

National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

Report of:	Cllr Ian Pritchard, Housing, Health and Environmental Protection Portfolio Holder
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Key Decision?	YES



CABINET

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Endorsement from Cabinet is being sought for Lichfield District Council to introduce the national **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'** (FHRS) and it's scoring mechanism to complement the already successful Staffordshire **'Ratemyplace'** scheme.
- 1.2 **'Ratemyplace'** will continue to provide a mechanism to view scores/star ratings with links to the **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'** web site. It also provides more than FHRS web site such as hygiene reports, information on local healthy eating awards, a web presence for small businesses and an i-phone application. Menus will also soon be available.
- 1.3 This report provides information about each of the food hygiene rating schemes, considers the rationale for adopting the **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'**, how it was developed and what support the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is providing.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the transition from **'Ratemyplace'** (including its policy and scoring system) to the national **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'** together with its policy and scoring system.
- 2.2 To approve acceptance of grant funding from the Food Standards Agency for transition to the national **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'** of approximately £71,000, split between 7 local authorities on the scheme and administered by Lichfield District Council as the accountable body.

3. Statement of Reasons

- 3.1 **What are Food Hygiene Rating Schemes?**

Officers from the Council's Food Team are responsible for inspecting food businesses to ensure that they comply with legal requirements on food hygiene. As part of the inspection process, an assessment is made of the business's level of compliance with legal requirements and the adequacy of food safety control measures in place at the time. The business is given a numerical score to reflect these aspects. **'Ratemyplace'** and **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'** convert these numerical scores into a simplified star rating for each business (albeit slightly differently).
- 3.2 **'Ratemyplace'**

After research by 'Which' showed there was a demand for local authorities to publish the results of food safety inspections online, Lichfield District Council's environmental health and communications teams had the vision to create a local online solution called www.ratemyplace.org.uk. Launched in 2007, the website helps visitors across Staffordshire make an informed decision about where they want to eat or buy food, based on a simple hygiene star rating system and open access to detailed inspection reports. It also encourages businesses to improve their hygiene standards through competition, rather than regulation. The website is well liked by local people and local food businesses. Together with a handy i-phone application, star ratings, high volume media coverage, and star rating door certificates, that help to build brand recognition, www.ratemyplace.org.uk is now welcoming over 5,000 visitors a month. Overall the system is helping to improve standards in food businesses across Staffordshire, is easy to understand and use, and is helping to direct local authority resources to target those premises that need the most improvement. It also provides Lichfield District Council with around £3,500 worth of income per annum
- 3.3 **Why move to the National Scheme when locally Ratemyplace is well known and used?**

The National Scheme is gaining momentum across the country, with 175 local authorities now operating it. Although not as functional, user friendly and locally focused as Ratemyplace, it is likely that being part of the National Scheme will become mandatory in 2012. On going discussions have been taking place with the Food

Standards Agency and **'Ratemyplace'** (Lichfield District Council) on how we can we can adopt the scheme and keep the **'Ratemyplace'** brand. Agreement has now been reached whereby **'Ratemyplace'** can continue but will use the **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'** scoring mechanism, policy, stickers and certificates. Partners across Staffordshire continue to be committed **'Ratemyplace'** and are happy with a move to the **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'**.

Local authorities such as us, operating 'local' food hygiene rating schemes have found them to be successful in encouraging businesses in their areas to improve hygiene standards. The national scheme aims to build on this and to contribute to reducing the incidence of food-borne illness (a national priority). Having a single scoring scheme in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will help ensure consistency for businesses and clarity for consumers across local authority boundaries.

3.4 How was the scheme developed?

The scheme has been developed by the Food Standards Agency following a major public consultation over the summer of 2008 with advice and guidance from a UK-wide Steering Group. This Group includes local authority representatives who have worked in collaboration with colleagues from the food industry and from consumer bodies. The development of the national scheme is supported by the Better Regulation Executive and by the Local Better Regulation Office. The branding for the scheme is based on the findings of independent research commissioned by the Food Standards Agency to see what consumers would find easiest to understand and use. The Food Standards Agency has an on-going programme for developing the IT system for publishing ratings to ensure that it has the functionality needed by local authorities and is as easy as possible for consumers to use.

3.5 How is the Food Standards Agency supporting the scheme?

In November 2011 we applied for a grant for transition to the national **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'**, as there was short window of time to apply for one. We were successful in getting approximately £71,000 for the 7 partner authorities. In addition to this the **Food Standards Agency** will:-

- provide a free IT platform (with helpdesk support) for publishing ratings.
- cover the cost of certificates and stickers for businesses.
- establish a 'Priorities Fund' to cover the costs that authorities may face from unexpectedly high levels of re-visit requests from businesses – this will provide insurance for the period in which the **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'** is bedding in and likely demand for re-visits becomes clearer.
- organise and fund consistency training for local authority food safety officers.
- issue the **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'** 'Brand Standard' which provides advice and guidance to local authorities on implementation and operation of the scheme.
- provide template materials for use with businesses and consumers and leaflets to explain what the scheme is about.
- work with local authorities to promote the scheme locally to raise awareness among consumers and businesses and will promote the scheme on a national basis.

Community Benefits

For consumers, the **'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'** will help them make informed choices about where to eat out or shop for food and they will be able to easily compare one business with another within their own area and further afield. Giving consumers this choice will incentivise food businesses to improve hygiene standards. The overall aim is to reduce the incidence of food-borne illness and the cost of this to the economy – currently there are around one million cases of food poisoning in the UK every year with an estimated cost to the economy of £1.5 billion.

For businesses, the scheme will provide an incentive to improve standards and do better than their competitors – good food hygiene ratings will be good for business whilst poor food hygiene ratings may make their customers think twice – any improvements they need to make to get a higher rating are no more than is already required of them by law.

Financial & Resource Implications

Lichfield District Council has applied for a grant for all partner authorities to transfer to the NFHRS. The total grant applied for is circa £71,000 to be divided up between the 7 partner Authorities

The revisit and re-rating mechanism built into the National Food Hygiene Rating could have resource implications going forward. For example we may see an increased number of businesses requesting a revisit following a lower star rating in order to improve this rating. This will mean more officer time and therefore cost in inspecting a premises. The Food Standards Agency have assured us money in the short term may be made available for revisits.

What are the resource implications for the Food Safety Team?

The scheme is based around the planned food hygiene intervention programme in order to minimise any burdens on the Food Safety Team.

Given the support being provided by the FSA - see above – the set-up and on-going costs are minimised.

If evidence emerges that operation of the mechanism that allows businesses to request a revisit when improvements have been made is significantly affecting planned intervention programmes, the FSA will ask the Steering Group to consider again the way that the safeguard operates.

Strategic Plan Implications

Ratemyplace and the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme contribute to '**Boosting Business and our Economy**', by helping business have a web presence, promoting competition and at the same time improving food hygiene standards.

4. Risk Management

	Risk Description	Likelihood / Impact	Status	Countermeasure
A	Difficulties and inconsistencies with partner Councils introducing the National Scheme	Low/Medium	Reputation/Citizen	Ensuring partner Councils are aware of the detail for implementing the scheme and regular updates are provided.
B	Consumer confusion between the National Scheme & Ratemyplace	Medium	Reputation/Citizen	Ensuring communication to the consumer is effective and that clear
C	Adverse publicity	Low	Reputational/ Citizen	Management- officer communication plus assistance from partner Government bodies e.g. Food Standards Agency

Relevant web links

Ratemyplace - www.ratemyplace.org.uk

National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme - www.ratings.food.gov.uk/