



# Northumberland

## County Council

### **Public Protection Service**

### **Public Health Protection Unit & Business Compliance & Public Safety Unit**

### **Food and Feed Safety and Standards**

### **SERVICE PLAN 2023-2024**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This Plan details how the food law enforcement service will be delivered in Northumberland. It has been produced by the Public Health Protection Unit and Business Compliance & Public Safety Unit, which encompasses Food Hygiene / Safety, Food Standards and Feed Hygiene. In delivering our services, we aim to protect, improve public health and ensure a fair-trading environment for all businesses in Northumberland.

Interventions will be:

- Transparent
- Accountable;
- Proportionate;
- Consistent;
- Targeted (risk based)

This approach will ensure that the Food Service is delivered in an efficient and effective manner with the aim of improving regulatory outcomes without imposing unnecessary burdens, in line with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform agenda.

Effective delivery of the food service involves a range of partnerships and joint working arrangements with other Council teams, other Local Authorities and stakeholders.

The Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement. It has also taken account recent and proposed changes to the Food Law Code of Practice (CoP).

This plan has been developed to transition the service back into alignment with the Food Law CoP and the full inspection plan, from FSA recovery plan following the Covid Pandemic. This includes the new food standards delivery model and development of a new food hygiene delivery model.

## **2.0 SERVICE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

## 2.1 Aims

To strive to ensure that:-

- i) Food and drink intended for human consumption which is produced, stored, distributed, handled or consumed in the County is without risk to the health or safety of the consumer.
- ii) Food and food packaging meet standards of quality, composition and labelling and that reputable food businesses are not prejudiced by unfair competition.
- iii) Feed is of satisfactory quality and composition and is correctly labelled.
- iv) Standards in food and animal feed businesses are improved across the county.
- v) Livestock is healthy, disease free, and suitably cared for, thereby protecting the public.

## Objectives

- i) To secure hygienic conditions in food businesses and minimise the risks associated with food handling.
- ii) To ensure food businesses meet legal requirements in respect of hygiene, quality, composition and labelling.
- iii) To promote continued improvements in standards through the adoption and application of good practice.
- iv) To enhance the awareness of food safety and food standards issues amongst food businesses and consumers through education and advice.
- v) To reduce the incidence of food poisoning and foodborne disease in the community.
- vi) To monitor the wholesomeness and sufficiency of water supplies.
- vii) To ensure all feed meets legal requirements in respect of quality, composition and labelling
- viii) To ensure that feed business operators meet legal requirements in respect of hygiene, traceability, quality control, equipment and storage.

- ix) To ensure that primary food and feed producers meet legal requirements in respect of hygiene, traceability, quality control, equipment and storage.
- x) To provide of an Export Health Certificate service and support businesses as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

## 2.2. Links to Corporate Objectives and Plans

The Council integrates and delivers its policies and priorities through a Corporate Planning Framework. In May 2023, the Council updated its Corporate Plan, which outlines the Council's priorities in the coming years through its Corporate Plan 2023-26. This plan is in alignment with the plans aims in that its overarching purpose is to help to provide a safe and thriving food sector within Northumberland.

## 3.0 BACKGROUND

### 3.1 Profile

Northumberland County Council is a unitary authority comprising the main urban conurbations of Berwick-upon-Tweed, Alnwick, Morpeth, Ashington, Blyth, Hexham and many smaller towns and rural villages. It covers over 5,014 Sq Km in total and has a population of 320,600 (2021) with the higher proportion of the population being concentrated in the industrial south east corner.

Northumberland is England's most sparsely populated County with a population density of 64 persons per square km. Please see table below to see the area breakdown for the region. The structure of the County's businesses is weighted towards smaller companies & sole traders.

	<b>Authority</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Area (sq. km) <sup>1</sup></b>
E06000057	Northumberland	320,600	5,014
E06000047	County Durham	522,100	2,226
E08000037	Gateshead	196,100	142
E08000024	Sunderland	274,200	137

E08000021	Newcastle upon Tyne	300,200	113
E08000022	North Tyneside	209,000	82
E08000023	South Tyneside	147,800	64

The Authority covers an area from the Scottish Borders to the boundaries of the Tyne and Wear Authorities, Cumbria and County Durham.

### 3.2 Organisational Structure

There are 67 Elected Members. Council elections were held in May 2021 where the Council's Administration remained a Conservative administration. The Council is run through a Cabinet, the Leader of the Council is Councillor Glen Sanderson and the Cabinet holder in respect of food & feed safety & standards is Councillor Gordon Stewart.

The Council's management structure organisation is led by the Chief Executive. The Food Service is delivered through the Public Health Protection Unit and Business Compliance & Public Safety Unit within the Public Protection Service, managed by Darin Wilson the Head of Public Protection. The lead unit manager is Peter Simpson Public Health Protection Unit Manager. The Commercial Team is managed by Principal Environmental Health Officer, Mark Mitchell. Its remit covers; food safety, food standards, port health, health & safety, Safety at Sports Grounds and infectious disease control. Other teams within Public Protection Service also contribute to food and feed enforcement, namely the Trading Standards and Animal Health Team, managed by Laura Brooks. Its remit includes food standards, fair trading, weights and measures, animal health and feed hygiene.

See **Appendix A** for details of the Public Protection Service organisational structure as it relates to the Food Service.

### 3.3 Scope of the Food Service

The Commercial Team has lead responsibility for enforcement work related to food safety and food standards matters. The Trading Standards and Animal Health Team lead on Feed.

The service is available to the public between Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5.00 pm and Friday 8.30 am to 4.30 pm. Outside of these hours, messages can be left on voicemail or by e-mail. Emergency arrangements are also in place through the Council's Customer Service Centre for incident reporting after normal

working hours by dialling the single council contact number (0345 600 6400). Flexible hours working arrangement are in operation for staff. Whilst most inspections and other visits are made to businesses during the day, many are also carried out outside normal working hours in order to inspect businesses such as restaurants and takeaways that do not open through the day. Visits carried out as part of planned programmes are usually unannounced unless there are specific reasons to give prior notification.

All aspects of the Food and Feed Service are delivered from:-

Food and Feed Service office location:
Public Health Protection Unit & Business Compliance & Public Safety Unit Public Protection Service West Hartford Fire Station West Hartford Business Park Cramlington Northumberland NE23 3JP  Telephone number: (01670) 623870 e-mail: <a href="mailto:public.protection@northumberland.gov.uk">public.protection@northumberland.gov.uk</a>

The operational teams within the Public Protection Service are responsible for enforcement work related to food and feed matters, including;

- planned visits to food businesses including full and partial inspections/audits
- other official control visits as defined in the Food Law Code of Practice issued by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) which include monitoring, surveillance, and verification visits
- the investigation and control of foodborne diseases including food poisoning outbreaks
- investigation of food complaints and food premises complaints
- sampling of food for microbiological contamination
- sampling of water at the Port of Blyth to ensure potable supplies on ships
- monitoring of pest control at the Port of Blyth
- the processing of sanitation certificates at the Port of Blyth
- maintenance of the food premises database
- responding to Food & Feed Alerts (issued by the Food Standards Agency)
- contributing to imported food controls through inspection and checks of imported foods at retail and catering premises



- enforcement of compositional standards (including safety) descriptions and labelling of animal feeding stuffs
- maintenance of a register in accordance with the Animal Feed (Hygiene, Sampling etc. and Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2015
- planned inspections of premises for food and feed hygiene having regard to the Feed Law Code of Practice
- inspections relating to metrology and fair trading
- provision of advice and guidance to new and existing food businesses and the general public, including the promotion of 'Safer Food Better Business' the food safety management tool developed by the FSA.
- response to enquiries from other local authorities in relation to food manufactured in Northumberland
- contribution to wider public health agenda issues
- consultation responses to the Planning Section, Building Control and the Licensing Section
- publication of the results of food hygiene inspections in line with the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme
- The provision of an Export Health Certificate service as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

### **3.4 Demands on the Food Service**

There are over 3900 food premises in Northumberland subject to food safety and food standards regulation and in excess of 1700 businesses, mainly farm premises subject to feed composition/labelling and hygiene regulation. Due to the nature of the county there are a large number of seasonal businesses associated with holiday accommodation and tourism, including:

- Bed & Breakfast accommodation
- Seasonal restaurants and cafes
- Holiday let accommodation
- Caravan parks (static and touring) & camping
- Farm Stay accommodation
- Ice cream vans and kiosks

The Port of Blyth and the docks at Berwick currently does not import food of animal origin and only low risk products not of animal origin at the present time. Grain can be imported intermittently. Incoming checks on goods (feed) is currently on hold and will be reviewed as the legislation changes.

The food premises (safety & standards) and feed (composition & hygiene) profile at 1 April 2023 was:-

Premises Type	Number
Primary Producers	43
Manufacturers and Packers	179
Importers / Exporters	7
Distributors/Transporters	77
Retailers	854
Restaurants and Caterers	2734
<b>Total: Food Safety &amp; Standards</b>	<b>3894</b>
Feed Hygiene Premises	1745
<b>Total: Feed &amp; Food</b>	<b>5639</b>

This includes 20 premises which require approval under specific legislation to ensure they meet a higher food safety standard. They are categorised as follows: meat products (2), dairy products (4), fishery products (7), egg products (7).

