



FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN 2015-2016

1. FOOD SAFETY SERVICE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Background, Aims and objectives

Background

The requirement to have a Service Plan is laid down by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in its *Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Law Controls by Local Authorities, Amendment number 5*. The FSA is an independent monitoring and advisory body that issues guidance to ensure local authorities' delivery of official controls is 'effective, risk-based, proportionate and consistent'.

Aim

The key food safety function of Cheltenham Borough Council is to ensure that the food sold, offered and stored for sale and entering the Borough is wholesome and fit for human consumption.

Our objectives include:

The regular control of food premises within the Borough.

The investigation of the safety and fitness of food including all complaints about the operation of businesses within the Borough.

To sample foods within the Borough whilst participating in local, regional and national food sampling programmes.

To ensure we approve and register all food premises within the Borough as required by legislation.

To undertake appropriate and proportionate food safety enforcement action within the Borough.

To undertake Home and Originating Authority duties within the Borough.

To promote food safety by way of advice and assistance to all food businesses, citizens and visitors of the Borough.

To administer and promote the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

To undertake Primary Authority Partnership arrangements

To control foodborne infectious diseases through the investigation of notifications

1.2 Links to Cheltenham Borough Council's corporate strategy for 2015-16

The Corporate Strategy contains three high level outcomes for 2015-16:

- Cheltenham's environmental quality and heritage is protected, maintained and enhanced
- Sustain and grow Cheltenham's economic and cultural vitality
- People live in strong, safe and healthy communities

The Food Service Plan supports these outcomes by working to achieve: improved food safety and hygienic premises; high rating food businesses in the national food hygiene rating scheme (resulting in increased consumer confidence in local businesses); and the control of foodborne diseases – all of which help promote the local economy as well as protecting the health of the people who live, visit or work in Cheltenham. Advice is also given that directly improves or protects the environmental quality of the town – examples range from pests and other vectors; to the disposal of FOGs (fat or grease in drains).

The cross-cutting objective of ensuring we provide value for money services that effectively meet the needs of our customers is at the core of our food service delivery plan.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Profile

Cheltenham is an attractive and vibrant town serving an extensive catchment area in central and eastern Gloucestershire and the South Midlands. It is ranked in the top thirty regional shopping centres in the UK, third in the South West and has the eighteenth highest consumer expenditure in Great Britain.

The Borough is based on the town of Cheltenham and is mainly urban with some areas of surrounding countryside. It covers an area of approximately 4,680 hectares and has a population of over 110,000.

Cheltenham has a wealth of restaurants and eating places. Twice a month it hosts a farmers market offering a valuable opportunity to sample local produce. The town offers a wide range of educational and employment opportunities, a year-round programme of festivals and events plus a strong cultural and sporting profile.

2.2 Organisational Structure

The food safety service is within the Public and Environmental Health team of the Public Protection Department, which forms part of the Environmental & Regulatory Services Division. The Division is currently subject to a restructuring exercise as well as undergoing major service transformation. The current structure is shown in Appendix 1.

2.3 Scope of the Food Service

The Council is not a Unitary Authority and therefore shares its duties under the Food Safety Act with the Trading Standards Department of Gloucestershire County Council. Cheltenham Borough Council aims to provide a full range of services within its remit offering a balanced approach between education and enforcement, in accordance with the council's graduated enforcement policy.

The Borough Council food safety service is provided by three appointed and authorised officers in accordance with the requirements of the FSA code of practice. These officers are also responsible for infectious disease control along with other environmental health functions in all food premises within the Borough. The officers are also responsible for food safety advice at events and festivals in the district of Cheltenham.

Specialist services such as public analyst and food examiner are provided externally by Worcester Scientific Services, Worcester and The Public Health England Food, Water & Environmental Laboratory, Birmingham, respectively.

Also within the scope of the food service are the following functions: sampling (food, water and environmental); primary authority partnerships and the local administration and promotion of the national food hygiene rating scheme.

