



Community Information
Trading Standards

HERTFORDSHIRE TRADING
STANDARDS SERVICE

**SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN
2003 - 2004**

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Executive Summary

The National Performance Framework

Background

Trading Standards services play a key role in local communities helping consumers, tackling unfair and unsafe trade practices and providing support for business. It is crucial therefore that Trading Standards provide high quality consistent and responsive service.

To help achieve this, the National Performance Framework for Trading Standards services was developed by the Consumer Affairs Directorate of the Department of Trade and Industry with support from the Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body for Regulatory Services (LACORS), the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), National Weights and Measures Laboratory (NWML). The framework introduces performance standards for Trading Standards and is aimed at ensuring that Trading Standards services throughout UK are able to develop a modern service working towards national and local priorities in a coherent way.

The framework delivery mechanism was that of a consistent structured Service Plan format for all authorities to follow.

The framework came into effect on 1 April 2002, and for the first time, prescribed the format and structure that annual Trading Standards plans should adopt.

The National Performance Framework aims to:

- Provide clear priorities and core standards for a modern Trading Standards service
- Support the role of Trading Standards in the community and in contributing to key local authority priorities
- Improve performance of Trading Standards by developing a system of measurement and sharing good practice and
- Facilitate a more coherent and consistent approach to enforcement and service delivery.

Outline Of Framework

The National Performance Framework has three key elements:

the **Service Delivery Plan**

the **Standard** and

the **Information Return**.

Together they have been designed to ensure that:

- All services work to policies and procedures based on the same core principles

- The Trading Standards plan is integrated into the corporate policies of the local authorities
- Resource and infrastructure planning is tied in more realistically
- Work plans are focused on desired outcomes based on relevant intelligence
- Continual improvement, through performance management and review is an intrinsic part of the Service
- Results and working methods can be compared with and challenged by other Trading Standards services
- Flexibility to reflect local priorities and initiatives as well as national ones is built in
- The profile of Trading Standards is raised locally
- There is more consistency between services
- There is better liaison and co-operation between Trading Standards Service and other agencies

Plans should therefore cover:

- The framework within which the Service is provided including resources, organisational structure, strategic objectives and community needs.
- Provision to meet the four national priorities and any local priorities.
- The development, modernisation and review of the Service to ensure continuous improvement.

The Service Delivery Plan

Every Trading Standards Service is now therefore required to draw up a Service Delivery Plan (SDP) outlining provisions in key areas. The SDP consists of three parts.

Part one covers the core responsibilities of the local service, its objectives, local structure and resources and the expectations of the community. It aims to allow authorities to set the scene and consider the circumstances in which they are operating as a prelude to formulating plans for the year ahead.

Part two sets out priorities for the service in the year ahead and requires services to at least make provisions in respect of each of the standards.

Part three requires services to have in place arrangements for reviewing progress in delivering the plan.

The Service Delivery Plan will be the basis on which local authorities will be monitored and audited nationally on their provision of a Trading Standards service.

Service Plan for Food Law Enforcement

In 2001, the Food Standards Agency developed and introduced the Framework Agreement on Local Authority Enforcement, which was developed through the Local Authority Enforcement Liaison Group

The Agreement provided for:

- **Publicly available local service plans** to increase the transparency of local enforcement services
- Agreed food law enforcement standards for local authorities
- Enhanced monitoring data with a greater focus on inspection outcomes and which provided more detailed information on local authority performance
- An audit scheme aimed at securing improvements and sharing good practice

Hertfordshire has produced an annual Food Plan since this time and this plan now sits behind the National Performance Framework Service Delivery Plan.

There are detailed specifications concerning the completion of both plans, and these two specifications have yet to be correlated centrally by the Government and Food Standards Agency to ensure that Trading Standards are only required to produce a single document

PART ONE

Context and Comparative Factors

SECTION A: THE TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE IN THE COMMUNITY

1. Core Responsibilities of the Trading Standards Service

Name Of Authority	Hertfordshire County Council
Name of Chief Inspector of Weights and Measures	Ian McLachlan

Status Of Plan	(yes or no?)
• Approved by Members	Yes

Enforcement Responsibility	Description	Is this in your remit? (yes or no?)
Weights and Measures	Work relating to the accuracy of weighing and measuring equipment in use for trade and ensuring quantity of goods is within tolerance. Verification services.	Yes
	• Does your authority maintain local standards? (Ref: Section 4 Weights and Measures Act 1985)	Yes
	• Does your service hold Approved Body status? (Relates to the Non Automatic Weighing Instruments Directive and linked UK Regulations)	Yes (EETSA)
Fair Trading	Includes claims about prices, quality or description of goods and services.	Yes
Product Safety	Includes monitoring goods supplied to consumers are safe and correctly labelled.	Yes
Food Standards	Includes ensuring food is correctly described and labelled throughout the supply chain, and that applicable compositional standards are met.	Yes
	• Is this function shared with environmental health?	No
Consumer Credit	Includes monitoring licensing regime, ensuing transactions, documentation and adverts comply.	Yes
Animal Health and Welfare	Includes movement licenses, monitoring welfare during transport and at markets.	Yes
Agricultural Standards	Includes ensuring fertilisers and animal feeding stuffs are of correct composition and labelled.	Yes
Age Restricted Sales	Ensuring certain products are not supplied to children, e.g. tobacco, videos, butane lighter fuel, fireworks.	Yes
Road Traffic	Includes supply of unroadworthy vehicles, overloaded goods vehicles, weight restriction areas.	Yes
Explosives	Ensuring fireworks and other explosives are safely stored on registered premises.	Yes
Petroleum	Ensuring petroleum is safely stored on licensed premises.	No (Fire & Rescue)
Environmental Legislation	Includes energy labelling, packaging disposal and motor fuel pollutants.	Yes
Licensing	List only the main duties:	
	Explosives	
	Poisons	
	Performing Animals	

Additional Functions. List any additional main duties which fall to your service (Do not include membership of enforcement forums and business partnerships as these fall into section 4 of the plan)
Provision of an advisory service to the authority in health and environmental matters, which include monitoring of water quality in HCC establishments.

Specialist Services. List only the main services below (include services such as calibration services, public analyst and product testing, note any partners)	Partners
Metrology Laboratory (UKAS accredited)	

Advice Responsibility	Description	Is this in your remit? (yes or no?)
Are you part of a Consumer Support Network?		
		Yes
Business Advice	Provision of advice to business through means other than inspection and home authority.	Yes
Consumer Advice	Provision of advice & information to consumers.	Yes

Indicate the level of consumer advice you provide. (Mark Y for yes where appropriate)
(In terms of the Community Legal Services Quality Mark definitions)

Client Level	Local tax payers	Contract in area	All contacts
Information	Yes	Yes	Yes
Assisted information	Yes	Yes	No
General Help	Yes	Yes	No
General help plus case work	No	No	No

Information: The advice service must typically be able to supply information such as leaflets and other reference material relevant to trading standards.

Assisted information: As well as offering information such as leaflets and other reference material will also provide someone to help find the information needed or to help decide on the most appropriate source of help.

