

Community Protection Group - February update

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service

Making Surrey Safer – Our Plan 2020-2023

April is fast approaching and this is when the changes set out in the Making Surrey Safer plan will start to take effect. We are working with Brunel University to develop a robust assurance process and are confident that communities will soon begin to see and feel the benefits of our new approach.

SFRS have also received a letter from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to advise that there will be a full inspection of the service week commencing 29th June 2020. Preparations for the inspection are well underway. This has been long expected and is part of the second round of inspections for all English Fire Authorities.

Fire Brigades Union Industrial Action

Members of the FBU are currently taking forward Action Short of a Strike (ASOS), which commenced on the 24 December 2019. Regular meetings are being held with representatives from the FBU and every effort is being made to resolve the issues raised. We have been communicating both internally and externally to ensure that all stakeholders are aware that this action will not impact service delivery and the community will continue to be safe.

Wholetime firefighter recruitment campaign

Interviews will take place during March and April. To ensure that we are continually improving and we attract, select and retain the best candidates, a thorough and realistic review of our approach to recruitment took place ahead of this round of recruitment, which was informed by the outputs of the HMICFRS inspection.

We have seen an increase in women and black, Asian and minority ethnic applicants, but there is still a lot of work to do create a diverse workforce that is reflective of our communities. This is one of our top priorities. We continue to recruit On-Call firefighters and the

SFRS/Trading Standards Joint Workshop

The benefits of bringing together the services within the new Community Protection Group are beginning to materialise. Trading Standards and the Community Resilience team within SFRS held a workshop to find out how the two services could work together to keep people safe. Outputs from the workshop were:

- A commitment to the sharing of data, resources and expertise, including the expansion of Safe and Well Visits to include scam avoidance and call blocker, advice. And for scam victim support visits to include identifying fire risks
- The coordinated development of the Primary Authority Scheme, using Trading Standards expertise.
- Sharing intelligence and data to better inform and target our interventions.

- The development of joint visits to businesses and the creation of a Centre of Excellence for Investigations and Enforcement Best Practice providing resilience for Fire and Trading Standards investigations. Sharing our pools of volunteers to enhance our reach and impact with vulnerable residents.

Armed Forces Team

Surrey continues to be a national exemplar for the way we are supporting our Armed Forces community. Last month we held a joint briefing with the Army for all district and borough council Armed Forces Champions and lead officers. This focussed on joint working as well as forthcoming events including VE Day on 8 May and Cadet Inspections across the county.

Countywide priorities include:

- Raising the attainment of our Service children, which is currently lower than both the county and national average
- Working with the Army Training Centre in Pirbright and Guildford Borough Council to run a national pilot to increase the number of soldiers registering to vote
- Developing the network of Veteran Hubs across the county. One of the leading Veteran hubs is run out of Guildford Fire Station, this will provide a blueprint for other Fire Stations to follow.

On the back of the positive work at Guildford Fire Station, links have been made with the NHS England 'Transition Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS)' for serving and ex-armed forces personnel who may have mental health issues. From 10 February 2020 TILS will be running assessments and treatment out of Guildford Fire Station.

Surrey Armed Forces Covenant Conference is being held at the Army Training Centre in Pirbright on 4 March with the focus this year on working with Defence. A number of Surrey businesses will be attending, along with the Lord-Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Surrey Mayors, Ministry of Defence, as well as the Army, the Royal Navy and RAF, both regular and reserve. 150 delegates are expected.

Forces Connect South East (FCSE) is a Surrey led cross border project to raise awareness of the issues affecting the Armed Forces community among public services. We have been selected as one of three finalist in the national Soldiering On Awards – the winner will be announced on 24 April 2020.

FCSE comprises Hampshire, Kent, East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils, Brighton & Hove and Medway Councils along with the Armed Forces, Service Charities and the NHS. FCSE has delivered training to over 7,200 staff and councillors across the UK and has developed the 'Forces Connect' signposting app available on Apple and Android, which has had 8,200 downloads so far. The project was funded by the Ministry of Defence through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund.

Community Resilience Team

Community resilience messages covering a range of issues including adverse weather, utility outage, public health messages and community action continue to be widely promoted through the monthly #SurreyPrepared communications toolkit. This is shared with the Surrey Communications Group, Parish Councils, Residents Associations, Flood Action Groups and other interested members of the community. In addition, a range of free community resilience training sessions have been held at Surrey Fire Stations with more planned.

To date over 50 people have attended Community First Aid training delivered in partnership with the British Red Cross, with another 40 residents booked to attend forthcoming sessions running out of Oxted and Guildford Fire Stations in February and March.

Work is also ongoing within the Community Protection Group to join up fire safety, flooding and business continuity messages targeting Surrey businesses; as well as planning a community resilience focus for the Surrey County Show jointly with the Fire Service, Emergency Management and Surrey Flood Resilience Teams.

Emergency Management Team

This is a very busy time for the Emergency Management Team. Through the Local Health Resilience Partnership (LHRP) we are supporting the work of the Director of Public Health and coordinating with the Chair of Local Resilience Forum to ensure we are prepared should the current outbreak of coronavirus have an impact in the UK and Surrey. There are currently no reported cases of COVID19 (Coronavirus) in Surrey.

