

Appendix A



Food Safety Service Delivery Plan 2022-2023

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SERVICE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (the Council) is committed to ensuring that food produced, sold or consumed in the borough is safe to eat and does not pose a risk to public health.

This Food Safety Service Plan sets out how the Council will deliver the elements of food safety and hygiene for which the Council has enforcement responsibility.

The requirement to have a Food Service Plan is laid down by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in its Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement. The FSA was established in April 2000 as an independent monitoring and advisory body and is the central competent authority responsible for food safety in the UK.

2020-2022 were unprecedented years for the Environmental Health team and food safety service. All of the food competent officers were involved in the COVID-19 pandemic response. The closure of many businesses and the adaptation of businesses to work in different ways significantly impacted the food safety interventions carried out. The guidance produced by the Food Standards Agency in prioritising interventions during this time and afterwards (The Recovery Plan) was implemented as appropriate.

It was not possible to record every intervention carried out by the various teams, but at every covid restriction change relevant businesses were contacted and where information about new businesses or changes in how a business operated (e.g. to takeaway or delivery) was available, contact was made and advice was issued.

Investigations into workplace and community cases of COVID 19, supporting contact tracing, participation in outbreak management teams, daily outbreak cells and other daily emergency planning cells such as the excess deaths cell at the height of the pandemic, enforcement of the rules on businesses closures and the increase in complaints dealt with by the team – such as noise, bonfires etc. affecting people staying at home, placed additional demands on the service.

Although restrictions eased in 2021/2022 this was only part way through the year and the backlog of food hygiene interventions which had built up as with the majority of Councils, including an increase in food businesses registering during the period continued to impact on service delivery. New food registrations have continued to be received at a high rate.

Aim

To maintain, and where possible improve, the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors to the borough and the success of local food businesses by ensuring the safe production, processing, handling, storage, distribution and sale of food in the borough.

Objectives

The Council's Environmental Health team works with relevant central government agencies to enforce statutory provisions and to provide education, guidance and emergency intervention to ensure the health of persons living, working and spending leisure time in the Borough is not adversely affected by physical, chemical or biological hazards. One element of this work involves appointing persons as Authorised Officers under the Food Safety Act 1990 to regulate food safety in the borough.

Specific objectives of the Environmental Health team in connection with food safety are:

- To meet the standard set out in the Framework Agreement issued by the Food Standards Agency
- To implement the FSA Recovery Plan prioritising food safety interventions
- To ensure that food is safe to eat and free from extraneous matter
- To carry out food hygiene interventions in accordance with the minimum inspection frequencies and to standards determined by the Food Standards Agency
- To participate in the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme providing information about businesses to facilitate customer choice
- To encourage standards of hygiene higher than the minimum acceptable in law
- To take enforcement as necessary, proportionate and appropriate in order that duty holders are able to achieve and maintain a good standard of food hygiene
- To keep accurate records of all food enforcement activities and maintain an accurate register of food businesses in the borough
- To deal with food alerts in accordance with Food Standards Agency guidance
- To investigate complaints relating to food premises or food sold in the borough
- To investigate notified cases and outbreaks of food and water borne illness and take effective action to control the spread of infection in conjunction with the appropriate officers of UK Health & Security Agency, and other partners as necessary
- To sample and risk-assess private water supplies
- To effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the public and businesses using our service and to respond positively to challenges

- To increase the knowledge of food handlers and the general public about the principles and practice of food hygiene
- To support and promote schemes and initiatives which improve the health of customers of food businesses
- To undertake surveillance, inspection and sampling of foods and food contact materials including imported food
- To provide appropriate responses to public health emergencies
- To work with partners to maintain a safe community.

Links to Corporate Objectives and Plans

This work underpins the [Council's Corporate Plan 2021-24](#) of which corporate priorities include a commitment to:

- Evolving, vibrant town centres and a growing economy
- A sense of community where people feel safe
- A well run council which puts its customers first

BACKGROUND

Profile of the Local Authority

Welwyn Hatfield Council is a blend of old and new and covers an area of approximately 130 square kilometres of mid Hertfordshire in the East of England. It is made up of both urban and rural communities, with the towns of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield the main commercial centres, with eight other large villages and settlements.

