

Report To: Safe, Sustainable Communities
Committee

Date: 27 October 2009

Report By: Corporate Director Environment &
Community Protection

Report No:
ECP/SCS/MM/09/027

Contact Officer: Martin McNab

Contact No: 01475 714246

Subject: Food Hygiene Information System

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek approval for Inverclyde Council to implement the Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS) to provide information to consumers about the standard of hygiene at food business premises.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 In November 2006 the Food Standards Agency launched a series of trials of consumer information schemes, also known as "Scores on the Doors" across the UK. A number of schemes were trialled with the Scottish trial being the Food Hygiene Information Scheme. This was trialled in five local authorities in Scotland with the intention of comparing the different schemes after a two year trial period.
- 2.2 The primary purpose of the schemes is to provide consumers with information about the standards of hygiene at food businesses as found by local authority officers in the course of programmed inspections.
- 2.3 An interim report published after the first year of the trial in Scotland recommended the adoption of the two tier Food Hygiene Information Scheme across Scotland. This recommendation was later ratified by the Food Standard Agency Board.
- 2.4 To date 25 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland have indicated a willingness to adopt the scheme which will give the scheme high visibility and recognition amongst consumers.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That committee approves the implementation of the Food Hygiene Information Scheme with a launch date of 1st October 2010.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 A number of countries and regions internationally have scores on the doors schemes and associated web search applications to allow information from inspections to be displayed for the benefit of consumers.
- 4.2 The success of these schemes, together with the increased publication of inspection reports following freedom of information legislation north and south of the border prompted the Food Standards Agency to launch separate trials of FHIS (a two tier scheme) in Scotland and a six tier scheme in England with the intention of finding the best scheme to promote nationally.
- 4.3 The Food Hygiene Information Scheme has two tiers of result for businesses, “Pass” and “Improvement Required” which customers can use to make a choice of which businesses to patronise. Display of certificates by businesses is optional therefore unsurprisingly few businesses receiving an “Improvement Required” rating choose to display their certificate. Accordingly an “Awaiting Inspection” certificate is available for businesses which have not been rated as yet. Details of inspection results for all businesses will be available online.
- 4.4 The first year independent evaluation of the trial was intended to be an interim evaluation with a full evaluation to be completed after two years. The perceived success of both schemes however, and the increasing numbers of authorities adopting schemes, led to a reduced timescale and earlier this year the Food Standards Agency recommended the adoption of FHIS in Scotland and the six tier scheme in the rest of the UK.
- 4.5 Obviously it would have been preferable if one scheme had been chosen for the whole of the UK; however a large number of authorities in England had adopted the six tier scheme in advance of the trial results and were understandably resistant to scrapping what they had in place and adopting the FHIS scheme.
- 4.6 In spite of this there is now sufficient support amongst local authorities in Scotland to make this a potentially widely recognised and understood scheme for consumers, a benefit which the early local schemes lacked.
- 4.7 As well as information being available by the display of certificates and potentially via Inverclyde Council’s website, the FSA is designing a web portal to allow consumers to search for the scores of businesses across the UK. One early concern had been that providing data for this would be potentially onerous, however it is likely that updates can be made available on a regular basis using minimal officer time.
- 4.8 Although the scheme is intended solely to provide information for consumers and it is made clear that it cannot be used to “gold plate” regulatory standards, authorities adopting the scheme have reported an overall improvement in compliance with hygiene legislation.

5.0 Proposed Implementation Timetable

- 5.1 A number of different approaches have been used to implement the system in other local authorities. Options exist to phase in the launch of the scheme by area or business type.
- 5.2 Given the relatively small geographical size of Inverclyde it is proposed that we launch the scheme across the entire area as phasing by area would be impractical and potentially confusing for consumers. Similarly attempting to cover certain business types before others could potentially put some businesses at a competitive disadvantage through no fault of their own.

5.3 It is therefore proposed that we go live with the scheme across Inverclyde on 1st October 2010. This will minimise the numbers of businesses on which we are reliant on a desktop assessment of their rating in the scheme as a sizeable proportion of food businesses will be inspected over a 12 month period. This will reduce the additional workload and give us greater confidence in ratings applied without introducing too lengthy a delay in the process.

5.4 In order to give businesses a reasonable time to address any issues and spread the load of any possible revisits in advance of the launch date we propose to inform all businesses of their ratings 3 months in advance of the launch and to begin publicity of the scheme at that time. The experience of other authorities would suggest that this will be a reasonable timescale to enable the scheme to be launched within existing resources.

6.0 Implications

6.1 Legal

None.

6.2 Finance

None – the scheme will be launched and managed within existing resources.

6.3 Human Resources

None.

6.4 Equalities

None

7.0 Recommendation

7.1 That committee approves the implementation of the Food Hygiene Information Scheme across Inverclyde with a launch date of 1st October 2010.