



Environmental Health Service

East Devon District Council

Food Enforcement Service Plan
2010-11

December 23 2009.

Introduction

This document is East Devon District Council's Food Service Plan written under the Framework Agreement from the Food Standards Agency.

It forms the basis of the food enforcement function for the Authority and ensures that national food priorities and standards are addressed along with locally identified needs.

The Plan sets out how the Council will provide a food safety service and what the key components of the service will be. It allows objectives to be set for the future in the field of food safety. It is in addition to the Environmental Health Service Plan of which food safety is one key function.

It has been produced to ensure that local food businesses, members of the public, Council Officers, Members and other agencies understand our approach to food safety, and help to ensure that our actions are fair, consistent, open and effective.

We will seek to work with local businesses, and attach prime importance to the planned inspection of food premises and the prompt resolution of food related complaints and enquiries. Local and national food safety initiatives will be supported to the extent that resources allow.

The Plan is supported by procedural documents to assist staff in achieving a high quality and consistent service.

If you require copies of this document in any other language or format do not hesitate to contact Environmental Health Service:

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1.0 Service Aims and Objectives

1.1. Aims and objectives

The Service aims to ensure that all food produced, stored and distributed handled or consumed in the district is safe, wholesome and without risk to the consumer.

We achieve this through a combination of education and provision of up to date information to food businesses backed up where necessary with food law enforcement. This approach is based on our responsibilities under EU food hygiene legislation as applied throughout the UK, with national guidance and standards coming from the Food Standards Agency

The methods of achieving our aims will include;

- risk based inspection of food premises
- the use of postal return questionnaires to reduce the inspection burden
- a coordinated sampling programme
- use of training seminars and individual coaching sessions
- promoting training for food handlers
- providing leaflets
- publishing newsletters
- promoting out award scheme for local food premises
- promoting food hygiene awareness in the community
- providing food hygiene training to schools
- developing a "scores on doors" scheme to publicise business standards
- working in partnership with related organizations to promote the health of people in the district

Following our successful partnership with Exeter City Council and Mid Devon Council introducing written management systems to 400 small businesses, *Safer Food, Better Business (SFBB)* we continue to promote the system as part of our normal programme of visits to premises.

In planning and delivering the food law enforcement services we take into account national guidance and model standards required by the Food Standards Agency. In 2010 we will continue to focus on recommendations made by the Food Standards Agency to ensure ongoing compliance with these standards.

The Environmental Health Service received and is maintaining the Customer Service Excellence Award status, and we are making ongoing improvements to all our areas of service provision as part of this initiative.

1.2. Links to Corporate Objectives & Plans

The Council's vision statement is "Outstanding and sustainable quality of life for everyone in East Devon".

To achieve the vision, there are seven priorities:

1. Affordable homes
2. Thriving economy
3. Safe, clean and green environment
4. Recycling
5. Children and young people

6. Excellent service for our customers

7. An inspirational Council

The food safety service has a particularly important role to play several of these priorities:

- Thriving economy

We provide transparent and proportionate enforcement creating a fair and consistent environment in which good businesses can thrive, promoting a healthy and therefore effective workforce. We advise on new legislation and its implications to ensure proprietors are not wasting effort on un-necessary 'red tape'. Our food premises award scheme helps to promote our best performing businesses.

- Safe, clean and green environment

We protect people from unsafe food production, and safeguard the environment against nuisance from food businesses.

- Recycling

We encourage and reward businesses who recycle and are energy efficient through the EdgeAhead award scheme, and provide information and advice.

- Children and young people

We provide services for children through the Junior Lifeskills scheme, and by going to schools to provide careers advice and participate in lessons on public health.

- Excellent service for our customers

We are customer focused and primarily provide our services at the customer's premises, making our service available to minority and vulnerable groups freely and impartially. We monitor feedback from service users to ensure we maintain high standards.

2.0 Background

2.1. Profile of East Devon

East Devon is on the Devon coast in the South West of England. The Council area covers 314 square miles between the River Exe and outskirts of Exeter to the West, Somerset (inland) and Dorset to the East. The District stretches 30 miles east to west and 15 miles north to south. Exeter International Airport is in the District, and main line rail services and the M5 are easily accessible.

There are eight Devon Districts. We have a population of 132,600. According to the Wikipedia Encyclopaedia in 2007 we were 140th in size by population out of the 358 district councils in England. The rural nature of the district is emphasised by the population density which is 1.62 per hectare. There are 68 Town/Parish Councils.

