

**Note of Local Authority Assured Trader Scheme Network's National Standards Steering Committee meeting held on 23 July 2008**

**Present:**

Nicola Brown (NB) – LAATSN Chair, OFT  
Wendy Martin (WM) – Director of Policy, LACORS  
Susan Marks (SM) – Social Policy Officer, Citizens Advice (CA)  
Ulrika Diallo – Policy Advisor for Trade and Industry, FSB  
Paul Ramsden (PR) – Deputy Chief Executive, Trading Standards Institute  
Paul Thomas (PT) – Head of Trading Standards, Devon County Council  
Kate Damania (KD) – Head of Policy and Promotions for CCAS, OFT  
Brian Jackson (BJ) – Trading Standards Partnership Manager, OFT  
Laila Benfaida (LB) – LAATSN Project Officer (seconded)  
Kathryn Annand (KA) – LAATSN Project Officer (seconded)  
Elizabeth Yaroson (EY) – LAATSN Secretary, OFT

**Opening – Actions from previous meeting – update**

1. NB welcomed everyone. She introduced KA and LB, working on LAATSN development, BJ who would be working on LAATSN from September, UD who would provide feedback to the FSB on their anticipated representation on the NSSC and KD Head of OFT Codes Policy, working on OFT's self-regulation project. NB went through the action points from the previous meeting as follows:
  - LAATSN documentation – has been updated, in particular to address CPRs compliance and decision taken on frequency of re-audits
  - Constitution of NSSC – this remains unchanged to retain flexibility, await decision from FSB regarding proposed membership
  - Membership updates – are being circulated to Citizens Advice, LAATSN member schemes are now listed on TS Central with links to each scheme
  - Consumer Direct (CD) – pre-shopping pages now signpost to LAATSN webpages (and CCAS, Trustmark), it was also noted that CD will signpost (though may vary from region to region) to assured traders, and
  - OFT has been giving pointers to auditors before audit process undertaken - NSSC view that this had improved process and ability to ratify (though limited no. of applications recently).

## Procedural update

2. Membership update – EY provided information as follows:
  - Total LAATSN membership = 34 local authorities.
  - Estimate an additional 20 to 30 authorities over the coming year (including a number joining existing schemes, and two potential regional schemes)

## Minimum standards

3. Review of feedback on operation of LAATSN from members –  
**(This item was deferred to 'Development update')**
4. First re-audits (due 2009) – it was agreed that:
  - For regional schemes, focus should be on lead or nominated authority with sample of others
  - It is re-audit of **scheme**, not authority
  - Scheme Operators should highlight, in particular, any changes that affect compliance with the minimum standards, any improvements and best practice, and certify compliance
  - Peer review to confirm this

## Development

5. Prior to the meeting an NSSC member had queried whether it should be a mandatory requirement for scheme operators to indicate membership of the network. No decision was taken, but this led to a discussion concerning incentives for joining LAATSN. It was suggested that few members indicate membership of the network – possibly due to lack of incentives. PT suggested that the varying types of schemes – may make it difficult to 'sell' in a meaningful way. KA felt that LAATSN provided choice. KD observed that LAATSN, CCAS and TrustMark all came from different angles with all offering the consumer something. For example, CCAS is market focused and has nationwide coverage. PR and PT pointed out that it was both the OFT and TSS duty to develop LAATSN.
6. It was agreed that an objective should be drafted concerning coverage of LAATSN (in terms of increasing consumer access to schemes meeting minimum standards) – OFT to produce a draft for NSSC agreement. This could then be used as the benchmark to evaluate LAATSN's success.

Production of 'handbook/toolkit' and feedback from consultation with TSS.

7. A paper was circulated providing feedback from the recent consultation exercise. KA and LB provided an update on development of a toolkit to provide practical guidance / best practice on schemes to TSS.

#### **Support from TSI, OFT, LACORS and other organisations**

8. Issue of support given to LAATSN schemes has been raised as an issue. Led to a discussion on broader development issues – such as branding, single portal access/central database. NB indicated a number of these issues were being considered as part of broader government reviews for example, BERR's Consumer Law Review Call for Evidence, Scottish Government consultation on proposals for a Trusted Trader Framework for Scotland. OFT is also considering self-regulation issues in a project - KD pointed out that a discussion document would be issued [NB. This is now likely to be in the new year in advance of a stakeholder event].
9. On having a central searchable database – PR suggested that LAATSN should have a searchable database. SM suggested that the databases for CCAS, TrustMark and LAATSN should be through one site, perhaps CD's. TSI have looked into providing a 'mash up' – (works on trader within a radius of x) – but, there is a question as to whether local authorities want this (authorities would send data from their system for TSI to combine)?
10. There was some discussion around the different criteria requirements of LAATSN and CCAS.
11. Short term it was suggested that the focus should be on the outcome of the consultation with TSS on developing LAATSN – above issues could be given further consideration in due course and in light of developments with government reviews currently underway. Other specific short term deliverables discussed:
  - Production of handbook/toolkit (see above)
  - OFT to establish whether LAATSN webpages could be easier to find for example, through shorter domain name.
  - OFT to draft an article for Citizens Advice's 'Advisor' magazine and TS Today. LACORS can also provide LAATSNs development work on its webpages.

- Network event to launch handbook/toolkit and to facilitate members discussion on arbitration / prepayment protection

### **TSI Fair Trading Award**

12. In response to the consultation on developing LAATSN TSI had proposed that its Fair Trading Award be considered as an element of LAATSN. The NSSC agreed that it would not be appropriate to require this as a mandatory element of Minimum Standard 2b. However, the NSSC agreed that it should be included as a best practice element of 2b. OFT to update documentation accordingly.
13. PR said that he would make enquiries within TSI to determine whether the training could be offered at a discount to LAATSN scheme operators.

### **TrustMark**

14. It was noted that local authorities were being approached by Trustmark. Discussion on whether parallel LAATSN membership should be encouraged. No particular view expressed, but it was recognised that the schemes are complementary, with different focus/benefits and ultimately it is for the local authority to determine which scheme best suits the needs of its community. It was suggested that, resources permitting, an exercise could be carried out to determine whether a local authority Trustmark scheme would meet the LAATSN criteria.