



In 2009 the **London Borough of Bexley** was awarded Beacon status in the category of Cutting Red Tape. This award recognised that the council had ***demonstrated innovative ways of working with business including the development of the retail enforcement pilot project as a way of releasing resources to respond to public need.*** The assessors also remarked on the strategic leadership provided by elected Members in securing real improvements in the quality of life for Bexley's diverse communities.

Achievement

- Improved outcomes for local people through reductions in crime and anti-social behavior – a total of some £25,000 recovered from rogue 'builders' on behalf of elderly and vulnerable residents, an increase in effectiveness of intelligence in respect of underage sales and a reduction in the level of violent crime fuelled by alcohol.
- A significant reduction in regulatory burdens for local businesses, including a reduction in primary inspections.
- The freeing-up of resources – the move to campaign-led enforcement, especially in respect of Trading Standards enforcement more effectively targeting rogue traders and errant businesses.
- Highly successful partnership arrangements addressing areas including licensing enforcement, counterfeiting and distraction burglary (rogue traders) to reduce the incidence of crime and disorder within the borough.
- Reduced regulatory enforcement for compliant businesses, which has released resources for more active participation in local issues.

Lessons Learnt

The approach to regulation developed through the Retail Enforcement Pilot (REP) is highly effective in reducing administrative burden on compliant businesses – whilst supporting public protection and freeing-up resources.



A multi-agency approach to addressing local issues helps to deliver efficient and robust responses to those issues. Local communities must be included in that diagnosis – and where appropriate, in the design and implementation of effective interventions.

Regulatory support for local businesses – including the provision of information and advice, sharing intelligence and providing training – can make a real contribution to their operational effectiveness and trading prospects.

Elected Members have a key role in helping to ensure that regulation is fairly administered and that the well-being powers available to local authorities are used to both develop the local economy and protect communities, workers and the environment.

Focus For Action

Consultation with local communities identified a range of issues – protection for the elderly and vulnerable, alcohol related anti-social behaviour and violence, and action against trading fraud. These issues were highlighted in the **Bexley Community Strategy** as priorities for action.

In respect to enforcement on alcohol licensing, changes to the law provided the catalyst for a multi-agency approach to enforcement. The **Responsible Authorities' Group**, comprising the Environmental Health service, Trading Standards, Neighbourhood Services, the Police and the Fire Service, was established to share intelligence, discuss licensing applications, explore potential solutions and interventions and to develop closer working relations with businesses. The council's **Public Protection Services** played a lead role in bringing the partners together.

One effect of the partnership working has been a reduction in the level of Police resources required to maintain order in the town centre during weekends.

Effective Solutions

The **Retail Enforcement Pilot** was one of a series of tools which enabled Bexley council to streamline its approach to regulation by reducing the number of visits made to compliant businesses. Information gathered using hand-held data-capture devices is shared by different regulators, thus saving time and resources – and minimising the administrative burden on firms.

REP was set up by the Department of Trade and Industry in 2004 and transferred to the Better Regulation Executive in 2007. In September 2008 sole responsibility was assigned to LBRO. The scheme aims to promote partnership between enforcement agencies, in order to:

- *explore ways of reducing the enforcement burden on trade;*
- *develop more sensitive risk management procedures;*
- *explore common risk assessments across enforcement agencies;*
- *promote best practice;*
- *provide common data coding and information exchange;*
- *release resources for more intelligence led enforcement;*
- *ensure primary inspections of businesses are planned on a need basis to avoid, where possible, the need for multiple inspections by enforcement agencies;*
- *provide alternative strategies to conventional inspections; and*
- *provide simple intervention strategies for referred issues.*

The development of a business partnership scheme based on the Bexley registered traders scheme has provided confidence to consumers as to the reliability of traders whilst Members are provided with information, guidance and assistance on their own particular concerns. The scheme has also been used as a tool to identify market sectors where particular issues become apparent.

The building of partnerships with financial institutions for joint working on rogue traders has enabled immediate responses to cases of suspected overcharging and intimidation in respect of substandard building work.

Contacts and Links

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Challenge21

www.challenge21.co.uk

IDeA - Cutting Red Tape Community of Practice

www.communities.idea.gov.uk/welcome.doc

Retail Enforcement Pilot

www.lbro.org.uk/Pages/Article.aspx?id=294