

Cabinet – 11 September 2013

Walsall Council Food Awards 2014

Portfolio: Councillor Ali, Public Health and Protection

Related portfolios: None

Service: Regulatory Services

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary

- 1.1 'Good Hygiene is Good for your Business' is a slogan developed by the Food Standards Agency to promote the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. Walsall Council has been a member of this scheme since 1 April 2011 and around 75% of Walsall businesses that have been inspected are of at least a satisfactory level.
- 1.2 It is important both in terms of economic growth and in terms of the health of Walsall residents that we have a thriving but ultimately safe food industry. Cabinet identified this whilst approving the Food Law Enforcement Service Plan in June 2013 and asked that Regulatory Services consider an award scheme to incentivise food businesses to improve their ratings. It was suggested that the 'winner' of any such award scheme should be announced during Food Safety Week 2014.
- 1.3 Three awards have been considered, as follows:
 - a 'Most Improved Retailer' award to acknowledge progress made by small businesses in improving standards;
 - a 'High Achiever' award for those small businesses who have shown consistently high standards over time;
 - an award for 'Innovation and Best Practice' which would include the sharing of best practice within the business or local community.
- 1.4 Regulatory Services staff have agreed to work with and consult with partners such as District Centre Management, Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce on the detail of the scheme. It is then intended that applications could be invited from 1 January 2014 with a closing date no later than 31 March 2014 so that preparations could be made to judge and award any prizes in Food Safety Week, June 2014.

- 1.5 Between October 2013 and March 2014 Regulatory Services will also be trialling an initiative called Health Switch. This work is funded by Public Health and aims to tackle one of the key health inequalities in the Borough – obesity.
- 1.6 The scheme involves Environmental Health and Trading Standards colleagues working together with takeaway businesses rated as 4 or 5 on the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. Officers will encourage higher nutritional awareness and educate businesses in the principles of healthier eating, food preparation and try and influence the range of healthy food offered for sale by such premises.
- 1.7 Health Switch is a recognition of improving nutritional standards within a business. It allows businesses to start at a level they believe is attainable, perhaps bronze, but also to progress to the next level as their confidence grows. The award consists of four levels, bronze the basic level through silver and gold to platinum, which is the highest. The scheme will cover a wide variety of premises from ethnic takeaways through to pizza places. In order to allow flexibility within the award for these diverse businesses each level will have ten components five (at least) of which will have to be complied with before the business receives its certification or award. Once the components are achieved and verified and they receive their award they could consider progressing to the next level.
- 1.8 Initial discussions have taken place with the Active Involvement Coordinator of Children's Services in terms of their potential involvement in this scheme. The Coordinator works with a body of youth inspectors who we believe may be able to assist in the preparation and implementation of the awards and therefore will be invited to the consultation and planning meetings suggested in paragraph 1.4 of this report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the institution of a Food Business Award Scheme the culmination of which will be planned for Food Safety Week in June 2014.
- 2.2 That Cabinet acknowledge and endorse the Health Switch scheme as a key component of the authority striving to tackle health issues caused by obesity and incentivising a progressive switch to better nutrition in the borough's food establishments.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 The provision of safe food and water and the prevention of outbreaks of food and water borne disease is a fundamental principle of protecting public health. Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers work directly with businesses and residents and are constantly striving to provide a balance between the economic success of the business against the need to always protect the health of customers and indeed staff.

- 3.2 The National Food Hygiene Rating scheme works on the basis of Environmental Health staff inspecting food businesses and assessing the structure, food hygiene procedures and management control of the premises against national standards.
- 3.3 The scores given for these elements of the food business then dictate what risk rating the premises has which in turn dictates the frequency at which the premises is rated. For example, a premises rated as A would require inspection every six months due to the high risk nature of activities or poor standards encountered during the visit.
- 3.4 Presently the make up of food businesses in Walsall (July 2013) is.

5 Very Good	= 323 businesses
4 Good	= 336 businesses
3 Satisfactory	= 350 businesses
2 Improvement Necessary	= 137 businesses
1 Major Improvement necessary	= 174 businesses
0 Urgent Improvement necessary	= 11 businesses

The awards scheme wishes to incentivise and reward business so that they do not simply accept their rating but they wish to progress and become a 5 rated premises.

- 3.5 Presently businesses voluntarily display their rating although it is available on the Food Standards Agency web site and mobile app for consumers to check. The Government is not yet committed to making the display of certificates on the premises a legal requirement choosing to publicise the scheme and work with business and local authorities to encourage voluntary display instead.
- 3.6 Initial discussions with the Federation of Small Businesses, Regeneration and District Centre Management suggest that the scheme would be very welcome in Walsall and should act as a boost to business and the economy. However the detail and timing of the scheme is key to ensuring it achieves its aims and is transparent and robust. Whilst the purpose of the award is to incentivise businesses, there are many and varied business premises within the Borough, which makes like for like comparison difficult. We therefore wish to ensure we are targeting the correct businesses with this Award and not disincentivising other businesses by their potential exclusion.
- 3.7 Whilst the safety of food is paramount in terms of the Council's statutory functions the composition and labelling of such food is also vital; this became evidently clear during the recent horse meat scandal.
- 3.8 The Health Switch project combines the knowledge and experience of Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers to encourage and reward businesses for taking the next steps in improving their menus and product options to give residents of Walsall easier access to healthier food and healthier alternatives.

