers of Commerce, and a talk to letting agents which was carried out in partnership with Woking Borough Council's Housing Team.

2.2 Checktrade/Trading Standards Approved Trader Scheme:

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards have joined forces with Checktrade to ensure residents can easily find reputable traders in their area. Locally branded for each local authority, the Checktrade/Trading Standards Approved, Buckinghamshire and Surrey partnerships include a large number of local businesses, meaning residents have a wide choice of reliable traders.

To become a Checktrade/Trading Standards Approved trader and to obtain our new 'double' accreditation, businesses must meet set standards and pass rigorous background checks.

When a consumer chooses a trader that has the County Council "Trading Standards Approved" logo they know that they will get a reputable, credible trader that has not only been vetted by Checktrade, but has also been approved by Trading Standards to ensure that they operate in a legal, honest and fair way. Surrey has 2360 Checktrade/Trading Standards Approved members, of which 191 members are in the borough of Woking.



2.3 **Reported Criminal Complaints/Investigations:**

During the last year we have received 2146 criminal complaints concerning businesses in Surrey. Of these, 190 related to businesses based in the borough of Woking.

Details of our latest court actions against rogue traders, the selling of counterfeit goods and other unlawful trading practices in Buckinghamshire and Surrey can be found on our website by visiting: <http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/trading-standards/news-from-trading-standards/prosecutions-and-other-court-actions>

2.4 **Doorstep Crime/Rogue Trading:**

One of the areas that we are active in is in relation to doorstep crime. We are committed to protecting residents from being taken advantage of by rogue traders and also from feeling pressured on their doorsteps to make decisions that they would not otherwise make.

We have a Rapid Action Team made up of dedicated officers who respond to calls for help from consumers by attending the scene of doorstep crime incidents. We work closely with Surrey Police and other agencies to help reduce incidents of distraction burglary and rogue trading in Surrey. We normally ask Surrey Police to attend with us in order to avoid a breach of the peace and to carry out arrests if necessary. Our Rapid Action Team are on duty Monday to Friday from 9am until 5pm, and can offer residents a range of support from providing information and assistance, to intervening, disrupting activities and taking enforcement action against doorstep callers.

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards have recorded 15 interventions in the last twelve months regarding doorstep conmen in the borough of Woking out of a total of 244 interventions across the county of Surrey. Of the 15 interventions, the majority of complaints related to paving, tarmac and gardening work. Also of note was 1 complaint relating to a bogus Trading Standards Officer incident whereby over £6000 was attempted to be claimed from a Woking resident.

An example of our work in protecting residents from rogue traders can also be demonstrated by our participation in a week long national multi-agency operation which took place the week commencing 28 September 2015. During this week we worked closely with Surrey Police in the borough of Woking to help reduce incidents of distraction burglary and rogue trading by carrying out activities such as conducting checks on business vehicles in the borough in order to protect residents from the threat of rogue traders.

2.5 **Stop Cold Calling Sticker Initiative:**

We were one of the first authorities in the country to develop a no cold calling sticker scheme which is designed to empower residents giving them the confidence to deal with cold calling traders.

Cold calling doorstep traders who target the elderly and vulnerable cause most concern, offering services like roofing, block paving, guttering, painting and gardening maintenance. There are of course plenty of reputable traders offering a range of services but they can still be a nuisance if they cold call against residents wishes.

Our Stop Cold Calling packs are distributed to residents in the borough of Woking in a wide variety of ways. For example, packs are distributed during events such as at the

'Empowering older adults in local emergencies' event which took place in Woking in September 2015; via our partners such as Adult Social Care teams and via Surrey Police; packs are also located at various locations including the Woking Neighbourhood Advice Centre, the Mascot Hub, Woking Police Station and Woking Library to name a few. Our Rapid Action Team officers also provide the Stop Cold Calling packs to residents who have been targeted by rogue traders, and we also supply the packs to any residents who would like one.

2.6 **Eat Out Eat Well (EOEW):**

The 'Eat Out Eat Well' (EOEW) Award has been developed to reward caterers throughout Surrey and Buckinghamshire who make it easier for their customers to make healthy choices when eating out. It has three levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold, and is symbolised by an apple logo in the shape of a heart.

