



Southampton City Council
Municipal Journal Local Government Achievement Awards 2010

Public Protection Achievement

“Open for Business” Regulatory Services supporting Business in Southampton

SUMMARY

Southampton City Council's Regulatory Services recognises that effective and well targeted regulatory advice plays a key role in helping businesses stay successful. The “Open for Business” initiative comprises a number of strands to provide sector specific advice and information to local businesses. By addressing cultural change within Regulatory Services, working with partners and re-prioritising existing resources, the initiative seeks to support key priorities and deliver a safer environment for workers, customers and others in the city.



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Regulatory Services supporting Business in Southampton

Southampton City Council's "Open for Business" initiative comprises of a number of activities to provide advice and information on regulatory matters aimed at protecting consumers and citizens.

Under the "Open for Business" branding, Environmental Health and Trading Standards and other council departments, working with Business Link, Business South the Southampton business network, have provided sector specific advice and information aimed at small and medium sized local businesses.

Recent national research has shown that small businesses rely on business advice provided by local authorities and the initiative by Southampton City Council acknowledges that the current economic climate is causing difficulties for local businesses. By identifying and engaging with the right person in a business, Regulatory Services can encourage competence in self-regulation and strong leadership to help businesses survive such difficulties.

The businesses market will operate fairly and at its best with a level playing field where everyone protects themselves, their workers, customers and others from harm and unfair treatment. The "Open for Business" initiative aims to encourage business to see regulatory compliance as 'the way we do business around here' through the supportive attitude and approach of Regulatory Services in Southampton.

The initiative has arisen through Elected Member meetings with officers and was launched at a Member led conference. It is clearly recognised at a political level that good regulation is good for business, and Politicians have been extremely supportive of the "Open for Business" initiative. Strong and effective leadership from the top of the Authority has been evident in the "Open for Business" initiative, as it integrates regulation and public protection very positively with other key priorities such as the promotion of business, economic prosperity and the promotion of employment. A briefing paper was taken to Chief Officers' Management Team in 2008 to set the scene for "Open for Business".

What is Open for Business?

The City Council's Regulatory Services have been working for some years, since the Hampton Review, to become more business friendly, recognising that effective and well targeted regulatory advice plays a key role in helping businesses understand and meet their statutory responsibilities.

Environmental Health and Trading Standards have addressed cultural change to ensure that they are welcoming to business and that communications take the right tone. The services aim to be businesslike and offer tailored and helpful advice, which is neither too complicated nor simplistic.

In order to advertise this approach and to signpost this change to staff, the advice and information was branded under the "Open for Business" branding, which is used on stands, leaflets and articles.

At Southampton "There has been a strong emphasis on cultural change, moving away from enforcement activity towards working with businesses to solve problems" Action Research on the National Enforcement Priorities, LBRO 2009

The change of emphasis towards provision of business-friendly advice and information to assist self regulation is cost effective for Regulatory Services. The "Open for Business" initiative has not required additional financial or other resources, but has relied on prioritising existing resources using budgets that are currently available for regulatory services, including publicity, learning and development and IT. In order to deliver "Open for Business" initiatives, Regulatory Services has sought to raise income from alternative sources through partnership working.

Partnership Working

Environmental Health and Trading Standards have worked with other council partners and signed up to Memorandum of Understanding with Business Link in 2008. This committed the council and Business Link to work together in the provision of business advice, and the two organisations have worked together to provide advice to small businesses. Other partners include Business South, the Southampton Business network as well as the Office for Fair Trading, other council departments and local agencies.

It is important that all local businesses supported by Business Link are able to meet in person with their Business Link Advisor easily and locally, to minimise travel time and therefore cost. Regulatory Services have been able to offer the use of our central offices, and facilities including car parking, to Business Link and their clients in recognition of the partnership. This has facilitated closer networking between Regulatory Services and Business Link and strengthened the ability to cross signpost each others services to assist business.

What are we doing?

It was decided to focus on "sector specific" advice and to signpost to specific business advice web based sources, in particular Business Link and ERWIN (everything regulation whenever it's needed). The project also centred on sector specific articles published in the council's magazine "City View". The magazine is distributed to all households and businesses in Southampton, 10 times a year, and includes specific "Business View" pages. The articles were advertised via press releases, and display stands under the "Open for Business" branding at business events and seminars aimed at local businesses.

The sector specific articles were written in such a way that they could also be used in web pages and as stand alone leaflets providing an ongoing cost effective resource. The articles directed businesses to easily accessible web based advice which is recognised as the most cost effective communication channel either by self service, or via the Council's Contact Centre.