The main settlements are the coastal resorts of Exmouth (Devon's largest town – population 46,296); Budleigh Salterton; Sidmouth; and Seaton, and in rural inland areas Honiton; Ottery St Mary; and Axminster

2.2. Organisational Structure

The Council's services are delivered by eight Services grouped under four Directors.

The food safety function is part of the Environmental Health and Health Equalities Service and based in the Commercial Team of Environmental Health.

The relevant part of the organisational chart is shown below.

Environmental Health - Food / Health & Safety



2.3. Scope of the Service

The Commercial Team deliver the food safety function and have other responsibilities;

- occupational health and safety,
- animal licensing issues,
- commercial private water supplies,
- disease control and infections,
- complaints,
- planning consultations,
- licensing consultations.

We use external contractors to carry out some routine medium and low risk inspections to allow capacity to deal with 'reactive' issues such as infectious disease outbreaks and food related complaints.

External expertise is available from food examiners appointed by the Public Health Laboratory Service, the consultant in Communicable Diseases (Health Protection Agency) and the Director of Public Health at East Devon Primary Care Trust.

2.4. Demands on the Service

The Commercial Team is based at the Council Office, Knowle, Station Road, Sidmouth. There is an out-of-hours service available for emergencies.

We have 1598 registered food businesses which are mainly in the retail and catering sector. There are 25 businesses approved under product specific regulations manufacturing meat, dairy and fish products, as well as shellfish harvesting.

Because of the importance of tourism in the district, especially during in the summer months, there is a great impact on workloads, with increased numbers of complaints. Tourism by its very nature results in a high turnover of business ownership and these require an increased input by officers.

The migration of our records systems to Idox UniForm (CAPS) is nearing the end of the project. This has entailed significant data cleansing to ensure records are up to date and accurate. Reporting tools have been developed to ensure continued accuracy and integrity of the database and detect data input errors.

- Food Hygiene Inspections

We have a risk based approach to Food Hygiene Inspections putting most resources into premises and processes where the risk of food poisoning is increased.

We aim to inspect all premises at the frequency determined by the classification scheme set out in guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency. Lower priority premises are sent self assessment questionnaires to reduce unnecessary inspections.

Food hygiene inspections are our priority, and over previous years we have consistently attained high performance. For the year 2010/11 we anticipate 100% of inspections due for food premises will be completed.

- Safer Food Better Business

In 2006/7 we, in partnership with Mid Devon District Council and Exeter City Council, provided a series of free workshop sessions and on-site coaching visits throughout the year. These were very popular. We will continue to promote this easy to understand food business management system to as many small businesses as possible in our area through on-site coaching visits.

- Food Poisoning and Infectious Disease

The number of infectious disease and food poisoning notifications to date so far in 2009/10 is 233. This is very similar to the comparable figure of 222 for the same period in 2008-9.

Of these notifications, 191 related to cases of food poisoning. Food poisoning outbreaks require immediate investigation and place a burden on the programmed food inspection plan.

There have been 9 reported outbreaks of diarrhoea and vomiting at residential homes, a holiday camp and a hotel since April 2009. These can probably all be attributed to viral causes, such as Norwalk, which are generally spread from person to person and are easily transmitted where people are gathered in close confinement. Careful management of these outbreaks and attention to cleaning and hygiene prevented escalation.

An outbreak of e.coli 157 occurred at a visitor attraction in the district where farm animal contact is encouraged. Again careful management of the outbreak and co-ordination with the Health Protection Agency contained the incident and prevented further infection.

- Complaints and enquiries

We have dealt with 178 complaints and enquiries to date in 2009/10. These consisted of 27 complaints about food, 32 about alleged unsatisfactory premises, 19 unconfirmed food poisoning incidents. The remainder consisted of general enquiries, such as requests for information.

2.5. Enforcement Policy

The Council endorses the principle of good enforcement practice set out in the Enforcement Concordat by the Cabinet Office. The Enforcement Policy was reviewed and re-issued by the Head of Service during the year to take in to account the Regulators Compliance Code is issued by the Government which legally obliges listed regulators to have regard to the Hampton principles when forming policy, rules, codes and guidance.

