



Subject:	Food Service Delivery Plan 2024/25
Date:	Tuesday 11 th June 2024
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The Food Standards Agency, in their monitoring and oversight role, require all NI District Councils to prepare an annual Food Service Delivery Plan which sets out the Council's key functions and planned activities for delivery of food hygiene, food standards and other food safety related responsibilities.
1.2	This report presents Belfast City Council's draft Food Service Delivery Plan for the 2024/25 year and seeks Committee approval of the draft plan so that it can be submitted to the Food Standards Agency for review.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to approve the draft Belfast City Council Food Service Delivery Plan 2024-2025

3.0	Main report
3.1	The Council's Food Safety Unit works with local businesses to build compliance with Food Law and to ensure that food produced and sold in Belfast is safe and can be trusted. This not only protects the consumer and public health, but also protects and enhances the reputation of the City, our local businesses and their competitiveness, thereby supporting economic growth.
3.2	Food related illness costs the local economy, individual businesses and the consumer- people may suffer from food poisoning and food related illness, potentially resulting in hospital admissions for some patients, and costing the Belfast economy through work related absences and consumer claims.
3.3	To protect consumers, the Council is required to implement a programme of planned food hygiene and food standards inspections for food businesses across the city. These inspections are programmed based on food safety risks presented by the businesses. Food sampling programmes are also delivered throughout the year, and the Council responds to and investigates food complaints as well as cases of food borne illness.
3.4	The Food Hygiene Rating Act (NI) 2016 requires businesses to display their food hygiene rating, improving the opportunities for consumers to make informed choices and encouraging improved compliance. Currently at least 84% of food businesses are rated as 3, 4 or 5 (broadly compliant or better). See Appendix 2 for ratings breakdown.
3.5	Work to ensure allergen requirements placed on food business are being adhered to, forms an important element of the Food Safety service, and aims to protect consumers who have food allergies from harm. It is estimated that around 2 million people living in the UK have a food allergy. Following a number of high profile cases resulting in fatalities, new legislation has been introduced since 2021 regarding the adequacy of labelling requirements for food that is prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) i.e., food that has been packed on the same premises from which it is being sold. Our officers monitor compliance and offer support to businesses during their inspections.
3.6	The Council's imported food control function continues to facilitate trade while ensuring food safety and public health is protected by undertaking official controls at Belfast Port. From the 1 st October 2023 the Windsor Framework introduced the Northern Ireland Retail Movement Scheme (NIRMS "green lane" scheme) to facilitate qualifying traders to move retail goods from GB to NI. Whilst DAERA oversee the NIRMS arrangements, both DAERA and local Councils undertake official controls on other food products arriving at NI ports that are destined for, or at risk of entering the EU (red lane). For Belfast City Council this includes controls on fish products, high risk food not of animal origin, plastic kitchenware from China and Hong Kong, and organic products. Work to finalise processes, infrastructure and a longer-term sustainable resourcing model for these services will continue to require input from the Port Health service in the 2024/25 year. The Port Health service continues to work closely with the Food Standards Agency, DAERA, DEFRA, other government departments, local businesses and other stakeholders to ensure adequate arrangements are in place to facilitate trade and protect consumers.
3.7	<p>Key Issues - Food Service Delivery Plan</p> <p>Each year, the Council produces a Food Service Delivery Plan which sets out the activities, techniques and approaches to be taken during the year to support businesses in ensuring food safety, food standards and to promote informed healthy choices. The Plan provides the basis on which the Council's regulatory activities are monitored and audited by the</p>

	Food Standards Agency, and it is a requirement that it is presented to the Council for approval.
3.8	The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has a key role in overseeing local authority regulatory activities to ensure that official controls are delivered. Powers to enable the FSA to monitor and audit local authorities are contained in the Food Standards Act 1999. A detailed Framework Agreement on local food law enforcement has been produced by the Agency, in conjunction with local authority representative bodies, to provide guidance on how regulatory service plans should be structured and what they should contain. The Belfast City Council Food Service Delivery Plan for 2024/25 has been drafted in line with the framework requirements..
3.9	The Framework Agreement described above requires that Food Service Delivery Plans should be submitted to the relevant Member forum, in this case the People and Communities Committee, for approval. This is to ensure local transparency and accountability.
3.10	A summary of the key work activities completed in the last year and profiling the work of the unit is included for information in Appendix 1. A summary of current food hygiene ratings is included in Appendix 2. The Food Service Delivery Plan for 2024/2025 is included in Appendix 3.
3.11	Members should note that during the Covid pandemic (between 2020 and 2022), food hygiene and food standards inspection programmes were significantly impacted, as visits were paused due to business closures during periods of lock down, and subsequent restrictions on social distancing etc. The FSA worked with Local Authorities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland during 2022/23 to develop recovery plans for food safety services, setting priorities for service recovery at that time. Belfast City Council's Food Safety team successfully achieved the key milestones and objectives for 2022/23 and 2023/24 which were designed to focus interventions on the highest risk businesses, bringing these back into the routine inspection programme. In 2023/24, significant progress was made towards returning to normal inspection frequencies for the vast majority of businesses across the range of high, moderate and low risk categories.
3.12	The FSA recovery plan approach ceased on 31 st March 2023. This change has renewed the expectation for Local Authorities to return businesses to their normal inspection frequencies, as laid out in the Food Law Code of Practice. The FSA have however acknowledged that a backlog of inspections still remains among many Local Authorities and have advised that a pragmatic and risk-based approach should continue to be adopted where this is needed. Belfast City Council's Food Service Delivery Plan for 2024/25 reflects this approach and the inspection programme prepared by the Council's Food Safety team aims to return the vast majority of businesses to normal inspection frequencies. For some businesses in the very lowest risk category the service will also utilise alternative enforcement strategies to ensure these businesses continue to address food safety issues, while ensuring business risk profiles are up to date.
3.13	FSA will be continuing its work in 2024/25 to modernise the delivery models for Food Standards and Food Hygiene regulatory inspection programmes, to ensure inspections and resources are better targeted based on risk, while reducing burdens for businesses and Competent Authorities where possible. A new Food Standards Delivery Model is to be introduced this year. For food hygiene, FSA have indicated that following feedback from a pre-consultation exercise in 2023, implementation of changes to the Food Hygiene delivery model has been postponed until the Food Standards delivery model is introduced later this year. Councils will be further consulted on proposed changes to the Food Hygiene delivery model as the models evolve.

3.14	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The Food Standards Agency provides some grant funding to help support these services on an annual basis to all District Councils in NI. This funding is allocated based on population size of each District as well as the profile of food businesses located within each area. In 2024/25 the funding allocated to Belfast City Council remained relatively consistent at just under £300,000 (£298,481)</p> <p>The remaining resources required for this core service are included within the City and Neighbourhood Services existing budgets and no additional resources are anticipated.</p>
3.15	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessments</u></p> <p>None</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p> <p>Appendix 1 – Summary of the key areas of work undertaken by the Food Safety and Port Health Unit 2023-2024</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Current food hygiene ratings</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Food Service Delivery Plan 2024-2025</p>

Appendix 1

Food Safety

Background Summary

This paper provides a summary of the work carried out by the Council to monitor and ensure food safety during the year ended 31st March 2024.

In 2023-24 the Food Safety Unit continued to address challenges that remained from the Covid 19 pandemic. During the period between 2020 and 2021, normal working activities were significantly impacted due to public health and social distancing restrictions and temporary requirements for businesses to close, leading to a backlog within the inspection programmes. During and following the pandemic, the Food Standards Agency provided direction for all local authorities, including a recovery plan which set priorities for addressing this backlog. The recovery plan directed all activities until March 2023 and each local authority was expected to meet the specified targets within the designated timelines. Belfast City Council's food safety unit successfully met all milestones as laid out in the recovery plan, and continued to make progress during 2023/24.

