

South West Regional Partnership

Overview

This three year project is focused on assisting the South West Regulators Forum (SWeRF) and providing better support to the food sector – one of the main industries in the area. The group is unique in that it includes both local and national regulators.

The key objectives are to:

- provide targeted and more joined up business advice and support to the food sector;
- improve the consistency of approach of local authority regulatory services;
- develop robust structures and governance for transparency and accountability;
- build stronger partnership arrangements for future initiatives;
- engage more effectively with elected members; and
- have a strong regional voice by producing regional consultations.

Achievements to Date

Several regional events were staged to make sure all the stakeholders were consulted, informed and given an opportunity to contribute to the development of the objectives.

In February 2009, a conference was held to which the heads of regulatory services from all unitary, county and district councils were invited. The attendance was excellent and there was agreement to form a strategic board to set priorities for regulatory services.

In April, a symposium for elected members gave prominence to the expectations of business and the benefits of partnership working for regulatory services. This led to a re-evaluation of the priorities in the light of the recession and in terms of the balance between the needs of the local area and the national regulators.

In May, there was full attendance at the inaugural meeting of the Strategy Board. A draft constitution, draft terms of reference and the outcome focused priorities for 2009-10 were all agreed. These are drawn from research in individual authorities and include:

- improving and valuing the environment;
- promoting safer and stronger communities and healthy and safe homes;
- supporting communities and, in particular, vulnerable people;
- encouraging economic prosperity and value for money;
- promoting and advancing the well being of and life chances for children and young people; and
- protecting and promoting health and well-being.

To date, governance arrangements and constitution have been established and a common enforcement policy has been agreed. Three core priority areas have been identified; economy, intelligence/evidence and benchmarking competency and training. Task groups have been sent up to take forward the priority areas.

Future Plans

SWeRF Task Groups are overseeing the development of improvements to ways of working, specifically:

The Better Regulation in Food project will deliver a report in March on best practice in regulation of food businesses taking account of a business perspective on regulatory interventions and making recommendations for adopting the most effective intervention styles region-wide.

Working with the support of the Government Office SW and the SW Regional Development Agency SWeRF has been looking to explore the concept of a Better Regulation for Business Forum to give business a stronger voice in the development of best practice ways of delivering regulatory services.

A Competence Working Group is looking to coordinate the training input from various bodies in the SW to ensure best value for money and aims to develop a SWeRF competence development plan in response to emerging thinking about shared regional workplan priorities. The group will also consider the scope for a regional response to the cross-regulator competence agenda. An Intelligence Working Group is bringing together examples of best practice in intelligence sharing between regulators and especially building on work done in Trading Standards and with other enforcement agencies.

Business engagement remains a key priority and a workshop with this theme is being organized for March 2010 in partnership with the Government Office. This follows an initial SWeRF initiative to set up a Business Forum.

East of England Regulatory Services Partnership

Overview

Established in October 2008, the East of England Regulatory Services Partnership (EERSP) involves 48 local authorities and encompasses environmental health, trading standards and the fire and rescue service. This initiative is building on the foundation created by several existing groups of regulatory services, although these are mainly based on individual counties and / or professional areas. The intention is to enhance this collaborative working by drawing together all the regulatory services across the region, in order to meet the better regulation principles more effectively.

From October 2008 to April 2009, an initial LBRO-funded project was undertaken that had two key strands. The first was the completion of an interactive web-based tool enabling businesses to access tailored advice on trading standards. The second was the identification of specific areas where partnership working could enhance the consistency of operations, provide the capacity to develop initiatives, or improve the level of engagement with national regulators.

The key objectives of EERSP are to:

- strengthen partnership working;
- share best practice;
- promote the delivery of better regulatory services;
- build on a successful model of regional and sub-regional coordination to reduce duplication and burdens on business;
- improve engagement with business sectors and their perceptions of dealing with regulatory services; and
- monitor and record economies of scale resulting from regional working.