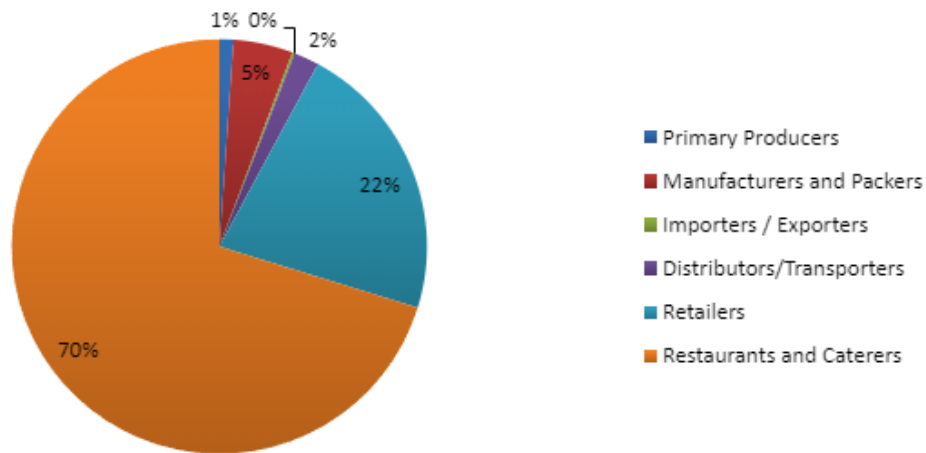
Within the food premises these activities require a specialist approach:

- Large scale pastry and food products manufactures
- Fish smokehouses
- Egg Packers
- Cheese manufacturers
- Oyster bed
- Live and cooked shellfish

In addition, these premises, where exporting, require the provision of an Export Health Certificate service which is complex and very labour intensive.

Excluding feed hygiene premises (which are not subject to detailed food safety or standards inspection), grouping the food premises into broader categories shows that most (92%) are retailers, restaurants, or caterers. These are predominantly small single businesses which require individual attention, particularly to food safety procedures and record systems during the inspection process. The figures also show that about 65% of food premises are in the rural areas of the County making travel a significant factor for the inspection service.

## Food Premises (Hygiene & Standards) in Northumberland 2023



### 3.4.1 Food Safety

The Commercial Team received 1177 service requests in 2022-23, an increase of just over 100 requests compared to 2021-22. This has returned to pre-pandemic levels. Requests are usually for verbal advice on food hygiene requirements; design, layout and materials used in catering areas; documentation; staff training; infectious disease control if food handling staff become ill; and toilet facilities for customers in new or altered premises. Information packs are sent out to general enquiries, including both food safety and food standards general advice. Visits are made depending on the complexity and risk of the proposed business.

The Food Law Code of Practice expects that once new businesses are operational or registered, inspection should be carried out within 28 days. The service operates a risk-based system for new registrations to ensure high risk premises are inspected as a priority.

The service received 257 complaints about food in 2022-23, for example, foreign objects, food causing illness, the hygiene of food premises or food handlers. This is a decrease compared to 2021-22.

### 3.4.2 Food Standards

Business enquiries for food standards advice remained stable in 2022-23, with the service responding to 89 requests. The service requests tend to be of a more complex nature as businesses were looking for advice on compliance with the Food Information Regulations.

The Service receives a steady number of complaints about food, for example, its labelling and/or description, issues with allergens or selling food past its best before date/use by date. As with the majority of complaints and service requests dealt by the service the response time is 3 working days from receipt. The service received 69 complaints about food standards in 2022-23.

Northumberland County Council acts as 'Home Authority' (see section 4.3) for a range of local food manufacturers who trade beyond the boundaries of the Council. In this role, help and advice is offered in respect of the composition of new and developing products, and their permissible labelling. The latter can place an uneven, heavy demand on officer time. The team would also take a lead role in the investigation of complaints by other Local Authorities about businesses for which the Council acts as Home Authority.

This year saw ongoing work in relation to the enforcement of Natasha's Law, which is named after Natasha Ednan-Laperouse who, at the age of 15, passed away due to a severe allergic reaction. Natasha had a sesame allergy and was not made aware that sesame seeds had been baked into the bread of a sandwich she had purchased.

From 1 October 2021, the requirements for prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) food labelling changed in Wales, England, and Northern Ireland. The new labelling will help protect your consumers by providing potentially life-saving allergen information on the packaging. Any business that produces PPDS food is required to label it with the name of the food and a full ingredients list, with allergenic ingredients emphasised within the list. Businesses need to check if their products require PPDS labelling and what they need to do to comply with the new rules.

Prepacked for direct sale or PPDS is food which is packaged at the same place it is offered or sold to consumers and is in this packaging before it is ordered or selected. It can include food that consumers select themselves (e.g. from a display unit), as well as products kept behind a counter and some food sold at mobile or temporary outlets.

This was a huge section of work for the service with detailed advice and guidance needed for our businesses. In addition, additional time was required during interventions to check compliance and provide advice if needed.

`Produced in Northumberland` is an initiative from Northumberland County Council which recognises Northumberland food producers and also businesses that use and promote food and drink that is made in Northumberland. The core of the scheme is a source verification carried out by lead auditor trained officers of the Public Health Protection Unit. Additionally, scheme members must reach a compliant food safety standard so this provides additional reassurance to the public that food produced or retailed with this branding is both safe and sourced locally.

This verification scheme is offered to local businesses with the aim of raising the profile, value and public confidence in Northumberland food & drink. With regard to helping tourism within the County the scheme also helps to add value to the visitors overall experience of Northumberland as food & drink is such an important and memorable part of their visit.

From March 2020 to March 2023 the scheme moved from its normal proactive inspections to a free service with a remote assessment and an increased prioritisation on promotional work. The aim being to continue to support our members during the pandemic and cost of living crisis, promoting amazing local product. As we move forward in 2023-24 we will be restarting the inspection aspects of the scheme, continue to promote Northumberland foods and bring in new members, with the outlook of improving / expanding the scheme to bring in more members and increase visibility.

### **3.4.3 Feed**

2022/23 saw a return to 'business as usual' and inspections were carried out as they were pre-Covid.

The FSA Memorandum of Understanding with National Trading Standards (NTS) for the Feed Delivery Programme has been signed for a further 3-year period with effect from April 2023.

To support this arrangement, it has been agreed by the FSA that the funding for delivery of feed law official controls will be categorised as a business-critical activity. This means that whilst it will continue to be subject to review based on the FSA's overall annual budget, funding for this activity will be prioritised.

The inspections of businesses are carried out by the Trading Standards and Animal Health Team. The team is managed on a day-to-day basis by a Senior Trading Standards Officer who also conducts coordination of feed hygiene work

regionally and liaises with the other 11 Local Authorities in the North East region to ensure that this work is undertaken.

### **3.5 Enforcement Policy**

The Authority has signed up to the Enforcement Concordat and the corporate Enforcement Policy embraces the policies and procedures detailed in the Concordat and the Regulators Compliance Code. This is publicly available from the council website.

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/About-the-Council/Corporate-Enforcement-Policy-3-November-2015.pdf>

## **4.0 SERVICE DELIVERY**

### **4.1 Interventions at Food and Feed Establishments**

Local Authorities are required by the Food Standards Agency Food Law Code of Practice and Feed Law Code of Practice to document, maintain and implement an Interventions Programme for all food premises for which they have food law enforcement responsibility. The Commercial Team & Trading Standards and Animal Health Team undertake interventions in accordance with relevant legislation, the code above and centrally issued guidance and to meet realistic targets given the available staff and resources and other service demands.

Different types of interventions (actions) allow Officers to use their professional judgement to apply a proportionate level of regulatory and enforcement action to each business. They are applied in a risk-based manner such that more intensive regulation is directed at those businesses presenting the greatest risk to public health. Official controls include:-

- Inspections
- Audit
- Surveillance
- Verification
- Sampling
- Monitoring

Other interventions that are effective in supporting food businesses to achieve compliance with food law include:-

- Education, advice and coaching
- Information and intelligence gathering

This range of interventions allows Local Authorities to choose the most appropriate action to be taken to drive up levels of compliance, taking into account the recommendations in the Hampton Review “Reducing Administrative Burdens: Effective Inspection and Enforcement”.

#### **4.1.1 Food Safety**

Under Chapter 5 of the Food Law Code of Practice, premises are rated according to risk in Categories A-E, which determines their frequency of inspection as follows:

The full food safety premises risk rating profile at 1 April 2023 was:-

Category	Intervention Plan	Interventions required by risk category
A	Inspection at 6 monthly intervals	5
B	Inspection at 12 monthly intervals	68
C	Inspection at 18 monthly intervals	409
D	Alternate between official control and other interventions every 2 years.	1204
E	Alternative Enforcement Strategy every 36 months.	2048
Unrated	To be visited and risk rated.	71 (+ new businesses arising during the year)
Outside Programme		46*
<b>Total</b>		<b>3851</b>

\* 'Outside Programme' are registered premises with no inspectable risk, for example haulage companies registering in case food is kept on a vehicle overnight.

In addition to the programme, interventions may be made in response to the following triggers:-

- consumer complaints
- change of ownership
- implication in a food poisoning outbreak
- a food alert
- change in business operations which may lead to a higher risk rating
- request for a re-rating under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

#### 4.1.1.1 New Registrations

The Food Standards Agency Code of Practice requires that all new premises should receive an initial inspection and this should normally take place within 28 days of registration or from when the Authority becomes aware that the establishment is in operation.