General Help: The advice service must typically be able to offer information and advice to consumers to help resolve the problem. The service will diagnose the problem, explain the options available to rectify the problem, identify further action and give basic assistance such as assisting in form filling, letter writing and by contacting other organisations for further information.

General help plus case work: As above but will take action on behalf of the consumer and puts their case to the other party in order to persuade them to make or change a decision in favour of the consumer. This might include negotiating by telephone, by letter or face to face. The service may provide advocacy in formal proceedings such as the Small Claims Procedure.

Your council/business tax payers: Residents, local businesses, organisations based in the area.

Contracts arising in your area: Complainant/enquirer may not be based in the area, but the goods or services causing concern were obtained in the area.

All contacts helped: Advice is given regardless of origin.

The primary legislation enforced by the service is listed in Appendix 1.

2. Community and Corporate Objectives

2.1 Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) fundamental aim is to provide high quality services and create the conditions in which all Hertfordshire's citizens can enjoy a good quality of life. Three years ago HCC decided to focus on the following objectives:

- Sustaining Hertfordshire's environment and economic prosperity so that the county continues to be an attractive and safe place to live and work.
- Improving education and support to children and families so that young people are able to achieve their potential.
- Providing easy to access, high quality, cost effective services to all citizens and supporting disadvantaged people and communities in ways that help people to help themselves.

2.2 These aims and priorities have been developed through four interlinked processes:

- Political priorities based on the above objectives are agreed annually and published as promises in the Local Performance Plan.
- The Herts Connect vision defines the kind of organisation we aspire to be and how we need to work to achieve the promises.
- The Hertfordshire Together partnership provides the means to develop a shared set of priorities with its partners.
- The 'Simply Done' process across the authority builds upon the three previous processes, with the aim to streamline HCC's internal processes and procedures. The objectives of 'Simply Done' complement the outcomes of the Council's recent Continual Performance Assessment, and this plan includes action identified for the Trading Standards Service

A reviewed set of four promises, taking account of national priorities and local people's views were agreed in February 2002.

These are as follows with the sub promises of relevance to the service listed

- **To make Hertfordshire a better place to live and work**
- Work with the community to protect and enhance the environment.
- Reduce youth crime by working with the Police and other agencies.
- Work with business to increase prosperity, protect jobs and improve standards of living for local people.
- **To offer children a better future.**
- Help people to continue learning throughout their lives
- **To help people help themselves.**
- Work with the NHS, voluntary organisations and other councils to improve health and care services.
- Promote equality and improve access to our services, employment and buildings.
- Make it easier for people to get advice and information they need from us.
- Give local communities a better voice to tackle local problems.
- **To give the public value for money**

3. Service Aims, Objectives and Strategic Thinking

3.1 The overall aim of the Trading Standards Service is to: -

- Contribute to the economic, physical and mental well being of consumers.
- Contribute to the economic prosperity and competitiveness of Hertfordshire business.
- Ensure individuals have accurate information on which to base purchasing decisions.
- Prevent consumers and business suffering loss through unfair trading practices.

It seeks to pursue this through a number of key objectives which include: -

- The provision of services to advise and educate consumers of their rights as purchasers of goods and services.
- The provision of advice and home authority services to help businesses comply with their legal obligations.
- The regulation of the market place, by means of targeted inspections, audits, sampling programmes, complaint investigations and formal action where necessary and appropriate.

3.2 The service aims and objectives sit easily within the priorities identified in the National Performance Framework of:

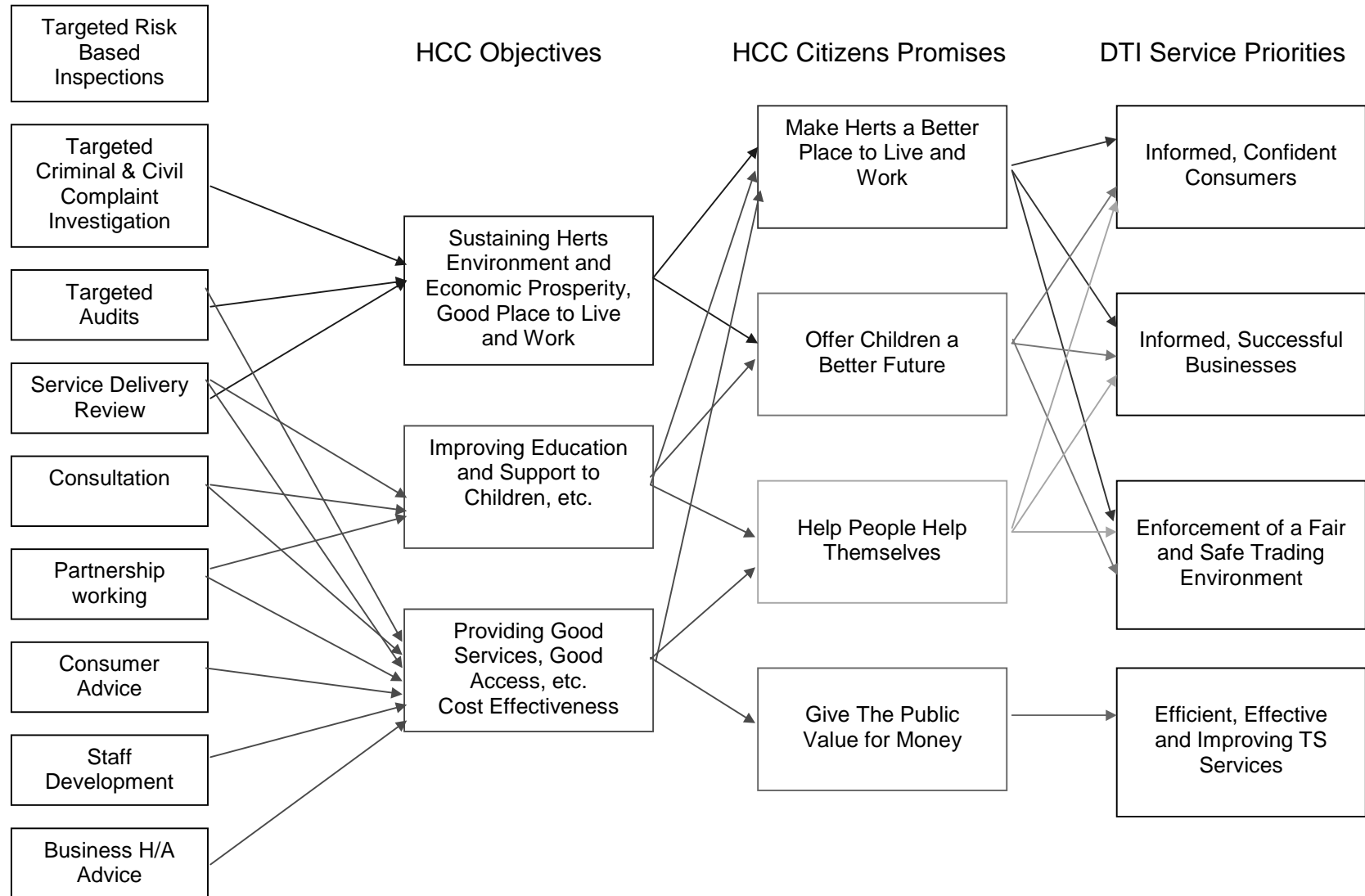
- Informed Confident Consumers
- Informed Successful Businesses
- Enforcement of a Fair and Safe Trading Environment
- Efficient, Effective and Improving Trading Standard Services

As well as the Hertfordshire promises mentioned above, found in the Best Value Performance Plan.

