

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL
TRADING STANDARDS JOINT COMMITTEE**

DATE: 18 MAY 2023

**LEAD OFFICER: STEVE RUDDY
HEAD OF TRADING STANDARDS**

SUBJECT: TRADING STANDARDS COMMUNICATIONS

1.0 SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

- 1.1 Trading Standards holds a variety of information and expertise which could help or reassure residents and businesses – for example knowledge of what goods are unsafe and are being recalled, knowledge of the latest scams circulating, or knowledge of where doorstep crimes are being committed. We share this information through a range of different channels to engage the residents for whom it would be most relevant. Having an ongoing programme of engagement with residents and businesses enables us to share more information with more people in support of our service priorities
- 1.2 This report outlines the different channels and methods used to communicate our work and advice for residents and businesses, as well as giving examples of the Services communications.
- 1.3 Improved communication reach and impact, together with the impact on consumer awareness and education, will support corporate objectives to enhance prevention work and hence better protect residents from harm

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Trading Standards Joint Committee:
- 2.1.1 notes the Service's work to communicate its' activity.
- 2.1.2 considers ways in which the reach and impact of the Service could be extended further

3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 3.1 It is important that the Joint Committee understands how we communicate so that: the Committee knows where to look if they are seeking information; the Committee can sign in to receiving communications in their preferred way;



and so that, as community leaders, the committee can let local residents know how to get useful information.

4.0 **DETAILS:**

- 4.1 Trading Standards holds a variety of information and expertise which could help or reassure residents and businesses – for example knowledge of what goods are unsafe and are being recalled, knowledge of the latest scams circulating, or knowledge of where doorstep crimes are being committed. We share this information through a range of different channels to engage the residents for whom it would be most relevant. Having an ongoing programme of engagement with residents and businesses enables us to share more information with more people in support of our service priorities.
- 4.2 As the principal consumer protection agency, Trading Standards are able to provide advice and guidance to residents and businesses on how to deal with issues generally or more importantly how to prevent incidents occurring in the first place.
- 4.3 Following investigations and convictions we publicise outcomes to serve as a warning to others who may be considering committing the same crimes; to reassure residents that criminals are getting justice; as a way to highlight how communities can help by looking out for each other; and how to report similar incidents.
- 4.4 Some messages are very general and some are targeted at a very small audience (at times down to an individual level).
- 4.5 Communications are integral to our prevention work, increasing community resilience, protecting our local economy and demonstrating to the criminal fraternity that crime does not pay within Buckinghamshire and Surrey.
- 4.6 Working closely with the Communications teams of both Buckinghamshire Council and Surrey County Council, press releases are issued when relevant and appropriate. Examples include outcomes of court cases, warnings and advice on identified emerging trends.
- 4.7 In addition to looking at quarterly data, periodically we more deeply review the effectiveness of the different channels we are using, to establish how well engaged with they are and by whom so that we know where to target our resources and what channels to use for different audiences. On the last occasion this was done it caused us to make some changes in our approach, including in relation to information for businesses so that we now have a separate newsletter dedicated to them.
- 4.8 A particular challenge facing the Service on communication is keeping pace appropriately with technology/apps. For example, for a while we posted on Instagram because this has a generally younger audience. However, we did

not gain sufficient traction with the type of things we were posting about (relative to the other things posted on that platform) to generate enough engagement for it being worthwhile continuing to put resource into this platform. We are however able to put messages out via the corporate accounts for things like Instagram and TikTok if they would be particularly suited to those channels.

- 4.9 Press Releases:** As well as being distributed to local media press releases are also posted on both Council's websites. Depending on the topic they may be picked up by local outlets (both printed press and social media accounts) or by regional or national media, including radio and TV. Some recent examples of stories in the media are in the links below:

[Trading standards investigation leads to prosecution of fraudulent roofing operation | Surrey News \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

[Surrey fraudster jailed for eight years after fleecing thousands of pounds from elderly victims - Surrey Live \(getsurrey.co.uk\)](#)

[Aylesbury shopkeepers who hid stash of cigarettes in wall are fined | Bucks Free Press](#)

[Trading Standards cracks down on illegal tobacco sales in Buckinghamshire | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

[Trading Standards cracks down on illegal tobacco sales in Buckinghamshire - Bucks Radio](#)

<https://www.bucksfreepress.co.uk/news/23384731.fraudsters-jailed-aylesbury-conning-elderly-people/>

<https://www.bucksherald.co.uk/news/crime/men-jailed-after-aylesbury-court-hears-how-they-conned-the-elderly-in-fraudulent-home-improvement-scheme-4063919>

- 4.9.1 Press releases often result in requests for in person interviews to explore a topic in greater depth, these include local and national broadcast media as well as online webinars. Our media profile also means we occasionally receive requests to participate in television programmes such as BBC Fake Britain, Watchdog and Rip-Off Britain.

