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# Food Safety Service Plan 2006/07

Report by the Head of Environmental &  
Community Health Services

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members approval for the Food Safety Service Plan for 2006/07. It is a requirement of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement that a Food Safety Service Plan be prepared in accordance with a format provided by the FSA. Under the Council's constitution this is part of the policy framework that has to be formally approved by the Council.
- 1.2 This is the sixth annual report which details the work that the service has planned for 2006/07, the staffing and financial resources required, the constraints that may prevent some of the tasks from being fulfilled and the priority of the tasks. It also includes a review of the previous year's performance and identifies where the Authority was at significant variance from the service plan and the reasons for that variance. The review is set out in Section 6 of the service plan on pages 35 to 46.

## **2 SUPPORTING/BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 Huntingdonshire District Council is a Food Authority and as such it is responsible for enforcing specific food safety legislation, this work is carried out by the Environmental and Community Health Services Division. The service is linked to the priority outcome of a healthy population.
- 2.2 The aim of the Service Plan is to -
- ◆ provide information about the Food Safety Service;
  - ◆ identify the means by which the service will be provided;
  - ◆ identify the means by which the service will meet any relevant performance targets or performance standards;
  - ◆ enable performance to be reviewed by examining any variances from the Service Plan; and
  - ◆ demonstrate a balanced enforcement approach.
- 2.4 The FSA sees this Service Plan as a mechanism for local authorities to ensure that national priorities and standards are addressed and delivered locally as well as -
- ◆ focussing debate on key delivery issues;
  - ◆ providing an essential link with financial planning;
  - ◆ setting objectives for the future and identifying major issues that cross service boundaries; and

- ◆ providing a means of managing performances and making performance comparisons.

### **3 REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE IN 2005/06**

- 3.1 The Food Service was not fully staffed for the whole of the financial year, one full-time post was vacant for three months and one member of the food safety team was on sick leave for a period of two months. The Commercial Services Manager was on secondment for the whole year and temporary cover was arranged for that period by temporarily upgrading two existing members of the Commercial Services team (for a period of 6 months each). As a result some of the improvements outlined for 2005/6 have not been completed and these have now been carried over to the 2006/7 development plan. Despite this the service recorded 99.4% of necessary inspections.
- 3.2 There were two successful prosecutions this year for offences under the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995. These resulted from dirty and unhygienic conditions being found in two food premises. One of the premises had an active mouse infestation and voluntarily closed until suitable improvements had been completed. In both cases substantial fines were achieved and there was significant media coverage. In addition two proprietors of a food business were formally cautioned for offences under same regulations. Officer time and legal costs involved in bringing cases to court were significant.
- 3.3 In October 2005 the food service was subjected to a FSA focused audit on 'The Home Authority Principle, Advice to Businesses and Food Safety Promotion'. The auditors wanted to see comprehensive evidence of the services innovative working with food businesses, schools, voluntary groups and local consumers. The aim of this work was to improve and promote food hygiene and safety in both the work place and the home. The audit was very thorough and required significant officer and administrative resources. Everybody involved in the audit was complemented by the auditors. Their final report was very complementary and did not identify any areas that needed to be addressed. It confirmed that the food team and support staff are providing a comprehensive level of service that more than satisfied all the criteria outlined in the FSA's Enforcement Standard and audit protocol.
- 3.4 In January 2006 new EU and UK Food legislation was introduced. This has created a significant impact on food business operators as they will now have to have a fully documented food safety management system in place. To meet the needs of the food business sector the service has had to provide considerable guidance and advice. In addition all officers had to familiarize themselves with the new statutes, revised codes of practice and industry guides, this required a sustained period of training which reduced productivity.
- 3.5 The October 2004 revisions of the Food Law Code by the FSA introduced a number of changes to the way food law may be enforced. In particular the Code allows an Alternative Enforcement Strategy (AES) to be adopted in the service plan. As part of last year's Service Plan a pilot alternative enforcement strategy was initiated and completed over a

5 month period. The pilot focused on testing the effectiveness of alternative enforcement interventions (as opposed to routine inspections) in low risk food businesses. The evaluation of this pilot study has demonstrated that this type of intervention is effective and has the support of local businesses.

The results of the pilot study suggest that 80% of low risk food businesses in the district can be dealt with by an alternative enforcement strategy with about a 40% saving in officer inspection time for affected premises. As the strategy develops it is expected that time savings can be increased to 50% for affected premises. It is estimated that for year 2006/7 this will release an extra 60 hours of officer time which will be re-invested in advising and informing business on the implications of new legislation and assisting in the implementation of the FSA's Safer Food Better Business (SFBB) food safety management system. The SFBB system is specifically targeted at high risk food businesses.