- 3.9 The Health Switch project will run between October and March and, although it is a Borough wide scheme, care has been taken to ensure there are award candidates from each of the six Area Partnerships and Walsall town centre to promote a local feel.

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 The work of Regulatory Services fits neatly within the Council's priorities as it is fundamentally involved with liaising with businesses of all sizes to ensure the work they undertake and products they produce are safe both in terms of the impact on their employees and the health of residents across the whole life course.
- 4.2 The service is in a position whereby it can support business by providing face to face, timely and competent advice on a range of complex subjects to ensure they operate correctly, efficiently and lawfully. Responsible, profitable businesses that have longevity are key to ensuring the economy recovers and that local people can stay in employment or get back into employment as quickly as possible.
- 4.2 Whilst the work of Regulatory Services involves the protection of health and the improvement and profitability of business it also recognises that some individuals or traders will place profit before safety and therefore the service has a range of legal sanctions available to it to tackle what are basically criminal behaviours.

5. Risk management

It is not known how many businesses may wish to apply and therefore the amount of resource required to consider those applications is also unknown at present. The Awards will run alongside the Food Inspection Plans that are already in existence, will be by application only and the scheme will be run in consultation with Trading Standards, Regeneration and Public Health colleagues.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The service is currently funded from within the council's cash limited budget. The consideration of a cash prize of up to £500 may be met from existing budgets although no specific budget already exists for this. Discussions have taken place with Regeneration colleagues to identify any funding that could be found for assisting with the scheme. The cost of printing application forms and certificates may be met within reason through current printing arrangements and through online forms which the businesses can download and print directly themselves.
- 6.2 Public Health has commissioned Regulatory Services to run the Health Switch Project and therefore there should be no additional cost to the service.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The food law activities presently carried out by Regulatory Services will continue and all businesses will be dealt as deemed appropriate by the inspecting officers regardless of any application submitted as part of an award scheme. The Authority should reserve the right to exclude a business from the scheme if during the course of the application matters of concern are found at the premises leading to enforcement action.
- 7.2 To ensure that the Authority does not find itself subject to legal challenge, the detailed proposals of the scheme will be worked on with assistance from experienced organisations over the next three months in preparation for applications in the New Year.

8. Property implications

There are no property implications within this Report.

9. Health and wellbeing implications

- 9.1 The primary objective of the work of Regulatory Services is to ensure that the health and wellbeing of individuals and indeed communities is protected. The fact the service has a direct link to both business, residents and partner organisations also places it in a strong position in terms of added value work in terms of interactions on such key issues as obesity, smoking, alcohol and safety at work. Failure to undertake this work would place residents at threat of ill health, disease and particularly for vulnerable persons the possibility of preventable death.
- 9.2 In Walsall, it is estimated that around 55,000 adults (26%) are obese and around 130,000 (62%) are overweight or obese and tackling this issue is identified in the 'Improving health and well being through healthy lifestyles: Making 'healthier choices easier' chapter of the Health and Well Being Strategy for Walsall 2013 - 16

10. Staffing implications

- 10.1 The Food Law Enforcement Service plan 2013/14 acknowledged that, with the challenges facing local government in the years ahead, the way in which we operate will have to change. Incentivising business to improve their standards may reduce pressure on Regulatory Services Staff in terms of numbers of poorly rated premises allowing more resources to be targeted at rogue traders.
- 10.2 The service has been commissioned by Public Health to trial the Health Switch project and therefore funding has been made available to cover much of this work.

11. Equality implications

These proposals seek to benefit all parts of the community equally and will be consistently applied across the Borough. Food sampling programmes and support for local businesses will where possible reflect local needs. Where there are food businesses or consumers with particular language, cultural or other needs these can be addressed with reference to good practice that is shared amongst local authorities within the West Midlands and also nationwide.

12. Consultation

Key to this awards scheme will be consultation and engagement with the business community through such organisations as the Federation of Small Business, Chamber of Commerce, Local Enterprise Partnership, Town and District Centre Management and Area Partnerships.

Author

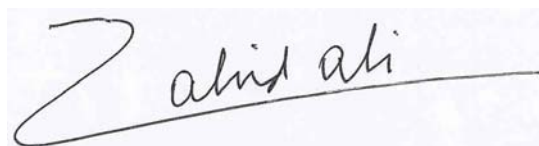
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30 August 2013

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30 August 2013