

report



meeting	COUNTY COUNCIL		
date	17 December 2009	agenda item number	7a v

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

REPORT FOR THE PERIOD OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2009

1. I am very pleased to present my report to Council as the Community Safety Portfolio Holder on the varied activities that have taken place within it. I hope you find the report of interest and will be very happy to provide further information on any subject it covers.

HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

National Alcohol Awareness Week – ‘rethink your drink’

2. The 19th – 23rd October marked National Alcohol Awareness week. A number of activities were organised across County Council venues which were supported and co-ordinated by the Healthier Communities Service. Approximately 150 staff from County Hall, Lawn View and Meadow House visited information stands to get advice on safe drinking. The initiative supported the NHS national campaign ‘know your limits’ which delivers the message of responsible drinking.

Newark Health and Well-being Event for the Homeless

3. A day of activities took place at Holy Trinity Community and Partnership Centre, Newark during October for homeless and vulnerably housed people living in Newark and Sherwood. The event is part of a series being run across the County by the Healthier Communities Service and was organised in response to the poor physical and mental health often experienced by this vulnerable group. This group also finds it very difficult to access normal health provisions.

4. Approximately 30 local service users attended the event and were able to benefit from advice on issues such as drug and alcohol misuse, oral, mental and sexual health in an informal environment. Food and nutrition advice was provided by the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, who ran 'cook and eat' sessions where service users were able to learn how to cook. Holistic therapies were also on offer, and each service user received a bag of toiletries, donated by Boots, the Chemist. Feedback from both service users and staff was incredibly positive and 92% of attendees felt that they had gained something from the event.

Tobacco Control and the Health Bill 2009

5. The health bill, banning the sale of cigarettes via vending machines and point of sale advertising for tobacco has been hailed as a positive result for the people of Nottinghamshire.
6. Nottinghamshire's 'County Tobacco Alliance' has actively campaigned in support of the Health Bill which has now been given Royal Assent. The new law will particularly benefit young people who are more likely to access cigarettes from unsupervised vending machines. It will come into effect over the next few months.
7. Tobacco remains the biggest cause of health inequalities across the county and leads directly to over 1300 deaths each year. Reducing smoking rates in Nottinghamshire is therefore a key priority and the Council and its partners are putting innovative plans in place to continue to support those who want to quit as well as encouraging young people to live smoke free lives.

Beacon Project

8. The Beacon Project, which supports homeless and vulnerably housed people in the Mansfield area, has received funding from the Healthier Communities Service so that much needed support can continue over the winter months.
9. The £13,000 funding will provide this vulnerable group with a hot Sunday dinner during the winter months over the next two years. This group of people are at their lowest ebb at the weekend when no food is available and there are no other agencies able to offer this type of support.
10. I visited the Beacon Project on 26 November 2009 to present the cheque to the organisation and to meet with its service users and volunteers. I found the visit to be both very interesting and informative. I sincerely applaud the valuable contribution made by people, like those I met, who

volunteer their own time and expertise to help the most vulnerable people in our communities.

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES

White Ribbon Campaign 25 November – 10 December 2009

11. As part of the White Ribbon Campaign, the Safer Communities Team organised a media campaign on domestic violence with radio interviews, posters and testimonies from victims. In addition the team also ran a stall in County Hall on 25 November. Staff and visitors supported the event, with 75 people adding their hand print to the “These Hands are Not for Hurting” banner and over £50 was raised in support of the 24 hour domestic abuse helpline. This was a light hearted way to support a serious issue. The County Council has also registered it’s support on the national White Ribbon Campaign website.
12. Wearing a white ribbon is a personal pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. Each year men and boys are urged to wear a white ribbon for one or two weeks starting on 25 November which is the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women.

Burglary Project

13. The County Council is a key lead organisation of the Safer Nottinghamshire Board burglary project, designed to protect the communities in Nottinghamshire from the trauma of burglary. It was decided to focus on the areas with the highest number of burglaries in the County in order to make the maximum impact. A ‘problem solving’ approach has been used throughout the project to identify the specific problems in an area before appropriate measures to deal with the problems are implemented.
14. Details of the method of entry for each of the ‘hot spot’ street areas were provided. A range of interventions have been put in place including media campaigns, window locks, ‘smartwater’ signage, burglar alarms, and high profile patrolling.
15. A full evaluation of the project is currently underway and the details of this will be available shortly. However, early indications show a 66% reduction in burglaries in the hot spot streets in Bassetlaw, Newark and Sherwood during the life of the project and a 50% reduction in the South Notts area.

TRADING STANDARDS

Loan Shark Operation

16. In November, officers from the Trading Standards East Midlands Illegal Money Lending Unit, supported by our own Trading Standards staff and Nottinghamshire Police, executed two search warrants in the Meden Vale area of Mansfield in relation to suspected illegal money lending and money laundering activities. Two male suspects were arrested.
17. Using loan sharks can ruin people's lives and the trading standards team not only tackles illegal money lenders, but also supports the victims by referring them to legal forms of credit. Loan sharks charge very high interest rates and all too often use threats or violence to extract repayments. Trading Standards officers are working to alert people to the fact they have access to much cheaper and safer options.

Fireworks Initiative

18. As Members may recall, Trading Standards recently led an initiative with the Police and Fire Service aimed at reducing the levels of antisocial behaviour over the Bonfire Night period caused through the misuse of fireworks. The work included:
 - Joint visits to all 152 premises licensed to store fireworks, reminding them of their responsibilities in respect of safe explosives storage and preventing sales to people under the age of 18;
 - All three agencies combined to undertake evening 'hotspot' patrols targeting Ashfield and Worksop;
 - Test purchase exercises carried out by Trading Standards
19. The test purchase exercises resulted in 3 sales out of 16 checks and further investigations are ongoing with the premises that failed with a view to prosecuting. The initiative attracted some useful media interest and our officers undertook local radio interviews whilst an article also appeared in the Mansfield & Ashfield Chad.