The table overleaf shows, diagrammatically, the links between National Priorities, the County Council's Objectives and Promises and The Service's Key Aims and Objectives.

It should be noted that medium term objectives against the local priorities are highlighted in the plan.

4. Table Showing Links between National Priorities, Corporate Promises & Local Objectives



SECTION B: LOCAL STRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

4. Organisation, Accountability and Wider Links

4.1 Profile of the County

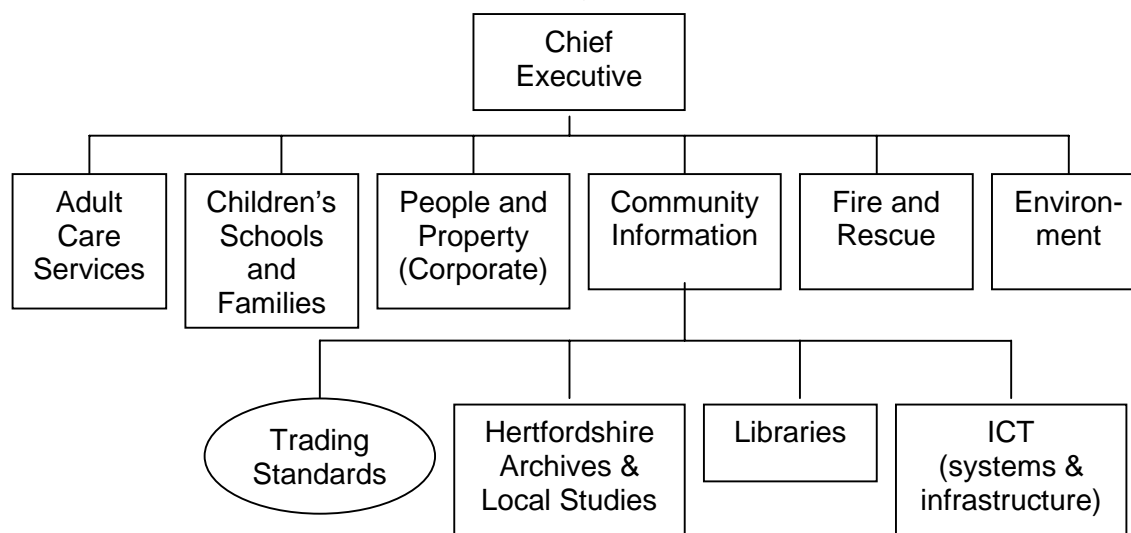
With a population of just over one million, Hertfordshire is the most densely populated county in England. There is no main population centre with 85% of the population living in one of 28 communities of more than 3 000 people. More than a quarter of the population commute to London. The proximity to London, and the airports of Heathrow, Luton and Stansted, together with good road links, means that many companies have relocated their primary offices into the county.

4.2 Structure and Organisation

The council has 77 elected members with a Conservative majority. A single party cabinet and five politically proportionate scrutiny committees were adopted in 2001. The gross revenue budget is over £1 billion.

Services are delivered through five departments with the aid of the Councils Customer Service Centre, operating 67 hours per week.

The Trading Standards department is part of the Community Information Department and, the Head of Trading Standards reports to the Director.



A structure chart for the department, together with the committee responsibilities can be found at Appendix 2.

Trading Standards is part of the portfolio of the Executive Member for Community Services, and the Head of Trading Standards has direct access to that Member.

4.3 Awards, Standards, Quality Marks

The Corporate Performance Assessment carried out in 2002, classed Hertfordshire as an “excellent” Authority. Following this classification, freedoms and flexibilities allowed by central government include a requirement only to produce two plans, a Community Strategy plan and the Local Performance plan. Neither of which needs to be submitted to central government. We will however continue to produce our NPF Service Delivery plan and our Food Law Enforcement Service plan and submit them to the relevant bodies.

As a medium term objective we are looking to use the EFQM model as a means of measuring our service performance and for benchmarking with other Authorities.

The Service achieved the provisional CLS Quality Mark for its advice services in 2002.

Indicate if you have received, or are working towards any of the following	Received	Working Towards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charter Mark • Investors in People • OFT Excellence Award • Beacon Status • CLS Quality Mark • ISO 9000 	<p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>	<p>No</p> <p>-</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>-</p> <p>No</p>
<p>Do you use the EFQM model</p> <p>Do you have a service level agreement with the OFT</p> <p><u>Others</u> UKAS Accredited Metrology Laboratory OIML Class F2</p>	<p>No</p> <p>Yes</p>	

4.4 Partnerships

The service has developed partnerships with a number of agencies to deliver its services more effectively. These are listed below: -

ACTIVITY	PARTNER
Information and Advice	
Consumer Support Network	Citizens Advice Bureaux Local Businesses Age Concern Help the Aged Central Herts Consumer Group Herts Police Community Safety Co-ordinator Dixons Retail Group Qualitas
Provision of advice and information	Small Business Service Hertfordshire Chamber Of Commerce
Dissemination of advice and information	The Office of Fair Trading Department of Trade and Industry
"Megadrive" providing information to young people about car ownership	Hertfordshire Road Safety Unit Hertfordshire Police Motoring Organisations
Inspection and Enforcement	
Operation of the Home Authority principle	Other Trading Standards Departments
Joint sampling initiatives Joint training Benchmarking Sharing best practice Notified Body status for verification of weighing machines	Eastern Region Trading Standards Departments
Food and Animal by-product matters	District Councils x10 (Environmental Health)
Food Enforcement	The Food Standards Agency The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Egg Marketing Inspectorate)
Animal Health Enforcement activities	The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Unroadworthy Vehicles	Hertfordshire Police
Underage Sales	Hertfordshire Police Citizen Card St Albans Primary Care Trust Hertfordshire Health Promotion
Doorstep Initiative	Hertfordshire Police Neighbourhood Watch Watford and Three Rivers Against Crime Voluntary Groups Banks/Building Societies
Consumer Credit exchange of information Part III Assurances Stop Now Orders	The Office Of Fair Trading

Various Enforcement activities	Customs and Excise The Benefits Agency The Inland Revenue
Counterfeiting Enforcement	Federation Against Copyright Theft Federation Against Software Theft British Phonographic Institute Anti-Counterfeiting Group

5. Local Authority Trading Standards Expenditure

	Gross 2002/2003	Allocated 2003/2004
Employee costs	1,525,209	1,732,650
Premises related expenses	160,996	173,586
Supplies and Services	276,170	282,117
Other running costs	310,459	321,545
Capital charges	49,000	41,000
Total Expenditure	2,321,834	2,550,898
Income	138,704	115,511
Total Net Expenditure on Service	2,183,130	2,435,387

6. Staffing Allocation

Role	Number of Staff
Management	6.0
Administration	4.4
Enforcement Staff	25.0
Enforcement Support Staff	3.0
Consumer Advice	7.7
DTS Trainees	1.5
Contracted Staff	0.3
Total number	47.9
Current Vacancies	4.0
Long term vacancies	

Qualification	Description	Number of Staff
DTS	DTS or equivalent	20.3
DCA	Full	1.0
DCA Food Paper	Full and Food	5.0
DCA Animal Health	Full and Animal Health	0.0
DMS		0.0
DCA Single Papers	Safety Credit	1.0 1.0
Food Hygiene	Intermediate	26.0

7. Accessibility

Services

- Trading Standards staff provide advice and information to consumers and businesses. The volume and spread of calls received from our CSC are collated monthly and every quarter questionnaires are sent to enquirers of the service asking for feedback on accessibility. The results are reviewed and resources are then adjusted to ensure our target response times are met.
- The department offers a calibration service through its UKAS accredited Metrology Laboratory, open 9am–5pm Mon-Fri.
- A Public Weighbridge service is available 8am-3:30pm Mon-Fri.
- The Council subscribes to “Language Line”, a service which offers immediate translation facilities.

