

West Suffolk Council Food Safety and Health and Safety Service Plan 2024 to 2025

Report number:	CAB/WS/24/017	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	12 March 2024
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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 2024 to 2025, as contained in Appendix A to Report number: CAB/WS/24/017.

1. Context to this report

- 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 **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.
- 1.5 The council commits to playing its part to implement the themes of the national strategy, "Protecting people and places" 2022 to 2032.
- 1.6 A full copy of the West Suffolk Council Food Safety and Health and Safety Plan 2024 to 2025 is attached as Appendix A to this report.

2. Delivery against 2022-2023 Plan

- 2.1 Detailed below is a summary of progress made against the 2022 to 2023 plan:
- 2.2
- The CEH team met the requirements of the Food Standards Agency's quarterly 'temperature check' recovery plan. This set local authorities targets for a risk-based phased return to

undertaking food hygiene inspections in line with Food Law Code of Practice requirements.

- The CEH team has worked to significantly reduce the outstanding inspection backlog from 809 inspections outstanding to 206.
- The team have increased the number of samples taken from 20 in 2022-2023 to 40 in 2023-2024.
- Due to a reduction in staff resource the team have discontinued the planned health promotion work in partnership with Suffolk County Council Public Health, Suffolk Eat Out, Eat Well and Take Out, Eat Well.
- Through additional temporary resource the CEH team were able to deliver a targeted project aimed at reducing accident rates in the transport sector. Significant issues were identified, and the team are following up with formal action as appropriate. Following the end of additional temporary resource, the team are not intending to deliver a health and safety project in 2024 to 2025.

3. Challenges and priorities for food safety and health and safety

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

- 3.2
- Ensuring that the service plan meets the Food Law Code of Practice requirements and as part of this, to undertake a demand led review of the CEH team (people, processes and performance) to inform more efficient and effective ways of working and resourcing plans.
 - Significant time and resource investment into the council's database system (ASSURE NEC) to ensure that the product is brought up to a standard that is fit for purpose and enables public facing services in line with our transformation programme.

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 Governance and Regulatory.

5. Risks associated with the proposals

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

There are a range of risks that need to be acknowledged in adopting this plan;

- Increasingly members of the public are reporting suspected food poisoning through social media, which is a potential resourcing pressure.
- West Suffolk has an ageing population, which in turn are considered a vulnerable group. Cases of serious foodborne illnesses such as listeria monocytogenes continue to increase nationally and locally.
- From 1 February 2024 the Health Protection Agency Group has returned to the pre-Covid notification processes for notifiable infectious diseases and confirmed food poisoning cases. This will see an increase in the numbers for 2024 to 2025, of which a percentage will require investigation. This will be factored into the review of the team to ensure that the council has the ability to undertake its role in outbreak investigations.
- Discussions are ongoing in relation to the mandatory display of food hygiene ratings. Failure to undertake timely food hygiene inspections will impact the economic growth of new business, and a failure to meet inspection timescales, as set out in the Food Law Code of Practice, will impact consumer confidence in the national scheme. [Mandatory display | Food Standards Agency](#)

- 5.2 Alongside these wider risks, which will be monitored and responded to accordingly, the intention is to utilise the demand led review of the team to review ways of working and resourcing across the team in accordance with the FSA requirements.

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 2024 to 2025. 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 Personal data processing – There are no implications.

- 6.4 Equalities – There are no implications.
- 6.5 Crime and disorder – There are no implications.
- 6.6 Safeguarding – There are no implications.
- 6.7 Environment or sustainability – There are no implications.
- 6.8 HR or staffing – Adequate resource is needed to implement the service plan.
- 6.9 Changes to existing policies – There are no implications.
- 6.10 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 - Draft Food Safety and Health and Safety Service plan, 2024-2025

8. Background documents associated with this report

- 8.1 [West Suffolk Council Food Safety and Health and Safety Ser2024](#)