

Appendix A



**WELWYN
HATFIELD**

Food Safety Service Plan 2024-2025

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1. SERVICE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aims and Objectives

To improve, the health of residents and visitors and enable a prosperous local food business economy by ensuring the safe production, processing, handling, storage, distribution and sale of food in the borough.

Links to corporate objectives and plans

Food Safety service work underpins the [Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2026](#) , and the particular corporate priorities that the Food Safety Service Plan aligns with are:

- ***Enable an economy that delivers for everyone***

Food interventions support local businesses to be compliant and successful. The food sector is a significant employer in the Borough. Regulation supports business growth and achieves overall long-term economic gains. Working with businesses and partners to create a fair and equitable trading environment. Supporting businesses through education, advice and targeted enforcement and encouraging best practice.

- ***Run an effective council***

Our service aims to be accessible, accountable and adopt a first-time right approach. The service supports Better Business for All to ensure businesses get the right support for regulators in a format that is accessible.

- ***Together, create opportunities for our communities***

Food interventions ensure the safety of food manufactured, processed and sold in the borough to help us feel safer. Ensuring high standards of food hygiene and food standards through monitoring of premises to achieve compliance with food law. Empower consumers to make informed choices in relation to the food they purchase and consume through the Food Standards Agency National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.

This Food Safety Service Plan has been produced as required by and in accordance with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in its Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement.

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

2. BACKGROUND

Profile of the Local Authority

Welwyn Hatfield Council 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.

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 the East of England (8.3%). Welwyn Hatfield is generally a prosperous area but has some areas of deprivation and disadvantage.

Organisational Structure

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 the Cabinet.

The Council's management structure is [here](#):

Food Safety is delivered by the Environmental Health Team, which is part of the Environmental Health Service which is part of the Resident Serviced and Climate Change Directorate.

The food service is delivered by 3 full-time equivalents, as follows:

- 1.0 x Team Leader (Senior Food Officer);
- 1.0 x Environmental Health Officer
- 1.0 x Technical Officer

There is a 0.5 FTE Health Improvement Officer who works to improve wider health determinants and supports the promotion of healthy eating. We also are grant-funded by Hertfordshire Public Health to deliver a health-based sign-posting scheme known as Healthy Hub. A component of this relates to healthy eating.

The whole Environmental Health service, which includes food safety, is additionally supported by a team of 2½ administrative officers and an IT Systems Manager.

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

Scope of the Food Service

The work of the Food Safety Team was narrowed to focus on food safety, health and safety at work matters, advice to the Safety Advisory Group and communicable disease control.

Food-related roles include:

- delivering a food service that adheres to Food Standards Agency's Food Law Code of Practice;
- undertaking food hygiene interventions in accordance with the Food Standards Agency's minimum inspection frequencies and standards;
- participating in the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme;
- determining approvals for foods of animal origin;
- involvement in the control of imported foods;
- taking proportionate regulatory action if required to achieve and maintain a good standard of food hygiene;
- keeping an accurate register of food businesses;
- keeping records of food regulatory activities;
- responding to Food Standards Agency food alerts;
- undertake surveillance, inspection and sampling of foods and contact materials;
- investigating complaints relating to food sold or handled in the borough;
- investigating cases and outbreaks of food or water-borne illness and taking effective action to control the spread of infection;
- providing appropriate responses in support of public health emergencies; and
- subject to the availability of resources, to support initiatives that improve the health of residents & visitors.

Demands on the Food Service

Food hygiene establishments are regularly inspected. The time between each inspection is determined using the national risk assessment scheme.

Welwyn Hatfield has approximately 750 food businesses. Since the pandemic there has been a higher turnover of food businesses. The table below shows the total number of food establishments in the borough broken down by the type of food business as of 8 February 2024:

Premises type (FSA category)	Establishments
Catering Premises	37
Caterer / Restaurant	2
Distributor	20
Hotel/Guest House	9
Importer	3

Manufacturer/processor	11
Mobile Food Unit	29
Pub/Club	52
Restaurant/Café/Canteen	133
Restaurant/Caterer – other	172
Retailer	45
School/college	70
Smaller retailer	76
Supermarkets/Hypermarkets	24
Takeaway	53
Uncategorised	6
Total	742

We currently have two food businesses that are approved establishments. These are a food business that is approved for the supply of fishery products and one business approved as a collection centre for dairy products.

The use of privately owned venues for entertainment events results in significant demand for regulatory advice to promoters and the Safety Advisory Group. This includes major festivals at Hatfield House and Colesdale Farm. This have a significant impact on more routine food safety work, especially during the spring/summer event season.

Service delivery points

The service is wholly located at:

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

Service users may contact officers in the following ways:

- **Email:** e.health@welhat.gov.uk
- **In person:** between 8.45am and 5.15pm (Mon – Thu) 8.45am - 4.45pm (Fri)
- **Telephone:** 01707 357242 during the above hours.

