

# Fitness for Purpose

## Quality Counts



Helping hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs to raise standards in health & safety, fire and food safety, and trading standards



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## Foreword

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### Foreword by Rt Hon Richard Caborn MP, Minister of State for Tourism and Cllr Chris White, Chair of the Local Government Association Regeneration Board

Tourism is a barometer of our economic and cultural wellbeing. The success of the sector can be measured by how effective it is at persuading consumers – at home and from overseas – about the depth, heart and quality of the UK offer. The UK offer goes beyond our iconic attractions, the variety of our rural and urban landscapes, our leading position as the place to do business and the richness of our leisure opportunities and events. Underpinning all this is a powerful economic sector, providing a livelihood and prospects for over two million people. Crucially the tourism industry, like any other sector, operates in an increasingly competitive environment. If the UK is to keep pace with world travel forecasts, a £100 billion a year industry is a minimum achievement by 2010, compared with the equivalent figure of £76 billion a year now.

Improving the quality of our product is vital if we are to achieve the levels of growth at which we are aiming. If anything is guaranteed to spoil visitors' experiences, it is substandard accommodation. The reputation and damage to a location and indeed the country as a whole, can be significant. We want people to come back time and time again, and encourage their friends and relatives to come too. Of course, many accommodation providers have an excellent product, but there are those – often at the “budget end” of the market – whose standards fall short, or even fail to meet basic minimum legal standards.

Everyone booking accommodation in our hotels, B&Bs and guesthouses should expect that at the very least, it is fit to be trading. Fitness for Purpose aims to create a framework within which this can be provided. And a more clearly publicised complaints procedure, as envisaged under the Fitness for Purpose approach, will

ensure that problems are promptly investigated and properly dealt with.

*Fitness for Purpose – Quality Counts* shows how tourist destinations will benefit through local authorities being able to target their resources at those accommodation providers which are failing to get even the basics right. Ultimately, by helping those businesses to improve, destinations can achieve a better standard of accommodation across the board, upon which to build further improvements in quality.

Well-run business will benefit too, through local authorities being able to take a lighter-touch approach to enforcement. For many businesses, compliance with regulations should become much easier and less costly.

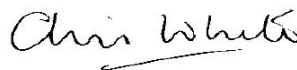
Improving the productivity of our tourism industry is a continuing challenge. Although recent figures for tourism have been encouraging, especially for inbound visitor numbers and expenditure, we cannot afford to be complacent. We must build on recent progress and on the commitment of everyone involved. As part of the

programme of action described in *Tomorrow's Tourism Today*, which sets out the responsibilities and actions of public and private sector organisations in the key areas of marketing, quality, skills and data, DCMS and the LGA are committed to taking forward Fitness for Purpose in the drive to raise quality standards.

Finally, we would like to thank the six local authorities who piloted the project, the industry Best Practice Forum and the Fitness for Purpose Steering Group for their help and advice.



Richard Caborn  
Minister for Sport and Tourism



Cllr Chris White  
Chair of the LGA Regeneration Board

## Introduction

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The Government's wide ranging tourism reform programme is based on a strong relationship with our partners in both public and private sectors, and is driven by improvements in delivery in key areas, including the need to improve the quality of tourist accommodation.

Much of this work has drawn on the Government's overall strategy for the development of tourism in England, as set out in *Tomorrow's Tourism* (DCMS, 1999), which was reaffirmed by the publication in July 2004 of *Tomorrow's Tourism Today*.



*Tomorrow's Tourism Today* sets out the responsibilities and actions of public and private sector organisations – namely DCMS, *VisitBritain*, the Regional Development Agencies, the Local Government Association and the Tourism Alliance – in driving forward policies for the sustainable growth of the tourism industry. It describes recent nationally led progress in each of the four key priority work areas:

- **Better marketing of the product at home and overseas;**
- **Raising the quality of the product;**
- **More investment in the workforce;**
- **Improving the quality and timeliness of data on tourism.**

*Tomorrow's Tourism Today* can be found on the DCMS website ([www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)).

## Raising the quality of the product

In 2003, domestic tourists spent £5.5 billion (excluding package trips) and overseas tourists £9 billion on accommodation alone.

The tables below illustrate the range of locations visited by domestic tourists. Fifty-seven per cent of visits are to seaside resorts and large towns, which contain many small hotels and B&Bs and which represent some 35% of accommodation used.

<b>Type of location stayed at on holiday by domestic tourists 2003</b>		
	% of total trips	% of total spend
Seaside	27	29
Large City/Large Town	30	30
Small Town	19	17
Countryside/Village	24	23
Not specified	1	1

Source: United Kingdom Tourist Survey (UKTS). Total trips of UK residents in 2003 was 121.3 million and total spend £20,560 million

<b>Accommodation used by UK residents in England 2003</b>		
	% of total trips	% of total spend
Hotel/Motel/Guesthouse	29	42
B&B/Farmhouse B&B	6	8
Rented House/Chalet/Flat	6	9
Hotel/University/School	1	1
Rented house/second home/timeshare	1	1
Camping	3	2
Towed caravan	2	1
Friends/relatives/home	44	25
Other	12	12

Source UKTS. Total trips and spend as in table on page 8

It is estimated that there are between 50,000 – 60,000 hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs in the UK.

