

Work Plan for 2025-2026

Environmental & Regulation: Food & Safety Team

This work plan explains the proposed delivery of food controls which will be carried out by the Food and Safety Team in the year 2025 – 2026. The Food and Safety Team is responsible for several key activities:

- The responsibility for enforcing food hygiene and food safety legislation in all food premises in the district.
- Carrying out proactive inspections and interventions of food businesses, investigating food and premises complaints, as well as cases of suspected food poisoning and water borne diseases.
- Programming the frequency of inspections of the around 1850 food business in the New Forest area; this number remains relatively stable, despite new businesses opening, and some businesses ceasing trading.

Whilst inspection and support of food businesses is the single largest area of work for the Food and Safety Team, it is also responsible for many other work areas including workplace health and safety regulation and caravan and animal welfare licensing.

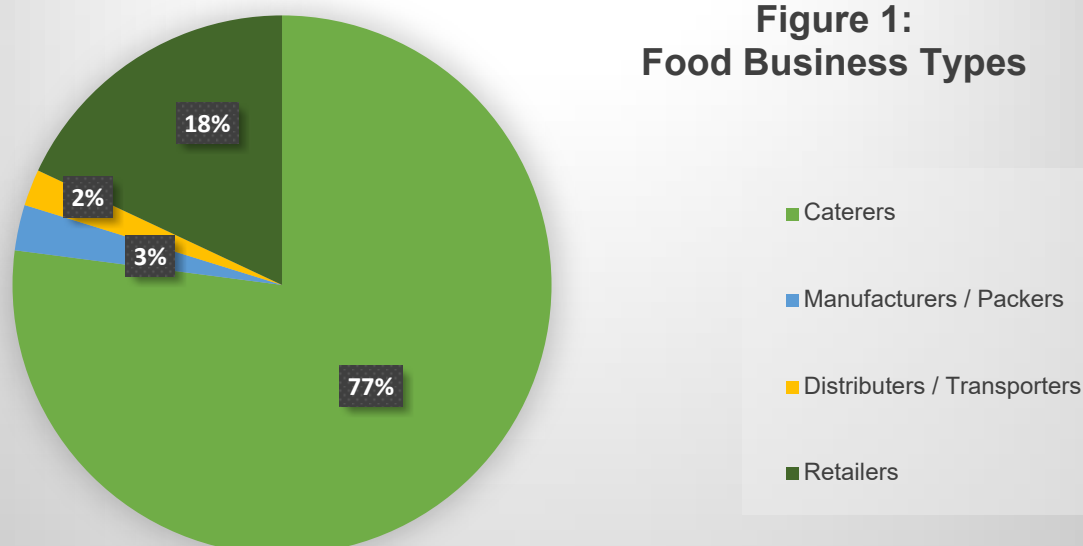
Food Businesses in the New Forest

As of 1 April 2025, there were 1827 food businesses in the district, with **77%** (1407) being caterers, and **18%** (329) retailers. The remaining **5%** of businesses are manufacturers / packers, or distributors / transporters. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

The catering businesses can be subdivided into 268 restaurants, 137 public houses, 110 takeaways, 109 care/nursing homes, 100 clubs, 89 schools, 95 mobile caterers, and 75 hotels/guest houses, as well as a number of caterers.

As of 1 April 2025 there were **9** approved premises (manufacturers of dairy, meat or fish products) which are subject to enhanced controls, as well as **26** businesses which may be subject to initial inspection but no further intervention. These include primary food producers and include fishing vessels, fruit farms and deer larders.

**Figure 1:
Food Business Types**



Risk profile of food businesses

All businesses generally receive unannounced visits, and at the end of the food hygiene inspection, the business is scored and given a risk rating which dictates when the next routine inspection will be due. This risk rating is based upon the scale of the business, the types of food handled, whether the business undertakes any specific high-risk processing or primarily serves vulnerable groups, and how well the business is performing.

The risk categories are A, B, C, D and E, where A and B are often larger or poor performing businesses, C and D are mainly caterers, and E rated are often small-scale home-based businesses. Figure 2 shows the current profile of businesses in the New Forest.

