



Ryedale District Council

REPORT TO: Community Services and Licensing Committee

DATE: 29 November 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Environmental Health Manager
Steven Richmond

SUBJECT: 'SCORES ON THE DOORS' - A SCHEME TO
PROMOTE FOOD SAFETY THROUGHOUT
RYEDALE

WARDS AFFECTED: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members with the details of an exciting new initiative which not only promotes food safety but also empowers consumer choice.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. That Members support and approve participation in the scheme detailed in this report.

3.0 REASONS SUPPORTING DECISION

The details are provided within part 7 of this report but essentially are twofold:

- a. Improving standards of food hygiene/safety in businesses.
- b. Providing more information to customers.

4.0 BACKGROUND

121 local authorities throughout England have now put in place 'Scores on the Doors' schemes. Although such schemes have only been set up and running in recent years anecdotal evidence quickly suggested they had a positive impact on the food safety standards of premises within the particular local authorities district. An interim report by Northumbria

University (October 2007), who were tasked with evaluating the impact and effectiveness of 'Scores on the Doors', is backing this opinion.

5.0 INTRODUCTION

In the UK, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 came into force on 1 January 2005. Apart from exemptions relating to public security, privacy of the individual, etc. the general principle is to give citizens the right to access information held by public authorities unless this can be shown not to be in the public interest.

Environmental Health Officers are tasked with inspecting food businesses and each business is assigned a risk rating which forms the basis of the frequency of future programmed inspections. The rating scheme uses the national system detailed in the Food Standards Agency's Code of Practice for Enforcement Officers.

Ryedale's 'Scores on the Doors' will be developed in partnership with the other 7 local authorities within North Yorkshire. The risk ratings used to classify individual premises to give them a 'Scores on the Doors' rating will only be the ones that are directly controllable by the food business.

6.0 POLICY CONTEXT

'Scores on the Doors' is being supported by the Food Standards Agency. The local authorities that are running schemes already use a small number of companies who operate the website on their behalf. The Food Standards Agency is at present evaluating a number of pilot projects and the Agency intends to make a recommendation about a national scheme at its Board meeting in March 2008. Ryedale District Council and indeed the other North Yorkshire authorities will ensure that the scheme follows the national recommendation. To ensure consistency through audit, the Scheme will be included within Ryedale's Food Safety Quality Management System which is certified to ISO 9001: 2000.

7.0 REPORT

National Statistics reported this year that nearly 15 million households in Great Britain (61%) had internet access which is a 4 million increase since 2002.

'Scores on the Doors' provides an opportunity to take advantage of this development by improving communication and involvement with the consumer who spends a significant amount of disposable income on food.

'Scores on the Doors' and similar types of schemes are changing the way in which consumers can make use of website information. In this

scheme for example, having received information about the hygiene conditions found at premises, consumers can use their judgement on how those premises are performing against the required standards of food safety when making their purchasing choices. Similar schemes already have apparently led to a reduction in food borne illness and increased compliance has reaped business benefits.

The 2 main aims of 'Scores on the Doors' schemes are:

- a. to improve standards of food hygiene/safety in businesses - with the following underpinning objectives:
 - to drive business compliance with mandatory food safety hazard assessment schemes;
 - to provide recognition and reward of good performance;
 - to create competition amongst businesses;
 - to generate peer pressure amongst businesses;
 - to encourage a healthy community.
- b. to inform customers - with the following underpinning objectives:
 - to enable informed customer choice;
 - to increase consumer confidence;
 - to fulfil freedom of information duties.

It is anticipated that businesses will become more self-regulating and meet their legal obligations under food hygiene legislation (meeting a 'broadly compliant' standard), with less need for additional interventions from the local authority.

This is important, as next year the FSA is proposing to change the way it monitors and assesses the performance of local authorities and how they deliver their food law functions. Local authorities will be assessed on the number of food businesses in their area that are 'broadly compliant' with food hygiene legislation. The number of 'broadly compliant' premises will also be a performance indicator (NI 184) under government's new performance framework for local authorities Performance Assessment to be introduced in 2008/09.

As food businesses start to self regulate more, it is anticipated that this will enable officer time to be better focussed at improving standards spending less time undertaking lower risk inspections which at present must be carried out at specified intervals. Officers will be able to provide more assistance to high risk businesses and those that require guidance and advice, and also increasingly target those food premises that fail to meet minimum food safety standards.

Prior to a 'Scores on the Doors' scheme going ahead within Ryedale there is a great deal of preparatory work to be undertaken here and with

colleagues in the other North Yorkshire Authorities. The scheme will follow the preferred option to be recommended by the Food Standards Agency in March 2008. It is vital that all interested parties have confidence in information put onto the website and in achieving this consistency of work among officers is paramount. Having an ISO approved food quality management system in place and the checks required as a result, and peer review exercises etc. should ensure lack of consistency is not a problem.

8.0 OPTIONS

Not taking part in 'Scores on the Doors' scheme is an option but with an increasing number of authorities joining (West and South Yorkshire local authorities are already participating) and several authorities within North Yorkshire already committed, it is recommended that Ryedale District Council give support to the scheme.

9.0 RESULT OF OPTION APPRAISAL

For the reasons mentioned under 7.0 Report the scheme is recommended.

10.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Preliminary discussions have already been held with the principal external service provider to supply a web portal to contain the information. The Northumbria University Study (referred to earlier) reported that technology resources within authorities could not deliver and sustain such a service effectively. The service will cost £2,500 per annum (starting in 2008/09) but this cost will very likely diminish as the use of mobile phones by customers to obtain information increases and the resultant charges help support the cost of the system. Initially it is proposed to fund this initiative through savings from this year's budget and then through re-profiling of the existing budget.

-11.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Many local authorities that are operating schemes indicate that they have received far fewer complaints or adverse enquires from businesses.

The Food Standards Agency has formed the opinion that it is legal to publish inspection reports (in terms of data protection etc) but the inspection report should not contain any personal or confidential information.

12.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS N/A

13.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

Once approval to participate in the scheme is given a policy document will be prepared which will provide detailed guidance to officers so that the scheme will be perceived to be in line with good practice, consistent and fair in operation.

14.0 CONCLUSION

The external service provider (mentioned under 10.00 above) had up to October received 5 million food hygiene requests this year with one Council who launched the service receiving 200,000 food hygiene rating requests on the first day.

The Northumbria University Study indicates that all the authorities interviewed felt it achieves the following objectives:

- it provides a means to enable the public to make informed choices about where to eat or purchase food;
- it encourages food businesses to be proactive in driving up food hygiene/safety standards;
- it enables the majority of Freedom of Information requests to be dealt with by directing the enquiry to the website;
- it promotes consumer choice with customer and peer pressure acting as an incentive for food businesses to drive up standards.

Background Papers: None

OFFICER CONTACT: Please contact Paul Crossley, Principal Environmental Health Officer if you require any further information on the contents of this report. The officer can be contacted at Ryedale House, Malton on 01653 600666 x 300 and email paul.crossley@ryedale.gov.uk .