



High Peak Borough Council

working for our community

Environmental Health Service

Enforcement Policy Statement

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICE - ENFORCEMENT POLICY STATEMENT

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Introduction

1.1 This statement outlines the enforcement policy of the Environmental Health Service of High Peak Borough Council.

1.2 Wherever possible and appropriate, officers will seek to find solutions which are arrived at by agreement and co-operation.

Officers are required to regulate activities across a wide range of businesses and to have professional dealings with many types of individual. Full regard will be had to the different abilities which may be encountered, and to the role which education and help can play in achieving compliance.

1.3 Nevertheless, the aim behind much of the Service's effort is the protection of persons at work, the general public and environment from disadvantage, damage or harm due to failure to comply with safeguards provided for in law. Arising from this, there will be circumstances in which enforcement is sometimes unavoidable and the Council must use its full legal powers, including prosecution, where necessary.

1.4 There are two distinct facets to enforcement, which may be taken to mean either of the following:-

- a) **Enforcement for Compliance** This ensures that the Council has programmes in place for monitoring compliance by businesses and individuals with the various legislation affecting them. For example, there will be inspection programmes in place for food premises, workplaces and authorised processes.

Many such programmes are based upon an assessment of the risk posed by the activity and the resulting consequences of it not being conducted in accordance with the prescribed statutory standards. Others require inspections at pre-determined intervals, or set annual targets for the number of inspection to be made.

Because of the diversity of requirements under the different legislation and guidance, it is not practicable in this document to be prescriptive about the ways in which inspection programmes are organised and monitored.

However, each Team has in place the means to arrange programmes or visits which will satisfy the needs of their particular legislation **and** the mechanism for monitoring.

- b) **Enforcement for Non Compliance** In this aspect of enforcement, the options available for taking action against businesses or individual for ignoring or otherwise failing to comply with their legal obligations are detailed.

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For the purposes of this Policy, enforcement for non-compliance includes the following levels of action, which can be taken:-

- Prosecution
- Formal Cautions
- The service of Notices, included 'Minded to Take Action' where applicable
- Works in Default, including seizure of items
- Revocation (of Licenses, Authorisations or Permits)
- Written warnings (sometimes referred as informal Notices)
- Seizure
- Revisit to Premises
- Advice
- No Action

The principles outlined in the Enforcement concordat (the Government's own enforcement Guidelines) and paragraphs 3.1 to 4.7, below, will be applied to all such actions.

1.5 Enforcement action may be taken as a result of an incident, a complaint, an inspection or information received.

2.0 Legal Provisions

2.1 Apart from the specific laws relating to the technical aspects of environmental health work, there are a number of other legal or quasi-legal provisions relating to or having a bearing on enforcement as a whole.

These include:-

- The Enforcement Concordat
- The Code for Crown Prosecutors
- Police and Criminal Evidence Act
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act
- Human Rights Act
- Freedom of Information Act
- Data Protection Act
- Environmental Information Regulations
- Local Government Acts
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act
- Codes of Practice/Guidance

but this is not an exclusive list.

2.2 Many of the above contain little more than a passing reference to the needs of enforcement whereas some, such as Police and Criminal Evidence Act and others, are fundamental.

Officers will comply with all of the enforcement provisions of the above where they are relevant to a particular case, and the Service will ensure that systems are in place to ensure that officers are kept updated in changes to the legislation.

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- 2.3 Whenever possible, the Council will work in partnership with other agencies to achieve common goals on matters of mutual concern.

These agencies will include, for example, the Environment Agency, the Strategic Health Authorities, the Primary Care Trusts, the Health and Safety Executive, the Food Standards Agency, Derbyshire County Council, the Police and many others, as may be appropriate.

Where an enforcement matter affects a wide geographical area beyond the Borough's boundaries, or involves enforcement by one or more other local authorities or organisations, all relevant authorities and organisations will be informed of the matter as soon as possible and all enforcement activity co-ordinated with them.

3.0 Specific Considerations

- 3.1 Our enforcement policy is based on openness, transparency and proportionality. Where it is necessary, enforcement will be undertaken without fear or favour and without consideration of the race, ethnic background, religion, social status, colour, sex or sexual orientation of any persons involved.
- 3.2 If any person exerts undue or improper pressure in an attempt to influence a decision concerning enforcement, it will be reported to the Service Head without delay.
- 3.3 As a general rule and where there may be options, the level of enforcement contemplated will be the minimum at which a satisfactory solution is thought to be achievable.

4.0 The Enforcement Concordat

- 4.1 The principles outlined in paragraphs 4.2 to 4.7, below, will be followed at all times. These are derived from the Government's Enforcement Concordat, to which the Council has signed up and is fully committed to upholding.

