

**SPELTHORNE BOROUGH COUNCIL AND
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**



SPELTHORNE JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE: 20 MARCH 2017

LEAD OFFICER: DAVID BULLEN

**SUBJECT: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE & SURREY TRADING STANDARDS
WORK IN SPELTHORNE**

AREA(S) AFFECTED: ALL

SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

A report to provide an update on the work of Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service, particularly within Spelthorne in 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Spelthorne Joint Committee is asked to note that Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service:

- (i) Reacts to any local issues specifically drawn to Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards in respect of Spelthorne consumer issues.
- (ii) Responds to any Trading Standards and consumer issues highlighted by intelligence gathering and reporting. This routinely includes the Spelthorne local area in any project and routine undertakings including test purchasing and sampling as appropriate.
- (iii) Responds to business enquiries and bespoke/chargeable requests from businesses based in Spelthorne focusing on Small/Medium Enterprises (SME) and national businesses. Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards actively promotes membership to the Better Regulation Delivery Office Primary Authority Partnership scheme.
- (iv) The following is for information. Please note the report content which is for information and not recommendation.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

1.1 Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards - an update on the Joint Service

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.

Since the formation of the joint service in April 2015 the service has continued to perform well and deliver excellent results against key performance indicators. The service is achieving all the savings projected in the business case and is exceeding income generation targets for the year.

The service has six key performance indicators and these are:

- Increase the financial savings for residents as a result of our interventions and investigations.
- Protect residents by stopping rogue traders operating in Buckinghamshire and Surrey
- Prevent residents becoming victims through expanding the use and reach of social media alerts, TSAAlerts, volunteers and other preventative initiatives to raise awareness of scams, rogue traders and unsafe products
- To increase the number of Primary Authority Partnerships
- Increase membership of trade approval schemes.
- Work with partners to tackle illegal sales of age restricted products; to explore new ways to reduce harm from the use and consumption of unsafe products; and to tackle poor food quality and nutrition

1.2 Trading Standards Approved Trader Schemes

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service is continuing to work with Checkatrade to ensure residents can easily find reputable traders in their area. We have over 2300 Checkatrade/Trading Standards Approved members, of which 157 members are in Spelthorne. Businesses are removed from the scheme where intelligence suggests that they are not suitable to receive our approval.

To become a Checkatrade/Trading Standards Approved trader and to obtain our new 'double' accreditation, businesses must meet set standards and pass rigorous background checks. The minimum standards we set will be maintained for any future partnerships we may enter into with any other trade approval scheme operators.

We have been exploring options for developing similar partnerships with other trade approval schemes and have just launched a similar option for Trustmark scheme members. TrustMark is the only government endorsed accreditation



scheme listing traders who work in and around the home. Working in partnership with Trading Standards will add local assurance to this national recognition.

1.3 **Volunteering Scheme**

Trading Standards aims to create an environment of "Confident Consumers and Trusted Traders" through advice and enforcement. Our volunteers will be an integral part of this purpose; increasing the consumer knowledge and confidence of residents and helping us to improve customers' experience of using businesses in Buckinghamshire and Surrey.

We offer our volunteers an exciting and enjoyable experience, a chance to do something completely different with new people from a variety of backgrounds. It also gives volunteers an opportunity of learning new skills and gaining practical work experience; most importantly, volunteers will have the satisfaction of being able to make a real difference in their local communities.

Volunteers enable Trading Standards to do more. For example, one Volunteer has visited more than 300 food businesses to provide guidance leaflets about allergen labelling and see what information is already given to the public by each business about this issue. Our volunteer Product Safety Market Surveyors look in their local shops for items that might not comply with safety requirements and we also have Volunteers who are available to give talks within their communities about Trading Standards issues.

Details of our current Volunteering opportunities are available at <https://do-it.org/organisations/surrey-trading-standards-vams>

1.4 **Work on scams and protecting the vulnerable**

Protecting the vulnerable and tackling scams continues to be a key priority for our service. We are continuing to work closely with the National Trading Standards Scams Team (NTSST) and we receive details from them of potential scam victims based in Surrey who we will go and visit to provide advice and support. So far this financial year we have contacted about 400 scam victims whose details were sent to us via the NTSST and they have all been sent a scams pack. We estimate that we have saved over £300,000 this financial year through our interventions and by stopping people responding to scam mail.