Demands on the Food Safety Service

The Service Delivery Point:

Address	Hours	Contact details
Cheltenham Borough Council Municipal Offices Promenade Cheltenham GL50 9SA	Mon, Tue, Thurs and Fri (09.00-17.00) Wed (09.30- 17.00)	01242 775020 env.health@cheltenham.gov.uk

There is an out of hours emergency service available which addresses the emergency closure of premises, food product withdrawal and outbreaks of food associated disease.

On 31st March 2015 there were 1011 food businesses on our database - the profile is given in the table below with figures for the previous financial year in brackets as a comparison:

	NO. OF PREMISES
PRIMARY PRODUCERS	0 (1)
MANUFACTURERS + PACKERS	6 (9)
IMPORTERS/EXPORTERS	2 (1)
DISTRIBUTORS/TRANSPORTERS	8 (10)
RETAILERS	167 (166)
RESTAURANTS AND CATERERS	828 (829)
TOTAL	1011 (1016)

As is expected for a town like Cheltenham the hospitality and catering sector predominates, the majority being small or medium sized enterprises.

With such a small team, the programmed food hygiene intervention plan for any given year can be severely disrupted by food poisoning investigations, national food alerts, food sampling and non food related matters such as health and safety accident investigation.

2.4 Enforcement Policy and Regulatory Reform

Cheltenham Borough Council has adopted and published a corporate enforcement policy which will form the basis of all enforcement action undertaken by the Food Safety Service.

In recent years there have been a number of reviews conducted that have resulted in a change to the nature of regulation. The emphasis being that the regulatory system as a whole should use comprehensive risk assessment to concentrate resources in the areas that need them most.

In terms of food safety, this means concentrating efforts on those businesses that do not meet the minimum legislative standards, with alternative interventions in those that generally comply. This was further developed in the Regulatory Reform Act 2006 Compliance Code, which encompasses the criteria of the Enforcement Concordat of being transparent, accountable, proportionate and consistent with the additional element of being targeted only at cases in which action is needed.

There is a suite of interventions that focus on outputs and continued improvements in food safety. This allows us to choose the most appropriate action to be taken to drive up levels of compliance of food establishments with food law. In addition, we operate an Alternative Enforcement Strategy (compliant with Annex 5) which allows us to target resource at the highest risk premises.

3. SERVICE DELIVERY

3.1 Food Premises Regulation

The regulation of food premises is undertaken in accordance with the Food Safety Act 1990 Code of Practice. All food premises are subject to a detailed assessment based on particular criteria including types of food and method of handling, consumers at risk, level of current compliance in terms of practices, procedures including cleanliness and confidence in management.. This numerical calculation is transferred into the categorisation of premises from A to E. Category A premises are inspected a minimum of every 6 months, category B every year, category C every 18 months, category D every two years and category E premises every 3 years.

The food safety team aim to inspect all non-compliant food businesses within our area within 28 days of the due date. This includes all newly registered premises as they are deemed non-compliant until the first visit and a risk assessment has been undertaken. All non-compliant category A and B premises, i.e. those that fall significantly short of broad compliance will be visited within 28 days of the due date as required by the Food Standards Agency. Other categories of premises that are broadly compliant will be addressed by a combination of official controls and other interventions.

Further official control visits are made to premises where there are food safety concerns, in particular where the level of current compliance in food safety practices and procedures fall below satisfactory or there is little or no confidence in management. Other visits to food premises may follow a request for advice, complaint or an alleged food poisoning incident. Visits are primarily unannounced with evening/weekend inspections undertaken when required to accommodate the needs of some food businesses, e.g. those that do not open during office hours and markets and festivals held at weekends.

In line with current guidance and the necessity to target ever scarce resource at higher risk activities, we operate an alternative enforcement strategy for low risk businesses.

a) Statutory Performance Monitoring

Each local authority must submit a statutory return to the FSA on their official food controls each year through the Local Authority Enforcement Monitoring System. Monitoring tables can be viewed on the FSA website: <http://www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/monitoring/laems/mondatabyyear> although it can take some time for the latest data to be published.

b) 'Broadly Compliant' premises (PP10) and the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

Cheltenham Borough Council participates in the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, which is a public interface to food hygiene standards in premises that sell food direct to the final consumer. Each food business in the scheme is given a food hygiene rating ranging between 0 (urgent improvement necessary) and 5 (very good) after it has been inspected, and the level of compliance with food safety and hygiene legislation is reflected in the rating - a rating of 3 and above indicates the premises is broadly compliant, for those businesses not excluded or exempt from having a rating. The website can be viewed at www.ratings.food.gov.uk

The measure of how many food premises in the district are 'broadly compliant' with food safety legislation has been kept as local performance indicator PP11 since it was discontinued as a national one.