On average, expenditure on accommodation represents 27% of UK residents' overall expenditure on tourism.

<b>Accommodation industry in England registered with national tourist boards 2003</b>					
Hotels		Guest Houses		B&B	
Units	Bed spaces	Units	Bed spaces	Units	Bed spaces
8,853	630,740	6,703	118,164	11,211	98,629

The highest standards are vital if we are to achieve the levels of growth at which we are aiming. Inevitably, visitors' experience of their hotel accommodation is one of the key "moments of truth" creating a lasting impression of this country. Many establishments – catering for a wide range of needs and budgets – provide excellent standards of accommodation, leading to satisfied customers taking away a positive impression. Improvements in the National Quality Assurance Scheme, as described on pages 20-21 will reinforce this.

### **The role of Fitness for Purpose – driving up quality**

The industry has long been concerned about the overall damage done to the English tourism sector by the existence of poor quality accommodation. There is much evidence (not least from complaints to DCMS, local authorities, national and regional tourist boards) to show that poor and indeed substandard levels of accommodation not only raise serious health and safety concerns, but also create a bad impression

of England that can significantly harm the country's reputation as a leading tourist destination. This was discussed at the Hartwell House Seminar convened by the Secretary of State in 2001. It was agreed that local authorities should be encouraged to provide a Fitness for Purpose approach to inspections based on existing statutory obligations and that businesses that repeatedly failed to meet minimum Fitness for Purpose standards should be closed. That led to a comprehensive set of recommendations in the "Fitness for Purpose Policy Recommendation Paper" issued in July 2002 by the Fitness for Purpose working group (on the DCMS website at [www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)), which in turn led to the successful completion of a number of pilot projects in 2003. These are described further on pages 14-19.

Fitness for Purpose is targeted at those hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs which are failing to meet minimum legal requirements on health and safety, food safety and hygiene, trading standards and fire safety, in order to help them to improve. It aims to give those businesses the support they

need to raise standards in those areas, whilst also taking a lighter regulatory enforcement touch to well-run businesses that are already complying with the necessary regulations. Fitness for Purpose is **not** primarily concerned with “cosmetic” or subjective quality issues. Those issues – including appearance, levels of service and cleanliness – are dealt with as part of the National Quality Accommodation Standards Scheme.

The customer-focused objective of Fitness for Purpose is essentially about consumer protection at the lowest end. Also, a more clearly publicised complaints procedure will ensure that problems are promptly investigated and properly dealt with.



Fitness for Purpose offers a unique opportunity to improve standards within the industry and enhance the marketing potential of those taking part. Based primarily on the pilot schemes carried out in 2003, Fitness for Purpose demonstrates how local authorities and accommodation providers can play their part in the drive to push up quality standards, by realising the following benefits:

- Better consumer protection;
- Clearer regulatory standards for businesses and consumers;
- Businesses better informed about their obligations;
- Local authorities co-ordinating inspections more effectively, and less red tape for businesses, especially SMEs;
- More self-assessment for well-run businesses.

## The role of Fitness for Purpose – driving out red tape

The costs to industry, especially small businesses, and local authorities of regulation, services and enforcement have also been of wider concern to Government. As part of the 2004 Budget, the Government asked Philip Hampton to carry out a review of regulatory services and enforcement. An interim report was published by HM Treasury in December 2004 – *Reducing administrative burdens: effective inspection and enforcement*. It drew attention to the importance of Government tackling the administrative costs of regulations, the costs imposed by the enforcement activities of regulators through form filling, inspection or other action, and to the fact that the burden of administrative costs fall most heavily on the smallest businesses.

It also drew attention to work undertaken by the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants on costs to businesses. The BCC estimates that the cumulative costs of regulations on business introduced since 1988 is approximately £30

billion, of which £7 billion is a recurring annual cost. The Institute of Chartered Accountants conducted a study which found that red tape costs the UK £7 billion a year with 69% of this falling to micro businesses employing less than 10 people, of which there are many in the accommodation sector. Other estimates have suggested that the administrative burden could be as high as 10% of GDP, based on estimates in other EU countries.

The interim report proposed a number of solutions:

- Ensure general use of robust risk assessment methodologies to programme inspections so that no inspection takes place without a reason;
- Re-balance advice and inspection, because good advice leads to better regulatory outcomes, especially for small businesses;
- Better tailor advice for businesses;
- Simplify the forms that businesses have to fill in, using business reference groups and common reporting frameworks;

- Reduce the number of forms that businesses have to fill in, by encouraging greater sharing of data, and eliminating duplicate information requests;
- Make incentives for compliance more effective;
- Strengthen the penalty regime, and make action against rogue businesses quicker and more effective;
- Improve joint working including information sharing and cross-training between regulators;
- Continue the recent trend of consolidating regulatory functions into national regulators

The full report can be viewed at  
[www.hm-treasury.gov.uk](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk)

The aim of Fitness for Purpose is to reduce the burdens on business through a more joined-up approach to inspection and a lighter touch for compliant businesses, which sits well with the aims of the Hampton Review. Following the final report due in spring 2005, DCMS and the LGA will consider how the Review can reinforce Fitness for Purpose.