- 4.10 TS Alert!** is a fortnightly electronic newsletter with a wide range of pertinent information sent to anyone who signs up to receive it. Information ranges from the latest product/food recalls and scam alerts to updates on consumer issues and fun articles: [TS Alert \(new\) - TS Alert 28th April \(newsweaver.co.uk\)](#)



- 4.10.1 Currently there are 1,244 direct recipients every fortnight, but our reach extends far broader with many of these individuals disseminating within their wider communities. For example, through Neighbourhood Watch, Housing Associations and Thames Valley Police Alerts.

4.11 Business Bites: [Business Bites](#) is also a fortnightly electronic newsletter but is aimed specifically at business, with 72 subscribers, and contains information that is particularly relevant to them.

4.12 Sector Specific Newsletters: As the enforcement authority for animal health and welfare legislation we work alongside the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) to ensure that keepers understand and follow the rules to maintain high standards of animal welfare, the human food chain is protected, prevent livestock disease and to protect the rural economy for the benefit of everyone.

4.12.1 As part of this work the Service sends members of our farming community an animal health newsletter once or twice a year containing guidance, advice, topics of interest as well as signposting to other agencies and charities e.g., The Farming Community Network (FCN). FCN is a voluntary organisation and charity there to help farmers, livestock keepers and their families with either personal or business issues.

[Animal health newsletter - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](http://surreycc.gov.uk)

4.13 Facebook: Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards currently has 2,056 followers on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/BucksSurreyTS> however our total reach in 22-23 was over 573,000 with an average engagement rate (i.e. the proportion of posts where a reader interacted by liking, commenting or sharing a post) across the 2022 calendar year of 3.34% (well above the 1-2% considered good for local government services).



4.13.1 We also have a private Facebook group as a safe space for our Scam Champions to discuss issues, share experiences and plan future events. This group is highly engaged with and valued by the users.

4.14 Twitter: Twitter is another social media platform utilised by Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards. The Service currently has 4,189 followers to our own account, however with retweets our reach is a lot higher, a recent tweet offering a free webinar on Scams Awareness and Saving Safely was seen by over 4,000 people (see screen shot below). Both Council's also put Trading Standards information out through their general Council accounts (see example below) and retweet particularly pertinent messages. For real time updates and alerts on scams and frauds we recommend following our pages: https://twitter.com/Bucks_Surreyts/





4.15 Neighbourhood Alerts: Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards is a member of the Neighbourhood Alert system, an online, secure community messaging system. It is used by various agencies such as Police, Fire, Neighbourhood Watch etc to communicate directly with individuals and groups in specific geographic areas. In turn these messages are disseminated by individual Neighbourhood Watch coordinators throughout their local communities.

4.15.1 The Service uses this valuable tool to send alerts of doorstep crime incidents, scams, and other imminent threats. Although we can communicate with anyone within the network, anywhere within the UK, we currently have core of 2,246 active subscribers.

4.15.2 We also supplement this alert system through 'dynamic tasking'. As well as issuing alerts members of our Prevention team will contact directly any vulnerable individual we are aware of within the locality of the incident.

4.16 Campaigns. The Service regularly participates in or runs campaigns. Examples include National Consumer Week, firework safety, Halloween costume safety ([Scare safely this Halloween! - YouTube](#)) and Rogue Trader Week. This year a campaign is being considered around young adults starting in their own home for example first time students or care leavers. The campaign would focus on how to approach tasks such as finding insurance without being scammed.