The Council's Port Health service also carries out official controls on imported food arriving in Belfast Port. Since 31st December 2020 (the end of the transition period following the UK's exit from the EU), the Port Health service has operated on a 24/7 basis carrying out statutory documentary and physical checks on incoming food and food materials.

Protecting Consumers and Supporting Businesses

Visits to premises are an integral part of the Service and Council officers use them to support food businesses to understand and meet their legal obligations, and to ensure that food they supply is safe and meets compositional and labelling requirements. The visits are planned using a risk-based approach that targets resources to where they are needed most and to reduce the inspection burden on better businesses. The support provided by Council officers during such visits can be vital to sustain and protect businesses, particularly in the current financial climate.

Last year the food safety team carried out 1312 food hygiene inspections and 977 food standards inspections. The team achieved the key milestones and objectives for 2023/24 which were designed to focus interventions on the highest risk businesses, bringing these back into the routine inspection programme. They were also able to carry out inspections from the backlog that had accumulated during the pandemic and as a result, significant progress has been made towards returning to normal inspection frequencies for the vast majority of businesses across the range of high, moderate and low risk categories.

During the 2023/24 year, in total the team carried out over 3300 visits, took 1301 food samples and responded to over 1700 requests for service.

The unit received 552 complaints about food or food premises. Of these, 100% of urgent complaints were responded to within a 1 working day target. 84% of food complaints were fully investigated and resolved within 8 weeks.

Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

The Food Hygiene Rating Act (NI) 2016 requires all food businesses within the scope of the scheme to display their food hygiene rating sticker in a prominent position where it can easily be seen by customers at all entrances to the premises. The rating is based on the level of food hygiene / safety compliance found at the time of the last inspection. The rating is also published on the Food Standards Agency's website: www.food.gov.uk/ratings.

The aim is to enable consumers to make informed choices as to where to eat based on the hygiene rating and the scheme encourages businesses to improve and maintain their hygiene standards. Currently 84% of our premises are rated 5 - very good, 4 - good or 3 - generally satisfactory.

We are aware that FSA plan to introduce new legislation requiring the mandatory online display of Food Hygiene Ratings at some point in the near future. This will present unique challenges to capture relevant data in order to make informed decisions on how best to implement and enforce any proposed requirements.

Imported food control – Port Health

Belfast Port is the only container shipping terminal in Northern Ireland receiving imports from countries around the world. It also remains Ireland's busiest ferry port, with arriving trade from GB ports. The Council supports the movement of food into NI by industry through the delivery of imported food controls. They are delivered from office and inspection facilities located within the harbour estate at Corry Place.

The current Port Health inspection facilities are approved by the EU for the importation and clearance of a range of high-risk foodstuffs, including fish and fish products and high-risk food not of animal origin. Last year the Port Health service processed 4362 pre-notified consignments of food imports. We also completed 3463 surveillance checks on consignments potentially containing food products that had not been pre-notified. Such consignments included foods from non-EU countries, including nuts and nut products, confectionary, curry products, fruit, rice and wine. These were inspected and examined for contaminants such as aflatoxins, excessive or non-permitted additives and pesticides. Many of these products have to be sampled at EU defined levels. The consignments are often detained until an acceptable result is received or in some cases if found to be unsatisfactory rejected (see enforcement below).

We also carried out documentary checks on 1485 composite products containing fish and other products of animal origin that sit under DAERA overall enforcement responsibility, carried out checks on approximately 16000 Illegal Unreported and Unregulated Catch Certificate documents that accompany wild fish consignments.

The Port Health Unit also validates imports of organic foods from 3rd Countries from the rest of the world (non-EU), involving documentary and identity checks. Last year 631 organic consignments were validated including a number of bulk consignments.

Community Engagement and Good Relations

Our Food Safety and Port Health teams deliver a front-line service interacting with consumers and local businesses to protect our community and respond to any queries related to food safety. The Council carries out a number of initiatives to support ethnic communities and businesses. We continue to work with the large number of ethnic caterers in the city and will always make information available in a language which can be understood and, in accordance with Council policy, will continue to employ the services of interpreters where necessary.

Supporting the Local Economy

Food production, transport and sale at retail and catering establishments play an essential part in our local economy. Northern Ireland's food and drink processing sector accounted for £1,088 million of GVA for Northern Ireland in 2021¹, with over 25,000 employees, with many more in retail and catering sectors. Good quality, local and safe food has a key role to play in developing local tourism. The work of the Council helps to protect the reputation and maintain the standards of our local food industry. It is particularly important to support new businesses and we offer help to anyone thinking about starting a food business. We intend to continue with such supporting activities to assist local businesses in providing safe food.

With the emergence from the pandemic the City was successful in once again attracting a number of high-profile events along with Maritime Weekender, Planet Love, Oktoberfest, Mela, Belsonic, Feile, Live at Botanic, Christmas Continental Market, St Patrick's Day and Orangefest celebratory events. These events are vital to promoting the city, tourism and the local economy. We will continue to work closely with the events team in the council and the event organisers to ensure these events are a success and are safely managed.

The UK's exit from the European Union and the NI Protocol has placed significant additional duties on the Port Health service, applying food import controls on a range of products arriving into Belfast Port from GB. Whilst there are significant challenges in this work, we continue to work with a range of stakeholders to ensure adequate systems are developed and resources put in place to facilitate the monitoring and checking of imports of high-risk foods, to health certify high risk food exports to the EU, and to ensure we capture and communicate information relating to unsafe and non-compliant food within the food chain.

Promoting Food Safety

Throughout the year we have used the council's website and social media to support FSA and Safefood campaigns and training courses for food businesses and to promote key food safety messages. The Food Safety team is making use of the improvements in online communications to provide online training to businesses in allergen awareness. Email communication of important food safety messages such as pest control and allergens has also proved an effective means of communicating with businesses.

Food Allergen information

The council continues to prioritise and improve the provision of allergen information within food premises.

Recent high-profile allergen deaths have raised the public's awareness of this important area of our work. We continue to address any compliance issues raised through complaints or found at routine intervention visits through our graduated approach to enforcement and taking appropriate formal action where necessary to protect public health.

The UK government has given a commitment to improve allergen labelling and this has resulted in the legislation for Pre-Packed for Direct Sale (PPDS) foods which came into force on 1 October 2021. This legislation has required a diversion of Food Safety resources to support businesses and monitor compliance. We have agreed to prioritise resources to promoting the requirements for PPDS. This work is being progressed in liaison with Safefood and FSA NI and through our ongoing programme of inspections, as well as our online training and email communications.

Preventing Food Fraud

¹ DAERA, NI Agri Food Sector Key Statistics report Dec 2022

Food fraud is committed when food is placed on the market with the aim of deliberately misleading the consumer. Food fraud becomes food crime when it is no longer carried out by individuals but becomes an organised activity perpetrated by groups. It is carried out for financial gain and there is evidence that Covid 19 and the current economic situation may be increasing its occurrence. Examples of food fraud that we have dealt with include misleading declarations of meat content in sausages and pies, alcohol substitution and inaccurate alcohol strength declarations and the substitution of cod with cheaper varieties of white fish. The Food Safety Unit participated in the NIFMG sampling survey for fish speciation of which 3 samples were found to be adulterated out of 53 samples taken from a range of processing, retail and catering establishments. This resulted in written warnings to each of the 3 businesses, further samples taken at each premises were found to be genuine for the fish species declared. The Council continues to participate in the annual Europol-Interpol joint OPSON operation targeting food fraud. In 2023-24 the Council participated in a survey for Country of Origin and Traceability of Beef and Chicken Products in which all 4 samples were found to be genuine.