4.2 Procedures

Advice from officers will be clear and simple and will normally be confirmed in writing, explaining why any work or actions may be necessary and stating the timescale for progress and completion. A clear distinction will be made between legal requirements and best or desirable practice.

Before formal action is taken, the opportunity may be provided to discuss the circumstances of the case and, if possible, resolve points of difference **unless** immediate action is required (for example where there is a serious risk to health and safety, food safety, environmental protection or to prevent evidence from being destroyed).

In circumstances where immediate action is necessary, an explanation of why such action was required will be given at the time or, if this is not practical, within **5 working days**.

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Where there are rights of appeal against specific actions, advice on the mechanism to be followed will be given in writing. Wherever possible, this will be included with the enforcement notice or other documentation.

4.3 Transparency

Information and advice will be published in plain language concerning the legislation which the Council is applying. Officers will be open about the work required, including any financial costs in complying, and consultation will take place as appropriate. Discussion will take place concerning general enforcement issues, specific compliance failure or problems with anyone who is experiencing difficulties.

4.4 Helpfulness

Officers will provide a courteous and efficient enforcement service and individual officers will identify themselves by name.

A contact telephone number and an e-mail address will be provided for on-going discussions. Businesses and individuals will be actively encouraged to seek advice and information relating to the Service's enforcement role.

4.5 Complaints

If business operators or members of the public indicate that they wish to complain about any aspect of enforcement work, officers will ensure that the mechanism for doing so is clearly explained

4.6 Proportionality

Costs of compliance are to be minimised to ensure that any actions required by the Council are proportional to the risks involved.

Where the law allows, officers will take account of the circumstances of a case and the attitude of the operator when considering the level of enforcement action.

4.7 Consistency

Consistency means taking a similar approach in similar circumstances to achieve similar ends. The aim is to achieve consistency in the advice given, the response to incidents and the ways in which statutory powers are used.

Consistency does not mean simple uniformity and officers will need to take account of many variables such as the scale of the risk, the attitude and actions of those involved and any history of compliance, whether positive or negative.

Decisions on enforcement action are a matter of professional judgement and officers will frequently be required to use discretion. Efforts will continue in order to develop arrangements for promoting consistency, including effective arrangements for liaison with neighbouring Authorities and other enforcement agencies.

5.0 Specific Enforcement Actions

The procedures or guidance to be followed when undertaking specific types of non-compliance enforcement are contained in the following paragraphs:

Prosecution:	5.1 – 5.1.4
Formal cautions:	5.2 – 5.2.4
Notices:	5.3 – 5.3.4
Works in default:	5.4 – 5.4.3
Revocation:	5.5 – 5.5.5
Written warnings:	5.6 – 5.6.3

5.1 Prosecution

5.1.1 Where statutory powers to prosecute exist, the decision to do so is not taken lightly.

Each case is unique and will be processed according to its own merits. There is no suggestion that prosecution will automatically follow the discovery of an alleged offence.

In particular, alternative actions to prosecution which are outlined in paragraphs 5.1.3, below, will be considered in all cases and at every stage.

5.1.2 The decision as to whether to prosecute or not will be constantly reviewed and, if necessary, changed up until such time as an irrevocable step (e.g. accepting a Formal Caution as an alternative) is made.

5.1.3 The following steps will be considered as alternatives to prosecution, where applicable, as part of the decision making process. Each must be examined, however, in light of public interest (see paragraph 5.1.4b below):-

- Formal Caution
- Works in Default
- Written Warning

5.1.4 Before a decision to prosecute is taken, the case must satisfy, in general terms, the following tests:-

a) Evidential Test

There must be sufficient good quality evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction against each defendant and on each charge, before prosecution is authorised.

This is an objective test and means that a jury or bench of Magistrates, properly directed in accordance with the law, is more likely than not to convict each defendant on each charge.

Each prospective prosecution is scrutinised throughout the Line Management chain before the papers are sent to the Council's Legal and Democratic Service, in

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accordance with procedures. This is so that officers who are not directly involved in the preparation of the case can test the evidence.

The following will be borne in mind by case officers throughout the investigation:-

- The validity and relevance of any tape-recorded interviews.
- The continuity of evidence.
- The quality of any notes and records kept during the investigation.
- The level of compliance with the Enforcement Concordat, all legislation having a bearing on enforcement practice, and internal Procedures.

If there have been substantive departures from accepted practice on any of the above this will be made known to line management and Legal Officers, so that decisions on whether or not to proceed can be properly informed.

Officers may obtain evidence from many different sources throughout an investigation. Unused evidence will be disclosed in accordance with the requirements of the Criminal Procedure and Investigation Act 1996.

In considering the evidence, the following will be addressed:-

- Any factors, which might reduce the reliability of an admission made during a taped interview such as, for example, a defendant's age, or lack of understanding.
- Any factors which might have a bearing on the reliability of any witness.