Due to the increasing number of new registrations received by the authority, 513 food registration forms received in 2022-23, and the existing premises workload, the requirement to undertake initial inspections within 28 days does present a challenge to resources. This is particularly the case where there are a large



number of new business registrations that are received in respect of home bakers or childminders. These are likely to be low risk and when inspected and risk rated would most likely be Category E premises. As such these premises would require no further inspection in future years as they would be subject to the Alternative Enforcement Strategy approach (see 4.1.1.2)

On the 1st April 23 Northumberland had 71 unrated food premises. Of the outstanding 71 premises, 62 were received within the past 6 months. Of these premises 3 have been identified as likely to be 'high' risk based on usage type. Of the remaining 68 registrations 90% are likely to be low risk, again based on premises type. Any premises identified as 'high' risk is given priority by the inspecting officer to ensure resources are targeted where there is potential risk to public health.

Where there is a conflict for resources, all new registrations are allocated to the appropriate area officer, who would use the information provided on the form and by the food business operator, to determine when to carry out the initial inspection, giving priority to premises which in the officer's opinion present a high or medium risk, for example a public house serving meals, a cafe or restaurant. Low priority would be given to a child-minder who only provides a drink and snack and home bakers who do not produce any meat products for example.

#### **4.1.1.2 Enforcement Strategy for low risk category E food safety premises**

An alternative enforcement strategy has been adopted for dealing with Category E rated low risk premises. Alternative enforcement strategies (AES) are methods by which low risk premises establishments are monitored to ensure their continued compliance with food law.

It is not intended to preclude inspection, partial inspection or audit at such establishments where this would be the preferred official control option.

An establishment must have been subject to an initial formal inspection, and have been subsequently risk rated in accordance with Annex 5, of the Food Law Code of Practice before it can be determined to be a low risk establishment and therefore appropriate for it to be included in the alternative enforcement strategy.

#### **Risk category E premises**

All cat 'E' premises due for intervention 2023-24 will receive an alternative enforcement strategy. AES typically use questionnaires, with a sample of the businesses receiving a follow up visit to verify the information provided. This follow up visit can be recorded as a verification visit.

Visits may also be made to:

- any premises not returning a questionnaire
- any premises giving rise to a consumer complaint
- any premises where the returned questionnaire indicates significant changes in activities.
- any premises where a new food premises registration form is returned advising of a change in food business operator.

### Specialised processes

Appropriate training, and refresher training, will be made available to officers required to inspect specialised processes in the county. Where training is not accessible appropriate expertise will be sought from suitable consultants.

#### 4.1.1.3 Food Safety 2023-2024 intervention programme

The proposed 2023-2024 programme of work is detailed below:-

Category	Minimum intervention rating	Intervention type	Number of premises due	Target
A	At least every 6 months	Inspection, partial inspection, audit or sampling	5*	100% planned inspections
B	At least every 12 months	Inspection, partial inspection or audit or sampling	68	98% planned inspections**
C	At least every 18 months	Inspection, partial inspection or audit or sampling	245	95% planned inspections
D	At least every 24 months	Alternate between official control and other interventions every 2 years.	503	90% Official Interventions
E	At least every 36 months	Alternative Intervention Strategy	1351	90%
Unrated	Not known until inspection	Inspection	71***	90%
<b>Total</b>			<b>2243***</b>	

\* Plus any in year Cat A rated inspections

\*\* The aim is to inspect 100% of premises due, but a lower target has been cited to allow for contingencies.

\*\*\* Plus new businesses commencing during the year, estimated at 35 per month

The intervention programme figures will alter during the course of the year as a consequence of premises closing and as new food businesses open.

#### 4.1.1.4 Other Food Safety interventions

In addition to the recovery programme the team also carries out a number of other interventions to promote food safety and support businesses, for example.

- Increase the number of premises with a Food Hygiene Rating Score (FHRS) rating of 3 or more
- Carry out revisits to follow up non 'broadly compliant' businesses
- Respond to complaints and service requests within 3 working days of receipt
- Review local markets & events for food safety compliance
- On-going national, regional and local food sampling programmes

In 2023-24 we will continue to work with persistently low scoring premises Food Hygiene Rating Score (FHRS) rating of 0-2 to improve their standards as they not only pose significant risk to the public but also failure to improve may result in possible closure or prosecution.

#### 4.1.2 Food Standards

Under Chapter 5 of the Food Law Code of Practice, premises are rated according to risk in Categories A-C, which determines their frequency of inspection as follows. The full food standards premises risk rating profile at 1 April 2023 was:-

Category	Intervention Plan	Interventions required by risk category
A	Inspection at 12 monthly intervals	43
B	Inspection at 24 monthly intervals	952
C	Alternative Enforcement Strategy (AES) every 5 years	2692
Unrated	To be visited and risk rated.	85 (+ new businesses arising during the year)
Outside Programme		122*
<b>Total</b>		<b>3894</b>

\* 'Outside Programme' are registered premises with no inspectable risk, for example haulage companies registering in case food is kept on a vehicle overnight.

In addition to the programme, interventions may be made in response to the following triggers:-

- consumer complaints
- change of ownership

- a food alert
- change in business operations which may lead to a higher risk rating
- results of a sampling exercise

#### 4.1.2.1 New Registrations

Please see 4.1.1.1.

#### 4.1.2.2 Enforcement Strategy for low risk category premises

An alternative enforcement strategy has been adopted for dealing with Category C risk premises. Alternative enforcement strategies (AES) are methods by which low risk premises establishments are monitored to ensure their continued compliance with food law. It is not intended to preclude inspection, partial inspection or audit at such establishments where this would be the preferred official control option.

An establishment must have been subject to an initial formal inspection, and have been subsequently risk rated before it can be determined to be a Category C establishment and therefore appropriate for it to be included in the alternative enforcement strategy.

Currently Cat 'C' premises are not within the recovery plan for intervention in 2022-23, however if we have the resource, we would like to carry out some form of review through an AES. AES typically use questionnaires, with a sample of the businesses receiving a follow up visit to verify the information provided. This follow up visit can be recorded as a verification visit.

Visits may also be made to:

- any premises not returning a questionnaire
- any premises giving rise to a consumer complaint
- any premises where the returned questionnaire indicates significant changes in activities.
- any premises where a new food premises registration form is returned advising of a change in food business operator.

#### 4.1.2.3 Food Standards 2023-2024 intervention programme

The proposed 2023-2024 programme of work is detailed below:-

Category	Minimum intervention rating	Intervention type	Number of premises due	Target
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A	At least every 12 months	Inspection, partial inspection, audit or sampling	55	*98% planned inspections
B	At least every 24 months	Inspection, partial inspection or audit or sampling	628	90% planned inspections
C	At least every 5 years	Alternative Intervention Strategy	1619	90% planned inspections
Unrated	Not known until inspection	Inspection	85**	90% planned inspections
<b>Total</b>			<b>2387**</b>	

\* The aim is to inspect 100% of premises due, but a lower target has been cited to allow for contingencies.

\*\* Plus new businesses commencing during the year, estimated at 35 per month

As with food hygiene the intervention programme figures will alter during the course of the year as a consequence of premises closing and as new food businesses open.

#### 4.1.2.4 Other Food Standards interventions

In addition to the risk based intervention programme the team also carries out a number of other interventions.

- Liaise with other County Departments on food standards matters as appropriate e.g. Facilities and Procurement (school meals & catering)

#### 4.1.2.4 New Food Standards Delivery Model

For 2023-24 the food standards agency is implementing a new food standards delivery model with local authorities undertaking a transition to the new model from quarter 3/4 of 2023-24.

The new food standards intervention rating scheme involves the calculation of a risk profile for each food business establishment that is based on its 'inherent risk profile' and a 'compliance assessment'.

The inherent risk profile gives an indication of the risks associated with a food establishment and the compliance assessment assesses the FBO's performance. Both the inherent risk profile and compliance assessment are made up of subcategories, which are individually scored to allow the accurate assessment of different risk elements, that will be assigned according to the information available.

These subcategories are:

- inherent risk profile:
  - scale of supply and distribution
  - ease of compliance
  - complexity of supply chain
  - responsibility for information
  - potential for product harm
  
- compliance assessment:
  - confidence in management (CIM)
  - current compliance level
  - management systems and procedures
  - allergen information

When applying the food standards intervention rating scheme, LAs will assign the risk factor score that is most relevant to the food business establishment. Where a food business falls into more than one scoring category for a scoring factor, they must be allocated the lowest score (higher risk), in line with the precautionary principle. It is recognised that competent officers will use their professional judgement to assign a score based on using the descriptors under each of the risk scores.

To determine the frequency at which official controls should be carried out, the average scores for the inherent risk profile and compliance risk assessment are plotted onto the decision matrix.

The decision matrix follows a graduated approach based on risk. The frequency of official control activities starts at one month (high intensity) and progresses to less intensive frequencies enabling LAs to target their resource on those establishments deemed to be highest risk.

This supports the objective of the model and recognises that LAs will be focusing their resource on those establishments where they need to take prompt action to safeguard public health and protect consumers.

The decision matrix does not specify the particular official control activity that should take place. Instead, this approach gives LAs the flexibility to use any of the methods and techniques of official controls specified in Article 14 of Retained (EU) Regulation 2017/625, either individually or in combination, providing they are effective and appropriate in the circumstances.

At this stage we do not know the specific impact the change in delivery model will have on the inspection plan and as such have based the 2023-24 plan on the current system. However we are expecting the change to require significant resource from within the service which will impact on our ability to deliver the plan as currently detailed.

### **4.1.3 Port Health**

The following work programme is proposed for Port Health:

- Visit 90% of high-risk ships\* entering the Port of Blyth and Berwick
- Carry out monitoring of the Port of Blyth's pest & waste controls
- Contract sampling of the Port private water distribution network

\* High risk ships are categorised as any vessel entering the port directly from a non-EU country or has a previous history of non-compliance.

