

West Suffolk Food Safety and Health and Safety Service plan

Report number:	CAB/WS/23/016	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	14 March 2023
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Decisions Plan: The decision made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.

Wards impacted: All wards

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Food Safety and Health and Safety Service plan 2023 to 2024, as contained in Appendix A to Report number: CAB/WS/23/016.

1. Background

1.1 Our Food Safety and Health and Safety Service plan outlines our commitment to protect public health and safety and the environment, by conducting programmed and reactive interventions, investigations, and research to detect, eliminate and control hazards by applying fair, transparent, and proportionate enforcement.

1.2 Food Safety

- The Food Standards Agency (FSA) Framework Agreement sets out what the FSA expects from local authorities in their delivery of official controls on food law. It includes the requirement to prepare a statutory Food Service Plan and describes in detail which areas of the service should be covered by the plan. The Food Law Code of Practice states that each competent authority must have an up-to-date, documented food service plan which is readily available to food business operators and consumers. The plan must be subject to regular review and clearly state the period during which the plan has effect.
- The plan must cover all areas of food law that the competent authority has a duty to enforce and set out how the authority intends to deliver official controls within its area.

1.3 Health and Safety

- The Commercial Environmental Health (CEH) team within the Environmental Health service works in partnership with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), other local authorities, private businesses and with other internal services where appropriate to regulate statutory health and safety provisions and to provide enforcement, education, guidance, and emergency intervention to ensure the health and safety of employees and other persons.
- The Council commits to playing its part to implement the themes of the national strategy, "Protecting people and places" 2022 to 2032.

1.4 A full copy of the West Suffolk Council Food Safety and Health and Safety Plan 2023/2024 is attached as Appendix A to this report.

2. Delivery against 2021/2022 Plan

2.1 Detailed below is a summary of progress made against the 2021/2022 plan:

- In 2021/2022 the food service delivery was impacted by COVID-19 because the environmental health resource was still focused on responding to the pandemic.
- Although restrictions eased in 2021/2022 this was only part way through the year and a backlog of programmed food hygiene interventions built up, including an increase in food businesses registering during the period, which has continued to impact on service delivery.
- The Food Standards Agency (FSA) recognised this was a national issue and introduced a National Recovery plan aimed at assisting local authorities to prioritise their recovery.
- Since the restrictions have eased, temporary additional resources have helped to increase the capacity to deliver against the plan. So far, West Suffolk has met the milestones associated with the FSA's recovery plan. 502 inspections have been undertaken this year (up to the start of December 2022).
- The Food Safety Service Delivery Plan will continually be reviewed considering any new FSA requirements, in particular the end of the Recovery Plan and the FSA's plans to implement a revised food hygiene intervention rating scheme expected in year 2023/2024.
- During the pandemic health and safety was focused around COVID advice and helping businesses. Accidents were still investigated as necessary and complaints, mainly COVID related were actioned.
- Since the restrictions eased, there has been an increase in health and safety incidents and complaints. The Health and Safety Plan will enable a focus back on health and safety and be implemented and reviewed, as necessary.

3. Challenges and priorities for Food Safety and Health and Safety

Key challenges for this year ahead in implementing this plan include:

- 3.1
- Ensuring the continued implementation of the Food Standards Agency recovery plan for 2023/2024, to include the plan for the FSA's new delivery of model.
 - Recruitment, development and retention of staff to ensure they are competent in delivery of this plan, thereby meeting the demands of the service, including new food business interventions in a timely manner.

- Resources required to develop skills for officers on Food Safety function.
- Improve the website and digitisation of the service to improve access for customers.
- To continue to support businesses and work with Trading Standards to achieve compliance with Food Information to Consumers regulatory requirements in respect of food allergens.
- To continue with the database migration to improve use of the database, making improvements to allow improved customer facing services.
- To review competency frameworks - there is a requirement in the Food Law Code of Practice and Guidance to monitor professional competency and consistency. Officers have completed self-assessments under this framework. These self-assessments need to be reviewed by the lead officer for food and practical onsite assessments of inspection techniques undertaken.
- To implement the Health and Safety Project through CEH team and have an intern to work on a project about workplace transport and pedestrian safety.
- To ensure any changes in legislation, for example to beauty industry are implemented and staff trained as appropriate

4. Other options considered, consultation and engagement undertaken

- 4.1 The service plan is a statutory requirement set out in the code of practice for food safety, and therefore no other options have been considered and rejected. Engagement has been undertaken with staff, as well as with members through the Portfolio Holder for Regulatory and Environment.

5. Risks associated with the proposals

- 5.1 The resourcing of the team to deliver this plan is a key factor to the successful implementation of this plan and this will be closely monitored over the coming year.

6. Implications arising from the proposals

- 6.1 Financial - The Commercial Environmental Health budget includes elements relating to the production and delivery of the Food Service Plan 2023/2024. As progress continues alongside the plan, further consideration will have to be given to resourcing and capacity to deliver against the framework.

- 6.2 Legal compliance - The Commercial Environmental Health team are governed by the requirement to have in place a service plan. The implementation of this plan should help to secure compliance with legislative requirements for businesses.
- 6.3 HR or staffing - Adequate resource is needed to implement the service plan.
- 6.4 External organisations (such as businesses, community groups) – The service plan will allow the Commercial Environmental Health team to provide a robust service for businesses and the public, to protect public health.

7. Appendices referenced in this report

- 7.1 Appendix A - Food Safety and Health and Safety Service plan