

Product Safety and Metrology

Business Plan 2019

Tyne & Wear Joint Committee on Trading Standards

Introduction

This plan is an extension on the previous review document of 2018 and provides detail on the future possible directions of the Tyne and Wear facility at Saltmeadows Road and the possible financial implications. The present building and fabric has been mostly static for 40 years since it opened in 1979 and operational function have changed dramatically over the years due to external forces. There have been tweaks to the building's fabric over the last seven years and these have been cost neutral and have allowed for expansion of functionality to an extent.

Changes in the Operating Landscape

1. The Office of Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) has made available a budget for local authority trading standards departments to utilise for consumer product testing. To this end one laboratory in each geographical region of the UK has been nominated to conduct the work. The monies available are only for the testing fees and not for the procurement of the samples. The Gateshead laboratory is a partner laboratory to West Yorkshire to provide the service to the North East. OPSS will only accept invoicing from one regional laboratory and due to the high administrative cost it was decided to let West Yorkshire take the lead. There is no guarantee of the longevity of the funding as the *"Strengthening National Capacity for Product Safety"* strategy is 2018-2020.
2. The effect of Brexit upon the functionality is, as yet, still an unknown quantity and the effect upon our regional Notified Body is unknown.
3. The number of established trading standards laboratories offering a comparable service is once again in decline, our UKAS auditors have warned us that we are now one of five and that we are the most northerly. OPSS recognises that once these resources are lost they are impossible to replace or restart.

Changes in the Operating Capability

1. At the last United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) audit in January 2019 it was decided to apply for an extension to scope of accredited tests. These areas can be developed within the operating environment without any major resource implications at present.
2. The chemical testing capabilities are severely reduced because of the arcane nature of the equipment and working practices of other local authority departments. For example, fewer samples of beers and spirits for alcohol content and food samples for meat content

as samples are sent to a laboratory designated as a Public Analyst by the environmental health section.

Possible Futures

The current workstream and testing facilities are nearing capacity with the resources currently available, therefore consideration needs to be made in increasing available resources. Most equipment is being utilised on a daily basis as are the staff and the current building layout is fit for current purpose but in its current configuration does not lend itself to expansion of activities easily and the suitability of one of the laboratories is questionable for its current use. The bottlenecks in the present system are the number of staff available to complete the activities and the size of available laboratories doesn't allow multiple operators so everything is in a queue waiting to be tested. Only one qualified Inspector of Weights and Measures places a lot of demands upon that person who also has all the managerial duties of the establishment with a balance of operational duties and strategic duties to be sought.

Maintenance of Current Capabilities

1. Maintain the status quo

One option is to maintain the present building layout, current staffing levels and capabilities. This would be the cost neutral option but due to being at the capacity of these resources will not allow for an increase in revenue or the addition of new functions.

Pros: No disruption to service, no cost

Cons: No capability for expansion of duties or staff, no opportunity to increase revenue, no means of freeing up staff for marketing activities or site visits, reliance upon the five authorities for exposure to the local economic operators, threatens a UKAS accredited function (capacity laboratory defects).

2. Refurbishment of the Capacity Laboratory

The laboratory's air conditioning unit is not suitable for maintaining UKAS accredited calibrations due to its age and lack of humidity control and therefore would need replacing at a cost of £20,000. This would not be money well spent as there are other defects and features within the

laboratory such as an open drain and running water which adds to the humidity problems. This room would still have to contain two different accredited tests and also legal work so would only allow one operator / one test at a time and is a health and safety issue when handling heavy test items due to available limited floor space.

Pros: Improve climate control for accredited activities

Cons: Laboratory closed whilst under refurbishment, loss of capability impacting on clients and our local authorities, not effective use of funds, doesn't alleviate health and safety concerns

3. Conversion of the Chemical Laboratory Into a New Mass Laboratory

Possibly a more cost effective measure would be to convert the adjacent laboratory which is presently the chemical laboratory and reduced ignition propensity (RIP) testing facility into a mass calibration laboratory. What would be needed is an air conditioning unit, the relocation into the capacity laboratory of the still and building of brick plinths. The current services of water and natural gas will need to be removed. The added benefit of doing so is remedial works need to be undertaken as there are open drains in this room which are now causing mildew growth on cupboarding. This mildew is fast becoming a health and safety issue. The windows in the laboratory will also need bricking up to maintain a stable environment. The fume cupboard will be need to removed, but that can be relocated into another area.

