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FOOD SERVICE POLICY

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Introduction

This is the Council's Food Service Policy for 2006/07.

The Policy tells you how we will protect and promote food safety and healthy eating throughout the District for the forthcoming year. We will do this in a number of ways, such as enforcing food safety law, sampling food and water for bacterial and chemical contamination and by providing training for businesses and the public.

Our Food Service Plan is part of a wider process of delivery of Council services as set out in the Council's Best Value Performance Plan which is available on our website at www.lewes.gov.uk

If you have any queries or matters arising from this Plan or any queries regarding food safety in general, please contact:

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1. Service Aims & Objectives

1.1 Aims and Objectives

Our aims are to:

- Ensure that food which is intended for human consumption in the district is produced, stored, distributed, handled and consumed in such a way that the risks to the consumer are kept to the minimum that is reasonably practicable.
- Promote a healthy diet.
- Promote sustainable food production and consumption.

1.2 Links to Corporate Objectives

Our ambition is to be recognised as a centre of excellence in environmental management and to make sustainable improvements in the quality of life of local communities.

We will do this by:

Key Aim 1 Protecting and enhancing the quality of the environment

Key Aim 2 Supporting and promoting a diverse and prosperous local economy

Key Aim 3 Supporting the housing, health and social needs of everyone in our communities

The provision of an effective food hygiene enforcement and advice service is central to enable us to achieve key aims 2 and 3.

1.3 How will we achieve our service aims and objectives?

We will do this by: -

Food Safety

- *Inspecting all our food premises on a planned programme, based on risk.*
- *Investigating all cases of food poisoning.*
- *Responding to all national food hazard warnings.*
- *Inspecting food to ensure it is fit for human consumption and ensure that unfit food is disposed of properly.*
- *Investigating food and food-related complaints from the Public.*
- *Carrying out our annual food/water sampling programme.*
- *Registering/licensing all food premises and mobile vehicles.*
- *Providing food hygiene training for food handlers.*
- *Raising awareness of food safety issues.*
- *Providing help and assistance to local businesses.*
- *Promoting the Council's Clean Catering Award Scheme to caterers throughout the District.*

Healthy Eating

- *Delivering education on healthy diets to specified sections of the community.*
- *Reducing the barriers to a healthy diet within our communities.*
- *Supporting the work of other agencies involved in delivering the healthy eating agenda, including Health Trusts.*
- *Ensuring all employees have access to a healthy diet whilst at work.*
- *Ensuring healthy diet choices are available wherever the Council sells or provides food.*

Sustainable Food Production

- *Supporting sustainable food production and supply.*
- *Working to improve the links between local communities and local food producers.*
- *Supporting the work of other agencies involved in promoting sustainable food production.*
- *Buying sustainably produced food for Council use where practicable.*
- *Supporting local food producers, distributors and suppliers.*

2. Background

2.1 Profile of Lewes District Council

Lewes District Council is committed to providing high quality services to those who live and work in the area.

The District covers 113 square miles, stretching from the coastal strip between Saltdean and Seaford, to Newick and Wivelsfield in the north. It has a good network of roads and public transport, both bus and rail. Much of the district lies within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with many Conservation Areas and unspoilt villages. The coastal strip is more urban in character, including the important Channel port of Newhaven and its ferry services to Dieppe.

The Council has approximately 460 employees. The main offices are in Lewes, with a departmental office and depot and in Newhaven, and sheltered housing schemes throughout the district.

