

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
Wednesday 9 June 2021

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR HANNAFORD (ATTENDING IN PERSON)
Re: Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Member Champions

Is the Leader aware that many local councils, including those in the far south west have Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Member Champions?

In order to spotlight these important issues, highlight the vital work that we are doing with others, continue to raise awareness , advocate best practice, and reach out to those who need help and support, will Devon County Council consider making such an appointment in the near future ?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR CROAD

Domestic abuse and sexual violence continues to impact thousands of adults and children in Devon each year. Domestic abuse is the largest single category of crime in Devon, accounting for over 20% of all offences and 40% of violent offences. It is present in all communities, often hidden. As such it is important that every Member plays an active role as champions within their community to understand these issues and the impacts on people and their families. As portfolio holder I will continue to play an active role in leading Members representation, for example as part of the emerging Domestic Abuse Board for Devon. Further I would wish to seek nominations for a Member champion on each of the three scrutiny committees in order to support me to better understand the Council's responses from across its services. I consider this shared leadership will provide the best route to understand the impacts of domestic abuse and sexual violence in Devon alongside the work the Council and its partners will lead and develop in response.

2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR ATKINSON (ATTENDING REMOTELY)
Re: Scams and Action on Tackling

Can the Cabinet Member inform what is happening here in Devon, between trading standards, the police and their resources tackle epidemic of scams in the UK as outlined in the article below

https://www.theguardian.com/money/2021/may/02/martin-lewis-theres-an-epidemic-of-scams-but-fraudsters-are-getting-off-scot-free?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other

Highlighting in particular whether the resources are sufficient to (a) protect and (b) protect by prosecutions.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR GILBERT

The Chartered Trading Standards Institute and The National Audit Office amongst others have produced reports which highlight the significant cuts to local authority trading standards services since 2010, in some local authorities up to 50% and, whilst not quite of that magnitude, Devon, Plymouth, Somerset & Torbay Trading Standards Service (DPST TSS) has also had to deal with significant budget reductions. It is difficult to calculate exact budget figures, as during that time the Service has moved incrementally from stand-alone individual local authority delivery to the current joint service with four partners. As an estimate the overall budget available to the combined trading standards services has probably reduced between 35-40%. The creation of a joint service has, however, significantly mitigated that impact with the overall capacity available to the Service meaning that it has been able to deliver economies of scale whilst retaining delivery across the range of trading standards functions.

In common with most trading standards authorities across England and Wales, DPST TSS uses, as a first point of contact for members of the public, the Citizens Advice Consumer Service which has been set up and funded nationally by central government to offer consumer civil advice and to act as a portal for referrals to local authority trading standards teams. Relevant information is then passed to each local authority on a daily basis for them to take any appropriate action. DPST TSS requests that 100% of scam and doorstep crime complaints are passed through. In 2019/20, DST TSS (as it then was) received 977 reports about Scams and Doorstep Crime and made 869 interventions to victims (in 2020/21, the same Service geographical area - i.e. excluding Plymouth - dealt with 1309 cases referred to us by the National Scams Team alone). Each report is triaged and the intervention may be either in person, on the telephone or by letter depending on the level of risk associated with that individual.

The Service uses the National Intelligence Operating Model to identify priorities based on consumer detriment and vulnerability and Scams and Doorstep Crime consistently feature in its top 3-4 priority areas. This "epidemic" is not new but is perhaps getting more sophisticated and develops quickly when the opportunity for fraud presents itself; such as with Covid-19 currently or green deal initiatives. While we address these priority areas relatively well there are many other areas of work where DPST TSS are unable to respond or carry out proactive work due to reduced capacity and this is replicated across Trading Standards nationally.

This prioritisation of Scams and Doorstep Crime work within the broad range of regulatory activity for which Trading Standards is responsible has allowed for some effective and innovative approaches to these issues. The Service operates an Intelligence and Investigations Group which includes not only experienced Trading Standards Investigators but also a dedicated Intelligence Unit, Accredited Financial Investigators and a degree of e-crime specialism. The Service also has a Communications capacity and is very active on social media platforms and produces Business and Consumer electronic newsletters. The overall capacity of the Service allows it to be intelligence-led and move

resources around to where there is an immediate need, better enabling it to deal with more complex investigations and giving it the “clout” to deal with major cases. The Service also works extremely closely with partners to try to maximise the impact of its activities and avoid duplication. All intelligence related to Scams and Doorstep Crime is added to our intelligence database which is disseminated to the Police (with whom monthly “Working Together to Combat Fraud” meetings are also held) and other enforcement agencies as appropriate.

The newspaper article referenced touches upon two areas of trading standard work and it may be useful in the response to make a distinction between these, as the strategy for dealing with each is slightly different, particularly in respect of enforcement. Those perpetuating mass marketing scams are generally based elsewhere, all too often outside of the UK ,which makes it very difficult to prosecute them within our local enforcement authority. The Service, therefore, primarily concentrates on advice and support to victims of scams, consumer and business education (providing the tools and information to prevent individuals and organisations from being scammed) and consumer and business awareness (providing up to date information on current scams) .The response of the Service to Doorstep Crime incidents is more enforcement based and the Service attempts to respond to all reported incidents including, where possible, an immediate visit to the property where the trader is still on site. Over the years, DPST TSS has carried out a number of high-profile prosecutions of doorstep crime incidents. However, the Service also tries to take a wider, more innovative approach alongside our normal enforcement procedures.