#### 4.1.4 Feed Hygiene

Under Section 5 of the Feed Law Code of Practice, premises are rated according to risk in Categories A-E, which determines their frequency of inspection as follows:

The Feed Hygiene risk rating profile at 01 April 2023 was:-

Category	Intervention Plan	Interventions required by risk category
A	Inspection at 12 monthly intervals	4
B	Inspection at 24 monthly intervals, except where Type 1 earned recognition applies	12
C	Inspection at 36 monthly intervals, except where Type 1 earned recognition applies	158
D	Inspection at 48 monthly intervals, except where Type 1 earned recognition applies	263
E*	Inspection at 60 monthly intervals, except where Type 1, Type 2 earned recognition or NTMS applies	850
Never Been Inspected		455
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,742</b>

\*Low risk premises mostly livestock farms.

The Feed Law Code of Practice introduced the term 'earned recognition' to provide business with good levels of compliance and members of an approved FSA Scheme to reduce the frequency of inspection to them.

The code of practice states the following:

#### **Earned Recognition:**

This is at the heart of the FSA approach to rewarding responsible businesses and encouraging industry to promote the positive role of regulatory standards;

Aims to reduce the burden on compliant businesses whilst concentrating enforcement activity at those businesses which are less compliant.



The Code describes two approaches as to how a feed business may qualify for Earned Recognition:

**Type 1:** a business which is a member of an FSA approved assurance scheme and demonstrates at least a satisfactory level of current compliance, with relevant feed law;

**Type 2:** a business which is not a member of an FSA approved assurance scheme and demonstrates a broad level of current compliance, with relevant feed law.

**National Targeted Monitoring Strategy (NTMS):** The NTMS is a mechanism to allocate appropriate resources to monitor compliance at low-risk farm establishments (livestock and arable farms) achieving at least a satisfactory level of current compliance.

The code allows low risk feed businesses (livestock & arable farms) who are part of an FSA approved scheme to have earned recognition allocated to them and a current level of compliance in accordance with the Code.

In addition to the programme, interventions may be made in response to the following triggers:-

- Consumer complaints
- A feed alert
- Change in business operations which may lead to a higher risk rating
- Additional funding from the Food Standards Agency.

Any existing 'unrated' premises i.e. those which have never been visited, will be reviewed when resources permit. A large portion of these premises will be low risk farms.

#### **4.1.4.1 Feed Hygiene at Primary Producer 2022-2023 intervention programme**

The Feed Law Code of Practice recognises earned recognition and the benefits it gives to businesses. Businesses which are part of a recognised FSA assurance scheme or are found on inspection to be broadly compliant have an amended frequency of inspection. As a result, consideration to 5.3 of the Code will be given when deciding premises due for inspection each year.

The code provides an inspection programme to be based on a number of factors, such as premises type, current level of compliance and if they are a member of an approved FSA scheme.

The proposed 2023/2024 programme of work is detailed below:-

Category	Minimum intervention rating	Intervention type	Visits required by FSA
A	At least every 12 months	Inspection	2*
B	At least every 24 months	Inspection	5*
C	At least every 36 months	Inspection	11*
D	At least every 48 months	Any official control (except where NTMS applies)	9*
E	At least every 60 months	Any official control (except where NTMS applies)	6*
Unrated	Not known until inspection	Inspection	13*
<b>Total</b>			<b>46</b>

\* The visits required do not match the interventions due as part of the feed risk rating scheme. Visits required are calculated by the FSA, based on a desktop assessment of the database and based on premises type and the current level of business compliance.

The service is aware of the National Enforcement Priorities for England and Wales which is produced by the Food Standards Agency which looks at animal feed law enforcement (at all stages of production, processing, storage, transportation and distribution, including import and the primary production of feed) and food hygiene law enforcement at the level of primary production.

The Animal Feed National Priorities for 2023/2024 are;

- Priority 1: Verification of effective implementation and maintenance of feed safety management systems
  - a: Verification at all feed business types
  - b: Verification at co-producers and businesses supplying former foodstuffs
- Priority 2: Effective monitoring of feed on farms
  - a: Examination of former foodstuffs / co-products being used for feed on farms
  - b: Effective monitoring of pest control procedures
  - c: On-farm record keeping requirements and documented procedures
- Priority 3: Effective monitoring of storage arrangements at feed premises
- Priority 4: Verification of feed labelling

- Priority 5: Effective monitoring of consignments of feed originating from non-EU countries, at points of entry

The service continues to carry out inspections based on the feed grant which may include a sampling programme. There is no specific sampling carried out by the service separate to this.

Since 2010 the Food Standards Agency via National Trading Standards (NTS) has funded local authorities an agreed amount to carry out a number of feed hygiene inspections. The project has been a great success, and in 2022/23 97% of national planned work was achieved. In the North East region, 97% of planned work was undertaken.

A regional budget of £90,983 has been granted to the North East Authorities in 2023/2024.

Feed hygiene inspections are currently only carried out when funded by the Food Standards Agency, unless a complaint is received.

#### **4.1.4.2 Other Feed Standards interventions**

- FSA Food and Feed Hygiene Grant

The Food Standards Agency grant for 2023/2024 is made up of the following:

#### **Northumberland Figures**

Inland Feed	£11,259	38 Inspections
Primary Production	£1,928	8 Inspections
Port Work	£500	

Coordination Fee	£27,314	
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<b>Northumberland Total</b>	<b>£41,001</b>	
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Where appropriate, Animal Health Inspectors will carry out Feed Hygiene inspections at premises which are subject to an Animal Health planned inspection to maximise efficiency. Trading Standards Officers will undertake inland feed hygiene inspections which are generally commercial and retail premises.

#### **Summary of resources required for Food and Feed Interventions**

Intervention programme	Food Safety	Food Standards	Feed	Port Health	Technical support
Resources required (FTE)	5.1	3.2	0.5	0.8	1.0

## 4.2 Food and Feed Complaints

It is the policy of this Authority to investigate all complaints regarding food, food premises and feed premises in accordance with local policies and procedures and in line with Local Government Regulation guidance and the Home Authority and Primary Authority Principle.

We will respond to all food safety complaints reported to us following our local procedure with a view to:-

- Ensuring the wider public health has not been put at risk
- Preventing a recurrence
- Taking appropriate action under the Food Safety Act and/or relevant regulations

We will respond to all food standards complaints reported to us following our local procedure with a view to:-

- Ensuring that the composition of food meets legal requirements
- Preventing a recurrence
- Taking appropriate action under the Food Safety Act and/or relevant regulations
- Ensuring that food is accurately labelled and advertised

We will respond to all feed complaints reported to us following our local procedure with a view to:-

- a) Ensuring that feed is wholesome and correctly described
- b) Preventing a recurrence
- c) Taking appropriate action under the Animal Feed (England) Regulations 2010 and/or other relevant regulations

### Summary of resources required for Food and Feed Complaints

	Food Hygiene complaints	Food premises complaints	Food Standards complaints	Feed complaints	Technical support
2019-20	120	149	97	0	-
2020-21	124	113	62	2	-
2021-22	152	131	69	0	-
2022-23	142	115	69	0	-
Resources required (FTE)	0.2	0.2	0.25	(incorporated into programme)	0.2

#### 4.2.1 Use of other agencies

The Authority will call upon the expertise of its food examiners and public analysts as deemed necessary in the investigation of feed and food complaints. In addition the North East Food Liaison Group and UK Health Security Agency (formerly the Public Health England) are sources of local expertise. NETSA (North East Trading Standards Association) a Regional liaison group comprising 12 Local Authorities, has a technical group that focuses on "Farm to Fork" issues, thus providing a further resource of expertise.

Where access to local expertise is not available, the Authority will seek the assistance and guidance of the Food Standards Agency and/or Local Government Regulation (LGR - formerly LACORS). The food service is also an active founder member of the Northumberland Business Alliance, which represents a range of regulatory and business organisations in order to improve consistency and reduce any unnecessary burdens on business.

### 4.3 Home Authority Principle and Primary Authority Scheme

#### Home Authority

With regard to trading standards and food safety matters, local government has developed a Home Authority scheme where the Home Authority is the authority where the relevant decision-making base of the business is located.

So for example, if the business is a sole trader and only has one site or office, the Home Authority will be the local authority where this site or office is located. For a business with multiple branches, stores etc. throughout the UK, the Home Authority will generally be the local authority where the head office (or decision making centre) is located.

The scheme is designed to help businesses by providing contact points for

advice and guidance in order to maintain high standards of public protection encourage fair trade and develop a consistent approach to enforcement. Northumberland acts as Home Authority for some 26 food companies, requiring maintenance of dialogue with management to update on operations, products and labels etc.

### **Primary Authority**

Under the provisions of the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008 Local Authorities may agree to become a “Primary Authority” for food businesses. The Commercial Team would respond to any requests to act as Primary Authority although currently it does not act as one.

Primary Authority companies can form a statutory partnership with a single local authority, which then provides robust and reliable advice for other councils to take into account when carrying out inspections or dealing with non-compliance. This leads to simpler, more successful local regulation. Businesses should be able to rely on the environmental health, licensing and trading standards advice received from local authorities, in the knowledge that it is expert opinion, applicable across the UK, and a secure basis for investment and operational decisions.

