

WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2021-22



Public Domain Image for food

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This plan was agreed by Wealden District Council on 21st July 2021 minute number CAB41/2021- CPH.



Views of Ashdown Forest and Hailsham duck pond

1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Food Service Plan is an expression of Wealden District Council's continuing commitment to Food Hygiene. The mission statement for this service is to

“Deliver an increasingly efficient and effective public health service which strives to promote and sustain a safe, prosperous community for businesses, residents and visitors.”

This plan has been prepared in accordance with paragraph 2.4 of the Food Law Code of Practice (2021).

- 1.1. The purpose of this plan is to set out how Wealden will deliver Official Controls for hygiene of foodstuffs within its area.
- 1.2. This service plan notes paragraph 6 of The Regulators Code (published April 2014), which states that “Regulators should ensure their approach to their regulatory activities is transparent”.
- 1.3. The food hygiene service of Wealden is informed by the principles of:
 - Proportionately (in applying the law)
 - Consistency (of approach)
 - Targeting (of enforcement action)
 - Transparency (about how we operate and what those regulated may expect)
- 1.4. The food hygiene service contributes to Wealden's corporate plan of 2019 - 23 aim to “protect and enhance Wealden's high-quality natural environment” and to “encourage healthy business practices through strong consistent regulatory advice, support training and enforcement”.
- 1.5. Wealden has adopted an Equality Policy and the Environmental Health Service conducts equality monitoring.
- 1.6. The Better Regulation Delivery Office placed food hygiene at Number 5 in their five priority regulatory outcomes for England (November 2011).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. WEALDEN– Profile

Population: 161,475 (ONS UK 2019)

Area: 835 Km²

Wealden District is mainly a rural area with five urban centres: Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield. As a District Council, Wealden is concerned only with food hygiene; the food standards and feeding stuffs function is delivered by East Sussex County Council (Trading Standards).