Surrey Trading Standards work in partnership with Woking Environmental Health to identify possible Eat Out Eat Well members, carry out assessments, and to help develop and publicise the scheme.

There are currently 231 active members of the healthy eating scheme in Surrey with 7 of these based in Woking. Members include:

New Haweli Restaurant - Old Woking Road, West Byfleet, KT14 6NU

Award: Gold

LinkAble Cafe -The Link, Board School Road, Woking, GU21 5HE

Award: Gold

Beacon Cafe - Christ Church, Town Square, Woking, GU21 6YG

Award: Silver

Bridge Barn Beefeater - Bridge Barn Lane, Woking, GU21 6NL

Award: Silver

The Grill Stop – Bentham Avenue, Woking, GU21 5LF

Award: Gold

Surrey County Council Staff Restaurant - Quadrant Court, GU22 7QQ

Award: Gold

Lexington Catering – Sabmiller - Church Street West, Woking, GU21 6HS

Award: Gold

Three nutrition training courses for EOEW members to help them achieve Gold Award have been carried out over the last year, with all members including those from the borough of Woking being invited to attend.

2.7 **Food Standards:**

Surrey Trading Standards is responsible for enforcing food standards, for example the labelling and quality of food, to ensure consumers are not misled.

We carry out this function in partnership with our colleagues at Woking Borough Council 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.

Of particular note, The Food Information Regulations 2014 came into force in December 2014 enabling the enforcement of the EU Regulations 1169/2011 Food Information for Consumers. One of the key changes brought in by these regulations is the requirement

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for all food businesses, including caterers and those selling food loose, to provide information on 14 allergens specified in legislation. The food business operator must have procedures in place to identify allergens present and provide this information to consumers upon request. It must be clearly stated for consumers that allergen information is available, and the food business operator must be able to supply this.

Trading Standards held allergen training workshops during 2014 for caterers to provide advice on the new requirements, to explain the options for how compliance with the legislation could be achieved and to identify why the regulations are so important, which with regards to allergens is ultimately about saving lives. The workshops were held in partnership with Environmental Health Officers and whilst no workshops were held in the borough of Woking, the nearest workshops were held in Guildford, Elmbridge and Reigate and businesses from all boroughs could attend.

Caterers have also been advised of these requirements during our food standards inspections, through social media campaigns and a mail shot.

We are also working on a project aimed at allergens in catering businesses. We are using intelligence to target either premises where we have received information of non compliance with the legislation or new premises who may not be aware of the requirements. Work is being carried out with these businesses to assist them to comply with the requirements, follow up visits are being carried out to ensure that the business has implemented the required changes and follow up sampling checks that the business is providing the information to consumers as required. We received specific intelligence concerning one business in the borough of Woking with regards to our allergen project, and have visited and followed up on the intelligence with the business accordingly.

Since the beginning of last year 7 businesses in the borough of Woking have been specifically advised about the new allergens requirements, and a further 5 businesses have been advised regarding the wider requirements of the Food Information Regulations 2014.

2.8 **Animal Health:**

Animal health legislation exists to protect both human, through the food chain, and animal health. This prevents the introduction of serious, notifiable 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.

During the last year we have received 32 complaints concerning businesses based in Surrey. Of these complaints, 3 related to businesses based in the borough of Woking and all concerned the welfare of cattle and sheep.

2.9 **Social Media:**

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

TS @lerts is a weekly email news bulletin that contains information and alerts about rogue traders, frauds, the latest scams, prosecutions taken, product safety recalls, new legislation and much more.

Recent TS @lerts have included information for consumers and businesses about the changes the Consumer Rights Act 2015 has brought in and the results of testing carried out on Halloween costumes for flammability requirements. Other examples of alerts specific to the borough of Woking have included warnings to Woking residents to be on their guard following distraction style offences at the start of the August Bank Holiday weekend during which vulnerable adults were targeted by a man claiming to be an NHS carer or staff member.