The enforcement approach reflects the requirements of the Food Safety Act 1990 (as amended) and orders and regulations made under the European Communities Act 1972. The primary responsibility for ensuring food safety is with the proprietors of food businesses. We will provide advice and information to proprietors as a key element in helping them to understand how to fulfil their responsibilities.

Our options for enforcement include informal action, advice, statutory notices, formal cautioning and prosecution. We consider the enforcement policy and assess the risk to public health and the seriousness of a particular offence in deciding upon the best course of action.

3.0 Service Delivery

3.1. Food and Premises Inspection

A food safety work-plan is drawn up at the beginning of every financial year to balance national and locally defined priorities. It includes specific targets to be met and is subject to ongoing review.

Our food hygiene inspection programme is developed from the Food Safety Act Code of Practice which determines the frequency of inspection according to food safety risk. Emphasis is placed on those premises where the perceived risk of food borne illness is highest.

We aim to inspect all premises at the frequency determined by this classification scheme.

Category (Frequency of Inspection)	A (every 6 months)	B (12 months)	C (18 months)	D (24 months)	E (36 month questionnaire)
Numbers of Premises	6	88	590	155	561

The risk ratings vary on each inspection, however the annual number of inspections or other interventions due is normally between 600 and 700 each year. The number of inspections due 2009/2010 will be 489 in categories A to D, and 164 category E premises. Many category E premises have already received a questionnaire over the past few years and if so, will require an inspection. In general all inspections are unannounced and a handwritten report of inspection is given to the proprietor during the visit.

Revisits are only made where there are food safety concerns following initial inspections and written warnings have been given, or to follow up particular enforcement actions such as Statutory Notices. Other visits may also be made if there is a request for service, a food complaint or a food poisoning incident. Officers do occasionally visit and liaise with businesses when there are changes in legislation, as a result of a food alert or for a special project.

The resource required for this work is shown in the departmental structure. All members of the Commercial Team have a combined food safety and health and safety role.

3.2. Food Complaints

We expect that around 240 complaints and enquiries about food and food premises will be investigated in 2010/2011.

We have a documented procedure for dealing with food complaints which includes liaison arrangement with food businesses and other Local Authorities. We will always have regard to this information, and enforcement decisions will be made under the Environmental Health Enforcement Policy.

3.3. Home Authority Principle

We have no formal Home Authority agreements with any local business. We comply with the guidance given by the Food Standards Agency when investigating complaints against companies who do have Home Authority agreements elsewhere.

3.4. Advice to Business

While we recognise that resource priorities lie with food safety inspections, we will continue to provide food businesses with as much support and advice as resources permit.

The Environmental Health Service has taken considerable action to improve communication with local businesses over the last year, in part through the Customer Service Excellence process. The Commercial Team have attempted to set up customer focus groups, and have made links with the local Chamber of Commerce to try to arrange a business focus group specifically to look at food and health and safety enforcement issues with businesses proprietors.

We have published a Commercial Team Newsletter, sent to all businesses on our database, to inform them of events happening both nationally and locally and consult them on possible changes in our service delivery.

We provide a comprehensive range of advice including leaflets produced nationally, mailshots to specific trade sectors and locally produced leaflets on infectious diseases, farmers' markets, childminders and hazard analysis guidance.

The Councils website also provides a considerable amount of food safety information, produced and maintained from within the Commercial Team.

3.5. Food Sampling

We have a food sampling programme which reflects the EC Sampling programme, the Local Authority Co-ordinating Body for Regulatory Services (LACoRS) and Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) national programmes. We are required by specific regulations (such as shellfish classification) to take certain samples. Where resources allow we also take part in any local initiatives or concerns in liaison with the Devon Chief Environmental Health Officers Food Liaison Group and PHLS Liaison Group.

Officers also take reactive samples as a result of food poisoning investigations and complaints they receive. This is generally a small number and does not significantly affect resource allocation.

A documented sampling plan and policy has been prepared and is in use.

3.6. Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Disease

We follow the Communicable Disease Plan developed by the North & East Devon Health Authority and other relevant organisations.

We have a procedure for investigating infectious diseases, and the systems in place for this are adequate to cope with the existing number of notifications.

There has been a nationally and locally high level of outbreaks of Viral Gastroenteritis, (also known as Norwalk disease) which has impacted on the Teams workload during the year.