We will continue to share intelligence and explore opportunities to work with other agencies to target food fraud and food crime. Our intelligence led food sampling program will be an essential element of this work. In 2023-24 we carried out specific intelligence led investigations, including the investigation of unregistered food businesses operating without registration or approval.

Preventing Illness

A scientific review published in 2022 by the Food Standards Agency estimates there are around 2.4 million cases of foodborne illness every year in the UK. Whilst the majority of these go unreported, some can cause serious illness, permanent disability and in extreme cases death. The elderly and the young are particularly vulnerable. Food poisoning is estimated to cost a societal burden to the UK of up to £9 billion each year. As well as ensuring that businesses produce safe food, the Council also investigates cases of food poisoning to identify the source and prevent those who are ill from infecting others. We investigated 167 confirmed cases of food related infectious diseases last year as part of our MOU with the Public Health Agency; these were dealt with within 24 hours in 100% of cases. We also dealt with 113 alleged food poisoning complaints.

We provide advice via social media and other campaigns to raise public awareness of how to prepare food safely in the home.

Port Health staff continue to screen vessels and aircraft arriving in Belfast for illness and infectious diseases. We examined 100% of the Maritime Declarations of Health for all vessels arriving in Belfast Port to ensure compliance with International and UK health and hygiene requirements including food safety and control of infectious diseases. In total, 2077 Maritime Declaration of Health documents were examined. 85 Ship Sanitation inspections were also carried out and certificates issued to the vessels. The Port Health team routinely met with Public Health Agency and Agents to manage COVID cases and other infectious disease cases in vessels, crew changes and ensure agents / visiting vessels are aware of any COVID controls in Northern Ireland.

The unit also routinely liaise with the Harbour Commission and business within the port to manage and to advise on public health nuisance i.e., waste attracting vermin.

The port staff also liaise with Agri-Food Biosciences Institute to monitor disease vectors and invasive species such as mosquitos.

Promoting a Healthy Diet and Tackling Obesity

In Northern Ireland each year there are around 4,500 deaths from cancer and 3,700 from heart disease and circulatory conditions. Diet, especially excess saturated fat, salt and sugar is thought to play a role in about one third of all cancer and heart disease cases. In an effort to help tackle

obesity and poor diet officers continue to participate in NIFMG nutritional surveys and provide information and advice to consumers and food businesses. In 2023/2024 the Food Safety Unit participated in the children's meals survey and took 16 samples of children's meals from local food businesses and sent them for nutritional analysis. The final report and associated findings, which included tips on healthier reformulation was issued by us to 338 premises. The findings were also publicised through the Council's social media sites and in the City Matters magazine, however the Caloriewise scheme continues to be advertised in our written communications with businesses, and the Food Safety Unit continues to work with our partners including other NI District Councils and the FSA.

Enforcement

Our enforcement approach aims to provide support, advice and guidance to secure compliance. This approach has been successful with 84% of our total food businesses found on inspection to be broadly compliant with food hygiene legislation.

However, where businesses consistently fail to comply or present a serious threat to public health, it is important that the Council takes action to protect consumers. Last year the Council issued 425 written warnings requiring action, and in 53 more serious cases formal enforcement sanctions were taken.

In 2023/2024 the team prosecuted 3 food business operators for serious food safety offences and 3 further prosecutions are pending with the Courts plus a further 18 formal investigations ongoing which may lead to legal proceedings. 7 food business operators were issued with Cautions. Many of these cases identified serious food safety offences, in particular failure to implement adequate cleaning and pest proofing as well as failure to put in place adequate procedures to control pests.

During routine inspections 33 premises were found to have conditions that required immediate closure due to an imminent risk to health. These closures were due to pest infestations and the risk of contamination to food. The food business operators agreed to a voluntary closure undertaking, until the risks were deemed to be adequately controlled. A graduated approach to enforcement was used based on the merits of each case, several of which are under consideration for legal proceedings being instigated. In addition, the team is preparing a number of cases for formal enforcement action following other investigations which took place in 2023/24. The council's legal team is assisting with these.

In Port Health, the vast majority of imported food products arriving at Belfast Port were found to be compliant with legislative requirements, only a very small proportion of consignments required interventions. These included a small number of rejections due to significant failures in documentary, identity or physical checks on entry. A small number of illegally imported consignments were also identified as unfit – 5 Seizure Notices and Condemnation Warning Notices were served, and 5 Condemnation Orders were issued by the Justice of the Peace under food safety legislation. These were principally in relation to small vans arriving in Belfast Port having travelled from Eastern Europe, carrying food products that had not been refrigerated or labelled and were found to be unfit for consumption. The Unit has worked with Port Health Authorities in GB and with relevant Embassies in these countries to raise awareness of imported food requirements for food businesses.

Appendix 2 - Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) 2024

As of 1 April 2024, there were 3553 food businesses operating within the Belfast City Council area; of these businesses approximately 3142 premises were included within the scope of the FHRS. Regulation 3 of the Food Hygiene Rating Regulations (2016) details the categories of establishments that are exempt and/or excluded from the scheme but still require an intervention:

- An establishment where the sale of food is not the primary activity and where the only food sold is shelf stable at ambient temperatures and delivered prepacked and remains sealed at all times e.g., chemist.
- Off licences selling food which is shelf stable at ambient temperatures and delivered prepacked and remains sealed at all times
- An establishment providing caring services but also used as a private dwelling e.g., childminder.
- Food manufacturing, packing, import or distribution premises that do not directly serve the public.

The table below represents a snapshot of the status of premises within the scope of the FHRS at a given point in time (13 May 2024).

Further information is available on the website at

<http://ratings.food.gov.uk/authority-search-landing/en-GB/807>

Hygiene Rating	Number of Premises	Percentage %
5 - Very good	2100	67.0%
4 - Good	515	16.4%
3 - Generally satisfactory	178	5.7%
2 - Improvement required	40	1.3%
1 - Major improvement required	33	1.1%
0 - Urgent improvement required	0	0%
Establishments with rating of 3 or better i.e., broadly compliant	2793	84%

Appendix 3

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL CITY & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES DEPARTMENT SERVICE PLAN FOR FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT 2024 - 2025

This service plan for food law enforcement describes the balance of techniques and approaches to be taken by Belfast City Council during 2024 - 2025 to ensure food safety, food standards and promote informed healthy choices. The Council will mix and balance the four common approaches to enforcement:

- Demand driven
- Education driven
- Inspection driven
- Intelligence driven

Food safety is a priority for the Council's regulatory service, with staff in Food Safety, Port Health and Business Support providing most aspects of the service.

1 – Service Aims and Objectives

1.1 Aims and objectives

The key aims and objectives of the food service are to:

1. Protect consumers and ensure food produced, imported through or sold in Belfast is safe to eat and meets the necessary legal standards
2. Support the local economy, including the regeneration and investment in the City Centre by minimising the cost of food related illness and supporting individual businesses through clear advice, guidance and good regulation which are effective, risk based and proportionate.
3. Respond to all complaints or service requests within target response times and meet the needs of local people through effective delivery of quality and customer centric services.
4. Help consumers and businesses understand about safe food and healthy eating and help to ensure that consumers have the information they need to make informed choices whilst promoting food sustainability and helping to reduce food poverty.

1.2 Links to corporate objectives and plans

Belfast City Council published its first community plan, The Belfast Agenda in 2017, setting out the vision for Belfast to become a City which will drive a successful economy, a magnet for investment and a great place to live for everyone. This plan has been updated in 2024 to reflect the priorities of community planning partners and the public.

The Food Safety Service has an important contribution to make to the achievement of the city's priorities, particularly by supporting the economy and creating a safe city. The service also helps the Council in its efforts to stimulate the local economy, supporting other key strategies including the Bolder Vision for Belfast which aims to create a more attractive, accessible, safe and vibrant city.