We have visited several Scam victims in the Spelthorne area in the last few months. One lady, Mrs W, who is a widow in her late 70s/early 80s, initially denied that she was responding to mail. After a further visit due to signs that would indicate she was responding heavily and sending lots of money, Mrs W called the officer back and admitted that she had been responding and was sending at least £100 per month. She asked for some more help and following a positive intervention is now no longer responding to scam mail.

On 25th January 2017 we ran a Scams Conference at Epsom Downs Race Course, aimed at existing and potential partner organisations that can have a role to play in reducing the impact of scams. This was run in conjunction with the NTSST. This event was very well attended and attendees included a number of officers from Spelthorne Borough Council.

Trading Standards and Adult Services are concerned about the effect that telephone operated scams and nuisance calls have on local residents. To reduce these problems we are fitting devices on vulnerable residents' landline telephones to stop them receiving scam and nuisance telephone calls.

We are loaning these truecall care devices to selected residents free of charge. Units installed are being funded by money we have recovered from criminals using the Proceeds of Crime Act.

On average, 45% of the calls made to participants are nuisance calls. This initiative, as a whole, has now blocked over 30,000 scam and nuisance calls.

Residents have said:

"I feel safer now knowing that the call is unlikely to be a nuisance call." MB

"The new apparatus is absolutely marvellous. I have had no nuisance calls since it was installed." MB

"Since having the truecall device I feel much safer answering the phone." EQ

"Really pleased. Has eliminated so much aggravation. Anyone not on my list who gets through seems to have a genuine reason for wanting to speak to me." PB

"Since the Truecall device has been installed we have not had a single nuisance/cold call. We are now so much more relaxed when answering the phone. The device has blocked all nuisance calls and it is simple to add trusted callers. Excellent device. Hopefully we will be able to keep it." PB

Information about the Truecall devices and advice for residents is available at <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/trading-standards/finding-the-right-trader/rogue-traders-scams-and-cold-callers/phone-fraud-and-nuisance-callers>.

We can provide posters, flyers and a pull up banner to promote the True Call scheme and would be grateful if members of the committee could promote it within their communities.

1.5 **Responding to Modern Day Slavery**

As a service we can, on occasions, come into contact with individuals who may be being trafficked or exploited for labour. We have seen this, particularly, with doorstep crime incidents where labourers may be subject to exploitation. Where we have concerns that an individual might be being trafficked and/or may be in servitude or slavery the local authority has a duty to notify the Home Office under the Modern Slavery Act.

We are often asked to assist Surrey Police in operations tackling alleged perpetrators.

1.6 **Social media**

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards issue regular information about our service on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, 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. We currently have just over 2700 subscribers to TS@lerts; however, the actual number of recipients is far higher as it links with the National Trading Standards Scams Team and cybersafe surrey, neighbourhood watch and local police beats. It also gets posted on social media. Residents and businesses can subscribe to the news bulletin via <http://scc.newsweaver.co.uk/trading-standards>.

We currently have over 3600 twitter followers and one recent tweet reached 3690 people. We have 749 'likes' on our Facebook page and popular posts reach over 2000 people, the most popular being in May that reached approximately 10,000 + people. We have over 500 connections on LinkedIn with colleagues, partners and businesses. We also have a separate Primary Authority group set up on LinkedIn.

The service started using Instagram last year and to date we have posted 118 times and have 105 followers.

1.7 **Eat Out Eat Well**

The Eat Out Eat Well Award has been developed to reward caterers 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. The level of award is based on a scoring system that takes into account the type of food on offer, cooking methods, and how the meals are promoted to customers. This scheme benefits both caterers, by promoting their businesses, and consumers, by helping them make healthier choices when eating out.

The Eat Out Eat Well award is assessed and managed by Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service and the local Environmental Health Service.

Last year we were highly commended in the Regulatory Delivery Primary Authority Awards 2016 for helping to support 33 branches of Sports and Leisure Management Ltd T/A Everyone Active leisure centres to achieve Gold assessments in the Eat Out Eat Well healthy eating award. The judges described it as “An innovative example of Primary Authority improving public health enabling consumers to make healthy eating choices”.

There are currently 8 Eat Out Eat Well members in Spelthorne out of 204 in Surrey. Members include:

- Spelthorne Leisure Centre, Staines Upon Thames
- The Thames Club and Spa, Staines Upon Thames
- Hare and Hounds, Sunbury on Thames

1.8 **Business Advice Service**

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service has extensive experience of advising a variety of businesses from small family companies to international blue-chip corporations. Our Trading Standards Officers provide advice to businesses to ensure they operate in a fair, competitive and legal manner.

