

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel **DATE:** 16th June 2011

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PART I **FOR INFORMATION**

FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY – IMPORTED FOOD CONTROL UNIT

1 Purpose of Report

To advise the Overview & Scrutiny Committee of

- the outcomes following the Food Standards Agency's focused audit of the Councils' Inland Imported Food Control Arrangements and
- for Members to note the action plan for dealing with the identified non-conformities.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

Endorsement of the action plan.

3 Community Strategy Priorities

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is an independent Government department set up by an Act of Parliament in 2000 to protect the public's health and consumer interests in relation to food.

Authorities are audited against the Food and Food Law Enforcement Standard in the Framework Agreement, which sets out the minimum standards of performance expected. The audit reports are published on the Food Standards Agency's website.

- **Celebrating Diversity, Enabling inclusion**

- Supporting and encouraging all the cuisines in Slough to provide healthy eating (Catering for Health) choices, safe food businesses including importation of ethnic foods.

- **Adding years to Life and Life to years**

- Ensuring imported foods available in the Borough are safe to eat.

- **Prosperity for All**

- Supporting local businesses in meeting their legal requirements around the complex legislation related to imported foods.
- The Council has a 'Primary Authority' agreement with a major food importer based in the town.

4 **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

It is anticipated that the plans can be implemented within existing resources. However, unplanned reactive pressures, such as major investigations, may have an adverse impact upon the availability of the team to complete the identified actions within the existing agreed time frames.

(b) **Risk Management**

Recommendation	Risk/Threat/Opportunity	Mitigation(s)
Approval of the action plan	Limited risk to delivery from serious incidents such as Work Related Death Investigations, Animal Health Disease; food poisoning outbreak or unplanned staff absences	Contingency plans in place supported by re-assessment of priorities.
Failure to approve	Serious risk to delivery of statutory obligations and potential criticism from the Food Standards Agency; resulting adverse publicity for the Council.	Re- assessment of resources and priorities

(c) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

There is a legal obligation for the Council to maintain an effective Imported Food Control Service. There are no Human Rights Act implications in this report.

(d) **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Equality Impact assessments have already been completed for the core policy areas of the Services

5 **Supporting Information**

The Food Standards Agency's Strategy to 2015 sets out the approach to be taken to ensure that people can have trust and confidence in the food they buy and eat, including imported food, and that regulation is effective, risk based and proportionate.

Slough was identified for a focused imported foods audit because of the towns diverse community and likelihood that a number of local food outlets handle imported foods. In addition the Council has more that 30 enhanced remote transit sheds (ERTS) which handle imports of products of both animal origin and non – animal origin, including those that require organic verification; these foods are then distributed nationally.

Significant comments/ findings from the FSA include;

- 'It was clear that imported food controls form an integral part of the food service provided by the Food and Safety and Trading Standards teams responsible for the enforcement of imported food controls at Slough Borough Council.'
- 'The Authority had developed Service Plans for both the food safety and trading standards services which were broadly in line with the Service Planning Guidance in the Framework Agreement'
- 'Documented procedures for the authorisation of officers had been developed and implemented for both teams.'
- 'Food safety officers had received training in imported food controls and it was acknowledged that officers in the Trading Standards Team would also benefit from undertaking some basic training on inland imported food control.'
- 'There was evidence that officers made relevant checks on imported food as part of routine food hygiene and standards inspections. The food safety inspection aide-memoire had been amended to include a useful section to prompt officers to record details of their imported food traceability checks.'
- 'The Authority had developed policies and procedures relevant to the scope of the audit. It was acknowledged that trading standards procedures would benefit from more regular and ad hoc reviews'
- 'The Authority had submitted an imported food return on the Local Authority Enforcement Monitoring System (LAEMS) for 2009/2010, which broadly reflected the Authority's sampling and enforcement activity.'
- 'It was clear that the Service was proactive in providing advice to food businesses on imported food controls.'
- 'The Food and Safety Team had developed a comprehensive internal monitoring procedure and there was clear evidence of effective internal monitoring across the Service, including imported food control activities.'
- 'A 'reality visit' was undertaken to an ERTS in the district that handled imported foods.

The report identified 7 recommendations for improvement in relation to non-conformities identified; these are detailed in Appendix 1.

In addition 2 examples of good practice were highlighted;

- Enforcement Guidance. The Authority had produced a range of useful guidance for officers on relevant and specific imported food issues
- Advice to Businesses. The Authority was proactively involved in providing advice to business in a range of ways to help them comply with imported food legislation.

Work is progressing on completion of the actions identified; the FSA will contact the Council for an update on progress against the action plan in August 2011. It is anticipated that all actions will have been completed.

6 Conclusion

Imported Food Control is a critical part of the work carried out by Food Officers at Slough; this is recognised by the audit, together with the information, advice and support that is given to local businesses. The areas of non-conformity identified are mainly in relation to documentation covering the work. It is anticipated that the actions required will be completed ahead of a 6 month review by the FSA in August 2011.

7 **Viewing of plans**

The full report from the Food Standards Agency Audit is available for viewing by contacting Democratic Services on 01753 875120.

8 **Background Papers**

'1' Food Standards Agency Framework Document

'2' 'Safer Food for the Nation', Food Standards Agency, March 2011

9. **Appendices Attached**

Appendix A - Action Plan from the FSA Audit Report