

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 FEBRUARY 2007

STATEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER (Community Planning, community safety, cultural services, public protection, trading standards and post-16 lifelong learning)

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN FORT

TRADING STANDARDS

Trading Standards to Enforce New Legislation

The government is to raise the legal minimum age to purchase tobacco from 16 to 18 years old, bringing it into line with the age limit for alcohol. The County Council's Trading Standards Service is responsible for the enforcement of legislation relating to the sale by retailers of a number of age restricted products, including alcohol and tobacco. The new legislation will come into effect from 1 October 2007, and a campaign to raise awareness of the imminent change in age will be launched in the summer.

Best Bar None

The UK-wide scheme, which is backed by the Home Office was piloted in Manchester in 2003 and has since been adopted by over sixty other towns and cities with great success. Best Bar None aims to reward licensees who provide good management, a safe and enjoyable environment for customers, discourage binge drinking and prevent alcohol-related crime. It will encourage licensees to act responsibly and take pride in their premises and surroundings and, in doing so, put something back into their local community. The rewards for licensees include, the prestige of being part of the awards scheme, increased business within the area and lower insurance premiums resulting from the fact that they are running safer establishments.

The Trading Standards service is working with district councils and other partners to promote the 'Best Bar None' scheme to licensees of bars and public houses in North Yorkshire. The scheme was launched in Selby last year and now Scarborough District Council has now invited the County's Trading Standards Service to assist in the introduction of the scheme in the seaside town.

Animal Welfare Prosecution

Acting on information that animal cruelty was taking place on a farm in the Skipton area, last summer. The County Council's Trading Standards officers visited the farm and found, what was described by an officer of 20 years experience, as the worst scenes of neglect that he has seen. Officers discovered a minimum of 155 cattle and sheep carcasses left rotting in farm buildings and on the farm land. More carcasses were present but were in such a decomposed state discerning actual numbers was impossible. Subsequent veterinary examination of some of the remaining livestock found they were being caused unnecessary suffering.

In January 2007 the farmer in question, a Mr James Drake, pleaded guilty to charges of animal cruelty, failing to deal with livestock carcasses appropriately and allowing live animals access to carcasses. He was ordered to pay fines and costs of over £2500.

Trading Standards Prosecution Leads to £12,500 Compensation for North Yorks Resident

Philip Patrick Atkinson & Vincent Christopher Wright trading as AW Builders pleaded guilty at York Crown Court on 22nd January 2007 to offences of giving misleading price indications. The successful prosecution followed a trading standards investigation into the pair after their original quote for an extension at a house in Harrogate rose from £17,000 to in excess of £25,000. Atkinson and Wright took far longer to carry out work than was reasonable and this together with their constant demands for increased payments caused considerable stress and financial problems for the complainant. Work was never finished, and in fact the extension had to be completely rebuilt by another tradesman.

Sentencing Atkinson and Wright, his honour Judge Ashurst said that he was aware of the distress and financial difficulties the victim had suffered because of their actions, and so he was focusing their punishment on a compensation order to her benefit rather than imposing a fine which would go into central government funds. He also imposed conditional discharges on the pair, allowing their sentence to be increased if they offend again within the next two years.

Avian Influenza

On Saturday 3rd February, 2007 the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) confirmed that there was a case of Avian Influenza (H5N1) at a poultry farm at Upper Holton, Suffolk. The H5N1 virus strain being the more serious version of Avian Influenza. As a result DEFRA imposed a 3km protection zone, a 10km Surveillance zone around the infected premises. A further restricted zone covering an area of 2090 square kilometres has also been imposed. The state Veterinary Service arranged for the humane slaughter and disposal of approximately 160,000 turkeys from the infected premises which was completed late on 5th February, 2007. Two personnel involved in the operation one a veterinary officer subsequently showed signs of having contracted avian influenza. Tests have shown that the respiratory symptoms experienced by the personnel were not caused by the avian influenza virus.

Trading Standards & Regulatory Services have been closely monitoring the developments since the suspect case was announced on 2nd February, 2007. There has been a national ban imposed on bird gatherings, including fairs, markets, shows, exhibitions and pigeon races. This has affected some North Yorkshire businesses which have been contacted by the Trading Standards Officers.

