

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**NEIGHBOURHOOD, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES
CABINET MEMBER**

TRAINEE TRADING STANDARDS OFFICER

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to convert the established post of Trainee Trading Standards Officer from a single grade to a career grade post.
- 1.2 The key points in this report are as follows:
- the new national qualification framework for Trading Standards Officers
 - the age profile of Trading Standards Officers in North Lincolnshire
 - the difficulty in recruiting qualified Trading Standards personnel
 - the opportunity to offer a professional “apprenticeship”

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 In June 2002, a trainee Trading Standards Officer post was established to enable a student, undertaking a BSc Hons degree in Trading Standards, to gain work experience and attain the skills element of the Diploma in Trading Standards (DTS).
- 2.2 The post was established on Grade 1 and on successful completion of the DTS qualification, the trainee was appointed as a Trading Standards Officer.
- 2.3 Since April 2005 the post has remained unfilled due to budgetary constraints. However, additional government funding for enforcing new legislation has now been provided to Trading Standards Services.
- 2.4 Radical changes have been made to the Trading Standards qualification regime. As well as the traditional post graduate route, a new modular system has been introduced. This consists of a Foundation Certificate in Consumer Affairs and Trading Standards, followed by the completion of a number of service delivery modules. The modules consist of portfolios of evidence and written and oral

examinations to test the candidate's level of skills, experience and knowledge.

- 2.5 Earlier this year concern was expressed by the LGA and Office of Fair Trading about the drop in the number of qualified and trainee Trading Standards Officers since 2003. Indeed, the Local Government Workforce Strategy for 2007 showed that Trading Standards Officers are in the top 10 of most difficult posts to recruit to.
- 2.6 The age profile of the seven Trading Standards Officers currently in post is high, with three officers over 58 years of age. This includes the two senior managers.
- 2.7 The restructured post of Trainee would enable a person with the required educational qualification to come into Trading Standards at the bottom of Grade 3 and then progress to Grade 4 and Grade 7 after successfully completing elements of the new qualification framework. Due to the need to demonstrate practical skills and experience, the trainee will be involved in all areas of enforcement activity and over time will become an increasingly valuable resource.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 There are three options for consideration:
 - i) Option 1 – to leave the trainee post vacant and recruit suitable qualified officers when vacancies arise.
 - ii) Option 2 – to employ a Trainee Trading Standards Officer who has completed a consumer/trading standards degree.
 - iii) Option 3 – to employ a Trainee Trading Standards Officer on a career grade and provide the necessary training.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 Option 1 would be subject to the market place and there would be no guarantee, given the current shortages, that a vacancy would be filled.
- 4.2 Option 2 depends on whether a suitable graduate could be recruited. Also to achieve full qualification, their time would be fully taken up in gaining the necessary skills and experience. Currently there is no vacancy for a Trading Standards Officer.
- 4.3 Option 3 would provide an opportunity for an individual to embark on a “professional apprenticeship” gaining experience and qualifications whilst, at the same time, contributing to the work of Trading Standards. Once he/she had passed a number of modules, authorisation could be given to enforce that legislation. Over time sufficient modules would be achieved to qualify as a Trading Standards Officer. This option would appear to offer greater flexibility and the best chance of a successful recruitment process.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 Financial

As a consequence of a development bid, the Council has allocated a sum of £14000 in 2008/9, with a further sum of £24000 in 2009/20, to be added to the existing Trading Standards budget. These sums and the timescale are sufficient to meet the salary and training costs of a career grade trainee Trading Standards Officer.

5.2 Staffing

As in the past, staff are keen to pass on their knowledge and experience to those starting out in their careers. Two officers have received training and gained accreditation to act as verifiers under the new qualification framework.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 Statutory

There is a statutory duty upon the Council to enforce consumer protection legislation. This requires officers who have the knowledge, skills and statutory qualifications to carry out these duties.

6.2 Section 17 Crime and Disorder

The extra resource of a trainee Trading Standards Officer will have an impact on antisocial behaviour issues and rogue traders who prey on the elderly and vulnerable.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

7.1 Staff have been consulted and are in agreement to appointing a trainee Trading Standards Officer.

7.2 Human Resources has been consulted and actively involved in drawing up the job descriptions and person specifications for this career grade post.

7.3 The Trade Unions have been consulted and are in agreement with these proposals.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the Cabinet Member approves the recommendation set out in paragraph 4.3 of this report.

- 8.2 That the report is forwarded to the Corporate Service Cabinet Member for approval.

SERVICE DIRECTOR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report

Trading Standards Institute Qualifications Framework
Neighbourhood and Environmental Services Budget for 2008/9 to 2010/11
Trainee Trading Standards Job Descriptions Stages 1, 2 and 3
Trading Standards Institute Press Release 24/6/08