This work includes:

- Highlighting the need for a Business Continuity Management System to ensure services have mitigation in place for the potential impact from staff absence and supply chain failure
- Planning ahead should the UK National Flu Pandemic activation level increase
Supporting information requests and actions from Cabinet Office Briefing Room a (COBRa) and Central Government

The team has also been working with partners for support residents during the recent Storms Ciara and Dennis.

Events

The sporting event season started this month with the Thorpe and Egham half marathon. Following feedback from residents and members we are reviewing the current policy around management of the events and how residents and members are kept informed.

Business Continuity

We are looking to gain accreditation to the International Standard for Business Continuity (ISO 22301:2019). Now the Corporate Level Group to oversee the work required has been established, we will be able to establish the KPIs and actions required to meet the standard. This work will cover one of the duties under the Civil Contingencies Act and measures for the remaining duties; that the Corporate level.

Corporate Health & Safety

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) International Health & Safety Award Submission

Corporate health & safety have completed a submission for the RoSPA International Health & Safety Award. The submission covered several areas including policies, accident data, trends, training and leadership involvement. The result is due in March.

Property & Land

We have been supporting the senior managers of Land & Property with their health & safety arrangements, which has been a huge task. However, after the new structure is in place, and along with a Corporate Landlord model, health and safety matters will be in a much better place.

Waverley Borough Council (WBC)

We reached out to the new health & safety adviser at WBC to offer support, as it was identified that the person is not currently in a competent position and his primary role is Emergency Planning with health & safety bolted on. We've offered to be his 'go to person' in the event of needing advice. We have also offered out internal health and safety for managers course.

Internal Audit

The internal health & safety audit action plan is now almost complete, with actions completed within the timeframe. The only area that has slipped is Property & Land. Internal Audit have been made aware of the slippage, and are putting in a plan of action with the new head of maintenance.

Health & Safety Hub

The health & safety hub continues to work well. We are promoting more joined up working which has involved advisers delivering training, going out on inspections and discussing joint health and safety campaign messages.

Trading Standards

New Trader Approval Scheme

The Trading Standards Service provides a range of trader approval schemes to help protect residents and support local businesses; helping residents find reputable businesses with confidence and to avoid rogue traders. For the last five years one such scheme has been delivered in partnership with Checkatrade. This partnership comes to an end in April, when Checkatrade is ending all of its partnerships with Trading Standards services nationally.

The service has been developing an alternative, which will be in place by April. The new partnership with United Knowledge Ltd, means that residents will continue to benefit from being able to choose a trader that is Trading Standards approved. It will also mean that the service can continue to support reputable local businesses and offer additional advice and assistance on a cost recovery basis. A more detailed briefing on the new scheme is available on request.

The new partnership will:

- Allow us to signpost residents to reputable businesses and to avoid rogue traders.
- Enable advice and information to be provided to local businesses
- Have local Surrey County Council and Trading Standards branding, with robust systems and processes in place, and with website, branding and trade-marks controlled by the service.
- Ensure full costs of operation are covered through fees, with no up-front set up costs for the council.

Underage sales of Knives

Due to ongoing concerns about the rise in knife crime and violence, particularly in connection with young people, the Service has supported both Surrey and Thames Valley Police with “Operation Sceptre” which aims to reduce knife crime. This includes visiting retailers in targeted areas and attempting to test purchase knives with an under-age volunteer.

The latest phase of test purchasing, working with Surrey Police and Police volunteers took place in February 2020. Twelve test purchases were attempted in Camberley and Guildford. In 10 instances the sale was correctly refused but in two cases a sale was made to the 15 year old volunteer.

A targeted programme of further test purchasing will take place across the county during 2020. This will be supplemented by online test purchasing and also a programme of information and advice for retailers on how to comply with the law and also to go further based on best practice for knife storage, display and sales policies and staff training.

In addition we will work with the Police to launch a Responsible Retailers Agreement encouraging businesses to operate a challenge 25 approach and a range of further steps to help restrict access to knives. We are working closely with the communications team to ensure that we enhance awareness and the impact and reach of this work.

EU EXIT and Trading Standards

During the transitional period after the EU Exit, future trading arrangements will be agreed. Until these further arrangements are agreed, some risks especially in relation to confusion among the business community, remain. The latest statements from government make it clear that future regulatory alignment is extremely unlikely. As standards and regulations diverge, businesses will have a growing need for regulatory advice and guidance.

Protecting Vulnerable Residents:

Cowboy builders jailed for a total of 6.5 years following £270,000 fraud case, Cowboy builders have been jailed after causing major damage to the home of an elderly couple in Worcester Park and charging £270,000 for unnecessary repairs.

Thomas William Penfold, Managing Director of P&T Property Services Limited, was convicted of money laundering and fraudulent trading and was jailed for four years, and banned from being a company Director for seven years. His employee Glenn Steel was convicted of fraudulent trading and was jailed for 30 months. The case was brought by Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards, the trial took place at Guildford Crown Court in January and they were sentenced today [24 February].

