

Appendix B

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
Public Health and Protection

Annual Review of the Food Safety Service Delivery Plan 2015/16

Background

In accordance with the Service Plan a review has been carried out to identify any variances from the preceding year.

Summary

There were no significant variances from the plan however it is unlikely we will have achieved all of our due food hygiene inspections by the year end. The service has prioritised the highest risk food businesses and will achieve all category A and B inspections.

It has been a very demanding year on the food service as the team has taken an unprecedented amount of formal enforcement action due to the persistent poor performance from some food businesses. This has mainly been in the service of hygiene improvement notices but we have also seen a rise in voluntary closures and food seizures. It was also necessary to take our first food prosecution for a number of years which was successful in that both an early guilty plea was entered, which advantageously minimises financial costs for all parties but more importantly the business has now achieved a good standard of legal compliance therefore reducing the risk previously presented to consumers; our residents and visitors to the borough.

The degree of enforcement action has resulted in the team identifying the need for more proactive intervention next year focussing specifically on those businesses scoring 0-2 within the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.

In addition to the demands of the food service the same officers have been involved in a successful health & safety prosecution.

With regards to staffing, we have carried one vacant Technical Officer post throughout the year but we have used a contractor to assist in the delivery of food inspections and have very recently employed an EHO on a casual contract.

Officer Training

During 2015/2016 all food authorised officers involved in food safety enforcement undertook the mandatory 10 hours of food related Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as required by the Food Law Code of Practice (England).

We have formalised cascade training sessions and maintained regular monthly meetings of the food officers to share learning and good practice.

Training courses attended by officers over the last year include:

- Imported Food (For inland authorities)
- E.Coli 0157
- HACCP
- FSA Consistency
- BRDO Primary Authority Impact
- Legal practices and procedures
- Food Crime
- Healthy Eating Initiatives
- Training Principles and Practices

Food Business Training

The service has continued to provide low cost food training to local residents and businesses. This is now provided by food officers as part of their normal duties following most of the food officers undertaking a level 3 qualification to enable them to gain the necessary skills to teach adults. Given the impact this has on our resources the number of level 2 courses will be reduced in 2016/17.

Pass rates for these courses remain extremely high.

| Type of Food Training | Numbers of Food Handlers Trained 2014/15 | Numbers of Food Handlers Trained 2015/16 |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Level 2 Food Safety | 84 | 141 |
| Level 3 Food Safety | 21 | 29 |

Primary Authority Partnership

The Primary Authority agreement with Ocado continues to be successful. One day per month is fully funded by Ocado which enables a food officer to provide advice on changes in legislation, guidance and food alerts. Welwyn Hatfield also provides the first point of contact for other local authorities across the country if they have concerns with food supplied to Ocado customers.

Food Sampling

Food sampling is undertaken formally in response to food poisoning outbreaks but also as a routine intervention within the delivery of our food safety service.

During the last year we participated in both national and local sampling programmes and took a number of formal samples in relation to complaints about food businesses.

During 2015/16 the authority took 46 microbiological samples and 1 sample was sent to the public analyst for composition analysis. This figure is similar to that of the previous year (43). Of these samples however far more samples failed to meet minimum microbiological standards (19). In these circumstances advice and guidance is provided to food businesses and further samples and/or formal enforcement action is undertaken.

Inspection completed 2015 -2016

In 2015-2016, 291 food businesses have been risk rated (to mid March 2015) this is a 24% increase on the previous year. Given the pressures on staff resources we have prioritised the inspection of high risk food businesses (categories A and B premises), all of these have been inspected within the required timescales.

Of the category C inspections, which are lower risk, we currently have 24 outstanding for this year. This is a much lower figure than last year (98) but we do not expect to complete them all within the required timescales. They will be completed as a priority in April 2016.

Following little intervention with our category D and E food businesses in recent years we have made a significant effort this year to gather intelligence about these businesses and update our database.

We have continued to see a decline in standards in some food businesses; this has resulted in a significant increase in formal enforcement action. Taking enforcement action is resource intensive but proportionate to the risk presented to public health.

Other Food Interventions

In 2015-2016 the authority received 106 requests for new business registration. The majority of new registrations are low risk in terms of food safety. Those businesses that are identified as high risk due to the food handled or cooking methods are prioritised for inspection. New Businesses place a considerably additional draw upon our resources; best practice in addressing this demand for service will be discussed through Herts & Beds Food Group to ensure a consistent approach is maintained with our neighbouring authorities.

In addition to the new businesses officers responded to 37 complaints about food businesses (41 during 2014/15).

Written warnings and enforcement notices served

| Type of enforcement action | 2014/15 | 2015/16 |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Letters/ written warnings | 122 | 182 |
| Hygiene improvement notice | 16 | 56 |
| Hygiene prohibition notice | 0 | 0 |

*Please note these figures are only accurate as at the time of writing and change on a daily basis.

It should be noted that the increase in food hygiene improvement notices served has a significant impact upon the resources available to undertake routine inspections. Some of these notices have not been complied with and lead to further investigation including interviews under caution. We aim to develop coding within our computer software to accurately record the time spent by officers preparing and interviewing suspects, as this is not part of our statutory return but will be useful as a management tool and to inform members.

Food Hygiene Prosecution

On 25 January 2016 a prosecution was taken against MMS Catering Ltd trading as The Pavilion restaurant in Wigmores North, Welwyn Garden City and Mr Ahmed, the manager of the restaurant. Following a lengthy investigation that was initiated by a complaint from a member of the public both the business and manager entered guilty pleas to a combined total of 10 food hygiene offences. They were fined a total of £19,314.80 which included all costs incurred by the Council. The magistrates made reference to the new sentencing guidelines in making their judgement and identified that there was a clear lack of control to protect customers. An inspection of the business after the case noted a significant improvement in compliance.

Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Disease

During 2015 -2016 we were notified of 38 residents suffering from food related infectious disease. Where confirmed food poisoning can be related to a specific food business investigations are undertaken to identify improvements required in the structure and/or practices employed to prevent a re-occurrence.

Inter Authority Audit

Herts and Beds Food group set up a sub group this year to carry out an inter authority auditing programme across the 14 authorities focussing on the implementation of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. Our lead food officer volunteered to be an auditor as part of this project undertaking audits at two neighbouring authorities. In addition we were subject to our own audit in July 2015. An action plan has been drawn up following this audit and agreed with Executive Board to makes improvements to the existing arrangements.

Conclusion

It has been a successful year in that more interventions have been delivered, every intervention serving to improve public safety. Though it is disappointing to see an increase in non compliance the team has acted swiftly to intervene and take the most appropriate course of action to protect the public.

The pressures of a prosecution, voluntary closures, seizures and the large number of hygiene improvement notices served has impacted upon the timely delivery of some of our lower risk food inspections. We have reviewed management practices and prioritised by risk throughout the year in accordance with the Food law Code of Practice in order to make sure our work is focussed on protecting the public.