Pros: A new fully compliant laboratory, allows the capacity laboratory to be used for one use with all water services in one area, minimises health and safety concerns, frees up the legal metrology laboratory for cigarette testing, all labs are still functional during conversion so no downtime, reuse of most of benching and plinths, allows two operators to work simultaneously, all electrical and IT facilities already in existence, improved security as two more external windows removed

Cons: Length of time to strip out existing and installation of new, cost, without new facility / laboratory loss of all chemical capability

The relocation of the legal metrology laboratory into a new mass laboratory will allow the conversion of that laboratory into a RIP testing facility in isolation which would allow for a possibility of providing an accredited test rather than a screen test as presently conducted.

Pros: Avoids the need to provide an air conditioning unit to the legal metrology laboratory, allows utilisation of small area efficiently, ability to continue testing fire safety of cigarettes, relocation of existing equipment, minimal structural works

Cons: Main gas supply into the building located here so fire protection needed for services

The provision of a small chemical laboratory is possible if constructed within the current training room. This will allow for the testing of alcohols and other consumer products. There is already a water supply in that area so the only service needed would be heating radiators. There would be a cost involved in building stud partition walls.

Pros: Allows continuation of some chemical provisions, allows for continuing competence of staff, maintain testing in these areas for the constituent authorities

Cons: Relatively small cost; loss of training room, create a long corridor

Re-configure the existing layout within the current building

The laboratory, when designed and built allowed for a second storey to be added to the front portion and has high ceilings which are more than double height in the garage areas.

1. Build a second storey

This would allow all non-metrology laboratories to be located upstairs and would provide extra space for new facilities and services to be delivered. Accommodation could also be provided for extra staff to be located and also used as meeting and training facilities. The cost associated with this would be £1M

Pros: Completely future proofing the facility, provide office space for officers, provide meeting room, provide training rooms

Cons: Large disruption to all accredited activities resulting in loss of revenue for a considerable time, large expenditure

2. Build a new floor level in the first garage

There is sufficient floor space within the first garage to have a new floor level with three small laboratories built on that floor. Services needed would be heat, where the heating pipes already exist, power supply, water supply and IT points.

Pros: New laboratory space which will allow new capabilities to be developed, contained within the existing building footprint, no disruption of existing accredited tests, new permanent toy testing laboratory

Cons: associated costs, some loss of floor space to build a staircase

3. Convert existing mezzanine level to laboratory

An option that can be considered in isolation or as part of other alterations is to convert a dead storage space into laboratory space where flammability testing as well as cigarette fire safety testing could be conducted. Services already are provided in this space and the only structural addition would be the construction of a staircase as current access is provided by ladder.

New testing to be added to accredited capabilities from 2019

An extension to accreditation in calibration is being applied for with UKAS to cover the following areas:

- Increase mass calibration facility up to 50 kilograms
- To calibrate force gauges
- To undertake calibration of volume measures by gravimetric means
- To perform calibrations of balances at customers' premises

These extra calibration capabilities do not involve any extra investment as they are conducted for in house purposes presently and so this application will allow for a chargeable service to customers. There is a cost involved with the application and a small uplift in our audit fees but these should be mitigated when work comes in as a result of the changes.

An extension to accreditation in toy testing is applied by UKAS to cover the following areas:

- Expanding material test method
- Static strength test method
- Test Method for monofilament fibres

Future testing to be considered for accredited capabilities

- Toy testing is being reviewed to see what toy requirements can be added
- Metrology and calibration requirements are being consulted upon with stakeholders.

- Increasing accuracy level to E0 standards which would put the laboratory on parity with the Government laboratory
- Expansion of what consumer products can be tested

Additional staff needs

To expand the range and influence of the laboratory consideration has to be made to increasing the staffing levels, finance has been consulted to ascertain the resource implications. The options available are to appoint a new technician grade or another Weights and Measures Inspector. Considerations need to include a review of Business Continuity requirements in the staffing, with an eye to succession planning.

Adding another technician will add (assuming top of grading point) another £42,082 to the annual staffing costs. Adding another trading standards officer (TSO) (assuming top of grading point) would add £49,665 to the annual staffing costs. This TSO will need a different skill set to the routine officer to be able to cover the roles of a technician as well as an Inspector.

For a £7,583 differential in the staffing costs another trading standards officer would be more beneficial to the structure and organisation. Advantages include:

- Succession planning
- Business continuity
- Cover for the laboratory manager in absence
- Allows for more legal metrology functionality
- More flexibility in the UKAS accredited capabilities
- Avoiding bottlenecks in the workstreams