2.2 Organisational Structure

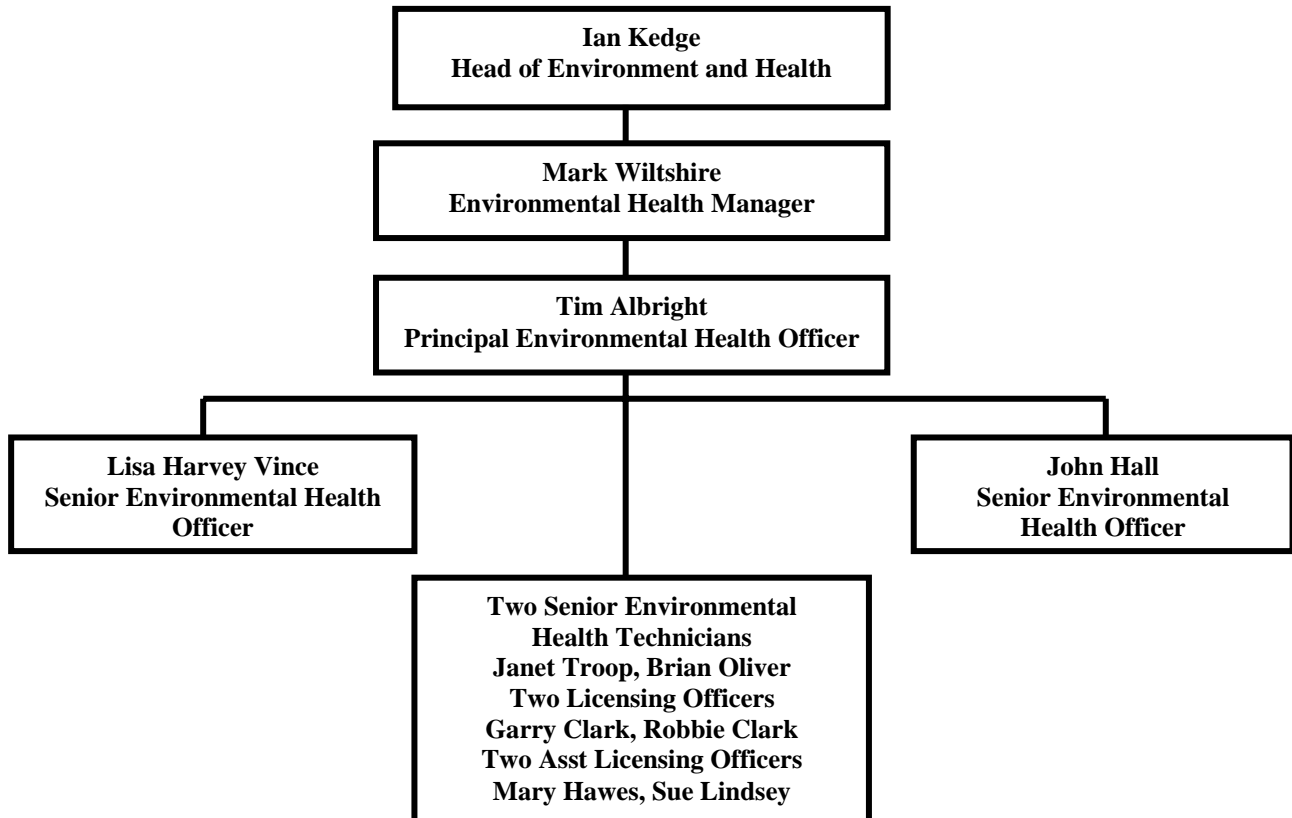
2.2.1 Lead Officers

The Department is headed by Ian Kedge, Head of Environment and Health.

Day-to-day management of the Public Health function, including Food Safety, is undertaken by Mark Wiltshire Environmental Health Manager.

The manager responsible for food service delivery is Tim Albright, the Principal EHO (Commercial).

2.2.2 Departmental Structure – Commercial Team



The Lead Member for Environment & Health is Councillor Carr and she has overall responsibility for food safety on the Council's Cabinet.

2.3 Scope of the Food Service

The food service comprises:

- Routine hygiene inspections of food premises
- Investigating complaints about food and food premises
- Food and water sampling
- Investigating food poisoning outbreaks
- The provision of training and advice to food businesses
- Food hygiene training
- Food hygiene promotional work

The service is delivered by the commercial team of the Environmental Health Department, alongside their Health and Safety and Licensing duties.

2.4 Demands on the Food Service

At 1st April 2006 there were **860** registered food premises within the district, all of which are inspected at set intervals. The inspection interval is determined by the potential risk to health posed by the food premises.