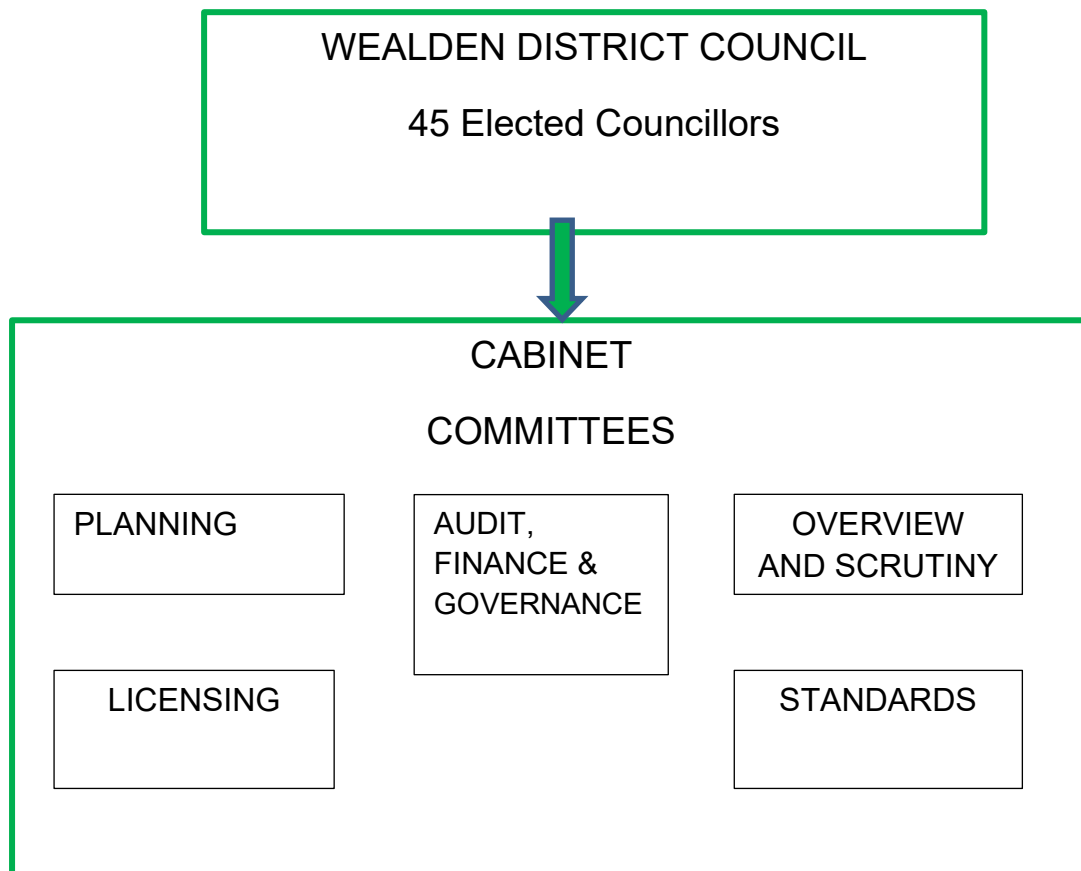


Map of the Wealden District reproduced by kind permission of Ordnance Survey

The District of Wealden contains small pockets of rural, coastal and urban living. The food businesses within the District reflects this mix.

Small and micro businesses form a fundamental part of the Wealden economy as almost 90% of businesses in Wealden employ less than nine people.

3. WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL STRUCTURE



Decisions on food hygiene matters are delegated to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder Cllr Philip Lunn.

Cllr Lunn makes decisions on policy matters regarding food hygiene and communicates these to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Policy, Planning and Environmental Services.

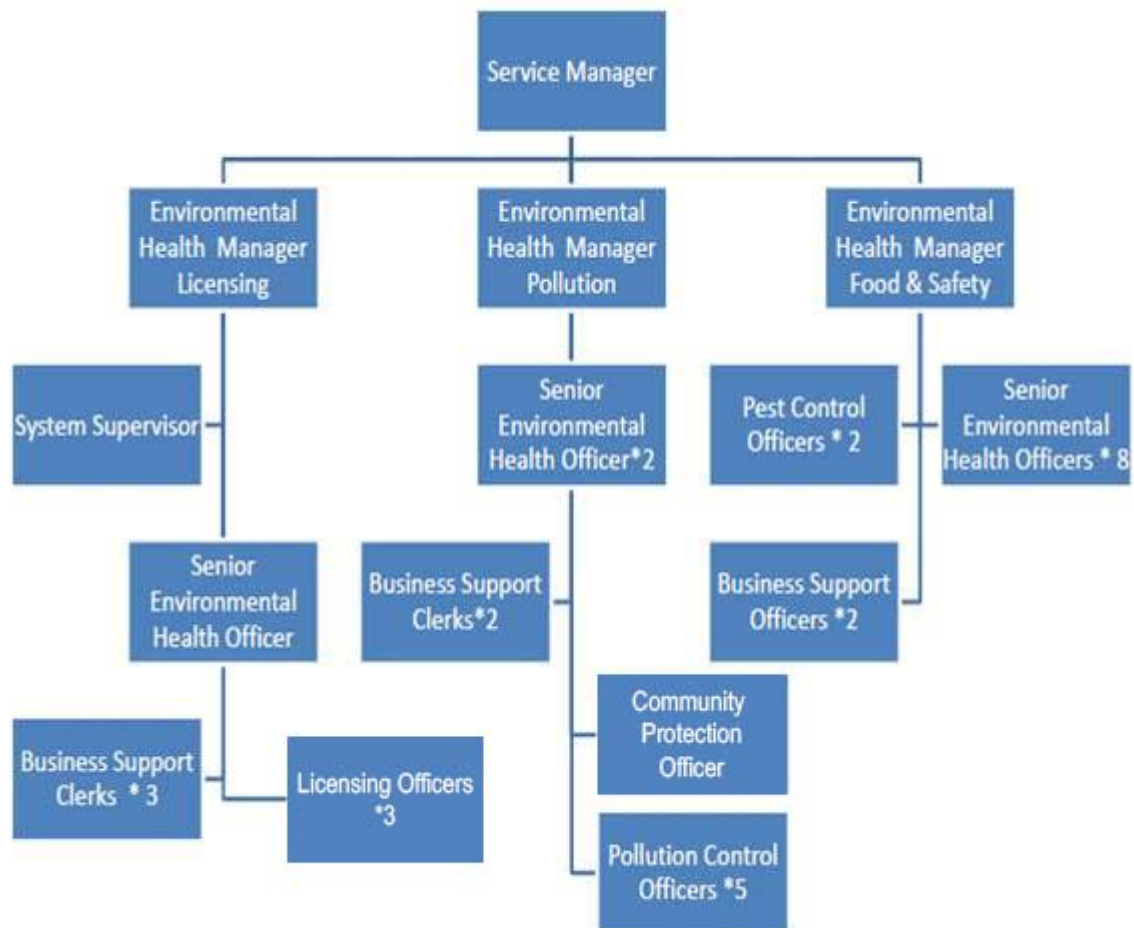
The senior management structure of Wealden District Council is shown on the chart below. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Policy, Planning and Environmental Services, Isabel Garden, directs the Head of Environmental Health accordingly, Richard Parker- Harding.