## Experience from the Pilot Schemes

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### The pilot councils

Following the work of the Tourism Initiative Group and the Fitness for Purpose working group in 2002, a number of pilot projects were set up during 2003 representing a wide cross-section of areas from towns to seaside resorts.

The six local authorities chosen were:

- Blackpool Borough Council
- Bournemouth Borough Council
- London Borough of Camden
- Canterbury City Council
- London Borough of Greenwich
- West Sussex County Council

Each authority was asked to implement two core elements of Fitness for Purpose. These were:

- Joined-up working between tourism and enforcement departments; and
- Communication with local businesses.

They were also given the choice of other optional elements which included:

- Co-ordinated food, health and safety and fire inspections;
- Introducing self-assessment for compliant businesses;
- Creating a comprehensive accommodation register;
- Creating a business regulation unit;
- Creating targeted training for accommodation providers on compliance with minimum standards.

### What the pilots did

Full details of the pilot projects are contained in *Fitness for Purpose: Lessons from Local Authorities' Pilot Studies* which can be viewed on the Local Government Association's website [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk).

- **Blackpool Borough Council** – implemented the project in a defined area of the town, Gynn Square, and set up a cohort study for comparison purposes. They used the services

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- of private consultants to work with accommodation providers, encouraging compliance with the full range of regulatory functions using a self-assessment checklist.
- **Bournemouth Borough Council** – implemented the Bournemouth Quality Scheme, which encouraged all accommodation providers in the area to meet minimum standards. They employed two inspectors to carry out inspections, which were paid for through subscriptions to the Quality Scheme.
  - **London Borough of Camden** – implemented the project using the same consultants employed by Blackpool Borough Council and the self-assessment checklist in the Kings Cross area of the borough. The visits were followed up by a seminar and workshops to which accommodation providers were invited. A partnership arrangement was also set up between Camden and Business Link for London so that arrangements were made for diagnostic visits to identify business support needs for those accommodation providers who requested them.
  - **Canterbury City Council** – recognised the need for a database of accommodation providers in their area and integrated information across eight agencies. A Senior Environmental Health Officer made consultancy visits to 19 accommodation providers together with a pack covering information across all regulatory functions. A seminar was held to which all accommodation providers were invited which provided a mix of information and training.
  - **London Borough of Greenwich** – concentrated their resources on public houses that provided accommodation, with the objective of increasing the number of bed spaces available in the area, in premises that meet national Quality Standards as well as complying with regulations. Fifty-three premises were visited by Environmental Health Officers providing a consultancy service, self-assessment checklist and information pack which included business support.

- **West Sussex County Council** – set up training courses for accommodation providers, which were given by regulators to help explain the practicalities of meeting Fitness for Purpose. A Visit Sussex database was developed with an improved complaints procedure. Audits of 53 premises were carried out to assist with compliance and where non-compliance was found it was referred to the appropriate agency. A business advice pack containing information on a range of regulatory issues affecting small accommodation providers was also distributed to about 450 traders countywide.

### **The Benefits**

**For local authorities** Fitness for Purpose demonstrated it can:

- Enable resources to be better targeted especially where they are stretched, through coordinated, efficient and joined-up working between tourism and enforcement departments, leading to economies of scale and better targeting of resources;
- Encourage sharing of best practice by the enforcers of regulation;
- Lead to better working relationships with local businesses;
- Create more formalised links between tourism and enforcement officers so that the worst illegal businesses can be flushed out and tackled.

**For those local authorities marketing tourist accommodation (e.g. through TICs)** it can:

- Ensure that action can be taken to tackle those businesses that are not up to standard and enable all tourist destinations to target their

enforcement resources at those accommodation providers which are failing to get even the basics right;

- Ultimately, by helping those businesses to improve, destinations can achieve a better standard of accommodation across the board, from which to build further improvements in tourism quality;
- Give confidence to visitors who are recommended or book accommodation through a tourist office portal that it will be fit for purpose and ensure that they will enjoy their stay and come back again and recommend a visit to others;
- Lead to better consumer protection;
- Increase the standards of quality, safety and service for visitors that can enable tourist destinations to provide a more competitive tourism product in line with “World Class” standards of excellence.



**For fire services** it can:

- Enhance working partnerships with local authority enforcement departments (although some fire authorities will be local authorities at county council level in their own right);
- Help further reduce the risk of fire incidents.

**For businesses** it can:

- Improve productivity;
- By improving standards, encourage visitors to return time and time again;
- Clarify regulatory standards through better and more focused advice from regulatory services;
- Reduce “red tape”, time and waste for well-run tourism businesses that can demonstrate, through self-assessment, an ability to meet minimum standards and compliance with legislation. This can be achieved through better coordinated regulatory services leading to a reduction in the number of inspections;
- Create opportunities for self-assessment of risks in health and safety, food standards, trading standards and fire safety with further

opportunities of practical help and assistance available to deal with problems and to comply with legislation from local authorities;

- Lead to a saving in time for managers and staff through coordinated inspections;
- Bring about savings by identification of problems at an early stage which might lead to higher costs if left unattended;
- Provide business support through training.

