

CHIEF FIRE OFFICER REPORT
ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 NOVEMBER 2021

Title	Chief Fire Officer Report	
Chief Fire Officer Suite of Services	Trading Standards, Civil Protection and Coroners Services	
Purpose of Report	To provide a strategic update on issues and key areas of service provision, opportunities and challenges.	

1. Trading Standards

Trading Standards has returned to intelligence led activity with officers carrying out physical inspections, responding to customer complaints and supporting businesses in person except where bespoke risk assessments identify specific vulnerabilities which make face to face contact inappropriate. In such cases the team is utilising alternative contact provision developed during the Covid 19 pandemic period.

Officers are also transitioning to more time working from the office in a Covid safe manner as identified during agile working discussions. This is progressing well, but I can foresee full implementation will be affected by the pace at which redesign and re-designation of working spaces is rolled out to workplaces outside of Shire Hall.

Overall demand on the service in continues to increase. Demand over Q1 and Q2 has risen by 14% against the same period in 20/21 but once adjusted for the reduced levels of core demand and high levels of Covid response work last year, the real increase in demand against core Trading Standards activities this year is 28%

The Service is recording an increase in the number of unsafe products placed on the market by Gloucestershire businesses; market surveillance and enforcement in relation to product safety legislation is a statutory duty for the Council, discharged by this Service.

This work is informed by intelligence supplied by the Office of Product Safety and Standards, by consumer complaints and by officer initiative. Response to this increased demand requires specialist knowledge and often absorbs the service's full capacity of qualified and experienced officers leaving no resource to deal with new demand. This creates a risk that the service may not be able to satisfy the performance indicator of 'responding to reports of unsafe products within one day'.

The easily ability to import cheap products through the internet and the transfer of responsibility for ensuring product safety to the UK importer following the loss of free movement of goods across the EU suggests this level of demand will continue for some time.

The Service is also recording a marked change in the modus operandi of rogue builders resulting in more complex and demanding investigations. Traders appear to be skirting the fringes of contractual breach and illegal activity often taking large sums of money from consumers for little or no work. Home improvements and renovations is the second most

complained about area of work in Gloucestershire and the one which records the highest detriment levels so is a priority area for the Service.

Resilience across several disciplines within the Service (Food Standards, product Safety, Doorstep Crime and Scams) is regularly tested by levels of demand or by managing demand while experienced and qualified officers take annual leave. There is a national dearth of qualified Trading Standards Officers and the route to qualification is stifled by a general lack of funding across Local Authorities to pay for training. This Service has been able to recruit at trainee level and has one new recruit and one existing member of staff undergoing professional qualification training at the moment with a view to relieving this pressure in the longer term longer term.

This is also the first step in addressing the ageing profile and sustainability of the service.

Themed – Working with Partner Agencies on Rogue Trading

The Service has 2 Officers (1 FTE) with specialist responsibility for this area for work. All other officers can be called upon to assist or to work under supervision in this area.

This is a Service priority area for a number of reasons, individuals may be targeted because of perceived vulnerabilities; targeted individuals are more likely to engage when they are vulnerable; the nature of the crime can leave individuals feeling at risk and unwilling to support enforcement and having identified a target, the criminals can return several times until funds are exhausted. Also, people do not want to be seen as not being able to cope by friends and relatives, especially if they believe it will result in conversations about ability to continue living independently.

During 2020/21 Covid restrictions, especially restrictions on travel and visiting people's homes distorted the level of activity in this area so, for this section only and to properly reflect the scale of work in this area, figures are taken from 2019/2020.

Although only just over 11% of the total complaints received in 2019/20, Door Step Crime (DSC) incidents feature as the second most complained about area of work and scams the third (motor vehicles are always top of the list). There were 678 DSC incidents and 235 reported scams, almost 3.5 per working day on average.

This is a very conservative figure, it is widely accepted that incidents are underreported and, reports are made, that reporting is fragmented between the Police, Trading Standards and Action Fraud.

