



Northumberland

County Council

COMMITTEE: **Cabinet**

DATE: **13th September 2022**

Food & Feed, Safety & Standards Service Plan 2022/23

Report of Liz Morgan - Executive Director of Public Health and Community Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Colin Horncastle - Community Services

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to present to the Cabinet, for its consideration and endorsement, the Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Service Plan for 2022/23.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Cabinet receives and adopts the Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Service Plan for 2022/23

Link to Corporate Plan

The Plan is linked to key aims of the corporate plan 2021-24 in that its overarching purpose is to help to provide a safe and thriving food sector within Northumberland.

Key issues

1. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has produced a framework agreement on Local Authority food law enforcement. The framework sets out the FSA's expectations of Local Authorities in relation to the planning and delivery of food law enforcement.
2. The framework agreement requires Local Authorities to take account of the Government's better regulation agenda when planning, resourcing and delivering their services. This means that resources need to be targeted where they will be most impactful and in the areas of highest risk in order to provide the public with an effective service.
3. From March 2020 to July 2021 the FSA suspended the Food Law CoP requirements for interventions so resource could be diverted into the local authority COVID response. During this period interventions were prioritised on public health risk. No formal food service plan was generated during this time however the FSA drafted and introduced the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Recovery Plan which sets out

guidance and advice to local authorities for the period from 1 July 2021 to March 2023.

4. A new delivery model for food standards was being piloted in some local authorities in England and Northern Ireland until the end of December 2021. Subject to the findings of an evaluation of the pilot and stakeholder consultation, it is anticipated that the new model will be rolled out nationally from April 2023. Work to review and revise the food hygiene intervention rating scheme is planned to commence shortly with a view to implementation in 2023/24.
5. In 2021/22 Public Protection was heavily involved in fulfilling statutory duties brought into temporary existence due to the Covid 19 pandemic. This included deployment of staff from the teams that normally deliver food and feed services. A temporary team was formed led by an officer from the Commercial Team. As an indicator of the work carried out on Covid, in 2021-22 alone the service responded to over 200 service requests, 335 complaints and investigated over 240 outbreaks. Our proactive work also included over 2600 Covid secure checks and 1200 Covid area checks.
6. In addition, the team was providing a new service due to the UK's exit from the European Union. For the first time since the early Seventies Environmental Health Officers now inspect food exports (food of animal origin) requiring an export health certificate. 2021-22 was the first full year providing EHCs within the new system and the service provided 167 certificates during this time. With the ongoing increase in exports, we are not expecting this to reduce in 2022-23.
7. The framework agreements requires that the Food and Feed Safety and Standards Service Plan 2022/23 (Appendix 1), which sets out the Council's 'Farm to Fork' approach to the safety & standards of the food chain and a review of service performance in 2021/22.
 - € To be approved at a relevant level with the Local Authority in order to ensure local transparency and accountability.
 - € To be produced in a specific format
8. There are over 3950 food premises in Northumberland subject to food safety and food standards regulation and in excess of 1700 businesses, mainly farm premises subject to the Animal Feed (Hygiene, Sampling etc. and Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2015. They are risk assessed in accordance with prescribed schemes in both the food law and feed law codes of practice, which specify inspection intervals based on the risk category of the premises. The inspection programme is delivered by Public Protection within the Housing & Public Protection Service. The Plan shows the delivery structure and required staff resourcing.

9. The review of performance in 2021/22 has found that overall, the service completed the targets set out for the end of March 22 within the FSA recovery plan meeting all key performance measures in what was a very challenging year.
10. The percentage of food businesses in Northumberland with a food hygiene rating of satisfactory to very good (3 to 5 stars) is 98.3% which continues to compare favourably with both the national average of 96.9 % and regional average of 98.0%.
11. As well as programmed inspections, Public Protection provides a reactive response to a wide variety of food safety, food standards & animal feed safety issues. These include complaints about food which does not meet legal standards or which is thought to have caused illness, or premises deemed to be unhygienic. Officers also work in partnership with Public Health England to investigate notifications of infectious disease outbreaks. In 2021/22 a total of 109 infectious disease investigations were carried out and 152 complaints regarding food hygiene, 131 complaints about food premises were received and 69 complaints about food composition, labelling or quality. 99% of these received an initial response within 3 working days in accordance with Service Standards.
12. The Public Health Protection Unit continues to deliver the 'Produced in Northumberland' (PIN) food source verification scheme. This voluntary food verification scheme (that was launched in February 2016) covers any food manufacturer, retailer and caterer within Northumberland who applies and meets the requirements of the scheme. The aim moving into 2022/23 is to continue to support and develop the scheme. For our existing members we will be offering another free year along with a remote assessment as we want to try and provide as much support as we can. But not burden businesses with additional cost at a time where businesses are recovering from the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic.
13. During 2022-23 we will also bring on new PIN members with, an inspection and onsite audit being carried out in line with the requirements of the certification scheme. The long-term plan will be to bring back the full verification scheme annual checks with onsite audits in 2023-24. This will be done in consultation with our partners and members to ensure the integrity of the scheme and support business as much as we can.

Background

No background papers

Implications

Policy	none
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Finance and value for money	Costs are given consideration in the plan. It is intended that performance management of plan delivery will increase the value for money provided. There are no new financial implications arising from this report. All costs for providing these services within the agreed service standards are included within the existing budget.
Legal	None, statutory provision
Procurement	none
Human Resources	none
Property	none
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	The proposal contained in this report does not present potentially-significant equality issues.
Risk Assessment	Adopting the plan will assist in providing a framework to ensure appropriate enforcement action is taken.
Crime & Disorder	The adoption of the proposed plan will assist in ensuring the enforcement of statutory regulations.
Customer Consideration	The plan would be delivered in such a way as to ensure that a consistent and proportionate approach is taken in all circumstances.
Carbon reduction	none
Health and Wellbeing	Will contribute to the protection and improvement of health through a safe food and drinks sector. Also contributing to a fair & safe trading environment.
Wards	All

Background papers:

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Liz Morgan
Chief Executive	Rick O'Farrell
Portfolio Holder(s)	Colin Horncastle

Appendix 1

Food and Feed Safety and Standards Service Plan for 2022/23

Author and Contact Details

Peter Simpson, Public Health Protection Unit Manager.

Tel: 07920806260 email: peter.simpson@northumberland.gov.uk