The borough has a population of approximately 119,900 in 2021 (Census 2021). This is an increase of 8.5% between 2011 and 2021, higher than the overall increase for England at 6.6%, and slightly higher than the East of England (8.3%). This exceeds previous Government demographic projections of population and household growth indicated for Welwyn Hatfield. Welwyn Hatfield is generally a prosperous area but there are some pockets of deprivation and disadvantage.

Hertfordshire has a successful and prosperous economy and this is also predicted to grow over coming decades. Major regeneration and growth initiatives are planned throughout the County and this includes Hatfield 2030+ which plans to improve both housing and business opportunities. This work has started with the development of The Common multi-storey car park in Hatfield town centre and the ongoing redevelopment of High View in Hatfield which will create new homes and business premises.

Organisational Structure

The Council's management structure can be found [here](#). The Food Safety Service sits within the Resident & Neighbourhood Directorate.

Welwyn Hatfield Council is in a two-tier area and has adopted a Leader and Cabinet system of government. The Council's committee structure is [here](#). The Food Safety Plan is approved by Cabinet.

There is an interim manager with responsibility for the delivery of official food controls, and the manager with specialist responsibility for food hygiene is the Team Leader (Public Health and Protection).

The Food Safety staff establishment provides for four suitably qualified officers who are able to undertake food safety duties. This comprises the Team Leader, two Environmental Health Officers and a Technical Officer. During 2022, short term food competent contractors have also been employed to support the team with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Recovery Plan, undertaking overdue food inspections.

There is also one part time health improvement officer whose work includes to a lesser degree the delivery of food safety promotion, with a greater emphasis towards wider public health and healthy eating projects.

The Council Constitution provides delegated authority to environmental health staff and appoints the Consultant(s) in Communicable Disease Control working for UK Health and security Agency as the "Proper Officer" for communicable disease control.

Specialist services are provided by external agencies such as the Food Examiner and the Public Analyst.

Scope of the Food Safety Service

The work of the Food Safety team also includes health and safety at work interventions, private water supplies, communicable diseases and also provides advice to the Safety Advisory Group.

As mentioned above, some short term food competent officers are being used during 2022 to assist with the FSA recovery plan.

In terms of food safety services, responsibilities include:

- Inspection of food premises in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice
- Registration of food businesses
- Approval and inspection of businesses producing foods of animal origin
- Investigation of complaints about food and hygiene at food premises
- Promotion of documented food safety systems
- Participation in and promotion of the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme
- Sampling of food for microbiological examination

- Investigation of food borne infection
- Investigation of food poisoning outbreaks
- Imported food control
- Food Sampling
- Food alerts (food hazard warnings)
- Provision of advice and guidance including participation in events that promote food safety and supporting new and proposed food businesses

Demands on the Food Service

Food hygiene inspections are carried out on a scheduled basis, to ensure that food is stored, prepared, handled and sold from this borough is safe for consumers to eat. The length of time between inspections is determined by carrying out a risk assessment against pre-determined criteria prescribed by the Food Standards Agency within the Food Law Code of Practice.

The table below shows the total number of food premises in the borough broken down by the type of food business:

FSA Code (Premises Type)	Numbers of premises
Catering Premises	34
Takeaway	54
Distributor	21
Hotel/Guest House	9
Importer	4
Manufacturer/processor	13
Mobile Food Unit	41
Pub/Club	55
Restaurant/Caterer – other	239
Restaurant/Café/Canteen	189
Retailer	52
School/college	70
Smaller retailer	79
Supermarkets/Hypermarkets	24
No code allocated	10
Total	894

