

ANGUS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL & LEISURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 28 AUGUST 2003

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSUMER PROTECTION DEPARTMENT - STAFFING
ADJUSTMENT

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Abstract

This report recommends an adjustment to the staffing establishment within the Trading Standards Section of the Environmental and Consumer Protection Department.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee agree to the redesignation and regrading of, post number ECP05J09, Senior Enforcement Officer, grade Tech4/5, to Trading Standards Officer, grade AP5/6

2. BACKGROUND

Due to the shortage of qualified personnel within the Trading Standards profession, new ways have been sought to fast-track candidates through the qualifying examination. One method accepted by the examining body (the Diploma in Trading Standards Council) was, rather than only train post-graduates, that there should be a scheme to recognise that knowledge and skills can be acquired from a whole range of learning experiences, both formal and informal.

Subsequently, a scheme was devised for career progression by way of “accreditation through prior experience and learning” (acronym APEL) designed to integrate professional knowledge, competency and experience. To reach the APEL standard it is necessary to demonstrate learning in appropriate areas and at an appropriate academic level.

Entry to the Diploma in Trading Standards via a Consumer Protection Degree remains as an obvious alternative to the APEL scheme. However, those who possess an alternative degree or other high level qualification, are now able and are encouraged to work to demonstrate an equivalent level of achievement. This equivalent needs to be closely related to the standards that underpin the Degree syllabus.

Two of our existing staff have, over a two year period taken part in APEL learning, supported by funding from this Department and contributions by the Department of Trade & Industry in London. The DTI are very concerned at the dwindling levels of qualified staff and have invested funds into the APEL scheme.

The syllabus for the Diploma in Trading Standards contains elements of the following subjects, which have to be achieved to the required level to meet the APEL standard:-

- Consumer Protection
- Civil & Criminal Law
- Local & Central Government and the EU
- Metrological Control Principles
- Information Technology and Systems
- Food and Agriculture
- Quality Management & Assessment Techniques
- Structure of Trade

The subsequent examination for the Diploma has the following elements:-

- Weights & Measures – technology, law and practical aspects
- Food & Agriculture
- A practical and an oral examination at the National Weights & Measures Laboratory (NWML) at Teddington.

In addition, each candidate must complete a Professional Practice element consisting of:-

1. Professional practice – written paper
2. A dissertation (subject approved in advance)
3. Completion and submission of practical workbooks.

3. OUTCOME

The staff in question having gained success via APEL to reach entry standard to the Diploma in Trading Standards course, went on to sit their examination and submit their dissertations and workbooks. The result is that they have gained their Diploma and are now fully qualified as Inspectors of Weights & Measures under Section 73 of the Weights & Measures Act 1985.

These two officers are currently employed within the Department as Senior Enforcement Officers, and already hold the Diploma in Consumer Affairs and other high level qualifications.

As stated, there is currently a national shortage of fully qualified staff with hardly enough new officers coming through the system to replace those who retire. Having these additional qualified staff will greatly assist the Department.

Our two officers are in the first batch within the UK to have successfully used the APEL route to full qualification and are to be commended for their effort and success.

Commendation should also go to those other officers in the Department who assisted with in-house training which is part of the scheme; and to the officers who had the foresight to grasp the training and funding opportunity which avoided the more lengthy and expensive route of recruiting trainees fresh from academic study.

4. PROPOSAL

In consideration of the shortage of fully trained and qualified Trading Standards Officers, the service needs for a full complement of professional staff, and to benefit from the skills of the two Officers who have pursued their professional qualification through the APEL route, it is proposed to appoint both individuals as Trading Standards Officers.

The Department's establishment currently has one Trading Standards Officer vacancy, and therefore it is proposed to redesignate and regrade one of the posts currently held by the postholders, Senior Enforcement Officer, to that of Trading Standards Officer.

These staffing adjustments have been discussed and agreed with the Personnel Services Manager.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost to the Department of this adjustment will amount to £2604 this financial year, and £3906 in a full year. These costs can be contained within our revenue budget.

7. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Law & Administration and Personnel Services Manager have been consulted on the contents of this report.

S R Heggie
Director of Environmental and Consumer Protection

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.

JM/FMCI

5.8.03