

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SAFETY & WASTE MANAGEMENT CABINET

BETTER BUSINESS FOR ALL (BBfA)

Agenda Item No.

8

Report of the Director of Community Protection (Chief Fire Officer)

Author:- John Boulter, Head of Protection (Business) (Tel: 25951)

Executive Member:- Richard Thake, Community Safety & Waste Management Portfolio

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Panel of the work of Hertfordshire's Better Business for All Partnership in which staff from the Community Protection, notably Trading Standards and Fire Protection have had a leading role in establishing and progressing.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Hertfordshire's Better Business for All (BBfA) partnership brings together businesses and regulators to consider and change how local regulation is delivered and received. The aim of this work is one of developing a new relationship between businesses and local regulators to support growth by identifying issues facing local businesses, shaping the provision of effective support services to them without compromising public safety and wellbeing which lies at the heart of good regulation.
- 2.2 The Better Regulation Delivery Office, a part of BIS, is the government sponsor for the BBfA initiative which now extends to over 160 local authorities in 18 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas who are involved with the programme, preparing and implementing action plans for their areas and sharing good practice. Their recent publication; 'Better Business for All and Growth' features the work going on in Hertfordshire which is recognised as being one of the leading BBfA partnerships in the country.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 The Community Safety and Waste Management Cabinet Panel is invited to affirm their support for the Better Business for All initiative and the work being undertaken within this Authority to work collaboratively to support the County's business community, provide a fair and level regulatory playing field and embed the sort of approach to regulation which fosters growth and prosperity.

4. Background

- 4.1 Good regulatory delivery provides essential protection from risks posed by day-to-day business operation. It protects citizens from unsafe food and products, from public and occupational health risks, and from fraud and financial detriment. It also protects businesses, ensuring fair competition and a level playing field.
- 4.2 Good regulation is also good business. It can reduce compliance costs by clarifying requirements, providing accessible advice about solutions, developing monitoring processes, and enabling recognition of investment in compliance. By supporting local and national businesses to grow, local authority regulators can also contribute to the development of economic wellbeing within communities, creating new jobs, raising levels of income and providing greater choice and availability of local services.
- 4.3 The BBfA partnership has achieved much since April 2013 when the Hertfordshire Chief Executives' Group approved a programme of work in support of the Better Business for All initiative, intended to improve the delivery of regulation in the county whilst at the same time, making the process of regulation that much more 'business friendly'. It has established a strong, effective partnership which continues to develop, producing tangible products and positive outcomes to support both the County's business and its regulatory communities. Key to those developments has been the establishment of structures, the production of a BBfA 'Charter', establishing a virtual 'one stop shop' for all things regulation and the delivery of a major training initiative. Details of each of those initiatives are set out below.

4.4 Structures

- 4.4.1 Structures, terms of reference and governance arrangements were established during the summer of 2013. A steering group, chaired by the Head of Protection (Business) has representation from all key stakeholders including representatives from the business community (Federation of Small Businesses, Chambers of Commerce, LEP) and, latterly the Hertfordshire Growth Hub, meets quarterly and provides oversight of an agreed work plan.
- 4.4.2 The Steering Group reports to the Herts Chief Executives Group and two of their number act as 'BBfA 'Champions'. Hertfordshire's BBfA partnership is notable for the fact that this has, from the start been driven by the counties local authorities as opposed to the Local Enterprise Partnerships which provide the governance arrangements for much, if not all of the other BBfA partnerships.

4.4.3 The Regulators' Forum which reports to the Steering Group is comprised of representatives of each of the various professional groups involved in local regulation (Env. Health, Licensing, Planning, Building Control, Trading Standards, Highways, Fire Safety etc.) as well as representatives from ACAS, Home Office Immigration, the Environment Agency and Food Standards Agency. It is this Forum where the bulk of the work programme is progressed and has proved to be a very effective mechanism for the sharing of ideas, information and the development and delivery of a variety of projects and initiatives.

