

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY

2 JUNE 2009

EXECUTIVE

16 JUNE 2009

FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT PLAN 2009/10

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Council's performance against the previous years Food Law Enforcement Plan.
- 1.2 To seek approval for the adoption of the Food Law Enforcement Plan 2009/10, which sets out the Council's regulatory function in respect of food safety over the forthcoming year. A draft copy of this is available in the Members' Room, on the Council's website or available on request.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Food Standards Agency Framework Agreement requires the Council to produce a Food Law Enforcement Plan (referred to as the Enforcement Plan). The key aim of the plan is to demonstrate how the Council will fulfil its regulatory obligations in respect of its food safety service.
- 2.2 The Enforcement Plan incorporates:
 - the service aims and objectives;
 - information about the food safety enforcement and related services provided by the Council;
 - details of the service's performance management systems;
 - comprehensive information to compare the current and past performance of the food safety service;
 - the Food Service Delivery Plan 2009/10 detailing the actions and improvements for the service in an effective, risk based, proportionate & consistent way over the forthcoming year; and
 - the annual food sampling programme which embodies the aims of the Council's Food Sampling Policy which is also posted on the Council's website and subject to periodic review.

3. KEY OUTCOMES OF THE FOOD SAFETY SERVICE 2008/9

3.1 Programmed Inspections

The service inspected 631 (455)¹ food businesses of a targeted 506 (461) food businesses, and used Self Inspection Questionnaires (SIQ's) as an alternative regulation strategy for 7 (20) low risk businesses and to ensure resources are directed towards high-risk activities. SIQ's are a cost effective means of maintaining contact with this group as well as providing the business with a useful means of keeping up to date with changes in law and other related issues affecting their business.

3.2 Service Requests

The food safety team dealt with 331 (324) service requests during the year, representing 64% (51%) of the 519 (635) service requests handled by the Commercial Section, which also includes health and safety regulation, infectious disease control, and provision of health promotion and training activities for businesses.

3.3 Food Sampling

The authority participates in national and local food-sampling initiatives to monitor the quality of food on sale in the City which is classified as satisfactory, unsatisfactory or unacceptable. Additional samples are taken in response to food complaints and where it is alleged a premises or foodstuff is implicated in a food poisoning incident. During the last year, 168 (255) food samples were analysed, and investigations followed in respect of 35 (43) unsatisfactory samples; there were no unacceptable samples.

Fewer samples were taken than the previous year due to a suspension in testing whilst the laboratory was transferred from Exeter to Bristol.

3.4 Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Diseases

A total of 189 (126) cases of possible food related infectious diseases were officially notified to the service. On investigation, no cases were conclusively linked to food from establishments in the city or elsewhere.

3.5 Enforcement Action

A total of 293 (93) formal written warnings and 113 (293) informal written warnings were issued to secure satisfactory standards in food businesses in the city. These figures are comparable to the number of warnings issued in recent years, and reflect a more targeted approach to non-compliant businesses.

Three businesses were temporarily closed until the proprietors had removed the health risk whilst another business was successfully prosecuted following a history of non-compliance. Proceedings were commenced for the prosecution of two further businesses, but these have not yet been concluded.

¹ Figures in brackets relate to 2007/8

3.6 Food Safety Training

A key component of the Government's drive on better regulation is assisting business compliance through advice, information and training. In total, 385 (525) staff from local food businesses gained a nationally recognised food safety qualification last year, through courses organised by the Council.

4. BETTER REGULATION

- 4.1 Regulatory Services have been the subject of considerable review in recent years. The conclusions of influential reports are now being interpreted and applied to regulatory services by their respective governing bodies overseen by the newly appointed Local Better Regulation Office (LBRO).
- 4.2 In respect of food safety, the Food Standards Agency reflected these changes through amendments to the Food Law (Code of Practice) England and Food Law (Practice Guidance) England which became available at the end of 2008.
- 4.3 The Enforcement Plan embraces the principles of better regulation and will continue to safeguard the health of the local population and contribute to the economic vitality of the city by targeting resources effectively and innovatively to assist food businesses in compliance.

5. PROPOSED KEY ACTIVITIES FOR 2009/10

- 5.1 In addition to the traditional intervention methods the following key activities will shape the food service for the forthcoming year:

Intervention Strategy

- 5.2 The strategy to improve compliance with food law and maintain a high level of compliance will be further developed following release of the Food Law (Code of Practice) England, and include:

- programmed inspections of 492 (551) food premises, based upon risk;
- targeting non-compliant business with effective use of appropriate enforcement tools;
- trialling the web based facility "Scores on the Doors", which allows consumers to access information on the standards of hygiene in any food business in the City, with the hygiene rated as a visual score;
- collaborating with forums/focus groups to target specific businesses to enable an exchange of information and gain an understanding of the obstacles some businesses face in complying with food law;
- running management of food safety workshops as a recognised intervention tool to support compliance in non-compliant, and smaller businesses.

Better Regulation

- 5.3 As a regulator of businesses in the City, it will be important to recognise the impact of the current economic downturn on businesses' capacity to comply, and to work with businesses to ensure that compliance is achieved through a wide range of intervention strategies. These will include greater engagement with business representatives and the joint development of advice/education interventions.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Food Law Enforcement Plan will be carried out within existing resource allocations for 2009/10.

7. RECOMMENDED

That Scrutiny Committee - Community supports and Executive approves:

- 1) the Food Law Enforcement Plan 2009/10;
- 2) the Head of Environmental Health to authorise changes to the Enforcement Plan in the light of centrally issued guidance and /or to meet operational needs.

HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

S:LP/Committee/609SCC4v2
20.5.09

COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:-

- 1) Service Plan for Food Law Enforcement 2009/10