### **Estimated Savings**

#### **Local authorities**

Starting the project can initially lead to additional workloads on officers, but it should deliver



long-term benefits and lead to sustained behaviour change. The important thing is to consider what can be done with the resources that are likely to be available. It may be better to focus on particular high-risk areas, as many of the pilot projects did, rather than trying to cover too much at first.

Principal savings can arise chiefly from improved working arrangements that allow for greater flexibility by the various regulatory authorities concerned.

#### **Fire services**

There is clear evidence that many employers are unsure about their responsibilities under existing fire legislation to carry out risk assessments and to take steps to remove those risks. In many cases this involves fairly basic low-cost resources such as ensuring that escape routes are unblocked and that sources of ignition are separated from inflammable materials. Earlier identification of fire risks during inspections might result in a reduction in the number and severity of fires and false alarms.

A reduction in false fire alarm calls to the local fire service could produce savings of over **£870,000** over five years<sup>2</sup>, and the incidence of fire outbreaks could reduce by 15%, generating savings of over **£12.5 million**<sup>3</sup> The average cost to fire services in respect of hotels and guesthouses per fire is put at **£34,808** in “The Economic Cost of Fire” (Home Office Research Study 229) with some 2,400 outbreaks of fire in these properties each year.

### Businesses

The costs of regulation on businesses reported by the Hampton Review are set out on page 12. A joined-up approach to inspections by local authorities could lead to savings in time and money for owners. An earlier identification of

problems, whilst requiring initial investment, should reduce the risk of fire, food poisoning and accidents which could be far costlier to rectify at a later stage. Savings made can release money which can be invested in raising levels of quality and, where possible, reducing prices for customers. The reduction of false fire alarms could generate savings for businesses of approximately **£210,000** over five years.<sup>4</sup> If account is taken of lost sales and down-time, this could be as much as **£1 million** over this period.

<sup>2</sup> Based on a reduction of 7% of the total of false alarms and that hotels and restaurants account for 7% of the total. The Home Office 2001 report “The Economic Cost of Fire” puts the cost to the fire service of responding to false alarms at **£372**.

<sup>3</sup> Assuming that awareness and compliance with fire safety requirements might increase to 85% and that the incidence of fires reduces by at least 15%.

<sup>4</sup> Based on an average company with 7 employees, with an hourly wage cost of **£13.3**, the hourly cost of labour per firm around **£90**, that each false alarm takes one hour of the firms time, and that there will be a reduction of false alarms in hotels and restaurants by 15%

## **Issues raised by the pilot schemes**

### **Risk Assessment**

One of the concerns raised by the pilot projects was that it was difficult to deal with “low-risk” tourism businesses within the framework of national targets set for health and safety, and food safety and hygiene.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) supports the principle of the Fitness for Purpose approach, on the basis that it has adopted a proportionate and risk-based approach to regulation and inspection, and local authorities have been encouraged to do so. This is enshrined in the Health and Safety Commission’s guidance to local authorities, issued under section 18 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

New ways of working in partnerships between the HSE, local authorities and others are being explored and developed as part of the “LAs and HSE Working Together” Strategic Programme. This includes using a range of intervention methods, and working with and through other intermediaries as appropriate. Further

information can be found on the HSE or LACORS websites ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) and [www.lacors.gov.uk](http://www.lacors.gov.uk)).

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) also endorses this approach in so far as it relates to low-risk establishments like B&Bs, but some larger establishments such as hotels will still be required to be inspected in line with the requirements of the current statutory code of practice. The recently issued FSA Code of Practice allows more flexible enforcement in low-risk food premises, in that food authorities can use an alternative enforcement strategy for maintaining surveillance of such premises.

Both the HSE and the FSA will be considering the recommendations that will be made to the Government by the Hampton Review of regulatory services that will be published in Spring 2005. The Review is covered in more detail on page 12.

### **Quality standards**

Fitness for Purpose is not primarily concerned with the level of facilities provided by

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accommodation providers, or by standards of service. It is about meeting a number of basic requirements. Quality standards have for many years been assessed through the National Quality Assurance Schemes administered by VisitBritain, VisitScotland, the Welsh Tourist Board, the AA, and the RAC.

One of the aims for Fitness for Purpose is to get providers interested in the idea of quality grading as well as achieving minimum standards.

The London Borough of Greenwich for example identified 10 accommodation providers to progress up to quality assurance scheme standards through Fitness for Purpose targeting, which would provide additional bed space in the borough.

VisitBritain published the *Britain Quality Review* in May 2004. As well as announcing in-principle agreement by the five grading organisations for common standards, the Review recommended that a new “bridging point” should be introduced to provide a new bottom rung to the standards ladder, and a stepping-stone to a One Star Standard. The proposed Entry Level Standard

would be available to those who have successfully completed the Fitness for Purpose self-assessment and basic regulatory compliance programme.

VisitBritain, the other grading organisations, and other interested bodies are now discussing the detail of the proposed Entry Level Standard. It is expected that a worked-up scheme, and proposals for fully involving local authorities, will follow later in 2005.