### **Summary of resources required for Home Authority and Primary Authority Scheme**

<b>Home &amp; Primary Authority</b>	<b>Food Safety</b>	<b>Food Standards</b>	<b>Feed</b>	<b>Technical support</b>
<b>Resources required (FTE)</b>	0.1	0.1	0.1	0

#### **4.4 Advice to Businesses**

It is the Authority’s policy to provide all necessary advice to food and feed businesses to help them comply with legislative requirements and the adoption of good practice.

Advice will be available during the course of all inspections and visits and also through [Northumberland County Council's website](#)

New food businesses seeking help are provided with advice and guidance on legislation and best practice (safety and standards), food hygiene training, premises registration, the Food Hygiene Rating System, and as needed useful contacts both within and outside the Council such as planning, building control, licensing and the Fire Service.

The service also has a wide range of information and trader advice leaflets available to businesses and consumers. Material is often displayed at information sites at local livestock markets on various subjects including feeding stuffs and animal health issues.

Press releases are also made when a topic is considered to be of general interest to businesses and consumers, or when a survey has revealed newsworthy issues.

### Summary of resources required for Advice / Service Requests to Business

New business contacts	Service Requests – Food Safety	Service Requests – Food Standards	Service Requests – Feed Hygiene	Technical support
2019-20	1065*	82	61	-
2020-21	1278*	77	30	-
2021-22	1069*	103	57	-
2022-23	1177*	89	48	-
Resources required (FTE)	0.4	0.25	0.1	0.2

\* The number of service requests in relation to food safety includes new food registration forms.

## 4.5 Food and Feed Sampling

The Authority recognises the important contribution sampling makes to the protection of public health of residents and honest traders. Sampling is undertaken for the following purposes:-

- Microbiological sampling and examination of food is an important part of food safety enforcement which enables authorised officers to gain an insight into the microbiological safety of food and which may reveal shortcomings in its safe handling, preparation and/or storage.
- The sampling and analysis of food is undertaken for compositional quality and safety purposes and for determining compliance with regulations relating to labelling and claims is an essential part of food standards enforcement.
- The analysis and/or microbiological examination of complaint samples is often vital in the investigation of consumer complaints.
- With all livestock entering the food chain, sampling is an important area of work to ensure that animal feed does not contaminate the human food chain. In some instances, materials used in the production of animal feed have been illegal and led to the withdrawal of products.

The Authority will:-

- coordinate with other local authorities in the North East Food Liaison Group (microbiology sub-group) to agree local sampling surveys
- participate where possible in UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) regional and national surveys
- coordinate for the purposes of food standards and feed with other local authorities in submitting samples to the Metrology Screening Laboratory
- participate in any sampling required by the Food Standards Agency

The sampling programme will have regard to the nature of food businesses in Northumberland and will focus on locally manufactured/produced foods and foods targeted as a result of previous sampling experience, complaints or centrally coordinated sampling initiatives.

Whilst placing a strong emphasis on local foods this risk-based approach will also include nationally and internationally produced foods where problems are suspected or identified. Where routine feed samples are taken, priority will be given for analysing levels of undesirable substances and feed additives. The priority for routine sampling is:-

- High risk businesses
- Consumer complaints
- Home Authority businesses
- Local producing businesses

A Service Level Agreement has been reached with UKHSA for the microbiological examination of food. This agreement involves the allocation of credits which are used for the examination of food and environmental samples as well as non-drinking water samples.

The Food Examiner for the Authority is:-

**Food, Water and Environmental Microbiology Services**

UK Health Security Agency  
Food Water & Environment Microbiology Laboratory  
Block 10, York Biotech Campus  
Sand Hutton  
York  
YO41 1LZ

The Public Analysts appointed by the Authority are:-

**Public Analyst Scientific Services Ltd**

i54 Business Park  
Valiant Way  
Wolverhampton



WV9 5GB

All laboratories are official food laboratories as notified to the EC under Council Directive 93/99/EC.

### Summary of resources required for Food and Feed Sampling

Feed & Food sampling	Reactive sampling to complaints – food safety	Reactive sampling to complaints – food standards	Planned sampling - food safety	Planned sampling - food standards	Planned sampling - feed	Technical support
Resources required (FTE)	0.05	0.05	0.1	0.05	-	0.1

#### 4.6 Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Disease

It is the policy of this Authority to respond to all cases of food poisoning or foodborne illness reported to the Council. This is carried out under the general direction, guidance and advice of the designated 'Proper Officer' appointed by the council in accordance with the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 (as amended). This is the Centre Director, North East UK Health Security Agency and specified deputies. The principal contact is Dr Kirsty Foster, Consultant in Health Protection, Health Protection Team, UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). Standard Operating Procedures are in place which detail the responses required for particular diseases.

Notifications from UKHSA and self-referrals are followed up either by posting information and advice, making a visit, or by telephone questionnaire depending upon the nature of the illness and risk assessment. This is carried out by food safety staff within the Commercial Team of the Public Health Protection Unit.

In the event of an outbreak the Authority will act in accordance with the Policy for the Control of an Outbreak of Communicable Disease, which was developed and agreed between UKHSA and the Northumberland, Durham and Tyne & Wear Local Authorities. The Principal Environmental Health Officer or representative will be a member of an Outbreak Control Team.

A representative of the team will attend the North & South of Tyne Area Health Protection Group. This group provides a link between the Consultant in Health Protection and the regional local authorities to determine and develop: policy; training; updating on legislative changes; case discussions aimed at consistency; statistical analysis of regional infections and advice on case control.

On the basis of previous year's figures infectious disease control will require the resources estimated below. This is reactive work and the number of cases requiring a response is outside of the service's control. Typically 55-60% of the cases requiring a visit are located in the rural areas of the county, which can involve considerable travel.

The resources required for outbreak investigation is unpredictable. An outbreak of viral illness will be managed in the main by UKHSA, an outbreak associated with food (food poisoning) can take officers out of their routine work for extended periods. Food borne outbreaks are typically 2-5 per year. Typical actions following such a foodborne outbreak include:

- Liaison with UKHSA
- Attendance at Outbreak Control Team if declared (may be several meetings)
- direct contact with cases to gather information, this can be a large number where a group event is involved e.g. wedding reception
- food premises investigation to identify cause(s)
- food samples taken to confirm source food or water
- faecal specimens to be collected from cases and contacts as part of the epidemiological investigation and case finding
- sample transport to laboratory etc.
- formal action with the food business to prevent recurrence
- consideration of other enforcement

### Summary of resources required for Infectious Disease Control

	Cases – officer investigation	Infectious disease outbreaks (inc viral outbreaks where no intervention required)	Cases - postal information only (Technical support)	Total
<b>2019-20</b>	144	49	446	639
<b>2020-21</b>	71	11	357	439
<b>2021-22</b>	109	36	498	643
<b>2022-23</b>	125	83	438	646
<b>Resources required (FTE)</b>	0.2		0.1	

### 4.7 Food Safety Incidents

It is the policy of this Authority to:

- i) respond promptly to all Food Alerts issued by the Food Standards Agency; and

- ii) notify the Agency of any serious localised incident or wider food safety incident that has been identified

The Authority will comply with the Code and in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures. The response to Food Alerts will be appropriate to their category and to any specific instructions that are given. Food Alerts are received electronically by email via the Food Standards Agency to a dedicated email inbox.

It is difficult to estimate the resource required to respond to these alerts since this varies dependent upon the number and status of alerts received. Most alerts are for information only and do not require contact with businesses. However for example during 2012-13 a considerable response over several weeks was required for food standards officers in respect of the discovery of horse meat in food products.

### Summary of resources required for Food Safety Incidents

Responding to feed & food incidents	Food Safety	Food Standards	Feed	Technical support
Resources required (FTE)	0.03	0.06		0.03

### 4.8 Liaison with Other Organisations

The Authority actively participates in local and regional activities. It is a member of the North East Food Liaison Group, its Microbiological and Food Standards Sub-Groups; attends meetings called by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) for food lead officers; the North & South of Tyne Area Health Protection Group; North East Trading Standards Association (NETSA).

The Food Liaison Group meets quarterly to discuss technical issues and agree standards with the aim of ensuring consistency of enforcement throughout the North East area. The meetings are attended by regional representatives from the FSA.

The sub group looks at food sampling initiatives to assess the microbiological quality of food manufactured, distributed and retailed in the area and where appropriate to give advice and guidance to businesses.

NETSA meets quarterly and like the food group is used to discuss issues and agree standards with the aim of ensuring consistency throughout the North East area. It also has a number of technical focus groups to promote consistency of interpretation and enforcement and to coordinate projects in the Northeast

Region. The main sub groups at the moment are 'Metrology' and 'Animal Health & Feed'.

The Authority is also represented on the following;

- NETSA Animal Health Panel
- National Agriculture Panel
- Association of Port Health Authorities

There is also liaison with other organisations including the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, Local Government Regulation, Public Health England, Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Food Standards Agency and the Care Quality Commission for Social Care Inspections.

Officers also work in liaison with other teams within the service particularly the Planning, Building Control and Licensing Sections, and other services such as the Fire and Police services and the Council's Facilities Management service (school catering).

Northumberland has acted as the coordinator for the region with regard to feed hygiene and has received a sum of £25,500 to cover the cost of the co-ordinators time, effort and management of the project.

#### **Summary of resources required for Liaison**

<b>Liaison with professional bodies</b> (preparation, attendance, actions)	<b>Food Safety &amp; Infectious Disease control</b>	<b>Food Standards</b>	<b>Feed</b>	<b>Technical support</b>
<b>Resources required (FTE)</b>	0.1	0.1	0.6	0.1

#### **4.9 Food and Feed Safety and Food Standards Promotion**

The promotion of food and feed safety and food standards will be achieved through local initiatives and publicity and by supporting national initiatives. The Authority is committed to further developing promotional opportunities where possible.