3.1 WEALDEN SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



3.2 WEALDEN DISTRICTCOUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE



This chart shows the structure for the Environmental Health service for Wealden District Council. A total of 21.75 full time officers are engaged in Environmental Health work for Wealden at an annual cost of £1,076,010.

3.3 FOOD HYGIENE STAKEHOLDERS

The food hygiene service of Wealden District Council is carried out by the members of the Food and Safety team, as part of the shared environmental health service and interlinks with Public Health England, neighbouring local authorities, Food Standards Agency and other bodies as shown below.



3.4 The function of the team, in addition to food hygiene, is to advise on health and safety at work including Covid 19, investigate notifiable infectious diseases, regulate skin piercing, licence holiday caravan sites and residential mobile home sites, licence kennels and catteries, provide pest and dog control service and to risk assess private water supplies.

3.5 The service operates from the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea and Vicarage Lane, Hailsham from 8.30am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday. Planned out-of-hour work is undertaken and emergency calls are taken on our behalf currently by Cornwall Council on 01424 787868.

3.6 Any complaints can be submitted to foodhs@rother.gov.uk, or calls will be taken by customer services on 01323 644222 or 01424 787000.

3.7 Enforcement Policy

Wealden Council adopted an Enforcement Policy for the shared Environmental Health Service in October 2014, Cabinet Minute 14/31 and is available at [EHEnforcementPolicy.pdf \(wealden.gov.uk\)](#)

The Environmental Health service standards and this service plan can be found at [Environmental Health Service Standards - Wealden District Council - Wealden District Council](#)

4. FOOD HYGIENE IN WEALDEN DISTRICT

The profile of food businesses operating within Wealden district on 5 April 2021;

WEALDEN	
Caring Premises	146
Distributor	32
Hotel	57
Manufacturer	78
Mobile	81
Pub/Club	166
Restaurant /Cafe	247
Caterer	311
Retailer	153
School/college	76
Small retailer	89
Supermarket	25
Takeaway	71
TOTAL	1532

Each year the numbers of food businesses varies - the total of 1532 is higher than previous years which have been about 1500. This increase is the explosion of micro food businesses that occurred during the lockdown months.

The service does not inspect each food business annually, instead it inspects according to risk and performance to make sure that the highest risk and the lowest performers receive the most attention.

4.1 FOOD HYGIENE INTERVENTION RATINGS

The Food Standards Agency sets out a numerical scheme which local authorities must use at each food hygiene inspection and this is used to determine;

1. When the next intervention will be (date)
2. What the next intervention will be (inspection/partial inspection/alternative)
3. Food hygiene rating

This numerical assessment of the business is based on the hazards, risks and controls. These figures are entered into the database and the next inspection is planned. The same information is used to create the food hygiene rating to inform customers of the general standards within a food business.

