NORTH OF ENGLAND TRADING STANDARDS GROUP

Operational Structure

Membership

The Group comprises:

Cumbria County Council
Durham County Council
Lancashire County Council
West Yorkshire Joint Services

Chief Officers Group

Chief Officers will meet as and when necessary but generally at three monthly intervals. Meetings will be scheduled to coincide in particular with:-

- business planning (the group business plan and individual authorities business planning)
- budget discussions/submissions.

The Chief Officer's group will set its own agenda and input to the agendas of focus groups. In particular, it will receive reports from groups and will monitor their output and performance.

Chief Officers will each ensure that appropriate resources are available within their own budgets/services to meet such commitments..

Chief Officer groups will be chaired by the Chief Officer from the host authority.

Special Projects Group

The Special Projects Group will consist of an officer from each of the member authorities with a nominated chairperson who will also act as secretary.

The group will meet as and when necessary but will normally meet quarterly.

Specialist Virtual Groups

Virtual Groups will deal with all technical issues and generally there will be no expectation that they should meet. It may be, however, that the need does arise for groups to meet for example, to deal with any major technical/operational development i.e. new legislation. The 'virtual groups' are as follows:

- Agriculture, Animal Feeds, Fertilisers
- Animal Health & Welfare
- Consumer Advice/Education

- Fair Trading (inc Consumer advice/education)
- Food
- Metrology & QA
- Safety

It is envisaged that all or at least the majority of the group's work will be undertaken by e-mail. The groups will consist (as a minimum) of a nominated representative from each member authority, one of whom will be nominated as the lead officer. Other interested staff can be included on e-mail groups for the purpose of informing debate and obtaining the widest possible view. If groups do meet only one representative from each authority will normally attend (but this will be a matter for each individual Chief Officer).

Specialist Virtual groups will deal with technical issues raised by members, the co-ordinator, delivery groups, Chief Officer's Group, LACORS or other external organisations.

In practice, items for consideration by a group will be sent to the group lead officer who will consider how best to deal with it. This might include:

- deal with it him/her self
- circulating it for discussion (within the group)
- forwarding directly to LACORS for an opinion
- forwarding to another group lead officer, a delivery group or chief officer group
- calling a special meeting
- asking the group co-ordinator to assist in obtaining background information from other authorities/organisations.

Group members will also be expected to initiate discussions on items of interest. It will be up to the lead officer to draw any discussion to a close, to summarise the views and decide the conclusion.

Lead officers may be appointed on a case-by-case basis so as to share the workload.
When an issue has been dealt with it should be minuted by the group leader and circulated to all interested parties. The group co-ordinator will be copied into all e-mail groups and will summarise any actions/decisions at Chief Officer meetings.

Should the group (or lead officer) feel that it is appropriate to make representations to external bodies (e.g. LACORS/government/other liaison groups) then it will be the responsibility of the group leader (or other nominated member) to make such representations. Before making any such representations a copy of the proposed letter should be sent to chief officers (via the co-ordinator) for final comment. If no responses/comments are received from chief officers within 7 days then this can be taken as authority to proceed.

If a virtual group feels that there is merit in undertaking a project then the group should prepare a briefing paper (including a draft 'Joint Project Outline' form) to be considered by the Chief Officers group.

Designated Specialists

Specialists from each authority will be identified for specialist categories. A lead specialist will be nominated where appropriate. Generally these will mirror the virtual group officers as will the lead officer. In a case of opinions requested by LACORS, these will initially be directed to the Co-ordinator. The Co-ordinator will then direct these to/and liaise with the lead specialist who will decide whether to:-

- answer the query without reference to others;
- seek the views of other colleagues within the designated specialist category (using virtual group e-mail);
- refer the matter to a delivery group or Chief Officers' Group;
- take no action.

If the lead officer is able to obtain consensus of opinion (or able to response him/her self) then he/she may submit it directly to LACORS (on behalf of the Group) - copied to the co-ordinator. In the case of issues of major significance, these may be referred to the Chief Officers' Group (via the co-ordinator).

If there is no consensus of opinion then individual views can be submitted to LACORS (copied to the co-ordinator).

The co-ordinator will liaise with group leaders on a case by cases basis as to who submits material to LACORS

If urgent and the view of the Chief Officer Group is necessary the co-ordinator will not wait for a meeting but circulate (by e-mail) to Chief Officers.

Copies of any final opinions/agreement will be circulated:-

- to the Co-ordinator (who may then circulate to chief officers if considered necessary);
- to colleagues listed against the specialist category;
- to other colleagues if appropriate.

The Co-ordinator will monitor the number of approaches from LACORS and the number responded to and will report this to the Chief Officers Group.