## Listening to our customers – handling complaints

No one wants to get a letter like this:

I was really looking forward to my stay as I have many happy memories of good service in the past. I was given my key and arrived on the sixth floor and the smell on leaving the lift was disgusting, it really stuck in one's throat. It could have been the smell of toilets, I was not sure. When I went in I found that the lock on the door was not working, I could not lock myself in. In fact the whole lock nearly came off the door. The furniture was badly stained and so was the bedding.

Letter to DCMS Minister about a hotel in London

The former English Tourist Council summarised complaints received by the 10 regional tourist boards between 3 April 2000 and 31 March 2001. A total of 5,114 complaints were received over a 12-month period and the majority (85.4%) of these are summarised in the table below (the remaining

14.6% were divided up between a further 18 different categories). Statistics collected by the Office of Fair Trading on consumer complaints ([www.oft.gov.uk](http://www.oft.gov.uk)) concerning entertainment, catering and accommodation suggest that the number may be similar today, with over 6,500 in the period January to December 2003.



There were 327.6 million overnight stays by UK and overseas residents in 2001, and complaints therefore represent only a small proportion of what would have been an enjoyable experience for most people on their holidays. But a bad service is likely to put people off using the same facilities

again and, at worst, persuade people to spend their holidays away from the UK. Local accommodation providers could potentially stand to lose up to £55 per night of income from a returning guest and the local economy £169 from a return trip<sup>5</sup>.

#### English Tourism Council analysis of complaints 3 April 2000 – 31 March 2001

	Number of complaints	% of total complaints
Health and safety	343	6.7
Cleanliness	1245	25
Facilities	942	18.4
Service	1205	23.4
Misrepresentation	330	6.5
Food	275	5.4

<sup>5</sup> Based on 2003 average spend (source: UKTS)

Tourism Officers in local authorities and other accreditation providers are the first people who are likely to receive complaints about accommodation they have listed or assessed. In the rare cases where something has gone wrong, investigation and feedback to the complainant can limit any perception that standards are generally poor in an area or accommodation over-rated.

It is in no-one's interest to ignore complaints or fail to respond to them. All this will do is to hold down standards and act as a disincentive for tourists to come to an area again.

How local authorities handle people and their complaints, and how they learn from the experience, says a lot about their organisation. Taking action in response to a complaint is the best way of mitigating the effect of the cause of the complaint. So handling complaints properly is an important part of good customer care.

It shows that local authorities:

- Listen to their customers' views; and
- Are continually trying to improve their service.

You will need to decide what action is appropriate to deal with a complaint. How you deal with complaints will depend on the nature of the complaint and whether it relates to a breach of legal requirements or some other failing. Where a complaint refers to a statutory requirement e.g. that an accommodation provider is not complying with fire safety regulations, then the appropriate enforcement department or agency should deal with the matter.

Enabling accommodation providers to take action in response to comments and complaints is to enable them to improve their service. Where you receive complaints about service standards you might, for example, forward the substance of the complaint to the accommodation provider and ask them to respond; if appropriate you might also tell the complainant that you have done so and that you, or the accommodation provider, will let them know the outcome.

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If the person making the complaint has sent information to you in confidence, you may need to check that the person's details or the substance of their complaint can be divulged. Serious or repeated complaints may need further action; in some cases it may be appropriate to remove the accommodation provider from promotional material or marketing, having given due notice and reasons and allowed the provider to respond.

### **Legal considerations**

Complaints are an important source of information and can help you target your resources at those accommodation providers giving rise to complaints and allegations of breaches of trading standards or health and safety legislation. It is important therefore that this information is passed to the department or agency responsible for dealing with the matter.

In doing this you will, however, need to take into account laws that relate to the sharing of information. The Data Protection Act 1998, The Human Rights Act 1998 and other legislation impose restrictions on what and how

information may be shared between authorities, agencies and other regulators.

If you pass on a complaint, you will also need to take account of the law of confidence and the law of defamation.

## Getting started

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Fitness for Purpose will require a step change in the way local authorities handle inspection processes, with a more “joined-up” approach between enforcement and tourism divisions. It will require new working practices, staff commitment and resources. It will also require effective communication with businesses to explain the benefits and to ensure their co-operation.

### Political support

Because Fitness for Purpose requires a very different approach in terms of joined-up working and the likelihood of publicity when action is taken against traders with poor standards, all of the pilot schemes felt it important to enlist the support of an elected member champion. This was usually the portfolio holder for regeneration and tourism. Generally, local councillors were very supportive of the aims and objectives of the project.

### Planning

The first step is to decide exactly what you want to achieve. Circumstances will vary and a problem in one area may be very different to that in another. Solutions are therefore likely to be different too. This guidance is not therefore prescriptive and local authorities may have other solutions, but it is based on the experiences of the pilot projects and what they found most useful.

It is important therefore to scope out what needs to be achieved. Whatever you decide to do must however be based on the basic principles underlining Fitness for Purpose:



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- To drive up standards in tourism accommodation to ensure that they meet the minimum legal requirements for health and safety, fire and food safety and trading standards;
  - To ensure “smarter working” between tourism and enforcement departments;
  - To engage effectively with local accommodation providers, including SMEs, about the basic requirements to meet the minimum legal standards in order to be fit for purpose.

