

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE

PEER REVIEW

TEAM REPORT



PEER REVIEW OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE - January 2007

1. Introduction

This report provides feedback on the peer review of Gloucestershire County Council's Trading Standards Service carried out in January 2007. This is part of a DTI-funded national programme of reviews of Trading Standards Services. The purpose of this programme is to challenge how well Services are performing and to help them identify improvements.

The peer review process has two key elements. Firstly, a self assessment carried out against nine criteria in a Trading Standards specific framework adapted from the EFQM® Excellence Model. Secondly, a follow-up peer review of that self assessment, which examines its robustness and accuracy, and identifies any further areas for improvement and also identifies good practices used by the service.

The Service undertook its self assessment over the period November 2005 to December 2006. The output from that self assessment was a report that identified the key strengths and areas for improvement for the Service, and a draft improvement plan based on this.

This was followed by a peer review by a team of people from other Trading Standards Services from within the Region, and a member of the Improvement and Development Agency's Peer Clearing House.

The team considered the self assessment carried out and its outputs, and came to conclusions covering the self assessment and its report; the draft improvement plan; good practices that others could learn from; and further opportunities for improvement.

This report contains details of the peer review process undertaken and the conclusions of the team. An appendix provides more detailed findings under each of the nine criteria of the framework.

2. Methodology

The peer review itself took place over the period 4th to 17th January 2007, the team consisted of:

Howard Burnett, Trading Standards Manager, Somerset County Council,
Lynn McElheron, representing the IdeA, who is the Strategic Partnerships
and Community Development Manager, Teignbridge District Council,
Phil Thomas, Trading Standards Manager, Swindon Borough Council.

They undertook a desktop review of the self assessment report and evidence and followed that with an on-site visit where they carried out a series of meetings and interviews with staff, Members and other key stakeholders as follows:

Group Director Community Safety, Terry Standing
Head of Trading Standards Service, Roger Marles
Lead Member, Cllr Shaun Parsons
Individual interviews with 11 members of staff
A focus group consisting 8 members of staff
2 Home Authority Companies and
3 Police representatives involved in the Crime & Disorder Reduction
Partnership.

The team also examined relevant documentation both before and during their site visit.

Most of the work was carried out at the Trading Standards office, this included a walk about visiting the rooms of each of the specialist teams.

The review team wishes to extend its thanks to Gloucestershire County Council's Chief Executive, Director, Member champion and everyone at Trading Standards service for their courtesy and co-operation during the visit.

3. Summary of our Findings

3.1 The Self Assessment and its Report

The peer review team consider that the Service has carried out a self assessment process that was for the most part challenging and robust. The team chosen to carry out the self assessment representing a good cross-section of staff.

Sufficient time was allocated to the assessment, the evidence gathered was comprehensive and for the most part relevant and accurate. The Trading Standards service had completed self assessments against the EFQM® Excellence Model annually since 2000, monitoring the score attained. These assessments were carried out with the assistance of an external consultant..

The self assessment process involved most of the staff in the department in the evidence gathering phase, and staff were kept informed of progress. Sufficient evidence was found in most areas to come to accurate conclusions, and this was used effectively to challenge how well the Service performs.

The report from the self assessment team raised valid issues and accurately reflected most of the evidence that both the self assessment team and the peer team identified

The self assessment recognised the benefits of better engagement with the services member champion and the need to focus on outcomes. Staff valued the Trading Standards management team and found them very accessible, and valued the engagement with the Director. It recognised that a major area for improvement was the need to consult with all stakeholders, including non-users of the service, to ensure that the service was customer focused.

Staff felt that the specialist teams were the best structure for service delivery, although they recognised that their individual targets restricted the flexibility in using their time for cross-team working. The processes in delivering the service were generally appropriate, with special projects used to deal with specific issues, such as the 'Vision Food Hall' and car clocking surveillance work.

The peer review team thought that the areas that could have been more challenged were those of partnership working and service outcomes. These issues became apparent in the feedback from interviewees. It is not apparent as to what the desired effects of projects are and how that is to be measured.

It was also not apparent that the training that is undertaken is focused on priority needs for the Service, and the effectiveness of ad hoc training in meeting objectives is not measured or reviewed. These issue needs to be more strongly addressed in the draft improvement plan.

