

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

21 FEBRUARY 2007

STATEMENT OF THE BUSINESS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER 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.

County Councillor John Fort
12 February 2007