



meeting	<b>COMMUNITY SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE</b>	
date	<b>18 July 2005</b>	agenda item number

## **REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (COMMUNITY PROTECTION)**

### **TRADING STANDARDS PEER REVIEW**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. To provide members with details of an improvement plan which has been drawn up following a recent Peer Review of the Trading Standards Service.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. Nottinghamshire has been the second authority within the East Midlands region to have taken part in the Department of Trade and Industry's Peer Review process which is part of a National Performance Framework for Trading Standards. The purpose of this process is for each trading standards service to assess how well it is performing and to identify areas for improvements. The use of peers from within local government as critical friends is intended to provide a challenging and knowledgeable environment to identify current strengths and agree key areas that require development.
3. From October to December 2004 a number of internal officers undertook a self assessment of the service. A written report on the findings was produced which detailed the services' main strengths and areas for improvement. This report was presented to the services' senior management team who developed an improvement plan detailing how and when the areas for improvement would be addressed.

#### **Peer Review Process**

4. The peer review team consisted of the following: -
  - John Fox – Consumer Protection Manager, Leicester City Council
  - Steve Mapson – Principal Trading Standards Officer, Northamptonshire County Council
  - Joanna Spicer – Councillor at Suffolk County Council, Shadow cabinet member for Caring and Protecting. I&DeA Accredited Member Peer.
5. The self assessment report together with the improvement plan was presented to the peer review team in early February 2005 together with a bulk of information which provided further details about the service. This enabled the peer reviewers' to

undertake a desktop review. In order to support this review a site visit was arranged for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of March.

6. The site visit comprised of a series of meetings and interviews with service staff, members of the council and other stakeholders, either individually or in groups.
7. Initial feedback was given to senior management of the service at the end of the site visit and this was supported with a written report. Amendments were made to the original improvement plan to ensure all recommendations made by the peer reviewers were incorporated.

### **Summary of findings - Strengths**

8. In regards to the process, the reviewers felt the self assessment process had been conducted in a structured and searching manner. They thought it had been collaborative and open and had identified the key issues that are central to the continuing development of the service.
9. A noteworthy strength they highlighted was that of leadership. The peer review team saw evidence that leaders engaged elected members in the development of the service, had a clear sense of mission and vision, lead by example and have a commitment to service improvement. They felt that this strength suggested that the areas of improvement highlighted in our self assessment report were likely to be achieved.
10. Consumer Advice Service – The service delivers a wide range of clearly defined services to a consistently large number of people. There was regular measurement of users' perceptions through postal surveys, the results of which showed a high degree of satisfaction. We found evidence from managers and external stakeholders that the service had acted to address areas of concern.
11. Managers have a realistic awareness of the challenges posed by the launch of Consumer Direct East Midlands in the summer of 2005 and have plans in place to modify the service and retrain its advice staff.
12. The Peer Review report stated that they saw first hand that the Portfolio lead member showed a clear understanding of the trading standards function and was involved in the development of the service. The opposition member interviewed indicated that they felt fully involved in policy issues. The Director of Culture and Community had established clear links for cross-departmental matters such as Community Safety.
13. Clear evidence of a service wide commitment to considering the opinion and needs of stakeholders when developing service priorities was identified by the peer reviewers.
14. The Peer Reviewers found a strong and established commitment to the training and development of staff in both professional development and other core skills. Competencies and knowledge were regularly reviewed to identify both individual training needs and any short and long term skills gaps within the service.

## Areas for Improvement

15. The following highlights the areas identified for improvement, details of the work planned and timescales for completion can be found on the attached Action Plan - appendix 1.
16. Leadership – our own self assessment identified that communication in terms of strategy, vision and service plans is inconsistent across the service. It was also felt that the service's approach to business planning could benefit from being more structured. The Peer Reviewers supported our findings in this area.
17. Policy & Strategy – it has been identified that further research needs to take place to identify if more policies need introducing into the service such as the ones highlighted in the Good Practice Guides for Trading Standard. Before this takes place however guidance is required in terms of how policies should be developed and how all policies will be monitored once introduced.
18. People – in regards to human resources the findings of both the self assessment and the peer review team showed that management of promotion and career development was inconsistent across the service. It was also highlighted that although processors were in place to identify skills gaps the service needs to develop mechanisms to ensure that these needs are addressed, for example, using exit interviews and results from Employees Performance and Development Reviews (EPDRs) more effectively. The Induction Process within the service was also an area identified for improvement in order to ensure staff have the relevant skills and knowledge to carry out there work.
19. Partnership – Evidence indicated that partnership arrangements were sometimes left to individuals to establish which can prove ineffective as leaders in other agencies may not allow their staff appropriate time. This together with assessing and reviewing joint working arrangements were areas identified by both the self assessment team and the peer reviewers as an areas we need to improve on.
20. Resources - There is a perception in the service that a tool we use for managing information (FLARE) is not used to its full potential. It was also felt the service lacked a systematic approach to evaluating IT and therefore this is highlighted in our improvement plan as areas we need to concentrate on.
21. Processes – The assessment highlighted that there was little evidence that the service is proactive in raising the profile of the service in a structured way. The service had also recently introduced a new scheme for risk assessing businesses which has been developed by Local Authorities Co-ordinators Of Regulatory Services (LACORS), it was identified that further work was required in this area. Finally in regards to processes it was identified that there was inconsistencies in the way staff carry out activities and therefore more detailed guidance is required to ensure consistency.
22. Results (Customer, People, Society & Key Performance) – A number of areas for improvement were identified in regards to improving our performance in regards to customer and staff satisfaction as well as improving our key performance results.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

- 23 The report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of  
. finance, equal opportunities personnel, Crime and Disorder, and users. Where  
such implications are material, they have been brought out in the text of the report.

## **Recommendations**

24. That the report be noted

**Richard Hodge**  
**Assistant Director (Community Protection)**

## **Legal Services Comments (KK: 04/07/05)**

This report is for noting only.

## **Director of Resources Financial Comments (C&C/RWK)**

None.

## **Background Papers Available for Inspection**

Self Assessment Report  
Peer Review Final Report

## **Electoral Divisions Affected**

All.