Trading Standards did not record a significant increase in reported scam activity during the pandemic period but we were aware of and used social media to warn against text and email scams referring to Covid fines or testing fees.

Most of the work in this area is in relation to mass mailing scams, all of which hope to entice the recipient into making repeat payments. Sometimes these are benign supplying vitamins/supplements or other goods of small value, sometimes they are more sinister offering clairvoyant services, preying on people who have suffered significant loss.

Most scams originate outside UK so it is difficult for a local authority team to tackle offenders. We are supported by a nationally funded scams team (money from the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy). Locally we benefit from their success working with Royal Mail to intercept 130,000 items of scam mail before they enter the delivery chain (Once it enters the process, any item of post sent to a named recipient must, by law, be delivered.) and interception outgoing scam mail containing victim's money. From this intercepted mail,

the national team provide details of Gloucestershire residents actively responding to scams and, in some cases, return money to them.

Members of my team work with scam mail recipients to help them identify malicious scam mail and also to encourage them to become more resilient. As well as victims identified by the national team, we work closely with Adult Social Care, raising awareness of the signs of scams and DSC amongst locality staff; conducting joint visits via the safeguarding team where vulnerable clients are identified. The aim of all visits is to leave people better equipped to cope with attempted scams in the future.

Using an approved method of calculation, the work of this Service tackling scams in 2020/21 saved slightly over £115,000.

Nuisance calls are another way Gloucestershire residents are targeted. People feel obliged to answer the telephone, especially outside office hours when calls would reasonably be expected to come from friends or family. Also haste to answer the telephone before it stops ringing increases the risk of trips and falls in older people.

In response to nuisance calls, this service has deployed 25 call blocking devices (5 funded by Cotswold District Council). In 2020/21 it is calculated that these 25 devices blocked 1,114 scam calls resulting in the likely prevention of 6.6 scams and generated savings to the individuals concerned of £30,431 and societal savings (social care, NHS, police etc. of £18,033. A total of £48453.

Moving forwards we are interested in promoting peer support through the Friends against Scams and Scam Marshall models as well as procuring more call blocker devices as demand currently outstrips availability.

Emerging trends include new technological vulnerabilities as the shift from 'bricks to clicks' forces more people into on-line shopping, increased targeting of younger people through social media and new vehicles for scam delivery such as bit coin and other crypto currencies.

The term rogue trader above – although easy to understand, it does not convey the real picture. Although some of our investigations reveal chaotic traders who get out of their depth, others identify deliberate criminal activity which has been linked to organised criminal gangs and modern slavery,

In the same way as we work to reassure victims and leave them feeling better equipped to resist DSC attempts in the future, Officers will also attend 'live' incidents as a matter of priority. Any report of trader still present results in an immediate visit by officers to the person's home partly to reassure the consumer but largely to ensure the trader is working legally and properly and to intervene where that is not the case, preventing further loss to the individual.

Incidents have historically involved home improvements and driveways, currently the modus operandi has shifted to building work or home improvements with some work carried out but work coming to a halt once the homeowner has paid over a lump sum as down payment. This MO finds a middle ground between fraud or consumer protection offences, civil or criminal law breaches.

Although Trading Standards has a very good working relationship with the Police, one of our team is embedded within Gloucestershire Police in his role as a Special Police Officer, DSC offences are often categorised by the Police as civil law breaches not criminal offences because they do not obviously meet the definition of Fraud. WE are working hard with Police colleagues to raise awareness that Trading Standards have recourse to additional criminal

offences for misrepresentation, failure to provide material information and failure to provide written information about cancellation rights (where they apply) so are often better placed to be the lead investigating agency.

As identified above Covid restrictions in 2020/21 saw a reduction in DSC complaints yet intervention by officers resulted in £22,738 savings in money not handed over or recovered following intervention

At time of writing the Service has 4 DSC investigations on going and 2 cases in court

In summary both scams and DSC incidents can leave long term impact on those directly affected but there are also longer term implications for County Council Adult Social Care, possibly both hastening the time at which a person develops care and support needs and diminishing their ability to self-fund.