Approximately 95% of premises are either food retailers or caterers. A small number of manufacturers, distributors and primary producers comprise the remaining 5%.

The majority of food premises are inspected to ensure compliance with general food hygiene regulations. Eight premises are approved under product specific legislation.

No food is currently imported into the EU through Newhaven. This is unlikely to change as the port has now lost its status as a Border Inspection Post.

No great seasonal variation in workload occurs aside from extra food inspections conducted during Lewes bonfire night.

The food service routinely operates from Southover House during office hours. Out of Hours cover for emergencies is provided via a duty officer from the department who is available at all other times. A small port health facility is maintained at Newhaven.

2.5 Enforcement Policy

Where officers discover contraventions of food hygiene law actions are taken in accordance with a set enforcement policy. The enforcement policy is available for public inspection at the Council Offices in Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes or on the website www.lewes.gov.uk.

3 SERVICE PLAN

In the year 2006/07 the Food Safety Section will provide the following levels of service: -

3.1 Food Premises Inspections

All food premises within the district are inspected at minimum intervals given by the Food Standards Agency. Category A premises (the highest risk) are inspected twice annually, category E premises (the lowest risk) are inspected every three years.

The publication of a new national code of practice has made two major changes to the inspection programme:

- Certain very low risk premises can be removed from the routine inspection programme, and subject to alternative enforcement strategies.
- Food manufacturers approved under product specific legislation are now inspected at set intervals (up to three times per year) irrespective of the risk rating of the premises.

2006/2007 Inspection Programme

Routine Inspections

| Risk Category | Total Number of Premises | Targeted Number of Inspections |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| High Risk Premises | | |
| A | 3 | 6 |
| B | 42 | 42 |
| SFBB inspections | | |
| | 382 | 382 |
| Approved Premises | | |
| Meat Products | 4 | 12 |
| Fishery Products | 4 | 8 |
| Total | | 450 |

We will inspect all these targeted approved premises and premises in risk categories A and B and achieve a **100% inspection rate for those categories**. Inspections of premises in other categories will be driven by the ongoing 'Safer Sussex Food' project, which is detailed in section **3.13**

Revisits

2005/06 statistics reveal that approximately 25% of routine inspections result in revisits to the premises. Therefore approximately **100** will be conducted in the 2006/07 year.

Staffing

Current staffing levels in the commercial team are sufficient to meet these targets.

3.2 Food Complaints

The investigation of food complaints has been identified as an area where the resources used in investigating many complaints are not reflected in the public health benefit. In many cases complaints are of a relatively trivial nature, and the food would be best returned to the retailer for a refund.

As such, in 2006/07, we propose that we will continue to only investigate food complaints where the complaint indicates the potential for a significant risk to human health.

Projecting from 05/06 figures we anticipate receiving approximately **20 food complaints** that warrant detailed investigation.

Current staffing levels in the commercial team are sufficient to investigate these complaints.

3.3 Healthy Eating

The Council's Environment Review Board has identified the following actions as priorities:

- *Work with the Food and Health Partnership and support groups for parents to deliver healthy eating training, demonstrations etc.*
- *Work with Action in Rural Sussex to develop a scheme to make healthy foods available in an identified community.*
- *Ensure that healthy options are available wherever the Council sells food to the public.*
- *Offer free hygiene, healthy eating and sourcing local produce advisory visits and discounted hygiene training to local food businesses*

- *In 2006/07 we will:*
- *Run one course of cookery training sessions this year for parents in order to promote healthy eating*
- *Work with the Council's procurement group to ensure that food bought for Council functions includes healthy options*

3.4 Sustainable Food Production

The Council's Environment Review Board has identified the following actions as priorities:

- *Ensure that the food sold to Council employees is, where practicable, sustainably produced and includes Fair Trade items and healthy options.*
- *Work with local producers to set up an Organic Box scheme for Council employees and Councillors.*
- *Work with Action in Rural Sussex to produce free local guides to local produce.*

In 2006/07 we will:

