

Choir signs up to improve safety for deaf community

MEMBERS of a special choir are backing a new system launched by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service which makes it easier for deaf and speech-impaired residents to book potentially life-saving safety checks.

The Chester-based Dee-Sign Choir use sign language to perform popular songs and are now sponsored by the Service after they impressed with performances at the Cheshire Positive Awards for Business.

Choir members either have hearing impairments themselves or have relatives who are deaf and they are urging people with similar impairments to request free safety advice using a new text messaging service.

The new scheme has been developed by the Service to make sure its Home Safety Assessment (HSA) programme – which offers fire safety advice and free smoke alarms – can be accessed by local residents with any form of hearing or speech impairment.

To use the system people just have to text "HSA" and their name and address to 07624 808 300. Users will then get a

receipt to confirm their request has been received and afterwards a text to say when the assessment will be carried out.

"Our HSA programme is a key way of improving the safety of our communities and the text messaging service can play a major part in ensuring that people with hearing or speech impairments can contact us," said Fire Authority Chair Cllr. Tony Hooton.

"The Dee-Sign Choir grab people's attention by highlighting the needs of the deaf community and we are delighted to be sponsoring them."

As part of further moves to increase deaf awareness, in partnership with Deafness Support Network the Service is appointing a D/deaf Persons Advocate.

The word Deaf (with a capital D) refers to an individual whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL) while the term D/deaf refers to anyone with a hearing loss.

The new post will be responsible for carrying out HSAs, fitting specialist smoke alarms, liaising with other agencies and increasing awareness of the D/deaf community among firefighters.



Cheshire staff join fight to save trapped victims Rescue teams in flood alert

TEAMS of staff from Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service travelled to Worcester and Tewkesbury in July to provide vital assistance during the severe flooding which devastated the area.

Initially members of the specially-trained Urban Search and Rescue Team and a rescue boat travelled down to the area on July 21 and were soon helping to rescue nine people who were stranded by floods of up to five feet deep in Offenham, a village to the east of Evesham.

The following day, they moved to Upton on Severn and Uckingham where they used the boat to rescue a further eight people from a marina and an elderly couple



and their dog from an area where the water was up to eight feet deep.

A relief team took over and

searched caravan parks, farms, isolated properties and overturned boats in the Evesham area and along the River Avon.

As the water began to recede, for the first time the Service sent in a further team of 20 people to assist with the recovery operation.

They included retained firefighters from Malpas, community safety advocates from Chester, Crewe, Macclesfield and Ellesmere Port and volunteers from organisations like Bank of America and Bentley Motors.

The team spent four days in the area providing help, reassurance and assistance to hundreds of residents, many of whom were elderly and living in remote areas.

They even managed to rescue an ostrich which had flown the coup and returned it to its owner!

Cheshire's Chief Fire Officer Steve McGuirk, who is currently President of the national Chief Fire Officers Association, said: "This major emergency again saw the Fire and Rescue Service delivering vital services to our communities - rescuing them from potentially life-threatening situations and taking them to shelters."

"All our people, both firefighters and support staff, deserve our gratitude and admiration for their unstinting work in the most difficult of working conditions."

Cllr Tony Hooton, Chair of the Fire Authority added: "The severe flooding put overwhelming demands on the resources of the local emergency services and I am pleased that Cheshire was able to respond quickly with specialist equipment and staff."

Hotels face safety checks after fatal fire

A MAJOR campaign has been launched by the Service to raise awareness of fire safety in the hotels across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington in the wake of the recent fatal fire at the Penhallow Hotel in Cornwall.

While detailed investigations into the Newquay tragedy are continuing, officers from Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have been reminding hotel and guesthouse owners of their responsibilities to ensure everything possible is done to prevent similar fires locally.

All hotels and guesthouses known to the Service have been sent letters to highlight fire safety issues, while staff are making random visits to premises at night.

"The loss of life and the devastation in Cornwall recently are a graphic reminder of the catastrophic potential of a night-time fire in a hotel," said Cllr Tony Hooton, Chair of Cheshire Fire Authority.

"While it is too early to know exactly what happened, our staff have been taking the opportunity to visit hotels and guesthouses in the area to check that all possible fire precautions are in place."

New fire safety legislation which came in last October abolished fire certificates and now requires people who own or run businesses to risk assess their own premises and put appropriate fire precautions in place.

Fire officers then audit the premises to check precautions are adequate and offer help and advice, but if they are found to be inadequate they can ultimately take the owners to court.

"We know there are at least 300 hotels and guesthouses across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington with sleeping accommodation for more than six people, and around half have been visited by our staff in the last six months," said Mark Cashin, Cheshire's Deputy Chief Fire Officer for Community Risk Reduction.

"Our new programme of evening visits has given us the chance to check if the precautions are in place during what is obviously the most potentially dangerous time."

"We want to work with all business owners to improve the safety of their premises and there is a full range of information and advice available through our website – www.cheshirefire.gov.uk."