PP11 – percentage of food businesses which are broadly compliant with food safety legislation

2008/2009 was a baseline year with less than 70% of our food premises being broadly compliant. As at 31st March 2014, 94% of rated food premises in Cheltenham in the food safety database were broadly compliant (n=924/981 premises). This is in line with the end of year reporting of 94% in 2014-15 (n=888/948). This indicator is reported to Divisional Management Team on a quarterly basis. In 2015-16, the target is to end the year with 95% of rated premises broadly compliant with food safety legislation. All unrated new businesses are automatically non-compliant at first, so are excluded from this calculation.

PP10 – grow the number of food businesses with a rating of 3 or more

At year end there were 777 Cheltenham food premises with a rating of 3 or higher out of 836 food premises on the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme website. This equates to 93% with a rating of 3 (generally satisfactory) or higher. This indicator is reported to Divisional Management Team on a quarterly basis and is also reported in the corporate plan

A **target number of interventions** is not set on an annual basis as the number of premises opening and closing or changing food liability throughout the year means such a target would not be meaningful. However, it is useful to assess the percentage of planned interventions delivered per risk rating category.

The following table gives the targets and results for 2014-15 for inspections due per risk category:

Risk Category	Interventions due	Interventions achieved	Target
A	1	1 = 100%	100%
B	107	107 = 100%	100%
C	334	318 = 95.2%	96%
D*	146	82 = 56.2%	94%
E*	87	10 = 11.5%	94%
Unrated ie 'new'	135	135 = 100%	100%

*lower targets are given for Category C-E premises as they present a lower risk to public health and are more likely to contain a higher mix of seasonal premises.

Note on 2014-15 inspections achieved performance

Resource was prioritised at the high risk and medium risk premises (including unrated new businesses) to facilitate the systems thinking review of the food safety service. The review demonstrated that a higher intervention rate, and faster assessment of unrated businesses could be achieved through the use of mobile technology. The Director of Resources is preparing an outturn budget proposal to support this development with ICT in the summer of 2015.

2015-16 Service Delivery Proposal

Inspection performance will be impacted this year due to the long term illness of one of the senior officers (one of three FTEs in the food safety service). The inspections due as of the start of the financial year are as follows:

Official food safety controls (inspections) due/overdue 762

New premises (average of 15 per month) 180

The inspections due can be broken down into risk categories as follows:

Risk category	Number due for intervention	Total by risk grouping	Target for 2015-16
Unrated – ie new businesses	Minimum of 180	254 HIGH RISK	100%
A	2		
B	72		
C	188	188 MEDIUM RISK	100%
D	172	363 LOW RISK	0%
E	191		0%
TOTAL	805	805	442/805 = 54.6%

It is proposed to focus the resource of the two FTE food safety officers for this financial year at the high and medium risk categories due for intervention. This will prioritise the most risky food activities for inspection whilst satisfying the requirements of the food safety regulatory framework (see para 2.4). However, this would result in approximately 363 low risk inspections being carried over into 2016 – 2017 and beyond, when they would be gradually completed alongside the inspections due for that particular year.

Local resilience arrangements are being explored with neighbouring local authorities to provide mutual aid in times of officer sickness or peak demand. This could address the potential regulatory gap although the council would need to consider the reciprocation of any such arrangement.

Alternatively, the food safety service could be resourced to achieve a higher proportion of all interventions due by way of a contractual arrangement with a food safety officer. This would need to be funded externally to the department as there is no such budgetary provision in Public Protection.

3.2 Food Complaints

Food complaints are investigated in accordance with the FSA Code of Practice. The number of food complaints investigated by the food safety team in 2014-15 was 20, with a further 68 complaints relating to the hygiene of food premises.