In promoting food safety and healthy choices the Food Safety Service also contributes to delivering the cross-government Food Strategy, published in June 2022, setting out a joint vision for the UK food system in 2030 and the Food Standards Agency's Strategy for 2022-2027.

The Service, by improving food safety in the City, plays an important role in promoting Belfast to visitors and tourists. This has become more visible since the Food Hygiene Rating Act (NI) 2016 came into operation in October 2016 requiring all relevant food businesses to display their ratings (display was previously voluntary, with only 57% of businesses displaying their rating). The implementation and enforcement of this legislation requires considerable resources.

2. Background

2.1 Profile of the Local Authority

The Council is the largest of the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland and, by any definition, is an organisation of size, importance and structure. It now serves a population of 345,000 (with a daytime population of over 400,000). The area is predominantly urban in nature with the Council offices being located in the city centre. The city is the major centre for both employment and entertainment in Northern Ireland with two thirds of the population of Northern Ireland being within 50 km of the city.

Within the city boundary is the Port of Belfast, Ireland's busiest port and a significant port within the United Kingdom. The area of the Port consists of 1,000 acres of water 2,000 acres of land and over 8,000 linear metres of quays. Around two thirds of Northern Ireland's seaborne trade, and a quarter of that for Ireland as a whole, is handled at the port. More than 2.3 million Tonnes of liquid bulk products are handled at Belfast Harbour annually.

2.2 Organisational Structure

Following local government reform in April 2015 and the additional powers and responsibilities of the new Council, the organisation has and continues to undergo substantial redesign. This has included new committee structures and restructuring of the various departments. Each Department reports to and discharges the functions of one or more Council Committees.

The City & Neighbourhood Services Department reports to the People & Communities Committee and comprises of over 1,400 staff. The CNS Department brings together many front-line functions that provide services directly to ratepayers across the city, including food safety and port health, as well as other environmental health functions.

Within the Food Safety team, there are currently four Officers (3 Assistant City Protection Managers and 1 Senior EHO) designated as lead food officers; 1 for Food Hygiene, 1 for Food Standards and two for Port Health, all of whom have responsibility for the delivery of this Service Plan for Food Law Enforcement. A pool of suitably qualified and authorised Environmental Health Officers and technical officers are employed by the Council, and are allocated to duties across the EH functions, and allocation of staff to each of those functions can be quickly adjusted, should the need arise. The Unit has established an area-based service delivery system.

The Northern Ireland Public Health Laboratory based at Belfast City Hospital, provides specialist services in food microbiology and pathology. The Council has appointed Eurofins Food Testing Ireland Ltd as Public Analysts to provide specialist analysis and advice on food composition, labelling and chemical and physical contaminants of food. The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute at Newforge Lane, Belfast, is employed for the identification of pests associated with food and food premises.

2.3 Scope of the Food Service

Belfast City Council carries out all functions relating to food safety and food standards matters, including the following:

- Registration and approval of food premises
- Inspection of food premises including manufacturing, catering and retail premises in accordance with a range of legislation and guidance, and taking into consideration the Council's Regulation and Enforcement Policy
- Implementation of the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme including publication of food hygiene inspection results on the national website
- Dealing with potential food hazards including food alerts
- Inspection of foodstuffs and the formulation and implementation of sampling programmes for analysis in relation to composition and labelling and/or microbiological examination.
- Investigation of complaints relating to food and hygiene of food premises and investigation of cases of suspected food poisoning
- Providing advice and information on food safety matters
- The provision of specialist food safety education programmes, and signposting to other commercially available training services
- Food safety and nutrition promotional activities, including participation in National Food Safety Week, and the development and promotion of actions to improve nutrition & health and reduce food poverty
- Provision of practical food safety and port health training to environmental health students
- Investigation of incidents of statutorily notifiable food and water related illnesses on behalf of the Director of Public Health of the Public Health Agency
- Inspection of third country (non-EU) imported food of non-animal origin
- In partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs the operation of the Port of Belfast Border Inspection Post and the inspection of Products of Animal Origin.
- Enhanced screening of Maritime Declaration of Health documents for all vessels arriving in Belfast.
- Inspection of vessels (ships – including passenger ferries) arriving at the Port to ensure compliance with International and United Kingdom health and hygiene requirements including food safety and control of infectious diseases and to issue Ship Sanitation Certificates as required.
- Enforcement of legislation relating to import control of Organic products
- Enforcement of legislation to control illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in order to ensure food safety and protect marine ecosystems
- The issuing of attestations and export health certificates required for the export of consignments of non-animal foods and fish from NI to third countries

The service is currently provided by members of staff employed by Belfast City Council. All staff involved in the inspection of food and food premises meet the qualification and competency requirements of the Food Law Code of Practice and the FSA competency framework.

2.4 Demands on the Food Service

2.4.1. Food Safety Service

Belfast City Council has 3553 food businesses within the City.

A profile of premises classified in accordance with the FSA monitoring returns are given below.

TYPE OF ESTABLISHMENT	NO. OF PREMISES
Primary Producers	7
Slaughterhouses	0
Manufacturers & Packers	170

Importers/Exporters	39 (includes Import Agents)
Distributors/Transporters	78
Retailers	733
Restaurant/Caterers	2522
Unrated premises awaiting first inspection on 1 st April 2023	38

129 premises are considered outside the inspection programme however officers are still required to assess the food safety risks associated with these types of premises and investigate complaints. These are for example head offices with no physical food presence but who have responsibility for food safety matters; market stalls or mobile vendors who are registered and risk rated by another local authority and events.

11 manufacturing premises and 6 cold stores in the city are approved under EC Reg 853/2004.

The majority of food premises in the city are caterers or retailers reflecting the fact that Belfast is a major regional centre for shopping, entertainment, business and tourism. However, within the City there are a number of major manufacturers including 2 major bakeries, 2 flour mills, 6 cold stores, 5 meat preparations and other meat products premises, an animal fat rendering plant, and 5 fish processors approved under EC Regulations which manufacture and process food for distribution throughout Northern Ireland and Great Britain and export to the Republic of Ireland.

An External Temporary Storage Facility (ETSF formerly known as Enhanced Remote Transit Shed – ERTS) is a warehouse designated by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), where goods are temporarily stored pending clearance by HMRC, and prior to release into free circulation. ETSFs are periodically examined to ascertain if foods are stored.

As shown above there are a large number of distribution centres located in the city many of which distribute across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Seven of these premises specialise in ethnic foods of non-EU origin and are monitored to ensure imported food controls are being adhered to.

It is estimated that over 5% of Belfast's food businesses, across a range of business types, are owned by people whose first language is not English. These food business operators have traditionally been Asian, however in recent times there has been an increase of people from Eastern European and African countries. Whilst this adds significantly to diversity and customer choice, it requires particular effort from the service to ensure equal access to advice and information, including the facility for the translation of documents and provision of interpreters for on-site visits and meetings.

The Council's food safety services are delivered from the Cecil Ward Building, 4-10 Linenhall Street, Belfast, usually between the hours of 0830 and 1700, Monday to Thursday, and between 0830 and 1630 on Fridays. The Port Health services are delivered from the Port Health Unit at Corry Place, Belfast Harbour Estate, delivering the import food control service on a 24 hour, 7 days a week basis.

Out of hours work is undertaken as necessary, such as for businesses that only open late at night and/or at weekends and for additional Port health work such as ship inspections.

An Environmental Health Officer is on standby outside normal office hours, to deal with urgent notifications from the FSA and also infectious disease incidents at the discretion of the Public Health Agency (PHA). A Port Health Officer is on standby out of office hours to deal with issues arising in the Port. This service extends 24 hours per day for 365 days per year.

