

Devon and Somerset Business Survey 2015

Listening to you...



Local regulators across Devon and Somerset are committed to supporting businesses by providing advice and guidance that helps them understand and meet their responsibilities. To help to do this 15 Local Authorities collaborated on a survey to gather feedback from business operators. For the purposes of the survey, 'regulation' and 'regulators' meant services like Food Safety, Health & Safety, Licensing, Trading Standards and Fire & Rescue but not Traffic Wardens or Planning.

The Feedback was used to develop Better Business for All (BBfA), a more focused way of working together that aims to support businesses by making regulations easier to access and understand.

This survey was open between 26 January 2015 and 29 March 2015 with 198 businesses responding.

Summary of results

- Torbay and North Devon had the most responses out of all the 15 Local Authorities, each with 15.7% of the total. Teignbridge and South Hams followed with 13.1% and 12.1% of the total responses respectively.

- Most respondents felt confident and comfortable seeking advice and assistance from regulators at 77.8% of respondents.
- Only a third of respondents would be willing to pay for specific business advice, support or training on regulatory matters (33.3%) compared to nearly two thirds that would not (64.6%).
- 81.3% of respondents would find a single point of contact for regulatory matters either very or fairly helpful.

The following question showed some strong responses with businesses acknowledging the commercial impact of compliance and the importance of a level playing field.

When thinking about regulation and its impact on economic growth, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	No response
If my business was found to be non-compliant I would be concerned that this would affect our reputation with customers	58.1%	37.4%	2.5%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%
Regulation helps to ensure a level playing field for business and consumers	34.3%	54.5%	5.1%	3.5%	2.5%	0.0%
It matters to my business that our customers know that we invest in compliance	45.5%	40.9%	6.6%	3.0%	3.5%	0.5%

The next table reflects the business' views on regulator's understanding of business pressures. Our Partnership is working hard to improve this response category, we want all our regulators to receive training in business insight or business mentoring so that they can understand business pressures and improve the way in which they regulate.

What level of understanding do you think regulatory officers have of the pressures faced by business?

	Number	Percent
Very good understanding	23	11.6%
Good understanding	84	42.4%
Limited understanding	71	35.9%
No understanding	14	7.1%
No response	6	3.0%
Total	198	100%

Positive regulatory comments



“Following an anonymous complaint about my business, the regulator came to see me during a particularly busy lunchtime. The complaint was dealt with thoroughly, but discreetly, & with the minimum of fuss.”

“Trading standards spend a good deal of time with us when they visit. The officer is very helpful and consults with colleagues as necessary. Last time we had a particularly unusual issue and he brought a colleague along for a second opinion.”

“Fire Safety officer giving advice and support re fire risk assessments before and after refurbishment”

“Assistance with the introduction of the new allergen regulations. Advice on setting up our kitchen to comply with regulation and to be cost effective when we started the business 11 years ago, which meant we did not spend money on equipment that did not comply or we did not need.”

“When we took on the hotel we requested the EHO to visit to provide an independent view of our current starting plans & how we were intending to proceed, we found this very helpful.”

“Licensing were very helpful when advising and helping us submit our application for changes to premises license.”

“Health & Safety have visited and they have a great relationship, she cares about her job and spends time to go through every detail.”

Negative regulatory comments



“Not booking appointment, coming to a seasonal place when previously saying they would not come that season, and then being particularly harsh, and not understanding a person with excellent English but not native English.”

“Fire safety inspectors are always so negative and unsympathetic to the realities of old buildings and being a small business with limited capacity to fund expensive alterations.”

“Just turning up at the worst moment and looking at snapshots of a business in the middle of August.

“Trading Standards - She was visited about 7-8 years ago by trading standards and felt the person was cold and impersonal.”

“Health and safety regulators suffer from over-zealous application of legislation to the point it can make a business un-viable.”

“Licensing - They didn't know that they were not allowed to play music above a certain level. The lady from licensing who came to speak to them was abrupt and rude and not courteous.”

Conclusions

When thinking about the actions of regulators, most respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that regulators: Encourage them to seek advice on how to comply, always explain the reason for visits to their business, enforce the law in a way that is fair and proportionate, are consistent in the advice they provide them and the way they enforce the law, coordinate services to minimise unnecessary overlaps & duplication and provide timely advice and guidance. However when asked if they agreed that regulators should consult with them when developing policies, plans, procedures

and service standards, the majority of respondents (by a small margin) either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The vast majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that regulators should: pre-book an appointment before they visit, inform the business how they intend to conduct an inspection/visit, provide full feedback after a visit, always give feedback to businesses whether positive or negative, encourage businesses to provide feedback on the regulators' performance, provide advice to new and existing businesses, and take enforcement action where appropriate.

More than 85% of respondents agree or strongly agree that: If their business was found to be non-compliant they would be concerned that this would affect their reputation with customers, regulation helps to ensure a level playing field for business and consumers and It matters to their business that their customers know that they invest in compliance.

Over half of respondents thought that regulatory officers have a good or very good understanding of the pressures faced by business', however over a third consider regulatory officers' understanding to be limited.

All the regulatory services were either highly valued or valued by the majority of respondents and most have not had a bad experience with any of them. Over half think regulators get the right balance between encouragement, education and enforcement and the vast majority are either very satisfied or satisfied with the courteousness and professionalism of regulators, have a good relationship with them, and feel confident and comfortable to seek advice and assistance on regulatory matters.

Health and safety was felt to be the most difficult area of regulation respondents had to implement into their businesses.

Businesses felt that regulators should provide advice, assist in businesses understanding their responsibilities, enforce rules and regulations and 77.8% also thought regulators role should be to signpost to other sources of information.

Businesses felt that completing paperwork and keeping up to dates with new regulations one of the biggest burdens. However, 68.7% found getting advice on regulatory matters either very easy or fairly easy. The majority use Council or government websites to access advice and support.

Most people would not be willing to pay for specific business advice, support or training on regulatory matters but the majority of them would find a single contact point for all regulatory matters helpful. Currently most businesses contact regulatory services via the telephone and most go to government department websites for advice and support on regulatory matters. The majority of respondents would prefer to receive information about complying with regulation via email.

The majority of respondents feel it is either very easy or easy to get advice on regulatory matters and most respondents feel there is no other information or advice on regulation they would like that they are not currently receiving.