An out-of-office hours service for serious food emergencies can be contacted via the Welwyn Hatfield Council Emergency Contact Centre on 0800 111 4484.

Regulation Policy

Regulation adheres to the [Corporate Enforcement Policy](#), which was approved by Full Council on 9 July 2018 and embraces the Better Regulation principles of proportionality, accountability, consistency, transparency and targeting.

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 customer's satisfaction, they can register their [complaint online](#) or using one of the above service access routes.

3. SERVICE DELIVERY

Interventions at Food Establishments

The authority ensures that all establishments are risk-rated and inspected or receive an intervention in accordance with the national Food Law Code of Practice.

Improving compliance of Non-Compliant Businesses (rated 0-2)

Where there is a history of poor performance in non-compliant businesses, officers may serve food hygiene improvement notices and/or seek to prosecute. Premises will receive a verification/surveillance or monitoring intervention (a revisit) to ensure they are compliant.

New Businesses

The Food Law Code of Practice requires that unrated (i.e. new) food premises be inspected, and risk rated within 28 days of registering. We have and will continue to triage all new premises to identify which ones are likely to pose a high risk. In line with other Hertfordshire authorities, we are reviewing our handling of new business registrations as we are finding it increasingly difficult to contact all of those that register with us, finding that many are registering well in advance of any proposed opening and/or the business not coming to fruition.

Inspections due between 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

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.

As of February 2024, 302 food inspections are due to be carried out in 2024/25 across all premises and risk categories, the majority of these are categories C and D.

New businesses will require inspection in addition to the programmed inspections currently due. (This figure can alter slightly where risk changes following an intervention).

The number of premises in each category due for inspection in 2024/25 (and those that are remaining for 2023/24 and will be inspected by 31 March 2024) is:

Risk Category	Frequency of Inspection	Establishments	Inspections due in 23/24	Inspections outstanding *	Inspections due in 2024/25
A	Inspection, partial inspection or audit at least every 6 months.	0	0	0	0
B	Inspection, partial inspection or audit at least every 12 months.	17	18	0	16
C	Inspection, partial	158	133	40	86

	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.				
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.	311	71	24	195
E	Alternative enforcement strategy or intervention at least once every 3 years	254	1	0	5
Unrated	This figure is constantly changing as businesses register throughout the year. New registrations are prioritised for inspection based on risk.	37	50-100	37	100**
TOTAL					302 (plus an estimated 100 new premises)

*Figures at the time of writing February 2024. These visits are all scheduled to be completed by 31 March 2024.

**Estimation

It should be noted that the required intervention level is less than would ordinarily be the case, because of the compression caused by last year's recovery inspection programme of most establishments. As many establishments have an inspection frequency of more than 12 months, this means that there will be fewer inspections in the coming year.

We plan to use this as an opportunity to redouble our work in the coming year to help local establishments to improve hygiene standards and obtain high Food Hygiene Ratings.

Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

The FHRs is a national scheme that provides consumers with information about hygiene standards at each rated establishment. Establishments rated 3 or higher are regarded as being '*broadly compliant*'.



The rating scheme allows consumers to make informed choices about hygiene standards at each establishment and encourage businesses to improve standards without regulatory action.

There is no mandatory requirement for food establishments operating in England to display the rating sticker, and some businesses with a lower rating choose not to do so.

The table below shows the food hygiene rating against establishment risk. '*broadly compliant*' establishments are shown in green. For printed versions of this report without colour, establishments that are not '*broadly compliant*' are shown using an asterisk.

	FHRS 0	FHRS 1	FHRS 2	FHRS 3	FHRS 4	FHRS 5	Total
A-rated risk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
B-rated risk	0	4	0	3	4	7	17
C-rated risk	0	0	2	29	52	75	158
D-rated risk	0	1	2	8	24	275	311
E-rated risk	0	0	0	0	20	199	254
Total	0	5	4	40	99	556	704

As of 2 February 2024.

Thus 98.7% of local food establishments are '*broadly compliant*'.

Following the inspection if the business is not satisfied with the score they have been awarded there are several options available to them.

If the business owner or manager thinks that the rating is unfair or wrong, they can appeal in writing to the Council. The 'right to reply' allows the business to tell

customers how the business has improved its hygiene standards or if there were unusual circumstances at the time of inspection. This response will be published online, alongside the rating. The business owner/manager can request a re-visit to get a new rating when all the necessary hygiene improvements have been made, for this, at Welwyn Hatfield, there is a charge of £223. This is a cost recovery charge that was introduced in April 2018. This fee is listed in the Council's fees and charges and is published annually.

There were 5 FHRS requests for revisits in 2023/24, we would anticipate a similar number in 2024/25.