Just a few examples of initiatives the Service, working with partners (in particular National Trading Standards) is involved with include:

Mass Marketing Scams

- The Service has created an MOU for referrals with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service
- The Service works closely with local authority and third sector partners in our education/support initiatives; including Adult Safeguarding Teams, Citizens Advice Bureaus, Community Groups, Charities etc. Age UK, Dementia Alliances, etc.
- The national UK banking protocol; an initiative through which branch staff can alert Police/TS to suspected scams, often when the perpetrator and/or victim is still on the bank premises
- A national initiative with Royal Mail to identify and remove scam mail from the postal system
- Work with Schools and Universities, including U3A (University of the third age). DPST TSS led on the development of a Young Person Scams Pack, which has now been adopted nationally.
- National partner initiatives such as Rogue Trader Week, Scams Fortnight and Scamnesty Month
- The Service has attended a full council meeting to give a presentation on scams awareness and as part of that we encouraged Members to sign up to Friends Against Scams which is a National Trading Standards

Scams Team initiative aiming to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams by empowering them to take a stand against scams in their communities.

[Friends Against Scams - National Trading Standards \(NTS\) Scams Team initiative protecting and preventing people from becoming victims of scams](#)

Doorstep Crime

- The Service regularly use its in-house Financial Investigators to seize and detain financial assets, for example in one case in 2019/20 we secured the return of £35,000 to an 82 year old consumer.
- The Service is partner in the Exmoor Rural Crime Initiative tackling many aspects of rural crime including door step crime, fly-tipping, modern slavery and the launch of the No Cold Caller signs for farms.
- The Service delivered 500 doorstep crime prevention packs to rural properties across our local authority areas and placed two articles in the NFU magazine to help raise awareness of rural scams and promote the 'Farm Watch' scheme.
- Carried out bespoke training to approximately 80 new recruits to the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, including protocols which police officers should follow when responding to doorstep crime incidents with the aim of increasing the chances of successful capture of evidence, improved victim support and eventual suspect identification

In summary, it is probably reasonable to talk about an “epidemic” of Scams and Doorstep Crime and there is significant consumer and business detriment involved. Action Fraud reports that since lockdown began, over £2.5bn has been lost to scams and this is just what has been recorded - the actual figure is likely to be much higher. They are relatively easy crimes to commit, the degree of risk to the perpetrator is less than in many other criminal activities, for the most part the offences are under-penalised and many, if not all, of the enforcement partners are struggling with resources. However, although enforcement plays a role, the most effective response is one of prevention through awareness raising and education. In both respects, through the joint service structure, DPST TSS is better placed than most local authority trading standards services to take on this challenge. This is perhaps illustrated by the fact that DPST TSS were asked by the Local Government Association to lead on the compilation of a Consumer Protection and Scams Good Practice Network Guide as part of the national response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT (ATTENDING REMOTELY) Re: Delivery of the A382 Improvements

Given Devon County Council is leading on the delivery of the A382 improvements, and now Stage 1 improvements are running 9 months behind schedule, can the council confirm the anticipated dates for completion of stage 1, and the start and completion dates for stages 2, 3 and 4.

Also, will Devon County Council be required to provide any additional funding, has funding for Stages 2, 3 and 4 been secured?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR DAVIS

Stage 1 was constructed almost totally during the COVID various lockdown periods, unsurprisingly there were some hold ups but it is now fully open.

The recent award for the completion of the works to improve the A382 corridor is the result of a significant effort by a partnership of the County and District Council to progress the scheme through a complex Government Scrutiny process. We are now in the process of reviewing the construction programme which will be discussed with the Department for Transport before final agreement.

The current funding programme assumes a scheme cost of £44.85 million. This is comprised of £38.12 million From the DfT and a local contribution of £6.73 million, some of which is anticipated to come from developer contributions.

4. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR CONNETT (ATTENDING REMOTELY) Re: Meeting of the Teignbridge Highways and Traffic Orders Committee

Will the Cabinet member explain why the long-planned June 10 meeting of the Teignbridge Highways and Traffic Orders Committee was cancelled, without consultation, and a new date imposed of 29 July.

Has the forced postponement caused any delay to local highways schemes which would have been presented to the Highways Committee for consideration on June 10?

Will the Cabinet member provide a firm assurance that no more Teignbridge Highways Committee meetings will be forcibly cancelled and that local County Councillors will be consulted in future?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

The Teignbridge HATOC postponement is to allow the Teignbridge phase of the Rapid Charging Devon (StreetHubz) project to be progressed.

The project involves multiple phases across Devon and very tight funding deadlines. The target implementation date for the Teignbridge phase is towards the end of 2021. If the report on the public consultation results was submitted at the Autumn HATOC there wouldn't be time for the project to progress successfully within the deadlines.

The postponement of the June HATOC allows for a local Member briefing, a five-week statutory public consultation and a report on the results of the consultation to be presented to the deferred Teignbridge HATOC for their

consideration. The date still falls within the June/July HATOC cycle of meetings.

There are no other planned Traffic Regulation Orders or local highway schemes on the agenda for approval.