

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

meeting date: THURSDAY 9 JUNE 2022
title: FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2021-24
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
principal author: MATTHEW RIDING

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To advise Committee of the progress towards achieving the delivery of the Council's Food Safety Recovery Plan in line with the Food Standards Agency's expectations.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives - None
- Corporate Priorities - To help make people's lives safer and healthier
- Other Considerations - None

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Food Standards Agency (FSA), as central competent authority responsible for food safety in the UK, has set out its expectations of local authorities for the delivery of official food controls. This has taken account of the impact that Covid-19 has had on local authorities including challenges with resources that may be available.

2.2 The FSA has acknowledged that there has been considerable impact on local authorities' resources during the pandemic, which has affected the ability to deliver the expected levels of official controls in food establishments. It has issued guidance and advice in a Recovery Plan that sets out its expectations of local authorities in the defined recovery period.

2.3 The FSA has emphasised the importance of having service plans in place to set out how the Recovery Plan will be implemented in each local authority, in terms of delivery and resources. Accordingly, this Service Plan has been developed to reflect the FSA's Recovery Plan covering 2021-24 and will concentrate on the activities required to fulfil these requirements.

2.4 The general principles to be applied throughout the period of the Recovery Plan are:

- When intelligence suggests risks have increased local authorities should undertake interventions to assess and address those risks
- When on-site interventions are undertaken subsequent interventions should be programmed in line with the code of practice
- New food hygiene ratings should be given where appropriate interventions are undertaken
- Where non-compliance is found appropriate action should be taken to secure compliance
- Remote assessment may be used in certain circumstances, to enable attention to be focussed on key areas at subsequent onsite visits. This helps determine the need for onsite interventions at lower risk premises and for Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) requested revisits in limited cases.

2.5 The plan requires a risk-based approach in restarting the delivery of official controls, with the priority on new food establishments and for higher risk and/or non-compliant establishments. High risk establishments are those in the categories A, B, C and D which are less than broadly compliant with food hygiene legislation (FHRS 0,1,2). The plan provides flexibility for lower risk establishments (D – broadly compliant FHRS 3,4,5) and category E.

2.6 Recovery Plan Expectations

2.6.1 **Phase One** (1 July to 30 September 2021)

Activities required in Phase One involved the prioritisation of “new businesses” that were awaiting an initial inspection (eg use of triage process). Where information indicated a potential consumer protection risk, an onsite visit should be undertaken. In addition, the planning of interventions of high-risk and non-compliant establishments, for inspection in Phase Two, was undertaken.

2.6.2 **Phase Two** (1 October 2021 to 2023/24), until implementation of new food hygiene intervention rating scheme.

- Official controls that are undertaken to support trade and enable export
- Reactive work in case of non-compliance (complaints/food incidents/food hazards)
- Sampling in accordance with local authority sampling plan
- Ongoing proactive surveillance to obtain accurate picture of local business landscape
- Onsite interventions as appropriate at new businesses
- Planned intervention programmes of high risk and non-compliant establishments in line with timelines set out in recovery plan
- Implementation of intelligence/information-based approach for lower risk category establishments
- FHRS requested revisits responded to in line with FHRS Brand standard.

The FSA does encourage local authorities to move at a faster pace to realign to the Food Law Code of Practice requirements where resources allow.

3 Ribble Valley Borough Council Recovery Plan

3.1 **Phase One** of Ribble Valley Borough Council's Recovery Plan covered the following activities:

- To establish a triaging system whereby food business registrations received are risk assessed by analysing information / intelligence in order to prioritise onsite interventions.
- To carry out proactive surveillance to identify open/closed/recently re-opened/new businesses.
- To carry out reactive work, including enforcement in the case of non-compliance through complaint investigations.
- To plan for the resumption of planned interventions at high-risk category and non-compliant establishments.

3.2 Performance Review of Phase One

During phase one, 100% of new businesses were prioritised for interventions through a new triaging system. This involved sending 227 questionnaires to all new registered businesses.

93 on-site interventions were carried out on "high risk" new businesses.

100% of food hygiene complaints were responded to with appropriate actions completed.

Planning of all high risk and non-compliant establishments was completed.

In addition to the above, 7 on-site interventions of B risk establishments were carried out (including the approval of two new establishments for products of animal origin).

Unfortunately, no proactive surveillance was carried out due to pressures on resources caused by the Coronavirus response work.

3.3 Phase Two of Recovery Plan

The following activities have been planned in line with FSA's guidance.

Activity	Period	Number of interventions required/ estimated
New businesses triaged for interventions of high risk businesses	March 2021 -2024	200 expected annually
On-site interventions – high risk unrated establishments	March 2021 -2024	90 expected to be high risk and receive an on-site intervention
On-site interventions A risk establishments	To March 2022	0
On-site interventions B risk establishments	To end of June 2022	16
Onsite interventions Non-compliant C establishments	To end of September 2022	4
Onsite interventions Broadly-compliant C risk establishments	To end March 2023	138
Onsite interventions Non-compliant D risk establishments	To end December 2022	1

4 **Resources**

The food team at Ribble Valley Borough Council is comprised of:

- 1 Lead officer (Qualified EHO) – 0.75 FTE (currently filled on interim basis 0.5 FTE)
- 1 EHO – 0.4 FTE
- 1 EH Technician (Higher EHORB qualified) – 0.5 FTE (currently vacant)
- 2 part-time administrative officers – total 0.5 FTE

As reported to the Health and Housing Committee, on 18 March 2021, in the Review of the Work of the Environmental Health Team, the service has experienced a prolonged period of reduced staffing levels due to difficulties in recruiting to vacant posts. This has included the food team where the Senior EHO and EH Technician (Food Safety/Health and Safety) posts have been vacant for approximately 2 years. Some temporary appointments have been made during this time to ensure the Lead Food Officer role is fulfilled in line with the requirements of the FSA's Food Law Code of Practice.

Based on the present staffing levels there are sufficient resources to deliver the majority of the required activities for the Recovery Plan. However, activities such as proactive surveillance and participation in national / regional sampling programmes will not be undertaken due to the need to prioritise resources on interventions at establishments.

5. **Review of Service Plan**

Progress towards achieving the targets set in this service plan will be monitored on a monthly basis with reports to the Head of Service. Where resources allow, further activities will be carried out to enable the authority to realign with the Food Law Code of Practice requirements. These will be included in future reviews.

6 **CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 That committee note the progress in service delivery for food hygiene official controls during the recovery period since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and note that further reviews of performance will take place during Phase Two of the Recovery Plan.

Matthew Riding
ACTING HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH SERVICES

Marshall Scott
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

For further information please ask for Matthew Riding, extension 4470

REF: MR/H&H/9.6.22