Historically there has been a continued increase in the number of large outdoor events which have significant catering facilities associated with them, such as farmers' and continental markets, festivals and concerts. These events sometimes require evening, weekend and Bank Holiday visits to monitor food hygiene standards. We will continue to strengthen relationships with promoters and organisers this year in order to ensure that adequate attention is given to planning for food safety. Significant events this year include the Christmas Continental Market, St Patricks Day, Feile, Orangefest, Live at Botanic, Bruce Springsteen, and Belsonic music festivals, among others.

2.4.2. Port Health Service

In late 2020, the Port Health service established a 24-hour service to deliver the additional responsibilities resulting from the UK's exit from the EU for imported food checks on some foods arriving from UK. Windsor Framework arrangements agreed by the UK Government commenced from 1st October 2023, and the Council is working alongside our partners in DAERA, DEFRA and FSA to apply the requirements by July 2025.

The Port Health team comprises 4 shift-based teams who operate a 24/7 service, in addition to a small team of 4 daytime officers deliver imported food controls for goods arriving from other 3rd countries, ship sanitation inspections, infectious disease duties, public health nuisances and some food hygiene work within the Port.

It is intended that a further review of the Port Health function will be undertaken once the operating and funding models for delivery of Windsor Framework obligations are clarified and progressed over the year. An appropriate and sustainable longer term service model, including sustainable financing arrangements is required and we continue to advocate for this with key partners, including FSA, DAERA and DEFRA.

The Port Health Unit is currently located in office and inspection facilities within the harbour estate. These facilities were approved in January 2010 by the Food Standards Agency on behalf of the European Union as a Designated Point of Entry into the EU for the carrying out of official controls on high-risk products of non-animal origin imported from outside the EU. The facility is also approved as a Border Inspection Post for the examination, sampling and clearance of third country imports of products of animal origin and is operated by the Council in conjunction with DAERA (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs). It is also approved as a First Point of Introduction for certain food contact materials. Whilst the Corry Place facility was sufficient for the Council's service requirements up until December 2020, following introduction of the Windsor Framework, capacity limitations at the facility mean that delivery of increased inspection workloads will require additional purpose-built inspection accommodation in the future. DEFRA are currently constructing a new purpose-built inspection facility at Belfast Port which is expected to be completed around July 2025.

2.5 Enforcement Policy

The Council has prepared a Regulation and Enforcement Policy which was formally adopted by the Council in December 2011. The purpose of this policy is to secure an efficient and effective approach to all regulatory and enforcement activities carried out by Belfast City Council. The policy is consistent with the principles set out in the Government's Better Regulation Agenda and with the principles of the Enforcement Concordat and it is also intended to improve compliance with legislation while minimising the burden on businesses, individuals, organisations and the Council. The policy sets out the principles which will enable the Service to ensure consistent and open

enforcement and is considered when determining appropriate enforcement action. Management controls are in place to ensure that all decisions on enforcement are consistent with this policy.

In preparing the Policy, the Council has considered the Regulator's Compliance Code and the "Statement of Intent" between the Local Better Regulation Office, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment, and District Councils.

The Regulation and Enforcement Policy is available on the Council's website and can be accessed at www.belfastcity.gov.uk. Businesses are advised of the existence of the policy together with how it can be obtained on all standard letters and reports left following the inspection of premises.

This general policy is supported by unit specific guidance and procedures.

The Council maintains its own Legal Services to provide support to service Departments.

3. Service Delivery

3.1 Food Premises Interventions

The Council plans and delivers a risk-based Food Premises Intervention Programme based on the requirements of the Food Law Code of Practice. The frequency and type of intervention planned aims to concentrate resources on the worst offenders and higher risk businesses whilst at the same time reducing the burden on the better businesses.

The Council recognises the importance of a robust intervention programme and will thoroughly inspect all businesses that are higher risk or have poorer compliance levels.

As in previous years the Council will use a "light touch" Alternative Enforcement Strategy for the very low risk premises that are not included within the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. This strategy will negate the need for intervention in many of these premises. Examples of these type of premises are childminders and chemists.

There are 1300 premises due a food hygiene intervention plus a backlog of 752 from previous years and 451 premises due a food standards intervention plus a backlog of 61 in 2024-2025. This is a decrease on the previous year's programme and reflects efforts made to reduce backlogs. however the overall scale of the programme remains larger than in years gone by, prior to inspections being paused during the covid pandemic which created a backlog.

Staff resources continued to be affected during the 2024/2025 year with the challenges in recruiting suitably qualified staff. Local authorities across the UK are experiencing difficulties recruiting environmental health officers into local government and in particular to food safety sections - additional monitoring and auditing requirements of the FSA and the complex competency framework that food officers are required to attain in order to practice, often makes this more difficult.

3.2 Food Hygiene Intervention Strategy

As per the Food Law Code of Practice the following premises have been prioritised for inspection in 2024-2025:

Risk category	Inspection planned
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A	6
B	138
C	420
D	353
E	345
Unrated	38
Backlog C	3
Backlog D	522
Backlog E	227

The unit currently has one industrial placement student who is assisting in the completion of the alternative enforcement strategy.

3.3 Food Standards Intervention Strategy

Food standards interventions aim to ensure that food sold throughout the city complies with relevant compositional and labelling requirements, is properly described and of sound quality. In general food standards inspections are carried out during the same visit to premises to conduct a food hygiene inspection where they fall due within the same timeframe. However, for higher risk premises such as Category A, Approved Premises, Manufacturers and Distributors and some other Category B premises, the standards inspections may be carried out separately in order to facilitate focused attention on food standards.

As per the Food law code of practice the following premises have been prioritised for inspection in 2023-2024:

Risk category	Inspection planned
A	15
B	100
C	297
Unrated	39
Backlog B	61

A priority area for the majority of these premises will be to assess provision of Allergen Information including where necessary provision of correct Pre-Packed for Direct Sale Allergen and Mandatory Information through the use of the PPDS checklist. A substantial number of these interventions shall be completed while officers are on-site for a Hygiene inspection, thereby utilising resources to maximum efficiency.

3.4 Alternative Enforcement Strategy (AES)

Normally those food businesses which present the lowest risk to public health will be subject to an alternative approach to inspection. This AES consists of a Food Safety Hygiene and Standards Self-Assessment Questionnaire which is posted out to the businesses along with tailored advice and information. Completed questionnaires are reviewed to monitor compliance and confirm that there have been no significant changes to the business or a change in ownership. Premises that do not provide the necessary information or indicate a significant change to their activities will be subject to an inspection.

The Unit has currently identified 544 premises who present the lowest risk for Food Hygiene Category E and 422 for Food Standards Category C, which will be subject to Alternative Enforcement Strategy for 2024-25.

3.5 New food standards and hygiene delivery models

Following a consultation exercise in 22/23 the FSA are introducing a new system for risk rating premises that are subject to programmed food standards inspections in 2024/25. The new Food Hygiene delivery implementation has been postponed until the Food Standards model is fully in place.

The new Food Standards delivery model may impact on the planned interventions for food standards and a mid-year review of tagged interventions will have to take place. This will affect the overall programme due for the year and potentially impact on end of year returns data. The current planned programme will continue to be implemented as is, until such times as the new programme can be devised. This is dependent on a IT systems upgrade by our information management system service provider. We will continue to work with our internal digital services team to implement the new system. This will impact the team as time will be required to train staff on the new model and the new amendments to the IT system. .

These new delivery models aim to enable District Councils to deploy resources more effectively as the proposed risk rating matrices will enable focus on the highest risk and/or non-compliant businesses.

3.6 Allergens

A significant change to the labelling requirements for PPDS foods came into force on 1 October 2021. Prior to the introduction of the new requirements additional support including advisory visits, leaflets, webinars etc. was offered to businesses to help them achieve compliance. We will continue to offer support throughout this year as businesses implement the requirements and escalate to formal action where appropriate.

