



**MEDWAY COUNCIL  
FRONT LINE TASK FORCE  
TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE PLAN  
2008 TO 2009**

*Building safer communities*

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*Associated Documents:*  
*Operations Action Plan*  
*Peer Review Action Plan*

# 1. AIM, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

## 1.1 Aim

**The aim of Medway Council's trading standards team is enhance the competitiveness, economic growth and prosperity of Medway by providing a fair and safe trading environment to protect consumers and allow legitimate businesses to compete on equal terms.**

This means that effectively Trading Standards protects the way that markets work to make sure they are competitive which is a very necessary ingredient to maintain the economic growth and prosperity of Medway.

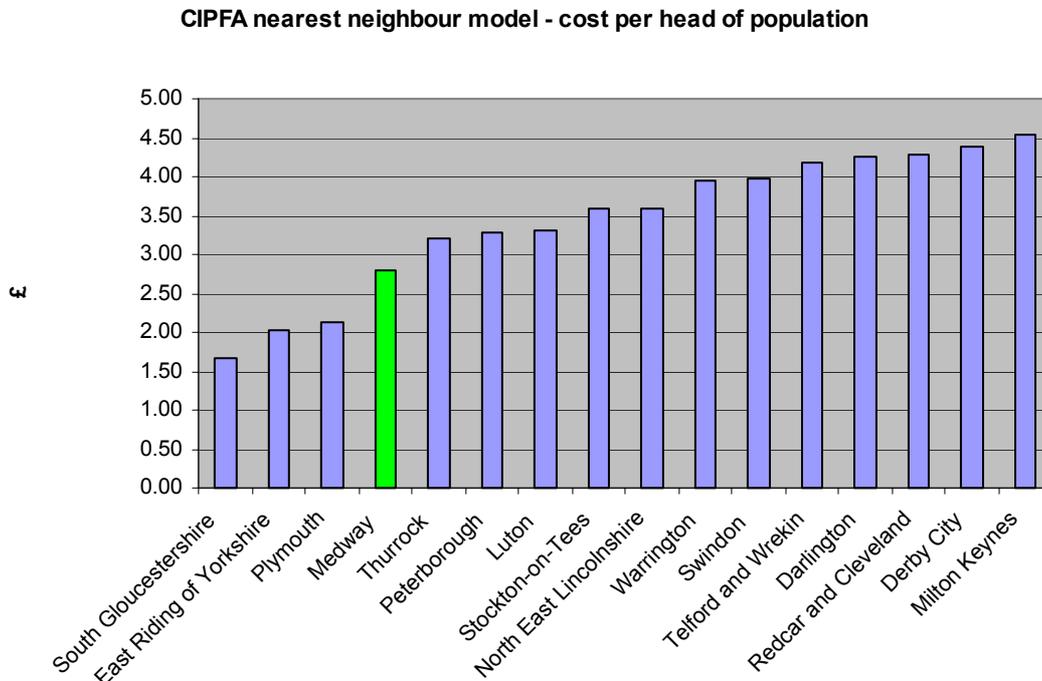
In relation to the trading standards function, the team adopts a business mix of the application of proactive and reactive work. Proactively, the team target specific areas of the trading environment with enforcement campaigns to raise levels of compliance with consumer protection laws whilst reactively responding to consumer and trade enquiries with the provision of civil legal advice and in some cases, an investigation into the facts of the complaint for law enforcement purposes.

The team is positioned within the Regeneration and Development Directorate, and forms part of the Safer Communities team (with Environmental Health, Community Safety, and Medway Wardens). Externally, the team has strong links with trading standards authorities across the south east and are members of the Trading Standards South East authorities (TSSE). The purpose of the association is to share best practice and carry out projects where regionally beneficial.

Medway, located in North Kent, is just 30 miles from London and 40 miles from the cross channel services. The M2, M20 and M25 motorways are close at hand and the Medway Towns are well served by Rail services from London, as well as regular coach services to and from London, Victoria. Medway's population stands at 249,502 and is centred on the five main towns of Chatham, Rainham, Gillingham, Strood and Rochester.

## 1.2 Cost

The gross expenditure for 2006/2007 was £654,000. This compares favourably with other authorities from the CIPFA nearest neighbour model.



The gross expenditure for 2007/2008 was £712,000  
The total budget allocated for 2008/2009 is £828,000

## 1.3 Objectives and strategy

The strategic framework for Medway Trading Standards can be found in the following diagrams. This lists the national, regional and local priorities for trading standards, some of which are statutory.

Using the strategic framework, objectives for the Medway trading standards service can be established. These objectives can be used to assist in business planning for the period 2008 – 2009.

However, there is a national drive for regulatory services enforcement to be more risk based and take an intelligence led approach. A strategic intelligence assessment in line with the National Intelligence Model (NIM) is therefore conducted. This will involve looking at the needs and expectations of stakeholders, analysis of complaint and enforcement statistics, regional (level 2) and local (level 1) intelligence and any other information that is relevant.

A national (Level 3) control strategy has been produced by LACORS giving the following priority areas:

- Tackling mass marketing scams
- Preventing people being victims of door step crime
- Reducing intellectual property crime
- Improving information about food health and nutrition
- Reducing food incidents
- Preventing animal disease
- Enhancing animal movement control and traceability

Guidance is given on level 2 and level 1 contributions to the national strategy.

These assessments will also inform the priorities and action plan for the next year.

**LACORS/FSA vision**  
Promote the production of, and access to, safe, sustainable and nutritious food with the aim of improving local community health and well being

**Dept of culture, media & sports**

- Reduce crime & disorder
- Public safety
- Prevent public nuisance
- Protection of children from harm

**Dept of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

- Effective disease control
- A well educated and compliant farm industry, capable of greater self-regulation
- Sound welfare practices
- Identifying and dealing consistently with breaches of legislation and best practice
- Sound evidence to provide assurance to central government and to support the departments public service agreement objectives

**Office of Fair Trading**  
Make markets work well for consumers  
Work with trading standards to:

- strengthen the partnership between the OFT and the TSS, ensuring greater clarity in strategic planning and joint action.
- make the best use of our complementary skills and experience in order to deliver a first-rate service to consumers and to business.
- establish a clear picture of the TSS that we all want to see in the future and identify a strategy for how we achieve this.

**Dept of Health**  
Reduce harm caused by tobacco and alcohol

**National Weights and Measures Laboratory**  
Ensure UK measurement is accurate, fair and legal

**Communities & Local Government National indicators**

- Business Satisfaction
- Impact on fair trading environment
- Control systems for animal health
- + others

**Local Better Regulation Office / Rogers priorities**

- Alcohol Licensing
- Fair Trading (trade descriptions, trade marks, doorstep selling)
- Animal & Public Health

**Medway Council Performance Plan 2007 - 2008**

Core values:

- Putting our customers at the centre of everything we do.
- Giving value for money.

Strategic priorities:

- A clean and green environment.
- Safer communities.
- Children and young people having the best start in life.
- Older and vulnerable people maintaining their independence.
- People travelling easily and safely in Medway.
- Everyone benefiting from the area's regeneration

**Medway Council Trading Standards objectives**

1. Prevent harm to children and nuisance caused by young people from access to age restricted goods
2. Ensure food and farm standards and encourage informed food choices/healthy eating
3. Disrupt traders operating in the informal economy
4. Detect & prevent people from being the victim of commercial crime in their own homes
5. Ensure fair competition through the accuracy of description, measurement, marketing and pricing of goods/services
6. Prevent the supply of unsafe consumer goods and ensure correct storage of dangerous goods
7. Create confident consumers and informed successful Medway businesses

**Trading Standards South East**

Working together for a fair & safe trading environment to achieve efficiencies for maximum effectiveness whilst retaining local and democratic accountability

Priorities: 2007-2008

- Buy With Confidence
- Doorstep Selling
- Under Age Sales
- Consumer Direct South East
- Regional Training Facility
- Regional Intelligence
- Scambusters

**Strategic Intelligence Assessment**

- Needs & expectations of consumers
- Needs and expectations of businesses
- Needs and expectations of partners
- Local awareness of trading standards

**Sources**

- Consumer Direct Database
- OFT UK threat assessment
- Regional intelligence Unit
- Local intelligence
- Consultation and surveys

