

**PROMOTING FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS
IN ARGYLL AND BUTE**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1** The Local Authority, as the food authority, secures food safety and public health through the regulation and enforcement of the Food Safety Act 1990 and related Regulations.
- 1.2** This work is carried out outwith the public view. The enforcement policy adopted serves to secure compliance through supporting businesses to comply, through risk-based proportionate enforcement and, where necessary, the service of formal Notices, seizure of foodstuffs, closure of premises or processes, and reports to the Procurator Fiscal.
- 1.3** The service has sought to improve the level of consumer awareness of the standards of food safety within premises, through the EatSafe Award and Food Hygiene Information Scheme. The Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS) was brought about by the Food Standards Agency, Local Authority Food Officers and Consumer Focus to allow the public to know how hygienic their favourite restaurant, takeaway or shop is.
- 1.4** The FHIS provides “at a glance” information about the standards of hygiene in food businesses both at the premises and on our website. These provide the consumer with clear, interpretable information on food safety standards and give recognition to businesses with high standards of food hygiene and management.
- 1.5** This Paper advises Members of the work undertaken in Argyll and Bute Council, which has taken it to the forefront in these national schemes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** That Members recognise:-
 - a. the work being undertaken by the Councils environmental health service to protect food safety; to support the food industry in Argyll and Bute and note that its work on the EatSafe and Food Hygiene Information award schemes is at the forefront in Scotland
 - b. the work of the catering industry in introducing this scheme and the high level of compliance with food safety in terms of the FHIS and EatSafe award schemes

- 2.2** That Members consider the extension of the FHIS into the retail sector in 2011-12, subject to the caveats detailed in 7.3; and the promotion of the scheme to consumers

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1** At the PPSL Committee on 16 June 2010, Members agreed to a strategy for the implementation of the voluntary, national Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS) to caterers in Argyll and Bute in 2011. This was considered with the agreed Food Law Enforcement Plan and the concept of promoting an “informed consumer”.
- 3.2** The FHIS programme has been delivered across all catering premises in Argyll and Bute within the agreed timescale. This Scheme also supports the EatSafe Award Scheme which the Council’s Environmental Health Service have been operating for 3 years, and provided public recognition for high standards of food safety and management within businesses. The Schemes also provide public awareness through Certificates being displayed on premises and on the Food Standard Agency website www.food.gov.uk...
- 3.3** The work to date has brought Argyll and Bute Council’s Environmental Health service, and its food businesses, to the forefront of food hygiene/safety :-
- (i) 84% of all caterers have been awarded with a “PASS” certificate although the “Improvement Required” is always initially higher at the launch of the Scheme in that Area
 - (ii) 99 EatSafe Awards have been issued; this is the third highest by any Local Authority with only East Ayrshire and Glasgow City Council awarding more (See Appendix 1)

4. Food Hygiene Information Scheme

- 4.1** The FHIS was delivered by a project team comprising Environmental Health staff and project managed by the Area Environmental Health Manager (Helensburgh / Lomond).
- 4.2** The Scheme has been successfully launched across all caterers in Argyll and Bute, with the last area being launched in Mid Argyll, Kintyre and Islay on the 16th March 2011. Across Argyll and Bute Council, 96% of all caterers (830 premises) have been awarded “PASS” Certificates. A breakdown of the full statistics is detailed in Appendix I.
- 4.3** The level of “PASS” Certificates issued varies across the Area Teams and reflects the conditions in the inspections undertaken by enforcement staff. It should be noted that, where “IMPROVEMENT REQUIRED” is issued, the business need not display the Certificate, although the information is placed on the Food Standards Agency website.

4.4 The Environmental Health service will ensure that the non-conformities that initiated the “IMPROVEMENT REQUIRED” Certificate are notified to the food business and are rectified. Once the business has informed us that the items have been rectified the premises will be reassessed. If major non-conformities are found this may result in formal action. In all cases food safety will be protected and the risks managed adequately.

4.5 The benefits of the Scheme are :-

(a) ***To the Local Authority***

Raises the profile of Environmental Health and food safety, addresses non-compliance and provides “consumer” pressure to improve standards

Improves efficiency as non-compliance businesses are tending to undertake the works and report their actions earlier with the Scheme

Supports the local economy by recognising businesses with high standards of food safety and providing advice to consumers to allow them to make a choice where they consume food

(b) ***To the Business***

Businesses have reported that this scheme:-

Provides reassurance to businesses that they have adequate standards in place and recognises “compliant” businesses

Provides a competitive advantage compared to other businesses who do not have either a “PASS” Certificate or an EatSafe Award

Reassures customers

(c) ***To the Consumer***

Provides consumers with food safety information, for the first time

Provides reassurance of the work undertaken by the Council’s Environmental Health service and standards within businesses

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHEME

5.1 We have promoted the Scheme through discussion with catering businesses, and consumers through voluntary groups, etc.

- 5.2** 96% of all caterers have been awarded “PASS” Certificates under the FHIS and work is ongoing to raise standards in the remainder. This is higher than the Scottish average of approx 75%.
- 5.3** There have been two high profile launches at food related events and displays at several other smaller events, all of which attracted encouraging comments on the Scheme.
- 5.4** The first of the major events was in September 2010, at the EatBute Food Fare in the grounds of Mount Stuart House, Bute.

