



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot  
Neath Port Talbot Council

## **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Regeneration and Sustainable Development Scrutiny Committee**

*7<sup>th</sup> June 2019*

### **Report of the Head of Planning and Public Protection**

N. Pearce

#### **Matter for Information**

**Wards Affected:**        *All Wards*

#### **Update report on the business advice service operated within Environmental Health & Trading Standards**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. To provide Members with an update of the business advice service operated by Environmental Health & Trading Standards, from April 2018 (1<sup>st</sup> year review).

#### **Executive Summary**

2. This report provides an update regarding the provision of advice to new and existing businesses by the Environmental Health & Trading Standards Department and the operation of the charging system for this service as a means of cost recovery for the department.

## Background

3. Environmental Health & Trading Standards have the statutory duty to enforce a wide range of legislation, from food safety, weights and measures, product safety, health and safety, and private rented properties including housing of multiple occupation.

In April 2018, the Environmental Health & Trading Standards service introduced a charging scheme for bespoke business advice- designed as an added value service to assist new start and existing businesses that wanted advice on complying with the legislation relevant to them.

The confirmed proposal was to charge businesses for bespoke advice on a cost recovery basis, with the exception of the “sign posting” to sources of advice which was to continue free of charge given how little resource this requires.

Fees for the provision of advice were set at £60 per hour or part thereof with a suggested minimum of a 2 hour initial consultation. Fees increase annually by the inflationary rate (currently 2%).

Neath Port Talbot was not the first authority to charge for Environmental Health & Trading Standards advice - the following authorities within Wales were already charging for the provision of business advice:

Shared Regulatory Services (Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend)

Pembrokeshire County Council (Food Hygiene and Standards)

Monmouthshire County Council (Food Hygiene)

## Powys County Council (Food Hygiene)

Charges ranged from £45-75 per hour. Some authorities also specified a minimum 2 hour initial consultation.

Alternatively, businesses remain at liberty to buy advice commercially from free-lance experts with trading standards or environmental health backgrounds or relevant qualifications, or for the businesses to carry out their own research.

### **First year review: findings and developments**

During the initial phase of introduction, a set of standardised Terms and Conditions were developed, together with an Application form, to formalise the contract and the scope of advice requested. The scheme was publicised and made available online, and promoted by officers during visits and when businesses contacted the Environmental Health & Trading Standards services for initial advice. Initial contact advice and “signposting” to recommended sources of information has continued alongside the offer of the bespoke advice service. This baseline level of support has been refined and is primarily provided by email as a free service, which is still an extremely valuable starting point for businesses.

The bespoke business advice service has been well received by those who have used the service, although uptake numbers have been rather low to date. The service has been used by 6 local businesses who have sought advice on a range of Food Safety and Trading Standards topics, and has resulted in an additional income of £864.00.

The introduction of the business advice service has however further assisted with the need for a change of mindset- for both

officers and business proprietors. It complements other cost recovery and income generation initiatives being delivered within the Environmental Health & Trading Standards services, which also include:

- Japanese Knotweed;
- Drainage CCTV surveys;
- Weights and Measures verifications;
- Private Water Supplies- risk assessments;
- Noise impact consultancy services;
- Food Hygiene Rating re-assessment visits;
- Cost recovery for Housing Act notices;
- Giants Grave environmental management.

Whilst there has been a reduction in the number of sites/ premises visited to provide a free advisory service to, this has in turn freed up resource to concentrate more on existing statutory activities. The amount of saved officer resource is estimated to be in the region of 1.0 FTE.

## **Proposal**

4. To note that the bespoke business advice service has been introduced on a cost recovery basis, and that it complements the existing free “sign posting” to sources for generic business advice.

## **Financial Impact**

5. No significant adverse financial impact.

## **Integrated Impact Assessment**

6. There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for monitoring / information purposes.

**Valleys Communities Impacts:**

7. No implications.

**Workforce Impacts:**

8. No implications.

**Legal Impact**

9. No significant legal impacts.

**Risk Management**

10. None

**Consultation**

11. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

**Recommendation(s)**

12. That the report be noted.

**Reason for Proposed Decision(s)**

13. Matter for monitoring. No decision required.

**Implementation of Decision**

14. Matter for monitoring. No decision required

**Appendices**

15. None

## List of Background Papers

16. None

## Officer Contact

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