A business that produces high risk food with good controls is seen once between twelve to eighteen months. This intervention frequency will increase to once in six to twelve months if the business serves a vulnerable group (elderly/infirm/young). Any business with poor controls will require the most attention as decided by the inspecting officer. All food hygiene inspections fall into one of these categories;

1. Category A and B (92+; 72+)

These are the highest risk food businesses and must be subject to an inspection, partial inspection or audit at least every six months (A) and every 12 months with (B). It is Wealden's policy that these businesses are fully inspected.

2. Category C (52-71)

These medium risk businesses will receive an inspection, at eighteen months, if they are broadly compliant it will be a partial inspection; otherwise a full inspection will be made.

3. Category D (31+)

Category D premises are subject to an intervention every 24 months.

Where they are rated 30 or 40 for "type of food", these businesses must be subject to inspection, partial inspection or audit. Where the premises is rated less than 30 for type of food etc. it can alternate between official controls. Wealden District Council inspects all category D's, partial inspections for those that are broadly compliant.

4. Category E (0-30)

The FSA advice on these lowest risk food businesses is that they could have an intervention every 36 months. It is Wealden DC policy that these lowest risk food businesses are subject to a physical inspection or an alternative enforcement questionnaire every 36 months. It is important to retain observation of these lowest risk businesses to prevent minor issues becoming major over a long intervention interval.

4.3 FOOD HYGIENE RATING SCHEME

The food hygiene rating scheme was adopted by Wealden in April 2011 to provide information to consumers on the hygiene, structure and management of a food business. At the end of an inspection the business is issued with one of the window stickers below. In England the display of window stickers is not required by law. All food hygiene ratings are published at <http://ratings.food.gov.uk/authority-search-landing/en-GB/107>

Business with a 3, 4 or 5 are deemed to be broadly compliant with food hygiene legislation and those with ratings of 0, 1 or 2 have failed.



In April 2020 - 99 % of food businesses in Wealden were broadly compliant with food law up from 98.3% in April 2019.

FOOD HYGIENE RATINGS April 2020

	April 2021	April 2020
0	0	0
1	2	4
2	1	0
3	70	94
4	232	246
5	980	937
Broad Compliance	99.8%	99%

The very high performance for 2021 cannot be taken at face value. Food hygiene inspections were made during the lockdown months by appointment. This was to protect the health and safety of both officers and businesses.

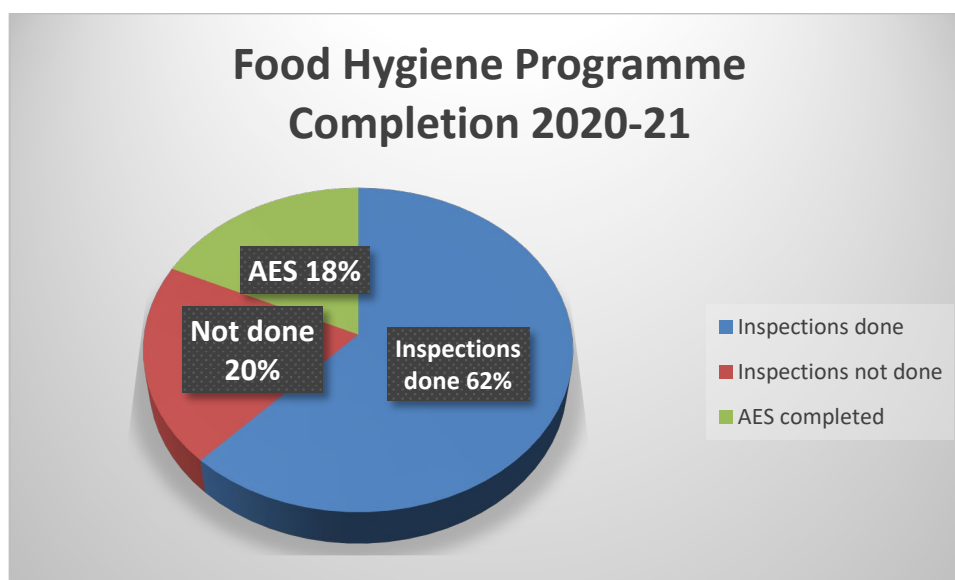
4.4 FOOD HYGIENE INTERVENTIONS PERFORMANCE 2020 -21.