Richard Lockhead, Cabinet Minister for Rural Affairs attended our display and commented favourably on the motives and delivery of the Scheme.

- 5.5** The other, in February, at the West Highland and Islands Food Fare, Oban, which was a Trade Fare which also produced support to the Scheme with the food business operators. It was marked with a formal presentation of “PASS” Certificates to hoteliers carried out by Peter Midgley Food Standards Agency (Scotland), Head of the Local Authority Food Enforcement Branch.

He commented that Argyll and Bute Council and its businesses were at the forefront in implementing the national EatSafe Award and FHIS Schemes. This recognises the commitment of businesses and the Council’s Environmental Health service to the Scheme.

6. FOOD SAFETY IN ARGYLL AND BUTE

- 6.1** The Council’s Environmental Health service undertakes significant work to regulate, promote, and secure safe standards of food safety in Argyll and Bute, working with businesses and other Local Authorities and the Food Standards Agency. The FHIS and EatSafe Award Schemes provide an opportunity to inform consumers of this work and of businesses which comply with standards, based on a detailed audit and inspection process.

- 6.2** In addition to this, a wide range of enforcement work is undertaken, and of significance this year are :-

- (i) 645 premises were subjected to formal, detailed inspections and audits by the Council’s Environmental Health professionals for food safety in the period 1st April 2010 to 7th March 2011.
- (ii) A total of 35 formal Notices were issued for a range of contraventions, including inadequate food safety systems, consideration and training of food handlers. These have been complied with.
- (iii) We have supported new businesses in establishing, and of significance are 5 new manufacturing operations which require to be formally licensed by the Local Authority.

- (iv) We have investigated outbreaks of illness associated with, or involving, food businesses, including an outbreak of D&V in a wedding party. Investigations confirmed a viral source rather than foodborne.
- (vi) A business within Argyll and Bute was prosecuted and found guilty of contraventions under the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) (Scotland) Regulations. The business was fined £1,150 and the contraventions related to conditions found at inspection in 2008 have been rectified. The proprietor has carried out improvements and the premises are now compliant and have been awarded a "PASS" Certificate in terms of the FHIS.
- (vii) As a result of the new trading arrangements between China and Scotland, supported through fish inspection and certification, the first exports of salmon from an Argyll company to China (the first in Scotland) have taken place. This supported business is utilising new trading markets.

7. THE INFORMED CONSUMER

- 7.1** We have successfully implemented the Food Hygiene Information Scheme for caterers and the Certificates are reviewed at every programmed visit by Environmental Health staff. They will be re-issued with a new "PASS" Certificate and, where standards have slipped, an "IMPROVEMENT REQUIRED" Certificate will be issued. The results will be regularly updated onto the Food Standards Agency web-site.
- 7.2** There is a potential to extend this to the retail sector and preparatory work has been done to support this extension. Additional funding has been obtained from the Food Standards Agency of £3,500 to support this in 2011 / 2012.
- 7.3** It is recommended that :-
 - (i) The Scheme is extended to retail premises, based on outcomes of recent visits and forthcoming programmed visits.
 - (ii) To minimise the implications to the service, premises which are not due an inspection will be categorised as "AWAITING INSPECTION" and awarded a Certificate, where they come in to the scope of the Scheme, and will only be inspected on a risk-based approach depending upon available Environmental Health resources.
 - (iii) That the focus is on raising awareness of the FHIS and EatSafe Award Schemes with the consumer via the Certificates and on the Food Standards Agency web-site.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The introduction of the FHIS and EatSafe Award Schemes brings Argyll and Bute's Environmental Health and local businesses to the forefront of other Local Authorities and "leads the way" nationally.
- 8.2 The Schemes provide benefits to the Local Authority, the economy, businesses and the consumer. It provides power to consumers to promote improvements to food safety by electing to consume food in premises which are compliant with food safety standards and have a "PASS" Certificate. It may take some time to implement this "culture" but the Schemes provide this information to consumers for the first time.

9. IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Policy : None
- Financial : Grant of £3500 received to implement project in 2011-12
- Equal Opportunities : Applies to all caterers and retailers
- Personnel : Work integrated within general work



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Appendix 1

FHIS Breakdown per geographic area

	A & B Council	BC	HL	MAKI	OLI
No. of Premises	834	252	189	180	213
No. of PASS Certificates	738	229	177	151	181
No. of "Improvements Required"	56	14	5	26	11
No. of Exempt Premises	71	11	9	3	48

Eat Safe Awards (as of 7th March 2011)

Aberdeen	23
Aberdeenshire	32
Argyll & Bute	99
Edinburgh	74
Clackmannan	4
Dumfries & Galloway	34
East Ayrshire	170
Glasgow	138
Highland	42
Midlothian	1
Moray	2
North Ayrshire	32
Scottish Borders	3
South Ayrshire	26
South Lanarkshire	25
Stirling	33
West Dunbartonshire	59
West Lothian	6