2. Civil Protection Team

CPT continues to support the response to C-19

- Attending C-19 Tactical Response Grp
- Attend C-19 Risk Management Sub-grp

Duty Officer (24/7 on call)

- 3 significant water outages
- Fuel supply disruption
- Damaged Culvert
- Potential River pollutants
- 3 fire incidents

In partnership with other LRF member agencies delivered

- 1 day JESIP Multi-agency Tactical Course 18th October
- 1 day JESIP Multi-agency Operational Course 27th October

The programme of GCC Emergency Management Framework is continuing, areas progressed since August include: -

- Elected Members Awareness session delivered and post session report being drafted
- X2 'Director on Call (Gold)' briefings outlining their role delivered
- Director on-call guidance re-written and distributed to all Director on call officers on the rota
- Review of CPT information available on the intranet / GCC webpage undertaken and being updated
- 'Gold' & 'Silver' handbooks being drafted

CPT continue to provide emergency management support for 5 district councils continues as per the SLA & each districts individual work plans.

- CPT have supported districts to revise their flood plans to be compliant with the revised DEFRA standards – these have been submitted to DEFRA by the stated deadline of 24th November
- Emergency response exercise delivered at Cheltenham BC
- Elected Members awareness session delivered at Gloucester City Council
- Flood plan (including identified flood warden) completed for the 'Willows' site in partnership with GCC Traveller liaison officers and Tewkesbury BC
- Emergency response guide updated for Forest of Dean DC & Cotswold DC

CPT works with each district individually to compile a work plan for each ¼, the above does not cover all the work undertaken but lists some of the key work streams that have been completed since August 21.

CPT have now finalised the plan template and guidance document (in consultation with the LRF Community Resilience Sub-Grp) for the promotion of 'Community Resilience Plans' – these are aligned to the Government Guidance and reflect local considerations. X2 virtual workshops are being planned and are hoping to be delivered before the end of 2021.

As part of the LRF Human Aspects sub group work plan, CPT have engaged with the Local Health Resilience Board (LHRP) and will attend a scoping workshop at the end of October regarding a framework for Psychosocial support for persons affected by an incident.

LRF Animal Disease Plan has been revised (in consultation with Trading Standards / AHPA) and is out for consultation (ending 22 Oct) after which this will be finalised and exercised.

Major Accident Hazard Pipeline Plan (MAHP) draft is complete and will be going out for LRF consultation on 25th October.

Multi-agency Flood Plan has been revised and submitted to DEFRA for assurance that the plan aligns to new DEFRA guidance.

LRF Mass Evacuation & Shelter Plan finalised and is due to be exercised in November. CPT continue to provide secretariat support the Gloucestershire Prevent Partnership Board (GPPB).

Themed – GCC Business Continuity: -

CLT agreed a 2 year business continuity (BC) project plan in October 2020. The aim of the project is to strengthen the BCM framework across the organisation and ensure that all service areas have an up to date, robust business continuity arrangements.

The County Council is a Category 1 responder as defined in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and as such it has a statutory responsibility to write and maintain continuity plans.

In the early part of the project CLT agreed a 'Policy & Framework' document to embed BC into the organisation. Following this business impact assessment (BIA) and business continuity plan (BCP) templates were designed and agreed to ensure a uniformed approach across the council. A dedicated BCM Officer (part of the Civil Protection Team) supports BC plan owners to write their service area plans.

The 'Business Continuity Management Assurance Board' (BCMAB) was revised and membership re-established so that all of the directorates are represented. The BCMAB meets on a quarterly basis and is chaired by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO). This board is responsible for ensuring that the project deliverables are achieved.