3.2 The Draft Improvement Plan

The draft improvement plan contained most of the key issues that were considered important by both the management team and the peer review team. There was a clear process of prioritisation, which was defined before the self assessment began and which was followed when drafting the improvement plan.

We have identified the following areas of improvement to the draft plan:

- a) further integration with the work of other services within the authority and the LAA
- b) further flexibility between specialist teams operations
- c) more proactive working with partners, including the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships
- d) more consultation and better use of evidence to ensure that key drivers for the service are identified
- e) Better performance management to ensure that key priorities are met, and setting of targets, which measure the impact (outcome) of initiatives, and training.
- f) consider other ways of reducing the impact on the environment of delivering the service.
- g) The means by which improvements will be measured or assessed also need to be made clearer.

With these additions, we feel that the improvement plan will be an effective tool for moving the Service forward and produce sustainable improvements.

Overall, we feel that the Service has a clear and ambitious strategy for improvement that takes account of local and national priorities.

3.3 Good Practices Identified

We identified the following issues, which we consider to be examples of good practice that we could recommend to other Services:

- Annual self assessment against the EFQM© Excellence Model, using the scoring scheme.
- The use of the in-house intranet in providing everything necessary to provide the service.
- Comprehensive evidence logging system based on the Police system.
- Development and use of the Vision Food Hall and Cyril the Seal initiatives as educational tools.

3.4 Further Opportunities for Improvement

As identified above, the only further opportunity for improvement that we would like to see included in the improvement plan is that of some areas of engagement, use of evidence, monitoring outcomes and looking at ways of providing a sustainable service

The LACORS peer review website contains many examples of good practice identified during the peer review process, and you could consider looking at the website to identify if any other Services have been shown to be particularly effective in these areas, and learning from them

3.5 Conclusions

Overall, the team would like to congratulate the Service for the way in which it has carried out the self assessment process, and we feel confident that it will result in improving further what is already a very good Service.

Some improvements were identified for the Service to carry out. The Service is now asked to:

Incorporate the issues described above in the improvement plan

Improve the plan as described in paragraph 3.2 above.

We would ask you to provide a response to these issues, and include an updated improvement plan, within four weeks of the date of this report.

The team would be willing to return to the Service in one years time in order to discuss progress.

Signed

Dated

H J Burnett,
Lead Reviewer,
On behalf of the Peer Review Team.

Appendix - The Detailed Findings of the Peer Review Team

The peer review process is based on the same framework that was used by the Service during its self assessment. It is based on the EFQM® Excellence Model, specifically adapted for the use of Trading Standards Services.

The framework contains nine criteria as follows:

- Leadership
- Policy and strategy
- People management
- Partnerships and resources
- Processes
- Customer results
- People results
- Society results
- Key performance results

The peer review team looked for evidence of the effectiveness of the self assessment process, including the correct identification of the key issues, under each of these nine headings in order to come to its conclusions. The main body of the report highlights the key issues found. The following provides more detail of these and other issues, by reference to these nine criteria.

The issues raised below do not have to be addressed by the Service, unless they are specifically referred to in the main body of the report – they are given to provide more detail regarding the issues discussed by the review team and to provide a greater degree of context.

1 Leadership

The self assessment identified the correct strengths with regard to leadership, including the accessibility of management and the empowerment of staff. Areas for improvement were identified in the areas of Member engagement and the need for smarter targets for the service plan activities based on outcomes.

However, it did not identify that the service could work better with other services within the authority, as an areas for improvement. From the focus group and interviews, it was felt that the service was remote from the rest of the organisation. Also the service had not considered making use of some corporate initiatives & systems-

2 Policy and Strategy

The review team felt that the self assessment provided a sufficiently robust and challenging consideration of all the issues relating to policy and strategy. It clearly identified that there were links between the corporate, service and team plans, and that targets were monitored regularly and fed back to staff.

It also identified that customers needs should drive policies. The peer review team, from discussion within the focus group, noted that not all staff were aware of corporate priorities nor were they aware of the progress of the Local Area Agreement and the need to contribute towards it. The team also determined the need to build on the work currently being undertaken in respect of minority groups. There was a wealth of data available to evidence customer needs which had not been put to best use, e.g. although there were issues with the Polish community this had not been addressed, but it is in the plans for the Community Liaison Officer.