For the latest bulletins and to subscribe to TS @lerts visit:
<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/trading-standards>

2.10 **Scams Hub Project:**

Trading Standards is committed to helping residents protect themselves from scams. Scam mail and scam telephone calls can be cleverly worded to make people believe that the correspondence or caller is genuine. Elderly and vulnerable people are particularly likely to receive scam mail and scam telephone calls trying to get them to part with their money or hand over their bank details. Unfortunately only a very small number of scams are reported and billions of pounds are lost each year by victims of scam mail and scam telephone calls.

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service are signed up to a protocol with the National Trading Standards Scams Team (NTSST) in order to raise awareness of scams within the counties and to visit those found to be most vulnerable to them. We receive priority referrals which result from intelligence gathered by the NTSST and in some cases scam mail has been intercepted which contains money and cheques. When visiting victims of scams, not only can we provide support to those identified as being at risk of financial abuse from scams, as part of our role we also provide advice, information, assistance, and return any cheques or money which has been sent to the scammers which has been intercepted.

A total of 106 of possible scam victims within Surrey have been identified since January this year. Of these, 16 are based in the borough of Woking, of which 6 have been visited to date and 10 are due contact from us shortly.

In appropriate cases we can also arrange for call blockers to be installed in homes where residents have been scammed out of large amounts of money and have been upset by a large volume of scam phone calls.

2.11 **Scams Sticker Packs:**

As part of our work in helping residents protect themselves from scams, we have produced a newly updated Scams Sticker Pack that seeks to raise awareness of scam mail, scam emails and telephone calls to assist in dissuading those who might fall prey to scammers from being targeted. Inside the Scams Sticker Pack are stickers for cheque books, telephone handsets and now also computers, all of which remind residents to think twice, to ask advice, and to hang up on telephone callers asking for money or bank details.

2.12 **Vulnerable Consumer Interventions:**

During the last year we have carried out 152 vulnerable consumer interventions (excluding our scams hub project interventions), of these, 15 interventions relate to residents in the borough of Woking with a total of £6250 being saved for residents.

2.13 **Underage Sales:**

Historically the focus of trading standards work was on test purchasing and enforcement, however since early 2013 we have increased the number of advice visits carried out at retail premises.

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. Over the last year we have only received 1 complaint about underage sales in the borough of Woking, and have carried out 10 advice visits to premises in Woking.

As a Responsible Authority under the Licensing Act 2003 we received and considered 18 licence applications for premises in the borough of Woking. For 10 of those applications the businesses were given advice regarding prevention of underage sales and/or we took action to have conditions related to preventing underage sales imposed on their licences.

2.14 **Petroleum:**

During the last year we have received 178 complaints/enquiries concerning petroleum related issues in Surrey. Of these 19 related to businesses based in the borough of Woking. 7 of the 19 were enquiries relating to verification and approval for refurbishment work, and then of the complaints received, the majority related to misleading pricing/short measures, and a few concerned spillages/leaks and a complaint concerning possible contaminated fuel.

3. OPTIONS:

3.1 This report is for information only.

4. CONSULTATIONS:

4.1 This report is for information only.

5. FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT:

6.1 This report is for information only.

7. LOCALISM:

7.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Joint Committee on our work taking place in Woking.

8. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS:

8.1 There are no equalities and diversity implications in this report.

9. OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Crime and Disorder	The main areas that impact on community safety are age restricted sales and tackling doorstep crime and deception. We protect local residents in a range of ways and help to reduce the fear of crime.
Sustainability (including Climate Change and Carbon Emissions)	No significant implications arising from this report
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	No significant implications arising from this report
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	We have a dedicated vulnerable person's officer based in Surrey who works in partnership with the Adult Social Care Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.
Public Health	The main areas that impact on public health are age restricted sales, tackling doorstep crime and deception and promotion of the 'Eat Out Eat Well' healthy eating scheme. An officer also represents our joint service at Smoke Free Surrey and we carry out initiatives to tackle the supply of illicit tobacco.
Human Resource/Training and Development	No significant implications arising from this report

10. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

10.1 The Joint Committee is asked to note the report for information.

11. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

11.1 This report is for information only.

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Consulted:

Officers of Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards only

Annexes:

None

Sources/background papers:

None

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