

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET
MONDAY 24 MARCH 2003 AT 2.00 PM**

**TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE DELIVERY AND FOOD LAW
ENFORCEMENT PLANS 2003/04**

Report of the Director of Community Information

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Executive Member: Gerald Game

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek the approval of the Cabinet to the Trading Standards Service Delivery and Food Law Enforcement Plans 2003/04 before submission to the County Council.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The two plans flow from requirements placed on the authority by the Department of Trade and Industry and Food Standards Agency. The latter draws on powers contained within the Food Standards Act 1999 and the former from a Performance Framework agreed following an Audit Commission report "Measure for Measure". A peer review process for service delivery plans is being developed and the FSA have a program of auditing authorities plans. The Plans will drive much of the service delivery in the coming year.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The Cabinet is asked to endorse the Service Plan and Food Law Enforcement Plans 2003/04 and recommend their adoption to the County Council. The plans will then be submitted to the Department of Trade and Industry and Food Standards Agency.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Food Law Enforcement Plan is now in its third year and sets out the authority's approach to that activity. It follows the format laid down by the Food Standards Agency summarising the resources available in terms of staff and finance. Included is a breakdown of staff competencies and how we maintain those competencies.
- 4.2 Food inspection and sampling targets are included in the plan and it is pleasing to note that for 2002/03 we will have met our targets. Quarterly updates on performance against those targets are sent to the Executive member and group spokespersons.
- 4.3 The Food Standards Agency (FSA) have a planned programme of auditing authorities activities and these have become more focused recently, homing in on either inspection, sampling or procedural issues. We were expecting an audit within the year 2003/04, but the FSA have stated that they will not visit authorities graded as excellent in the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment. We will continue to update our documentation and processes, as well as following the format for the plan, so that the inevitable future audit will not have grounds for complaint.
- 4.4 The National Performance Framework gave rise to the first Trading Standards Delivery Plans last year. A high percentage of authorities used the template and specific and general feedback to authorities was given in December 2002, when the first batch of plans had been assessed. Hertfordshire has endeavoured to address the points raised in that feedback, especially in linking the National priorities to the Hertfordshire promises and departmental priorities. We have also been more explicit in detailing how we meet the national priorities which are:-
- Informed Confident Consumers
 - Informed Successful Businesses
 - Enforcement of a Fair and Safe Trading Environment
 - Efficient, Effective and Improving Trading Standards Services
- 4.5 The specific feedback on the last Hertfordshire plan recognised that we met or were addressing 30 out of the 43 standards. Our assessment is that a slightly different presentation of the plan would have raised that further. We were praised for our use of headlines, our leadership of the local Consumer Support Network, our use of technology in providing advice and our work with Home Authority companies, especially major retailers.
- 4.6 It was felt the standards mentioned above might lead to more prescription of an acceptable level of service, albeit recognising local discretion. However, the Department of Trade and Industry has been working with local authorities to develop a better suite of performance

indicators relating to those standards and complemented by a peer review process. The authorities within the Eastern Region have been active in the development of an inter authority auditing process. More detailed work programmes are being developed to sit behind the plans.

- 4.7 Trading Standards departments throughout the country have encouraged government, to agree a process by which these two plans and the forthcoming Animal Health Framework can be amalgamated into a single document as much of the information is common. Discussions are still ongoing.

5. Financial Implications

The activities described in both plans form the core activities of the service, carried out within the existing revenue budget.

Background Papers

National Performance Framework for Trading Standards – *Department of Trade & Industry*

Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement – *Food Standards Agency*

Departmental Records