- *We will make an organic vegetable box scheme available to staff within the Council's Lewes offices by July 2006.*
- *Free guides to local food producers will be made available to the public by September 2007.*
- *Review cost of hygiene training courses to support businesses trading in locally produced foods.*

3.5 Genetically Modified Crops

The Council has declared that the District will, so far as is possible, be kept free of GM crops. To this end:

- (a) it will ensure that no GM crops are grown on land over which it has control;*
- (b) insofar as lies within its power, the Council will resist the growing of GM crops within the District until such time as public concern has been adequately addressed; and*
- (c) if and when notified of any prospective GM organisms' marketing consent, the Council will make its objections known to the relevant authorities, requesting that the District be exempted from any consent that might be given.*

3.6 Home Authority Principle

We support the Home Authority Principle, particularly with respect to small and medium sized enterprises.

We have now ceased our Home Authority relationship with Famous Moes Pizza, as the company headquarters have relocated to Brighton and Hove. A review of companies in the area has revealed no suitable candidates with whom to establish a new Home Authority relationship.

3.7 Advice to Business

It is our policy to make every reasonable effort to provide local businesses with advice and guidance to enable them to comply with the law.

In previous years we have monitored the numbers of requests for advice from food businesses, and estimate that we receive approximately 500 such requests per year. The responses to these requests vary from simple verbal advice through to lengthy site visits and meetings.

However, on 1 January 2006 new food hygiene legislation introduced an important new requirement for all food businesses to have a documented food safety system. This change has generated an increased level of requests for advice, many of which are being addressed through the 'Safer Sussex Food' project (**see section 3.13**).

3.8 Food Sampling

We feel the most effective method of producing safe food is to encourage and ensure that businesses adopt safe and hygienic practices. This is known as hazard analysis and control. We consider this is preferable to relying on food sampling to identify problems.

However, where product sampling is required either to back up such an approach, or as part of process monitoring, the food business is itself responsible for such sampling and analysis.

A routine sampling programme is conducted by the council, as set out below.

We have arrangements with the Health Protection Agency at Brighton and Kent Scientific Laboratories for analytical work on food samples.

Current staffing levels in the commercial team are sufficient to meet these targets.

Food Sampling Programme 2006/2007

LACORS/HPA Co-ordinated Sampling Programme (Local Authority Co-ordinating Organisation for Regulatory Services/Health Protection Agency)

We will participate in the LACORS/HPA sampling programme. The number of samples to be taken has been determined by the HPA. The 2006/2007 programme will consist of four studies:

| | |
|--------|---|
| June | Mobile food vehicles |
| August | Wiping cloths and cutting boards in catering premises |

Local Sampling Programme

In addition to the above sampling, we will:

- Sample drinking milk from all dairies in the district every quarter.
- Sample meat products from all manufacturers in the district every quarter.

Follow-up Sampling

Any samples which yield unacceptable or unsatisfactory results will trigger follow up action, including investigating potential causes of the poor result, advising the business concerned and re-sampling until the result is satisfactory.

3.9 Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Disease

We investigate every notification of confirmed food poisoning. Possible food poisoning cases are investigated if a general outbreak (i.e. two or more cases not within the same family) is suspected, or if a food premises is strongly implicated in the cases. Outbreaks of food related infectious disease are investigated and controlled in conjunction with the Health Protection Agency.

Projecting from 2005/06 statistics it is anticipated that approximately **150 confirmed cases of food poisoning and 30 suspected cases** will be reported in the forthcoming year.

3.10 Food Safety Incidents

The Council handles food hazard warnings in accordance with the relevant Food Safety Act codes of practice. Food hazard warnings are received in the office via fax/email during working hours. Urgent warnings are reported to the duty officer via the Chichester call centre outside office hours.

Projecting from the numbers of warnings received in the year 2005/06 it is anticipated that approximately **80 food hazard warnings** will be received in the forthcoming year. The action required by these warnings vary from warnings received for information only to warnings requiring visits and/or written instruction to a large number of food businesses.

Current staffing levels in the commercial team are sufficient to meet these targets.

