
Food Safety Service Plan 2013/14

Report by the Head of Environmental & Community Health Services

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval for the Food Safety Service Plan for 2013/14 which includes a review of the previous year's activity. 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 thirteenth annual report that has been submitted to Members. It details the work that the service has planned for 2013/14, 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.

2. FINANCIAL COMMENT

- 2.1 The overall budget for 2012/13 is £441,360 which represents a minor reduction on the previous financial year. It is anticipated that the budget will be sufficient to meet the demands of the service, but in the event of a complex legal case or the introduction of central sampling charges then additional funds will have to be sought. Further details are provided within the service plan and in the Executive Summary at Annex 1 of this report.

3. SUPPORTING/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The service is linked to Huntingdonshire District Council Leadership Direction Strategy, the FSA Strategy to 2015 and Cambridgeshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. There are also close links with the Council's Environment Strategy and the National Health Improvement Agenda. The service provides a positive opportunity for the Council to interact with local businesses and protect the health of our community.
- 3.3 There are currently 1494 food businesses in the district and the service helps the changing local food economy to remain vibrant and provides

practical support to businesses in a difficult economic times. The work of the service helps to maintain public confidence in the standards of our local food industry, helps businesses comply with food legislation which helps ensure fair competition, and allows well-run food businesses to flourish and contribute to the local economy.

3.4 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 identify areas for improvement and
- ◆ demonstrate a balanced enforcement approach.

3.5 In planning and delivering the service the Service Plan takes into account the Government's better regulation agenda. Key to this agenda are the five principles of good regulation:

- ◆ targeting (to take a risk-based approach)
- ◆ proportionality (such as only intervening where necessary)
- ◆ accountability (to explain and justify service levels and decisions to the public and to stakeholders)
- ◆ consistency (to apply regulations consistently to all parties) and
- ◆ transparency (being open and user friendly).

4. REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE IN 2012/13

4.1 The staffing resources for the Food Service were 20% less than planned due to a long-term absence within the team. In order to try to maintain service levels a contractor was engaged for a short period using salary savings and FSA grant funding which had been allocated to help meet the costs for the implementation of the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and a number of officers worked additional hours (including evenings and weekends).

4.2 Members of the team were also involved with a number of legally and technically complex cases, 4 food safety prosecution cases, an investigation into alleged illegal meat slaughtering and visiting at short notice a number of premises at the specific request of the FSA in connection with the horsemeat scandal. These matters had an impact on routine workloads and it was therefore not possible to deliver all the elements of the service plan as intended, although it is intended that some of the service development projects be incorporated into the next year's service plan. As a result of re-prioritising of work the service ensured that 95.6% of higher risk and 64.4% of lower risk premises requiring an inspection were inspected within the specified time frame.

4.3 In total 1216 inspections, interventions and visits were carried out to food premises as part of programmed activity and in response to complaints, food alerts and service requests. This includes the initial business support visits to the 136 new food businesses who registered this year. The support we provide on all inspections and visits can be

vital to businesses that are under pressure in the current financial climate. Our officers make sure food businesses are aware of their legal obligations and help them to ensure that the food they supply to local consumers is safe. A range of alternative approaches to engage low-risk businesses has been carried out, which are aimed at minimising burdens on the businesses while still ensuring that they have support from the Council.

