

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

TO: Head of Environmental Services **SUBJECT:** Food Safety
CC: Chief Executive **MY REF:** FS/JK/JW
Deputy Chief Executive
Head of Finance
Divisional EHO (RAC)
FROM: Audit & Risk Manager **DATE:** 28 March 2013

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As part of the 2012/2013 Audit Plan, an audit has recently been completed on the systems and procedures in place to manage the council's Food Safety (FS) function.
- 1.2 This report outlines the approach to the audit and presents the findings and conclusions arising.

2 SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE AUDIT

- 2.1 The audit was undertaken in order to establish and test the management and financial controls in place over the provision of the FS service.
- 2.2 The audit was carried out using an audit programme designed to identify the controls expected to be in place and the possible risks arising from the absence of those controls.
- 2.3 The control objectives examined were as follows:
- a) Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that the FS service is delivered in accordance with current legislation and codes of practice.
 - b) A comprehensive database exists that identifies all premises, people and activities that are subject to FS legislation.
 - c) A method of risk assessment is employed in order to formulate an inspection programme and the frequency of visits and there is a clear programme of work.
 - d) Enforcement is exercised through inspections and monitoring and there is a consistence approach which is based on FS legislation.
 - e) There are arrangements in place to assess the competency of officers and to maintain that competency at current, professional standards.
 - f) Requests for service (RFS) are recorded and responded to.

- g) Appropriate action is taken on receipt of a report of an incident concerning FS.
- h) Compliance with FS legislation within the council's workplaces is monitored.
- i) Achievement against performance/improvement objectives and targets is monitored effectively with the reporting of relevant, accurate and timely performance measures being undertaken.
- j) Adequate control and security arrangements are in place to preserve the confidentiality, reliability and availability of systems and data.
- k) Appropriate financial and budgetary control procedures and reporting measures are in place.
- l) All risks associated with the service have been identified, recorded and assigned.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The council's FS duties and responsibilities are delivered by the FS team which is part of the Food and Occupational Safety and Health (FOSH) Division of Environmental Health.
- 3.2 The revised budget for the division (FS and Health and Safety) for 2012/13 is £500,700.
- 3.3 The FS team is responsible for enforcing food hygiene legislation in approximately 1400 premises. Around 640 premises were identified as requiring a visit in 2012/13. For 2013/14 the figure is 750.
- 3.4 The FS service has an accredited quality management system which was originally approved in May 1999. The current certification expires in May 2014.

4 FINDINGS

- 4.1 In overall terms, the audit concluded that there are sound procedures and controls in place for the management of the FS function. It was evident that the team currently operates in a virtually paperless environment and that measures are in place to implement digitisation that will eventually automate routine processes and increase efficiency.
- 4.2 The findings from the audit which correspond to the control objectives listed at 2.3 are summarised below.
- 4.3 **Compliance with legislation**
 - 4.3.1 To quote from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) website: "the production, processing, distribution, retail, packaging and labelling of food stuffs are governed by a mass of laws, regulations, codes of practice and guidance".

- 4.3.2 For some time the Food Safety Act 1990 was almost the “bible” as far as FS law enforcement was concerned but the plethora of EU directives and the establishment of the FSA have altered the scene dramatically.
- 4.3.3 The FSA was established in 2001 following a report issued after several high profile outbreaks and deaths from food borne illness. It is now the leading authority for FS advice, guidance and standards and a number of its publications have statutory status and direct FS enforcement.
- 4.3.4 Principally they are the Food Law Code of Practice and the Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls by Local Authorities. Assurance was provided that the FS team’s practices and procedures were designed to comply with the requirements of these two documents.

4.4 **Premises database**

- 4.4.1 All registered premises are detailed in the Civica APP system, commonly referred to by its previous name, Flare. This contains information about the business proprietor, the type of business and the history of all inspections and any follow up action.
- 4.4.2 The database is maintained and updated as a result of inspections, standard information supplied by other service areas e.g. Planning and Revenues (NDR), as well as officers’ local knowledge and ad hoc information.