3.7 Revisits

In line with the statutory Food Law Code of Practice all food businesses that fail to comply with significant statutory requirements shall be subject to appropriate enforcement action and revisit to verify compliance. As a minimum they will receive a written warning letter.

However, officers will aim to utilise the wide range of enforcement options available to ensure compliance is achieved in a timely fashion. We shall make appropriate use of all enforcement options which continue to apply to all food businesses, and in accordance with the Council's Regulatory and Enforcement Policy.

For food hygiene a single compliance score of 15 (or higher) is considered significant.

For food standards a compliance score of 40 and/or a confidence in management score of 30 is considered significant.

For lower scores remedial action to secure compliance may be detailed on the post inspection report form and compliance will be verified at next routine visit, however, written warnings shall be issued where it is appropriate to do so, and more formal enforcement options will be considered for persistent non-compliance.

3.8 Revisits for FHRS rerating

Under the requirements of the Food Hygiene Rating Act (NI) 2016 additional revisits will be carried out on request to 're-rate' an establishment, subject to criteria being met and a fee of £150 being paid.

3.9 Food Complaints

The Council will commence the investigation of all food complaints received from members of the public or food businesses within three working days of receipt. In the case of urgent investigations, we endeavour to make contact within the same working day. Officers will investigate complaints in accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Food Managers Group (NIFMG) Food Complaints Investigation Procedure and where necessary the Council will liaise with Originating, Home Authorities and Primary Authorities during the course of its investigation. In determining the appropriate course of action, the Council will take into consideration any reports received from the Home, Originating or Primary Authorities and the food business identified as the cause of the complaint and will have regard to the Council's Regulatory and Enforcement Policy. For 2024/25 the Council estimates that it will receive approximately 550 complaints relating to food or the hygiene of food premises.

3.10 Home Authority Principle

Although not a legal requirement in NI, the Council supports the UK Home Authority Principle and, where appropriate, will liaise with the Home Authority of a business trading in the city, on enforcement and other issues which affect the policies of the enterprise. We will take cognisance of any relevant advice given by the Home or Primary Authority, including any published intervention plan.

While the Council does not enter into formal written home authority partnerships with any business, it has established a close liaison with the majority of businesses, including the Education Authority, for whom it informally acts as a Home Authority on behalf of the other 11 District Councils. Our remit extends to providing advice, guidance and the follow up of non-compliances in relation to policy or procedures identified by our own officers or by officers from the other District Councils. Advice is also provided during programmed inspections and other visits.

On request the Council will investigate all matters referred to it by other local authorities and where appropriate will provide a written response to requests for information. For 2024/2025 the Council estimates that it will receive over 200 requests for information from other Local Authorities.

Where appropriate the Food Safety and Port Health Unit will have cognisance of the contents of the "Statement of Intent" agreed between District Councils, DETI and the Better Regulation Delivery Office (Formally LBRO) for the purposes of providing better regulation of businesses.

The Council liaise closely with the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and carry out work on their behalf under a number of MOU's and SLA's. This includes work relating to egg, beef and poultry meat labelling and traceability and the issuing of export health certificates and attestations for trade to non-EC countries.

3.11 Advice to Business

The Council is committed to the improvement of standards in food businesses and advice to businesses is an important dimension of that strategy. Advice is given through site-visits, provision of compliance tools such as the Butchers' HACCP Pack, and the Safe Catering (HACCP) Pack, the Council's website, dealing with enquiries and requests for advice, through correspondence, meetings with trade groups, distribution of printed materials, and educational and online training programmes. The service will continue to support all businesses with the implementation and

maintenance of Food Safety Management Systems based on HACCP principles, in conjunction with a graduated approach to enforcement.

In order to promote a positive image and promote the reputation of the Council the unit plans to publish at least one article in City matters and interlink.

The Food Safety Unit accepts plans and specifications for all new and refurbished food businesses for review and comment. This approach is taken to help businesses secure compliance before they open thus saving the business and the Council resources by avoiding the need to carry out remedial works. It is estimated that 500 new businesses will receive advice in the year.

Our system of recording service requests, response times and actions help plan, improve and monitor this part of the service. It is estimated that in addition to complaints relating to food or premises a further 1200 requests for service will be received this year. There has been particular interest for information on food safety requirements as existing food businesses attempt to diversify and others want to operate a food business from their own home.

The Port Health Service is an active member of the local shipping community, having extensive business contacts with the Maritime Coastguard Agency, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, N.I. importers, customs, clearance agents, hauliers, shipping companies, ferry operators and stevedores. Advice is given on Port Health related matters, including food safety, to the shipping community on a regular basis and when requested help and advice is given to local importers and members of the general public on the importation of third country foodstuffs including products of animal origin. The Port Health service has also engaged together with DAERA, FSA and other Councils with trade and businesses to provide advice and assistance in relation to additional requirements following Brexit, and the service continues to receive requests for information and advice in this regard.

3.12 Food Inspection and Sampling

The Food Safety Unit has prepared a Food Sampling Policy outlining its general approach to chemical and microbiological sampling as well its approach in specific situations. This approach recognises the important role of sampling in protecting public health and product quality, detecting fraudulent activities and unhygienic practices and to ensure that food standards are maintained.

Food sampling programmes are produced annually for both chemical and microbiological samples, after consultation with the Public Analyst and the Food Examiner. The programmes are produced in accordance with documented procedures, are risk based and prioritised to focus on foods that are manufactured in the city where there are Home/Originating Authority responsibilities. The programmes also consider the type and risk category of food businesses and imported food. The programme has regard to national, regional and local co-ordinated sampling surveys.

Several areas of intelligence are used to identify priority premises, food products or specific analyses in addition to those collated from the food safety database. Such intelligence may include Incident reports sent to FSA, Food Alerts, FSA Annual Incident report, RASFFs, Food standards complaints; UK Food Surveillance System annual reports, FSA Imported Food Annual Reports & Food Fraud Database bulletins.

During the Covid 19 Pandemic sampling activities were restricted but the unit is now working towards pre-pandemic activity levels and in 2024/2025 we aim to sample 300 for chemical analysis and 1000 products for microbiological examination.

3.13 Port Health – Imported food inspections and sampling

The Unit receives up to 15 shipping manifests per day and from these are able to identify vessels and their cargoes. This includes both containerised shipping cargoes, and also all freight entering Belfast Port via roll on-roll off ferry services (up to 77 ferry sailing arrivals at Belfast Port each week). Cargo manifests are scrutinised, and all third country imported foodstuffs are identified. Additional surveillance of manifests to identify non-compliant loads has also increased following introduction of the NI Protocol.

Documentary, identity and physical checks, including sampling, are carried out on all third country products of animal origin in accordance with the EC veterinary checks regime. Following introduction of the NI Protocol, this has extended to relevant food products arriving from GB, however the number of samples of these products was initially small – sampling activity for these products has increased over the past year. Physical inspections on products arriving from GB have also been constrained due to limitations in the inspection facility at Corry Place, and also staffing recruitment and retention challenges.

EU legislation requires that specified import conditions will apply to certain imported consignments of third country products of non-animal origin. These products all require a documentary check, and a proportion will be subject to identity and physical checks (including sampling) at a level laid down in the legislation. Products not subject to the specific legislation will be risk assessed and appropriate checks, including sampling, carried out to ensure compliance with relevant imported food legislation. When possible, the Unit carries out imported food sampling programmes devised by the Food Standards Agency or the E.U.