By Phone

- The Trading Standards Service can be contacted 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 4pm Saturdays, through the authorities Customer Service Centre (CSC). During those hours first line advice can be given or details taken for a more specialised adviser to ring back.
- We have an out-of-hours contact number. This operates at all times outside our office opening times for our partnership enforcement agencies, manned by a duty officer. Its availability and use is restricted for emergency only.

Electronically

- The CSC deals with incoming e-mails via Herts Direct (the authorities web site) in the same way as telephone calls.
- A separate e-mail address is available for other authorities and agencies to contact the service direct.
- Our web site includes contact details and consumer and business advice information together with links to further websites.

In Person

- Staff qualified to give advice are available 9-5pm Monday to Friday at the departments offices at St Albans. Our building is designed to receive wheelchair users.
- Some ‘surgeries’ are held at local Citizens Advice Bureaux and consumers with particular mobility problems can receive a home visit by arrangement. We provide Trading Standards staff for surgeries at 10 CABx in Hertfordshire. These are undertaken on a monthly basis.

By Post

- Post is received at St Albans, and County Hall. The St Albans address appears on leaflets and the web site.

SECTION C: ASSESSING COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS AND FEEDBACK

8. Needs and Expectations of Consumers

Our assessment of consumer need is based on user surveys, analysis of consumer complaints, Indices of Deprivation 2000, other agency reports and a Mori Poll.

User Surveys

We have continued to send a survey form to 10% of past users of our advice service. The response rate is generally 30%. The survey is sent out on a quarterly basis at random. The questions used have changed within the last year and we now use the standard CLS Survey form. This will now allow comparison and benchmarking with other authorities. We are intending to include the survey on our website to allow 'unsolicited' feedback. We have also recently included within the survey those users who have contacted us by e-mail.

Results from the survey indicate that about 80% of customers are satisfied with our service against 10% who were dissatisfied. 84% found our information easy to understand and 85% found our service easy to access. 83% would recommend our service to others.

Mori Poll

Hertfordshire County Council commissioned the Mori local government research unit to conduct a programme of qualitative, quantitative research to identify residents' awareness of the Trading Standards Service as well as their priorities. The research involved self-completion questionnaires being sent to all 2,674 members of the Hertfordshire Citizens Panel in October 2001. Following a review at our departmental Management Group meeting it was agreed to re-commission the Poll on a three-year cycle. The survey will be repeated in 2004/05.

The key findings were as follows: -

- 82% preferred the telephone as a first contact
- Over three quarters of respondents were aware in the services involvement in ensuring correct weight or measure and the safety of consumer goods
- Our response times to particular problems were well within consumer expectations
- Priorities for respondents were
 - Investigating specific complaints (76%)
 - Routinely visiting traders for compliance (75%)
 - Providing basic information and advice for local people with consumer problems (72%)

Analysis of Consumer Complaints

Our customer service centre receives 34,000 contacts concerning our service per annum. We deal with approximately 20,000 complaints and enquiries every year that require more detailed advice, or relevant enforcement action. By analysing this data areas of consumer concern and associated trends are identified.

A top ten list of consumer complaints by OFT category is completed quarterly. The greatest cause of consumer complaints from April 2002 is Home Maintenance, repairs and improvements. This equates to 7.7% of all complaints and enquiries received so far this year.

The main subjects of complaints received by Hertfordshire Trading Standards were (Apr '02 – Dec '02)

1. Home Maintenance
2. Second Hand Motor Vehicles
3. Large White Goods – Major Fixed Appliances
4. Food and Drink
5. Motor Vehicle Repairs and Servicing

We also produce a list of problem traders, being those that have generated the greatest number of complaints or enquiries. The information is broken down quarterly, half-yearly and yearly, allowing identification of trends. This information is reviewed at Management Group meetings and assists in our business planning process, and targeting of resources to the areas that give rise to a high level of complaints.

Other Agency Reports

Local CAB

The CABx within Hertfordshire complete consumer complaint forms, code them in accordance with the OFT guidance and pass them to ourselves. This information is then reviewed by the Service's Advice Officers and forms part of the total OFT consumer complaint return from Hertfordshire.

Local CSN

Our CSN development plan has been lodged with the OFT for ratification. It is planned that future work of the CSN will help inform us in more detail of consumer needs across Hertfordshire.

Indices of Deprivation 2000

The Indices of Deprivation 2000 showed that all ten districts that make up Hertfordshire were above the national average for fewer numbers of unemployed and fewer qualifiers for means tested benefits indicating that deprivation is not a major factor for Trading Standards service delivery.

Conclusion

The needs and expectations of consumers continue to inform a major part of the Service Plan for Hertfordshire Trading Standards. The financial year 2003/2004 will see the implementation of a new Information/Intelligence Officer post, whose duties will include ensuring that relevant intelligence/information obtained by the service is reviewed and acted upon. This role will also form the link to the Stop Now Order work (SNORs) planned by the Service.

We will look to compare our consumer awareness with our EETSA partners.

9. Needs and Expectations of Local Businesses

Business Profile

Once dominated by the defence industry, the Hertfordshire economy is now more diverse. The County Council is the largest employer in the county. There is a growing Information Technology sector, but farming still plays a part in the economy. As already mentioned, many national and international companies have located their head offices in the county.

	Description	Number
Businesses registered for VAT	Start of 2002	37,315
Home Authority formal agreements	End of March 2003	3
Home Authority informal recognition	Estimate end of March 2003	1200
Risk assessment: risk assessment of business to determine frequency of inspection visits (LACORs guidance followed). Year-end March 2003.		
High		1010
Medium		11254
Low		15424
No Inspectable risk		624
Other Business Data		
Business start ups	2001 figure (latest available based on VAT registration)	4,520
Business failures	As above	4,085

Inspection Findings / Officer Feedback / Complaints about Business

It is recognised that reactive assessment provides vital information for targeting resources. We intend to make more effective use of data gathered to enhance this process.

Consultation

An annual survey of businesses that have been visited by Trading Standards, is carried out. This has previously been to check that staff are conducting themselves in an appropriate manner, but the latest survey (February 2003), asks businesses, in addition, how they would like to interact with the Service in the future and what are the problem areas that businesses feel that we should be targeting.

