



meeting	<b>COMMUNITY SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE</b>	
date	<b>13 February 2006</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 the progress on an improvement plan which was drawn up following a Peer Review of the Trading Standards Service.

#### **Peer Review Process**

2. During 2005 Nottinghamshire Trading Standards took part in a peer review of its service. This is a Department of Trade and Industry's initiative 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. The project identified a number of strengths within our service. The peer review team felt that leadership within the service was good. They stated that they 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 improvement plan were likely to be achieved.
4. 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 skill gaps within the service. They also thought that there was clear evidence of a service wide commitment to considering the opinion and needs of stakeholders when developing service priorities.
5. The improvement plan, which was the output of this process, was presented to Community Services Select Committee at its meeting on 18 July 2005.

## Progress on Improvements

6. **Leadership/Business Planning.** The review identified that the service's business planning could benefit from being more structured. It was felt that communication in terms of strategy, vision and service aims could be more consistent across teams if we were to adjust our business planning process.
7. In response to this we reviewed our procedure for service planning and during 05/06 have been doing things differently. As a result manager's perception is that Business Planning is more embedded in the service. Plans are better structured and targets are reviewed and updated if appropriate on a quarterly basis. Better monitoring and management of Employee Performance & Development Reviews (EDPR) and supervision takes place to ensure all staff are aware of how their individual performance fits into the overall performance of the service.
8. **Policy & Strategy.** It was recognised that the policies and procedures which exist within the service need to be assessed and review to ensure they help the service maintain or improve its standards. A gap analysis also needs to be undertaken to ensure that we have enough procedures or if we need to introduce more.
9. Staff changes in 2005 resulted in skill shortages in this area, therefore to underpin the work we need to do we had to get others trained. Six members of staff attended a Lead Auditor course and were successful in passing the exam. This course provided the tools for officers to assess the quality of services in terms of whether policies and procedures are being followed effectively.
10. **People.** How we manage promotion and career development was highlighted as an area of improvement as the peer reviewers felt that there were inconsistencies across the service.
11. As a result of this during 2005 we have revised and reintroduced our competency scheme. This resulted in four officers attaining career development. Staff now have a clear idea of what they need to do to progress in their scale. Human Resource planning in terms of development has been improved whereby a skills assessment has been undertaken and a training plan for the service developed.
12. **Partnerships.** The reviewers felt we could strengthen our partnership working by managers increasing their contact with managers within other agencies or departments to establish joint priorities and increasing commitment. There had been instances where the working arrangements which had been established by front line staff had not been as effective as hoped due to staff from other services not having the same priorities.
13. We have strengthened our relationships with other trading standard services by agreeing priorities at senior management level within the East Midlands Coordinators of Trading Standards (EMCOTS). We have improved our relationship with District/Borough Environmental Health Departments. Senior officers are establishing how we can work more closely together to reduce the burden regulatory services are having on businesses. A partnership we have with the Police – 'Operation Liberal' is continuing to improve; this is a joint group which aims to reduce the level of distraction burglary.

14. **Data Management.** The reviewers perception was that a tool we use for managing database information (FLARE) was not being used to its full potential. They felt we could use the database more effectively for service planning and monitoring performance. However it was identified that the standard of information being put into the database needed improvement before we could do this.
15. Training courses to improve the standard of information have taken place to provide staff with the required skills. A skills audit has been undertaken and more training is to take place over the following months. The perception amongst managers is that the information within FLARE is gradually improving and the data is more reliable. Managers feel they are receiving more support from Quality & Support Services, the database managers.
16. **Processes/ Raising the Profile.** The review highlighted that there was little evidence that the service was proactive in raising the profile of the service in a structured way. They felt the public needed to be aware of the work we do as our activities are undertaken for their protection and if they were aware of them they could do more to protect themselves.
17. Each team manager now ensures they regularly issue press releases about the work they are doing. We have strengthened our relationship with local media by highlighting to them the importance of our work in order that more articles are published; many articles have appeared on the front page of the Evening Post. We nominated the Evening Post for the 2005 Trading Standard Institute Media Award for their vigilant reporting of trading standards issues, which they were successful in winning.

## **Future Work**

18. Over the next few months the following areas of work need to be commenced or continued. The original peer review improvement plan was a three year plan and therefore improvement activities will be incorporated into business plans in the next couple of years.
19. **Quality Procedures/Policies.** Now we have provided our staff with training to fill the skills shortage detailed above, we need to review our quality procedures to ensure we have appropriate effective procedures in all areas and to ensure procedures are being followed.
20. **Learning and Development.** A new national Trading Standards qualification is being introduced which will provide the basis for a revised learning and development framework. In addition the service has decided to participate in the competency scheme developed by the East of England Trading Standards Association (EETSA) which has been financially supported by the DTI. We need to ensure a smooth transition from our current competency scheme to the new scheme.
21. **Partnerships.** We work with many different agencies or local authority departments. Many working relationships are formed at front end level. We need to continue strengthening these relationships by agreeing shared priorities at senior management level in order that officers are not pulled away from projects at the last minute.
22. **Business Planning.** We are assessing the effectiveness of the improvements made with our business planning process during the current year to ensure we continue to improve during the next planning year.

23. **Induction Process.** We will improve the induction process to ensure staff have the appropriate skills to carry out activities to the standard expected within the service. This is even more important with the advent of the new qualification which places greater emphasis on individual career progression through competency rather than qualifications.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

24. 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**

25. That the report and progress be welcomed.

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

### **Legal Services Comments [IR 17.1.06]**

The Committee is not being asked to take any decisions or exercise any of its powers. The report is purely a notification of the progress made since the earlier report to Committee on the subject.

### **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.