4.5 **Premises risk assessment**

- 4.5.1 All premises are risk rated at initial and subsequent visits in accordance with FSA guidelines. The exercise will place the business into a category (A to E) which will determine the frequency of future planning inspections.
- 4.5.2 The risk assessment can also be used to determine the award under the FSA’s Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.

4.6 **Enforcement through inspections/enforcement policy**

- 4.6.1 An annual programme of inspections is generated from the database of premises in line with the frequency determined by the risk rating.
- 4.6.2 The programme is divided among the inspectors for completion within the year. Of necessity the programme will change slightly as the year progresses to take account of business closures, new businesses or proprietors and inspections of low risk premises may be carried forward.
- 4.6.3 The FSA requires an authority to have an up to date, documented Food Law Enforcement Policy, which is readily available to food business operators and consumers. The council’s policy, which is available on the WDC website, was last approved in 2008. It was confirmed that changes since that time have not needed to be reflected in the policy.

4.7 **Officer competency**

- 4.7.1 The FSA requires that officers who carry out enforcement under food law are competent to carry out the range of tasks and duties they are required to perform.
- 4.7.2 All of the officers in the team are professionally qualified with several years experience and so are able to carry out their duties. As part of their professional status they are required to undertake CPD and to update their knowledge and skills as a result of legislative and technological changes.
- 4.7.3 Training costs are minimised as a result of in house training and membership of an inter authority training set up, the Coventry and Warwickshire Food Liaison Group.

4.8 **Requests for service**

- 4.8.1 RFS are received and recorded either through the Customer Service Centre or directly by Environmental Health. They are allocated to officers and they sit in an officer's action diary until they have been closed.
- 4.8.2 Performance is monitored and reported as part of the monthly team meeting.

4.9 **Reporting of incidents and action**

- 4.9.1 The FS team receives reports of food related diseases from GPs and also notifications from the public who suspect that they have become ill from eating food bought from a business in the district.
- 4.9.2 Whenever any such incidents are thought to be part of a wider outbreak and not isolated, they will be investigated in accordance with the Warwickshire Health Protection Unit Outbreak Control Plan.

4.10 **Inspections in council workplaces**

- 4.10.1 Any council run or related premises where food is sold or provided (e.g. sites managed by Cultural Services, the staff canteen or kitchens in very sheltered housing schemes) are subject to the same conditions as any other food premises and are all recorded in the database.

4.11 **Team performance**

- 4.11.1 All aspects of the team's performance – inspections completed, responses to RFS etc. – are recorded in some detail and reported to the monthly meeting of the FOSH team.
- 4.11.2 Performance is also recorded and presented numerically and in graph form as dashboard indicators.

4.12 **Control of systems and data**

- 4.12.1 The systems administrator for Flare is based in Environmental Health and controls access and privileges for all users, not just those in Environmental Health.
- 4.12.2 All of the evidence and documentation relating to the premises is maintained in the system with no paper copies being held. Back up of the system is undertaken as part of the ICT central back up routine.

4.13 **Budgetary control**

- 4.13.1 The budget for the FS team is combined with that of the Health and Safety team and is not separately identified.
- 4.13.2 The budget is monitored by the Divisional EHO, the EH departmental management team, and as part of the corporate budget monitoring process. The budgets for the years 2009/10 to 2011/12 all show some minor individual variations but all were contained within the total revised budget.

4.14 **Risk management**

- 4.14.1 The risks associated with FS enforcement are largely going to be related to a failure to meet statutory duties and failure to undertake inspections or investigations caused by lack of facilities, systems and suitably qualified staff.
- 4.14.2 These risks will be faced by most of the services within EH and have been identified, recorded and assigned in the EH risk register.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The audit concluded that there are sound systems and procedures in place to manage the council's Food Safety service.
- 5.2 The audit can therefore give a **SUBSTANTIAL** level of assurance that the systems and procedures in place are appropriate and working effectively.

Richard Barr
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