Our chargeable business advice service continues to be successful. There are 53 businesses in Spelthorne that have registered with us for business advice out of 933 throughout Surrey. We also continue to promote the Better Regulation Delivery Office Primary Authority Partnership scheme to businesses, which offers them the choice of more protection from inconsistent advice or even prosecution by other Authorities from around the country.

In Spelthorne two businesses have entered into a Primary Authority Partnership with us: Easy Mobility Ltd (Powered wheelchair supplier) based in Ashford and Cherry Active (Specialist food supplier) based in Hanworth. Within Buckinghamshire and Surrey there are a total of 88 Primary Authority Partnerships. We tailor each partnership to the needs of the business and we can be required to provide a wide range of advice and support. Last year we provided support to some of our primary authority businesses to work more effectively with OFCOM and the ASA.

1.9 **Reported Complaints**

There were 714 complaints reported to Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service by Spelthorne residents between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2016 and during the same period 375 complaints were made about businesses based within Spelthorne.

Unfortunately we cannot respond to every complaint so we prioritise the most serious cases and use others to plan our preventative work. We look at a range of factors to help us determine which complaints should be investigated. Our investigations criteria is published on our website: <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/trading-standards/trading-standards-policies-and-plans/trading-standards-investigations-criteria>

Details of our latest court action against traders using unlawful trading practices in Buckinghamshire and Surrey can be found on our website: <http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/business-and-consumers/trading-standards/news-from-trading-standards/prosecutions-and-other-court-actions>

1.10 **Doorstep Crime/Rogue Trading**

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. 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 Service have received 21 doorstep crime complaints from Spelthorne residents between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2016. One of these complaints came out of a talk given to the Spelthorne Older People's Forum about doorstep crime. The elderly resident spoke to an officer after the talk to say she thought she may have paid too much for work at her house. This lady had paid around £48,000 for work to her property and had, allegedly, been driven to a number of cash points by the traders to withdraw cash. This matter is now being investigated by us.

In October last year two individuals who had been living in Stanwell were found guilty of Fraud and Money Laundering offences following a doorstep crime investigation by this service and an investigation by Hertfordshire Police. One male was sentenced to four years imprisonment and the other was sentenced to 8 months imprisonment suspended for two years together with unpaid community work and a curfew. Two other males living outside Spelthorne were also investigated and one was sentenced to 21 months imprisonment and the other was cleared of the charge against him.

1.11 **Food Quality Standards**

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service 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 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.

Trading Standards and representatives of each of the 11 District and Borough Environmental Health Services meet quarterly to discuss issues of joint interest and to ensure consistency of approach. Included in this are areas such as Eat Out Eat Well, Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and Primary Authority. Public Health England and the Food Standards Agency are also represented on the Group.

Matters which arise on a day to day basis requiring joint working or where we hope to assist each other are dealt with by officers making direct contact. We also worked with Environmental Health Officers across the County to develop and deliver an allergens training package to businesses and Environmental Health Officers.

We are currently undertaking an allergens project focusing on caterers and are sampling food from caterers to ensure they are providing accurate allergen information and that the food sampled is free of the requested allergen. This project is focused on all areas of the county, including Spelthorne. We recently received an allergens complaint relating to a Spelthorne based business and this is being followed up.

1.12 **Animal Health**

Our Animal Health and Welfare Officers enforce legislation that protects both the health and welfare of livestock and human health, through the food chain. We support farms and farm related business, recognising the vital role that farming

www.surreycc.gov.uk/spelthorne

plays in the economic prosperity and protection of the rural environment in the county.

A core part of our work continues to be monitoring for compliance with legislation that seeks to prevent and contain serious livestock diseases such as Foot and Mouth. We have recently been proactive in publicising Defra guidance, in particular regarding avian influenza.

We work closely with Emergency Planning in the development and maintenance of contingency plans that prescribe the action to be taken in the event of a suspected or confirmed livestock disease. We aim to minimise the effect and consequences of livestock disease, which can have a devastating impact on the county if not dealt with promptly and effectively.

We recognise that the treatment of animals and their health and welfare is seen as a matter of considerable public interest and the public expect high standards of animal husbandry. We monitor compliance with regulations regarding livestock identification and record keeping, including traceability of animal feed and veterinary medicine. Compliance is required of all livestock keepers from the owner of 'pets' to those who run large, multi-national farming businesses.

Trading Standards continues to enforce the Rabies Act to ensure that all dogs have a rabies vaccination prior to entering the UK recorded in an approved 'Pet Passport'. We respond promptly to notifications of illegal entries of puppies to the UK and if necessary arrange for the quarantine of the puppy.