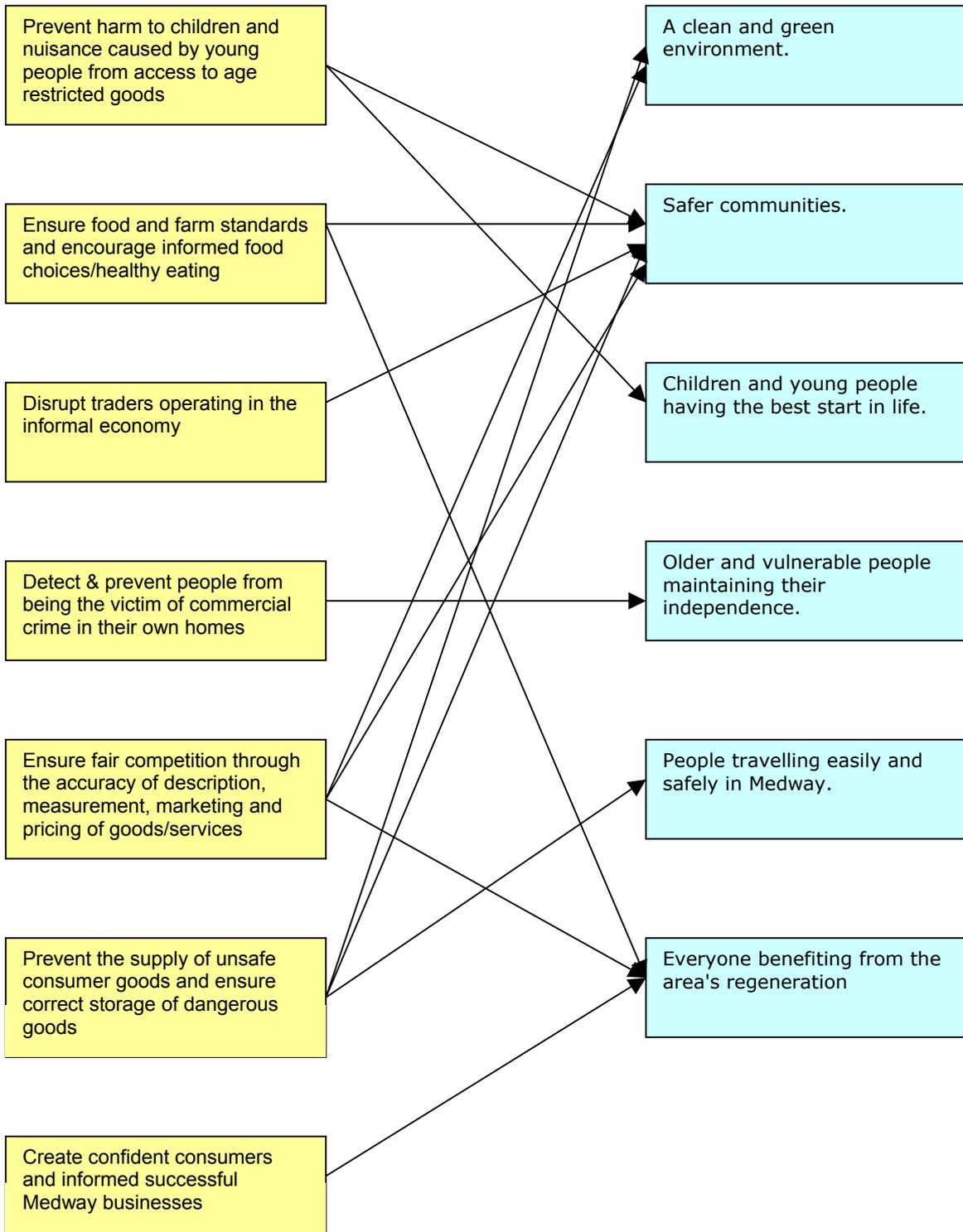
**GOSE (Local Area Agreements)**

1. Stronger communities
2. Safer communities
3. Children & young people
4. Adult health & wellbeing
5. Tackling exclusion and promoting equality
6. Local Economy
7. Environmental Sustainability

