

HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL - 20 SEPTEMBER 2023

PORTFOLIO: COMMUNITY, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN 2023 – 2024

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 That the Panel supports the proposed Food Safety Service work plan for the forthcoming year.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The report and attached appendices provide Members of the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel with information on how the Food and Safety Team will deliver food law controls during this financial year.

2.2 The work plan is in line with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Food Law Code of Practice for England, dated June 2023 and takes a risk-based approach, that ensures our resources are targeted where they will have greatest value to protect and improve the health of residents and visitors to the New Forest.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 During and following the coronavirus pandemic, the Food and Safety Team followed the Food Standards Agency 'Local Authority Recovery Plan: guidance and advice to local authorities for the period from 1 July 2021 to 2023/24' which set out how local authorities should deliver an effective food service, particularly whilst recovering from the impact of the pandemic.

3.2 The team carried out a total of 472 inspections in 2022/23. They completed all the food safety work in line with the plan, and successfully brought interventions of the highest risk businesses back in line with the Food Law Code of Practice by 31 March 2023 when the recovery plan ended.

3.3 Food controls for 2023 – 2024, have now reverted to the FSA Food Law Code of Practice requirements. The revised Code of Practice published in June 2023 introduced a greater flexibility of approach to interventions, enabling further targeting of resources at areas of greatest risk whilst providing a lighter touch approach to lower risk businesses.

3.4 The national and more substantial changes to the delivery of food controls are proposed in 2025 with a new delivery model: Achieving Business Compliance programme. This will modernise the way in which food businesses are regulated in England and is currently being trialled with a few local authorities and evaluated to assess how it could improve business compliance.

4. PROGRESS DURING 2022 – 2023

4.1 During the past year, all due and overdue high and medium priority food hygiene inspections were undertaken (98 inspections). These included all poor performing

businesses, which are those with a food hygiene rating of 0, 1 or 2, as well as those businesses which undertake high risk activities, such as large food manufacturers.

4.2 In addition, all food businesses with a medium risk rating (C-rated) (148), and 50% of lower risk (D-rated) (226) food businesses were inspected. The inspections of these lower risk premises were over and above the requirements of the Food Standards Agency recovery plan.

4.3 New food business registrations (215) were prioritised via a triage questionnaire, to ensure that those undertaking high risk activities were inspected within 28 days of their commencement date. Those identified as low risk following triage were deferred, although the majority were inspected within 4 months of operating.

5. THE WORK PLAN FOR FOOD SAFETY IN 2023 – 2024.

5.1 The Food Safety Service Plan and priorities are detailed in Appendix 1 which aligns closely to the Food Standards Agency Food Law Code of Practice.

5.2 The work plan prioritises critical enforcement work according to risk, which will protect the consumer but also support trade and the export of goods.

5.3 All high risk, poor performing businesses and lower risk D rated overdue inspections will be inspected by the end of March 2024. The aim is to ensure over 50% of our lowest risk outstanding E rated food businesses are contacted and all other food businesses when due an inspection, will return to the proactive inspection programme.

5.4 Further detail on the types and category of food premises in the New Forest, the number of programmed inspections due for 2023/24 and the strategy for delivery is detailed in Appendix 2.

5.5 The national Achieving Business Compliance programme is planned to be implemented in 2025 however, if directed by the Food Standards Agency this year, the workplan could be subject to change before this date.

5.6 The FSA continues to monitor local authorities' delivery of food controls against expectations set out in the Code of Practice through quarterly temperature checks, annual returns and local authority audits.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The report and appendices explain the strategy that the service will take in delivery of food controls to safeguard the health of residents in the New Forest. This will be achieved by targeting resources to ensure that appropriate action is taken to support and control poor performing and higher risk food businesses, whilst making full use of flexibility provided in the Food Law Code of Practice to address lower risk food businesses.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Delivery of the Food Safety Service Plan will be met within the existing Service budget.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 In order to effectively deliver the Food Safety Service Plan, officers may carry out enforcement of the legal provisions, to ensure that the public are not put at risk and there is compliance with the law. This will range from provision of advice, support and guidance for businesses, through to formal enforcement notices and prosecutions.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The service plan and new delivery model is designed to modernise food standards delivery, using local intelligence, and making the system fit for purpose. The aim is to make it easier for businesses to provide safe and trusted food, targeting resources at areas where there is greatest risk in order to protect the health of all consumers.

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