Note. Designated Specialists will not be expected to comment on every issue sent by LACORS. If significant resources are necessary to provide a reply, the employing authority's chief officer should be consulted.

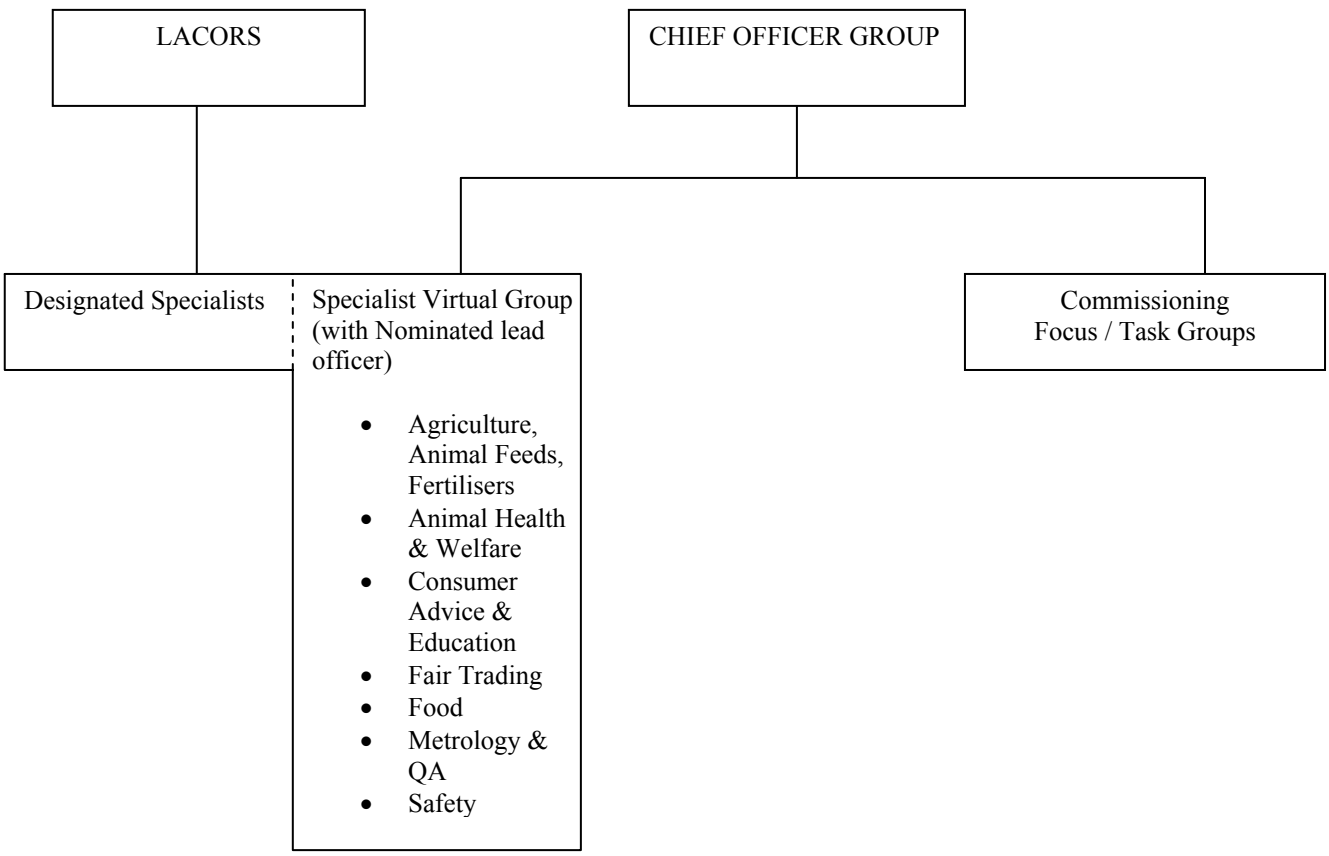
Focus/Task Groups

Focus/Task Groups can be established as and when considered appropriate by the Chief Officers' Group. These groups are time limited with a specific remit.

Task groups will meet as and when necessary but will conduct as much business as possible by e-mail.

From time to time the group will be invited to participate in co-ordinated exercises by other agencies such as DTI, LACORS or FSA. As a general principal, these will be agreed if they are to be externally funded in whole or to a significant degree. The co-ordinator (in consultation with chief officers) is authorised to agree participation in such exercises and/or submit bids/applications as necessary.

Training

Where appropriate training events will be organised by the co-ordinator. Groups will be expected to identify training issues, contribute to the delivery of specialist training and/or assist in the planning/content of courses.

North of England Trading Standards Group