**OPERATIONS & IMPROVEMENTS**

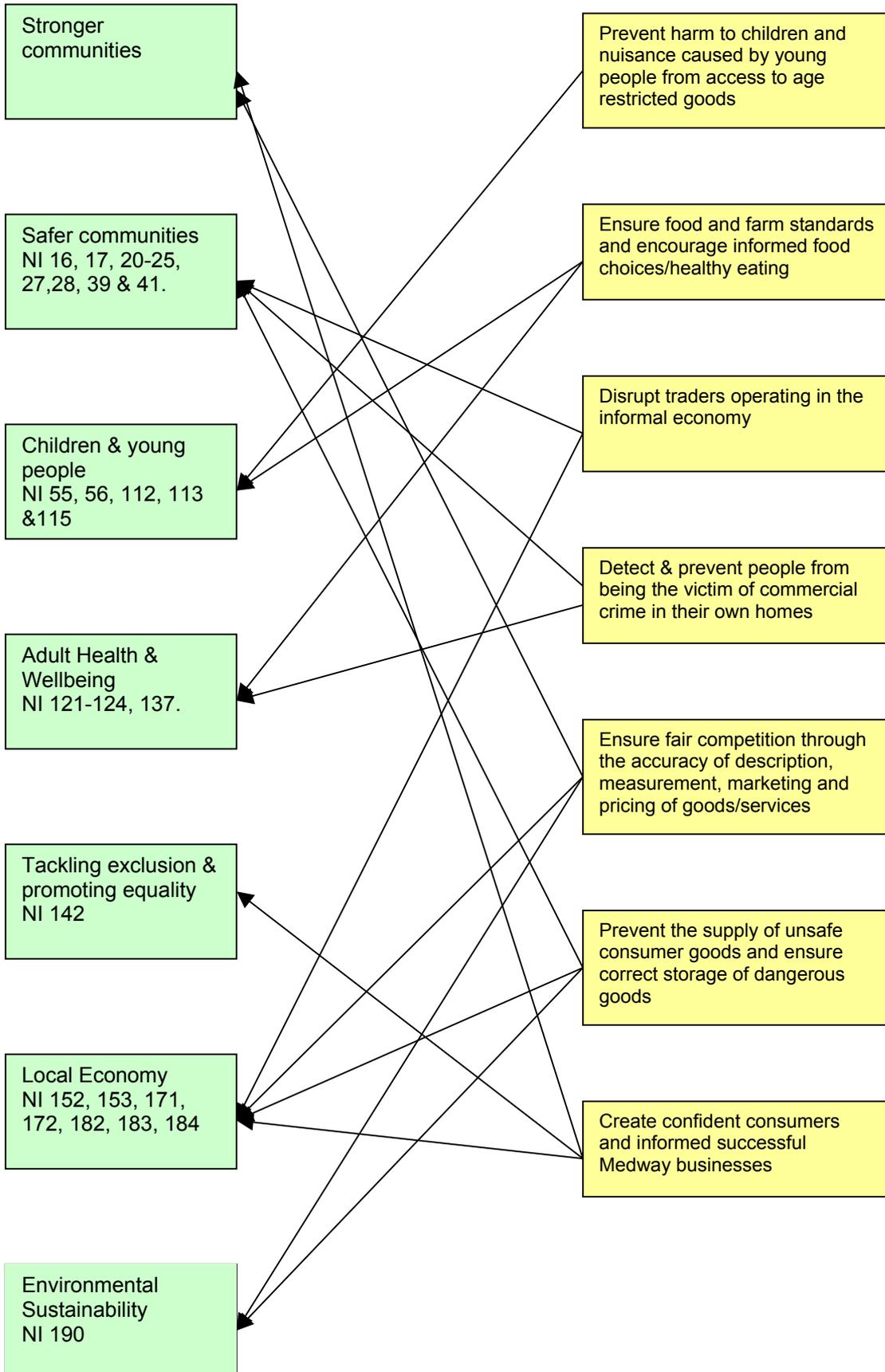
## OBJECTIVES

## PERFORMANCE PLAN



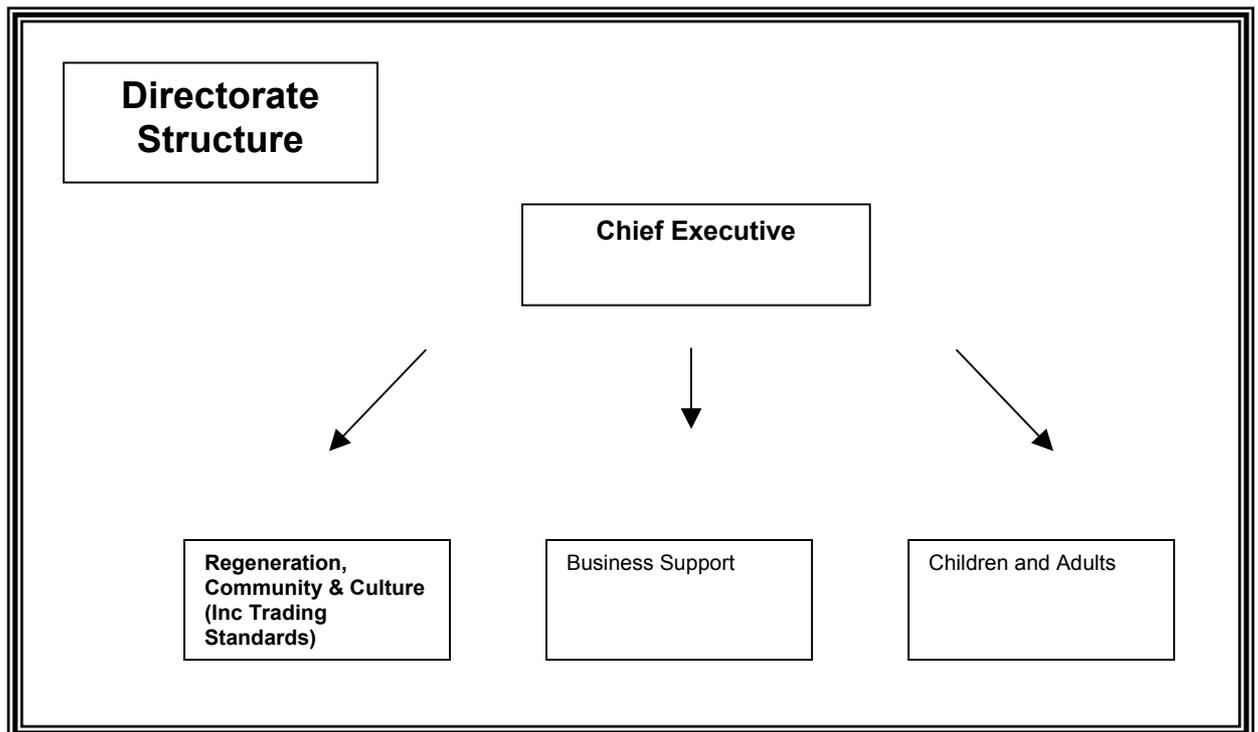
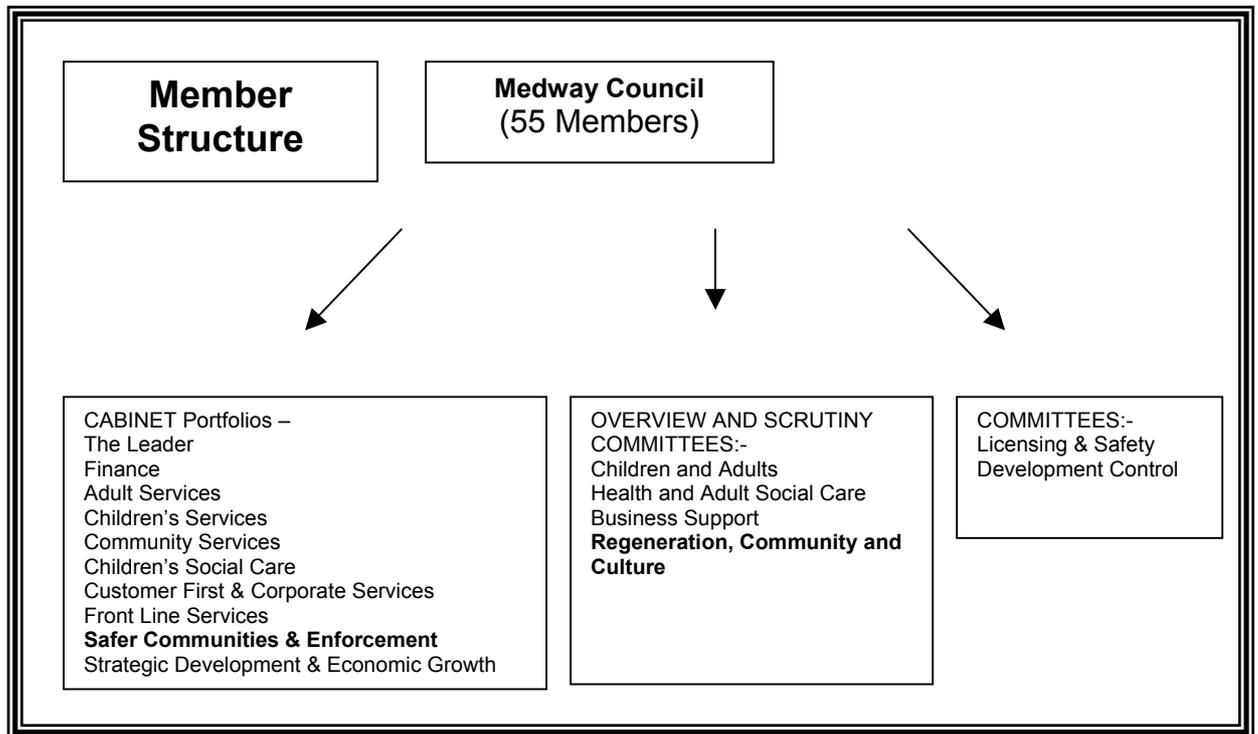
## LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