The Information/Intelligence Officer post will increase the effectiveness of the reactive assessment considerably.

Reactive assessment is made by review of enquiries, officer feedback and inspection findings. Evaluation is made by the management group

To enable us to reach non-users we are intending to use a form of wording on our Inspection Report forms, left following an inspection, to encourage further contact by business. In theory, this should result in all businesses, users and non-users, being contacted in a five year period.

Conclusion of Business Needs

Hertfordshire Trading Standards has always considered advice to local businesses as a key aspect of the Service. The needs and expectations of local businesses continue to be a priority for the Service, particularly in terms of authority advice.

It is intended to gather more information in 2003/2004 as to local business needs, and (as for consumer needs) the Information/Intelligence Officer role will be core to ensuring the needs are sought, collated, reviewed and acted upon.

We will look to compare our business awareness results with our EETSA partners.

10. Local Awareness of Trading Standards

The MORI survey conducted in October 2001 showed a good general awareness of some of the activities carried out by Trading Standards. Respondents were more likely to turn to the service if they continued to have problems with a trader, closely followed by the Citizens Advice Bureau.

We have also, within our Consumer Support Network Partnership, conducted a non-user survey in August 2002. 200 people were interviewed in Hemel Hempstead, an urban area and Baldock, a rural area. Findings showed that individuals were more aware of the CAB than Trading Standards. Following this survey a project has been developed to raise the profile of the partners within the CSN by sign posting and manning displays in local shopping centres. Another survey is planned for this year to measure any changes in results.

11. Demand for Specialist Services

The metrology laboratory is widely used by firms within Hertfordshire and by a number from outside of the area. The service provided to industry is designed to use spare capacity within the laboratory, and one local firm in particular, makes extensive use of the calibration facilities to provide certificates of accuracy to its customers. During the course of the year 2001/2002, 161 UKAS certificates were issued with a similar number of other certificates, to some 100 customers.

In July 2001 we surveyed a number of our laboratory customers. The results showed a high level of satisfaction with the service currently provided. The survey also highlighted a significant interest for higher levels of accuracy for mass calibration.

PART TWO

National and Local Priorities

SECTION D: PROVISIONS FOR NATIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES

12. Informed Confident Consumers

The service seeks to provide individuals with accurate information, and contribute to consumers economic well being. This sits with the authority's promise "To help people help themselves" and in particular making it easier for people to get advice and information.

12a Providing quality advice and information, using modern technology and appropriate media

- We provide a first step advice service for consumers that are resident in Hertfordshire or for consumers that have purchased goods or services from Hertfordshire businesses. Our call centre responds to 34,000 contacts per annum.
- We will maintain our Community Legal Service Quality Mark to ensure a quality advice giving and sign-posting service.
- We will contribute to Herts News, a free County Council news sheet that is delivered to all residential properties in Hertfordshire, informing residents of the work of the Service

12b Informing consumers to enable them to deal with new or difficult trading activity

- We continue to work with the local media to alert consumers to new trading malpractices. Recent examples include information about bogus callers, unsafe goods at car boot sales, firework safety and our of date goods.
- We will shortly have our own dedicated web site linked to Herts Direct. This will contain educational material for schools.
- Talks to community groups will continue as a means of spreading awareness of the service.
- Our web site will be enhanced to include information about current trading malpractices and updates on new and recent changes in legislation. We will include advice updated by the Sale and Supply of Consumer Goods regulations that have recently been implemented.

12c Creating confidence in E-commerce issues

- We will continue to review developing trends in e-commerce and provide advice and information to consumers using this medium. We will include good practice guidance on our web site to enable consumers to make purchases over the web with greater confidence. This will include information on the Distance Selling Regulations.
- This year we intend to contribute to the EETSA e-commerce project which will incorporate an assessment of authorities capabilities and investigative issues.

12d Developing and delivering pro-active education programmes to vulnerable groups

- With colleagues in the Eastern Region we are using the “Doorstep Initiative” to alert consumers and especially vulnerable groups, to the activities of rogue traders. The Doorstep Initiative display will feature in local libraries and other venues throughout the year. With local partners we have produced a 2003 calendar aimed at the elderly that includes contact material and advice concerning doorstep activities.
- We will continue to assist young consumers through the Megadrive initiative and by adding educational material for schools on our web site.

12e Joined-up working through Trading Standards regional co-ordinators or with other organisations, to improve service delivery through increased coverage, improved efficiency and so on

- We will work in partnership with others to target particular groups and deliver programmes to those groups e.g. “Megadrive”.
- We will continue to participate in the EETSA partnership and work with CABx within Hertfordshire’s CLS/CSN partnership.
- As an EETSA partner we will consider a regional pathfinder bid for Consumer Direct.
- As a medium term goal under the banner of “Herts Together” we will link with Local Strategic Partnerships to identify common aims and needs at a local level.
- We will build upon the EETSA ‘Doorstep Initiative’ in our service delivery.

12f Participation in your local Consumer Support Network

- We are leading on the provision of a Consumer Support Network in Hertfordshire. Our Development plan has been submitted to the DTI for approval.

12g Improved accessibility and availability of the service to local consumers including action to identify gaps in the service and reach non-users.

- Hertfordshire residents enjoy some of the best access to services of any authority, because of the extended opening hours of the Customer Service Centre. The web site Herts Direct carries a wealth of information about services, and this can also be accessed via digital TV in some areas of the county. The authority, in conjunction with NTL is piloting this means of access. The CSC has Minicom facilities and access to “Language Line”.
- We will continue to monitor patterns and numbers of calls through the CSC to our Advice Team and adjust resources to ensure all calls are responded to within our service targets. We will seek to improve electronic contact through our web site.

- We will contribute to Herts Direct (a quarterly free newspaper to every house in Hertfordshire) to bring to the attention of our service to non-users.
- Part of the CSN partnership action plan for this year is to survey non-users and promote the service to non-users through displays in shopping centres.

12h Measuring use and effectiveness of education, advice and information services

- Quarterly surveys of consumers using our advice service will continue to seek feedback on accessibility, areas of concern, and improvement.

12i Encouraging participation in consultation processes

- Our Consumer Survey form will be published on our web site together with a statement inviting consumers to contact us.

The MORI poll carried out in October 2001 showed a high proportion of respondents wanted access to advice, routine monitoring of the market place and investigation of specific complaints. These activities will feature prominently in our work plan for the coming year.

13. Informed Successful Businesses

Hertfordshire Trading Standards seeks to provide “advice and home authority services to help businesses comply with their legal obligations”. This links to the Hertfordshire promise “to make Hertfordshire a better place to work and live” and in particular “working with businesses to increase prosperity, protect jobs and improve standards of living for local people”.

13a Providing quality advice and information, using modern technology and appropriate media.

- We provide business advice and information through our Advice Team, Home Authority Partnerships and through inspections / visits to businesses.
- We are adopting the TS Community Website, which will enable us to provide comprehensive advice information on-line.
- We will provide information on up to date issues via the Business Channel of the Herts Direct website.