A sampling plan for this year is based on trade volumes and commodities. Samples taken will include mandatory samples required by imported food legislation as well as surveillance samples guided by the UK's National Monitoring Plan. We anticipate the numbers of samples to be taken from imported food consignments in 2024/2025 to be in the region of:

- Microbiological 45
- Chemical 250

The International Health Regulations (2005) require that all ships must be inspected at an authorised port such as Belfast and where necessary a Ship Sanitation Certificate issued for the prevention and control of public health risks. The unit also responds to Ship Sanitation inspection requests from ships that operate out of Larne Port. Certificates are valid for a period of 6 months. As the number of inspections are dependent upon requests from Ships Agents, the volume of inspections vary each year. In 2023/2024 we carried out 85 ship sanitation inspections, which is an increase from the previous year in which 73 ship sanitation inspections were completed.

Food hygiene and food standards inspections of Passenger Ferries registered with and operating out of Belfast are undertaken. Some of these ferries are large food businesses producing up to 7500 meals per day. We will inspect between 2 and 4 ferries in 2024-2025.

The unit also regularly inspects External Temporary Storage Facilities (formerly known as ERTS), fishing vessels operating out of Belfast and other vessels in dry dock for repair. Food Hygiene and Standards inspections are also carried out at George Best City Airport as well as ensuring the safety of water delivered to aircraft.

3.14 Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related and other Infectious Disease

The Council will attempt to investigate all notifications of infectious disease received from the Public Health Agency (PHA), within one working day of receipt. Specifically trained and competent environmental health officers within the Food Safety and Port Health Unit are authorised by the PHA for the investigation of notifications.

Investigation of outbreaks of food related infectious disease is conducted in liaison with the Consultant in Public Health Medicine of the PHA, and in accordance with the existing Outbreak Control Plans and protocols.

The Council estimates that it will receive 160 notifications of food related infectious disease during the year, with an additional 100 alleged food poisoning complaints from the public.

The Port Health Division will respond immediately it is notified of any complaint or incident of food poisoning or food related infectious disease occurring on board a ship or premises within the Port of Belfast or relating to a passenger using Belfast City Airport.

3.15 Food Safety Incidents

The FSA receives and issues information about foods within the supply chain which have been found to be unsafe or do not meet legal requirements. These include notifications about Product Withdrawals, Product Recalls and Allergy Alerts. Where necessary, the FSA will issue direction to councils to take specific action to protect consumers.

All notifications that require action are recorded on our database with details of the actions taken recorded against the relevant premises.

The Council estimates that it will receive 50 notifications from the FSA during the year and 80% of these will require investigation and further action to protect public safety.

3.16 Rapid Alert System for Feed and Food (RASFF).

With EU Exit, the UK has lost access to certain EU information systems including full access to the RASFF. As a result, the Food Standards Agency has developed the Risk Likelihood Dashboard to create a platform to enable more efficient and effective collation and sharing of relevant data for stakeholders involved in protecting public health in relation to imported food and feed. The Risk Likelihood Dashboard provides intelligence from consolidated data sources including historic TRACES data, RASFF Portal, refusals from other 3rd countries. Local Authorities can still create RASFF notifications but have view only of RASFF notifications. Belfast City Council have access to the Risk Likelihood Dashboard and use it routinely to identify potential risks with imported foods and target surveillance accordingly.

If a consignment/product is to be rejected or destroyed due to a direct or indirect risk to human health, an incident report and rapid alert notification must be completed and forwarded to the FSA Food Incident Branch after consultation with FSA Northern Ireland for onward notification to the European Commission. It is likely that 5-10 notifications will be generated in 2024/2025.

3.17 Liaisons with Other Organisations

The Food Safety and Port Health Unit has extensive liaison in place with a wide range of other organisations:

- Food Standards Agency NI (FSANI) through enforcement stakeholder meetings, the Northern Ireland Food Managers Groups (NIFMG), and numerous other formal and informal meetings.
- The Public Health Agency (MOU exists) in relation to the investigation of sporadic cases and outbreaks of food related infectious disease.
- NIFMG reporting to Environmental Health NI
- Association of Port Health Authorities. The Senior Environmental Health Officer (Port Health) is a member Port Health Liaison Network.

- The Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs in relation to the operation of the Border Inspection Post.
- Merchant Navy Welfare Board (NI)
- HM Customs and Excise nationally and locally in relation to imported food controls.
- Planning Service to review related applications.
- Department for Infrastructure Water Quality Liaison Group.
- Safe Food through projects and working groups on the Island of Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Area Medical Advisory Committee - Infectious Disease Sub-Group.
- Belfast Resilience-Harbour Working Group
- Maritime Coastguard Agency
- Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- The Education Authority for NI School Meals Service
- NI Takeaway association

Close liaison is maintained with the Council's Building Control Service, Pest Control and Waste Management Service, as well as with the other regulatory units.

3.18 Promotion of Food Safety and Healthy Eating/ Nutrition

The Council carries out educational and promotional activities as an integral part of its food safety duties. In addition to this, specialist promotional activities are carried by the Food Safety Unit. Many of these initiatives are designed to promote healthy choices.

In 2024-25 we shall participate in nutrition survey of ready meals for nutrition and health claims. The products will be assessed for calorie content as well as other nutritional markers such as sugar and fat content with a view to collating the data and evaluating the results.

The Council continues to participate in a fact-finding relating to premises that sell CBD products to gather information on supplier and manufacturer details in order to target specific enforcement in this ever-evolving area of Novel Foods.

Educational and promotional activities planned for 2024/2025 include the following:

Promotional Activity	Estimated Resources
Maintain and promote and manage the Food Hygiene Rating scheme (including the Online display regulations once these are published)	500 hours
The Council will review participation in the Caloriewise assessment project and aim to target the reassessments of Belfast Trust premises who have previously achieved the award.	50 hours
To provide an Imported Food/Port Health training day and recruitment promotional sessions for year 3 and 4 students on Environmental Health and other food related courses.	50 hours
To participate in relevant service wide business forums	50 hours
To publish at least one article in City Matters	5 hours
To develop relevant advice / information for businesses to assist them to comply with enforcement / legislative requirements	100 hours

4.0 Resources

4.1 Financial allocation

Details of the budget for the delivery of the Council's food service in 2024-2025 are within the City and Neighbourhood Service's revenue estimates and were approved by Council in February 2024.

4.2 Staffing allocation

4.2.1 Food Safety and Port Health Unit

The full staffing compliment in the Food Safety & Port Health Unit has the equivalent of 19 full-time staff engaged in food safety work. All officers hold specific qualifications and are assessed for competencies as required by the Code of Practice and are authorised for duties in accordance with the Council's documented procedure. (See table below).

Position	Hours (Full or Part Time)	Authorisation	FTE
Food Safety			
City Protection Manager	FT	None	0.1
Assistant City Protection Manager	FT	Full including Approvals	0.7
Assistant City Protection Manager	FT	Full including Approvals	0.7
Senior EHO	PT	Full including Approvals	0.8
Senior EHO	FT	Full including Approvals	0.8
EHO	FT	Full including Approvals	1.0
EHO	FT	Full including Approvals	1.0
EHO	FT	Full	1.0
EHO	FT	Full including Approvals	1.0
EHO	FT	Full	1.0
EHO	FT	Full	1.0
EHO	PT	Full	0.5
EHO	FT	Partial	1.0
Technical Officer	PT	Full	0.8
Technical Officer	FT	Full	1.0
Technical Officer	FT	Full	1.0
Technical Officer	FT	Partial	1.0
EHO	1	Vacant	1
Senior EHO	3	Vacant	3.0

Port Health/Imported food			
City Protection Manager	FT	None	0.1
Assistant City Protection Manager PORT (daytime)	FT	Full with Approvals inc Port Health	0.7
Senior EHO PORT (daytime)	FT	Full inc Port Health	0.7
Senior EHO PORT (daytime)	FT	Full inc Port Health	1.0
EHO PORT (daytime)	FT	Full with approvals inc Port Health	1.0

Team Leader EHOs x4 (shift based)	FT	Port health	4.0
EHOs x10 (shift based)	FT	Port Health – 2 posts vacant	10.0
Technical Support Officer x8 (shift based)	FT	1 post vacant Limited to regulatory support activities	8.0
Port Health Support Assistants (shift based)	FT	2 posts vacant	8.0

Current short-term vacancies that cannot be covered by temporary contracts are on occasion covered by agency staff.

