

Developing a coherent approach to improving local authority regulatory services'

Decisions

1. The Safer Communities Board is asked to support the LGA and LACORS in seeking from the ODPM the establishment of a Ministerial sub group of the central/local partnership to consider including as one of the central/local shared priorities 'the delivery of high quality regulatory services that underpin the health and well-being of local communities'.

Actions

2. LACORS on behalf of the LGA will formally approach the ODPM to explore how to take forward the above objective and report back on progress

Action by LACORS Secretariat

Contact: Derek Allen (020 7840 7201; e-mail Derek.allen@lacors.gov.uk)

1. Summary

1.1 The LGA and LACORS fully support the principle and have been active in seeking to develop a more coherent, joined up approach by central government sponsoring departments in determining their expectations for delivery from the wide ranging local government regulatory services.

1.2 A round table meeting facilitated by LGA and LACORS held in June 2004 and attended by representatives from many of the sponsoring govt departments started to explore the development of:-

- A common set of agreed priorities;
- A consistent approach to minimum standards
- A consistent approach to performance planning
- A consistent approach to audit and intervention

1.3 We also identified the need to develop:-

Robust evidence and research on enforcement strategies and techniques that secure better outcomes i.e. reducing risk and achieving compliance.

1.4 However care should be taken over a one fits all approach recognising that there will be local discretion, local needs and priorities. Therefore this needs to be balanced with the agreed national priorities required to be delivered locally. Care is needed in the messages sent out to avoid a perception that local government is no more than a delivery agency for central government.

1.5 It is also clear that many of the central government departments and their agencies' public service agreements and targets can only be achieved through the services provided by local government. It is therefore even more important that there is close dialogue and a shared understanding and ownership of priorities, targets and outcomes.

1.6 It should also be accepted that it is not so much how things are done but what is done to achieve the desired outputs and outcomes. This is where central government will need to focus and work with local government to achieve them.

1.7 Getting central/local agreement to the principles of having agreed priorities, minimum standards, performance measures, monitoring, audit and intervention, whilst challenging is achievable. However, translating these into a set of coherent, deliverable priorities, programmes and plans across Whitehall (within the resources available) is significantly more difficult.

1.8 The range of work streams and sponsoring central government departments adds further complexity with competing priorities, increasing demands, expectations and of

course the civil servants and Ministers often needing to look after the interests of their individual departments.

1.9 For local government and certainly for the regulators in local government the challenge is to raise the profile, significance and contribution of their services to their Council's corporate and community priorities. This has to be done on a number of levels:-

- The LGA and LACORS need to fully understand the central/local political landscape as it currently exists and what the future may look like.
- We must aim at the highest political level to secure recognition that the delivery of high quality regulatory services not only makes a significant contribution to improving the health and well-being of local communities, but is important enough to become one of the central/local shared priorities. By doing this we achieve the higher level political support that is so crucial to driving this agenda forward and help enable local authorities grasp the challenge and embed those services into their mainstream priorities.
- Local authorities can then legitimately further underpin this priority through second generation local public service agreements (LPSA's) with the incentive of real money coming into the local authority which can be invested in services, if the targets are achieved.

1.10 We need to have regard to the reality of the world we currently operate in. The drive for more efficiency (Gershon), the de-regulation/reducing red tape agenda (Hampton) and the SRO4 settlement, are all contributing to even greater pressure on local government finances, that both complicates and potentially compromises the ability of Councils to deliver these services. The Haskins review; the Health and Safety Commission/ Executive - Local Authority partnership work; and other work streams e.g. the Environment Agency and the LGA, are examples of important areas of local / central partnership work that is likely to affect the future work, delivery role and responsibilities of Local Authority regulatory services. It is therefore clear that a joined-up approach across Whitehall and their delivery agencies with local government is not an option but is an imperative.

1.11 Whilst many citizens are increasingly more demanding, sophisticated and able to articulate their needs, there is a significant minority who have become socially excluded, the more vulnerable in society who are regularly exposed to rogue traders, scamsters, loan sharks, unsafe and shoddy products, services, workplaces and food. In a dynamic, complex and rapidly changing market place where trading activities are undertaken, the ability to keep pace for regulators is increasingly difficult.

1.12 The resources available for local authority regulatory services will be in the main, at best the same, but more likely a good deal less to pay for these services. It will

therefore be very important to get agreement on the national priorities that central government wish to be delivered locally by local government, alongside the local priorities for an area or region . all of which must be underpinned by appropriate financial resources. Doing this in a planned, coherent, transparent and joined-up way will be hugely beneficial and the best way forward.

2. Next Steps

- 2.1 The Safer Communities Board is being asked to support the LGA and LACORS in seeking from the ODPM the establishment of a Ministerial sub group of the central/local partnership to consider including as one of the central/local shared priorities ‘the delivery of high quality regulatory services that underpin the health and well-being of local communities’.
- 2.2 Given the political support for this, LACORS and the LGA will work with the ODPM and other central government departments to agree priorities, minimum standards, performance measures and audit and intervention protocols, for a range of key local authority regulatory services, ensuring a far more joined-up and coherent approach to these services.