Thousands more firms to benefit from enterprise-friendly regulation scheme

Friday 26 April, 2013

Business and Energy Minister Michael Fallon has announced that the Primary Authority scheme will be extended to enable thousands more businesses to benefit from more consistent enforcement of regulation, and clearer advice on how to comply.

The measures were approved by Parliament yesterday as part of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act, a package of measures to make life easier for business.

From October 1st 2013, members of trade associations such as the British Frozen Food Federation or franchises such as Pizza Hut will be able to form Primary Authority partnerships with local authorities. Through these partnerships, their members will receive assured regulatory advice and guidance from one place - and all local authorities will be required to ensure their enforcement activities are consistent with this advice.

Improving the consistency of local authority enforcement in this way will reduce the pointless bureaucracy that acts as a barrier to growth, particularly for small firms.

Business and Energy Minister Michael Fallon said:

The extension of Primary Authority will put the needs of business at the heart of local regulation, opening up the benefits of assured advice to thousands of small companies.

This will particularly benefit those small operations, with perhaps just a handful of employees, who suffer the most when local regulation is delivered inconsistently. Local authorities will now be able to save these shops and businesses time and money by giving them the advice and support they need to comply with the law.

The Primary Authority scheme was set up in 2009 to support local economic growth by ensuring businesses benefit from consistent advice, in areas including trading standards and environmental health. Prior to the introduction of the extension announced today, only firms that trade across local authority boundaries can participate in the scheme. There are currently 2,416 Primary Authority Partnerships covering 100 local authorities, with 743 businesses benefiting.

The Better Regulation Delivery Office, which administers the scheme, is developing additional training courses and materials to assist local authorities when dealing with trade associations and similar groups.

Among the trade organisations anticipating advantages for their members is the National Federation of Meat & Food Traders, which has 13,000 members.

Chief Executive Roger Kelsey said:

As an organisation we deal with many instances where our members have experienced inconsistency in advice between local authorities.

The extension of Primary Authority will help us put some consistency in place for our members who include around 1,000 craft butchers, who are very skilled practically but not necessarily comfortable dealing with paperwork.

The federation’s intended Primary Authority is Horsham District Council.

Principal Environmental Health Officer Paul Hobbs said:

We see significant benefits in supporting the business community; we have a corporate approach of enabling business. There are also benefits for the council in raising its profile and adding variety to the routine work done by our officers.

Brian Young, Director General of the British Frozen Food Federation (BFFF), said:

We welcome the extension to the Primary Authority scheme. It will significantly reduce duplication of

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effort for both businesses and local authorities, whilst ensuring improved levels of consistent compliance and consumer protection.

The Primary Authorities with whom BFFF members will partner will have expertise in our sector. An on-going relationship with them will mean that businesses have access to effective practical advice with respect to compliance and enforcement.

Allowing trade association members to become Primary Authority partners is significant. It will allow more businesses to benefit from the relationship – especially SMEs who may not otherwise have been able to form a Primary Authority agreement with a local authority. The involvement of trade associations will encourage co-operative sharing of best practice which will help to raise standards across the whole industry.

James Montgomery, Chairman of the Specialist Cheesemakers Association, said:

We have been proactive in helping a number of enforcement officers get a better understanding of cheese making. Primary Authority is a natural way of building on this relationship and ensuring that our members have the best advice and help in making a good safe product.

Mark Oliver, Trading Standards Lead Officer, Better Business Team, Cambridgeshire Trading Standards, said:

From both a service and professional standpoint we can see huge benefits to both regulators and businesses in actively supporting these working partnerships. In receiving assured advice, businesses have greater confidence and certainty when making decisions in complex areas of trading law.

The extension of the scheme to organisations with a shared approach to compliance now enables us to share these benefits with many more businesses and promote good practice across trade sectors. The net effect of this not only helps business but also consumers and the wider economy.

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