Promotional activities will continue to include participation in:

- Promotion of Safer Food Better Business

Safer Food, Better Business, the FSA's food safety management guidance for businesses, is actively promoted during each planned intervention as it is usually the choice of food safety management system for most food business operators. The catering pack is available in English and Chinese, but it is also tailored for Asian cuisine, childminders, and care homes. There is also a version for the use of retailers.

Currently the service provides a paid service providing printed copies of both the SFBB catering pack along with the associated dairy.

- Food Hygiene Rating System (FHRS)

The above scheme was introduced on 2 April 2012 and the scheme involves the scoring of businesses on their management systems, their standard of cleanliness and their hygiene practices. The scoring is then translated into a rating from zero, where major improvement is needed, to 5, which is very good. Businesses receive a sticker showing their rating, which they are encouraged to display.

The aim of the scheme is to promote self-improvement by businesses.

- 5 – hygiene standards are very good
- 4 – hygiene standards are good
- 3 – hygiene standards are generally satisfactory
- 2 – some improvement is necessary
- 1 – major improvement is necessary
- 0 – urgent improvement is required

Administration of the scheme includes producing printed stickers, associated correspondence and data handling.

- Prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) food labelling

From 1 October 2021 the requirements for prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) food labelling changed in Wales, England, and Northern Ireland. The new labelling will help protect consumers by providing potentially life-saving allergen information on the packaging. Any business that produces PPDS food will be required to label it with the name of the food and a full ingredients list, with allergenic ingredients emphasised within the list. Businesses need to check if their products require PPDS labelling and what they need to do to comply with the new rules. The service will continue to advice and guide business on the new controls

- Information and guidance posted on website

A wealth of information exists on the Northumberland County Council website covering Environmental Health and Trading Standards issues. The entire site has been reviewed and the information provided refreshed to make it more user friendly and much easier to navigate and find information. We will continue to try and improve our existing online resources and provide new content when possible.

### Summary of resources required for Promotion

Food safety & standards promotion	Food Safety	Food Standards	Technical support
Resources required (FTE)	0.05*	0.05*	0.5

\* Note FTW time for FHRS & PPDS promotion built into the programmed inspection work resource

### 4.10 Export Health Certificates

The impact of leaving the EU has been substantial and one of the main consequences for the service has been the increased requirement to provide Export Health Certificates to local businesses.

Export Health Certificates (EHC's) may be required by food manufacturers / exporters who wish to export food of an animal origin outside England, Wales and Scotland.

These certificates confirm that a specific business complies with all relevant legislation and the food produced is without risk to health.

Dependent on the destination importing country and the commodity type an EHC may have to be sourced from the Animal Plant Health Agency (APHA), Northumberland County Council or Private Sector qualified officer, depending what is being exported and to where.

If a certificate is being issued from the APHA this is likely to be signed by a vet (commonly for meat and dairy products), although fishery products, honey and certain composite products may be certified by a local authority EHO.

In all cases, the council advises the embassy or consulate of the relevant country, food authority, as well as the importer, be liaised with by the food manufacturers/exporters to find out about any import conditions and if the certificate meets the stipulated requirements.

Currently the service is providing EHC support attestations for 3 approved fishery products premises in Berwick who are using export hubs within Scotland. In

addition we are providing regular EHC's for fishery products for a large approved premise in Amble.

The resource required for this provision has been substantial, this has been exacerbated with the time frame we are required to turn around the EHC. With the certificate submitted in the morning, reviewed, stamped and signed off within a few hours. This process is very intensive and puts officers under significant pressure. With some certificates requiring over 50 stamps, each stamp requiring a signature to coincide with the appropriate areas crossed out, any error potentially invalidating the certificate, which could result in the consignment being refused entry into the EU at the port.

During 2022-23 the service provided 165 certificates. With the ongoing increase in exports we are not expecting this to reduce in 2023-24

Export Health Certificates	Food Safety	Feed	Technical support
Resources required (FTE)	0.5	-	-

#### 4.11 The 'Produced in Northumberland' Verification Scheme

'Produced in Northumberland' is a business support initiative that recognises Northumberland food producers and also businesses that use and promote food and drink that is made in Northumberland. The verification scheme is delivered by the Public Health Protection Unit and is offered to local businesses with the aim of raising the profile, value and public confidence in Northumberland food & drink. The Unit also works in partnership to actively support and promote the scheme. A scheme focus group that is made up of local food businesses.

The Council has trademarked both the Produced in Northumberland and Produced in Northumbria as certification trademarks.



At the core of the scheme and what makes it unique at this time is the scheme is underpinned by a thorough food source verification audit that any aspiring business must pass. The officers within the Public Health Protection Unit carry out the verification audits who are trained to Lead Auditor standard that means

that the audits are to the standard of the ISO 22000 family of food management standards. In particular ISO 22005 - Traceability in the feed and food chain.

As well as the requirements of the verification audits any business must pass a food safety threshold. That is, they must have at least a 3-star food hygiene rating. So the scheme also offers assurance to the public of the safety of the food & drink products provided by member businesses.

<b>Food Hygiene Rating</b>	<b>Percentage of PIN members</b>
FHRS 5	90%
FHRS 4	8%
FHRS 3	2%

Producers who are members of the scheme have to prove to auditors who visit their premises that the food and drink is made in Northumberland. For butchers, checks are carried out on the origin of the animals from which their meat comes.

Produced in Northumberland is intended to contribute to the success of the tourism sector. In 2016 tourism contributed £307 million to the local economy.

Tourism businesses (including restaurants, hotels, guest houses, B&B's and food & drink retailers) who join the scheme are provided with a mark of recognition for their customers that they believe in the quality of the food and drink that is Produced in Northumberland. The hospitality businesses have to prove that a certain number of main foods used on their menu are produced in Northumberland. For example in the case of a B&B it could be that the sausage, eggs and kippers are produced in Northumberland.

Retailers who are part of the scheme are expected to provide food and drink that is made in Northumberland by a variety of different producers. It is recommended that these are identifiable by use of the 'Produced in Northumberland' logo e.g. a designated 'Produced in Northumberland' section within the shop.

Our goal is to obtain national recognition of the unique regional distinctiveness of Northumberland food & drink. It is hoped that by encouraging local businesses to use Northumberland food and drink this will make a positive approach in reducing food miles, lead to increased production and sales within the local economy and ultimately job creation in an area that relies heavily on tourism.

For further information and a list of food & drink businesses visit:



[www.producedinnorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.producedinnorthumberland.co.uk)

Through COVID and the cost of living crisis the team moved from its core inspection based verification, to a supporting / promotional role showcasing Northumberland's amazing local produce and were possible when our members could provide local delivery etc. Not only maintaining a local outlet for our manufacturers but also providing a service to Northumberland residents. Through this process we were able to maintain the core values of the scheme as well as directly supporting our local businesses in line with councils 'Driving Economic Growth' vision set out in the 2023-26 corporate plan.

The aim moving into 2023/24 is to continue to support and progress the scheme. The service is re-introducing the full verification scheme annual checks with onsite audits. Along with a planned increase in its promotion and visibility. In line with this to unlock the full potential of the scheme are also working closely with other services and teams as part of the development of the county food strategy, where PIN will play an integral role. As part of this process, we will be part of the food strategy working group to provide input into the strategy as its developed, along with regular meetings with the Rural Growth team to review progress. The long-term goal being to continue the development of PIN and take it even further.

### **Summary of Resources required for Produced in Northumberland**

<b>Produced in Northumberland</b>	<b>Verification</b>	<b>Administration</b>
<b>Resources required (FTE)</b>	0.9*	0.4*

\*The verification scheme currently has no dedicated admin support and the 0.4 FTE is provided by the inspectors themselves.

## 5.0 RESOURCES

### 5.1 Financial Allocation

The annual expected expenditure the Food Service for 2023-2024 is:-

Staffing costs (approx. including on costs)	£821,161
Travel	£ 12,760
Contractor & casual staffing costs	£ 32,330
<u>Sampling &amp; Analysis</u>	<u>£ 9,360</u>
<b>Total service cost</b>	<b>£875,611</b>

### 5.2 Staffing

The total staff resource allocated to the delivery of the work detailed in this plan is estimated to be approximately 16.52 full time equivalent (FTE) posts as shown in the tables below.

Work area	Team Manager (TS & AH Team)	Senior Trading Standards Officer	Trading Standards Officer	Animal Health Officer	Technical Support officer
<b>Feed</b>	0.08	0.6	0.25	0.3	0.1
<b>Feed total (FTE)</b>	<b>1.33</b>				

Work area	Principal EHO (commercial team)	Senior Environmental Health Officer	Environmental Health Officer / EHTO	Port Health Officer	Technical Support Officer
<b>Food Hygiene</b>	0.6	1	5.6		1.33
<b>Infectious Disease</b>			0.2		0.1
<b>Port Health</b>			0.1	0.9	
<b>Food sampling</b>			0.05	0.1	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5.95</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.53</b>
<b>Food Safety total (FTE)</b>	<b>10.08</b>				

Work area	Team Manager (Commercial Team, TS & AH Team)	Senior & Trading Standards Officer	Fair Trading Officer	Technical Support officer

<b>Food Standards</b>	0.5	2.61	1.0	1
<b>Food Standards total (FTE)</b>	<b>5.11</b>			

### **5.3 Staff Development Plan**

Training and development needs are identified by annual Appraisals and by ongoing assessment and monitoring throughout the year. Where specific training is identified, including refresher training, this becomes a requirement of their continuing authorisation as a service officer, the extent and currency of training is reviewed at the officer's annual appraisal.