13b Developing and delivering a pro-active education programme of business

- We intend to identify key areas of new legislation and make information about this available on the website. An Information Officer will be appointed whose role will include providing businesses with new and relevant information.
- We will consider sending e-mail bulletins to local businesses.

13c Working with business to improve compliance and minimise non-compliance.

- Hertfordshire is home to the decision-making bases of many well-known businesses and this places a particular strain on the Trading Standards Service. We are Home Authority for Tesco, the Dixons Retail Group and many others.
- The authority has a reputation for working proactively with business to aid compliance and uses its own information as well as that provided by other agencies.
- We will re-evaluate our work with Home Authority companies in light of the updated LACORS Home Authority Principle.
- We are continually striving to improve and enhance our Home Authority relationships. We have developed an electronic exchange of referrals and advice with one major company which has improved response times and reduced the need for face to face meetings. With another major company we will participate in a TSI Conference seminar this year highlighting how partnership working between a Home Authority and Business can improve compliance. We have also contributed to reducing numbers of civil complaints to other authorities by arranging consultation between individual authorities and HA companies, allowing an exchange of views concerning regional problems.

13d Participation in Local Business partnerships, forums and Local Business Link

- We will continue to work with the Small Business Service (who share the same office block) and the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce to provide relevant information to new businesses.

13e Joined-up working through Trading Standards regional co-ordinators or with other organisations to improve service delivery through increased coverage, improved efficiency and so on.

- We will continue to work with other authorities (especially in the Eastern Region) to promote uniformity and consistency of approach.
- Work for 2003/2004 will include co-ordinated food sampling across the region, uniformity of approach to SNORs work, and a continued regional partnership with DEFRA for animal health work.

13f Exploiting existing links between business, local authorities and government agencies to give information and advice

- Herts Direct has a dedicated Business Channel with links to all regulatory services and other agencies such as the Small Business Service.
- Our web site includes hot-links to other agencies such as FSA and we will increase the numbers of links.

13g Improved accessibility and availability of the service to local business including action to identify gaps in the service and reach non-users

- We will improve website contact with businesses by using our CSC to signpost business enquirers to information provided on our website.
- We will look to extend our annual business survey to incorporate more business “needs” information.

13h Measuring the use and effectiveness of education, advice and information services

- For our major Home Authority companies we will analyse trends of referrals to assess effectiveness of advice given.
- We will incorporate “satisfaction questions” in our annual business survey.
- We will measure the number of compliant businesses following re-visits where previous advice had been given.

13i Encouraging participation in consultation processes.

- We will encourage consultation through our web site, Herts Direct, through press releases and from our Home Authorities but we recognise that we need to encourage business consultation particularly with non-users.

14. Enforcement of a Fair and Safe Trading Environment

We are committed to ensuring a fair and safe trading environment in Hertfordshire to protect consumers and drive out rogue traders and so fostering a commercial environment where genuine traders can flourish. This will help to fulfil the County Councils objective to make Hertfordshire a better place to live and work.

14a. Principles of good enforcement that meet the requirements of the Enforcement Concordat and take into account the Code of Crown Prosecutors.

- The service will continue to abide by the Hertfordshire “Business Pledge”. This incorporates the principles of the Enforcement Concordat and the Crown Prosecution Guidelines. It sets out the overarching principles of advice and prevention taken by all County Council regulators.
- A key outcome of this year’s service plan is to develop and publish an updated enforcement policy for our Trading Standards service. This will be published on our web site.

14b. The operation of the Home Authority Principle in accordance with LACOTS guidance including responding to queries from other authorities.

- We will continue to comply with the LACORS Home Authority Principle guidelines, develop our relationship with the major companies in Hertfordshire and respond to enquiries from other Authorities.

14c. Risk Assessment

A programme of enforcement activity that is informed and linked to To recognised risk assessment analysis, and which reflects Appropriate levels of enforcement.

- The Food Service Plan and this plan will form part of the County Council Performance Framework and key indicators will be the subject of quarterly review.
- The annual Business Project Plan will form part of this document available to the Officers within the Service. This more detailed plan will not be available for public viewing.
- This Project Plan takes into account results and lessons learned from previous project work, trends in complaints/business enquiries, views of staff, new legislation and many other relevant sources of information.
- The programme of enforcement activity will be linked to the LACORS risk assessment scheme and the new scheme will be adopted by 2004.
- The department has agreed a number of Performance Indicators with Council Members. Meeting these Indicators is a service priority. These PI's are:

The average number of consumer protection visits per high and medium risk premises.

Number of Food visits to premises. High risk and medium risk

Number of Food samples per 1000 population.

Number consumer complaints and enquiries dealt with.

Score on TS best practice/-BVPI 166

% of enquiries dealt with within response standard.

Score against BVPI 177

14d. Enforcement arrangements for e-businesses/e-commerce

- We will participate in the EETSA e-commerce project, as stated.
- We will continue to monitor Home Authority web sites to ensure compliance.
- We will respond to complaints raised concerning e-commerce.

14e. Targeting Traders or business sectors which are known to give rise to high levels of problems

- We will participate in the EETSA Stop Now Orders project.

- We will track development of the Enterprise Act specifically in relation to enforcement orders.
- Officers have received training concerning SNOR's
- A project group has been set up to with a remit to look at our information and intelligence gathering with the aim of better targeting resources at rogue traders.
- We will target trades during 2003/2004 who are deliberately fraudulent, or who continue to ignore previous advice given by the Service.

14f. Tackling practices which target the vulnerable and socially excluded

- We will continue to participate in the regional Doorstep initiative.
- We will link our staff resources to the outcomes from this initiative to increase our effectiveness in this area. Where appropriate Stop Now Orders will be considered, particularly where traders are deliberately targeting/affecting the vulnerable or socially excluded.

14g. Arrangements through Trading Standards regional co-ordinators and/or with other enforcement agencies, (including central government agencies) to target rogue traders and unsafe or misdescribed goods to avoid duplication.

- We will continue to work with colleagues in the region (EETSA) to deliver the regional plan, which includes a programme of food, and animal feed sampling.
- We have adopted the regional rabies plan.
- We are a member of a County wide Food Liaison group which includes representatives from all local EH departments.
- With local Food Enforcement Authorities we have agreed protocols for food hazard warnings.
- We work with the Divisional Veterinary Manager in Chelmsford to co-ordinate Animal Health problems

14h. The inspection of Metrological equipment and goods based on risk assessment. Verification of equipment and arrangements for joined-up working on legal metrology issues.

- We will continue to provide a comprehensive verification service. We aim to offer an appointment within five days of request and to meet the needs of our customers we operate a verification service for petrol stations two days per week.
- We will retain our regional Notified Body Status.
- We will initiate a programme of inspection of metrological equipment based on risk.
- We will maintain our UKAS Accreditation and consider enhancing the service by achieving higher accuracy calibration.

SECTION E: EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE AND IMPROVING TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE

15. Efficient, Effective and Improving Trading Standards Services

Hertfordshire is committed to developing and improving its service and to ensuring we can meet the requirements of the service delivery plan efficiently and effectively. This supports HCC objectives of providing easy to access, high quality, cost effective services to all citizens and meets the HCC citizens promise to give the public value for money.