The Port Health shift-based staff (including Team Leader Environmental Health Officers, Environmental Health Officers, Technical Support Officers and Port Health Support Assistants) are employed on a temporary basis for Port Health to carry out required official controls on goods from GB following temporary funding from FSA.

*Full Authorisation: authorised by Belfast City Council to enforce the provisions of The Food Safety Order (Northern Ireland) 1991 and any Orders or Regulations made thereunder or relating to the foregoing or having effect by virtue of the European Communities Act 1972.

4.2.1a Estimate of Resource (Time) Requirements (based on pre Covid-19 data)

Food Hygiene/Food Standards

Activity	No Tasks	Time/task	Total Hours
Cat A inspections Hygiene	6	5.5	33
Cat B inspections Hygiene	138	5	690
Cat C inspections Hygiene	420	4	1680
Cat D inspections Hygiene	353	4	1412
Backlog Category D Hygiene	522	4	2088
AES Category E Hygiene	572	0.5	286
Unrated and unplanned events (Hygiene)	200	5	1000
Cat A inspections Standards	15	3	45
Cat B inspections Standards	100	1.5	150
Backlog Category B Standards	61	1.5	91.5
AES Category C Standards	297	0.5	148.5
Unrated and unplanned events (Standards)	200	1.5	300
Revisits	200	1	200
Advisory and other visits	75	1	75
Micro sampling	1050	1	1050
Chemical sampling	300	2	600
Food Complaints	500	7	3500
ID investigations	100	2.5	250
Food Alerts For action	60	50	3000
Prosecutions	10	74	740
Other Service Requests	800	7	5600
Staff Development	17	30	510
Working groups and initiatives with other external partners and	-	-	2000

stakeholders including NIFMG and Sub-Groups, FSA, APHA			
Management of service and staff	-	-	2,500
Staff meetings	-	-	1000
Projects e.g., web development, procedures, campaigns	-	-	1000
Mandatory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme	-	-	1000

Port Health

Activity	No Tasks	Time/task	Total Hours
Inspect all shipping and ferry Manifests	4300	0.5	2150
To screen Maritime Declaration of health documentation to monitor compliance with International Health Regulations and infectious disease	2000	0.5	1000
To inspect vessels for the issue of Ship Sanitation Certificates.	140	6.00	840
Documentary & phys. checks, including sampling, of foodstuffs imported from outside EU.	* (Estimated 44,000)	* (varies depending on task)	

*This estimate reflects documentary, identity and physical checks on products of animal origin (fish and fish products), high risk food not of animal origin, plastic kitchenware, organic products and IUU Catch Certificates undertaken in 2023/24 and is likely to be subject to further development and resource planning in 2024/25 as statutory requirements, systems and processes are further developed/updated, and businesses adjust to the new arrangements. The duration of tasks and degree of officer time varies according to commodity types and is under regular review with partners including FSA and DAERA as part of the annual resource allocation arrangements that are currently in place.

4.3 Staff Development Plan

The development needs of the Food Safety and Port Health Unit are identified as part of the Council's business planning process, competency assessment and through personal development planning. Relevant local training is identified by the Northern Ireland Food Managers Group and subgroups, the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland and the Public Health Agency. Training needs are also reviewed during the year to take into account staff changes and other issues identified. In-house briefing sessions are delivered regularly as part of monthly Unit meetings.

Competency requirements required by the Food Law Code of Practice are re assessed for all Officers annually and all deficiencies addressed in year.

Food Safety Training Plan 2024-2025

The priority training areas agreed between NIFMG and FSA and shall be provided as low-cost training. The key areas have been identified as follows:

- FHRS National Consistency Exercise
- Meat Hygiene Focus Training
- Food Hygiene Rating (online Display) Regulations
- Evidence Gathering
- Interview Skills and Tasking & Making Statements
- Root Cause Analysis
- Changes to international incident reporting & RASFF since EU Exit
- Food Standards Delivery Model
- Food Crime Intelligence
- Approvals
- Public analyst training on food sampling
- Food Supplement training
- Microbiology sampling for food officers
- PHA shared learning day
- Food Safety conference

There is also access to online courses provided by the FSA, Safefood, as well as refresher training via ABC Food Law. Port Health staff also avail of training on imported food controls via the Better Training for Safer Food programme.

5.0 Quality Assessment

The following arrangements are in place to ensure the quality of services provided by the Food Safety and Port Health Unit:

5.1 Internal Monitoring Arrangements

Procedures have been drawn up and implemented to monitor the quality of work of officers assigned to the Food Safety & Port Health Unit which cover all aspects of the Standard and help ensure procedures are fully implemented. Current procedures include:

- Regular individual meetings with lead officers
- Use of procedure notes
- Use of standardised inspection report forms, letters and phrases
- Review of post-inspection paperwork
- Monitoring of inspections, visits and actions by documentation checks and accompanied visits
- Post complaint investigation monitoring
- Approved premises file review and monitoring
- Internal auditing of adherence to procedures
- Monthly meetings of the Food Safety Teams
- Seminars / exercises and training as required

5.2 External monitoring and verification

The Border Inspection Post is audited annually by DAERA, and the food service is periodically subject to both FSA and EU audits.

The inland food safety team are subject to audit internally and externally. The FSA audit for 24/25 will focus on the unit's Food Service Delivery Plans for 24/25 and 23/24.

6.0 Review

6.1 Review against the Service Plan

Performance against the unit's business plan is reviewed periodically. This includes a quarterly review by the Unit Management Team. Summary performance information on the previous years' service plan will be reported with each Food Service Delivery Plan. The report shall also identify any variance together with areas of improvement.

Performance report on Food Service Delivery Plan for 2023-2024

1. Departmental Plan Targets

Performance Indicator	Target 2023-2024	Achieved 2023-2024
% Premises deemed broadly compliant	95%	84% The unit has noted a significant decrease in hygiene standards within food businesses particularly in relation to premises maintenance, pest control management and waste management which has resulted in overall decrease in premises deemed Broadly Compliant.

2. Other relevant performance information update for 23/24

Performance Indicator	Target 2023/24	Achieved % 2023/24	Explanation of variance and improvements for 2023/24
% Of the food hygiene programme complete	100%	68%	Priority inspections due in 2023/24 were completed, and progress made in addressing backlog, variance due to large number of premises in backlog remaining due from previous years. Continuous prioritisation of inspections and working to reduce backlog from Covid pandemic.
% Of food complaints resolved within 8 weeks	75%	94%	Target exceeded
% Of food standards programme completed	95%	94%	Some category B standards not completed & prioritised for 2425 as hygiene inspection also due in that timeframe.
Micro Samples Taken	1200	81% (975 samples)	Year on Year increase since Covid Pandemic; using available resources
Chemical Samples Taken	400	82% (329 samples)	Year on Year increase since Covid Pandemic; using available resources
% Of urgent food complaints responded to within target (1 working day)	100%	96%	slight decrease due to additional pressures on service
To investigate notifications of	90% returned within target	100%	Exceeded Target

gastrointestinal illness within 24 hours and report to PHA within 24 hours.	90% contacted within target	100%	Exceeded Target
% Of manifests examined for imported food stuffs	100%	100%	Target Met
Number of imported food consignments examined	This target was reported in the Food Service Delivery Plan in previous years, however volumes since 2021/22 have fluctuated significantly and are expected to change further as the Windsor Framework is implemented up to July 2025. We will work with FSA and partners to identify suitable targets as systems and processes, and trade volumes become established.		