If, after balancing the above, it is concluded that there is not a realistic prospect of conviction, the case will not proceed to prosecution.

One of the alternatives listed in paragraph 5.1.3 above may still be used if appropriate.

b) Public Interest Test

A number of factors will determine whether or not a particular prosecution is in the public interest and a balance in favour or against will be made between these factors, any of which might be present.

Those factors, which will tend towards prosecution include positive answers to the following, which is not an exhaustive list:-

- number of people affected by the offence;
- degree to which people are/were affected (seriousness of the offence);
- evidence that the offence was committed deliberately or maliciously;
- evidence that the defendant intimidated or harassed those affected;
- evidence of previous or on-going offences of a similar type;
- likelihood of repeated offence, which may be deterred by prosecution;
- the defendant was in a position of authority;
- a lack of co-operation on the part of the defendant; and/or,
- the offence is widespread, at least in the general area in which it was committed.

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Factors which might argue **against** a prosecution will include:-

- Court is likely to impose a very small penalty on conviction;
- the offence appears to have been the result of a genuine misunderstanding or mistake;
- the harm done was minor and was the result of a single incident, particularly if it was caused by a misjudgement;
- a willingness on the part of the defendant to co-operate and to ensure that no future offences of a similar nature are committed;
- long delay between offence and trial, unless the offence is serious, the defendant has caused the delay, at least in part, the offence has only recently come to light, or the complexity of the investigation results in unavoidable delays;
- the defendant is elderly, in poor health or confused (unless there is a real possibility that the offence will be repeated);
- the defendant has, so far as possible, put right the harm caused by the offence;
- a key witness has refused to testify or to provide a Witness Statement or, if they are the only victim, they have strongly indicated opposition to a prosecution.

5.2 Formal Cautions

5.2.1 Where it is felt that prosecution may not be appropriate, the use of the Formal Caution may be considered. In all such cases, the Home Office Guidance on the use of Formal Cautions will be closely followed where it applies to legislation enforced by Environmental Health.

5.2.2 Typically, the reason for choosing the option will be that the case does not fully meet the **Public Interest Test** described in paragraph 5.1.4b, above. It may be, for example, that the offence did not result in real harm to any person, or that the person responsible co-operated fully in limiting the effects of the offence.

5.2.3 A Formal Caution will **never** be used simply because the evidence in a case is not robust enough to give a reasonable prospect of success in prosecution.

Indeed, if a Formal Caution is offered and refused, the most likely alternative enforcement action would be prosecution, so the evidence must always be sufficient before a Formal Caution is considered.

5.2.4 Other factors governing the use of a Formal Caution include:-

- a) Line Management is informed before a Formal Caution is offered.
- b) If a Formal Caution is issued it remains active and relevant until its statutory expiry date, which is stipulated by legislation. No more than **one** Formal Caution will be issued to the same business or person for a similar offence within that period. If a further, similar offence is committed before the expiry of the Formal Caution, then prosecution will normally be taken in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

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- c) Unless the circumstances are wholly exceptional, details of any outstanding Formal Caution will be placed before the Court in any prosecution taken before the expiry date of the Formal Caution.
- d) The suspect will be given the opportunity, if (s)he so wishes, of viewing all of the evidence gathered in the case, including any which may weaken or undermine the prosecution. This is to enable them, and/or their legal advisor, to assess the evidence, so that the decision whether to accept the Caution or not can be an informed one.
- e) If accepted, the Caution will be fully recorded and a copy of the documentation held on a Register of Formal Cautions.

5.3 Notices

5.3.1 The service of statutory Notices is a routine part of the work of Environmental Health and it is not appropriate to deal with the format and wording of Notices within a document such as this. However, there are some points of commonality affecting all types of Notices, which are detailed in paragraphs 5.3.2 to 5.3.4.

5.3.2 Peer Review

There are occasions when speed of service is of the essence and in such cases peer review may not be practicable. Wherever possible, the use of standardised Notices will be used when peer review is not possible, to ensure the greatest level of uniformity of approach.

When peer review is possible, and this should be in the majority of cases, each Notice should be scrutinised by a member of the Team unconnected with the case.

5.3.3 Associated Documentation

Under normal circumstances, the following information will accompany a formal Notice:-

- A covering letter, setting out the background to the Notice and designating a case officer or other point of contact
- A copy of the relevant Appeal provisions
- A separate Schedule of Works, where appropriate
- Any other information, which may help the person served to understand and comply with the terms of the Notice.

5.3.4 Method of Service

The method of service of a formal notice may be specified in individual legislation and, in such cases, the method of service will be followed exactly.