Food Safety Officers/Environmental Health Officers, Food Standards Officers/Fair Trading Officers, will receive a minimum of 20 hours and Animal Health Inspectors 10 hours, on-going/update training for Continual Professional Development and this will take the form of in-house training (including personal research), external courses, and joint training initiatives with the North East Local Authorities via the NE Public Protection Partnership.

## **6.0 QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

### **6.1 Quality Assessment**

There are management arrangements in place to assess the quality of an officer's work and to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice, this is documented in the 'Monitoring the Quality of the Service' procedure. The Commercial Team & Trading Standards and Animal Health Team hold bi-monthly team meetings at which issues relating to consistency and competency are routinely discussed.

A system to allow service users to provide their perceptions of the Authority's performance has been introduced in the form of an on-line survey questionnaire. This is being requested through contact letters and emails following inspections and complaint / service request completion.

## 7.0 REVIEW

### 7.1 Review of the Food Service 2022-23

The respective Unit service managers and Head of Service annually review performance against the Plan. Regular reviews of food hygiene performance against targets will take place at team level. Where there are variances from the Plan the Unit Managers and Head of Service will be informed together with details of any action necessary to address the variance.

During 2020-2022 the FSA suspended the Food Law CoP requirements for interventions so resource could be diverted into the LA COVID response. 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 2023/24. The following review is based on the services response in relation to the recovery plan.

#### 7.1.1 Food Safety

##### 7.1.1.1 Inspections in 2022-23 (Food Safety)

Type	Programmed	In Year changes	% Target	Actual	% Completed *
High Risk Category A	6 (12)	6	98%	12	100%
Category B	63	-	98%	63	100%
Category C non-compliant	2	-	95%	2	100%
Category C complainant	168	-	95%	168	100%
Category D non-compliant	2	-	90%	2	100%
Category D complainant	0	-	N/A	817	100%
Category E	0	-	N/A	213	100%
Unrated	173 (535)	362**	95%	464	99%*** (86.7%)

\* % completed was based on phase targets in the FSA recovery plan, in which the service was able to overachieve.

\*\* New businesses commencing during the year, all new registrations are risk assessed and prioritised. High or medium risk, for example a public house serving meals, a cafe or restaurant is inspected as a priority. Low priority would be given to a child-minder who only provides a drink and snack and home bakers who do not produce any meat products for example.

\*\*\* Percentage completed based upon tagged unrated at the beginning of the year. Remaining premises are not yet in operation, have closed and reopened or are very low risk.

Overall the service completed the targets set out for the end of March'23 within the FSA recovery plan. In addition the service was able to work towards moving back to the Food Law CoP delivery plan for 2023-24

#### **7.1.1.2 Unrated Premises**

New and unrated premises have continued to require a lot of resource from the service, with the team receiving on average 31 new food registrations a month in 2022-23. The number of new registrations peaked at 44 in May 2022.

#### **7.1.1.3 Enforcement**

As a result of programmed food hygiene inspections, as well as service requests and complaints investigated by the Food Team, in 2022-2023 food businesses were issued with the following enforcement activities.

Enforcement Action	Totals
Written warning*	1442*
Voluntary closure agreement	6
Improvement Notices	14

\* Includes onsite reports left at the time of inspection where non-compliance was identified.

#### **7.1.1.4 Complaints (food safety & standards)**

142 complaints regarding food hygiene, 115 complaints about food premises were received and 54 complaints about food composition, labelling or quality. 99% of these received an initial response within 3 working days in accordance with Service Standards.

#### **7.1.1.5 Service requests for advice (food safety and standards)**

1177 requests for advice were received, 98% were responded to within 3 working days in accordance with service standards.

#### **7.1.1.6 Sampling**

A total of 158 microbiological food samples were taken in 2022-23. These were a mixture of local reactive and monitoring samples.

#### **7.1.1.7 Promotional Activities**

- Safer Food Better Business (SFBB)

Work continues to promote 'Safer Food Better Business' during inspections, revisits and service request visits. SFBB is a food safety management tool produced by the Food Standards Agency for small businesses to help them comply with legislation that requires a written management system to be in place. It is based on HACCP principles and helps businesses to identify where problems may occur.

- General Advice

Ongoing advice and assistance was provided during the year. This was particularly important as businesses were reopening following periods of closure due to the pandemic

- Food Hygiene Rating System (FHRS)

This is a national scheme; full details are available on their website [www.food.gov.uk/ratings](http://www.food.gov.uk/ratings). In the county as of April'23 the scheme is applied to 3220 food premises giving them a food hygiene star rating. 33175 food businesses out of the total achieved three, four or five star ratings (98.6%) which means the vast majority of our food businesses are compliant. This scheme includes all businesses that supply food direct to the consumer but some businesses are exempt, based on the low risk nature of food business activities, for example, chemists.

The FHRS breakdown of ratings is as follows:

Star rating	Description	Number of premises
5	Very good	2760
4	Good	324
3	Generally satisfactory	91
2	Improvement required	17
1	Major improvement required	23
0	Urgent improvement required	5

As of 1 April 2023 please see a breakdown below of the percentage of 3-5 rated premises for Northumberland, NE Region and England;

Area	Percentage of 3-5 rated Premises
Northumberland CC	98.6%
North East Region	98.1%
England	96.9%

### 7.1.1.8 Infectious Disease Investigation

646 notifications of infectious disease were received by UK Health Security Agency. Of these notifications 125 (19%) required an officer investigation. This involves: contacting the case to obtain information about their symptoms, food history, contacts and occupation then giving advice on preventing the spread of the illness and in some cases e.g. food handlers, requiring them to remain off work until clearance specimens have been provided. A total number of 83 outbreaks were notified, with the vast majority occurring in institutional settings, and were viral in nature spread person to person.

## 7.1.2 Food Standards

### 7.1.2.1 Inspections in 2021-22 (Food Standards)

Type	Programmed	In Year changes	% Target	Actual	% Completed *
Cat 'A'	55	-	98%	55	100%
Cat 'B'	0	-	N/A	262	97%
Cat 'C'	0	-	N/A	98	100%
Unrated	123 (492)	369**	95%	484	99%***

\* % completed was based on phase targets in the FSA recovery plan, in which the service was able to overachieve

\*\* New businesses commencing during the year

\*\*\* Percentage completed based upon tagged unrated at the beginning of the year. Remaining premises are not yet in operation, have closed and reopened or are very low risk.

Overall the service completed the years 2022-23 food standards inspection programme.

### 7.1.2.2 Unrated Premises

Please see 7.1.1.2

### 7.1.2.3 Enforcement

As a result of programmed food standards inspections, as well as service requests and complaints investigated by food officers, in 2022-2023 food businesses were issued with the following enforcement activities.

Enforcement Action	Totals
Written warnings*	1068*
Improvement Notices	3

\* Includes onsite reports left at the time of inspection where nonconformities were identified.

### 7.1.2.4 Complaints



Please see **7.1.1.4**

#### **7.1.2.5 Service Requests**

89 requests for advice were received, 99% were responded to within 3 working days in accordance with service standards. It is worth noting that food standards service requests tend to be complex in nature requiring detailed advice on how the premises can comply with regulations.

For more details please see **7.1.1.5**

#### **7.1.2.6 Sampling**

In 2022-23 the authority completed its local sampling programme, with a total of 52 samples taken within Northumberland.

##### **7.1.2.6.1 Sampling for allergens.**

In previous years sampling for allergens has been carried out within Northumberland. There has been proven non-compliance with allergens provisions in relation to food from caterers, in particular Indian restaurants and takeaways.

The service receives regular complaints about allergens and sampling is used in some cases to check the compliance of a food establishment if a complaint is received.

#### **7.1.2.7 Promotional Activities**

Please see **7.1.1.7 Promotional Activities**

### **7.1.3 Feed Hygiene**

#### **7.1.3.1 Inspections in 2022-2023 (Feed Hygiene) - FSA Funded**

Type	Programmed	Actual	% Completed
High Risk Category A	3	3	100%
Category B	3	3	100%
Category C	4	4	100%
Category D	11	12*	109%
Category E	4	11*	275%
Unrated	20	31*	155%

**\*actual is higher due to the fact that inspection funding was taken from Local Authorities who could not commit to their allocation**

To reduce the burden on business, all feed hygiene inspections planned to livestock premises in 2021/2022 were combined with an animal health inspection. Where possible, inland feed inspections i.e. those to retail premises, were undertaken alongside a food standards inspection.

### 7.1.3.2 Enforcement

As a result of programmed feed hygiene inspections, as well as service requests and complaints investigated by feed officers, in 2021-2022 feed businesses were issued with the following enforcement activities.

Enforcement Action	Totals
Written warnings*	22*
Voluntary closure	0

\* Includes onsite reports left at the time of inspection where non conformities were identified.

### 7.1.3.3 Sampling

In 2022-2023 the service took no samples of feed materials on behalf of the FSA as sampling funding was diverted elsewhere.

## 7.2 Variations from the Service Plan

### 7.2.1 Food Safety

There was no variation from the plan, all work was achieved

### **7.2.2 Food Standards**

There was no variation from the plan, all work was achieved

### **7.2.3 Feed Standards**

There is by nature small variations from the plan, this is due to other local authorities not achieving their own inspections. This can mean that additional inspections are undertaken by Northumberland County Council to ensure as far as possible that the regional grant is spent rather than being returned.