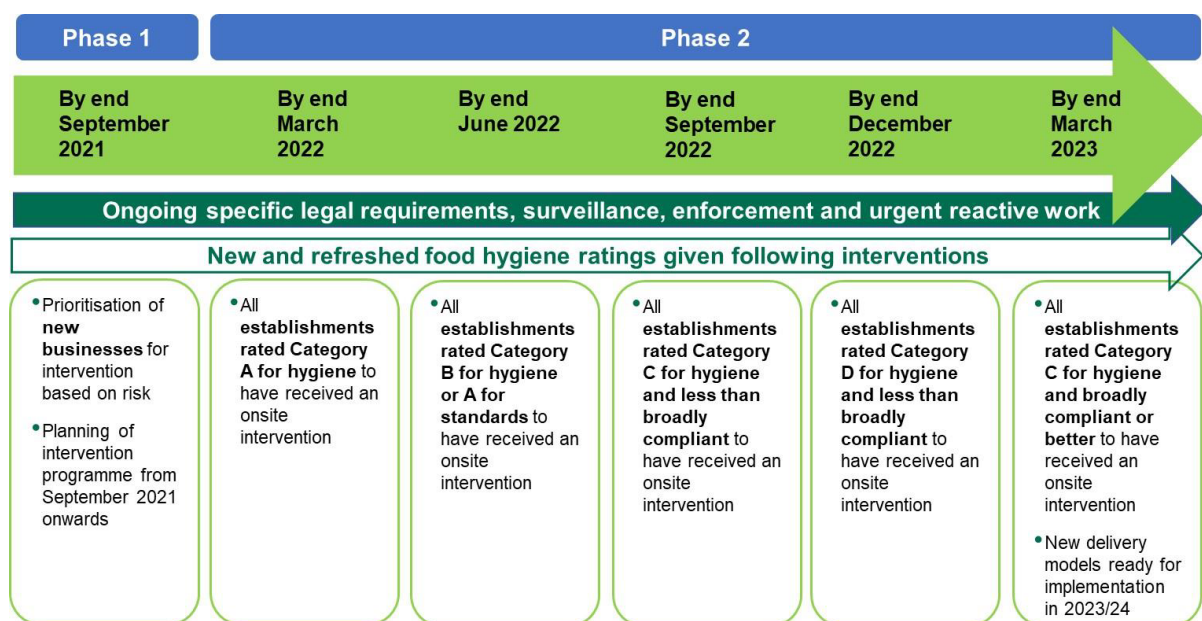
We currently have one food business that is an approved establishment. This food business is approved for the supply of fishery products. This business does not present any complex processes for inspection purposes.

FSA Recovery Plan

In March 2020, like most Councils, we suspended the delivery of our normal food safety service and prioritised Covid interventions, initially for the safety of our staff and customers, shortly afterwards as instructed by the Food Standards Agency.

Since this time, we have worked to deliver food safety services in line with the FSA directions throughout the pandemic and now with the FSA Recovery Plan which operates until March 2023.

The FSA Recovery Plan highlights specific time sensitive targets for food inspections to be completed. Achievement against this plan is measured by the Food Standards Agency by statutory return. We are on target to complete all food hygiene inspections/interventions by 31 March 2023 (at the latest) in accordance with the FSA recovery plan.



As of October 2022 (at the time of writing) there are 358 food inspections with an outstanding inspection due to be carried out in 2022/23 across all premises and risk categories. 36 are 'high risk' inspections in categories A-C, with the remaining 316 lower risk food businesses (category D & E). A breakdown of the total inspections for the entire year 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023 is provided below (Page 10).

We also have 6 new business that have registered and require inspection and rating. New food business registrations are risk assessed when they are received and those that can be identified as high risk food businesses are prioritised for inspection. Many of the new business registrations that we receive are low risk in terms of food safety, but they must all be inspected.

Regulation (Enforcement) Policy

The Food Safety Team undertakes enforcement in accordance with the [Corporate Enforcement Policy](#). The Corporate Enforcement Policy was approved by Full Council 9 July 2018 and embraces the Better Regulation principles of proportionality, accountability, consistency, transparency and targeting.