In Spelthorne we have a record of 20 livestock keepers, some of whom may just have a few pigs, sheep or goats as 'pets'. There are areas within Spelthorne that are used for grazing by larger cattle and sheep keepers.

In the last 12 months we have only received one complaint in Spelthorne regarding concerns over welfare of pigs. The complaint was followed up by Trading Standards and it was ascertained that there were no welfare concerns. In November last year we ran a free session for livestock owners on complying with animal health legislation.

1.13 **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. 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.

Between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2016 we received seven complaints about alleged underage sales within Spelthorne and we carried out four compliance/enforcement visits.

1.14 **Preventing the sale and consumption of illicit tobacco**

Operation Henry 2 is a national operation funded by the Department of Health and coordinated by the Trading Standards South East Regional Tasking Group. The operation is aimed at disrupting the storage, supply and retailing of counterfeit or illicit tobacco products from retail premises.

As a result of this operation the director of one Spelthorne based off-license appeared at court to answer 5 charges relating to the supply of illegal tobacco. In total 600 counterfeit Benson and Hedges cigarettes and 26 pouches of duty evaded tobacco were seized. All of the tobacco products were found without the required statutory health warnings. The director was fined £200 for each of the four counts of breaching the tobacco labelling requirements and £300 in relation to the trade mark breaches for the counterfeit Benson and Hedges cigarettes. He was ordered to pay the victim surcharge of £30 plus the prosecution costs of £1,171 giving a total of £2,301. The court also ordered forfeiture and destruction of the tobacco products.

Two further premises were visited in Spelthorne with no problems found.

1.15 **Fireworks**

Any business storing or selling fireworks is required to hold a fireworks license. The licenses are issued by Trading Standards. In Spelthorne in the lead up to November last year 12 businesses renewed their fireworks licenses. Spelthorne has one business licensed to sell fireworks all year round.

1.16 **Petroleum**

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards is responsible for ensuring that sites that store petrol for dispensing are storing it in accordance with legislation designed to prevent a risk of fire and explosion. There were no issues requiring our involvement in Spelthorne last year.

1.17 **Ensuring the safety of goods entering the EU**

The EU Regulation on Accreditation and Market Surveillance (commonly referred to as RAMS) came into force in 2008. This has introduced a duty on Member States to check the safety of products as they enter the EU from third countries. Consignments of goods arriving at ports of entry are processed through Enhanced Remote Transit Sheds (ERTS). Heathrow airport has a number of ERTS located near it and a number of these are within Spelthorne. As part of a regional project supported by the National Trading Standards Board we regularly receive notifications about potentially unsafe consignments of goods in the ERTS and we will inspect the consignments to ascertain if they are safe before Customs release them.

Since we began these checks various products identified as posing a risk to public safety have been prevented from entering the UK marketplace. Last year we intercepted and seized 2,500Kg of powdered tobacco product in the form of oral snuff. We secured a court order for the forfeiture and destruction of the product.

1.18 **Investment in staff**

All relevant staff are now members of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute and are registered for their Continued Personal & Professional Development (CPPD) scheme. Eligible staff are also supported to achieve Chartered Trading Standards Practitioner status. This helps us to ensure the continued competence of staff and enables us to demonstrate this competence to businesses, consumers and other key stake holders. All staff are required to complete a minimum number of hours of training each year to receive their CPPD certification.

1.19 **Local Liaison and joint working**

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service regularly liaise with the Spelthorne Police Teams and we work in partnership with them.

Last year we delivered a talk to the Older People's Forum in Spelthorne and we are doing so again in March this year.

In recent months we have been working with the Fire Service to implement partnership working. We are assisting them in the production of community packs to be provided to vulnerable residents. The Fire Service is now actively looking to identify potential scam victims and they will notify us of any concerns. We also now give out the Fire Service "Safe and Well" cards when we visit victims of scams and doorstep crime.

One of our officers works closely with Adult Social Care, attending local safeguarding adult groups and we are represented on the Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board.

2. ANALYSIS:

2.1 This report is for information only.

3. OPTIONS:

3.1 This report is for information only.

4. CONSULTATIONS:

4.1 This report is for information only.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 This report is for information only.

6. WIDER IMPLICATIONS:

6.1 This report is for information only.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

8. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

8.1 This report is for information only.

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Consulted:

Officers of Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service.

Annexes:

None

Background papers:

None

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