Ashfield Alcohol Action

20. Joint action between Trading Standards and the Police is planned in December to tackle the issue of antisocial behaviour caused through alcohol misuse. The focus of the work is to prevent access to alcohol

through sales to people under the age of 18. Both Trading Standards and the Police will be visiting off licenses to provide support to local businesses on what actions they can take to prevent sales being made to those under 18.

21. This exercise will be followed by work being carried out with the Police and the District Council licensing officers. The agencies will use a variety of methods available to drive down the level of alcohol being sold to young people, ranging from prosecutions and fixed penalties through to licence reviews.

Newark Livestock Market

22. There have recently been incidents at Newark Livestock Market where itinerant traders have been using aggressive practices to sell generators and other large pieces of equipment to farmers. Their actions not only caused serious detriment to the normal trading of the market, effectively closing it down for periods, but also jeopardised the personal safety and property of the farming community at the market. Trading Standards Officers attended the market, and continue to work closely with the local police to ensure that normal trading is maintained, and that these people do not trade there again.

Significant Consumer Redress

23. Interventions by Trading Standards officers continue to help local consumers enforce their rights. In a recent example, we assisted a couple in a dispute with a trader from outside Nottinghamshire following the purchase of a motorhome. Although the vehicle had been described as brand new, a number of faults quickly became apparent on delivery, which, combined with the poor general condition inside, confirmed that it had been used previously. Following our intervention, we were able to negotiate the return of the vehicle and a £24,000 refund. It is vitally important for the local, regional and national competitive framework that consumers are able to enforce their rights, and our officers are at the forefront of helping them to do this.

Doorstep Crime Update

24. Although reported instances of doorstep crime in October and November have recently reduced from the peak experienced in September, officers are preparing for a spate of fresh activity. The recent stormy weather offers an ideal opportunity for bogus property repairers to over-inflate the price of repairs, or carry out unnecessary work.

25. Trading Standards are working with the media to warn of the dangers of engaging with uninvited traders and are promoting our Buy with Confidence scheme, which currently has over 270 members. The publicity campaign should also encourage more people to report doorstep crime, helping to target our efforts.

Ensuring A Fair Deal For Powerstations

26. Trading Standards have just completed the annual test of the 'railweighers' at West Burton, Cottam, Ratcliffe-on-Soar and Thorseby powerstations. This is to ensure that the quantities of coal they pay for to fire the power stations are accurate. Over a year the railweighers are used to weigh many thousands of tonnes of coal and it is essential that the weighers are regularly maintained and tested. These tests are conducted by request and generate significant income.

27. Prosecutions Update

- A Forest Town plumber recently pleaded guilty to a range of charges in a joint prosecution brought by our Trading Standards Service and the Health and Safety Executive. An inspection of his work revealed lethal defects and he falsely advertised himself as being CORGI registered
- A North Nottinghamshire dog breeder pleaded guilty at Nottingham Crown Court in October to supplying a cocker spaniel described as being 2 years old which was in fact much older. The breeder had a previous conviction for a similar offence
- A Mansfield trader recently pleaded guilty to 4 specimen charges of exposing food for sale with lapsed 'use by dates'. A total of 162 such items were found in his shop with dates ranging from 8 to 34 days past the stated 'use by date'. The trader had been previously advised by our staff on 2 occasions about the law, and how to comply
- A Sheffield woman pleaded guilty in October to 8 charges of the sale and possession for sale of counterfeit DVD films seized from her stall at the Botany Avenue Car Boot Sale, Mansfield. A total of 354 discs were seized and a further 920 copied discs were seized at her home address.

EMERGENCY PLANNING

28. A newly updated and revised version of the County Council Elected Members Emergency Plan was issued in November and its release was followed by a half-day training event at County Hall. The aim of the training was to enable Members to develop their understanding of

emergency planning and response, and to help them prepare for their role in providing support and leadership to Nottinghamshire communities affected by emergencies. The evaluation forms from the event indicate that the training was valued highly by the participants.

29. The County Council is required to produce Off-Site Emergency Plans in relation to two sites in Nottinghamshire under the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) regulations. These plans relate to the Misterton Petroleum Storage Depot and DHL Supply Chain Ltd, Harworth and a one-day emergency planning exercise was held on 20 October to test the plans.
30. Consideration of each site involved an overview presentation by each site operator, followed by a desktop exercise and finally a debriefing discussion. The event was well attended, with representatives from the emergency services, County and District Councils, site operators, Oil and Pipelines Agency, the health community, the Environment Agency, the Highways Agency and Anglian Water Services. The interactive format of the day enabled all delegates to provide input and feedback. The emergency plans will now be reviewed in relation to findings from the exercise, and revisions will be made as necessary.

REGISTRATION AND CELEBRATORY SERVICES

31. I am pleased to report that Register Offices across Nottinghamshire have participated in the successful roll-out of the national Registration On-line (RON) system for civil marriages. This is part of an internet-based system that has been used for civil partnerships since their inception in 2005 and in July 2009 Nottinghamshire Registration Service included births and deaths in the online system. On 16 November a new module for marriages commenced and its introduction marks the completion of another phase in a national programme for the modernisation of the Registration Service.

COUNCILLOR MICK MURPHY
Cabinet Member for Community Safety