15a. Communicating and raising the profile of the service and the Plan to those responsible for delivering

- The service is part of the portfolio of the Executive Member for Community Services. The Head of Service has direct access to him and other members of the County Council. This plan and the Food Service Plan are considered by the Cabinet, and are available to all members of the authority. The plans are published on the Councils web site Herts Direct and so are available to the public, consumers and businesses, and to staff.

15b. Ensuring that officers within the service know which parts of the plan they are responsible for and how their performance against the plan will be measured

- The departments project plan details all enforcement activity in terms of projects and assigns officers to each project. This plan then feeds directly into team plans and then into individual Performance and Development plans. Annual reviews of officers take place as part of the IIP scheme.

15c. Consulting users on developing the service

- As previously stated we will continue to conduct both consumer and business surveys to assess our effectiveness and identify ways of improving the service.

15d. Dealing with complaints about the service

- Complaints against the service are monitored in accordance with the authority's procedures to identify any needs for improvement, and quarterly consumer surveys add to the overall picture of what is important to consumers.
- Consumers/businesses who complain about the Service that they receive (HCC Level 2 complaints), are responded to by the Service's Management Team. A satisfaction survey is also sent out to these complainants which seeks to inform the future handling of such issues.

15e. Developing the training staff to ensure that they have the skills required to deliver the service.

- Service Plans feed directly into team plans and individual Performance and Development plans. In turn those individual plans inform the training and development needs of the service, which has Investor and People status.
- We currently have one member of staff studying for a DTS qualification in the Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning scheme. In addition we are providing a years planned work experience for a student of the University of Wales in Cardiff studying for the Consumer Protection Degree.
During 2002/2003 our two trainees completed their Diploma in Trading Standards qualification (DTS) via the Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning route, and became Trading Standards Officers within the Service.
- A medium term objective is to institute the TSI CPPD initiative. We will be developing this project as a regional pilot within EETSA.

15f. Developing all aspects of the service from delivery to internal procedures to reflect current recognised good practice.

- Legislation Interest Groups, drawn from a cross section of staff, monitor trends, and look to future legislation, to inform future service plans, and our work throughout the year.
- Policy Officer will develop policies and procedures within the department to ensure good practice and consistency.
- Our participation within EETSA allows benchmarking against good practise within the region.

15g. Maximising efficiency through use of IT and other modern technology

- The department is fully supportive of “Lifewise”, a County Council policy aimed at developing a work/life balance. We make extensive use of technology such as laptops and mobile phones to allow flexible working and support staff.
- An IT upgrade within the department will allow improved and efficient use of IT technology.

15h. Evaluating and improving joined-up working and co-ordinated activities for enforcement, advice and information sharing

- Examples of partnership working are listed in 4.4, they include; developing protocols with local police authorities for investigating underage sales, Megadrive, EETSA co-ordinating groups. Review of partnership working is an ongoing activity that is used to develop and evolve partnership working, an example is the recent EETSA survey sent to all staff whose responses were fed back to improve the EETSA service.

15i. Plans for responding to emergencies effectively

- Extensive use is made of regional links in the development of plans to combat emergencies such as animal disease outbreaks, such as the EETSA Rabies Plan. Similarly regional training programmes on a number of subjects have been developed.
- As previously stated examples of planning for emergencies include liaison with EHO's for food hazard warnings, and links with the DVM for animal health enforcement.

15j. Allocating resources appropriately

- In 2001 our service went through a reorganisation process, that included input from all staff. The review set up the current structure, work processes and systems within the department. Within this framework a business planning process takes place at the beginning of the year. This is initiated by the Management group with consultation from staff. The NPF Service Delivery plan, the Food Enforcement Service Plan and a project plan are produced. The project plan includes the following years enforcement activity to which resources in the form of staff allocation and budgets are allocated. It is this plan that informs staff of their responsibilities for delivering the services key aims and objectives for the year. Performance Indicators are set and agreed with members. These are reviewed and reported on at regular intervals. Through the year Management review progress against the plan and with feedback from staff adjust and fine tune the project plan.
- For 2003/2004 the Service has been awarded (via the Revenue Support Grant) additional monies for the enforcement of the Stop Now Orders Regulations, and Animal Health work. Appropriate resources will be targeted towards these areas of work, and the Services will in particular work in partnership with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in producing a plan in accordance with National Framework Agreement for Animal Health.

15k. Ensuring formal reporting procedures are carried out in an efficient manner

- At present individual officers have responsibility to ensure formal reports are made in an efficient and timely manner. This year we will look to update and enhance standard policies and procedures for formal reporting. The recent appointment of a Policy Officer has created the capacity for such tasks.

PART THREE

Review: Assessment and Improvement

16. Quality Assessment, Review and Improvement

We seek to identify ways and means of improving our service by continual reviews and assessments of current practices and procedures. This contributes to change that enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of our service. Review and assessment allows us to meet the HCC objective of providing good services with good access and the HCC promise to give the public value for money.

16a. Monitoring of progress against the Service Delivery Plan

- Key Indicators in the Hertfordshire Best Value Performance Plan are reviewed quarterly, and considered by members. Services are expected to comment on performance and any deviation from targets.
- Activity under the separate Food Service Plan is reported quarterly to the Executive member and opposition spokespersons
- The departmental management team reviews progress against the service plan on a quarterly basis. Individual targets are covered in Performance and Development plans.

16b. Review of Policies and Procedures in the plan to:

Assess effectiveness

Identify areas of work needing improvement and take remedial action

Identify problems that need to be addressed in future plans

Assess successes

Ensure examples of good practice have been taken up and /or disseminated

Inform future planning

- The work of the service is monitored by the Management Group. This is done statistically by reference to performance indicators and also by review of projects as they are completed in conjunction with project officers recommendations / conclusions. The Management Group reviews the projects to assess effectiveness, to decide on remedial action, to inform future plans, to assess success, to recognise good practice and to inform future planning.
- By way of example, for 2003/2004 our enforcement work relating to the licensing and storage of explosives will further seek to target the problem traders identified from our previous work in this area.
- Analysis of our complaints and enquiries to better inform our service planning is a task for this year. We have set up a project group to analyse the processes involved and improve our efficiency in resolving complaints and enquires received by our enforcement teams.

16c. Use of external accreditation, self and peer assessment models to help appraise the service

- The Authority holds external accreditation for its UKAS Calibration Laboratory, IIP award, CLS Quality Mark and regional Notified Body Status. We are considering use of the EFQM Excellence model and external assessment will be extended now we have gained recognition by the Community Legal Services quality mark scheme.

16d. Comparison of outcomes with other Trading Standards services with similar business profiles, etc

- The Eastern Region (EETSA) use standardised Customer, Business and Employee satisfaction questionnaires, benchmarking the results.
- Some limited inter authority auditing takes place within the region.
- A medium term objective is to participate and contribute to the Inter Authority Auditing process for Food Enforcement and Peer Review for the NPF.

16e. User Surveys to assess satisfaction

16f. Consultation of stakeholders to assess effectiveness

- As previously stated customers of our advice service are surveyed quarterly, and we approach business on an annual basis to gauge how we have dealt with them.