Staffing resource required

All local authorities submit performance monitoring data to the Food Standards Agency and the agency publishes this information annually. This includes inspections undertaken and staff resources. Using this data, we can extrapolate and normalise this data to determine the maximum number of food establishments a full-time inspector may be allocated before this starts to adversely impact the delivery of required inspections.

The most recent published data is for 2019/20, and this showed that the UK average benchmark for maximum establishments adversely impacts the delivery of required inspections was 371.

We are satisfied that 2 front-line FTEs and 1 FTE Team Leader are sufficient for the number of food establishments (and non- food safety work) to fully deliver the Food Law Code of Practice requirements of a food service.

Food 'complaints'

All food service requests (sometimes called complaints) are assessed, prioritised and dealt with according to available capacity and risk. In 2023/24 (as of 2 February 2024) there were 110 service requests.

Home Authority and Primary Authority

Primary Authority is administered by OPSS (Office of Products Safety and Standards) which is part of BEIS (Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy). Primary Authority enables businesses to form a statutory partnership with one local authority. This Authority can then provide assured advice for other local regulators to take into account when carrying out inspections or addressing non-compliance.

The aim is to deliver improved co-ordination and consistency, and provide for an improved national approach to multi-site businesses in England and Wales.

The service has one Primary Authority agreement for food hygiene with Ocado Retail. This involves the delivery of around 155 hours of food safety support per year and can be delivered from within existing resources. The service is paid for by Ocado.

Advice to Business

The council is committed to supporting hygiene standards, business prosperity, thriving town centres and local employment.

The Council helps businesses achieve compliance by:

- giving advice during interventions;
- responding to requests for advice.

The Council seeks to reduce regulatory burdens and support business prosperity through the Hertfordshire-wide '[Better Business for All](#)' scheme.

In the coming year, we intend to utilise the tools being developed by the Better Business for All partnership to help support food businesses with their compliance around the provision of a documented food safety management system.

Food Sampling

In accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice we have a food sampling policy and program. The team will participate in any national; UK Health Security Agency (formerly Public Health England), nationwide coordinated sampling projects where there is a clearly identifiable risk/problem. This will include at least three national projects in addition to our local sampling plan.

Sampling will include a range of microbiological and analytical samples of foodstuffs and environmental swabbing. Samples are sent for microbiological examination to UK Health Security Agency and samples requiring chemical or physical analysis are sent to the Public Analyst.

The Council has a UKHSA credit allocation for microbiological sampling of 3,720 credits, which is equivalent to around 100 samples per year depending on the complexity of laboratory processes.

Sampling will also be undertaken, where appropriate, in relation to food poisoning outbreaks and food complaints, where formal action is being considered. The Authority will also sample, where necessary, any high-risk manufacturers within the district, and any businesses with which we have a primary authority agreement.

Microbiological Examination is undertaken by:

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

The County-appointed Public Analyst is:

Hampshire & Kent Scientific Services
Kent County Council
8 Abbey Wood Road
West Malling
Kent
ME19 4YT

Food Safety Incidents

A Product Withdrawal Information Notice or a Product Recall Information Notice is issued where a solution to the problem has been put in place, for example the product has been, or is being, withdrawn from sale or recalled from consumers.

A Food Alert for Action is issued where intervention by enforcement authorities is required. These notices and alerts are often issued in conjunction with a product withdrawal or recall by a manufacturer, retailer or distributor

The council handles food safety incidents including 'alerts' from the Food Standards Agency in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice.

Liaison with other organisations

The council has effective joint working with:

- the Food Standards Agency;
- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs;
- the Health and Safety Executive;
- the UK Health and Security Agency;
- other local authorities; and
- the Public Analyst

The Council is also represented at the following groups:

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

Food promotional work

There is a 0.5 FTE Health Improvement Officer who works to improve wider health determinants and supports the promotion of healthy eating. We also are grant-funded by Hertfordshire Public Health to deliver a health-based sign-posting scheme known

as Healthy Hub and Place Based Health Inequalities work. A component of this relates to healthy eating.

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 and acting on 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. All suspected outbreak notifications are investigated.

4. RESOURCES

Financial Allocation

The Environmental Health Service is allocated an annual budget as agreed by the Council's Cabinet and Full Council. The budget for Environmental Health in 2024/25 is £767,000 which includes other services as well as the Food Safety Team, notably Environmental Protection.

There is no growth or reduction in budget that will affect the delivery of the food service in 2024/25. However, enforcement cases may require additional spend over and above that allocated in the base budget.

Staffing Allocation

The food service is delivered by 3 full-time equivalents, as follows:

- 1.0 x Team Leader (Lead Food Officer);
- 1.0 x Environmental Health Officer
- 1.0 x Technical Officer

Whilst these officers primarily undertake food law regulation they also undertake Health and safety, communicable disease prevention and event safety advisory work.