The County Council is offering advice to all of its estimated 10,000 poultry keepers through its Animal Health and Welfare Service hotline 0845 3301221. All human health enquiries are being dealt with by the North Yorkshire Health Protection Unit.

The North Yorkshire Local Resilience Forum (NYLRF) Animal Infectious Diseases Group met on 8th February, 2007. The group is chaired by an officer of the Trading Standards & Regulatory Services and the membership consists of those operational partners that would deal with any notifiable disease outbreak in North Yorkshire. The Group was satisfied that as much preparation as possible had been undertaken in advance of any potential Avian Influenza outbreak occurring in the County.

At the time of writing we can confirm that the Avian Influenza outbreak is confined to the poultry farm in Suffolk.

CULTURE

Regional Cultural Portfolio Holders Network

On 29th January I attended the first meeting of the Regional Culture Portfolio Holders Network. The network is hosted by Local Government Yorkshire and Humber. The meeting agreed key aims and objectives relating to cultural improvement and the development of regional cultural priorities.

The network also discussed the involvement of Yorkshire and Humber in the 2012 Olympics and Elected Member representation on the board of Arts Council England, Yorkshire. The board is responsible for setting and monitoring regional arts priorities and regional accountability for the Arts Council's programmes of work. There are currently 5 places for election and I am considering an application in order to ensure that North Yorkshire is able to contribute to shaping the region's priorities for the arts.

Local Area Agreement

The Local Area Agreement for North Yorkshire was submitted by the GOYH to DCLG on the 8th February as planned. The key element of the submission was the set of stretch targets. By the time the submission was finalised there had been a great deal of investment of time and effort by a range of partners in the targets. As a consequence, the package is strongly supported and some difficult decisions had to be made along the way about which would be in and which not. The GOYH feedback is that the LAA offers a well expressed account of issues for North Yorkshire and that the strategy to deliver it is sound.

Partners are now turning to the task of firming up the performance management arrangements and the programmes by which the outcomes of the LAA will be delivered. Work is well advanced in disaggregating county level targets to district level so that LSPs can develop their own local monitoring arrangements. This disaggregation will be further refined as the delivery programmes are developed and identify where action needs to be focussed.

York and North Yorkshire Safer Communities Forum

The Safer Communities Forum brings together the principal criminal justice organisations across the County with local authorities and CDRP chairs so that they can collaborate in the strategic management of this area of activity. It is important that good progress is made in this area as the GOYH is looking for greater strategic capacity to support local delivery by community safety partnerships. Joint Coordination Groups have been established in relation to alcohol harm reduction, prolific and other priority offenders, data management and domestic abuse and all, though at the early stages, are addressing their priorities with a clear sense of purpose. So far, these developments represent another positive step in the development of stronger partnership working in North Yorkshire through the North Yorkshire Strategic Partnership.

Community Safety Strategy

Some members will be aware that the County Council's community safety strategy is being considered by Area Committees at present, to ensure members awareness of the strategy and to seek local concerns and priorities from members. The document is intended to provide the means by which the County Council can monitor its own response to this agenda and its attention to its responsibilities under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act which obliges authorities like our to have regard to the effects of what it does on reducing crime and disorder.

The strategy will be part of the Council's Policy Framework and so will be presented to the Council for final approval, probably at its next meeting.

Social inclusion

In 2004, the County Council approved its first Social Inclusion Strategy. Obviously a lot of changes to directorate work programmes have happened since and so last year an officer working group was tasked with revising the document. Production of the County Council's Social Inclusion Strategy 2007-2010 is now complete. The revised version identifies the current and future directorate work programmes that we are, or will be, implementing across the board to tackle social exclusion. Future monitoring of the action plans will identify the areas where work still needs to be done to ensure people do not suffer social exclusion. The document is also intended to act as a signposting document for people in North Yorkshire to contact the County Council on issues relating to the priority areas identified in the Strategy. The Safe and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be considering the Strategy in March and it will be presented to Full Council in May.

County Councillor John Fort