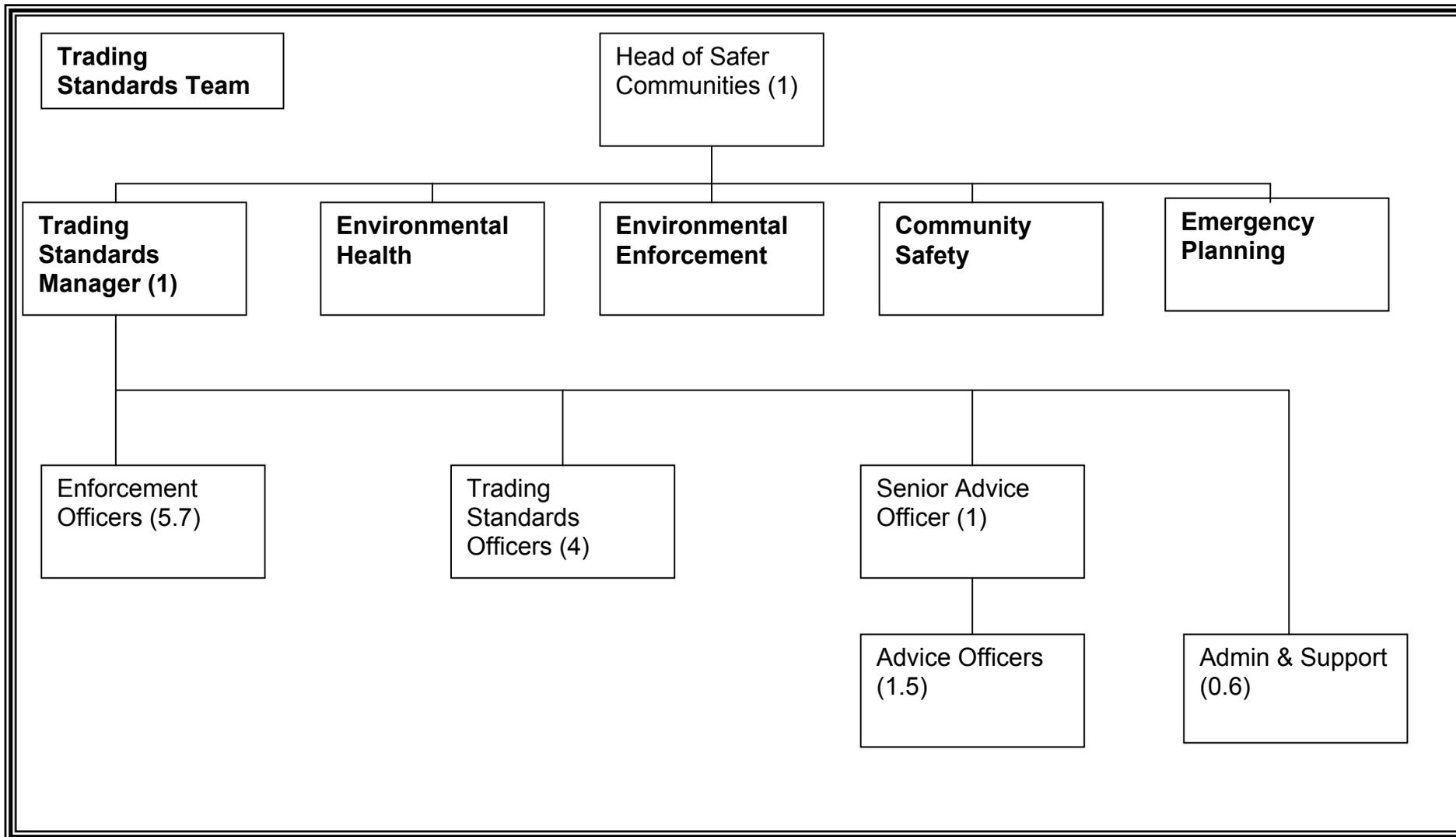
## OBJECTIVES



## 2: STRUCTURE

The diagrams below show the political, directorate and team structure for Medway Council.





## **3: STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT**

### **3.1 Needs and Expectations of Consumers**

#### **3.1.1. The local population**

Medway's population stands at 249,502 and is centred on the five main towns of Chatham, Rainham, Gillingham, Strood and Rochester. There is a large rural area on the Isle of Grain peninsula comprising the wards of Thames Side, Hoo St. Werburgh and All Saints and a further rural area of Cuxton and Halling. The contrast of urban and rural areas results in about 12% of the population of Medway living in a rural area geographically covering 70 % of Medway. The population is relatively young, 68.6% are aged 50 or under. 12% were aged 15-24. 11.7% of the population was over 70yrs old.

There are a number of wards within Medway that suffer from multiple deprivation factors. Five Medway wards are among the 20 most deprived in the whole of Kent. Many of the problems are deep seated and inter-related - poor economic prospects because of poor educational attainment. However, 11 wards are among the top 100 wards in Kent in terms of prosperity, including Hempstead and Wigmore, which is North Kent area's most prosperous. In these wards unemployment is lower than average and home ownership higher. These wards are on the outer fringe of Medway in the main and tend to be concentrated to the South East in Gillingham.

Medway's economy has suffered a great change within the space of a generation. A large heavy industrial base has expired and been replaced by service based industries with a focus upon the tourism industry. Medway's service sector now accounts for nearly three-quarters of all jobs.

#### **3.1.2. Consumer complaint trends**

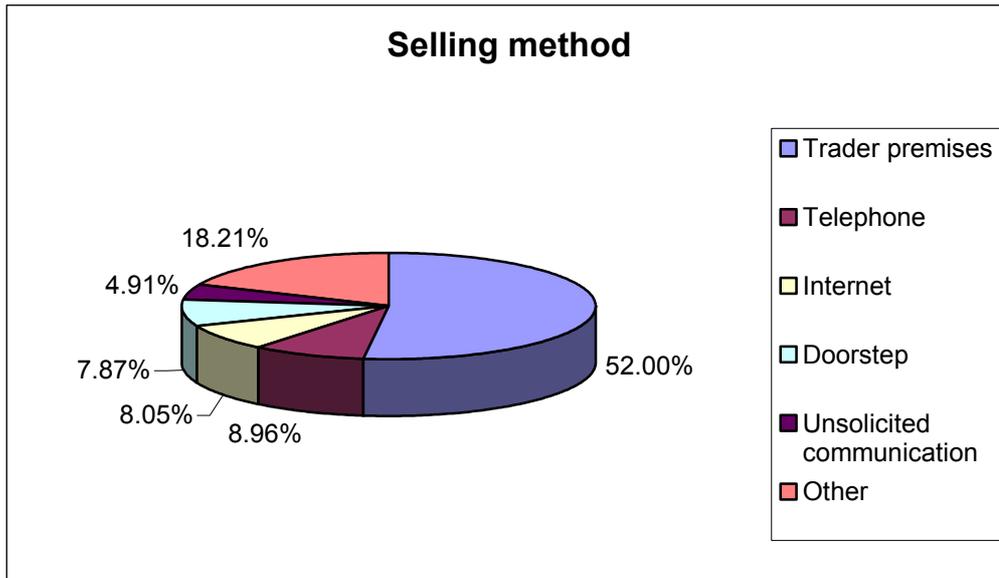
Last year, the service received in the region of 1900 complaints and requests for assistance (some via Consumer Direct).

By analysing the data for 2006 from the Consumer Direct database statistics on consumer dissatisfaction, areas of consumer concern and associated trends are identified. A local list of consumer complaints by category is compiled annually and is detailed in the table below.

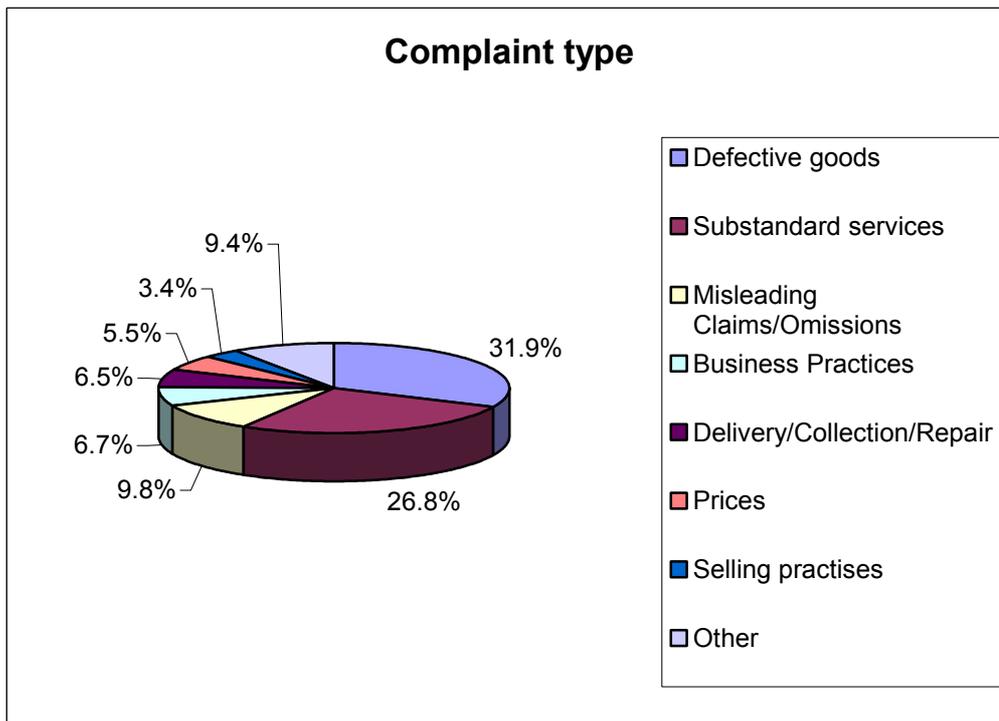
<b>Goods &amp; Services</b>	<b>%</b>
Home improvement	8.6
Second hand cars	7.8
Telecommunications (mainly mobiles)	7.5
Audio visual equipment (mainly televisions)	5.1
Furniture	4.9
Petrol	4.0
Domestic appliances	3.9
Car repair & servicing	3.5

The greatest cause of consumer complaints in the South East are therefore housing repairs (inc. double glazing), second hand cars, telecommunications, audio visual equipment and furniture. This seems broadly in line with national trends. The top five causes for complaint therefore cover over a third of all complaints.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the demands of consumers is higher and also the complexity of cases is increasing. Complaints about internet sales have dropped slightly.



The most common subject for complaint is still defective goods.



