



Cabinet 2 December 2009

Food Safety Standards Scheme ('Scores on the Doors') (Dec 09/21)

1. Summary and Reasons for Recommendation

- 1.1 This report outlines details of a scheme that introduces a star rating system for food safety standards assessed during inspection of food premises in St Edmundsbury. Such schemes are commonly known as 'Scores on the Doors'.
- 1.2 The purpose of the scheme is to:-
 - (a) inform consumers of food safety information in a readily understandable way; and
 - (b) raise food safety standards of food businesses within St Edmundsbury.
- 1.3 The majority of local authorities in Suffolk are or have already introduced a similar scheme, following the agreement of the scheme by the Food Standards Agency.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The 'Scores on the Doors' Food Safety Standards Scheme be adopted in accordance with the details outlined in this report.

3. Corporate Objectives

- 3.1 The recommendation meets the following as contained within the Corporate Plan:-
 - (a) Corporate Priority: *'improve the safety and well being of the community; and 'create a prosperous local economy.....'; and*
 - (b) Cabinet Commitments: *'shape the future development of the borough.....'.*
 - (c) Vision 2025: St Edmundsbury will be a place which:
'has one of the healthiest resident populations in the country'

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4. Key Issues

4.1 The primary aim of 'Scores on the Doors' (SOTD) is to inform consumers about the hygiene standards of food premises they may use. It also helps them to choose businesses with the best standards of hygiene. Furthermore, SOTD schemes drive up overall standards of hygiene in the areas that they operate in. This is because food businesses compete to ensure that their publicised hygiene standards do not put them at a trading disadvantage.

4.2 The scheme will offer a simple interpretation of a complex national scoring system for food safety that has been in place in all local authorities since the 1990's.

4.3 The Food Standards Agency (FSA) carried out consultation on SOTD schemes in 2008 and ascertained that many local authorities already operated some sort of rating system, some were star rated systems, and other were smiley faces or traffic light systems. In December 2008 the FSA announced it was recommending a six tier scheme (a rating of one to five stars, plus a fail) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It also announced that a UK steering group would be set up to determine the details of the scheme, although no timescale for the launch of the national scheme was advised. It may still be some time before the national scheme is launched. However, now the type of rating scheme that the FSA favours has been confirmed, one can be set up in St Edmundsbury based on the FSA approved scheme, that will not require any fundamental changes when a national scheme is implemented.

4.4 The scheme in St Edmundsbury

- (a) Following routine food inspections, businesses are given a hygiene rating. This is based on a national scoring system set out in a statutory Code of Practice. Relevant parts of this system are then used to generate a star rating. These will be accessible via St Edmundsbury's website, with new or amended ratings uploaded to the website on a monthly basis. A 'star' certificate will be printed and sent to the business, where display of the certificate will be voluntary, as we are unable to make this compulsory, although we will actively encourage displaying the certificates.
- (b) All catering food businesses who receive a routine inspection will be included in the scheme, lower risk food businesses where a full inspection is not always required will not be included.
- (c) Any business that is 'unhappy' by their star rating will be able to ask for a 'right of reply' to be entered onto the website. This will be subject to approval by St Edmundsbury. Should this not resolve any dispute, the food business will be able to appeal via St Edmundsbury's normal complaints procedure.
- (d) Providing that the scheme is well publicised before the launch date and food businesses have a 'right to reply' officers believe that this is fair to businesses whilst giving consumers an accurate picture of food safety standards. It is proposed that the scheme will be publicised through Community Spirit.
- (e) Ratings are based on the results of programmed routine inspections, typically at eighteen month intervals. It is not proposed to revise star ratings following any secondary inspections that take place, for example, to check that shortcomings found earlier have been corrected. Officers across Suffolk local authorities consider that to do so is likely to undermine the public credibility of the scheme because work will have been carried out simply to put right failings identified during an inspection rather than through good management. Such short term

improvements would not justify an immediate higher star rating as there will have been no time to show they can be sustained.