Service delivery points

The Environmental Health Service is located at:

The Council Offices,
The Campus,
Welwyn Garden City,
Hertfordshire
AL8 6AE

Service users may contact officers in the following ways:

- By mail
- In person at the reception to the above premises
- By telephone between 8.45am and 5.15pm (4.45pm on a Friday) on 01707 357242
- By email: e.health@welhat.gov.uk. In addition, each officer has their own email address

The majority of food safety work is carried out during the above office hours, although officers may conduct inspections out of hours as necessary.

An out of office hours service for serious food emergencies can be contacted via the Welwyn Hatfield Council Emergency Contact Centre on 0800 1114484.

Any queries or concerns about enforcement action should be discussed with the enforcement officer in the first instance. If this is not resolved to the satisfaction of the customer, they can register their [complaint online on the Council's website](#) or email contact-WHC@welhat.gov.uk

Appeals against enforcement action must be lodged with the appropriate Court or tribunal within the statutory timescale.

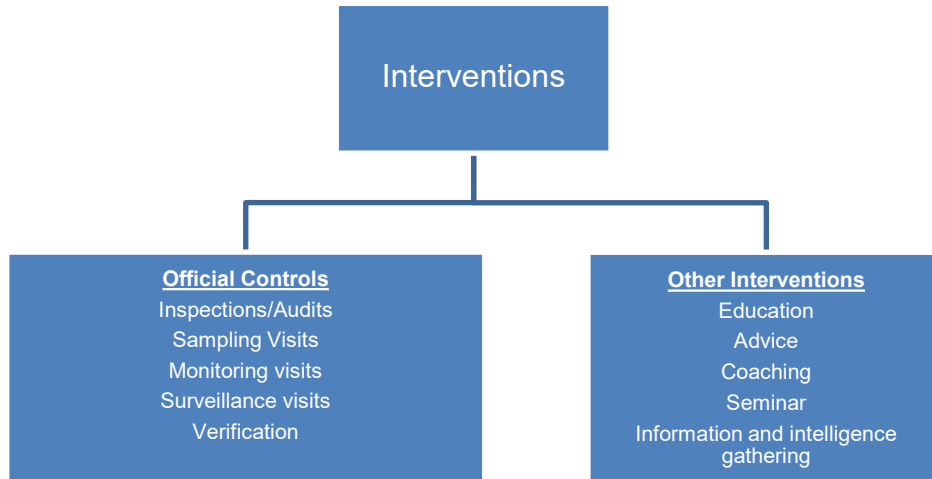
SERVICE DELIVERY

Interventions at Food Establishments

The authority aims to undertake good quality, effective risk-based interventions in accordance with the Food and Feed Law Code of Practice and Practice Guidance. All premises are risk rated and inspected or receive an intervention in accordance with the Code of Practice.

The aim is to achieve 100% inspection or intervention of all food premises, and the highest risk premises (Category A-C) are always prioritised.

Interventions at food premises can comprise a number of 'official controls' and other interventions to achieve compliance.



Category C/D food business interventions

Though there is flexibility with the Food Law Code of Practice for the type of official control intervention in Category C and D food business, this year given the disruption to the inspection delivery due to the Covid pandemic, all of these businesses will receive a full inspection.

Alternative Enforcement Strategy/Low Risk Establishments

Category E food businesses shall be subject to an alternative enforcement strategy. These businesses are being written to in the first instance and asked to complete a risk-based assessment questionnaire regarding their current business activities. Those not returned will be prioritised for inspection. Of the questionnaires completed a desk top risk rating will be undertaken and those that pose a higher risk will be inspected, and a sample of the others (depending on the size of the return) will be inspected.

Other Food Interventions

Revisits are undertaken to food businesses where necessary, where formal notices have been issued or the risk rating is high and requires a follow up to ensure actions have been taken.