- 4.4 In response to the Food Standard Agency's guidance on E.coli O157 and controlling the risk of cross contamination, the service successfully continued in the development and delivery of an appropriate implementation plan for caterers and food producers to address the necessary requirements. Due to the public health significance of the new guidance many Food Business Operators have required or requested additional help and advice in understanding and adopting the guidance and this has resulted in an increase in time being spent in premises during the inspection process.
- 4.5 The National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (NFHRS) was launched in Huntingdonshire on 30 April 2012 as a direct migration from the previous Scores on the Doors Scheme. Premises are now issued with a rating of between 0 and 5 and the scheme continues to be very popular with businesses and consumers. There is evidence that this scheme has encouraged food businesses to improve standards with a significant improvement in the number of 3 to 5 rated premises. This in turn has meant that associated efficiency savings have enabled resources to be directed into dealing with higher-risk premises and those presenting a risk to public health.
- 4.6 During the year an intervention programme including support and training was directed to those high-risk businesses which have a history of consistently performing at a poor level (0-2 stars). Where appropriate, relevant enforcement action was taken. Evaluation of the project has been encouraging and improvements in food safety standards have been achieved and maintained in many businesses.
- 4.7 The Secret Garden Party, a licensed annual music and arts festival attracting over 25,000 visitors, required significant resources and food officer involvement. Around 100 food vendors were visited, and food and water samples taken. Formal action was taken where appropriate. This was in addition to the inspection of site infrastructure, displays, event areas, water and lake-based activities, car parking and camping areas for health and safety issues. A growing number of other large-scale events, fairs, shows and heritage attractions place a significant demand on the service resulting in increased proactive and reactive work often at weekends and unsociable hours. These activities have been absorbed within existing budgets and resources but their impact should be noted.
- 4.8 The service has a clearly laid down enforcement policy which focuses on providing advice and guidance for businesses to secure compliance. This process is successful in the vast majority of cases. However, where businesses consistently fail to comply with the law or present a serious threat to public health it is important that the Council takes action to protect consumers. In 2012/13 there were 4 successful prosecutions

instigated for unhygienic premises and practices. The courts imposed significant fines and there was local media coverage. One case resulted in the court imposing a prohibition on the food business operator from managing the business. A total of 33 Hygiene Improvement Notices were served on 11 premises all of which have either been complied with within the specified timescales or have resulted in further action being taken. 5 premises were subject to voluntary closure and quantities of unfit food were voluntarily surrendered following routine inspections.

- 4.9 The service received 526 service requests from members of the public and food businesses. This represents an increase of 76% compared with 2011/12. Of these service requests 140 were complaints about unfit food or unhygienic food premises and 96 were food alerts from the FSA. These were all dealt with efficiently and effectively and provided a vital opportunity to demonstrate that the service responds to the needs and concerns of our community. Responding to complaints is a key way in which the service can gain intelligence about food businesses and helps to maintain consumer confidence in local food businesses.
- 4.10 119 food and 14 water samples were taken for analysis (considerably fewer than planned) of which 20 were found to be unsatisfactory. Appropriate action was taken to resolve any problems. An FSA funding of £2K was awarded for the successful installation and implementation of a new national sampling protocol and database.
- 4.11 The service carried out a range of promotional and educational activities, including the FSA national Food Safety Week and promoting the migration from 'Scores on the Doors' to the national 'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'. The food service also provided a number of ad hoc lectures and presentations to schools, business groups and voluntary sector organisations and produced 2 newsletters for all registered food businesses. Food Safety distance learning packages were also bought by a number of local food businesses.
- 4.12 The preventative activity did not eradicate all food-borne illness and 147 cases were notified to the Council. Some food poisoning organisms can cause serious illness and permanent disability and some types can kill. Where appropriate individual cases were promptly investigated and analysis of the investigation findings show that the majority of food-borne illnesses reported by residents of the district were contracted abroad, outside Huntingdonshire or in a domestic setting. There were no outbreaks of food poisoning or food borne illness reported.
- 4.13 Full details of the review are set out in Section 6 of the Service Plan.

5. SERVICE PLAN FOR 2013/14

- 5.1 The format of this document remains essentially unchanged from that of the previous year. (An executive summary can be found in Annex 1) The resources provided by the Council for this year are in keeping with the previous year and should be sufficient to enable this Authority to meet the requirements of the FSA provided the current level of resources is maintained. The food service has always adopted a risk-based approach to inspections and a graduated approach to enforcement. The service will continue to explore the use of alternative

enforcement strategies and interventions for low-risk businesses and any time saved will be invested in inspecting high-risk premises and providing education and guidance.