Performance target: to instigate investigation of 96% of food safety complaints received within three working days. A target has not been set for the resolution of these complaints as that depends upon the most appropriate course of enforcement action for each complaint on a case by case basis. In 2014-15 we achieved 95% against target (n =186/195). This is an increase against 2013-14 performance of 93% (n=135/146).

3.3 Primary Authority Principle

The Council will consult at an appropriate level with the Primary Authority for any food business, in accordance with the principles laid down in The Food Safety Act 1990 Code of Practice and BRDO guidance.

3.4 Advice to Businesses

It is the policy of the Section to provide assistance to local food businesses when requested to help them comply with the legislation and to encourage the use of best practice. This is achieved through a range of activities including:

- Advice given during inspections and other visits to premises
- Provision of advisory leaflets
- Responding to service requests and enquiries
- Attendance at Event Consultative Groups to advise on food safety at public and community events.
- Advice given in response to planning and licensing applications.

Whilst the resources of the Food Safety Service will always be used in proportion to the risk to public health, every effort will be made to accommodate requests for advisory visits to food premises.

3.5 Food Sampling

The food service participates in Public Health England coordinated cross-regional food sampling programmes as well as national studies. In 2013-14 this included: unusual serving platters; swabs and cloths in low rated premises; soft fruits; soft ice-cream; and lightly cooked beef products. In addition, the team continued to use their ATP (Adenosine triphosphate) monitor to assess the effectiveness of cleaning regimes. Foods are also sampled in response to complaints and food poisoning investigations when necessary.

It is not proposed to engage in sampling initiatives in 2015-16 due to officer resource, but this will be reviewed periodically.

Performance: the target was to participate in 100% of local, sub-regional and national sampling studies as agreed by Gloucestershire Food Safety Liaison Group and to follow up 100% of any unsatisfactory results with the respective businesses. In 2014-15, the team participated 83.3% of sampling studies (n=5/6) and followed up 100% of unsatisfactory results.

3.6 Control & Investigation of Outbreaks & Food Related Infectious Disease

The measures to be taken to control the spread of infectious diseases are contained in various acts of Parliament and their associated Regulations. This legislation places a duty on local authorities to control the spread of food poisoning and food and water borne diseases.

Annual notifications vary from year to year with a noticeable increase in Norovirus outbreaks in recent years. These outbreaks are often associated with closed settings which have a more vulnerable group of clients. Intervention in these outbreaks takes up a significant amount of officer time.

The objectives in respect of this service are:

- To administer and implement our statutory responsibilities relating to the control of infectious disease.
- Investigate all notifications of food poisoning cases and likely sources of infection whether confirmed or not at the earliest opportunity.
- Where a source is identified take appropriate action to ensure risk of spreading is controlled.
- Protect the well-being of individuals at risk by taking action to contain the spread of infection and provide advice and information regarding personal hygiene, food handling and control of infection.
- Exclude food handlers and people working with high-risk groups from work in consultation with the Consultant for Communicable Disease Control (CCDC).
- A Countywide "Outbreak Control Plan" is operated including standardised food poisoning investigation questionnaires.

Performance target: to action 100% of infectious disease notifications within one working day (with the exception of *Campylobacter* which has been put on reduced surveillance by the local health protection unit).

196 infectious disease notifications were received in 2014-15, and 100% were investigated within one working day. This was also achieved in 2013 – 14.

3.7 Food Alerts

The Food Standards Agency operates a system to alert the public and food authorities to serious problems concerning food that does not meet food safety requirements.

Food alerts vary in significance and require an appropriate response. Some are of high priority and require immediate action. This may involve contacting and/or visiting food premises and taking immediate action under powers contained in the Food Safety Act 1990. Others are for information only.

All alerts are received directly from the Food Standards Agency via a secure dedicated computer network system and via the Public and Environmental Health Managers mobile phone text messaging service. The Manager will instigate the necessary response and provide the necessary out of hours cover for this service.

Where the Council becomes aware of a serious localised incident or a wider food safety problem, it will notify the Food Standards Agency in accordance with the Code of Practice.