There is also a 0.5 FTE Health Improvement Officer who works to improve wider health determinants and supports the promotion of healthy eating. We also are grant-funded by Hertfordshire Public Health to deliver a health-based sign-posting scheme known as Healthy Hub. A component of this relates to healthy eating.

The whole Environmental Health service, which includes food safety, is additionally supported by a team of 2½ administrative officers and an IT Systems Manager.

The Environmental Health Officer and Environmental Health posts are assigned work based on their competency, qualifications and the requirements of the Food Law Code of Practice.

Staff development plan

The Authority will ensure that all officers involved in food safety work receive ongoing training in order to maintain and improve their level of competency and comply with the Food Law Code of Practice (England).

The Food Law Code of Practice 2023 details competency and qualification requirements for authorised officers. The Code of Practice has a requirement for evidenced based competency assessment for officers with officers obtaining a minimum of 20 hours CPD annually. Competent Authorities must ensure the 20 hours CPD are split as follows, a minimum of 10 hours on subject matters set out in Chapter 1 of Annex II of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 and on the obligations of the

Competent Authority resulting from this Regulation, relevant to the activities they are authorised to undertake and 10 hours on other professional matter.

5. QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Quality Assurance and Internal Monitoring

The following monitoring arrangements are in place:

- Paper/computer based checks in respect of food hygiene inspections. 5% of inspections will be checked and monitored.
- Paper/computer based checks in respect of food complaints.
- Shadow inspections for all new staff and those returning to food work
- Peer review/audit of enforcement action in respect of food safety work.
- Daily support of the Team Leader towards frontline officers and support staff
- Written work instructions and operational procedures
- Complaints against the service are received and recorded corporately in Jadu.
- Team Leader to manage any appeals made under the FHRS.
- Use of inspection checklist/proformas for inspections and standard phrases for consistency in formal letters.
- Ongoing appraisals and regular one to one meetings.
- Team meetings and briefings to discuss matters of professional and technical interest.
- Participation in the national FSA consistency exercise

The Food Service aspect of Environmental Health also has a number of performance indicators which are monitored on a monthly basis throughout the year.

These are:

- Food Inspections- 100% target for the completion of routine programmed inspections
- New food business inspected within target (28 days) - target 100%
- Broadly compliant- target of 90% (FHRS 3 or above)

6. REVIEW

Review against 2023/24 service plan

The food inspection module has successfully moved from M3 to Assure. Though there are ongoing improvements to be made to improve the data this has on the whole been successful and food complaints and sampling will move across to Assure in the upcoming year.

An audit of the food safety inspection programme by our internal auditors (SIAS) has determined reasonable assurance in the service.

Our service plan for 2023/24 and performance against it is outlined below:

	Objective	Achieved*
1	To undertake a risk-based programme of interventions of food premises in accordance with Food Standards Agency Food Law Code of Practice and Practice Guide.	160 programmed routine inspections 59 new business inspections 7 revisits 5 FHRS requests for revisit
2	To register new food businesses	83 new businesses registered 2 closed 59 inspected
3	To carry out food sampling in accordance with nationally and locally set programmes.	17 microbiological samples taken A further 30 scheduled before the end of the year.
4	To provide information, advice and education on food safety issues to the business and residential community.	Provision of temperature check and year end return data for FSA. Provision of FHR data available on FSA website Provision of LA web pages and links
5	To respond in line with service priorities to complaints and service requests concerning food safety.	110 Food hygiene service requests.
6	Increase internal monitoring	This has not been fully achieved during 2023/24 due to vacancies in the team but is planned 2024/25.

* Figures correct at the time of writing 7 February 2024

Identification of any Variation from the Review

The full programme of internal monitoring of the work delivered by the food officers was not undertaken during 2023/24 due to staff vacancies.

Areas of Improvement

They are as follows:

1. To conduct the full programme of quality assurance and internal auditing of the competency of food officers and quality of their work.
2. NEC Corporation, the IT provider for the back office database are issuing a de-support notice effective this year. The team have been and continue to work with the IT System Manager to move the database to Assure.
3. A mobile solution for food safety inspections will be trialled to determine the effectiveness of improved data capture and efficiency of recording.
4. The food information on the Council's website will be reviewed and updated to ensure it is providing information sought by businesses in consultation with internal economic development and the BBfA programme manager.
5. An electronic newsletter for businesses should be reviewed as an option for supporting businesses.
6. The standard phrases used for formal letters should be reviewed and updated as necessary.
7. With the introduction of Assure template letters should be reviewed and updated as necessary.
8. The procedure for new business registration should be reviewed and updated to reflect changes to the process as the team moves to the Food Standards Agency Register a Food Business (RAFB) service rather than GOV.UK.