- 5.2 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 high-risk food premises and delivery of key projects which will help to protect the health of individuals. It is also possible that the FSA may redirect resources, at any time, to meet the need of a nationally significant food safety concern or the Health Protection Agency may do the same in the event of a significant outbreak or public health emergency (eg pandemic flu).
- 5.3 Following the removal of essential car user status and associated allowances a review will be needed on the flexibility of the service's response to reactive and proactive visits, interventions and service requests in order to ensure that an effective and efficient service is maintained.
- 5.4 Regard will also need to be given to the changing regulatory landscape and Government direction as it relates to business regulation and enforcement.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Food Safety Service Plan 2013/14 provides comprehensive information about the service, and identifies the means and resources required to deliver this year's programme of work. It includes a review of the previous year's performance, including deviations from the plan and identifies a number of areas for service development

7. RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 Council is requested to note the contents of the report and approve the Food Safety Service Plan**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Food Safety Service Plan 2013/14
FSA Framework Agreement
FSA Code of Practice

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A full copy of the Food Safety Service Plan 2013/14 is available in the Members' Room. If you wish to have an individual copy, please contact the Environmental Health Admin Section on 01480 388302.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2013/14

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the Food Safety Service is to work with businesses and consumers to endeavour to ensure that food intended to be placed on the market for human consumption which is produced, stored, distributed, handled and purchased within Huntingdonshire is without risk to public health or the safety of the consumer.

The service is linked to Huntingdonshire District Council Leadership Direction Strategy, the FSA Strategy to 2015 and Cambridgeshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. There are also close links with the Council's Environment Strategy and the National Health Improvement Agenda. The service provides a positive opportunity for the Council to interact with local businesses and protect the health of our community.

The following key activities are identified within the performance management system and will be measured to determine the effectiveness of the listed activities and actions.

- ◆ Planned and reactive inspections of registered and approved food businesses.
- ◆ Provision of training, advice to businesses and food hygiene promotion.
- ◆ Taking food, water and environmental samples.
- ◆ Investigation of cases and outbreaks of food-borne and food poisoning illnesses.

The service will seek to achieve this through a number of key actions that are identified within this service plan.

CHANGES IN RESOURCES FROM 2012/13 TO 2013/14

STAFF	2012/13	2013/14
Environmental Health Officers (EHO)	2.0	2.0
Environmental Health Protection Officers (EHPO)	1.2	1.2
Senior Environmental Health Officer	0.8	0.8
Commercial Team Leader	0.5	0.5
Health Protection Manager	0.2	0.2
	4.7	4.7
Admin Support Staff	1.3	1.3
	Total	
	6.0	6.0
FINANCIAL	2012/13	2013/14
Direct Costs (Employees)	£275,550	£275,440
Overheads	£158,400	£157,850
Other Direct costs (specialist equipment legal fees and sampling)	£10,110	£10,070
	Total	
	<u>£444,060</u>	<u>£443,360</u>
	Income	
	<u>-£2,000</u>	<u>-£2,000</u>
	NET EXPENDITURE	
	<u>£442,060</u>	<u>£441,360</u>

ACTIONS AND TIME ALLOCATIONS

All calculations assume 1 x FTE = 1290 hours per year (215 working days x 6 productive hours per working day). Time does not include administrative support.

Proactive Tasks	Level of activity		Hours	FTE
	Actual 2012/13	Estimate 2013/14	Estimate 2013/14	Estimate 2013/14
Planned food hygiene inspections (A-D risk rated, in addition to those below)	483	410	3207	2.48
Alternative Enforcement Strategy (AES)	19	20		
Unrated food business interventions	2	55		
Revisits	177	144		
Inspection of new food businesses (occurring during course of year)	136	200		
Inspection of temporary food businesses	155	200		
Inspection of Approved establishments*	10	9		
Other visits (food, water and environmental samples/advisory)	234	250		
Overdue from 2102/13		67		
TOTAL	1216	1355		
Prosecutions	4			
Formal action (service of notices)	33			
Food safety and public health promotion	Project work linked to delivery of Corporate aims, Sustainable Community Strategy, Statutory duties and the delivery of the Service Development Plan eg Provision of targeted interventions, food hygiene training courses, scores on the doors/National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS), development of newsletters, leaflets, website, promoting food safety, healthy eating initiatives and reduction in infectious diseases.		555	0.44
Liaison with other organisations and agencies	Maintenance and development of existing links and initiatives both internal and external.		165	0.13

* includes dairy, meat cutting, gelatine re-wrapping, egg packing establishments, cold stores and establishments producing meat products.