It is difficult to determine the exact number of requests for service that we will receive during the year. However, it should be noted that we have experienced an increase in demand for service so far with 65 requests already this year. For comparison during 2018/19 we had a total of 26 for the year.

Such complaints and enquiries place unplanned demands on our service, but an effective response can maintain consumer confidence in local food businesses and improve standards. Complaints are also a key means by which we can gain intelligence about food businesses.

Reflective of the number of food inspections being carried out, there were two requests for revisit and no appeals last year. This year there have been nine requests for revisits and two appeals so far. Following Food Standards Agency guidance for the delivery of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, the Council introduced a cost recovery charge for those businesses that requested a revisit after April 2018. The current charge is listed within the Council's fees and charges.

Imported Food

As an inland authority our imported food controls are embedded within our routine inspection planned visits. We have prompts within our aide memoire to check the traceability of foods. We have a limited number of food businesses that are the first destination inland after import and in these premises import documentation can be checked.

Our team of officers maintain competency in imported food control through formalised training and their experience in this field. Where food fails to meet food safety requirements officers have sufficient competency to act appropriately and we will take enforcement action.

All food competent Environmental Health Officers working within the food team are expected to retain the status of Food Competent Certification Officer in order that they can deliver official controls on behalf of the Government to complete Export Health Certificates for certain animal products.

Inspections due in April 2022 - March 2023

The Food Law Code of Practice (England) 2021 details the five risk categories of food premises with each class of risk group having a specific minimum frequency of intervention. The number of premises in each category due to be inspected this year is detailed below:

Risk Category	Frequency of Inspection	Inspections outstanding at 14/10/22*
Category A	Inspection, partial inspection or audit at least every 6 months.	0
Category B	Inspection, partial inspection or audit at least every 12 months.	8

Category C	Inspection, partial inspection or audit every 18 months unless the business is 'broadly compliant' when planned interventions can then alternate between either an inspection, partial inspection, audit or other type of official control.	28
Category D	Intervention at least every 2 years and dependant on 'type of food' and 'method of handling' as defined in the food law code of practice.	88
Category E	Alternative enforcement strategy or intervention at least once every 3 years	228
Unrated	This figure is constantly changing as businesses register throughout the year. New registrations are prioritised for inspection based on risk.	6
TOTAL		358

*Figures at 14 October 2022. These figures are currently changing on a daily basis due to the resource that is currently allocated to food interventions, but this table provides a reference for understanding our position at this time.

Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

The FHRS is a Food Standards Agency national scheme which provides consumers with information about hygiene standards in food business establishments using, information gathered by officers at the time they are inspected to check compliance with legal requirements on food hygiene. The food hygiene rating given reflects the inspection findings.

The FHRS allows consumers to make informed choices about the places where they eat or shop for food and, through these choices, encourage businesses to improve their hygiene standards.

The service is committed to deliver the national food hygiene rating scheme which rates food businesses on a scoring system from 0 (urgent improvement necessary) to 5 (very good) based on compliance at the time of the last routine inspection. Food hygiene ratings are published online at <http://ratings.food.gov.uk/>.

Businesses are encouraged to display a sticker showing their food hygiene ratings at their premises where consumers can easily see them, although there is no legal requirement currently to display them.

The FHRS incorporates safeguards to ensure fairness to businesses. This includes an appeal procedure, a 'right to reply' for publication (together with the food hygiene rating) at <http://ratings.food.gov.uk/> and a mechanism for requesting a re-inspection/re-visit for the purposes of re-rating when improvements have been made.

As stated above a charge for requests for revisits made by businesses after April 2018 was introduced by the Council and there has not been any significant increase on demand following this change in policy.

Food complaints

All complaints about food or a food premises are recorded on the M3 database, assessed, prioritised and dealt with according to risk to determine level of intervention and appropriate further action.

Home Authority and Primary Authority

The service has one Primary Authority agreement for food hygiene with Ocado. This involves the delivery of around 155 hours of food safety support per year.

