

Cabinet – 14 December 2022

Walsall Council Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2022/23

Portfolio: Councillor Perry – Community, Leisure and Culture

Related portfolios:

Service: Community Safety and Enforcement

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

The Food Law Enforcement Service Plan (the Plan) attached as **Appendix A** describes how the Authority will enforce statutory controls regarding food safety and monitor food, premises and personnel in a structured manner. The Plan will also be used as the basis for any inspection or audit by the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

2. Summary

- 2.1 Through the work of its Environmental Health and Trading Standards services, Walsall Council ensures that its statutory responsibilities in the respect of regulating the food industry are fulfilled
- 2.2 Through the work of the Director of Public Health issues around health and wellbeing are at the centre of policy development. The link between the health of residents and the local economy is seen as a key issue in Walsall and is enshrined in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Corporate Plan. The aims and objectives of the Plan, contribute significantly to both the health and economy agendas

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet receive the Food Law Enforcement Service Plan for the year 2022/23, as evidence of the Council's compliance with its statutory duties in relation to food law, and recommend it to Council for approval and adoption.

4. Report detail - know

Context

- 4.1 The provision of safe food and water, the prevention of outbreaks of food and water borne disease and the investigation of allegations of food fraud are fundamental principles of protecting public health and the economy. Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers work directly with businesses, residents and partner agencies 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 staff.
- 4.2 The Plan sets out the Council's commitment to the implementation of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Recovery Plan and food safety enforcement for the year ahead and in section 6 of the plan describes the outturn against last year's work programme in the context of the interruption and subsequent resumption of the delivery of the programme during and following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

- 4.3 The Strategic Priorities and the ways in which Environmental Health and Trading Standards contribute to them are detailed below.

Risk management

- 4.4 **Economic** - Enable greater local opportunities for all people, communities and businesses.

The work of the service supports economic growth in a number of ways:

- a) Our work supports new and existing businesses to not only survive but thrive despite difficult economic conditions.
- b) Our work gives consumers confidence when shopping in Walsall
- c) Our work continues to introduce competition into regulatory standards through the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, empowering residents to choose which business should receive their custom
- d) We confront those businesses or individuals who seek to gain an unfair advantage over competitors by not complying with regulations thereby putting their staff and customers at risk.

- 4.5 **People** - Encourage our residents to lead more active, fulfilling and independent lives to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing

Ensuring that unsafe practices and foodstuffs are identified and robustly tackled to ensure the health of the public is protected therefore preventing ill health that places a negative burden on the economy and the lives of people.

To use the skills and opportunities available to the service to promote and implement key aspects of the Health and Well Being Strategy for example through Healthy Workplace Awards, Making Every Contact Count and tobacco control/smoking cessation projects.

To prevent outbreaks of communicable disease and where such disease outbreaks take place using the statutory powers available to control and stop their spread as well as bringing to justice those who may be responsible.

4.6 Internal Focus – Council services are customer focused effective, efficient and equitable

We will work with internal partners to give advice and expertise in relation to those matters that fall within our area of expertise. This could be as being a member of the Safety Advisory Group, Health Protection Forum, Training Forum, Directorate Health and Safety Committee, Exploitation Delivery Group, Transformation Groups and Walsall Proud Programme etc.

4.7 Children - Have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well

The work we undertake has a bearing on the health of children, premises that deal exclusively with children such as schools and nurseries are at present given a higher risk rating score because of the vulnerability or age of the children. Complaints and infectious disease incidents involving children would also receive a higher degree of response or scrutiny on the basis of a potential higher impact on their lives.

Trading Standards will respond quickly and effectively to national, regional or local food alerts around compositional standards for infant formula and similar foods necessary for or targeted at children.

Trading Standards conduct age restricted sales investigations around alcohol, cigarettes and knives in order to ensure young people are not at risk from unscrupulous traders.

4.8 Communities - Empower our communities so that they feel they are connected and belong in Walsall, creating safe and healthy places whilst building a strong sense of community

Food businesses are often at the centre of each community and their success and regulatory compliance can have a beneficial impact on communities. Likewise poorly run premises with overflowing bins, noisy equipment, late opening and badly prepared food can have a detrimental impact on the image or self-esteem of communities. Our services will therefore focus regulatory activity against those businesses having such a detrimental impact on communities.

Issues such as child sexual exploitation, modern day slavery, illegal immigration and other organised criminal activities can be associated with food businesses, staff therefore work closely with internal services and external agencies where they believe issues such as this exist.

Regulatory activity is prioritised based on risk and where serious non-compliance is found robust enforcement action is taken against those businesses having the most detrimental impact on communities.

Risk management

- 4.9 Without a plan that sets out a commitment to food safety and standards and a strategic review of the delivery of that service the authority could be challenged by the Food Standards Agency. Any audit or formal investigation by the Food Standards Agency would be more difficult for the authority to defend without such a plan.
- 4.10 The Plan highlights the good work carried out by the service to ensure food safety is maintained and to protect residents from harm. The disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has placed pressures on the services because of established and new businesses not receiving programmed and initial inspections and a consequent backlog of inspections and a deterioration in standards in some businesses. The food inspection programme is being re-set through the implementation of the FSA Recovery Plan, which recognises these pressures and sets priorities for local authority action.
- 4.11 The need for the service to continue to place a major emphasis on allergen control as a consequence of several high-profile deaths (outside of Walsall) means that a significant amount of Officer time is being dedicated to this area of work so that it is properly considered, and regulatory controls implemented as effectively as possible having regard to current guidance and best practice. This is increasing the time taken to complete inspections but is a key issue for the service to prioritise at present.

