

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP - CHARGING FOR SUPPORT ADVICE TO FOOD BUSINESSES

INTRODUCING THE “ACCESS” SCHEME

Cabinet - 9 February 2017

Report of Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services

Status: For Decision

Also considered by: Direct and Trading Advisory Committee - 19 January 2017

Key Decision: Yes

This report supports the Key Aim of: A dynamic and sustainable economy

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Matthew Dickens

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Recommendation to Direct and Trading Advisory Committee:

- a) That Members agree to the Environmental Health (EH) Partnership charging for bespoke food safety advice for new businesses.
- b) That a minimum fee be charged of £100 plus VAT for 2 hours work, and £50 per hour thereafter. (This is a cost recovery charge only.)

Recommendation to Cabinet

- a) That Cabinet agree to the Environmental Health Partnership charging for bespoke food safety advice for new businesses.
- b) That a minimum fee be charged of £100 plus VAT for 2 hours work, and £50 per hour thereafter. (This is a cost recovery charge only.)

Reason for recommendation: As part of the national Better Business for All initiative, the Environmental Health Commercial Team has reviewed how it can provide an improved advisory service for local food businesses.

Currently, when a new food business starts, often the first time an officer will have contact with them, is when they have started operating. On that first formal inspection, we can find fundamental structural and management system errors that can be costly for the business to correct in order to comply with the law. We would

like to recover our costs for a bespoke advice service to businesses that will assist them in complying with required regulation before they open.

We would also like to charge established businesses for advice in order to improve their hygiene rating scores and this will enable us to recover our non-statutory costs.

Introduction and Background

- 1 All new food businesses in the district are required to formally register with the local authority. At that point, these new businesses are put onto our database and are subject to a regular inspection regime, as defined by guidance from the Food Standards Agency.
- 2 It is not a requirement for a food business to be inspected before it opens. Quite often businesses open their doors to the public, and the owners have not received any food handling training, their preparation and processes are inadequate and their kitchens, storage areas and facilities are not appropriately designed to meet legal requirements.
- 3 In these cases, the businesses first contact with the Food Safety Officer can therefore feel quite confrontational and may lead to the owner having to spend time and money on further works to meet the basic compliance requirements.
- 4 Currently, some more proactive businesses may ask for advice, before they open their premises. Officers will spend time giving advice to these businesses. However, there is no statutory duty for the EH team to do this. In being helpful, resource can be diverted away from the statutory routine food inspections. However, officers know that this pre-advice can save time at the next inspection, as the business is already compliant and a good officer-customer relationship has been established.
- 5 The downside to this is that officers can spend time advising many businesses that never come to fruition. Also it can be seen that some businesses despite being advised by their regulator in person, still opt to go on and pay a consultant for the same advice. Almost as if by paying for a service, somehow validates the information more for a business.
- 6 A scheme has been devised that can be marketed to businesses in the district. The scheme is called ACCESS -Accelerating Compliance and Economic Success
- 7 This scheme will provide enhanced support for food businesses from highly qualified, experienced, front line food safety officers. The support will be tailored to suit each business. There will be a minimal charge for basic package of £100 plus VAT for 2 hours work (not including travel time). Businesses can then purchase additional time for training, food safety management coaching and follow up support visits. Instead of an

unannounced inspection, visits will take place at the convenience of the business

- 8 Food Safety Officers within the EH Commercial team will carry out the ACCESS visits. A different officer will do any rescore visits to avoid a conflict of interest.
- 9 The scheme will be aimed at both new and existing businesses. The intention is to give a new business a head start towards compliance. It will be particularly useful to people who are new to running a food business. It will also be helpful for businesses that are scoring poorly in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme that need additional help to improve compliance and apply for a rescore. Another target customer would be those businesses wishing to improve their hygiene rating score.
- 10 For those businesses that just require cursory advice, there will always be the option of obtaining free information via our websites and their associated links.

11 In Summary

In providing a charged advice service, the Environmental Health Partnership aims to:

- a) Improve relationship between business and regulator
- b) Save business money - help them get things “right first time” before opening.
- c) Reduce the resources required for revisits to food businesses
- d) Increase the food business manager’s confidence in running their business
- e) Promote business success and economic growth in both Sevenoaks and Dartford

Key Implications

Financial

Businesses will be invoiced for payment before an ACCESS visit takes place. A new income code will need to be established for income monitoring purposes. It is anticipated that the scheme will be available from April 2017.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities the power to charge for a service which is not a statutory function.