### **3.1.3. Surveys**

#### **Market Research**

The Trading Standards team uses satisfaction questionnaires to obtain the views of all direct users of the services. The results for 2007 – 2008 are given below. The previous year's figures are in brackets. It should be noted that this kind of survey tends to polarise the views of customers generally as people may only respond if they feel strongly either way.

#### **User satisfaction**

The survey found that 95% (94%) of users of the service were either very satisfied, 79%(80%) or fairly satisfied, 16%(14%), with the service as a whole. 88%(98%) found staff to be informative (the rest did not express an opinion) and 98%(98%) thought they had been treated fairly. User satisfaction has therefore remained fairly high and static, although the number who were very satisfied has decreased slightly.

In surveying the wider community, MVA conducted a poll in 2006 on behalf of Medway Council. This indicated that of those surveyed (1317 residents) 1% expressed dissatisfaction with the provision of Trading Standards services in Medway whereas 65% were either fairly or very satisfied with the service.

#### **Service Accessibility**

100%(90%) of the direct users consulted said that they thought Trading Standards was easy to get hold of. This is a positive statement concerning the accessibility of the service but clearly does not take into account the views of any users who found it impossible to locate the service (as they would not have been surveyed).

Of the users who were sent information packs giving information and advice on consumer law, 92%(88%) of users said the packs were useful.

None of the information can be linked to parts of the community that may face barriers to accessing Council services as a result of cultural, capability, linguistic or physical barriers. Access to service in that context is considered as part of the improvement options for the service as little data specific to Trading Standards is available. A Diversity Impact Assessment was carried out and is available on request.

#### **Service Priority**

Over the last year, users were asked by an on-going questionnaire based survey to indicate which areas of work they thought should be a priority for trading standards. They ranked the following areas of work in order: –

1. Making sure vulnerable people are protected from doorstep sellers
2. Consumer goods are safe

3. Making sure age restricted products like tobacco and alcohol are not sold to underage people
4. Disease free and humanely treated farm animals
5. Safe storage of dangerous substances
6. Accurately described goods
7. Prices are not misleading
8. Accurate weights and measures for goods

#### **3.1.4. Regional and local intelligence**

Both regional and local intelligence systems are continuing to be set up. Consumer Direct data and the introduction of the new National Performance Indicator NI 183 will assist in this process. It is anticipated that intelligence assessments from a regional system as well as local information will be available to assist the business planning process next year. The regional intelligence unit has now spread its remit to collect intelligence on all trading standards matters. Regional and local consumer trends should form part of those assessments.

#### **3.1.5. Conclusion**

It should be recognised that with the introduction of Consumer Direct, the whole area of advice to consumers has changed. Trading standards have positioned themselves to be able to provide second tier consumer advice, particularly to the more vulnerable in our community. The introduction should also be taken into account when analysing previous data.

In summary, the main points would appear to be:-

- ◆ Although we have had considerable success in this area, there is still a need to increase awareness of consumer rights and the confidence of consumers in accessing advice via the advice service, Consumer Direct and the Consumer Support Network.
- ◆ There are still some gaps in access to consumer advice in relation to young people, old people, ethnic minorities and the rural community.
- ◆ The key areas causing concern for consumers are home maintenance & repairs, telecommunications and cars.
- ◆ Consumers would like problem businesses addressed and a method for them to identify reputable traders
- ◆ Consumers feel that protecting the vulnerable from doorstep sellers should be our top priority, closely followed by the safety of goods.

## **3.2 Needs and Expectations of businesses**

### **3.2.1. Introduction**

Businesses registered for business rates	6086
Home Authority Firms: formal agreements	10

Risk Assessment (following LACORS guidance): assessment of risk a business poses to consumers and competitors to determine frequency of inspection visits and appropriate enforcement

High	19
Medium	1291
Low	1792

### **3.2.2. Enquiries from business**

In 2007 - 2008, the service received 238 complaints or enquiries from the business community last year. These were made up of 120 requests for information (4 from home authority companies). 74 were alcohol licensing applications. 44 were enquiries about our Fair Trader scheme.

### **3.2.3. Home authority work**

Proactive home authority work mainly falls within the area of food standards where home authority companies are visited, advised and samples taken.

Other home authority companies either fall within the area relating to safety of goods or companies where we receive regular information and requests from other trading standards services.

### **3.2.4. New legislation**

The changes to be introduced as part of the unfair commercial practices directive will require guidance to be issued to most businesses. The two sets of regulations, Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading and Business Protection from Misleading Marketing, create a fundamental change in the way the law in relation to fair trading will be applied. This will not only affect businesses but also enforcement services which will need to become conversant with the new law.

A significant piece of new legislation has been the introduction of Home Information Packs and Energy Performance Certificates. Some businesses will need specialist advice on this matter including public bodies covered by the legislation.

A further area arising from the new legislation will be the increase in working with the licensed trade giving advice on the new regime and dealing with the review of licences.

Many primary producers (both arable and livestock farmers) will also need to be advised regarding recent changes in food and feed hygiene.

Some businesses will also need continued advice on the scope of recently introduced storage of fireworks legislation and the general product safety directive, both areas of high priority.

### **3.2.5. Findings on visiting businesses**

Feedback from officers would suggest that, in terms of legislation applying to the majority of traders, the following are most frequently found incorrect:

- Business Names Act (displaying ownership details)
- Price Marking
- Underage Sales
- Use by dates

### **3.2.6. Regional and local intelligence**

Both regional and local intelligence systems are continuing to be set up. Consumer Direct data and the introduction of the new National Performance Indicator NI 183 will assist in this process. In the region of 200 “category x” business are expected to be identified next year. Each case will need to be considered to decide on the appropriate intervention. It is anticipated that intelligence assessments from a regional system as well as local information will be available to assist the business planning process next year. The regional intelligence unit has now spread its remit to collect intelligence on all trading standards matters. Regional and local consumer trends should form part of those assessments.

However, we do know that Medway is home to over 8,000 companies of which over half are VAT registered. Sectors with good growth potential include financial and business services, educational services, the electronics and computer base industries, high tech manufacturing, tourism and leisure and logistics businesses.

The perception of Medway as a predominantly industrialised region is misleading – although manufacturing is important, Medway’s service sector now accounts for nearly three-quarters (72.4 %) of all jobs. Growth in the financial and business services sector has been especially significant.

The report “Baseline Analysis for the Medway Economy” (1998) suggests that Medway has a higher concentration of manufacturing than the rest of the South East with the most significant sectors being based around mechanical engineering and transport. However this is declining.

The demand for manufacturing and office premises is improving. The success of Gillingham Business Park, Medway City Estate and Chatham Maritime demonstrates the importance of providing good quality development sites in

locations that are generally highly accessible. The construction of the Medway Northern Relief Road and Medway Tunnel has further heightened the perception of the area as a development location.

The area's inclusion within Thames Gateway and the subsequent regeneration projects, increasing links with Europe resulting from the Channel Tunnel and a reduction in trade barriers will become ever increasingly important.

### **3.2.7. Survey**

A telephone survey was conducted of a sample of businesses that were visited.

The responses we had obtained by the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 were favourable.

- 99% found staff informative.
- 99% found staff courteous and polite at all times.
- 100% felt they had been treated fairly at all times.
- 100% found the information easy to understand.
- 100% were satisfied with the overall level of service.
- 7% suggested our response to a problem was not fair or reasonable.
- 51% did not know it was possible to complain about council services.

The partnership to provide information on consumer protection issues from a business focus between Medway Council, TSSE and the TSI will enhance the levels of information available via the Internet and also in paper format. 2002 saw the launch of a tailored business advice pack. This has been followed up with the introduction of "No Idea, No Sale", a guidance pack to help retailers in the area of underage sales. This year, this will be expanded to cover on-licence premises. In addition, much work has been carried out in advising local businesses in the area of protection of children under the Licensing Act 2003.

Our assessment of the needs of businesses is based on the numerical data included in this plan and the introduction of new legislation. Our Peer Review has indicated a greater need for business consultation to fine tune our service delivery in the future.

### **3.3 Needs and expectations of partners**

The needs and expectations of many partners have been considered during the strategic framework for trading standards. However, Medway trading standards has many operational partners, their needs are examined below.