Financial implications

- 4.12 The service is funded from within the Council's cash limited budget and the plan will be met from within existing budgets. Details as to the costs associated with the service can be found at Section 4 of the Plan

Legal implications

- 4.13 By virtue of section 12 of the Food Standards Act 1999 the FSA has the function of monitoring the performance of enforcement authorities in enforcing relevant legislation. This function includes, in particular, setting standards of performance (whether for enforcement authorities generally or for particular authorities) in relation to the enforcement of any relevant legislation. The Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls by Local Authorities is the mechanism by which the FSA puts into effect the powers contained in the Food Standards Act 1999. It provides for the following:
- a) published local service plans to increase transparency of local enforcement services
 - b) clear agreed standards for local authority feed and food law enforcement
 - c) local authority monitoring data used to select authorities for audit where there are concerns about enforcement performance; and
 - d) an audit scheme aimed at securing improvements and sharing good practice

Any plan produced by the Authority should comply with the Framework Agreement.

The FSA's audits of local authority food and feed law enforcement are conducted against the requirements of the Framework Agreement and, more specifically, a document called the Standard.

The Standard sets out the minimum levels of performance expected in relation to the full range of a local authority's feed and food law enforcement activity, including food hygiene, food standards, imported food and feeding stuffs law enforcement.

The Standard draws together the obligations placed on local authority food and feed law enforcement services arising from legislation and related guidance, and codes of practice. This includes local authority performance in relation to inspections, sampling, complaints, formal enforcement, promotion and advice to business.

The work of the Division pertinent to this report is undertaken pursuant to the provisions of the Food Safety Act 1990 and associated codes of practice, the Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 and any other such regulations which were developed from the European Communities Act 1972

The Food Safety Act 1990 states that every food authority shall enforce and execute within their area the provisions of this Act with respect to which the duty is not imposed expressly or by necessary implication on some other authority.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

- 4.14 The Council is part of a national agreement/service level agreement with Public Health England for the analysis of any microbiological food samples taken. There is no cost for this service. The authority has to appoint a Public Analyst for food and an agricultural or deputy agricultural analyst for animal feed and fertilisers. Depending upon the nature of any samples taken and the type of analysis required the service will use on an ad hoc basis those companies or other local authorities outlined in Section 2.2

Property implications

- 4.15 There are no property implications arising from this report.

Health and wellbeing implications

- 4.16 The Council has a statutory duty to promote health and wellbeing. Through the work of the Director of Public Health, issues around health and wellbeing are at the centre of policy development. The link between the health of residents and the local economy is a key issue in Walsall and is enshrined in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Corporate Plan. The aims and objectives of the Plan, contribute significantly to both the health and economy agendas.

The services contribution to the corporate priorities also sets out how it contributes to the Marmot principles.

Staffing implications

- 4.17 There are no direct impacts upon staffing arising from the report.

Reducing Inequalities

- 4.18 The implications for reducing inequalities have been considered and assessed as set out below.

The regulation of the food industry affects all members of society. With the resources available the service will always prioritise those matters that more directly affect vulnerable persons. The service will assist where it can with translated material, interpreters or by coaching those who require it in the production or sale of safe food.

Implementation of the plan will have no adverse equality implications as the same levels of advice and support are provided to all food business proprietors from all sections of the community.

Certain sectors of the food trade are predominantly owned by one or other ethnic groups. In order to ensure a consistent and proportionate approach all decisions are based solely on consideration of risk, public safety, evidence, and public interest. All enforcement policies reflect this approach.

Climate Change

- 4.19 The report may have some indirect climate change and environmental implications in so far as it affects the working and commercial environment in Walsall

Consultation

- 4.20 This plan has never been traditionally consulted upon with the communities of Walsall. It is a document setting out the Council's commitment based upon statutory guidelines and responsibilities and therefore not subject to influence or change based upon formal consultation responses.

5. Decide

- 5.1 This plan is a statutory document, and the authority must produce, agree, publish and measure its own performance against it. The FSA has overall scrutiny of performance of local authorities to ensure the food industry in the UK is adequately regulated at a local, national and even international level.
- 5.2 The current plan reflects a balance between the requirements of central government through the FSA's Recovery Plan and the local situation in Walsall. Resources are no longer such that the authority can guarantee a fully compliant inspection regime. The plan indicates that the service will use risk, intelligence and the local knowledge and experience of inspectors to ensure high risk activities are dealt with as a priority. This will mean that certain low risk activities may therefore take longer to respond to.

6. Respond

- 6.1 Although the plan is brought to cabinet and Council for approval it is a living document. The implementation of food safety intervention programme required by Phase 2 of the FSA Recovery Plan began in October 2021 and it is expected that its implementation will be achieved by the end of 2022/23. Therefore, if the plan is agreed it will reinforce the direction of travel and priorities for the service or if there are different suggestions forthcoming allow the service to consider and implement and recommendations given.

7. Review

- 7.1 Monitoring and review of the Plan is built into the document and includes regular team meetings, 121s, APCs, Portfolio Briefings, statutory annual returns to government and a fortnightly refresh of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. The annual review brought before cabinet and Council fulfils a significant part of the review process.

Background papers

- a) Information is gathered primarily from the Regulatory Services Software System and from specific members of staff working within the Service.
- b) Corporate Plan 2022-25

Author

Paul Rooney
Team Leader – Environmental Health
☎ 653024
✉ paul.rooney@walsall.gov.uk



Simon Neilson
Executive Director

5 December 2022



Councillor Perry
Portfolio holder

5 December 2022