The couple were aged 89 and 84 at the time of the offence. The husband has since died, and the wife does not want to be identified.

In September 2017 a member of staff calling himself Paul cold called at the couple's home, claiming to be from the company which rendered the front of the house a few years' previously. They said any necessary work was still under guarantee and would be of no cost to the couple.

The trader then realised there was unfinished building work in the house – the couple had recently parted company with a different trader who had been completing a renovation project, including building an extension. The trader offered to complete the work at the same cost. The couple agreed and paid P&T £20,250 for the work.

On their first day of work, P&T demolished the living room wall while the couple were at a hospital appointment and without their knowledge or permission. Penfold claimed it just fell apart while they were removing plaster. In a subsequent interview, the husband described his feelings: ““I was in shock, I just couldn't believe that my wall between the living room and the hall could just crumble.”

Penfold and Paul also said the loft was in poor state and the whole roof would need to be replaced. After initially asking for £300,000, they agreed a price of £270,000 for

the work. The couple felt trapped by the builders and felt they had no choice but to agree. The company had also offered to supply extras 'for free' such as a stair lift, and paving the front and rear gardens. Steel wrote the quotes, contracts and letters from P&T to the couple, officers were not able to identify Paul.

The couple transferred £75,800 to P&T, but their bank suspected it was a fraudulent transaction, froze P&T's bank account and alerted the police. The police then contacted trading standards to investigate, who visited the home the same day – officers described it as a 'building site'. The couple did get this money back, but the original £20,250 had been withdrawn from the company account shortly after it was transferred and couldn't be returned.

P&T tried to thwart the investigation, claiming that the couple wanted trading standards to withdraw as it was 'causing alarm and distress'; and that it would 'have a serious and detrimental effect to the clients, their mental and emotional health along with their life span'. The couple subsequently withdrew their 'misplaced sympathy' for P&T.

Trading standards called in a building surveyor who saw no reason for the demolition of the living room wall, and found that the roof simply needed a few new replacement tiles. He said P&T had caused major structural damage, the actual cost of the works would have been a maximum of £90,000, and it would cost up to £5,000 to put right.

As well as investigating the offence, trading standards helped the couple make their home habitable again. Initially by finding a plumber to restore running water to the first floor, and referring to Surrey County Council's adult social care local handyman scheme meant that trip hazards were removed and a handrail was installed up the stairs. Officers also helped source reputable traders to continue the work.

In their investigations, trading standards discovered the company had also fraudulently taken money from a south London couple. The husband was in an extremely vulnerable state and was undergoing treatment for cancer when P&T cold called in August 2017 offering to clean the front of the house.

The couple were then advised that urgent work was needed to the roof, and were given an initial quote of £18,865. The company subsequently said there was additional works needed as the roof was unsafe and could kill anyone underneath it. They paid a total of £67,615 to P&T for work which was found to be unnecessary and contravened building regulations. The husband has also subsequently died.

Trading standards will now see if they can confiscate Penfold and Steel's assets to compensate the victims.

Denise Turner-Stewart, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience, said: *"Penfold and Steel's treatment of these two vulnerable couples is nothing short of disgusting and their prison sentences are exactly what they deserved. I would like to thank both couples for reliving these hugely distressing events with trading standards officers and in court so we can bring these criminals to justice."*

I would also like to thank our trading standards officers for the long hours and hard work on this investigation, and for their support for both couples. It's vital we bring these cases to court. These people are more than rogue traders, they're organised criminals who are knowingly targeting vulnerable people with the aim of stealing tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds from them. My message to these criminals is we're looking for you, we will find you, and we will work tirelessly to bring you to justice. I urge residents to never employ a cold caller, and to look out for vulnerable family, friends and neighbours if you know these traders are in your area."

For advice, and for a cold calling pack with door stickers, visit www.surreycc.gov.uk/tradingstandards

Community Protection Group – focus on joint working

Since the creation of the group, a key focus has been on building on existing joint working arrangements, both within Surrey County Council (particularly focusing on our duties as a landlord to vulnerable people) and also with external partners. This has led to Surrey Fire and Rescue Service working closely with the Fostering Teams to review the information available to foster families on Fire Safety and the offer of a Safe and Well Visit.

We have begun a programme of engaging in partnership working with all 11 boroughs and Districts and are working initially with Tandridge District Council (TDC) to build on the existing risk profile for the district. A joint plan has been developed between the Emergency Management Team and TDC to boost resilience for key services. A workshop is being planned for mid-March to explore what can be developed around TDC's strategic priorities and all of the benefits that the CPG can offer to TDC by working in partnership concentrating on the most vulnerable high risk people and the high risk places in TDC area.

We want to improve information sharing to help increase preventative action, build relationships with businesses and increase compliance rates, which will reduce the need for enforcement. This work with TDC will create a template we can then offer out to all other borough and district councils.

Yours sincerely

Steve Owen-Hughes

Head of the Community Protection Group