3.11 Liaison with Other Organisations

In order to ensure that enforcement within this Council's area is consistent with that of neighbouring authorities officers from the commercial team participate in the following:

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (Sussex Branch) Food Study Group

The Sussex Food Liaison Group (A Council Officer is currently secretary)

The Lewes District Council Food and Safety Group

The East Sussex Infection Control Group

Current staffing levels in the commercial team are sufficient to meet these targets.

3.12 Food Hygiene Promotion and Training

We will produce two editions of our newsletter for local food businesses and have expanded the circulation of the newsletter to include all registered food businesses in our area.

We will continue to promote our Clean Catering Award scheme, including a new combined award for those premises with smoke free dining areas.

It is planned to run six basic food hygiene training courses in the forthcoming year, subject to demand. Additionally we plan to work with SOMPRITI to run a basic food hygiene course in Bengali.

The quality of food hygiene training is evaluated by comments forms distributed to the candidates. During 2004/05, 95% of candidates rated the course as 'good', 5% as 'average', none as 'poor'

3.13 Safer Sussex Food

On 1 January 2006 new hygiene legislation introduced an important new requirement for all food businesses to have a documented food safety system. This was set to have a dramatic impact on the numbers of inspections completed as detailed in last year's service plan:

'It is evident that the time taken to complete a hygiene inspection is set to vastly increase. In 2005/06 we believe that we can complete 100% of targeted hygiene inspections, but this figure is set to fall substantially in 2006/07 (Food Service Policy 05/06)'

Fortunately the Council was successful in a bid for special funding from the Food Standards Agency to run a project in partnership with other organisations, namely the 'Safer Sussex Food' project. This will greatly assist local small businesses in coming to terms with the new legal requirements, by delivering a package of seminars and one to one coaching visits for over 1000 businesses across Lewes, Eastbourne and Wealden councils.

One element of the project is for council food hygiene inspectors to visit each business after the seminars and coaching to assess how well they have implemented a documented food safety system. These visits will be combined with routine inspections during 06/07, and hence will drive most of the inspection programme.

3.14 Imported Food Control

The Food Standards Agency has challenged Local Authorities to achieve a 'step change' in imported food control. Whilst the critical controls on imported foods should be applied at the port of entry, all authorities are now expected to contribute to the programme.

During 2006/07 we will include basic checks on imported foods on all routine inspections, and carry out enhanced inspections (i.e. with special emphasis on imported foods) at all food importers identified within our area.

Additionally we will have two special enforcement days on imported foods in markets and high street food retailers.

Current staffing levels in the commercial team are sufficient to meet these targets.

3.15 Ship Inspections

In previous years ships have not formed part of our routine inspection programme. However, in 2004 legislation was passed to make the Food Safety Act 1990 applicable to ships, and port authorities are now expected to routinely inspect ships that enter their port.

This new requirement will have limited effect on this Council, as relatively few ships use Newhaven. We anticipate conducting approximately 2 ship inspections in 2006/07.

4. Resources

4.1 Financial Allocation

The cost of the Food Safety Section has historically been included in the Public Health Budget and the appropriate apportionment made. Following on from the Best Value review separate budgets have been set up from 2002/2003 to more accurately reflect the true cost of the service. The costs for Food Control are as follows:

| 2004/2005 Actual | 2005/2006 Estimates | 2006/2007 Estimates |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| £141,488 | £149,260 | £154,140 |

Port Health is a separate budget head and is as follows:

| 2004/2005 Actual | 2005/2006 Estimates | 2006/2007 Estimates |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| £26,927 | £36,910 | £37,970 |

4.2 Staffing Allocation

The level of resource devoted to Food Safety has been reduced as part of the Council's cost savings following the Best Value Review. A Technical Officer post has been removed from the establishment. Staff Allocations are as follows: -

| Officer | Qualification | Competency | Function |
|----------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Head of Env & Health | Qualified EHO | Experienced in Food Control | Overall Departmental Management |
| Health Manager | Qualified EHO | Experienced in Food Control | Public Health Management |
| Principal EHO (Commercial) | Qualified EHO | Specialism in Food Control | Team Leader & Food Specialist |
| Senior EHO | Qualified EHO | Experienced in Food Control | Team Health and Safety Specialist |
| Senior EHO | Qualified EHO | Experienced in Food Control | Team Licensing Specialist |
| Senior EHT | CIEH Ordinary Certificate in Food Premises Inspection | Qualified Meat Inspector. Inspection of Category C -E Premises | Senior Technician |
| Senior EHT | - ditto - | Inspection of Category C - E Premises | - ditto - |

A total of 2.8 FTE Professional staff are allocated to Food Control

In addition 0.4 FTE equivalent staff are provided for administration and support.

