

Appendix 1

Food Safety and Port Health

Key Facts

- It is estimated that 11200 people in Belfast suffer from food poisoning and food related illness annually, resulting in 104 hospital admissions, 5 deaths and costing the Belfast economy £19 million.
- Diet, especially excess saturated fat, salt and sugar is thought to play a role in about round 350 deaths from cancer and 250 from heart disease in Belfast each year.
- Food fraud and food crime where the consumer is misled into buying inferior product is a growing concern within the global, complex food chain,
- Food production, transport and sale at retail and catering establishments play an essential part in our local economy. Food and drink accounts for £639 million of the GVA for Northern Ireland with the food sector as a major employer with almost 45,000 employees in Northern Ireland. Good quality, local and safe food has a key role to play in developing local tourism.
- There are approximately 3700 food premises based in Belfast
- 95.6% of our food businesses were found on inspection to be broadly compliant with food hygiene legislation
- 9 Food business operators were prosecuted for Food law offences last year.
- The owners of FLICKS restaurant, Moviehouse Cinemas (Yorkgate) Limited, on 29th April 2015 were fined £110 000 plus costs of £5000. This was the largest fine ever recorded for food safety offences in Northern Ireland.

Local Government Reorganisation

Local Government Reorganisation on 1 April 2015 resulted in Belfast City Council gaining an additional 10% of food businesses from Lisburn and Castlereagh. An additional 1.5 EHOs have been allocated to the unit from those transferred from Castlereagh and Lisburn Borough Councils to cover this additional work load. It is anticipated that quality of service will be maintained and extended to the new areas.

Protecting Consumers and Supporting Businesses

The work of the Food Safety Unit is critical to minimising the cost of food related illness on the local economy, individual businesses and the consumer.

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 are planned using a risk based approach that targets resources to where they are needed most and reduces the inspection burden on the 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 99% of our planned intervention programme. We carried out 4182 visits to premises, took 1,533 food samples and responded to almost 1,000 requests for service. The unit received 459 complaints about food or food premises and 90% of food complaints were fully investigated and resolved within 8 weeks.

A key element of our strategy is to enable consumers to make informed choices and encourage businesses to improve hygiene standards. **The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme** encourages this through the publication of standards of compliance observed during inspections. Currently participation in this scheme is voluntary, however, the NI Assembly has recently passed a Bill which will make the display of Hygiene ratings mandatory for businesses.

Within the City 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 1.4 million passengers and crew and almost 0.5 million freight units.

The Council supports this industry through the delivery of port health services from a purpose built office and inspection facilities located within the harbour estate which are approved by the EU for the importation and clearance of a range of high risk foodstuffs. Last year we examined 276 consignments and carried out 406 documentary checks of imported foods. Foods from non-EU countries, including nuts and nut products, curry products, rice and wine were inspected and checked 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.

The Unit also validated 55 imports of organic foods from 3rd Countries, following documentary and when necessary identity checks. Last year we also inspected 564 ships arriving at the Port to ensure compliance with International and UK health and hygiene requirements including food safety and control of infectious diseases. 99 Ship Sanitation inspections were carried out and certificates issued. Both Stena Superfast ferries (the largest food businesses in Belfast each serving up to 7,500 meals daily) and other passenger ferries operating out of Belfast were inspected for food hygiene and food standards and all cruise ships visiting Belfast were inspected at least once.

Numerous visits were made to George Best Belfast City Airport to ensure food safety and the safety of water supplied to aircraft.

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 that 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 £639 million of the GVA for Northern Ireland with the food sector as a major employer with 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 2014-2015 to support businesses, and advised 274 new businesses on the requirements for opening a food business. We intend to continue with such supporting activities to assist local businesses in providing safe food

From December 2014 there were significant changes to the information that food businesses must give to their customers. All food businesses (e.g. restaurants, takeaways, bakeries and delicatessens) must declare any of 14 identified allergenic ingredients which are used in non-prepacked or loose foods that are sold or provided. To assist businesses prepare for and implement this change we held 10 seminars, carried out advisory visits and sent out guidance documents. During this year we have worked with more than 600 businesses supporting them with this change in legislation. This work will continue to be at the forefront for 2015-16.

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

The food safety team have also supported Fair Share, a charity that re-directs surplus quality food to homeless charities which otherwise would end up in landfill.

Food Safety Week

Food Safety Week in 2014 was themed around campylobacter in chicken and kitchen hygiene. This year's theme is food safety with chicken and will focus on local and social media, providing hygiene information along with celebrity chef inspired recipes.

The Council will use its website to promote the key messages throughout the week.

Preventing Illness

It is estimated there are around 11200 cases of food poisoning in Belfast each year. Some of these can cause serious illness and permanent disability, some types can kill. Approximately 104 hospital admissions, 5 deaths occur in Belfast each year as a result of Food poisoning. The elderly and the young are particularly vulnerable. Food poisoning is estimated to cost the Belfast economy £19 Million each year. As well as ensuring 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 52 notifications of food related infectious diseases; which were dealt with within 24 hours in 100% of cases. We also provide advice, often aimed at the elderly and the young, to make the public aware of food safety in the home.

Over the last two years the unit has carried out a large and complex investigation into an *E. coli* O157 outbreak associated with Flicks Restaurant, Belfast in October 2012. With 141 confirmed cases this was the largest such outbreak experienced in Ireland and one of the largest ever recorded in the UK. Detailed investigations established a number of food safety offences which may have contributed to the outbreak. As a result the food business operator of Flicks Restaurant, Moviehouse Cinemas (Yorkgate) Limited, was prosecuted for 11 offences under food hygiene legislation. The limited company pleaded guilty to all 11 offences in Belfast Crown Court on Wednesday 25th March 2015. Sentencing took place in the Crown Court on Wednesday 29th April 2015 when HHJ Kerr Q.C. imposed a fine of £110 000 plus costs of £5000. This was the largest fine ever recorded for food safety offences in Northern Ireland.

Preventing Food Fraud

Food fraud is committed when food is placed on the market with the aim of deliberately misleading the consumer. It is carried out for financial gain and there is evidence that the current economic situation may be increasing its occurrence. Officers have carried out joint operations and shared intelligence with a number of statutory organizations including the Food Standards Agency, Trading Standards, PSNI and HMRC. Recent examples of major food fraud in the UK, including NI, have seen horse meat used as beef, recycling of animal by-products back into the food chain, products incorrectly labelled as organic, lamb curry substituted with cheaper cuts of beef, and

counterfeit wine. More localized cases, which resulted in successful legal action, have involved substitution of premium vodka with cheaper alternatives and the watering down of alcoholic drinks.

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.

Enforcement

Our enforcement approach aims to provide support, advice and guidance to secure compliance. This approach has been successful with 95.6% 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 181 warning letters requiring action to be taken and left 1170 written reports with businesses detailing food hygiene and food standards infringements to be addressed. In addition 4 legal notices, 1 voluntary closure undertaking and 4 cautions were issued. Furthermore 9 food businesses were successfully prosecuted: offences included unhygienic premises and alcohol substitution.

In addition the Council's Port Health Officers rejected 2 imported food consignments at the point of entry, including salmon which had been held out of temperature control and plastic kitchenware which permitted high levels of migration of polyamide into food. The foods were either destroyed or re-exported.

The rejection and destruction of such foods helped to protect Public Health in Belfast and further afield.

External Monitoring

The DOE NI Local Government Division use a best value quality and performance matrix score to monitor and compare the performance of food safety services across councils. Last year the Council returned a triple A rating, the highest possible.