

REPORT TO FARINGDON DIVISION (Buckland with Gainfield, Buscot, Coleshill, Eaton Hastings, Faringdon, Gt Coxwell, Littleworth and Little Coxwell) – August/September

For information, all that is detailed within my monthly reports is already within the public domain and thus in the media.

General Report for the Faringdon Division – during the month of August there are no designated formal calendared meetings – although briefings do of course continue between Senior Officers and Cabinet members, the Leader and myself as the Deputy Leader of the Council.

The collaborative work I am involved in with Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Service continues at a pace and a meeting with the 3 Chief Fire Officers from each service, together with their elected lead members took place this month with detailed discussion taking place on future developments and enrichment of the collaborative work programme. This initiative also now includes more development of the partnership with Thames Valley Police and further collaborative work with them. On 15th August I attended Woodstock where the OFRS and TVP unveiled the new partnership at the fire station. The fire service and the police are now going to share the offices in the fire station which means that both emergency services can better serve residents. There are plans for this arrangement, of co-locating teams from fire and police under one roof, to move across the county within other fire stations.

Senior officers in the Fire Service visit the fire fighters and I accompany them on most occasions. I have visited Blue Watch at the Thames Valley Fire Control Room with the Chief Fire Officer and Red Watch at Banbury Fire Station. Whilst at Banbury there was a “call-out” to an incident. A lady had secured her toddler in the baby’s car seat in the rear of the car and had thrown her car keys into the front of the car. She shut the back door of the car and then the car locked automatically with toddler locked inside – this was on the hottest day that we experienced this summer! The fire fighters were “on-the-run” within 2 minutes of the alert! Toddler was rescued successfully!

The murder of PC Andrew Harper. The Fire Service from Royal Berkshire were involved in this incident with Thames Valley Police and in recognition of the partnership work undertaken by both services, the fire service conducted a one minutes silence across the whole county as a private condolence (not for publicity) for Andrew’s family and the Thames Valley Police Force. I attended the Faringdon Fire Station for this observance on 23rd August.

Trading Standards - “Suspected loan sharks arrested in Oxfordshire”! A 41-year old woman and a 55-year old man were arrested in August on suspicion of illegal money lending and money laundering following an operation in the county. The England Illegal Money Lending Team working in partnership with the OCC’s Trading Standards and TVP executed a warrant at a residential address in Abingdon.

As the Cabinet Member for Community Safety I was quoted in the media as follows:- “Loan sharks not only ruin the lives of their victims and their families but can also have a wider damaging impact on the local community they target. This work is an excellent example of national and local partners, working together, to protect residents and hold offenders to account.

(Nationally, Illegal Money Lending Teams have secured more than 394 prosecutions for illegal money lending and related activity leading to nearly 480 years’ worth of custodial sentences. They have written off £74.9 million worth of illegal debt and helped over 29,000 people and this subject made national news on 29th August).

Sale of Knives – following on from past monthly reports I’d like to give you an update on work that has been undertaken to tackle the sale of knives to young people. Since December 2018, the Trading Standards Service has conducted over 40 advice visits to traders across the county. These visits have provided traders with the latest advice and guidance on the selling of restricted items, such as knives and will have reduced the likelihood of age restricted products being sold to young people. Since January 2019, 35 covert test purchasing attempts, where young people, escorted by our officers, have attempted to purchase a knife. The good news is, that the majority of retailers followed best practice advice and challenged the test purchaser, refusing to sell. However; 5 shops did go on to sell a knife to the young person (15% failure rate). In most cases, where a sale took place, investigations are still underway, as both the seller and the business may have committed an offence. In one matter the investigation has finished, with the seller accepting a Formal Caution. No formal action was taken against the business in this case, as we assessed them to have met the statutory defence available to them, in that they had taken all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to avoid committing the offence. However, we did provide them with further advice on how they could improve their systems further. Beyond test purchasing, we now also have a Trading Standards Team Leader attend each of the Tactical Tasking and Co-ordination Group meetings and Community Safety Partnerships in the County, to help ensure that we can work with others on this important area of work and share intelligence. Lastly, this current programme of under- age test purchasing has also been an excellent example of working with Oxfordshire Fire Cadets, who have provided test purchasing volunteers.

The Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service have been very busy since my last report. I will give a brief resume of some of the incidents that they have attended.

1) Domestic Incident - An unattended chip pan ignited causing a considerable amount of heat and smoke damage within the kitchen and smoke damage throughout the property during a family gathering. The Fire Service deployed two Firefighters wearing breathing apparatus to fully extinguish the fire and ventilate the toxic gasses. Two family members were treated for smoke inhalation on scene by firefighters. Extra care should always be taken when deep-fat frying or cooking with oil. Hot oil ignites extremely easily and when alight, any application of water can be explosive. Keeping an eye on it and having a fire blanket can help but replacing the pan with a thermostat-controlled fryer is the best option – the thermostat will prevent the oil getting too hot.

“If you have a chip pan fire, following these steps to stay as safe as possible:

- Don't move the pan as it will be very hot
- Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so
- NEVER use water from within the room as it will cause a fire ball
- Get out, stay out, dial 999.

2) Agricultural Incident - Crews were called to 30 tonnes of baled straw on fire, near to equestrian buildings, as well as several hundred metres of stubble burning within two adjacent fields. Using a 4x4 vehicle to damp down the burning stubble, crews concentrated on dealing with the main stack of burning straw to prevent it spreading to buildings and equestrian areas, using both the landowners machinery, and fire service vehicles. Although we have had a period of rain, the conditions are still dry enough for fire to spread rapidly and easily across farmland. Incidents like this highlight how vulnerable the countryside is to the effects of fire. We would encourage everyone not have bonfires during this dry and busy season and if the worst happens to call the fire service as soon as possible. It is believed that this fire was not started deliberately.

3) Road Traffic Collision - Thames Valley Fire Control were alerted to reports of 2 cars involved in a collision on the A361 at Bradwell Grove, 1 car had left the road and after hitting a tree came to rest on its side, trapping the driver in the vehicle. On arrival crews quickly stabilised the vehicle and removed the casualty from the car in conjunction with colleagues from South Central Ambulance Service. The road was closed by Thames Valley Police for approximately 1 hour whilst the vehicle was recovered. This was a significant incident which closed the road for approximately 1 hour and resulted in 1 individual being taken to hospital. Road users need to remember the importance of driving to the road conditions during this time of changeable weather.

4) Electrical Fire -. Thames Valley Fire Control were alerted to a fire on the ground floor of a property and thanks to working smoke alarms - everyone was evacuated safely before they dialled 999. On arrival firefighters wearing breathing apparatus entered the building and quickly located the source of the fire which had started in a tumble dryer. They quickly extinguished the fire and the machine was removed from the building. The street outside the property was temporarily closed to protect members of the public from the smoke that was emanating from the building. This incident highlights the importance of having working smoke alarms and the importance to test smoke alarms regularly, they really do save lives”.

5) Air Crash - a small 2-seater bi-plane crashed into a field beside the B480 near Henley. The crash led to the deaths of the two persons on the aircraft. A National Police Air Service helicopter found the scene from the air, guiding land crews in to the locality by hovering above. HEMS medical teams landed their own helicopter in the field. The fire services from Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire attended the scene and worked under the joint protocols for Thames Valley Police and the Air Accident Investigation Branch. Due to the force of the impact the speed of extricating the bodies was very slow, and, it took two days to complete this task. This incident was highly complex, whereby everything had to be catalogued in such a manner so as to be able to; not only gather the normal evidence that we would expect at a collision, but with the added complexity that AAIB will need to rebuild the aircraft for evidence gathering as to what the cause of the accident was. The members of the fire crews and officers in attendance will receive the welfare support required.

My next monthly surgery will be on Saturday 7th September in Faringdon Library, from 1000-1130hrs. My phone number is 01367 241468 and my email address is Judith.heathcoat@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

Judith Heathcoat
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