

**TO: ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –  
2 FEBRUARY 2005**

**SUBJECT: OUTCOME OF SCRUTINY OF FOOD SAFETY ENFORCEMENT SERVICE**

**FROM: MEMBER SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP**

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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To confirm the outcome of the scrutiny of the Service by Councillors Mrs Blacklock, Mrs Compton, Copping, Gill, Hatfield, Sandhar, and Smith.

**2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 On 20 October 2004 the Committee received a presentation and a Report from the Food Safety Team outlining the Councils' duties as a 'food authority' under the Food Safety Act. The Report proposed a plan for the Committee's scrutiny of the Service.

2.2 The Working Group's conclusions are detailed at Appendix 1.

**3. POLICY AND BUDGET FRAMEWORK**

Warwick District Council is a 'food authority' for the purposes of the Food Safety Act 1990 and regulations and the work of the Food Safety Team is a statutory service. Current and planned food safety enforcement services are within the present budgetary framework but this report proposes staffing implications for service and budgetary planning. It is understood that the officers will deal with such matters within the accepted service planning process.

**4. OUTCOMES REQUIRED**

1. That the content of the appendix be noted and the Committee resolves to conclude this review on the basis of the recommendations as set out and the Divisional Environmental Health Officer be asked to investigate the means of implementing the recommendations ; and
2. A report back to Committee should be submitted in 12 months on progress with the recommendations.

Graham Leach  
Committee Services Officer

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee agenda and minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2004.

**Areas in District Affected:** All

**Executive Portfolio Area and Holder:** Environmental Services – Councillor Mrs M Begg

**For further information about this report please contact:**

Contact Officer:	Graham Leach
Tel:	(01926) 456102 (Direct Line)
E-Mail	<i>graham.leach@warwickdc.gov.uk</i>

## Appendix 1

WDC is a 'Food Authority' with enforcement duties under the relevant legislation and is monitored by the Food Standards Agency [FSA]. Increasingly, the team tries to promote and encourage good practice, over and above the traditional 'policing' aspects of their work.

**STAFFING:** The Team has 7.5 FTE staff, with very high professional qualifications and expertise. The number of inspection visits per officer falls in the middle of the national range of recorded visits per officer. However, they are fully stretched, with limited resources to cover absences and use of outside supply staff has not been found to be generally satisfactory.

Members were concerned at the continuing vacancy of Head of Environmental Health post, and the consequent lack of overall leadership.

**COSTS:** In 2003/4 the total budget allocated was £365,073. By far the largest amount within the budget goes on personnel costs. A very small amount, £2,000+ is received in fees and charges. In comparison with other authorities, WDC costs per officer visit fall roughly in the middle of the range.

**FSA VERDICT:** The 2002 audit put WDC in the 'high range' of enforcement activity. There is constant internal as well as the external auditing and the unit is accredited to ISO 9001 2000 for its Quality Management System.

Having studied the workload, the scope of the responsibilities, and the pressures of the budget, Councillors agreed that the team provides an outstanding service, representing excellent value for money.

**PROCEDURES:** During the interviews, officers took the Councillors through the legislative framework, the Policies and Codes of Practice, and day-to-day procedures. In particular Members studied the Visit Report Form, and felt the space for 'Ethnic Monitoring' does not allow enough for descriptions of the type of food, the cuisine, of a restaurant or food outlet.

**AWARD SCHEMES:** WDC has 2 existing schemes to recognise exemplary food safety management, the Safe Food Award, and the Heartbeat Award, for catering premises offering, in addition, a healthy menu and no-smoking area/s.

A new scheme was described, "Scores on Doors", which the public would be able to access. It uses consumer power to engineer improvements in hygiene. Inspection results are posted on the Website, or at the premises themselves, and this would be the 'carrot' to motivate restaurateurs to raise and uphold standards and attract more customers – in contrast to the 'stick' approach perceived of the current inspection regime. Such schemes have been very successful in the USA.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In order to meet the challenges we face in the near future, including  
the growing number and variety of restaurants in the District  
the growth of tourism in the District  
the impact of EU legislation, from 2006 it will supersede UK legislation  
the development plans of the RASE at the National Agricultural Centre  
(Stoneleigh Park)  
the rise in food imports and 'food miles'  
the proliferation of dubious fast-food outlets, in lay-bys etc

- Staffing levels need to be reconsidered, in particular a student placement or a new training post.
- The premises visit form should be amended.
- There needs to be continued and closer co-operation with WCC and Stratford DC
- The possibility of charging for some/more services should be investigated
- A higher profile for the team and their achievements, such as an email newsletter each month to councillors and colleagues, should be sought
- The 'Heartbeat' scheme, in the light of the Health White Paper and Air Quality in Restaurants bill, should be reviewed
- The WDC Community Plan should be amended to acknowledge the role of Environmental Health and the Food Safety team in progressing our strategic aims
- A draft 'Scores on Doors' scheme for this District, whether or not other councils participate, should be produced.