Although staff were aware of all the activities which were a priority, they indicated that they were not aware of the hierarchy of these priorities, e.g. which were the 'must do' activities.

3 People

The review team agreed with the Service's positive analysis in the self assessment in relation to the People theme, including good staff development and the staff suggestion scheme, The review team also noted that the staff were well motivated and worked well in teams, and that their efforts were recognised.

The identified areas for improvement were supported from the evidence provided to the review team, including the need to consider more flexible working & use of exit interviews.

The focus group discussions indicated that the only minor additional area that would benefit from being addressed is assessing the effectiveness and impact of ad hoc training, and that the corporate HR may be able to give feedback on staff leaving.

4 Partnerships and Resources

The self assessment identified that the Service has identified and liaises with partnerships, and that following the establishment of Consumer Direct resources have been diverted into more assistance for consumers seeking redress.

The service utilises external funding and recovers debt to maximise its resources. ICT is used to improve effectiveness, including the internal intranet which support internal systems.

The improvement plan correctly focuses on need to improve partnership working although the review team thought a more proactive approach would be beneficial. The team also identified the need to use customer feedback to justify the provision of the 2nd tier consumer advice being provided.

5 Processes

The review team felt that the self assessment correctly identified the key strengths with regard to performance monitoring and ensuring that the service had a good media profile. Effective quality systems are in use to ensure the provision of consistent quality services, including the Legal Service Commission's quality mark for first tier consumer advice. This includes the effective use of ISO 9001 and other external certifications, and the intelligence led enforcement approach.

Processes generally are well managed, with process owners, clear targets and an understanding by staff of what they should do and how. There are clear systems in place for improving processes.

The way that services are provided is mostly focussed on stakeholder needs. The self assessment identified where this is not so, and these issues were properly carried over into the improvement plan.

These included providing more information in languages other than English to the Service's customers; considering using a free phone number for consumer advice; better sign-posting outside the premises and the provision of a dedicated room on the ground floor which can be used to meet the public and speak in a confidential environment. The review team agreed that consideration should be given to these.

6 Customer Results

The Service generally enjoys a high level of satisfaction from the businesses and consumers using their services. The latter has benefited from the introduction of a Community Education and Liaison Officer.

The issues correctly identified in the self assessment were the need to measure the needs and impact of resources, in particular the service's initiative such as Vision Food Hall, and also the need to keep customers informed of progress of investigations.

The review team also identified that improvements could be made in understanding customers needs, in particular non-users of the service, and in better promotion of the service.

7 People Results

The self assessment involved a thorough analysis of people results and indicated the benefits of the staff away days in contributing towards the high levels of motivation and job satisfaction of the staff. The review team also found that training was well provided for and the existing structure was well regarded and helps develop specialisms. The self assessment identified the need for more staff to participate in staff surveys so that the results were a better representation of the service's officers. However, it could have more

effectively identified the possible conflict of pressures & inflexibilities that could arise from the targets set for individual officers working in a specialist team and the service's overall targets.

8 Society Results

The self assessment identified that there were few society results but indicated the efficiency of the service, including the reduction in use of electricity, which benefits the environment. The service also worked with vulnerable groups and some CDRPs and has targeted some work on reducing obesity.

The self assessment had correctly noted that other ways of working could reduce the effects on the environment, including possibly more flexible ways of working thus making better use of time and travel. The review team felt that working more closely with all CDRPs could possibly benefit all communities, for example by reducing anti-social behaviour caused by irresponsible drinking.

9 Key Performance Results

The self assessment correctly identified as strengths high performance for key indicators and exceeding the targets for under-aged sales surveys and education. Other strengths were the proactive approach to enforcement using the Enterprise Act to deal with unfair traders, and participation in the Benchmarking Club.

Although ensuring medium risk home authority businesses were appropriately prioritised, and better collection of data for annual returns areas for improvement were correctly put in the improvement plan, the review team suggest that there should be improved monitoring of outcomes from any projects and key initiatives undertaken. This should ensure effective use of resources and a focus on initiatives that have been successful.

Signed

Dated

H J Burnett,
Lead Reviewer,
On behalf of the Peer Review Team.