A properly constituted project team and project plan is therefore essential. An input will be required from all the relevant departments involved – Tourism, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, representatives from the Fire Service and possibly others.

### **Joint working**

All the pilot projects reported benefits in tourism and enforcement officers working together through better sharing of information. Effective communication is an essential ingredient to ensuring that the project is successful and formal links need to be established between tourism and enforcement activities. This might be achieved by drawing up a Memorandum of Understanding with key stakeholders e.g. tourism, environmental health and fire brigade officers.

Either the tourism or enforcement departments can drive Fitness for Purpose, but a decision should be taken at the start of the project about who will take overall responsibility to establish exactly who should do what in the process.

### **Shared information**

The development of an integrated database of accommodation providers can help you to work smarter and engage in more efficient and effective intelligence-led activity. It can also support efforts to promote economic development through greater opportunities to assist businesses in raising and improving standards.

Devising shared databases is likely to be quite resource intensive and time consuming, and they need to be compatible between users to optimise their overall effectiveness. Databases should only contain substantiated factual data and any accommodation providers registered with a local authority should be made aware that their details will be in the database and of the uses to which the database will be put.

“Fitness for Purpose reduces bureaucracy and provides a more positive approach. The holistic and educative approach of the project was a welcome change from the traditional approach to enforcement”

Blackpool Borough Council

“A lot of work was done comparing lists from a wide variety of sources, both internal to the Council and from external agencies. A composite list was drawn up and many records updated. There were significant changes in ownership, and some premises had closed for refurbishment or ceased trading, whilst other premises had opened for business following major refurbishments. In most cases the enforcement services were unaware of these changes”

London Borough of Camden

“Improved working between tourism and enforcement officers has resulted in a vastly improved database of accommodation in the area for all to work with”

Canterbury City Council.

West Sussex County Council used their database of tourism businesses to record basic details of breaches of statutory requirements, publicise courses for businesses and relay information and advice to the trade. It also contained details of inspected and non-inspected accommodation. This provided an opportunity to support the work of tourism officers and regulators to promote accredited traders and provide them with advice and assistance.

## The Enforcement Programme

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Independent, uncoordinated inspections by a number of statutory bodies can be very confusing and time consuming for businesses. In any one year a hotel could, for example, be subject to separate inspections for food safety, health and safety, licensing, fire safety and trading standards. Inspections that are a mixture of advice and enforcement can also sometimes lead to confusion in businesses over what needs to be done legally and what is best practice.

It should be noted however that Fitness for Purpose **is not a soft option**. There will be cases where firm enforcement action is appropriate and necessary and if operators fail to cooperate with

any scheme taken forward under this initiative then reversion to the usual programme of inspection by enforcement departments may be necessary.

### Setting up coordinated food, health and safety, fire and trading standards inspections

Joined-up, multi-disciplinary working is the cornerstone of Fitness for Purpose, and many of the achievements of the pilots flowed directly from this.

It is important that a person be designated to take forward and control the process. This might be achieved by organising Environmental Health teams so that one designated adviser has responsibility for coordinating all inspections for a single premises, including those for fire safety and trading standards issues. The designated adviser could then rationalise, and hopefully reduce, the paperwork involved. This will ensure as far as possible an holistic approach to assessing the overall Fitness for Purpose approach for each premises and that businesses are not inundated with inspections in a short space of time. Bear in



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mind though that there is a danger in overloading small business proprietors with a large amount of information in one visit if too many inspections are rolled up together.

Regular meetings with the Tourism Officer should take place to identify businesses that are known to be advertising or trading but have not yet been inspected and to exchange information about failing businesses in order to formulate a strategy to address any failings identified in non-compliant businesses.

“The key benefits (from the project) were the efficient use of resources; a composite service-led initiative; provision of service that focuses on the actual needs of a business and a true risk based approach to enforcement”

London Borough of Camden

“The key benefits were visits made to premises which would not otherwise have been programmed, information sharing between tourism and regulatory departments and a business friendly approach”

London Borough of Greenwich

The pilots used a variety of methods to enable them to take forward their inspections. Brief details are given below. Full details can be found in *Fitness For Purpose: Lessons From Local Authorities’ Pilot Studies*, which can be found on the LGA website [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk).

**Blackpool Borough Council** used **consultants** with a good knowledge of local hotels and food outlets and a wide knowledge of environmental health to carry out their site visits. Property owners completed a self-assessment with the help of the consultant who would agree an action plan and priority for each. Specific appointments were made which meant that time could be spent on issues important to the proprietor and new issues highlighted by the consultant. One-to-one interviews meant that the advice was very specific and properly understood and was therefore likely to be implemented. The proprietors were able to better understand the importance of the tasks identified and were able to plan and prioritise actions with the help of supporting documentation.

**Canterbury City Council and Bournemouth Borough Council** used **existing resources** of their Environmental Health Officer. At Canterbury the EHO visited the target premises and inspected for basic compliance with health and safety and food safety, and also delivered guidance, if agreed, on fire safety and trading standards matters. Information was given to proprietors in an information pack which contained leaflets and booklets provided by the relevant departments and advice on how to use it. Proprietors were informed by letter of areas of non-conformity, which was followed up one month later with a self-assessment form.