4.17 Webinars/eLearning: The Service runs, on average, two webinars each month. They are usually based around the Friends Against Scams initiative (operated by the National Trading Standards Scams Team) which aims to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams through empowerment. Attendees learn how to protect themselves and their loved ones from scams and help raise awareness throughout their own community. However, the Friends Against Scam sessions are sometimes combined with partner training on a linked subject. For example, having guest speakers from either of the Police Services or Fire and Rescue Service. The next webinar on the 4th May will be a Scam and Cyber Crime Awareness session alongside Thames Valley Police and will have a live British Sign Language interpreter and subtitles, linking it in with National Deaf Awareness Week and to extend our accessibility to the deaf community. With help from partners to raise awareness of the sessions, to both Councils' staff and residents, there are currently over 180 people signed up for it and the session will also be recorded for future use.



Be Scam & Cyber Aware

Advice from Trading Standards & Thames Valley Police, on keeping you & your information safe.

With BSL & live subtitles



4.17.1 For those Friends Against Scams who want to do more, we also provide SCAMchampion training. A SCAMchampion hosts their own awareness sessions to recruit Friends and drive Friends Against Scams forward in their communities or workplace. We currently have 167 registered SCAMchampions.



Join our webinar to become a SCAMchampion



4.17.2 The online courses can be booked through our Eventbrite page here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/buckinghamshire-and-surrey-trading-standards-32720403671>

4.18 Face to Face / Events: The Service is aware that social media and electronic communications are not suited to everyone. The Service (often through our network of Volunteers including our trained Friends Against Scams / ScamChampions) regularly attends events to talk to residents or businesses face to face. Examples of events attended in the last year include: Surrey Pride, Bucks County Show, and The Association of Convenience Stores Heart of the Community Conference. Examples of regular events include library drop-in sessions, which are sometimes linked to community banking at libraries, Police training and a scheme in Surrey called Brewing Friendships.

4.18.1 The Brewing Friendships initiative aims to support people who have been identified by Adult Social Care as socially isolated. Over six weekly sessions a group are brought together in a social environment to cover topics such as IT Support, Scam Awareness, Art & Crafts, Falls Prevention & Low Impact Exercises, Nutritional Advice and Mental Health and Wellbeing. A key partner are local churches such as The Kings Church in Ewell who provide a venue, refreshments and a friendly face.

4.18.2 These sessions have received positive feedback including that the participants have benefited from the information, experience and knowledge they have received. As a direct result the participants have become demonstrably more resilient.

4.19 Partnership working and communications: The Service works closely with a range of other Council Services, such as libraries, regulatory services, adult social care, communications, community safety and community engagement. In addition we are a partner or linked to a number of multi-agency boards, including the Surrey Anti-Slavery Partnership, Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board, Thames Valley Multi Agency Approach to Fraud, Safer Buckinghamshire Board, Surrey Serious Organised Crime Board etc. These relationships enable relevant communications messages to be spread through our partners channels as well as our own.

4.20 Recently an article about scams and call blockers was featured in the Surrey Matters newsletter. The newsletter itself was opened by 84,000 residents across Surrey, with the specific article being clicked on nearly 3,000 times in the first 4 days since publication. As a direct consequence the Service received a very significant increase in applications for call blockers (80 in those few days) that we are now responding to.



5.0 CONSULTATION:

- 5.1 No external consultation has taken place. However the communications teams in both Councils are closely involved in this work.

6.0 RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 All significant risks affecting the service (which could at times relate to communications or could require communication) are regularly considered by the management team (two monthly for red and amber risks, 6 monthly for green risks).
- 6.2 Where risks become higher, these are shared with the Trading Standards Board for awareness and discussion.

7.0 FINANCIAL & VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no particular financial implications because there are no significant changes suggested in this paper. Should this report prompt discussions about a different approach to communications the financial impact of that can then be considered.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Service is aware of the need to be fair in what we communicate in terms of naming individuals or businesses prior to any conviction. The Service would take advice if considering communicating about a sensitive matter.

9.0 EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY

- 9.1 The Service is aware that different channels of communication suit people differently. We seek to use this appropriately to target relevant messages on an appropriate channel for the audience to whom the message is relevant. The Service aims to undertake a range of communication to reach people for whom the message is relevant. The paper includes examples of intentionally taking a different approach to communications in order to reach people who might not be able to access some of our routes.

10.0 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

- 10.1 The Service is currently working with SCC Communications Team to develop a Communications Strategy for the Service and the BC Communications Team will be consulted as this develops. It is likely that this will generate

further ideas about how our communications approach could be used in the future to improve engagement with residents and businesses.

REPORT DETAILS

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Consulted:

Annexes: None

Sources/background papers: None

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