A Team Leader and an Environmental Health Officer deliver this agreement which includes the provision of advice, guidance, and the investigation of complaints, liaising as appropriate with other enforcement authorities.

We are open to the development of further primary authority agreements with either locally based or other multi-site companies. Given that primary authority support is provided through the existing staffing allocation currently, we must be mindful to ensure we select relationships that suit the resource and skills available.

Advice to Business

The Food Safety Team is committed to supporting businesses in the borough, facilitating legal compliance, business growth and overall employment and economic viability.

The food industry is regulated by a range of legislation that aims to keep our food safe. Our work with food businesses is focused on helping them to comply with food safety legislation.

The Council helps businesses achieve compliance in various ways:

- Advice given during the course of inspections and other visits.
- By responding to enquiries.
- By offering a comprehensive advice service to new businesses.

The Council is also part of a Hertfordshire wide initiative called 'Better Business for All', which seeks to reduce regulatory burdens on business and support growth in the County. During the pandemic the partnership strengthened enormously as it became quickly evident of the support SMEs needed. The team worked collaboratively with colleagues across Hertfordshire authorities to interpret complex government guidance and provide business friendly interpretation. Guides produced remain

hosted on the LEP website and continue to be developed.
www.hertfordshirelep.com/business/business-support/

Food Sampling

It is the Council's policy to participate, where appropriate and where resources permit, in national, regional and locally coordinated sampling programmes.

Welwyn Hatfield Council has a credit allocation with UKHSA for microbiological sampling which is set at the beginning of each financial year. In the 2022/23 financial year, the allocation for Welwyn Hatfield Council is the same as previous years of 3720 credits (25–50 credits are required depending on the nature of each sample).

Our proactive sampling activity has ceased this year with prioritisation given to inspection interventions and enforcement action as necessary. There is sufficient resource to carry out reactive sampling as required. We will continue to review the resource available to recommence a proactive sampling programme quarterly during 2022/23, with a view to re-starting the proactive sampling programme formally in April 2023.

In respect of Microbiological Examination our samples will be sent to:

London Food, Water and Environmental Microbiological Laboratory, London
61 Colindale Avenue
London
NW9 5HT

Samples for analysis will only be taken in response to customer complaints when appropriate and considered necessary. The Public Analyst appointed by Hertfordshire County Council and therefore used by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council are:

Hampshire & Kent Scientific Services
Public Protection, Growth, Environment & Transport
Kent County Council
8 Abbey Wood Road, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4YT

Food Safety Incidents/Alerts

A 'food alert for action' is a communication from the Food Standards Agency to food authorities concerning a food hazard or other food incident and should be read accordingly. Actions are taken in compliance with the Food Law Code of Practice.

The agency may require action by us in response to these alerts and we have a documented procedure for dealing with such incidents. It is difficult to determine the

resource such incidents require on an annual basis as it is dependent on the nature of the action required and the number of food business it affects locally.

Liaison with other organisations

As part of the provision of a complete service and to ensure consistency of approach, the section works in conjunction with the following partner organisations:

- The Food Standards Agency
- Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
- The UK Health and Security Agency (UKHSA)
- Other local authorities including Trading Standards as appropriate
- Public Analyst

The Council is also represented on the following working groups:

- Hertfordshire, Beds & Bucks Food Liaison Group
- HEHOC Business Guidance Group
- Hertfordshire Health Protection Board
- Hertfordshire Health Protection Group
- Hertfordshire Environmental Health & Licensing Leaders Group

These groups also contribute to wider regional and national working groups.

This year the Council continues to be actively involved in developing Hertfordshire wide Incident Management Plans for during the COVID 19 pandemic as well as local, regional and national forums to ensure a co-ordinated and consistent response to anticipated patterns of infection over the winter months.

Food safety and standards promotional work

As mentioned above, there is also one part time health improvement officer whose work includes to a lesser degree the delivery of food safety promotion, with a greater emphasis towards wider public health and healthy eating projects.

Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Disease

When suspected food poisonings occur, our officers become involved in investigating the cause and identifying any unsafe food that is still in the food chain to help prevent further cases of illness.