A total of 719 food businesses were due for inspection in 2020 - 21 and 16 carried forward from 2019-20. Of the 719 due 447 inspections were completed giving 62% performance against the programme. Further 6 of the 16 inspections carried forward from 2019/20 were not completed. These were the luncheon elderly clubs which temporarily ceased trading during the pandemic.

There are two distinct reasons for this performance - many food businesses had to close during 2020/1 and inspections could not be done – the officers of the Food and Safety Team were responsible for enforcing the Covid 19 restrictions in all types of businesses throughout 2020 and 2021.

As planned in 2019 - 20 an alternative enforcement strategy (AES) was adopted for 140 of the very low risk businesses. These businesses were contacted electronically and asked to complete an online survey about their hygiene arrangements. The majority gave satisfactory answers; 10 did not respond and required further follow up.

There was a dramatic increase in the numbers of micro food businesses operating from domestic properties during the lockdown months. On 5th April there were 80 such micro businesses awaiting their first inspection. As these are generally low risk (cake makers, preserves and chutneys) their initial inspection must be fitted around high-risk work.



The priority for the Food and Safety team during 2020/1 was the advice and enforcement of the Coronavirus Closure Regulations 2020, and in the latter half of the year the new export certification system for exported food.

5. SERVICE DELIVERY 2021 - 22

Wealden is committed to providing a full food hygiene service.

For the year 2021 - 22 the total number of food premises due for inspection is 652 plus 272 outstanding from 2020 -21. These inspections are categorised as follows;

Category A	2
Category B	66
Category C	124
Category D	241
Category E	219
Carry Forward 2020/21	272
Total	924

The food hygiene interventions are conducted to ensure the food business meets the requirements of food hygiene law. It is Wealden's policy that these planned inspections are given priority and that 98% of this planned programme will be completed. A separate risk assessment of resources to complete this work is detailed at appendix 1.

5.1 OUR APPROACH

It is Wealden's policy to make food hygiene inspections without appointment. The Environmental Health Officer (EHO) will identify themselves to the food business owner (or person in charge) before starting the inspection. The intervention will be conducted in accordance with the Food Law Code 2021 in particular:

- The hazards and risks will be assessed
- The controls will be verified
- The businesses validation will be examined
- The findings will be discussed
- A report of visit form will be left
- A follow up letter may be issued

Environmental Health Officers also deal with licensing and health and safety issues during a food inspection.

5.2 POOREST PERFORMERS

In Wealden DC food businesses scoring 0-2 will receive more attention and support to continue to raise standards. This means that inspectors will make compliance checks (revisit) within three months of the initial inspection. If significant improvements have not been made Inspectors will take enforcement action. Those businesses which

show little or no improvement may be advised to contact a training contractor for tailored coaching, which they will have to pay for.

5.3 SEASONAL BUSINESSES

There are seasonal food businesses within the Wealden district who trade only between June and September or in early December. These businesses are inspected according to the Food Standards Agency food hygiene intervention scheme (as 4.1 above). However, those categorised as C are scheduled for an intervention at 18 months which may fall within their closed period. In these cases, it is policy to bring these inspections forward so they are inspected when they are trading.

5.4 UNRATED BUSINESSES

Unrated (unknown) food businesses will be subject to an inspection within 28 days of identification in accordance with Food Law Code. Surveillance is conducted for food business previously unknown to the authority on specifically on social media. A series of social media messages were made during 2020/1 asking for whistle blowers to come forward and this campaign resulted in several genuine reports of unregistered food businesses. This campaign will be repeated in 2021 – 22.

5.5 REVISITS

Revisits are made to any businesses for public health purposes and/or where significant statutory requirements were found on the programmed inspection. Food Law Code specifies where 15 or higher is awarded for hygiene/structure or 20 for confidence in management, a revisit will be made.

Revisits are always made after the expiry of statutory notices and to any businesses rated 0-2 FHRS. Revisits may also be made at the discretion of the EHO.

Food Businesses with 3 or 4 who wish to improve their score may apply for a revisit without charge after a three-month period or with charge once the work has been completed.