Achievements to Date

A project team was appointed in November 2008. Since it included existing coordination staff in the region, it benefited from established contacts and communications networks. Terms of reference and a business plan were established by a Steering Group in the same month, and these are now reviewed and revised as required. Progress was highlighted in interim and final reports produced in December 2008 and June 2009 respectively. The LBRO funding has enabled EERSP to begin acting on a broad scale, transcending common models for collaborative working, and capitalising on the potential for efficiency savings. Some ongoing initiatives are summarised below:

1. Business Advice Project

The web-based tool mentioned above was launched in June 2009 and is now available for use at www.everythingregulation.org.uk. It is known as ERWIN (Everything Regulation Whenever It's Needed). Work is now underway to develop its environmental health, fire safety and licensing content to transform it into a one-stop-shop portal of regulatory services advice for business. Implementation is scheduled for autumn 2010.

2. Intelligence Database

It was recognised early on that there was an opportunity to use intelligence networking to better target and use resources, thus improving compliance by businesses. EERSP is developing intelligence frameworks, protocols and systems across regulatory services. The outcome will be a secure website for the increased sharing of relevant information. This will lead in turn to an improved intelligence base, which can then contribute to the more effective planning of work programmes. The trading standards area of the site is currently being finalised for launch, and extensions to other regulatory services will then follow.

3. EERSP Website

It was appreciated at the outset that improved methods of communication were needed to underpin the development of the partnership, and that these should be timely, easily accessible and low cost. Consequently, the EERSP website is scheduled for launch in early 2010. This will enable information to be disseminated more efficiently, and will support the ethos of data sharing between the 40+ sub-groups operating within the region.

4. Impact and Outcomes Toolkit

In June 2009 EERSP identified a demand for a tool to measure the impacts and outcomes of regulatory services, in order to demonstrate their contribution to local communities. (This was felt to be particularly relevant in the context of competition for increasingly scarce resources within local authorities at a time of recession.) By coincidence, a research report commissioned by LBRO on the impacts and outcomes of regulatory services was published in October 2009. Subsequently, a simplified form of the toolkit this contained was field-tested in one local authority and then disseminated throughout the EERSP.

Future Plans

EERSP has now commenced its updated work programme for 2010. Since all its initiatives seek to build on existing expertise and experience, it is developing a skills database both across regulatory services and with other agencies and professionals.

The Partnership is currently exploring funding models for sustaining the momentum on a longer term and a more equitable basis, including the principle of Associate membership for linked agencies. It is also seeking further funding for the next phases of the ERWIN project, given that this has national application and can generate substantial savings for regulatory services and businesses alike.

Feedback

“The development of the Partnership and its objectives recognises that although the professional areas of trading standards, environmental health and fire and rescue fulfil different roles and activities, we share many key stakeholders and challenges. We share the same objectives in protecting and supporting local people whether this is their health, safety, economic prosperity or the environment in which our communities live. The vital services we provide have common forms of problem solving and information requirements. Sharing our precious skills and knowledge for the benefit of the whole region should allow us to improve local services and maximise our efficiency.”

David Collinson, Chair of the EERSP Steering Group

North East of England Regional Coordination

Overview

In April 2009, following the Local Government Review, 12 unitary authorities replaced 23 councils in the North East. Although adapting to this change has been a challenge, the new structure offers greater opportunities for cooperation. Closer partnership working between regulatory services is the main aim of the North East Regional Coordination project, building on the existing and successful trading standards and environmental health group networks, and capitalising on close links with Northumbria University. A pilot initiative has been part-funded by LBRO with contributions from the Health Protection Agency (HPA), Strategic Health Authority (SHA), CIEH and individual local authorities.

The key objectives are to:

- develop stronger governance arrangements through more integrated regional planning and joint working initiatives;
- improve the consistency and quality of regulatory services through the development of common processes and procedures;
- raise the profile of regulatory services through member engagement; and
- improve business compliance with regulatory requirements.