The programme of business continuity management (BCM) work is continuing. BCM activities from mid-August 2021 (last report 12/08/2021) to date have included:-
15 business impact analysis (BIA) meetings held with plan owners (plus follow-up meetings where required to sanity-check/finalise BIAs prior to sign off by the appropriate Director).
9 completed and signed off BIAs received.

Only 2 completed business continuity plans (BCPs) received in the new corporate format.

Quarterly meeting of the corporate BCM Assurance Board held 01/10/2021. Policy compliance statistics (no. of plans up-to-date etc.) provided for each Directorate. Draft CLT

paper presented confirming that progress on BIAs and BCPs is no longer on track given that the scope of the work is larger than expected and that plan owners are, for the most part, not completing the required work within the agreed timescales (BIAs within 2 weeks and BCPs within a further 4 weeks (i.e. within 6 weeks total elapsed time). The Assurance Board approved the paper (to be presented to CLT 28/10/2021) which asks CLT to either (1) take action to ensure plan owners (Heads of Service / Service Managers) prioritise the BCM work or (2) accept that completion of the project is likely to be delayed 3-6 months.

Work commenced in support of IMS planned exercise of the GCC Cyber Incident Response Plan – first planning meeting held with SW Regional Cyber Crime Unit.

3. Coroners

The primary function of the Coroner team revolves around the safe receipt of the deceased and the investigation (and if appropriate inquest) into their death.

The principle objective for the Coroner Team this year is to assist the Senior Coroner in addressing the backlog of cases that has resulted in court restrictions due to Covid. The Court has remained open during the summer months to ensure inquests can continue to be heard and the backlog reduced although the majority of these inquests have had no or little public involvement. The Centre Manager, Senior Coroner and AMPS are now working together to reassess the building risk assessment with a view to opening the court fully (in accordance with social distancing measures) to ensure all outstanding inquests can be listed in accordance with expectations from the office of the Chief Coroner.

An additional objective, and principle risk to the Service, will be to address the lack of pathologists available to conduct coronial autopsies. Timely examination of the deceased is an essential initial step in the coronial investigation process and remains an issue at both local and national level. The service has a KPI of '7 days between referral and autopsy'. However, this was stood down during Covid for safety reasons whilst the team were waiting for Covid swab results. This KPI has now been re-introduced for the Mortuary Team who have recently procured the services of an independent pathologist who is able to conduct examinations every Tuesday; a day that has always been hard to fill from the existing pathologist team. The Senior Coroner and Centre Manager are currently in consultation with another independent pathologist in an attempt to secure their services during the busy Christmas/winter period to help ease pressures on the entire death management system. The mortuary team are also willing to continue with some weekend working (on occasion) to ensure autopsies are conducted in a timely manner.

The Coroner's Service has continued to run its entire core functions from the Coroner's Court at Barnwood, Gloucester throughout the pandemic. Autopsies and body receipt/releases has been continuous in the mortuary, with enhanced PPE as directed by professional bodies. The majority of bodies have been swabbed on receipt with the results of these swabs dictating future investigation. The Senior Coroner has relaxed expectations on internal examinations to help ease pressures on staff and duty pathologists. All members of the team have now received both of their vaccinations and are in the process of arranging booster jabs with Gloucestershire Royal Hospital. Following the lifting of restrictions, the Coroner's Officers, Mortuary Team and admin have now re-joined as one team and all staff are receptive to the work of GCC Transformation Team regarding agile working and the potential benefits that this could bring to existing working patterns and the needs of team members to have a suitable work/life balance. Those who are able to, are still utilising working from home when appropriate.

Inquests have continued to operate from Barnwood during all lockdowns. The majority of these have had minimal public attendance for social distancing reasons and the larger inquests were stood down during the lockdown periods. The Centre Manager, Senior Coroner and AMPS are now working together to reassess the building risk assessment with

a view to opening the court fully (in accordance with social distancing measures) to ensure all outstanding inquests can be listed in accordance with expectations from the office of the Chief Coroner. The service also continues to investigate electronic means for allowing more people to virtually attend these hearings.