16g. *Monitoring the quality and consistency of advice and performance*

- The Customer Service Centre is subject to regular mystery shopper exercises carried out by an external organisation.
- CLS Quality Mark requires that we monitor the quality of advice given. 10% of all advice given is reviewed each month. Our CSC is monitored by reviewing all advice given, by floorwalking and “listening in” exercises.

Variations from our project plan are reviewed at Management Group meetings. The Service Delivery Plan is reviewed by the Deputy Chief Officer and the Policy Officer. This year’s plan has been developed following feedback from the Institute of Public Finance (IPF), our Head of Service, and internal review of our 2002/2003 plan.

Areas that we will seek to improve:

- The management and processing of intelligence and information in the Service, through the appointment of a dedicated Officer.
- Reactive assessment of consumer and business needs.
- Assessment of the needs of non users.
- Assess local business awareness of our service.
- Create confidence in e-commerce issues.
- Link enforcement work to needs and expectations of consumers and business.
- Monitor enforcement policy.
- Target rogue traders and trade practices particularly those who prey on the vulnerable and socially excluded.
- Performance measuring for development of staff.
- Raise awareness of service.
- Develop procedures for formal reporting.
- improve review and assessment of policies and procedures against the service delivery plan.

Appendix 1

Legislation List

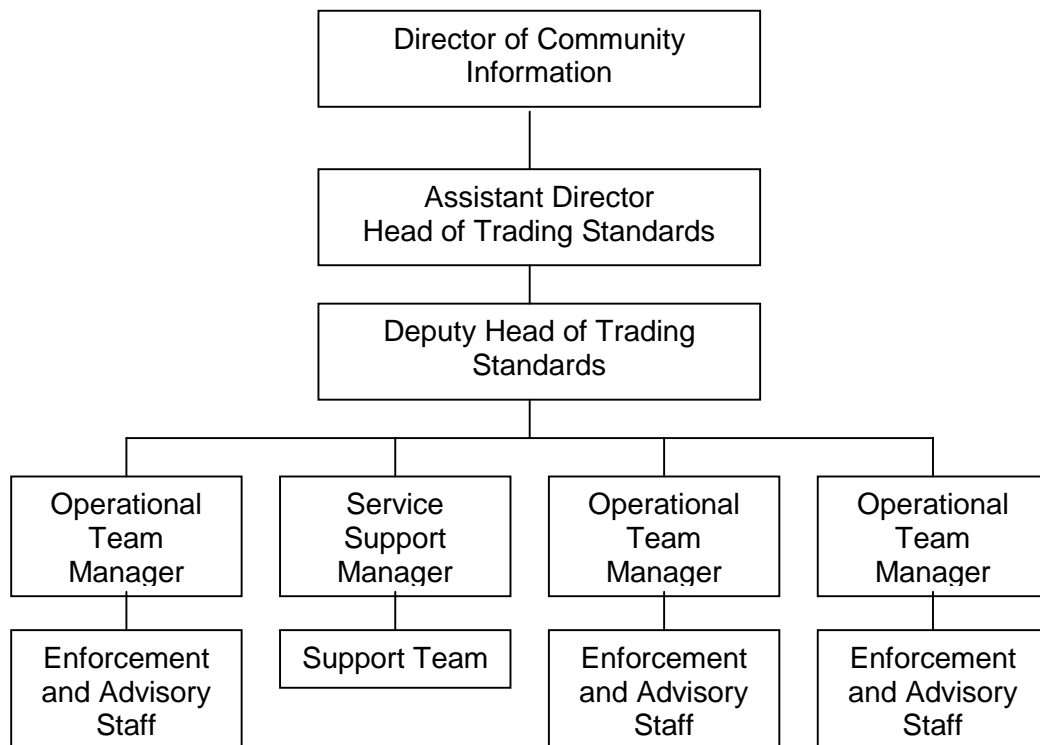
Administration of Justice Act 1970 – 1985
 Agriculture Act 1970 (part iv)*
 Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968
 Agriculture Produce (Grading & Marking) Acts 1928 & 1931*
 Animal Health Act 1981*
 Animal Health Act 2002*
 Animal Health & Welfare Act 1984*
 Business Names Act 1985
 Cancer Act 1939
 Children and Young Persons Act 1933
 Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991*
 Clean Air Act 1993*
 Companies Act 1985
 Consumer Credit Act 1974*
 Consumer Protection Act 1987*
 Control of Pollution Act 1974 (Sec. 75)*
 Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988
 The Copyright, etc. and Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Act 2002
 Courts and Legal Services Act 1990*
 Criminal Justice Act 1988
 Crossbows Act 1987
 Customs and Excise Management Act 1979
 Development of Tourism Act 1969: Section 18
 Dogs Act 1906 (As amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 1928)
 Education Reform Act 1988:Sec 216 – 218*
 Energy Act 1976
 Energy Conservation Act 1981
 Enterprise Act 2002*
 Environment and Safety Information Act 1988*
 Estate Agents Act 1979*
 European Communities Act 1972*
 Explosives Acts 1875 – 1976*
 Fair Trading Act 1973*
 Farm and Garden Chemicals Act 1967
 Food and Environment Protection Act 1985*
 Food Safety Act 1990*
 Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981
 Hallmarking Act 1973*
 Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
 Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985
 Knives Act 1997
 Licensing Act 1964 (as amended by the Criminal Justice & Police Act 2001)*
 Malicious Communications Act 1988
 Mock Auctions Act 1961

Motor Cycle Noise Act 1987
National Lottery Act 1993
Nurses Agencies Act 1957
Olympic Symbol etc (Protection) Act 1995*
Poisons Act 1972*
Prices Acts 1974 & 1975*
Property Misdemeanors Act 1991*
Protection of Animals Act 1911
Road Traffic Acts 1988 & 1991
Road Traffic (Foreign Vehicles) Act 1972
Road Traffic (Offenders) Act 1988
Scotch Whisky Act 1988
Solicitors Act 1974
Telecommunications Act 1984*
Theft Acts 1968 & 1978
Timeshare Act 1992*
Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002*
Trade Descriptions Act 1968*
Trade Marks Act 1994*
Trading Representations (Disabled Persons) Acts 1958 & 1972
Trading Schemes Act 1996
Trading Stamps Act 1964
Unsolicited Goods & Services Acts 1971 & 1975
Video Recordings Acts 1984 & 1993*
Weights & Measures Acts 1976 and 1985*

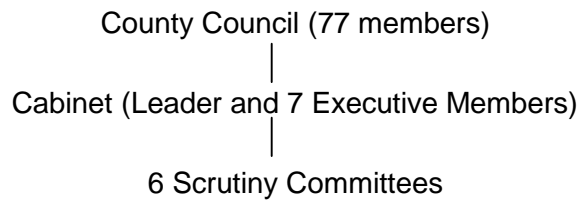
The above are many enabling statutes. Over 800 regulations and orders contain the more specific standards which the Department enforces. Those marked * are Mandatory on the County Council

Appendix 2

Departmental Structure



County Council Structure



Adult Care & Health Services
Audit
Children, Schools and Families
Community Services
Environment
Resources, Prosperity, Partnership and Consultation