[Food Hygiene Rating Scheme - Food Businesses - Wealden District Council - Wealden District Council](#)

5.6 SERVICE REQUESTS

Complaints about foodstuffs, food businesses or handlers can be made directly to Environmental Health by emailing foodhs@rother.gov.uk or by telephone to 01323 443322.

We do not accept anonymous complaints, full contact details will be asked for, which will be kept confidential. The team will observe the shared service complaint investigation policy to give a first response to a service request within 5 days and complete the investigation within 90 days. In 2020 -21 Wealden investigated 61 requests for service regarding foodstuffs and food businesses.

5.7 NEW BUSINESSES

One hundred and ninety-one (191) new food businesses opened in Wealden in 2020-21. Each of these businesses was given advice and guidance on both food hygiene and safety matters.

Every new food business is obliged to register with their local authority and this form is available on our website along with full advice on starting up a new food business at <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/safe-food-and-healthy-workplaces/starting-a-food-business/>

5.8 SAMPLING

Wealden Council samples food to ensure it is clean and safe to eat. Food samples are taken and sent to Public Health England in Porton Down for examination.

In 2020 -21 there were two distinct sampling campaigns – ready to eat salads and processed chicken products. The concern with ready to eat salads is that E. coli and other disease-causing bacteria can be present, mainly due to poor handling. In 2020/1 there was a nationwide outbreak of Salmonella, which was linked to processed chicken products. A total of fourteen visits were made to select food samples in 2020-21. Salmonella contamination was found in half the chicken products sampled and these were subject to an FSA recall notice. The salads were generally satisfactory.



Pictures showing food samples labelled and ready to be packed into transport containers for collection by Public Health England.

5.9 PRIMARY AUTHORITY

Primary Authority allows businesses to be involved in their own regulation. It enables them to form a statutory partnership with one local authority which then provides robust and reliable advice for other local regulators, to take into account when carrying out inspections or addressing non-compliance. Wealden acts as a primary authority for one food business. Wealden complies with the primary authority principle by checking the appropriate website before conducting food hygiene inspections and noting any assured advice or inspection plans.

5.10 BREXIT and IMPORT/EXPORT of FOOD

Since 1st January 2021 certification of food before export into Europe is required. This means that every consignment of food must be inspected and certified by an Environmental Health Officer before export. This is a distinct issue for those businesses exporting food from Wealden into Europe. There are a handful of businesses that regularly make such exports – each of these businesses were given detailed advice. Some were exporting products that were highly processed and are exempt from certification and others had animal products that had to be certified by another agency. Environmental Health Officers are only authorised to certify for fish and egg products – not meat or dairy.

There is one major company in Wealden who exports food outside the European Union every week. Environmental Health Officers must sign health certificates for this exporter weekly. In 2020 -21 a total of 762 such certificates were issued to accompany the food consignment to its destination. The food businesses pay for this service.



Health Certificates printed signed and ready for dispatch

5.11 NOTIFIABLE DISEASES

In 2020 -21 Wealden received 228 notifications of infectious diseases from Public Health England. From January 2021 we began investigating cases of Covid 19 that test and trace could not contact. These notifications must be followed up promptly to prevent further spread of the disease. For Covid 19 Environmental Health Officers attend the home address, for food poisoning officers contact cases within 24 hours by phone and less urgent cases contacted by post, in accordance with PHE guidelines.

Disease	2020 -21	2019 -20
Campylobacter	191	177
Covid 19	18	0
Salmonella	10	16
Cryptosporidium	0	9
Hepatitis E	1	5
E. coli 0157	10	3
Legionnaires Disease	0	3
Shigella sonnei	0	2
Paratyphoid	0	1
Others	14	9
Total	244	225

5.12 FOOD ALERTS

Food hazard warnings are issued by the Food Standards Agency and are responded to in accordance with the Food Law Code 2021 and with written procedure. There were no food alerts for Wealden District Council action in 2020 - 21.