- 3.6 The Huntingdonshire District Council Food Service was one of only 5 in England and Wales to be highly commended in the Food Link annual awards for 2005. This award was received for work done in the field of food safety and healthy eating promotion.
- 3.7 The preventative activity did not eradicate all food poisoning outbreaks. One relatively large viral outbreak of (presumed) food-borne gastroenteritis in a hotel restaurant was dealt with swiftly and effectively. Officers of the Food Service worked closely with the Consultant in Communicable Disease Control (CCDC) as part of an Incident Management Team. There were no secondary cases. No other outbreaks or unusual notifications were received. The number of food poisoning cases continues to exceed national averages, and the dominant pathogen is Campylobacter. All individual cases of notifiable food-borne illness were investigated. The analysis of the investigation findings show that the majority of food-borne illnesses reported by residents of the district were contracted outside Huntingdonshire or in a domestic setting.

#### **4 SERVICE PLAN FOR 2006/07**

- 4.1 The format of this document remains essentially unchanged from that of the previous year. (An executive summary is attached at Annex 1). The resources provided by the Council for this year will be sufficient to enable this Authority to meet the requirements of the FSA. There is a reduction of 0.5FTE posts compared to last year and this will impact on the level of service development identified for this year. This situation has arisen from the re-allocation of staff to meet other statutory service demands, the loss of experienced staff leaving the authority and considerable training and development demand of replacement staff before they can be deemed competent to carry out comprehensive enforcement duties. It is also anticipated that the new legislation will require officers to spend longer in food premises during each visit, in order to audit and evaluate the documented management systems that are now required
- 4.2 In the event of unforeseen issues arising during the year that would hinder the achievement of all targets within the service plan, priority

would be given to the inspection of food premises. It is also possible that the FSA may redirect resources, at any time, to meet the need of a nationally significant food safety concern.

- 4.3 There is a possibility of working in partnership to assist businesses in Huntingdonshire. The new Food Safety legislation introduced in January 2006 created a number of changes to the way food business operators must manage and control their businesses. To assist them the FSA have produced a toolkit, titled Safer Food Better Business. The Food Service supports this initiative and will be working with local businesses: providing briefing sessions and guidance notes to explain the new requirements and the use of the toolkit. In order to assist in this the Cambridgeshire Food Liaison Group has applied for grant funding from the FSA to support the delivery of the Safer Food Better Business Food Safety Management system and provide coaching and training for food business operators. The outcome of the bid will be known by September 2006. Any funding secured will be used to employ FSA appointed consultants to deliver and organise local training courses and 1:1 coaching
- 4.4 The changes in the legislation coupled with revision of The FSA Food Law Code of Practice April 2006 will necessitate a complete review of all the services standard operating procedures, changing the way data is recorded on the database, re-designing the various inspection forms advisory leaflets, and information currently available on the Divisions website. This process will require considerable time and resources.
- 4.5 The 2006/07 service plan includes updated performance data and introduces new elements to the education programme. (See Annex 2). The Food Services team is planned to become part of a wider section aimed at improving the health of the people of Huntingdonshire by addressing food safety, diet, exercise, etc. in a holistic way. The increasing emphasis on education will be linked to partnership initiatives to address health inequalities and contributions towards keeping Huntingdonshire's population healthy.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 Last year the team successfully inspected 99.4% of premises on their programme and delivered most of the initiatives outlined in the 2005/06 development plan. This year's plan includes further development of the alternative enforcement strategy, addressing the revised FSA Food Law codes and providing guidance and information to businesses on the implementation of the new food safety legislation. The plan also includes new elements to the education programme to provide a more joined-up approach to initiatives aimed at keeping the population healthy and reducing inequalities.

## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 The Council is requested to approve the Food Safety Service Plan 2006/7.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Service Plan for Food Law Enforcement 2006/07  
FSA Framework Agreement  
FSA Code of Practice

**Contact Officer: Susan Lammin,**  
**Head of Environmental and Community Health Services**  
**☎ 01480 388280/**  
**Chris Lloyd, Commercial Services Manager**  
**☎ 01480 388290**

A full copy of the Food Safety Service Plan 2006/07 is available in the Members' Room. If you wish to have an individual copy, please contact the Environmental Health Admin Section on 01480 388302.