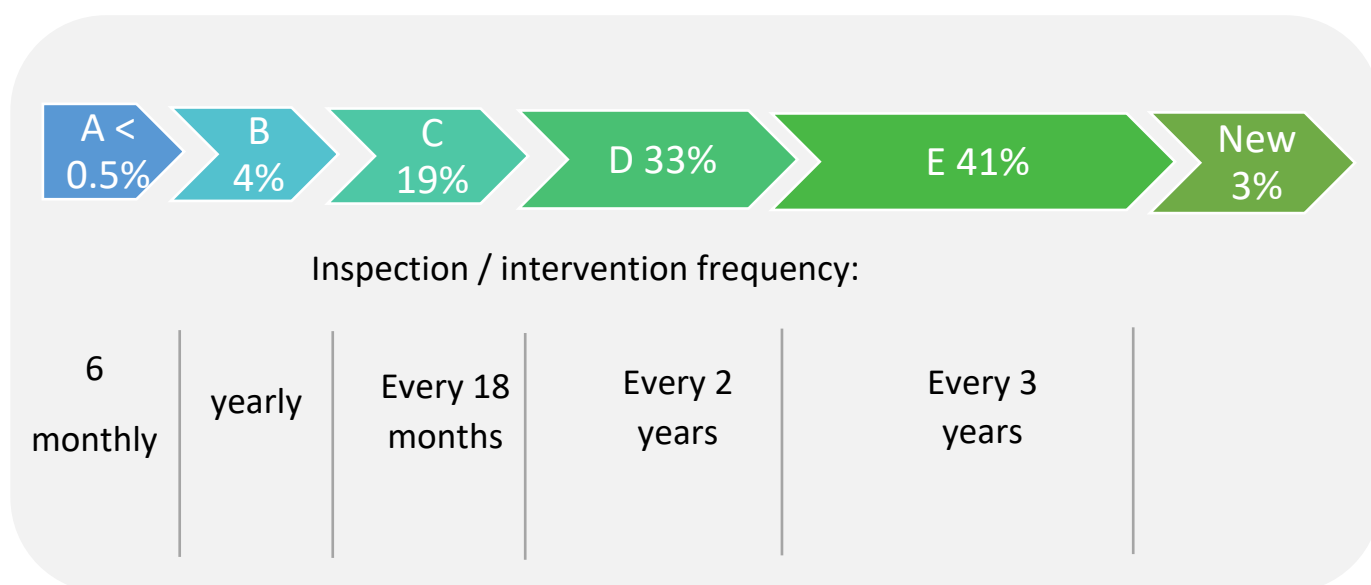


Figure 2 – Profile of food businesses in the New Forest

The purpose of the risk rating is to ensure that local authority resources are effectively targeted towards higher risk or poor performing businesses requiring assistance, whilst reducing the burden on lower risk, compliant businesses.

Over 40% (740) of all businesses are lower risk – often domestic cake makers, childminders, and small retailers, and these are contacted and/or visited less frequently, usually every 3 years. Officers' time is prioritised on the 23% of premises which are a higher and medium risk (A, B and C rated premises).

It should be noted that not all higher risk A and B rated businesses are of a poor standard. They could be rated higher risk, due to being large food manufacturers producing large quantities of high-risk food or they may be premises serving vulnerable groups (care homes) which require more frequent inspections.

Food Inspections and Interventions due in 2025-26

Based upon the risk rating above, all category A and B premises will be due inspection in the forthcoming year, as well as on average two-thirds of category C premises, and half of category D premises. The number can vary significantly year on year.

Figure 3 shows the interventions due in 2025-2026 by risk category. Given that 'A' category premises are inspected at least once every 6 months, should any businesses be scored as an A, these may also become

due during the year. Figure 3 does not include businesses which will request a re-inspection – see below for more information.

These interventions consist of both inspections for 2025 – 26 and those outstanding from the previous year.

The ‘unrated’ column consists of newly registered food businesses which have not yet received an inspection (63), and the estimated number of new registrations likely to be received based on previous year’s data.