4.3 Staff Development Plan

We have been awarded the Investors in People Award and accordingly have a detailed system in place for staff training and development.

Development is in 3 forms:

- In house training
- External courses and seminars
- Professional and technical qualifications

Each member of staff receives an annual appraisal during which their training needs are identified. Training needs identified for 2006/07 include food sampling, food poisoning outbreak control and microbiological criteria of foodstuffs.

We produce an annual training plan for all departments.

The Department keeps departmental training records for Food Control Staff.

5. QUALITY ASSESSMENT

In early 2005 we consulted local food businesses to discover their views on our hygiene inspections. 97% of respondents rated the thoroughness of their inspection as either excellent or good, and 100% of respondents found their inspection to be conducted fairly. Full results will be published on the our website in 2006/07.

The Environmental Health Department achieved Chartermark accreditation during 2006.

We have implemented an internal quality monitoring system for food hygiene inspections. A programme of regular paperwork checks and accompanied visits is used to ensure the quality of inspections and consistency of enforcement.

The Food Standards Agency revisited us in April 2003 to check our implementation of the service improvements required by their audit in September 2001. The Agency auditors found that we had effectively implemented all required improvements, and are now fully meeting the standards required by the Agency.

We have an award under the Investors in People scheme.

We are registered under the Environmental Management Audit Scheme (EMAS) and ISO 14001.

6. REVIEW

6.1 Review against the service plan

At the end of the period covered by this service policy the Principal Environmental Health Officer will review the year's performance against the service plan. The finding of this review will be presented to the Head of Environment and Health, and reported to cabinet.

6.2 Results of review against the 2005/06 service plan

6.2.1 Targets Achieved

- 100 % of targeted food hygiene inspections
- Major external funding sourced to assist businesses comply with new hygiene laws
- Chartermark status achieved
- Implementation of Council food policy commenced
- All LACORS/PHLS sampling programmes completed
- Planned local sampling programmes completed
- Investigation of all food complaints, including successful prosecution of restaurant causing salmonella outbreak
- New joint Clean Catering Award / Smoke Free Dining award implemented
- Clean Catering Awards issued to 44 premises
- Survey of business' views on hygiene inspections completed
- Increased liaison with local businesses through the new Lewes District Council Food and Safety Group
- Twice yearly Food and Safety newsletter published and distributed to all catering businesses
- All internal food safety policies and procedures reviewed
- Transfer of all relevant food safety information to Council Website completed
- 100+ food handlers trained in hygiene and passed Basic Food Hygiene exam
- Response to all Food Hazard warnings completed
- All food importers identified and inspected
- New risk rating scheme and Code of Practice implemented
- Structured training system for hygiene inspectors implemented
- Food hygiene paperwork revised in line with business consultation outcomes

6.2.2 Targets Not Achieved

- Online system for food premises registration not implemented
- Redesign of food section of Council website not completed
- Food hygiene charges not reviewed – taken forward to 06/07

- Organic box scheme not introduced – taken forward to 06/07
- Guide to local food producers not produced – taken forward to 06/07

6.3 Key Areas of Improvement Identified by the Commercial Team

- Continue to improve liaison with food businesses
- Completion of Safer Sussex Food project
- Improve relationship with elected members
- Website redesign and update
- Progress on better use of information technology
- Office layout redesign
- E-Government progress
- Promotion of healthy eating
- Promotion of sustainable food production.
- Increased partnership working
- Continue improved consultation with stakeholders and customer feedback