

SCORES ON THE DOORS UPDATE
(Report by Head of Environmental and Community Health Services)

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on running of the Council's Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (Scores on the Doors) which was launched in October 2008, following Members' approval on 18th June 2008.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The scheme, which applies to all caterers and takeaway businesses, involves food hygiene rating scores that are assessed during a routine inspection being published on the Council's website in a star rating format. The information provided is easy for the public to understand and enables them to make an informed choice about where to eat out. Businesses can be awarded up to five stars. The higher the standard of compliance, the more stars are awarded. Very poor standards are rated as zero. Businesses are provided with certificates and window stickers which can be displayed in their premises.

3 REVIEW OF THE SCHEME

- 3.1 Since the scheme went live on 27th October there have been over 35,000 hits on the website. This is a significant volume of activity and confirms the public interest in this initiative. There has been a slight reduction in monthly hits recorded since the launch but it is anticipated that this will increase again after a publicity campaign to coincide with the first anniversary of the launch of the scheme. There are currently 835 catering and takeaway business listed on the website.
- 3.2 There is evidence that the differentiation within the 5-star schemes encourages competition between businesses and drives up standards. Several premises have used the Scores on the Doors branding on their advertising, vehicle livery and menus. Businesses regularly contact the service to enquire as to how they can improve their star rating and several have added photographs and other details to the relevant pages of the website
- 3.3 Since the launch of the scheme the number of 4 and 5-star premises has significantly increased and the number of 1 and 2 stars decreased. In terms of service efficiencies the increasing standards will result in

reduced enforcement activity and intervention at the better performing premises thereby enabling resources to be directed to poor performers and areas of higher risk.

Rating	October 2008	September 2009
5 Stars	47	106
4 Stars	208	232
3 Stars	282	257
2 Stars	164	107
1 Stars	33	18
0 Star	6	9

- 3.4 The number of reported food poisoning cases has reduced by 7% (237) compared to last year but continues to marginally exceed national averages. The reduction in annual notified cases is the first time this has happened in 5 years. Although the majority of cases are contracted outside of the Council's area, nevertheless these are encouraging statistics.
- 3.5 The information on the website has also been used to help inform local awards (the annual Hunts Post food awards) and have also helped to address Freedom of Information requests.

4 FUTURE ISSUES

- 4.1 The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has for several years been considering the development and implementation of a national Scores on the Doors scheme. Initially the FSA was considering a 2 or 3-star scheme but following a consultation exercise in September 2008 has now abandoned this idea in favour of a 5-star scheme. There are currently over 140 Councils operating a 5-star scheme in England, 105 of which operate the same scheme as this Council. However due to a number of issues the FSA has not been able to progress the development of a national scheme at the pace envisaged.
- 4.2 Should a national scheme eventually be developed then a further report will be made to Members to seek their views as to whether this Council adopts the national scheme or continues with the current scheme.
- 4.3 Currently all costs associated with the scheme are met within existing resources. However it should be noted that the service provider costs associated with the website, hosted by Transparency Data, have increased this year. In addition the service has recently been contacted by Ordnance Survey advising that as premises addresses and post codes have been created wholly or in part using their ADDRESS-POINT product, then every transaction/click usage on this service (using a post code as a search criterion) is charged at 2p. This will add an additional £400 per annum to the overall costs. At the present time these increased costs can be absorbed within existing budgets but if there are further increases in costs or reduction in budgets this may not be sustainable.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Scores on the Doors Scheme has proven to be popular with both businesses and consumers. The scheme contributes to and promotes the Council's community aim of healthy living and the key activity 'reducing the risk of food poisoning' by improving food hygiene standards across the district. It also supports the Council's aim 'to improve our systems and practices' by providing consumer information to local residents and visitors in an open, transparent and consistent manner.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 Members are requested to note the contents of the report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

None

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