

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) West Sussex Fitness for Purpose (FFP) Tourism Pilot

Introduction

This is a Memorandum of Understanding on the exchange of information and operational co-operation between West Sussex Tourism Initiative, West Sussex Fire Brigade, West Sussex County Council Trading Standards Service, the West Sussex County Council Tourism Officer, Adur District Council, Arun District Council, Chichester District Council, Crawley Borough Council, Horsham District Council, Mid Sussex District Council, Worthing Borough Council, East Grinstead Town Council, Burgess Hill Town Council, South Downs College and Chichester College with a view to the exchange of information, co-ordination of enforcement and advice for the benefit of Consumers and Tourism Businesses in West Sussex.

The signatories

- Take note of the spirit of co-operation and goodwill that already exists between the organisations.
- Recognise the benefits to be derived from delivering close working relationships to achieve common aims.
- Seek to enhance the understanding of the advantages and opportunities which the exchange of information and operational co-operation can bring to effective law enforcement and business support.
- Wish to provide and improve the legitimate exchange of information and operational co-operation in support of shared objectives and have therefore reached the following understanding.

Scope

This MoU covers all of West Sussex and all the above Authorities. All partners agree to support the objectives of the FFP pilot including

- Exchanging information on businesses operating in the tourism industry.
- Co-ordinating enforcement activity in the tourism industry, including inspections.
- Supporting training courses and other business advice activities for tourism businesses. This will include making businesses aware of their legal responsibilities.
- Co-ordinating complaints referral to ensure that all partners are aware of the level of complaints about tourism businesses in West Sussex and ensuring that consumers receive help and advice about their complaints.

- Good links already exist between the above organisations and local tourism businesses in West Sussex. These links will be maintained using existing processes.

Background

West Sussex is the largest of 6 national pilot areas across England for Fitness for Purpose, a Government initiative to drive up standards in the tourism accommodation industry. A leaflet from DCMS/LGA introducing the scheme is enclosed as appendix A.

The pilot phase is due to end by December 2003 and this memorandum will be reviewed at that time as well.

West Sussex Tourism Initiative leads the West Sussex FfP Pilot on behalf of the above partners.

Sharing Information

The “VisitSussex” database of tourism businesses maintained by West Sussex Tourism Initiative and used by most tourism officers across West Sussex will be the main database for the FfP pilot. It will be used, amongst other tasks, to record basic details of complaints, publicise courses and relay information and advice to the trade. It contains details of inspected and non-inspected premises in West Sussex. All Authorities will pass information they have on inspected and non-inspected premises to West Sussex Tourism Initiative so that this database can be updated and maintained. That part of the database accessible to the public will not change because of the above actions, many of them being for use by partners only and not the general public.

All Authorities will continue to use their own databases for their own purposes, for example for recording information relating to enforcement actions taken against individual traders.

All information sharing shall be undertaken subject to the requirements of

- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Enterprise Act 2002

Training

- The WSCC Trading Standards Service, West Sussex Fire Brigade and District/Borough Council Environmental Health Departments shall supply trainers and training materials for The “Quality Edge” FfP training courses taking place in the Autumn. Three courses for bed and breakfast providers are anticipated in the

autumn of 2003 and will be organised by Sussex Downs College and Chichester College.

- If an Auditor is appointed to the FfP pilot the enforcement organisations will assist in his/her training. The auditor will be based in Worthing with WSTI and West Sussex Trading Standards Service.
- The WSCC Trading Standards Service, West Sussex Fire Brigade, Worthing Environmental Health Service and the Tourism Officers will provide advice leaflets on relevant subjects so that a pack of information can be put together and used to help and advise local tourism businesses. This is to encourage best practice amongst West Sussex Tourism Businesses.
- All partners will assist in the promotion of the FfP training courses to the trade.

Complaint Handling

- All partners agree to refer all complaints about West Sussex Tourism Businesses to the West Sussex Trading Standards Advice Line (01903 839749 and 01293 895304) with the permission of the complainant. Their Advice Team is based in Worthing. All Authorities taking complaints will ask if complainants are content for their details and the details of their complaint to be referred to another Authority for advice and possible further action.
- The Trading Standards Service will refer any criminal allegations to the appropriate enforcement authority. Some authorities already refer complaints to, for example, their own Environmental Health Department. This will continue to happen if the Authority concerned so wishes, but a copy of the complaint will still be sent to Trading Standards, marked “for information” or similar.
- Tourism Officers will still refer details of complaints against graded premises to the appropriate membership organisation as well.
- The appropriate enforcement authority will deal with any allegations of a criminal nature in the normal way, working to minimum legal requirements.

Complaints against a Member Authority

That Authority, using their normal complaint procedure will deal with complaints against the way a pilot Authority has conducted itself.

Communication

Meetings and other means of communication will be used to keep all Authorities aware of what is happening in the pilot. WSTI will manage this process and keep appropriate records.

Review

The FfP pilot will be reviewed in January 2004 by a meeting of all member Authorities or their representatives. A report on the pilot will be prepared by WSTI and sent to the DCMS/LGA as appropriate. The nominated officers will acknowledge and agree this report before it is sent.