

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
COMMUNITY INFORMATION & PROTECTION
SELECT COMMITTEE
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SELECT COMMITTEE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Report of the Director of Community Information

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TRADING STANDARDS INSPECTION PROGRAMME

1 Purpose of the report

To provide information on the inspection of goods and services to enable the select committee to consider areas for possible scrutiny.

2 Background

Trading Standards enforces over fifty Acts of Parliament and over 1000 sets of regulations. The majority of the Acts of Parliament place a duty on the authority to enforce the provisions contained in the legislation, but do not (with some exceptions) give guidance on how that is to be achieved. Inspection of goods and services, particularly at the point of production or importation, and advice to business on how to comply with the law, all seek to meet the duties placed on the Council.

3 Visits to Business Premises

These take place for a variety of reasons, and may arise as a result of a consumer complaint, a request from the business for advice, or because they are due for a visit on the basis of a frequency allocated on the basis of risk. Higher risk premises should be visited or inspected annually, medium risk at least once in a 24 month period and low risk premises once in 60 months. The risk rating is a points score based on turnover, previous history, production and quality control factors. Only a complete visit, in the four core areas of Quality, Safety, Metrology and Fair Trading counts as a visit in terms of the Audit Commission Performance Indicator J7.

4 Specific Requirements & Performance Indicators

- 4.1 The only current target laid down at a national level is that contained in Code of Practice 8, "Food Standards Inspections", made under the Food Safety Act 1990. Based on the risk system, authorities are encouraged to meet the levels outlined above and better them where appropriate. This equates to visiting 40% of food premises in any one year. Hertfordshire's current performance stands at 26% with the aim of reaching 30% as soon as possible.
- 4.2 The Audit Commission Performance Indicator for Trading Standards is the average number of visits to medium and higher risk premises in a year. The latest performance figure for Hertfordshire is 0.18, where the class average (for counties) is approximately 0.30.
- 4.3 An Audit Commission paper "Measure for Measure" published earlier this year made much of the variability in the delivery and resourcing of Trading Standards Departments.
- 4.4 Some authorities have been known to receive letters of concern from the Department of Trade and Industry if their required returns under the Weights & Measures Act 1985 show a very low level of performance.

5 Future Developments

- 5.1 In September the government announced plans for a revamped Office of Fair Trading, at arms length from government. One of its duties would be to set national standards for local trading standards authorities.
- 5.2 This month (October) should see the publication of the Food Standards Agency's expectations of local authorities, following an extensive consultation. One of the expected outcomes is to insist on member endorsement of an annual service plan for food standards work.