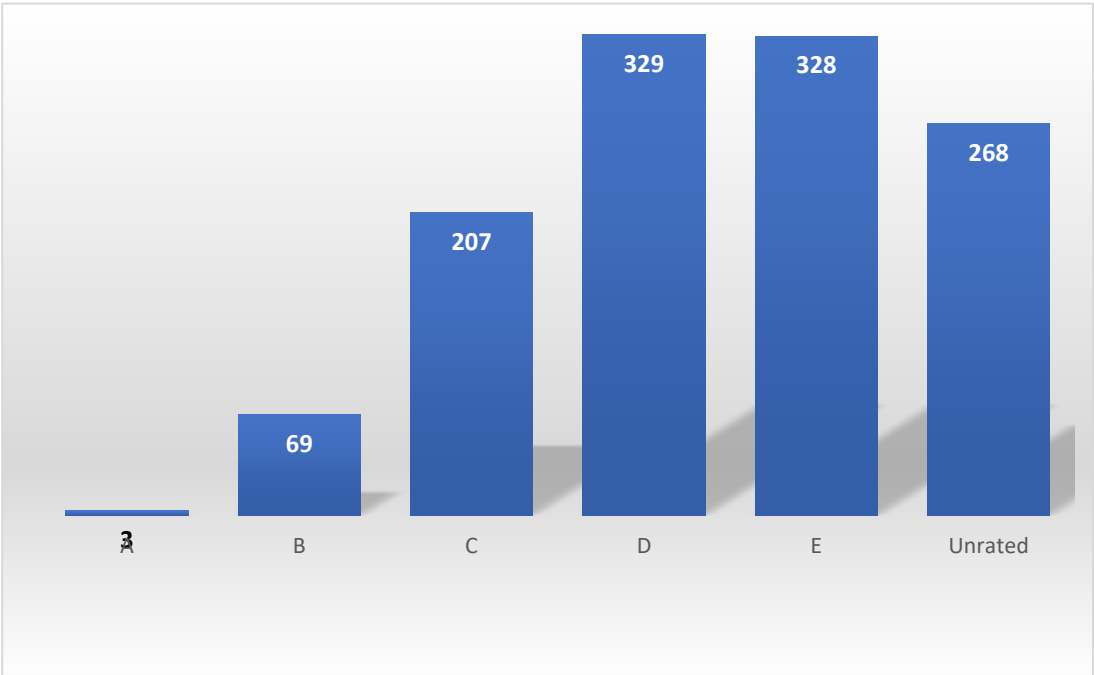


Figure 3 – interventions due by risk category

Food Hygiene Rating Scheme



In addition to the risk rating generated following a food hygiene inspection, businesses will also receive a food hygiene rating. This national scheme is designed to allow consumers to make informed choices on places where they eat out or shop for food whilst encouraging businesses to improve their hygiene standards.

The ratings range from 5, (very good) to 0, (urgent improvement necessary). A business is given a window sticker which displays the rating and the score awarded. In England, businesses are not obliged to display their rating, however all ratings are available for the public to view on the Food Standards Agency website.



The majority of businesses in the New Forest have received a rating of 3 or above.

Currently 98% of businesses have a rating of 5 (very good) 4 (good) or 3 (satisfactory) – against the national average of 97%. Only a 2% minority of businesses currently have a rating of 2, 1 or 0 requiring improvement, urgent improvement or very urgent improvement – against a national average of 3%. These businesses are given actions to carry out and a revisited to ensure standards improve or further enforcement action is taken.

The rating is kept by the business until the next inspection, unless the owner applies and pays for

a re-inspection. An officer will then carry out a further inspection and a new rating is issued.

Figure 4 – distribution of food hygiene ratings

There is a fee of £233 for a re-inspection, as this is a discretionary service. Many businesses recognise the importance of having a good rating and the team are seeing an increase in requests for re-inspections (in 2024-25, 41 businesses applied for a re-inspection).

Official and non-official controls

| Risk Category of premise | Frequency of intervention | Type of intervention |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| A | Every 6 months | Inspection or audit |
| B | At least every year | Inspection or audit |
| C | At least every 18 months | Alternate between inspection and another 'official control' where the business is broadly compliant. Official controls are normally verifying an aspect of the business or monitoring the business. |
| D | At least every 2 years | Alternate between inspection and another 'non-official control'. A non-official control could be information gathered not by qualified staff (apprentices) |
| E | At least every 3 years | Flexible strategy which may include an official or non-official control. |

Figure 5 – official and non-official controls

Figure 5 shows the range of controls which are given to local authorities when a food business becomes due an inspection. Whilst high risk premises must receive an inspection or similar, lower risk premises may be subject to lesser controls which enable resources to be targeted towards areas of higher risk.

Investigations and Advice

Across all areas of responsibility, the Food and Safety Team receives over 1,400 requests and complaints each year. Of those, typically, around half relate to food matters, including infectious disease. This figure has been relatively stable for a number of years.

Generally, a third of these are complaints made by members of the public about food purchased or consumed, or standards of hygiene observed at a premise. They also receive complaints from people claiming that food they have eaten has made them ill and although difficult to investigate where there is no physical evidence, further investigations are carried out where more than one complaint is received. The team are notified of over 300 cases of infectious disease per year, most of which are as a result of food poisoning bacteria, such as salmonella and campylobacter. Their role with these cases, is to determine how the individual became unwell, whether a food business could be implicated and if it is a single isolated case or a potential outbreak.

