

## **Appendix 1**

### **Food Safety and Port Health**

#### **Background Summary**

This paper provides a summary of the work carried out by the Council to monitor and ensure food safety and to encourage healthier choices during 2017-2018.

#### **Protecting Consumers and Supporting Businesses**

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

Last year we implemented our food service plan and completed 92% of our planned hygiene intervention program and 88% of the Food Standards intervention program. These percentages are increased from the previous year which had been reduced due to the demands of the mandatory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and new Food Information Regulations including a requirement for business to provide information on allergenic ingredients. During the year we carried out around 5354 visits to premises, took 1486 food samples and responded to around 1000 requests for service. The unit received 628 complaints about food or food premises, 97% of complaints were responded to within the 48 hours target, and 84% of food complaints were fully investigated and resolved within 8 weeks.

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 its last inspection. The rating is also published on the Food Standards Agency's website: [www.food.gov.uk/ratings](http://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 98% of our premises are rated 5 -very good, 4 - good or 3 - generally satisfactory, with only 2% requiring improvement (rated 0, 1 or 2)

Within the City Council boundary is the Port of Belfast, which is one of the major ports in the United Kingdom. About 60% of Northern Ireland's seaborne trade and a fifth of the entire island's is handled at the port which received over 6,000 ship visits last year. Belfast remains Ireland's busiest ferry port with over 1.5 million passengers and crew and over 0.5 million freight units. The Council supports this industry through the delivery of Port Health services from purpose built office and inspection facilities located within the harbour estate.

The Port Health facilities are approved by the EU for the importation and clearance of a range of high risk foodstuffs. Last year we examined 315 consignments and carried out 482 documentary checks of imported foods. Foods from non-EU countries, including nuts and nut products, confectionary, curry products, fruit, rice and wine 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).

The Unit also validates imports of organic foods from 3rd Countries, involving documentary and identity checks. Last year 33 Organic consignments were validated.

Last year we inspected 488 ships arriving at the Port to ensure compliance with International and UK health and hygiene requirements including food safety and control of infectious diseases. 109 Ship Sanitation inspections were carried out and certificates issued to the vessels.

### **Community Engagement and Good Relations**

Our Food and Port Health team deliver a front line service interacting with consumers and local businesses to protect our community and respond to any query 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. Food and drink accounts for £672 million of the GVA for Northern Ireland with the food sector as a major employer having almost 45,000 employees in Northern Ireland. 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 and assist those that have just opened. We held a range of workshops and events during 2017-2018 to support businesses, and advised 209 individuals on the requirements for opening a new food business. We intend to continue with such supporting activities to assist local businesses in providing safe food.

Over recent years the City has been successful in attracting a number of high profile events including the Tall Ships, the World Police and Fire Games, the Giro D'Italia, along with annual concerts, markets and festivals. These events are vital to promoting the city, tourism and the local economy. We work closely with event organisers to ensure these events are a success and are safely managed.

The Council website has been updated with improved information for anyone wishing to open a food business or for managing an existing business.

BREXIT poses a major challenges for the import and export of foods and we will be reviewing developments closely with a view to supporting exporting food business and importers to meet any additional food safety requirements. It is likely that additional checks and controls may be imposed to control the import and export of foods post BREXIT and these may place additional demands on Food Safety and Port Health.

### **Food Safety Week**

In 2017 Northern Ireland Food Safety Week was launched on 19 June. Last year's theme focused on Safe Summer Food. The Council issued a press release, used its website along with social media and had leaflets available to promote the key messages throughout the week.

This year's food safety week starts 4 June and will be based around the "People that keep your food safe", it will provide an opportunity to raise the profile of all the good work council food safety officers do.

## **Preventing Illness**

There are approximately 22,200 cases of food poisoning occurring annually in Northern Ireland. 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 the UK £1.5 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 100 confirmed cases of food related infectious diseases last year; these were dealt with within 24 hours in 100% of cases. We also dealt with 178 alleged food poisoning complaints.

We provide advice, often aimed at the elderly and the young, to make the public aware of food safety in the home.

## **Preventing Food Fraud**

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 organized activity perpetrated by groups. It is carried out for financial gain and there is evidence that the current economic situation may be increasing its occurrence. Recent examples of food fraud that we have dealt with include 'Premium wasabi powder' which was sampled and found to contain no wasabi, under declared meat content in various meat products. We continue to take surveillance samples for alcohol substitution with cheaper alternatives, the watering down of alcoholic drinks and the substitution of a variety of fish including cod/whiting with cheaper varieties of white fish.

This year, Belfast City Council took part in Operation Opson VI focusing on Food Supplements. This was a priority under the Food Standards Agency National Co-ordinated Sampling Programme 2016/17. Belfast co-ordinated and provided officer training to the 11 District Councils in Northern Ireland which were to be involved in the operation. Businesses were sent a letter and food supplements leaflet prior to the Opson VI operation with a follow up visit and assessment of labelling for compliance with Nutrition and Health Claims and Food Supplements Regulations. Sampling was also carried out. None of the product was found to be injurious to health however there were a number of labelling irregularities identified. Food supplements continue to be an area of significant work with a recent voluntary surrender and destruction of non-compliant products being removed from the market.

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.

## **Promoting a Healthy Diet and Tackling Obesity**

In Northern Ireland each year there are around 4,000 deaths from cancer and 3,000 from heart disease. 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 work with local businesses to ensure that the nutritional labeling of food is accurate so consumers can make informed choices about what they eat. The Council is also working with businesses to encourage them to improve the nutrient profile of their foods and to provide calorie information to consumers through work with Caterers on the Calorie wise project.

## Enforcement

Our enforcement approach aims to provide support, advice and guidance to secure compliance. This approach has been successful with 98% of our 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 1720 written warnings requiring action and in more serious cases formal enforcement sanctions were taken.

The team prosecuted 4 businesses for food safety offences including 2 for poor hygiene conditions in the premises, 1 for the sale of food containing a non-permitted additive and 1 for substituting an alcoholic spirit drink in place of a well-known brand.

3 formal cautions were issued to businesses. 1 caution related to misleading the consumer in the description of protein whey food supplements. The other 2 cautions were both related to allergens. In one case the offence related to the sale of unsafe food, in that it caused an allergic reaction in a customer who had requested a meal free from a particular allergenic ingredient and the business had failed to ensure that the food provided was free from the ingredient. The second allergen case related to a large retailer who failed to withdraw a product from sale that had not been labelled with the appropriate allergen declaration.

A total of 4 premises were closed where there was considered to be an imminent risk to health. In these cases this was due to pest infestations and risk of contamination of food. Voluntary procedures were used in these cases and with the co-operation of the food business operator it was not necessary to seek emergency prohibition orders

From October 2016 under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme it has been a requirement for businesses to display their rating sticker where people buy or eat food. During the year the food safety team have issued 10 fixed penalty notices on food business operators that failed to display a valid food hygiene rating sticker.

In addition Belfast City Council has taken the first successful prosecution in Northern Ireland against a business for failing to display a valid food hygiene rating sticker. The business was fined £250 and ordered to pay £120 legal costs, for failure to comply with the requirements the Food Hygiene Rating Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. At the time of the offence the premises was rated one, indicating "major improvement necessary" to comply with the food hygiene requirements.

In the Port Health Unit,

- 15 containers were rejected including 5 containers which contained foods which were incorrectly labelled and were subsequently referred to the Inland Authority for action.
- 15 Notices were served under Official Feed & Food Controls Regulations (NI) 2009 including detention, destruction and re-dispatch.
- 2 detention notices were issued under organics legislation.