4.5 The BBfA Regulators Charter

4.5.1 The establishment of a Hertfordshire Better Business for All Charter (Appendix 1) which sets out the actions and responsibilities of Hertfordshire Regulatory services and businesses within the county has provided an important milestone for the BBfA initiative. The document is both a clear public statement of intent in how local authorities will deliver their regulatory roles and what a business should expect of their local regulators. It also acknowledges business's own responsibilities and a commitment for business organisations to work with their local regulators to provide feedback and help improve services as well as levels of compliance.

4.6 'Soft landing pack'

4.6.1 Working closely with the Hertfordshire LEP, the partnership has produced an online resource to better support the county's business community. The 'soft landing pack', hosted on the LEP's website, guides businesses through the regulatory process step by step and provides a 'one stop shop' for accessing regulatory advice, on both local and national regulation, and signposting using direct contact details to the relevant contacts in all of the county's local authorities should more support be required.

4.7 Training Programme

4.7.1 Whilst the partnership has delivered a number of products and initiatives in the last 18 months, it is the business awareness training programme, attended by nearly 300 local regulators, which has been at the heart of efforts to change cultures and behaviours.

4.7.2 The one day training programme which was first piloted in June last year, has been designed to address two particular needs which regulators themselves flagged up as areas of weakness. Firstly, an improved understanding of the many challenges of running a

business, the business community's perception of regulators and how best to overcome or address those fears, concerns and challenges. The second area identified for development focused on increasing regulators' understanding of the work of their fellow regulators in different professions (highlighted in a previous skills audit) and was designed to improve regulators 'signposting' ability where a business was seeking additional help and guidance in an area outside of that regulators own expertise. A sample training day timetable / agenda is included in Appendix 3

- 4.7.3 In total five training events have been held, one in Watford and two each at the Fire & Rescue Training Centre, Stevenage and at Stevenage Borough FC (which was better suited to larger numbers). 280 officers attended the training from across Hertfordshire's regulatory community. Attendance levels from across the 11 local authorities in the BBfA partnership has, on the whole, been very good and it is estimated that around 75% of all regulators across the partnership have now received the training. Whilst this falls short of our bold ambition for 100%, it remains nonetheless a very significant achievement which we believe is unmatched anywhere in the country. All Trading Standards and Fire Protection staff attended the training.
- 4.7.4 In addition to local regulators, other organisations have also benefitted from the training such as staff from the Hertfordshire Growth Hub and WENTA as well as several local authorities in Kent, Surrey, Hampshire and Dorset each of whom are looking to set up similar BBfA partnerships and training initiatives in their own localities.
- 4.7.5 Feedback from each of the training events has been very positive. The training has increased officers' understanding of the needs of business, the importance of fostering a relationship built on trust and understanding to improve compliance, as well as improved officer awareness of what different regulators do and how to access their support. A consolidated summary of feedback from the training these is presented in Appendix 2. Of particular note, 90% said they that they now feel better placed to signpost to other regulators and 88 % said they understand business challenges better – the two primary objectives of the training.

4.8 Community Protection's contribution to the BbfA partnership

- 4.8.1 As well as chairing the BBfA Steering Group, staff from within Community Protection have played a significant role in progressing many of the initiatives and projects. In particular, the production of the BBfA Z cards, the piloting of online surveys (using QR codes) and the

development of the web content are all projects where staff from Trading Standards and Fire Protection have taken the lead.

4.8.2 The BBfA social media content is managed from within Joint Protective Services. A very active social media profile has been developed over the last year and is being used to great effect. Whilst the Twitter account might have only 298 followers but content regularly get retweets from Hertfordshire County Council, the LEP, FSB etc meaning that one message about BBfA can reach as many as 35,000 followers.

4.8.3 Latterly, the skills and expertise of the directorate's training centre has been invaluable in supporting the development of some BBfA e-learning packages which build on the successful regulator training events and be made available to all partners thus providing a more sustainable training and induction programme for regulators in the county.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 With the exception of a small amount of funding to assist with the production of a training DVD (now a national resource), the resourcing of Hertfordshire's BBfA work has been entirely self-generated. For 14/15, each of the Local Authority partners has made a financial contribution to support the BBfA programme (£800 per LA) and this pooled budget has funded the production of promotional material and an extensive business awareness training programme.