**Bournemouth Borough Council** provided **extra site visits** as a result of their project and those not meeting the required standards were given guidance. If standards did not improve then accommodation was withdrawn from tourism marketing and endorsement.

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**West Sussex County Council** provided a two-pronged approach to their project. **Training courses were provided for accommodation providers** over two half-day sessions to promote best practice and help operators understand their legal obligations to safeguard the safety of their guests and to ensure fair treatment. The various regulatory departments ran the courses, directed

mainly at SMEs. During the pilot a dedicated officer also carried out **advisory visits** to businesses that had not been previously inspected. They provided information on how to comply with legislation and encouraged them to attend training courses. Any major non-compliance identified during the visit was communicated to the appropriate enforcement department.

The use of existing personnel does however tend to result in higher workloads for those engaged in the work. Those councils that used this method considered that it would have been better had dedicated staff been used wherever necessary for development and enforcement of the scheme.

### **Who to target?**

This will largely depend on local circumstances and perceived areas where problems might exist. Most of the pilots used a risk-based approach to the properties that were inspected. Blackpool

Borough Council targeted an area with a high density of hotels, mostly small businesses with no staff. The London Borough of Greenwich concentrated on public houses that provided accommodation, and the West Sussex County Council pilot on small accommodation providers, especially those not registered to NQAS standards through the RAC, AA or VisitBritain.

Further details about risk assessment can be found on page 20.

## Getting alongside businesses

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### Communication

The way that you handle communication with local businesses will ultimately determine how successful your project will be. You will need to explain to them what the minimum legal standards are to ensure that they are met, but this need not be heavy-handed and indeed most of the pilot projects adopted an advisory approach with follow-up visits to check on progress. Businesses involved in the pilot schemes seem to have responded well to this, with real and tangible improvements.



Many businesses, especially those of small and medium size, will be glad of help and support – which is something that the current system of unannounced inspections does not always achieve. That should effectively improve standards, improve relationships and build up trust with the local authority departments.

Remember though that businesses will be looking to see what they might gain from participating willingly with your project. If they think it can improve their business prospects by increased trade, or reduce their overheads by fewer inspections, you are likely to win them over. Bear this in mind when organising any seminars or training sessions otherwise your turnout may be low. You may also need to take account of busy times for businesses (see Blackpool case study on page 36).

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“I wish I had this system years ago. It would have made my business much easier to run. It offers excellent protection not only from statutory action but, more importantly, from civil claims”.

A Blackpool hotelier

“It was better than I thought. It made me aware of potential problem areas that I hadn’t thought of before”.

A Blackpool B&B

The pilot projects used a number of approaches.

The London Borough of Camden visited hoteliers at the beginning of the project to confirm details and introduce the initiative and then followed this up with letters setting out the benefits of Fitness for Purpose and an invitation to a seminar.

A further letter and advice note was then sent about a compliance audit. Hoteliers who had not responded to the seminar were followed up.

External consultants saw targeted hoteliers, identified areas of non-compliance and then left action lists with them. Revisits were made, but hoteliers were given longer to comply than they would have done under the normal inspection regime. Additional support was available if it was required. Non-compliant issues were prioritised and hoteliers received signposting to other agencies that could supply them additional support to help them achieve compliance. Hoteliers liked the approach.

Details of Blackpool’s approach have been mentioned in the section on enforcement. They contacted representatives of local trade associations to discuss the concepts of the project and they involved them when they launched the project. One lesson from their pilot was recognition that the training that they offered could have been more sensitive to the time restrictions of the hotel trade. Participants told them that major works and training were most conveniently carried out during the winter period and that it would be useful if enforcement requirements and local training reflected this. If training and meetings were to take place during the busy season between Easter and October, this should avoid breakfast and evening meal times i.e. take place between 11am and 3pm.

Reference has already been made to West Sussex’s training programme. It was made possible through partnership working between the county and district councils in the development of courses run by their regulators. The courses were organised by a local college using ESF “Quality Edge” programme funding.

Courses were run for two half days and included:

- Trading standards criminal law, civil law and contracts;
- Basic food hygiene and health and safety;
- Fire safety requirements including risk assessment.

They also gave practical advice to B&B owners on matters such as writing a brochure, taking deposits, simple ways to avoid “no shows”, use of credit cards, setting up a cancellations policy, the law relating to discrimination, and health and safety obligations.

Information packs were given to participants and the courses were conducted in a relaxed environment that allowed for questions. A course was also run for TIC staff and Tourism Officers and a course arranged at the end of the pilot for the trade. Feedback about the courses and the approach was very positive.

“We consider that the pilot was very successful. The courses were well supported, mainly by small operators, and the conference held in February attracted more than 80 delegates, which included a creditable number of hotel managers and owners. The advice pack was well received”.

West Sussex Tourism

“The “seconded” TSO provided useful one-to-one advice to many of the businesses visited. He also liaised successfully with the regional Tourist Board and affected the removal of a few misleading signs that the Tourist Board had been trying to get removed for a long while!”