Partners	Area of Service
South East Trading Standards	As outlined elsewhere in this document, the team is a member of the TSSE. This is a regional grouping operated in conjunction with LACORS.

<p>Authorities (TSSE)</p>	<p>TSSE links together all the Trading Standards authorities in the South East. It is made up of Trading Standards services from Bracknell Forest, Brighton and Hove, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Medway, Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Portsmouth, Reading, Windsor, Slough, Southampton, Surrey, West Berkshire, West Sussex and Wokingham councils.</p> <p>The vision and mission for TSSE are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring fair &amp; safe trading throughout the South East.</li> <li>• To work in partnership to provide Best Value Trading Standards services whilst maintaining local accountability supported by regional resources, to contribute to the development of a fair and safe trading environment.</li> </ul> <p>The majority of TSSE Authorities (including Medway) have agreed to utilise the TS Communities Web package which ensures that advice information given by Medway in both paper and electronic format is up to date and follows nationally agreed advice.</p> <p>Operational campaign are included in this service plan.</p>
<p>Consumer Direct</p>	<p>Consumer Direct is a consumer advice call centre ran by TSSE and sponsored by the Office of Fair Trading. The call centre provides first level consumer advice by telephone allowing trading standards advice services to focus their advice and education activities on the more complicated issues, vulnerable consumers and hard to reach groups.</p> <p>Medway trading standards and Consumer Direct link up to carry out joint promotional work.</p>
<p>Kent Police</p>	<p>The team is working in partnership with Kent Police to enforce the Medway Council Act which is designed to regulate sales of second hand goods and the holding of occasional sales in Medway. There is also a high degree of liaison for dealing with alcohol sales. These activities are underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding to support information interchange.</p>
<p>Customs &amp; Excise</p>	<p>At Thamesport, the team relies on assistance from HM Customs and Excise in checking the safety of consumer goods imported into the European Union as a first point of entry.</p>

Citizens Advice	<p>The Service has good links with the Medway Citizens Advice. Both are key partners in the Consumer Support Network.</p> <p>The Medway Citizens' Advice Bureau operates from two locations in Chatham and Gillingham. Overall they helped 7500 – 8000 people in 2007/2008. Of these around a quarter were categorised as consumer related enquiries. These include calls to its Debt line service on 01634 573525. This service managed almost £10.5 million of debt during that period. A substantial proportion of the debt related to consumer debt such as personal loans, hire purchase and credit cards.</p>
Consumer Support Network	<p>The CSN will develop into a significant partnership vehicle both to allow penetration of advice to hard to reach groups.</p>
Safer Communities Service (including Environmental Health)	<p>There is a high degree of cooperation particularly in the area of Community Safety and Food Standards.</p>

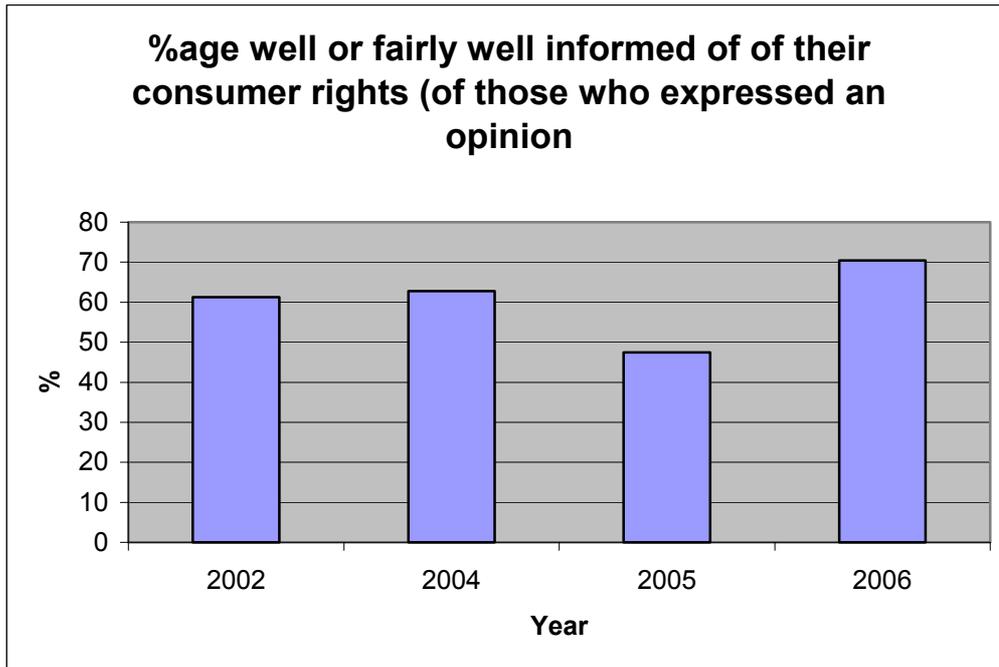
### 3.4 Local awareness of trading standards

#### Medway Opinion poll 2006

The latest poll of Medway residents was conducted in 2006 on behalf of Medway Council. Two questions relating to consumer awareness (of their rights and access to advice) were included. The same questions were asked in 2005, 2004 and 2002, those results are given in brackets. The results were as follows: -

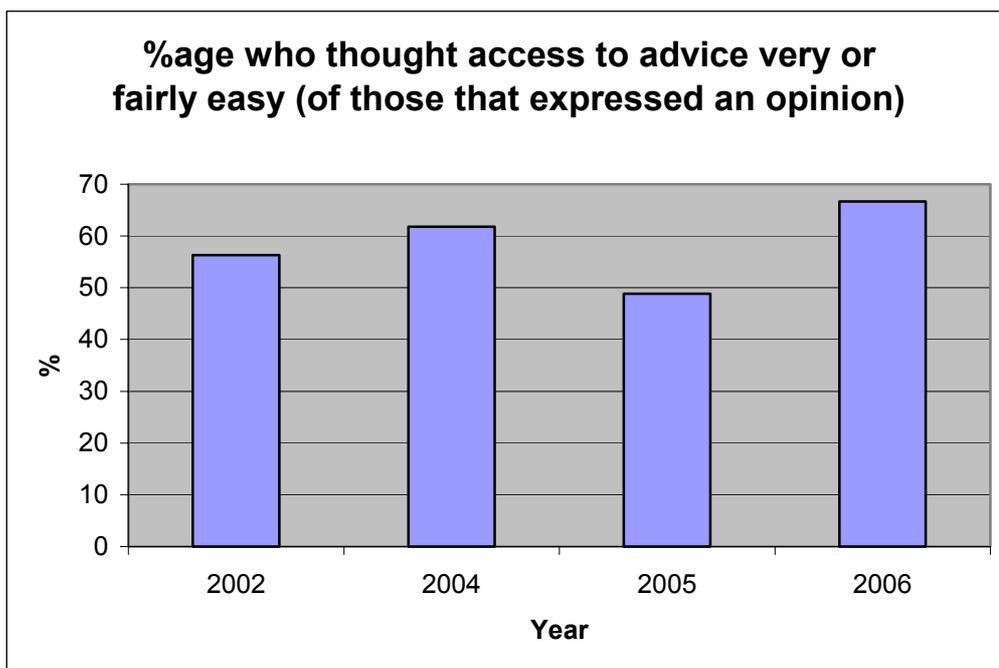
How well informed, if at all, do you feel about your rights as a consumer; e.g. knowing what you are entitled to if something you've bought is faulty, or a service is poor?

- 14% felt very well informed about their rights; (9%)(13%)(8%)
- 48% fairly well informed; (37%)(46%)(41%)
- 17% not very well informed; (36%)(28%)(19%)
- 9% not at all well informed; (15%)(7%)(12%)
- 11% did not know. (3%)(6%)(20%)



How easy or difficult do you think it is to get information or advice about what you are entitled to if you are sold a faulty product, or receive a poor service?

