



meeting	<b>COMMUNITY SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE</b>	
date	<b>25 April 2005</b>	agenda item number

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

### **TRADING STANDARDS PEER REVIEW**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. To provide members with a summary of the findings of a peer review which has recently been undertaken within the Trading Standards Service. The peer reviewers' written report is in draft form at this stage, however, the completed report will be presented to members at the meeting on 25 April.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. Nottinghamshire Trading Standards Service 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 the 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 officers within Nottinghamshire Trading Standards undertook a self assessment of the service. A written report on the findings of this self assessment 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 we would address the areas for improvement.

#### **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. Our 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 detail about our 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 is supported with a written report.

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

8. In regards to the process, the reviewers felt the service had been very open and that the statements we made in terms of our strengths and areas for improvement were honest. Meetings and interviews with our stakeholders provided further evidence and the reviewers were satisfied that all key issues had been considered in our report.
9. The reviewers felt the report presented to them could have done more to highlight our strengths as it became clear to them on their site visit there was more examples of excellence and best practice than they first thought when undertaking their desk top review.
10. 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.
11. 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. We initially identified this as strength in our self assessment and the peer review felt this was confirmed in the results of various surveys that showed a high degree of satisfaction by businesses and consumers.
12. It was felt that the training and development of staff is a major strength of the service. Recently, a more consistent use of the corporate EPDR assessment process has resulted in better identification of training needs.
13. Some successful partnership operational arrangements were in place and the importance of cross functional working was recognised at senior levels.
14. Relationships with local media were seen to be good and there was evidence of regular coverage of the achievements of the trading standards service.

### **Areas for Improvement**

15. Partnership working was identified through our self assessment process to be an area we could improve on and the peer review team agreed with this within their report. The process identified that partnerships in place were ad hoc and often only established at operational levels. The peer review team were pleased to see this as an action on our improvement plan however they believe we should give more priority to this improvement than our proposed timescale for completion by September 2006.
16. Although the peer review team believed that the service was committed to undertaking the actions detailed within the improvement plan they suggested that we should provide more detail on our plan in terms of the priority the service gave to the improvement area and how the improvement would be assessed.
17. It was recognised by the Peer Reviewers the steps we have made to improve our business planning processes however they recommended that we prioritise our operational work by assessment of risk or detriment to consumers.

18. The Peer Review team believe we should give more priority to the creation of guidance for policy development as this is seen as key to achieve improvements within the service.
19. It was also recommended that we expand our plans for an induction process to include the assessment of current skill levels for newly appointed staff.
20. A number of improvements were identified by us in regards to our management of data, the peer review team supported our initial suggestions and recommended that due to the nature of the problem these issues needed a strong management approach.
21. Finally the peer review team made a couple of recommendations in terms of processes currently adopted by the service. These were in respect of marketing our service to businesses and the process we use in the production of reports for formal legal proceedings.

### **Next Step**

22. Trading Standards Management Team will give careful consideration to the comments made by the Peer Review Team and make amendments to the improvement plan if appropriate. The Peer Review Improvement Plan is one of the key priorities within the current year's business plan and progress against the plan will be continuously monitored.

### **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 [IR 13.4.05]**

There are no decisions to be taken as the report is for noting purposes only. There are no separate legal issues to be addressed.

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

None.

### **Background Papers Available for Inspection**

Self Assessment Report  
Improvement Plan

### **Electoral Divisions Affected**

All.