Achievements to Date

The main thrust of the project has been enhancing the coordination of environmental health services both within the region and with other regulatory services. Recently, the focus has been on developing the infrastructure and processes that will ultimately underpin improved service provision. The first joint regional meeting between environmental health groups and the North East Trading Standards Association (NETSA) was held in April 2009, while a commitment to work together was agreed at a meeting of the new Heads of Regulatory Services Partnership in November 2009. Draft terms of reference and governance structures were circulated for consideration prior to the next meeting scheduled for February 2010.

Quick wins have been obtained in areas such as communications, regional governance and professional development. A regional consistency programme for food enforcement officers has been initiated. Greater collaboration with the Health Protection Agency has extended to a successful joint Health Protection Conference in November 2009. Activity with CIEH has been reinvigorated, primarily through the joint development of an annual training programme for environmental health practitioners.

Future Plans

Although funding is not currently in place beyond the life of the pilot, work is progressing to develop and support the Heads of Regulatory Services Partnership. It is hoped that this will provide the strategic drive to embed and sustain many of the outcomes derived from the pilot. Greater joint work between existing regional and sub-regional groups will also continue to be encouraged.

Feedback

“There is a huge opportunity within the North East to realise significant benefits through more strategic and joined up regional working between local authority regulatory services. However, our success is reliant on the commitment given by our existing regional coordinators and their continued support from the partner organisations.”

Joanne Waller, Head of Environment, Health and Consumer Protection, Durham County Council

“NETSA welcomes any initiative that raises the profile of regulatory services within the region and within individual local authorities. Engagement of members is seen as being particularly important as many authorities in the region are facing major budgetary challenges. NETSA has an excellent track record of delivering regional projects such as Consumer Direct North East, Scambusters and the Illegal Money Lending Team and we look forward to sharing our expertise in these areas with our colleagues in other regulatory services.”

Alan Kirsop, Secretary, NETSA

Public Protection North West Partnership

Overview

The Public Protection North West Partnership extends to environmental health, licensing and trading standards. It was formed by Trading Standards North West (TSNW) and the Greater Manchester Public Protection Partnership (GMPPP). The catalyst for bringing them together for stronger joint working across the region was LBRO's support for the initiative. TSNW comprises the 22 trading standards authorities in the North West, while GMPPP is made up of the 10 AGMA authorities plus Warrington and Blackburn and the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service. Ultimately, the Partnership seeks to include all 46 local authorities and fire authorities in the region.

The main objectives are to:

- provide a regional framework for regulatory services;
- promote innovation and self-improvement;
- achieve efficiency savings by sharing good practice;
- tackle poor performance through tailored, coordinated support;
- develop the intelligence function and a consistent approach to service delivery;
- coordinate the support provided by other local authorities and agencies;
- develop links with other regional and national agencies; and
- develop a strategy to attract funding.

Achievements to Date

A Steering Group has been set up consisting of representatives from TSNW and GMPPP and local environmental health groups. A project management team has also been established. The first regional stakeholder event held in May 2009 was attended by over 50 delegates from the regulatory services. The feedback suggested that it successfully raised awareness of and interest in partnership working.

Certain work streams have been completed such as the mapping of regulatory services' officers. The mapping of regional and sub-regional groups is also underway.

Supported by further sponsorship from LBRO, a KBA Strategic Leadership in Modern Local Government programme began in January 2010 for 10 heads of regulatory services from various disciplines. The Partnership views the professional development of future leaders as an effective way forward.

Future Plans

A consultation on a draft constitution with a governance model will begin in February 2010, with the ambitious target of having the final version in place by March.

The Steering Group has also decided to employ a coordination assistant on a pilot basis with the primary aim of enhancing coordination across environmental health and licensing. If this proves successful the sustainability of expanding regional coordination across regulatory services on a permanent basis will be considered. Funding for this initiative has been met from the initial LBRO grant.

Funding from other agencies is actively being sought.

Feedback

"We are grateful to LBRO for the support it has provided during the pilot phase of the regional coordination project which has brought the region's regulatory services together. The stakeholder meeting in May proved to be a watershed event and the Steering Group is hopeful that the enthusiasm shown will translate into acceptance of a governance model of the region."

Steering Group Chair Paul Noone