- 12% felt access to advice was very easy; (6%)(10%)(7%)
- 44% fairly easy (37%)(45%)(33%)
- 16% neither easy or difficult (17%)(22%)(21%)
- 8% fairly difficult (20%)(10%)(7%)
- 4% very difficult (8%)(2%)(3%)
- 16% did not know. (12%)(11%)(28%)



## **4. OPERATIONS**

### **4.1 Prevent harm to children and nuisance caused by young people from access to age restricted goods**

- Participate in Operation “Filter”, a weapons surrender campaign run by the police, by conducting a underage test purchase survey in relation to knives and advise retailers of the law
- Conduct a series of test purchase exercises covering fireworks, alcohol and tobacco, in partnership with the police where appropriate
- Continue to provide information for the TSSE Persistent Offenders project
- Take appropriate enforcement action including licence reviews where necessary. All premises will be visited where intelligence is received of underage sales
- Educate businesses of our No IDea, No Sale scheme, giving advice on how to avoid selling age restricted products to underage persons
- Consider all licensing applications submitted to the Council in line with being a responsible authority under the Licensing Act for “protection of children from harm”
- Publicise our “Stop that Shop” hotline for confidential intelligence gathering

### **4.2 Ensure food and farm standards and encourage informed food choices/healthy eating**

- To provide support to business, especially home authority businesses, and take risk based enforcement action to safeguard the food supply chain. This will be carried out in line with Food Standards Agency Inspection requirements.
- To take samples for the following campaigns:
  - TSSE Regional coordination of sampling projects (a pick list)
  - FSA/LACORS food sampling campaigns
  - Colourants in food follow up
  - Sandwiches
  - Animal feed
- To conduct a campaign to examine substitution of drinks within licensed premises
- To carry out advisory and enforcement visits to primary producers to check feed and food hygiene and animal health requirements
- To check marinas for compliance with rabies legislation
- To review the new DEFRA animal health framework for necessary changes

### **4.3 Disrupt traders operating in the informal economy**

- To take an intelligence led approach to tackling counterfeiting
- To consider the recovery of assets from offenders in appropriate cases

- To use the Enterprise Act in a structured way to tackle the most complained about and rogue traders
- To enforce the Medway Act 2001 to reduce outlets for stolen property

#### **4.4 Detect & prevent people from being the victim of commercial crime in their own homes**

- Operate a Rapid Action team to respond to requests from consumers and businesses while they have itinerant traders at their premises
- Engage with TSSE Operation rogue trader
- Maintain our Fair Trader scheme for reputable home improvement businesses
- Improve our website to include a forum for Fair Trade members and better search facilities for the public
- Contribute intelligence to the regional intelligence unit

#### **4.5 Ensure fair competition through the accuracy of description, measurement, marketing and pricing of goods/services**

- To advise businesses on the new regulations introduced as a result of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive and examine problem areas now covered by the legislation.
- To conduct the following campaigns:
  - Home information Packs & Energy Performance Certificates
  - Car Dealers
  - Continuation of intellectual property enforcement at boot fairs and other premises throughout the marketing chain
  - Hallmarking of Asian jewellery
- To visit all high risk businesses, including packers and manufacturers producing average quantity goods
- To conduct local credit fitness licensing checks in partnership with the OFT
- To check the accuracy of weighbridges
- To expand our Fair Trader scheme to cover more trade sectors or areas

#### **4.6 Prevent the supply of unsafe consumer goods and ensure correct storage of dangerous goods**

- To participate in the following TSSE campaigns:
  - TSSE Child resistant & novelty lighters
  - TSSE Toys
  - TSSE Candles
- To conduct the following local campaigns:
  - “natural” cosmetics
  - personal protective equipment
  - electrical Christmas decorations
  - second hand goods
- To visit premises to ensure the correct storage of fireworks

- To visit premises on a risk assessed basis to ensure correct storage of petroleum
- To respond to requests from HM Customs & Excise in relation to products being imported through Thamesport

#### **4.7 Create confident consumers and informed successful Medway businesses**

- To engage with the Consumer Challenge Quiz for young persons with special needs
- To engage with 15-16 year old young people by providing talks to schools covering the citizenship curriculum.
- To conduct education and consumer advice outreach visits to shopping centres, rural and community areas and temples. These will be done in partnership with Consumer Direct, Consumer Support Network partners or partners within the Safer Communities service.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the cold call restriction zones within Medway.
- To provide support to business, especially home authority businesses, and take risk based enforcement action to safeguard consumer and business needs. This will include visits to all high risk premises.
- To respond to all reasonable requests for advice from consumers and businesses

## 5. REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT

### 5.1 Provisions to review the work of the service against the service plan and Peer Review Improvement plan

SDP Standard	Arrangements for Assessing Performance
Monitor progress against plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To monitor delivery of the Service Plan on a regular basis with the Portfolio holder for Medway Council</li> <li>To monitor delivery of the service plan at regular team meetings</li> <li>To monitor standards performance indicators at regular meetings with the Front Line Task Force management team</li> <li>To monitor individual targets which go towards the Service Plan by using the liP Performance Development process</li> <li>To record any significant variations in the record of meetings</li> <li>To monitor the external environment and identify any need to vary the service plan</li> <li>The service plan will be published (without specific information on enforcement campaigns) enabling staff and users access</li> </ul>
<p>Review policies and procedures in plan:</p> <p>(i) to assess effectiveness</p> <p>(ii) to assess successes</p> <p>(iii) to ensure examples of good practice have been taken up / disseminated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targets</li> <li>CIPFA benchmarking</li> <li>Medway Council Trading Standards is a member of TSSE. TSSE has many focus groups given a strategic steer from an executive committee. TSSE has its own Business plan. As part of this process, some joint campaigns and benchmarking of outcomes takes place. At present, the main emphasis of TSSE is to benchmark best practice with the aim of sharing information about all processes and procedures. It is hoped this will bring some convergence in these matters as each authority adopts best practice from the others.</li> <li>The peer review process will assist in highlighting areas of best practice and areas where there is room for improvement.</li> </ul>
Use of external accreditation, self and peer assessment models to appraise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Medway Council has been awarded liP</li> <li>Medway Trading Standards have been awarded the CLS Quality Mark</li> <li>LACORS Peer Review process</li> </ul>

service	
Comparison of outcomes with similar TS services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benchmarking takes place with CIPFA statistics</li> <li>• TSSE benchmarking of two CSN questions</li> </ul>
User surveys to assess satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User satisfaction surveys carried out in line with NPF information return guidance</li> <li>• MORI poll of non-users</li> </ul>
Consultation with stakeholders to assess effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best Value process</li> <li>• Consumer Support Network partners</li> <li>• Engagement with Business Link</li> <li>• Engagement with trader approval scheme members</li> <li>• Engagement with TSSE partners</li> </ul>
Monitoring the quality and consistency of advice and performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLS</li> <li>• response times</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction surveys (which include questions on helpfulness, clarity of advice, time spent, understanding, etc.</li> </ul>

## 5.2 Variations from Service Delivery Plan

Key variations from 07/08 service delivery plan	Reason for variation
Number of samples taken	Financial
Consumer Challenge Quiz	Research completed to carry out this year

A summary of last years activity is attached as Appendix 1.

## 5.3 Areas identified for improvement

Medway trading standards is currently conducting a self assessment under the Peer Review process. The review of that assessment by external trading standards personnel and an IDEA councillor is due to take place in the first quarter of this year.

Areas for improvement have also been identified in this plan. These will be located in the new peer review improvement plan or the operational action plan for next year.