Food Sampling

The Food Standards Agency places considerable emphasis on the importance of sampling as part of the delivery of a local authority's food service. Sampling can be used as both a means to support business, to verify that they are producing safe food, and also to emphasise when their food safety controls are inadequate. Local high-risk businesses are sampled, such as approved premises, manufacturers, especially those carrying out specific processing, including sous-vide foods, fermentation, or aseptic packaging.

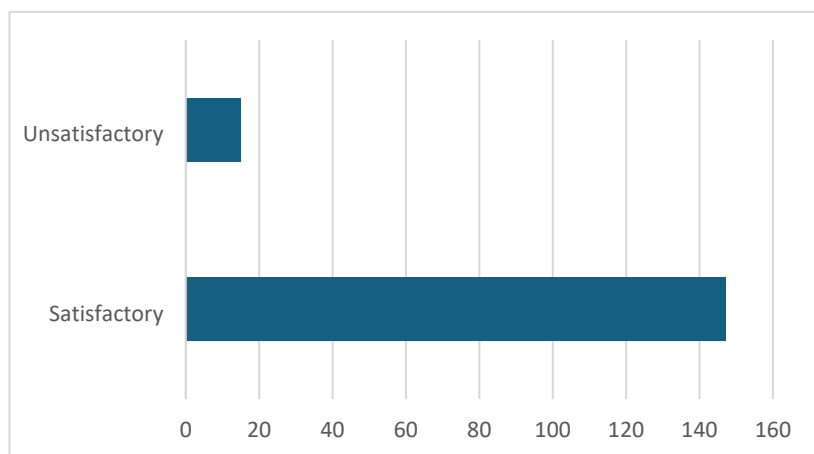


Figure 6: Samples taken 2024 - 25

The Food and Safety Team also participates in national and local Hampshire wide sampling projects which are identified by emerging issues and epidemiological data. In the coming year, it is planned that the team will participate in studies of dried fruit, nuts and seeds, and root vegetables.

Last year 162 food samples were taken and sent for analysis and a similar number is planned to be taken this year. Whilst the majority of samples taken are satisfactory, last year 10% were found to not meet food safety requirements.

In these cases, officers support the businesses in investigating what went wrong and will re-sample where necessary to demonstrate that any additional measures put in place by the business have been successful. The role of the team is to ensure that measures are taken to prevent unsafe food from being placed on the market.

Strategy for delivery of the food service

Local Government is facing significant workforce and recruitment challenges which is particularly evident in the environmental health field. The food and safety team are currently operating at a reduced staff capacity as a result of the challenging recruitment market, which has an impact on the number of inspections and other interventions undertaken. Interventions are always prioritised based on risk and in addition the following strategy has been adopted to assist in the effective delivery of the food safety programme and work towards increasing the number of lower risk interventions.

1. Ensuring that interventions are undertaken based on risk and using the full flexibility in delivery of food controls outlined in the Food Law Code of Practice, i.e., undertaking partial inspections, targeted audits, information gathering instead of full inspections in all premises.
2. Triaging newly registered food businesses, identifying those undertaking high risk activities and requiring immediate inspection, from those which are lower risk and are not such a high priority.
3. Reviewing our business systems to ensure that they are as efficient as possible, and that time taken to undertake individual inspections is optimised. For example, providing inspection reports and rating stickers on site for 4 and 5 rated businesses to reduce time in sending inspection paperwork after the visit.
4. Undertaking a recruitment and retention review of Environmental Health Officer and Technical Officer posts, benchmarking salaries across Hampshire and supporting career grading of posts. Once completed, a further recruitment campaign will take place.
5. Appointing and training apprentices through a 4-year degree course to become qualified Environmental Health Officers. Whilst not qualified to undertake inspections, these team members are able to carry out sampling, complaint investigations etc. which frees up the time of authorised staff.
6. Flexible working and overtime for Environmental Health Officers to enable them to inspect businesses during their operating hours which includes evenings and weekends.
7. Appointing qualified agency staff on a short-term basis when available to cover the current vacant posts within the team.

By applying this strategy, the Food and Safety Team aim to complete all high and medium risk A, B, C rated premises and then prioritise the D rated inspections and use alternative inspection strategies with the E rated premises. It should be noted that with current resources not all D and E rated inspections will be completed.

Progress is reviewed on a quarterly basis, by the Service Manager, to ensure that this strategy is effective in best utilisation of resources to delivering the statutory food safety function. Feedback will also be provided to the Strategic Director and Portfolio Holder on a quarterly basis.