The sector specific approach represents a move away from the way Regulatory Services are traditionally aligned within the Authority, with specialist teams dealing with specialist themes. This can lead to businesses having to consult with a number of different enforcement staff – an unnecessary burden on business. "Open for Business" challenges Regulatory Services to think more keenly about our business customers, and what is more helpful for them. This has led to the up-skilling of staff as they help business understand the full range of regulation affecting them. The sector specific presentation of regulatory messages reduces burdens on business at no additional cost for Regulatory Services. This should reduce the cost to businesses associated with obtaining good quality advice.

Public Protection Outcomes

Two sector specific seminars have been held with landlords and letting agents aiming to raise awareness of their specific responsibilities including tenant safety and welfare, fire safety, protection of the environment in terms of waste and recycling advice and protecting the financial wellbeing of tenants. Feedback from the first seminar for Estate Agents which drew

together all the relevant council departments and other agencies, identified demand for a similar event aimed at Letting Agents. This was arranged 8 months later and had similarly high satisfaction feedback. These targeted seminars attracted over 170 delegates between them.

Also in 2009 an initiative to tackle work related violence in the City's licensed premises saw free training being delivered to front of house staff, largely funded by the police. 11 licensed premises were selected following information from the police and PCT that showed they had the highest number of violent incidents. A thorough joint inspection of the premises by a health and safety inspector and police officer identified bespoke improvements for each business. This sector specific initiative led to changes in practice and staff behaviour to recognise and take action early on in situations which may become violent. This protects both workers and customers, and can improve how safe people feel in the city. Before and after questionnaires demonstrated an improved knowledge, changes in practice and high levels of satisfaction with the training delivered.

Environmental Health also worked with the City's Chinese Association and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to deliver workshops and 1:1 coaching sessions in the Chinese language to Southampton's Chinese caterers. The focus for this sector specific training was Safer Food, Better Business. This initiative protects public health by reducing the risk of food poisoning, and supporting business sustainability. Evaluation demonstrated improved compliance in a significant number of participating businesses, with very positive feedback. Funding was secured from the FSA in order to deliver this initiative.

"I did find his comments very positive and his attitude towards helping us to be positive about health and safety were a refreshing change from 'days of old' when one felt that the inspectors were trying to trip you up! Yes – actually a pleasure to be assessed whilst being assisted."

"Only wish I knew before how approachable and how much advice was on offer from our local H&S inspector. May have saved ourself some money on H&S consultants!!"

Feedback from customer satisfaction questionnaires following health and safety inspections.

Environmental Health and Trading Standards issue customer satisfaction questionnaires to all business customers and achieve high levels of customer satisfaction. National Indicator 182 'Percentage of business customers of regulatory services who respond that they have been treated fairly and/or the contact has been helpful' is exceeding target, and satisfaction with proactive inspections of business ranged from 97.9% to 100% across Environmental Health and Trading Standards in 2008/9.

Supporting Key Priorities

"Open for Business" contributes to Southampton Local Area Agreement Key Outcome 13 – promoting the growth and sustainability of local enterprise and small businesses which requires the provision of appropriate, widely known and easy access business support networks. Delivery against this priority is through the relationship with Business Link including cross signposting of each other's services, and the delivery of sector specific advice and guidance to business.

Southampton City Council firmly places customers at the heart of all it does, and seeks to ensure all services are customer focussed. It states this along with its 6 priorities for the year 2009/10. "Open for Business" directly supports 4 of these priorities:

- **Providing good value, high quality services** – identifying and securing funding for initiatives from alternative sources, monitoring costs and reducing them where possible. Ensuring the advice provided and it's presentation is accurate and clear. The style and tone of Regulatory Services is businesslike.
- **Getting the city working** – Southampton's economy is a prime factor in the ongoing success of the city. Improving links and relationships with businesses is key to this work, supporting them locally through delivery of risk based, relevant initiatives.
- **Keeping people safe** – People who work, live and visit the city need to be safe and feel safe. "Open for Business" seeks to make safety and wellbeing an intrinsic part of business, rather than an ancillary topic.
- **Keeping the city clean and green** – by combining all relevant messages together in one place for a particular business sector, waste, cleansing and sustainability issues are included where previously they would have been found separately.

In 2009 LBRO published research they had commissioned on the National Enforcement Priorities. Southampton Regulatory Services was one of 7 Local Authorities who participated in this research, and the report highlighted that in Southampton enforcement activity already reflects the national priorities laid out in the Rogers Review, with the objective of working smarter by targeting resources at the source of problems rather than their symptoms.

Environmental Health and Trading Standards also align service delivery with the latest strategies from partners such as the HSE, FSA and LACORS to maximise effectiveness, and maintain consistency.

In conclusion, the approach employed by the "Open for Business" encourages a change in culture in the way business advice is provided by Council teams and external partners. It could be extended to other local authorities and government departments, and Southampton would be willing to work with the sponsors of this award to promote the initiative to others.