It is estimated that around 100 food alerts requiring various levels of action will be received on an annual basis. It is difficult to estimate the resource required to meet this responsive element of the service as the work associated with individual alerts can vary significantly.

3.8 Liaison with Other Organisations

The Council is committed to ensuring that the enforcement approach it adopts is consistent with other enforcing authorities. This takes place through regular meetings and attendance by the manager at the Gloucestershire Food Safety Group. This group comprises of peer representatives of each of the six District and Borough Councils in the County, the County Council Trading Standards Service, the Food Standards Agency, the local FSA vet and PHE Laboratory Service.

The forum provides a mechanism for discussion of relevant food matters, the provision of training on a county-wide basis, the formulation of policy, documentation and guidance and co-ordinated responses to Government and Central Agencies.

The Council attends the Gloucestershire Public and Environmental Health Forum (previously known as the Consultant in Communicable Disease Committee). By means of this forum, which meets half yearly, members are kept informed about relevant subjects and are able to benefit from the valuable and very necessary liaison between public health and medicine.

A Divisional Veterinary Officer is part of the Forum and is able to brief the group on local and national issues regarding animal welfare, disease control and food safety.

Within the Council, the Food Service is also a consultee for the planning, building control and licensing functions.

4. RESOURCES

4.1 Financial Allocation

The Food Safety Service budget for the coming year is approximately £184,000 (not yet available on Agresso) which includes staffing, travel subsistence, I.T. development, legal action and office overheads necessary as part of the food safety enforcement function. Specific Food Safety related insurances. Recharges for I.T. support, Human Resources, accountancy and audit. Corporate insurances, communications, E government and asset management.

The Council always seeks to recover costs following successful legal proceedings wherever possible.

4.2 Staffing Allocation

All food safety officers are appropriately trained and competent to work within this field. Officers are authorised according to their competency and experience. There are 3 FTEs dedicated to the delivery of the food safety service. One of these (Senior Environmental Health Officer) is on long term sick leave.

The food safety service is led by Sarah Clark who is EHRB registered.

There are two SEHOs and one senior technical officer in the food safety team. Chris Fawcett is EHRB registered and widely experienced in food safety. Bernadette Reed is an experienced officer with over 25 years' experience in local authority environmental health. The senior technical officer is Stephen Edwardson. Stephen is EHRB registered and specialises in food safety enforcement.

Additionally, the Public Protection Heads of Service, Barbara Exley and Yvonne Hope, are EHRB registered and widely experienced in food safety enforcement.

4.3 Staff Development Plan

The Council has an annual review system of staff, this process includes training needs. The food safety team holds regular meetings to review and distribute workloads in addition to monthly 1-2-1 meetings for all the team. Any training needs required for new legislation, guidance etc are discussed and actioned at these meetings.

Food safety regulators are required to achieve a minimum of 20 hours of continued professional development every year. The service encourages cascade training as a mechanism to disseminate new guidance and further staff development.

5. QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Local performance indicators are reviewed quarterly. Please refer to section 3.1.

All officers use standard inspection/audit forms and have undergone consistency training.

The use of customer satisfaction surveys is currently being reviewed.

The Uni-Form database (which also forms the Public Register of food premises) is audited on a monthly basis for data accuracy before upload to the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme portal.

6. REVIEW

Last year's progress in food safety includes:

- continuing a high standard of broadly compliant businesses included in the food hygiene rating scheme
- intervention at all high risk premises due for intervention
- assessment of all unrated 'new' food businesses
- prioritisation of visits to non-compliant food businesses and use of alternative enforcement strategy
- 437 written warnings of non-compliance with food hygiene legislation
- one voluntary disposal of food because of food safety risk
- one Improvement Notice served to secure compliance
- two Simple Cautions issued for food safety offences
- 23 formal samples taken in national and regional food sampling programmes and development of staff competencies in this area
- Award of FSA grant to promote FHRS display in low-rated premises
- official controls carried out in 467 premises
- received and actioned 196 infectious disease notifications
- service transformation including exploration of mobile technology
- Primary Authority Partnership arrangements formed with Edwards & Ward
- Successful bid to Health Inequality Fund to address trans-fat levels in takeaways
- Participation in national Food Safety Week