3.7. Food Safety Incidents

All food alerts are dealt with using the Food Safety Act Code of Practice, and there is a documented procedure to deal with them. In the year to date we received 51 food alert warnings from the Food Standards Agency. Last year we received 110 alerts in the same period.

Occasionally food alerts have serious food safety implications and resources have to be diverted from other food safety services, particularly the food inspection programme. The Council's out of hours emergency service allows for food safety incidents to be immediately acted upon where necessary.

3.8. Liaison with other Organisations

We actively participate in the Devon Chief Environmental Health Officers Food Liaison Group, where topics of mutual concern, policy and procedures are debated. The meetings are held every 6 weeks with adhoc working groups on a more regular basis to deal with specific issues.

We regularly liaise with;

- Devon CC Trading Standards
- Devon Environmental Health Officers Food Liaison Group
- Local Authority Co-ordinating body for Regulatory Services
- Food Standard Agency
- Planning & Building Control Services
- Department of Environment Food & Rural Affairs
- Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science

3.9. Health Promotion and Health Equalities

We have an important role in promoting improved public health and reducing health inequalities. A number of significant health problems are associated with food safety and unhealthy eating. Although most of our resources were targeted at enforcement of food law, during 2009/10 we have been providing limited hygiene/hand washing practical lessons with primary schools. We provide an effective and fun demonstration using ultra violet to show how good (or bad) hand cleaning is, and reinforces good practice in the minds of youngsters. We took part in the local "Junior life skills" event in 2009, which proved a great success with the 1,200 children who went, inspiring us maintain our involvement in the future. We also took part in the "11 Million Takeover Day" at the Council Offices. We intend to continue and develop this important goal of influencing young people with healthy ideas.

During the previous year we launched a new award for businesses which have food safety and environmental practices well above minimum legal requirements, EdgeAhead. This rewards high standards of healthy eating, food hygiene, responsible drinking and environmental protection

themes. The scheme will be promoted and encouraged during routine food visits to recognise and reward our higher performing businesses.

4.0 Resources

4.1 Financial Allocation

Food Safety is part of a wider enforcement activity covered by the Commercial Team which includes health and safety. The overall budget for 2009/2010 for this combined service (including support costs) is £362,440 of which the food safety element makes up approximately £231,025.

4.2. Staff Allocations

Staff engaged in food safety work also work in other areas, in particular occupational health and safety. Consequently staff allocation within the food service fluctuates on occasions.

Approximately 3.25 FTE staff are directly involved in food safety matters with 0.75 FTE administrative support. There is also a Sampling officer shared with the private sector housing team, which equates to 0.5 FTE. External contractors are employed to carry out a number of medium risk inspections so employed staff can deal with 'reactive' issues and other work. This support equates to approximately 0.5 FTE.

A rule of thumb for staff resourcing that we can employ for testing sufficiency of resources is that each FTE should carry out between 250 to 350 substantial pieces of work per year. The 2010-11 forecast is approximately 1000 pieces of substantial work (inspections, complaints and enquiries, infectious disease investigations). This equates to about 300 per FTE. This does not include smaller pieces of work that also require attention such as planning and licensing consultations, non-statutory work such as health promotion, maintaining web pages, dealing with outbreaks and inspecting and assisting new businesses and answering enquiries.

We continue to concentrate on meeting basic legal duties, however in the coming year we will put more emphasis on proactive food safety promotion and associated health topics such as healthy eating; as well as implementing 'best practice' measures that are part of our Customer Service Excellence Award status.

The Head of Service will undertake a periodic review of performance and workload to identify any critical shortfall in resources.

Most of the officers within the service and involved in food safety enforcement are qualified Environmental Health Officers.

The Technical Officer has the Environmental Health Higher National Diploma and has recently passed the examined part of the Diploma in Higher Education in Food Safety and Legislation. Following the completion of a "logbook" of practical experience, this officer will have the competence required by the Food Standards Agency to undertake higher risk food inspections. This will strengthen the team considerably.

All Commercial Team Officers are properly authorised to carry out a range of duties under the Food Safety Act 1990 and appropriate regulations.

4.3. Staff Development

Staff appraisal and development interviews are carried out annually to determine training needs.

Other specific food safety training to meet Food Standards Agency guidelines is arranged through the year.

4.4. Quality Assessment

Internal monitoring procedures have been set up to verify compliance with relevant legislation, codes of practice, procedures and other guidance. These are actively being used to increase the quality of this service.