5.2 Recently, the local authority partners have increased their individual financial contribution to this work (£2,000 per authority in 15/16) which has enabled the partnership to fund a one year dedicated Project Officer post to sustain, widen and deepen the work of the partnership in support of its BBfA ambitions

6. Equalities

6.1 There are no equalities issues arising from this work programme, at this time



Hertfordshire Charter

Better Business for All Partnership Charter

This is a voluntary undertaking between Hertfordshire Regulatory Services and all local business, irrespective of size or resources.

Aim

To support a relationship between businesses and regulators built upon trust, understanding and a desire to improve together in terms of compliance with regulation and support of business growth.

Purpose

Hertfordshire Regulatory Services are committed to working with businesses to help them meet their statutory requirements and to prosper. This Charter sets out the actions and responsibilities of regulatory services and businesses within Hertfordshire.

Regulatory Partners will:

- Support and promote the local economy by supporting local businesses
- Make it easy to seek advice
- Make information and advice easy to understand
- Explain the reason for their visit to businesses
- Carry out regulatory activity in a fair, helpful, transparent, proportionate and consistent way
- Be accountable

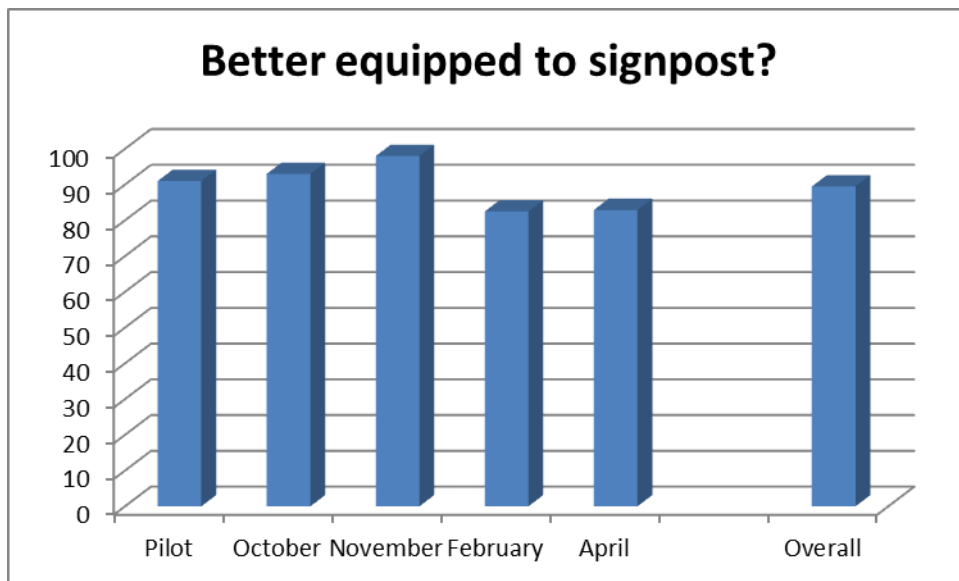
- Minimise the cost of compliance for businesses by ensuring that any action taken is proportionate to risk
- Coordinate services to minimise unnecessary overlaps and duplication
- Wherever possible reduce regulatory burden on business
- Consult with businesses through groups representing local businesses, when developing policies, plans and service standard.
- Promote Better Business for All to businesses and consumers

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Chambers' of Commerce (CoC) and Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will encourage local businesses to:

- Seek advice from Hertfordshire Regulatory Services on matters of compliance
- Encourage other businesses to contact Hertfordshire Regulatory Services for advice
- Work with Hertfordshire Regulatory Services to achieve a satisfactory outcome and put problems right quickly
- Take part in publicity about positive experiences with regulators
- Be fair, helpful and transparent in dealing with Hertfordshire Regulatory Services staff
- Provide feedback to Hertfordshire Regulatory Services on improvements to the local regulatory system.



BBfA Training Evaluation



90% of all delegates said they that they now feel better placed to signpost to other regulators and 88 % said they understand business challenges better – the two primary objectives of the training.