- (f) Whilst this is how most SOTD schemes operate, the forthcoming national SOTD scheme may insist on a scoring mechanism for re-inspections. It should be straightforward to modify the scheme to permit this if required. In the meantime, this proposal is consistent with most SOTD schemes nationally.
- (g) SOTD schemes depend on consistency of risk ratings by local authorities. A risk rating consistency exercise for all officers involved in food inspections in Suffolk has been undertaken, and this is a regular event.
- (h) It is proposed to start recording star ratings following inspections carried out from January 2010, although it is not proposed to officially launch it until April 2010, when it will go fully public. It will be publicised through Community Spirit and the star ratings will be available on the website. Although the Council cannot insist businesses publicise their ratings at their premises, it is hoped that the majority of them will. The consultation indicated that most businesses who responded were in favour of displaying their star ratings.

5. Other Options considered

5.1 To not implement a scheme at all.

St Edmundsbury currently runs its own food hygiene award but this is only given to 20 to 30 businesses a year. This scheme could be continued but it would not provide the same level of information to all consumers as the proposed scheme.

5.2 To await the national scheme implementation.

There is still no date for the national scheme to go live. Other councils across Suffolk have implemented the scheme and local businesses are keen to see the scheme working in St Edmundsbury.

6. Community impact *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and diversity issues)*

6.1 General

6.1.1 The community will be able to make judgements on food businesses for themselves by referring to the star rating system. At present they can ask for information regarding the hygiene standards direct from the Council, but this scheme will make it more easily understood and accessible to all sectors of the community.

6.2 Diversity

6.2.1 This star rating system will be implemented across all food businesses, and will be easily accessible to all communities through its ease of identification.

7. Sustainability Impact *(including environmental or social impact on the local area or beyond the Borough)*

7.1 The introduction of SOTD will ensure the community are aware of the food hygiene standards of the food businesses within the Borough and will have the ability to choose where they wish to purchase their food from.

8. Consultation

8.1 Extensive consultation has been undertaken with food businesses that are inspected by the Environmental Health Commercial and Food team. Of the 500 surveys that were sent out, 104 were returned (20.8%).

8.2 12 questions were asked, and some of the main findings were:-

- (a) 83% of respondents agreed with the idea of the SOTD scheme as proposed (6% did not, 11% did not know);
- (b) 79% of respondents said they would display their star rating (8% said they would not and 8% said they did not know, the remainder did not answer); and
- (c) 79% of respondents said they would work harder to improve their hygiene standards in order to increase/maintain their star rating (11% said they would not and 7% said they did not know, the remainder did not answer).

8.3 Other comments received include:-

- (a) "a good score would reassure my customers";
- (b) "as a cook and a customer I welcome the scheme";
- (c) "we like to work with you and try and raise our standards";
- (d) "any scheme improving hygiene has to be good"; and
- (e) "as a business that operates in several "districts" it is important that the maintenance of schemes and consistency of scoring is identical in all local authorities".

9. Resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

- 9.1 Costs of operating the new scheme will be minimal and can be accommodated within existing resources.
- 9.2 The existing computer system used by Environmental Health (M3) can produce mailshots to businesses, rating certificates, and the information which will be displayed on the website. The only cost will be a small amount of officer time in administering the scheme.

10. Risk Assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

10.1

Risk area	Inherent level of Risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual Risk (after controls)
	High/Medium/Low		High/Medium/Low
Food hygiene standards not maintained – would be a failure to deliver the Council's responsibilities in providing a safe environment	High	Risk based inspection programme carried out.	Medium

11. Legal or policy implications
 11.1 The Food Standards Agency has indicated that it will be introducing a national scheme in the future and expect all local authorities to implement a scheme.

Wards affected	All	Portfolio Holder	Bury St Edmunds and Community Safety
Background Papers		Subject Area	Environmental Health and Licensing

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