5.13 ADVICE FOR FOOD BUSINESSES

- i. Wealden Council offers a range of business advice through the website at [Business Support - Wealden District Council - Wealden District Council](#)
A business support leaflet is available in hard copy or electronically to all and includes health and safety advice for business.
- ii. Advice is available for those thinking of starting a new business on the website at [Starting up a business - Wealden District Council - Wealden District Council](#) Should more detailed guidance be required, Environmental Health Officers will do so on request
- iii. The Wealden business efocus magazine gives a wide range of business advice [Business Support - Wealden District Council - Wealden District Council](#)

- iv. The Environmental Health service webpages provide food hygiene advice for new start-up businesses at [Starting a Food Business - Wealden District Council - Wealden District Council](#)
- v. The Environmental Health service has prepared specific health and safety advice on safe re opening of businesses during the Covid 19 pandemic at [Support and advice for businesses during the covid 19 pandemic - Revised May 2021 - Wealden District Council - Wealden District Council](#)
- vi. Free to download posters have been created by the Environmental Health team available at [Signs to advise customers and staff of Social Distancing requirements - Wealden District Council - Wealden District Council](#)



- vii. Throughout the pandemic regular update emails were sent to every registered food business via gov.uk. Updates were also sent on the implications for food businesses of EU exit electronically through the gov.uk website.

6. RESOURCES

Budget 2021/22	
Total cost	£431, 424
Employee Costs	£175,586
Supplies and Services	£11,430
Staff	3.6 FTE

The specific monies allocated to the following areas are as below:

Sampling budget	£9948	With PHE not Wealden
Legal Action	£1,000,000	For general council disasters and emergencies – not specific to food hygiene

The number of full-time equivalent staff working on food hygiene, including supervision and management, for 2020 -21 is 3.6, authorised food officers are named below;

Environmental Health Officer	Additional Qualification	Level Authorisation	Level Authorisation
		Inspection	Enforcement
PIPER Richard	EHORB Registration Env Health Degree	A-E	Full
WAKEFORD Claire	EHORB Registration Env Health Degree	A-E	Full
KANE Una	EHORB registration Lead Assessor Chartered EHP	A-E	Full
SIMMONDS Rachel	Env Health Degree EHORB Registration	A-E	Full
POWELL Jamie	Env Health Degree EHORB Registration	A-E	Full
WRIGHT Philip	Env Health Degree EHORB Registration	A-E	Full
WHITCOMBE Ann	Env Health Degree EHORB Registration	A-E	Full
PAGE David	EHORB Registration Env Health Degree Chartered EHP	C - E	Full

Other Officers, within the Environmental Health Department (but not within the Food and Safety team), who are authorised are as follows:

PARKER HARDING Richard	Head of Environmental Health	Full Authorisation
EDWARDS Simon	Senior Environmental Health Officer	Full Authorisation
RANDOLPH Mark	Senior Environmental Health Officer	Full Authorisation
MINNS Greg	Senior Environmental Health Officer	Full Authorisation
BEAUMONT Cathy	Deputy head of Environmental Health	Full Authorisation

There are two pest control officers who provide professional advice to Environmental Health Officers and can give expert evidence to courts if required for an emergency closure of a food business.

6.1 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Annual appraisals are conducted to identify each team members training needs and these collected needs from a training programme. All attend external seminars meetings and training courses.

During 2020 – 21 team meetings were held every week online.

Those officers outside Food and Safety Team were invited to some online meetings to learn about new working procedures, specifically on export health certificates. Officers from outside the team do not conduct food hygiene inspections alone unless they have completed the required training and are up to date with FAST procedures and policies.

6.2 SUSSEX FOOD LIAISON GROUP MEETINGS

Wealden is represented on the Sussex Food Liaison Group by the Food and Safety Team Manager. This liaison work ensures that our enforcement activities are consistent with those of our neighbours.

In 2020 - 21 the food and safety team participated in one consistency exercise; these are blind tests designed to ensure that individual officers are consistent with scoring.

Wealden is represented on the CIEH Sussex Branch of the Food Study Group, and Public Health England meetings on infection control.

7. QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Each year Wealden Council's performance against this plan is measured, using all the specified targets, standards and any targeted outcomes within this plan. It will specify where there has been variance from the plan and the reason for that variance.