## **Appendix 1**

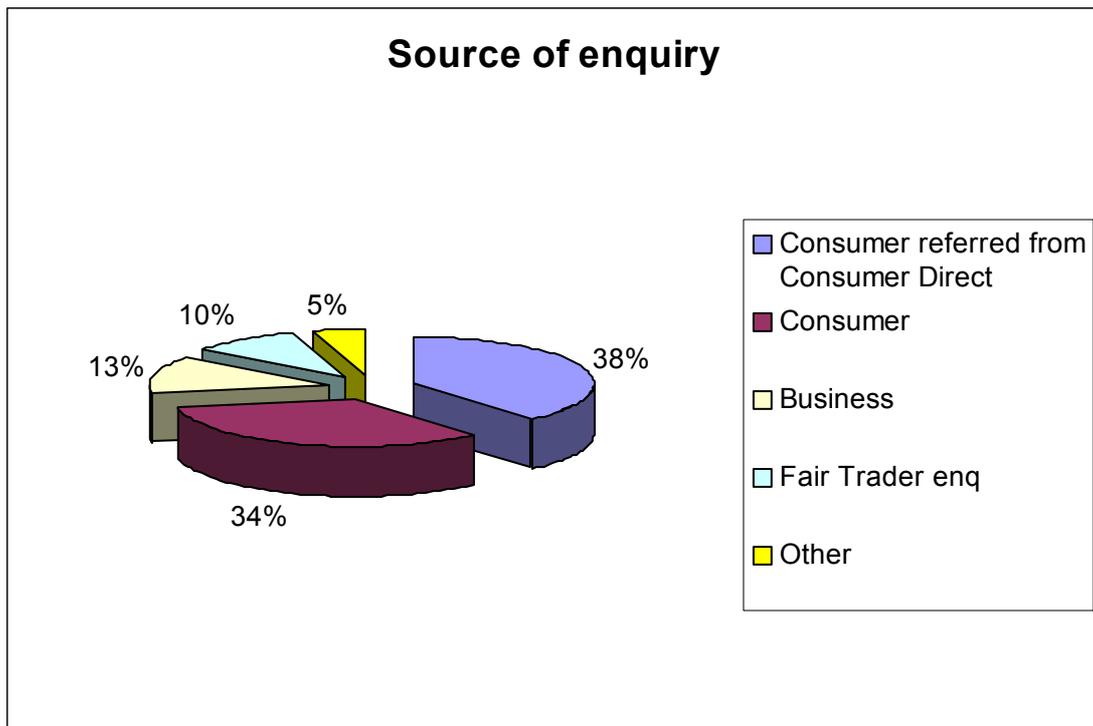
## Trading Standards Summary Report for 2007 – 2008

This report is designed to be a summary of the teams activities for the year 2007 – 2008. It outlines the targets and activities that were set in the service plan for that year and what was achieved.

### **Enquiries**

With the introduction of Consumer Direct South East by the South East Trading Standards authorities, Medway Trading Standards has received less enquiries than usual. This has allowed the team to concentrate their efforts on more complicated enquiries referred from Consumer Direct where advice to consumers goes beyond simple advice that can be given over the phone. This could be because the consumer is vulnerable and requires addition help or that documentation needs to be examined.

The team also still deal with enquiries from business, other enforcement agencies, the media and members of the public enquiring about our Fair Trader scheme. We also receive intelligence reports from Consumer Direct (known as Notifications) of all enquiries made to them in relation to Medway residents or businesses. These totalled 6292 for the year 2007 – 2008.



The team aim to provide an initial response to 75% of enquiries the same day as receiving them. For the year 2007 – 2008, this figure was almost 74%.

## Visits & samples

Medway Trading Standards carry out visits to premises on a risk assessed basis. The table below shows the number of premises in each risk category, the target percentage for visits and the actual percentage we visited.

Risk	Number of premises	Target	Actual
High	24	100%	96%
Medium	1150	20%	20%
Low	1579	N/A	N/A

The team also planned to take 120 food samples and 40 non-food samples. 29 non-food samples were obtained and 91 food samples were taken. The lower number of samples was due to financial restrictions. This year we intend to take the same number of samples.

## Campaigns

Approximately 52 campaigns were planned last year covering enforcement of trading standards legislation and advice and information for consumers. All but six were carried out. Some of the reasons for not doing these campaigns were outside of our control e.g. events not taking place, others were not carried out due to the diversion of resources or finance into other areas.

Campaigns of particular note included the continuation of the TSSE Community Safety campaign. The project has been continued after it's initial two year period. The project included setting up a rapid action team which would visit consumers confronted by doorstep sellers, usually concerning building work, while the trader was still at the premises. An evaluation at the end of the two year period showed the project had met most of it's targets. The number of residents in fear of being conned on their own doorstep had decreased, but was still high. This showed a need to continue the project and ensure we kept on top of the problem. In the last year, the team conducted operation "Rogue Trader", a multi – agency initiative designed to disrupt rogue doorstep sellers. Also, Medway added to this campaign by the introduction of two "cold calling restriction zones" within Medway designed to empower residents to say no to doorstep callers, give additional support to the local community where necessary. To compliment this initiative, a stage show, using Trickster, was also conducted one of those areas to warn vulnerable consumers of the risks of doorstep and other scams.

A large campaign conducted this year was in relation to intellectual property and counterfeiting. Throughout the year, the team have been building up intelligence surrounding persons selling counterfeit products within the area. This is an ongoing campaign but has already resulted in 4 large seizures of designer clothes and shoes worth in the region of £75,000. Subsequent enforcement action is still taking place. This campaign will be continued this year with the added element of looking at unsafe counterfeit goods.

Several campaigns were run in partnership with local authorities across the South East covering food sampling, checks on car credit adverts, excessive packaging and product safety sampling.

Another noteworthy campaign was the continuation of the Medway "Fair Trader" scheme. One of the main reasons for setting up the Fair Trader Scheme was due to feedback from Trading Standards service users. People living within Medway told us they wanted a list to let them know the reputable traders if they were choosing to have home improvements done. A second reason for setting up the scheme was that every year the Trading Standards Advice Team at Medway Council receives many complaints regarding home improvements, and it was felt that by having such a scheme this might curb the scale of the problem. Through the Fair Trader Scheme, Trading Standards can work with the traders, and help them to provide a better service. The Fair Trader Scheme aims to eliminate rogue traders from operating within the area. By providing the public with a list of pre-vetted businesses who work within home improvements, customers can feel confident that they are choosing a trader who will provide an honest, decent and fair service. We now have 238 members, an increase of 20% over last year. We have also started to promote the scheme to other trade sectors. The scheme has now been approved by the Local Authority Assured Trader Scheme Network (LAATSN), run by the Office of Fair Trading which supports a network of local authority local trader schemes which meet nationally agreed standards.

Another important area for trading standards is the sales of various restricted products. Regular exercises were carried out with children of various ages to see if products such as cigarettes, fireworks and alcohol could be purchased. Several sales took place and resulted in varying degrees of enforcement action, depending upon the circumstances. Included in this was participation in the Home Office campaign, "Tackling Underage Sales of Alcohol", in partnership with the police.

Campaigns included providing advice to local businesses including Home Information packs and Energy Performance Certificates, medical weighing equipment, firework retailers and second hand dealers. Businesses were also checked for product safety, in particular, nickel in jewellery, cosmetics, phthalates in plastic and second hand goods.

Our outreach education and advice program has seen an increasing number of visits to shopping and community centres and was enhanced by regular visits to local temples to give consumer advice and to act as a first contact to other Medway Council services. The team also took part in the Council's "Your Town, Your Future" exercise. During that week, advice was given to 60 classes of school children regarding firework safety.

## **Enforcement Actions**

Five prosecutions were instigated last year covering trade marks, trade descriptions and product safety. All five are currently being processed. Also

cautions were issued to three people. A further 120 letters of warning or advice were issued. The service also consulted 25 business regarding unfair practices under the Enterprise Act. Four of those required obtaining undertakings to desist from such practices.

The team feels this is an important area to measure but recognise that an enforcement action can vary from a verbal warning through several other type actions to a prosecution, i.e. any form of communication with an alleged offender.

## **The Media**

Over the last few years, the team decided that it should make better use of the media in all it's forms, including the internal publication for staff and councillors. It was for this reason that a target of 28 media releases was set (a recent 17% increase). The team achieved 19 media releases, but will continue to strive to meet the new target.

## **Customer care**

Medway Trading Standards prides itself on putting the customer first. This does not only mean the people we have dealings with but also the general public for which we have a duty to protect. Many of the activities mentioned already in this report are conducted for the benefit of the public, however, standards are also set for the people who contact us.

Standard	Target	Actual
Consumer satisfaction rate	95%	95%
Business satisfaction rate	90%	100%
Enquiries responded to the same day	75%	74%
Letters responded to fully within 10 days	100%	98%
Telephones answered within 6 rings	95%	91%

We were pleased to reach our high standards for customer satisfaction for the second year running despite an increase in the target for businesses. This compares well with many other organisations. We are pleased that the enquiries responded to on the same day of receipt is still high although processes need to be improved slightly to achieve the target. We are continuing to work hard to try and achieve our target for answering the phone within 6 rings, the actual figure being improved from 85% to 91%.

The service retains the Community Legal Service Quality mark.