### **7.3 Areas for development**

The following areas for service development have been identified:-

- Continue to develop the service in line with the principles of Better Regulation.
- Continue to improve the quality of data held on the database
- Continue to develop new ways of working to improve service provision
- Continue to promote and further develop the 'Produced in Northumberland' verification scheme.

### **7.4 Export Health Certificates**

The provision of Export Health Certificates has been a highly complex and constantly changing area of work for the service. The professionalism and effort by officers within the team cannot be underestimated in trying to support our local businesses.

In 2022-23 the service provided 165 certificates during this time. With the ongoing increase in exports we are not expecting this to reduce in 2023-24.

	Export Health certificates
2022-23	165

### **7.5 Produced in Northumberland**

As detailed in the planning section in 2022-23 and during the whole COVID pandemic and through the cost of living crisis the team moved from its core inspection based verification, to a supporting / promotional role showcasing Northumberland's amazing local produce and were possible when our members could provide local delivery etc. Not only maintaining a local outlet for our manufacturers but also providing a service to Northumberland residents. Through this process we were able to maintain the core values of the scheme as well as directly supporting our local businesses in line with councils 'Driving Economic Growth' vision set out in the 2023-26 corporate plan.

Unfortunately, we were unable to further expand the scheme, but we were able to maintain its current numbers with 93 members. This is predominantly food & drink producers however there are still a good number of hospitality and retail premises that are members of the scheme.

PIN Members	Total
Verified	93
Provisional Verification	0
Pending	0
Expressions of Interest	25*

\*Recent expressions of interest.

The aim moving into 2023/24 is to continue to support and progress the scheme. The service is re-introducing the full verification scheme annual checks with onsite audits. Along with a planned increase in its promotion and visibility. In line with this to unlock the full potential of the scheme we are also working closely with other services and teams as part of the development of the county food strategy, where PIN will play an integral role. As part of this process, we will be part of the food strategy working group to provide input into the strategy as its developed, along with regular meetings with the Rural Growth team to review progress. The long-term goal being to continue the development of PIN and take it even further.

Resource	Budget
Staffing costs	£8 650*
Income from membership	-£0.00
Balance	£8 650

*Note – Based upon a 0.2FTE*

The cost to the service for 2022-23 was not representative of its full operation, as we provided the service for free and were not proactively inspecting, the cost was significantly less than previous years. As we develop full roll out in 23-24 it is expected that out cost to the service will move back to a net £41,000+ operation costs which will have to be met from existing budget.

#### **7.6. Customer satisfaction survey results 2022-23**

Due to the pandemic the customer satisfaction surveys were put on hold and as such we have no data to present

#### **7.7 North East Regional Benchmarking Results**

Due to the pandemic the regional benchmarking has been put on hold and as such we have no data to present

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- Alternative Enforcement

In this context a means of assessing compliance with food law by means of self-assessment or provision of advice to the food business operator, via a questionnaire or letter

- Broadly Compliant

A premises which has good compliance with food law

- Due Diligence Defence

The due diligence defence is available to anybody accused of a breach of food safety regulations. Essentially, the defence is that the accused took all reasonably practicable steps to avoid the breach.

- Food Standards Agency Framework Agreement

The Framework Agreement on Local Authority Enforcement provides the Agency with a mechanism for implementing its powers under the Food Standards Act to influence and oversee local authority enforcement activity.

- Food Alerts

Food Alerts are the way the Food Standards Agency tell local authorities and consumers about problems associated with food and, in some cases, provide details of specific action to be taken.

They are issued 'For Information' where a solution to the problem has been put in place or 'For Action' where intervention by enforcement authorities is required. They are often issued in conjunction with a product withdrawal or recall by a manufacturer, retailer or distributor.

- Food Standards Agency

The Food Standards Agency is an independent Government department set up by an Act of Parliament in 2000 to protect the public's health and consumer interests in relation to food.

- High risk premises

A food business which falls into risk category A or B, inspected every 6 or 12 months. May be a premises with poor standards (and thereby subject to enforcement action) or a use a high risk process and/or have a vulnerable customer base.

- Local Authority Enforcement Monitoring System

LAEMS is a web-based system used to report local authority food law enforcement activities to the Food Standards Agency. Local authorities upload data, that has been generated from the local system, 'CIVICA' on which they record data on food law enforcement activities, to LAEMS. Once uploaded to LAEMS, the local authority data are aggregated to the pre-defined categories required by the FSA, including 'interventions', 'sampling' and 'enforcement'.

- Medium risk premises

A food business which falls into risk category C, subject to an official control such as a full inspection or audit every 18 months, this is where the bulk of our restaurants, cafes etc. are rated.

- Non-Compliant

In breach of food law requirements. Further action needed by the food business operator to avoid formal enforcement action.

- Regulators' Compliance Code

The Regulators' Compliance Code asks regulators to perform their duties in a business-friendly way, by planning regulation and inspections in a way that causes least disruption to the economy.

- Safer Food Better Business

Safer food, better business (SFBB) is an innovative and practical approach to food safety management. It has been developed to help small businesses put in place food safety management procedures and comply with food hygiene regulations.

- UKFSS

The UK Food Surveillance system (UKFSS) is a national database for central storage of analytical results from feed and food samples taken by enforcement authorities (local authorities and port health authorities) as part of their official controls. Information about the sample and the results of analysis are entered onto the system, and then validated, using the data entry tool.

- Unrated Premises

The unrated premises are those which have recently opened or changed proprietor since the last inspection. These are identified via new food premises registrations or identified by an officer which on district. These premises are, where notification takes place, visited initially and are assessed according to risk for further inspection.

- Verification

The checking, by examination and the consideration of objective evidence, whether specific requirements have been fulfilled

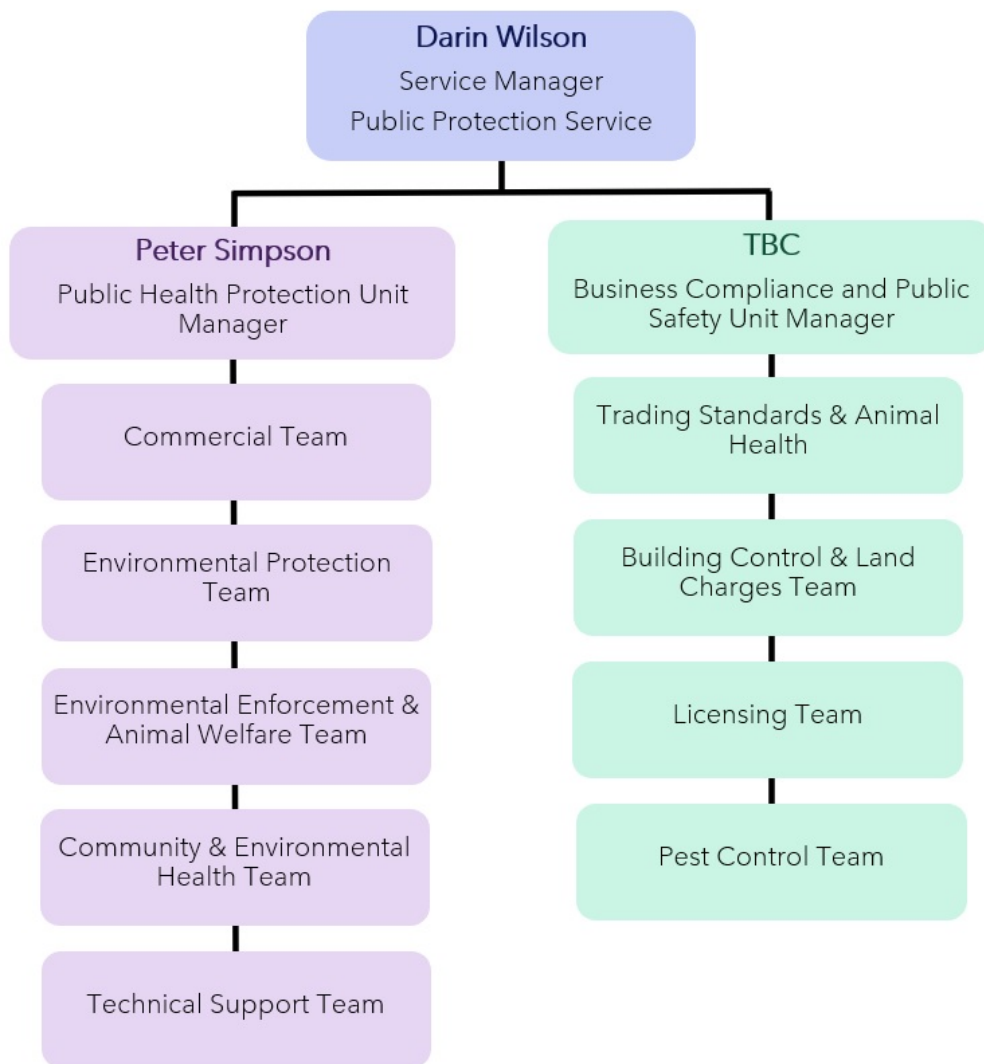
- Written Warning

Any relevant communication with the proprietor/owner/manager of a premises stating that infringements of legislation have been detected.

## **APPENDIX A: Organisational Structures**



**A. Public Protection Service - Public Protection Units.**



## B: Commercial Team Structure



### C: Trading Standards & Animal Health Team Structure