In the event of a suspected outbreak, the resource demand would be significantly higher due to the intensive staffing requirements when dealing with such eventualities. This would be accommodated by diverting resources from other less critical environmental health work. All notifications are investigated.

Food Fraud

Food fraud is committed when food is placed on the market with the aim of deliberately misleading the consumer. Food fraud is carried out for financial gain and has become an ever increasing phenomenon nationally. Food Fraud can give rise serious health risks.

Examples of food fraud include;

- Recycling of animal –by-products back into the food chain
- Packing and selling of beef and poultry with unknown origin
- Knowingly selling goods which are past their ‘use by’ dates
- Deliberate false mis-description of food for example cheaper alternatives, peanuts instead of almonds, farmed salmon sold as wild, the widely publicised use of horse meat.

Our Service helps to prevent and act upon food fraud by responding to FSA food alerts, and reporting suspicions or information gained through our routine interventions with business and the community. Tackling food fraud ensures that there is a level playing field for all businesses and encourages a vibrant economy.

RESOURCES

Financial Allocation

The Public Health and Protection Service is allocated an annual budget as agreed by the Council’s Cabinet and Full Council. The budget for the whole of the Public Health and Protection Service in 2022/23 is £748K; however, this includes the food safety service, other functions within the food safety team and the Environmental protection service. This is published and with regard specifically to the delivery of the food service budget for:

- Staffing
- Computer software
- Consultancy fees including specialist and legal advice
- Laboratory examination
- Promotional materials
- Personal protective equipment for food officers
- Sampling
- Technical equipment for food officers
- Training and development of food officers
- Travel (including car mileage)

There is no growth or reduction in budget that will affect the delivery of the food service in 2022/23. However, enforcement cases may require additional spend over and above that allocated in the base budget at the start of the year.

Staffing Allocation

As described above, there are two Environmental Health Officers and one Technical Officer assigned to deliver food interventions under the management of a Lead Food Officer (Team Leader).

The officers undertaking food safety interventions also carry out other Environmental Health work, but this is more limited than it has been previously to provide more focus on the delivery of the food service.

Technical Officers undertake food safety work to a level appropriate to their qualifications and in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice.

A team of 3 support officers is available to assist the food officers in the delivery of their work in addition to supporting the delivery of all other aspects of the environmental health service.

Staff development plan

All officers are subject to regular appraisal and participation in competency assessments and authorisation frameworks for the relevant service areas.

Specific Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements as required by the Food Law Code of Practice, membership of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health or equivalent professional bodies are also adhered to.

It is essential that Officers are up to date in legislation and enforcement issues and the service utilises free and low cost training courses available in addition to completing specific job training as required by the Food Standards Agency Competency Framework for authorisation.

In line with Council corporate procedures, staff appraisal and development assessments are undertaken. Training needs are identified during this process and may also arise during the course of the year as part of staff monthly one to one meetings.

Quality Assurance and Internal Monitoring

The following monitoring arrangements are in place:

- Sample paper/computer based checks in respect of food hygiene inspections
- Sample paper/computer based checks in respect of food complaints
- Shadow inspections for new staff or those returning to food work
- Peer review/audit of enforcement action in respect of food safety work.

REVIEW

Review against the Service Plan

As part of the service planning process, a full review of all activities referred to in this document will be undertaken.

Identification of any Variation from the Review

The review will identify where the Authority is at variance from the service plan and, if appropriate, the reasons for that variance.

Areas of Improvement

The Authority will set out any relevant improvement plan identified as necessary by the review. This is in addition to the matters identified and agreed in the service plan and the council business plan.

The review of last years' Food Safety Plan identified the following Improvement Plan for 2022/23

1. Identify and source resource for the delivery of the food safety service demands
2. Reduce the number of new registration inspections and ensure that from April 2023 new registrations are completed within 28 days of registration
3. Recommence monitoring arrangements for all food competent officers