4.5 Activity & Outcomes for 2008/09

Although generally our planned outcomes for this period were achieved, in the area of programmed food inspections we did not meet our target.

Normally we carry out 100% of all planned inspections required by the Food Safety Act Code of Practice, In 2008/9 we achieved 95% of food hygiene inspections, which was below our expectations. This was directly as a result of the migration our computer records to a new database system (CAPS).

Audit checks identified numerous problems which resulted us being unable reliably identify all due visits for the comprehensive food business inspection programme as we approached the year end (March 31st). We have been taking measures to cleanse the data and also reporting tools are being developed to ensure all premises due for a visit are picked up and scheduled for inspections. We are now hopefully in a position to prevent recurrence of this problem.

We have found it difficult adjusting to this different system, especially in the area of retrieving data identifying the next inspection date for programmed visits.

4.6 Activity & Outcomes for 2009/10

The delivery of the service in 2009/10 has also been badly affected by the protracted migration of our computer system to CAPS. For a long period we were unable to produce performance management reports, accurate inspection programmes and information necessary to report on National Performance Indicators and statutory returns. It has continued to be a drain on staff resources within the Commercial Team where the ability to comply with statutory guidance and standards has been affected.

Intensive ICT support means that many of these problems have been resolved.

Activity and outcomes to date include:

Action plan prepared following recommendations from FSA on compliance with food safety enforcement codes of practice and guidance.

- On target to achieve 100% of food hygiene inspections required by the Food Safety Act Code of Practice.
- Issued 44 informal notices.
- Issued 3 improvement notices.
- Investigated 32 complaints about food premises.
- Investigated 19 allegations of food poisoning.

- Investigated 27 complaints about food.
- Obtained 149 food samples 200 water samples from commercial premises with private water supplies and approximately 100 shellfish bed samples.
- Updated the Councils web site information on food safety and introduced on-line applications for registration of food premises.
- Produced a Commercial Team newsletter.
- Continued promoting the Food Award scheme, EdgeAhead
- Created new information leaflets and customer charters
- Sent out 172 questionnaires to our service users to establish satisfaction levels.
- Assisted in achieving Customer Service Excellence Award
- Provided informative talks to Community groups out of office hours
- Maintained approval status for five shellfish beds
- Responded to 51 food hazard warnings
- Carried out Equality Impact assessments of our routine work streams in the Team and identified some elements of service provision which require review or improvement
- Participated in two “Junior life skills” events in partnership with Devon Fire and Rescue, Police, Devon CC and others.
- Taught hand washing skills to primary school pupils
- Taken part in lessons and careers event at Sidmouth Community College

5. Objectives for 2010/11

We are hoping to maintain our expanded service this year within the limited resources available to us and continue to achieve some ‘non-statutory’ objectives for 2010/11.

Our plans are,

- To achieve 100% of food hygiene inspections required by the Food Safety Act Code of Practice.
- To complete the action plan agreed with the Food Standards Agency and comply with all relevant national standards and codes of practice.
- To introduce the national “Scores on the Doors” scheme as part of a Devon wide collaboration and project to participate in the Food Standards Agency first phase introduction.

- To promote *Safer Food Better Business* to small caterers by recommending the toolkit and diary pack during programmed inspection visits, and provide some additional workshops. We hope to target some of these to the specific needs of our ethnic minority caterers.
- To promote food hygiene training for persons working in the district by re-introducing training courses.
- To continue to liaise with the Health Protection Agency to try to achieve a reduction in the levels of reported food poisoning in the District.
- To maintain the food sampling programme.
- To consult with consumers and business using various survey methods to establish and monitor customer satisfaction levels. We hope to identify potential service improvements and promote effective food safety management
- To consult with food businesses through focus groups and to develop communication with other trade associations.
- To further develop and enhance website pages on food safety.
- To regulate food businesses in accordance with the Council's enforcement policy.
- To encourage participation in the EdgeAhead award to recognize excellence within the business community, and work in partnership with the Primary Care Trust on developing the healthy eating content.
- To produce web based newsletters in partnership with other local authorities specifically aimed at the business community.
- To develop and improve links with education establishments to extend the range of opportunities we can offer to schools.
- To identify and share specialist expertise throughout Devon and beyond.
- To continue to implement the principles of the Customer Service Excellence Award
- To address issues raised during Equality Impact assessment.