West Sussex Tourism

## Self-assessment

Self-assessment by compliant businesses is an important tool and, as can be seen from the examples above, has been extensively used by the pilot projects. Examples vary. Some have taken the form of short leaflets with pointers to activities that businesses should take into account and others have taken the form of self-completion questionnaires.

A series of leaflets is enclosed with this toolkit that set out a number of important standards that businesses should be able to meet to ensure minimum legal standards in food safety and hygiene, health and safety, fire safety and trading standards. These can be given to businesses to complete and you will be able to reproduce them as necessary. The advice they contain can provide a good solid first step for businesses in complying with their legal responsibilities. Local authorities can of course add their own additional questions if they wish.



**The leaflets are not however intended as a comprehensive guide to the law. They are intended to make businesses review various areas of their business and to consider where practice might be improved. They do not replace the need for businesses to meet all the requirements of the law, whether mentioned in the guides or not. The guides will be updated regularly and we will post amendments on our website at [www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk), but the law may change more quickly than the guides can be updated and businesses should be advised to refer to appropriate guidance or seek specialist advice to ensure compliance.**

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These leaflets are not the only self-assessment tools that have been produced and many local authorities and agencies have produced their own guides to the law.

- The Planning and Regulatory Services Online (PARSOL) ([www.parsol.gov.uk](http://www.parsol.gov.uk)) have an e-based self-assessment package that can be used;
- Three of the pilot projects, West Sussex County Council, Blackpool Borough Council and the London Borough of Greenwich have produced self-assessment questionnaires and advice for local businesses. They would be happy to give you advice;
- Business Link ([www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)) gives practical help and advice for businesses on various aspects of the law and also has an e-based self-assessment package;
- VisitBritain has produced the “Pink Booklet” which is a practical guide to legislation for accommodation providers. It also provides a list of relevant legislation.

Larger accommodation providers should already be assessing risks, but some may be interested in Fitness for Purpose. Their needs are likely to be quite different from SMEs and you will need to tailor any self-assessment material accordingly.

## Monitoring and feedback

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### Monitoring

To enable you to assess the effectiveness of your project, you should build in some evaluation techniques. This might revolve around data analysis and evaluation.

Blackpool Borough Council found it useful to compare their approach with traditional inspection methods so that future enforcement agency activities could be planned with greater efficiency. Full details of this statistical analysis can be found in *Fitness for Purpose: Lessons from Local Authorities' Pilot Studies* on the LGA website [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

### Evaluation

It is important to know if the programme that you have organised has been successful or needs to be refined. West Sussex sent out a questionnaire asking business to rate how easy the pack was to understand, if it was relevant to their needs and if it was detailed enough on a rating of 1 – 5. Canterbury and West Sussex sent out an evaluation form asking whether their audit visit and seminars were useful. Eighty-one per cent of respondents to Canterbury's feedback form said the information they had received was useful or very useful.

### Feedback

Don't forget to publicise your successes. This can build confidence in your programme with businesses and can show visitors how effective you are in raising standards in your area and in dealing with complaints.

## Our support for you

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We want to give you continued support as you take forward your schemes.

- We will put *Fitness for Purpose – Quality Counts* on the agenda on LGA's Tourism Forum. This will give you an opportunity to discuss progress or raise concerns.
- The following is on the DCMS website at **[www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)**:
  - This guidance and our self-assessment leaflets. You will find this on the tourism page;
  - A list of all those local authorities that are running a Fitness for Purpose scheme. You will need to let us know.

- Information about who to complain to about poor standards and a link to the A-Z of local councils so that people can easily find someone to write to. We will forward on any complaints we receive.
- An archive of letters and forms etc from those councils who participated in the Fitness for Purpose pilot projects that you can search and download.

We can also include local news on the success of your schemes. You will need to let us have details.

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The pilot schemes have a wealth of experience about how they ran their schemes, the successes and problems and how they overcame them and would be pleased to talk to you. The contacts are:

Blackpool Borough Council	Ian Almond	01253 478326 ian.almond@blackpool.gov.uk
Bournemouth Borough Council	Mark Smith	01202 451717 mark.smith@bournemouth.gov.uk
London Borough of Camden	Dipti Patel	Dipti.patel@camden.gov.uk
Canterbury City Council	Sandra Jones	01227 862218 sandra.jones@canterbury.gov.uk
London Borough of Greenwich	Rosa D'Alessandro	020 8921 6282 rosa.dalessandro@greenwich.gov.uk
West Sussex County Council	Pam Foden	01903 839839 pam.foden@wsep.org.uk
	Ray Nicholson	01903 839716 ray.nicholson@westsussex.gov.uk

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The Best Practice Forum ([www.bestpracticeforum.org](http://www.bestpracticeforum.org)) encourages businesses in the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism industry to introduce new ideas and innovation by adopting or adapting best practice – so raising their efficiency, productivity and competitiveness to world-class levels. The work of the Forum is managed by Hospitality and Leisure Manpower, the training and business improvement consultancy. Their contact number is **020 8977 4419** or email **ifap@halm.co.uk**

Any enquiries relating to this document or information for the DCMS website should be mailed to **enquiries@culture.gov.uk**



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