Where there is no prescribed method, any of the following may be used:-

a) *Hand Delivery*

The Notice will be delivered to the person(s) identified as being responsible. Where this method is used, the date, time, place and other relevant details will be endorsed on the notice.

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b) Recorded Delivery

The Notice is sent by first class, recorded delivery post.

c) Normal post

Where normal post is used, a copy will be endorsed giving details of the contents of the envelope, the date, time and place of posting, and the address to which sent.

d) Left at Scene

The Notice may be left at the scene, i.e. a premises or vehicle. A copy of the notice will be endorsed giving details of the service method.

5.4 Works in Default (WiD)

5.4.1 Works in Default refers to the powers given to the Council under specified legislation to undertake works required in a Notice that has not been complied with in the time permitted. A charge is normally made for carrying out such work, which the person(s) named on the Notice, would be required to pay.

5.4.2 The approval of line management will be sought before arrangements are made to carry out works in default. At the time that approval is sought, the case officer will provide full details of the perceived need to undertake the work, and be prepared to discuss alternatives.

5.4.3 There are two distinct types of WiD, these being:-

- a) *Seizure* of equipment causing a nuisance, for example stereo equipment in respect of noise problems.
- b) *Physical works* undertaken by the Council to abate nuisance or comply with specified standards, for example carrying out drainage works where there may be risks to health.

5.5 Revocation

5.5.1 In some circumstances, notably Licences, and Authorisations or Permits made under the Environmental Protection Act, the revocation of a Licence, Authorisation or Permits may be used as an enforcement method.

5.5.2 Whilst this is a legitimate enforcement action, it should always be remembered that the above may involve the removal of livelihood, sometimes without reference to an independent arbiter or the Courts.

Accordingly, revocation is used only as a last resort, when other sanctions are either deemed inappropriate, or have been tried without success.

5.5.3 No revocation action will be taken without reference to line management.

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5.5.4 Where revocation action is taken, it will normally follow at least two warnings, in writing. However, it is recognised that this may not always be possible, especially in the case of some types of licensing offence.

5.5.5 When revocation action is taken, those concerned will be informed of any rights to appeal which they may have and be told of any time limits or other constraints which may apply.

5.6 Written Warnings

5.6.1 Perhaps the commonest and most versatile form of enforcement is the use of a written warning, which may result from a service request investigation or a routine inspection visit.

5.6.2 There are few rules governing the use of this type of action, as it is not a regulated or statutory function.

However, a written warning will normally:-

- clearly state the nature of the problem and suggest either specific remedies or a standard to be achieved;
- state the actions which may follow if matters do not improve;
- designate a named officer as point of contact;
- clearly distinguish between a legal requirement and 'desirable standard';
- indicate any follow-up action intended, (such as a re-visit within a specified period of time);
- where possible point the way to specialist advice or additional information; and,
- offer to work with the person(s) responsible.

5.6.3 The tone of a written warning will be firm, businesslike, unambiguous, polite and helpful.

5.7 Revisit of Premises

5.7.1 Following a formal notice or a written warning and advice we will normally revisit the premises to check compliance has been achieved. We may advise that a check will be carried out within a set time period.

5.7.2 In the event that a notice or written warning and advice have not been complied with, the circumstances will be reviewed and considered further in accordance with the provisions of this policy.

5.8 No Action

5.8.1 In exceptional circumstances, contraventions may not warrant any action. This can be where the cost of compliance to the offender outweighs the detrimental impact of the contravention on the community, or the cost of the required enforcement action to the Council outweighs the detrimental impact of the contravention on the community.

5.8.2 A decision of no action may also be taken where formal enforcement is inappropriate in the circumstances, such as where a trader has ceased to trade. A decision to take no

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action must be recorded in writing and must take into account the public health implications of the contravention.

6.0 General

6.1 Determining whether formal enforcement action is viable and appropriate

The steps outlined in the Code for Public Prosecutors will be followed during any formal enforcement action. This can be viewed by accessing the following website:

<http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/index.html>

6.2 Accepting Guilty Pleas

The Code for Crown Prosecutors will be followed.

6.3 Considering the views of those affected by offences

Officers undertake enforcement on behalf of the public at large and not just in the interests of any particular individual or group. When determining the public interest test, the consequences for those affected by the offence, of the decision whether or not and how to take enforcement action and any views expressed by those affected, will be considered.

Those people affected by the offence will be told about any decision that makes a significant difference to the case in which they are involved.

6.4 The interests of stakeholders

Where particular local circumstances dictate, enforcement activity will, where practicable, take account of those circumstances which minimise any adverse effects of enforcement activity on legitimate businesses and individuals.

Visits will be made outside normal office hours where practical to meet the requirements of an individual or a business.

Interpreters/translations can be made available when a business or the public do not have English as a first language.