Reactive Tasks	Level of activity		Hours	FTE
	Actual 2012/13	Estimated 2013/14	Estimated 2013/14	Estimated 2013/14
Food related service requests and complaints (premises and food)	526	500	629	0.48
Food inspection and sampling - estimate food, water and environmental samples to be taken	47	80	120	0.09
Infectious disease control - estimate notifications of food borne/food poisoning illnesses	147	200	129	0.1
FSA food alerts for action	12	15	30	0.02
Advice to business enquiries/response to business and consumer queries	Provision of guidance to start up businesses on implementation of relevant legislation and all businesses on changes to legislation, emerging risks and issues of interest. Alternative Interventions to specific business groups including newsletters. Promotion of the FSA 'Safer Food Better Business' toolkit to all relevant food business. Advice given at the time of each inspection plus an estimated further 200 service requests and enquiries from the public and businesses on food safety matters, including voluntary organisations, community events, emerging risks and issues of interest, Home Authority/Primary Authority Principle.		530	0.42
Staff development and training	Internal and external training courses, peer review exercises, research.		200	0.15
Service management	Overall supervision and management of service, policy and procedural development. Responding to central government consultations and audits.		500	0.39
Total			6064	4.7

The overall budget for 2012/13 is £441,360 which represents a minor reduction on the previous financial year. It is anticipated that the budget will be sufficient to meet the demands of the service but in the event of a complex legal case or the introduction of central sampling charges then additional funds will have to be sought.

The administrative support workload includes producing post-inspection letters; data entries to Flare and Anite; taking and recording enquiries and service requests; collating data on infectious diseases; collating information for the Food Standards Agency; internal performance monitoring; on-line services; and legislative compliance.

A balanced workload has been proposed for the 2013/14 year which incorporates a full range of enforcement actions including food safety interventions, advice and assistance. Due to the nature of the service some interventions are carried out during evenings and weekends. The plan has been based upon the service being fully staffed. If staffing levels are not maintained, then the service will be under-resourced to meet the requirements of this service plan. This will have an impact on completion of inspections targets (particularly lower-risk ones) and the delivery of the development plan as outlined below. The occurrence of any major incidents, large or legally or technically complex cases or enforcement action, or a food poisoning outbreak would also have a significant impact on the delivery of the service plan.

The impact of large scale events such as the Secret Garden Party (SGP) and other major organised events also needs to be recognised. In 2012 the SGP resulted in approximately 180 hours of officer time including staff involvement in relation to food hygiene and health and safety both before and during the event.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2013/14

During 2013/14, the following developments are planned. This work is in addition to proactive and reactive food enforcement and promotional work being undertaken as identified in this service plan and is linked to the objectives and outcomes identified in the Corporate Plan, the Sustainable Community Strategy and Regional and National strategies.

- ◆ Maintain, review and update the Flare database to include business email addresses so as to improve communication with businesses and identify efficiency savings.
- ◆ Maintain, review and where relevant develop the work undertaken to address the FSA guidance on controlling risk of cross contamination from *E. coli* O157 within food businesses, including catering and retail businesses.
- ◆ Develop an educational and advisory program targeting new businesses to improve compliance and food safety.
- ◆ Deliver targeted educational and enforcement interventions for high-risk businesses which consistently demonstrate poor compliance (ratings between 0 and 2).
- ◆ Continue to review existing and identify any new private water supplies and onward distribution systems within the district and carry out appropriate risk assessments as required by legislation.
- ◆ Consider the feasibility of extending the Primary Authority Scheme to additional local businesses.
- ◆ Maintain and review the Council's food service website content and customer information access.
- ◆ Provide and display promotional materials to support the 2013 FSA National Food Safety Week.
- ◆ Continue to monitor the whereabouts of car boot sales within the district and identify the number and types of food businesses trading on them.