Any areas in need of improvement will be specified and an action plan put in place to implement their improvement. There is a significant backlog of food inspections. The FSA have yet to advise on this matter, but it is Wealden's intention to complete as many as possible.

The service subscribes to RIAMS, an on-line service, providing links to national advice and guidance for Environmental Health practitioners.



Picture of the telephone box on Milton Street Alfriston now in use as a mini library.

8. NATIONAL RECOGNITION

As part of the preparations for EU Exit, it was always known that the team would have a significant role in the health certification and export of fish from Rye to Europe. During the preparations in Autumn 2020 it became clear that many fishermen in East Sussex and Kent would not be able to access the new export system.

The exporters, Chapmans of Rye, worked with the shared Environmental Health Service of Rother & Wealden to establish an export hub which is open to all fishing communities on the South East Coast.

Fish from Sussex, Kent and Essex is collected by road, transferred to Rye where it is inspected and dispatched. One export health certificate is issued. This allows for rapid transit at the border control post and minimises the cost to all involved.

The establishment of an export hub for fish in Rye has attracted a lot of interest from central government departments and other local authorities. The success of the hub was noted in the EFRA report into Seafood and Meat Exports to the EU, published April 2021 at

[Seafood and Meat Exports to the EU - Committees - UK Parliament](#)



Photographs show – inspection of fish by EHO; prepared pallets of fish ready to be loaded; seal on vehicle ready to go.

CONCLUSION

This service plan has been agreed by Wealden District Council on 21st July, minute number CAB41/2021- CPH and is published on the Wealden District Council website.

9. CONTACTS

E-mail: foodhs@rother.gov.uk

Website: Wealden District Council

Telephone: 01323 644222 or 01424 787000.

Address: Vicarage Lane Hailsham East Sussex BN 27 2AX
Town Hall Bexhill on Sea East Sussex TN39 3JX



View of Wealden District Council Offices Hailsham

Appendix 1

Impact of Covid 19 – Risk Assessment of Impacts

Recovery

The Food Standards Agency has asked each local authority to make a risk assessment of their resources to determine ability to complete to recover the planned programme of work.

The issue here is the unknown demands that could be placed on the service in the coming year. The Director of Public Health (ESCC) has advised that he may need the assistance of qualified Environmental Health Officers from Wealden to assist in any local outbreak, in accordance with the Covid 19 local outbreak plan.

The Food Standards Agency recovery plan advises local authorities to resume physical food hygiene inspections it has yet to advise on the backlog.

RISK ASSESSMENT

HAZARD – Covid 19	Although the vaccine programme is well underway there are growing numbers of cases locally among younger people. Outbreaks are occurring in schools and colleges. It is not possible to predict the number of local outbreaks the DPH will ask for assistance.
HAZARD – Non completion of food hygiene inspections	Food hygiene standards fall creating another public health risk.
THOSE AFFECTED	All in Wealden
RISKS	Very high to public health from both Covid 19 and non-completion of food hygiene inspections.
CONTROLS – physical food hygiene inspections	Risk assessments have been prepared and sufficient PPE has been obtained but the precautions will make the visits significantly longer. Officers are required to assess Covid security measures within the business as well as food hygiene.

Local Outbreak Control-impact on food programme

The Director of Public Health has said that he may require qualified EHOs to assist with local outbreaks of Covid 19 associated with health or care setting, schools, children with special needs, prisons or secure establishments.

As this will be a priority the food intervention programme could be varied according to circumstances.

Should the resource demand be low (less than 0.5 fte) it should be possible to complete;

- A and B rated food businesses as physical inspections
- C rated food businesses as focussed physical inspections
- D and E rated food businesses as virtual inspections or alternative enforcement strategies.

Should the resource demand be medium (less than 1.0 fte) it should be possible to complete;

- A and B rated food businesses as physical inspections
- C rated food businesses as focussed physical inspections

Should the resource demand be high (less than 2.0 fte) the minimum achievable would be;

- A and B rated food businesses as physical inspections

An external contractor has been engaged to complete the majority of the 272 outstanding food inspections from 2020/1.