

 REPORT TO EXECUTIVE			
PORTFOLIO AREA: HEALTH AND WELLBEING			
Date of Meeting:		3/3/2003	
Public			
Key Decision:	No	Recorded in Forward Plan:	Yes
Inside Policy Framework			

Title: FOOD SAFETY PERFORMANCE

Report of: HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION SERVICES

Report reference: EPS.14/2003

Summary:

The report sets out options to improve food safety inspection performance.

Recommendations:

Members are recommended to note the options for improved performance and to consider the financial implications of increasing the establishment levels within the Food Safety Section.

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1. 2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

Food safety inspections have formed the basis of two reports to Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee, TC 226/02 and EP.04/03. Both reports

identified that the number of inspections undertaken was directly proportional to the availability of staff and that any staff reductions would have a significant impact on planned inspections.

2. The second report, EP.04/03, considered on 9th January, 2003, identified options to minimise the drop in performance. These included the funding of either an additional Environmental Health Officer or a specialist food safety technical officer post. Both of these options would effectively provide an additional resource to help ensure that an inspection level of around 87% could be achieved even where one post was vacant. At present a vacancy represents a 20% reduction in inspection performance.
3. A third option was the re-introduction of a sponsored student post which although not providing an immediate solution could provide the resource of a trained officer with local knowledge to fill any vacancy which occurs once they have qualified. Assistance in this respect would also help to address a national shortage of Environmental Health Officers.
4. Members of the Executive, at their meeting on 27th January considered the reference from Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee as agenda item EX 011/03. The decision of Executive was that the Portfolio Holder for Health and Well Being Councillor Bloxham, discuss the issue with the Head of Environmental Protection Services and report back on any options available to improve the situation.
5. Discussions have taken place and this report sets out the options available.

Options

3. Before considering options available to aid staff recruitment it is important to consider why current staff have left, or are considering leaving Carlisle. Whilst some have left for career progression or family reasons recent departures or applications for advertised vacancies have been due to salary levels. Over the years most Cumbria authorities have offered broadly similar salary packages, which have been comparable to National levels. Partially as a result of the shortage of Environmental Health Officers this picture has changed with many authorities paying more than Carlisle. Of particular concern however is the fact that three neighbouring authorities are paying higher salaries.

Recently two officers have applied for jobs in an adjoining authority and one was offered the post only to subsequently decline the offer. As part of the overall consideration of staffing within Environmental Protection Services current salary levels for Environmental Health Officers could be considered as a retention issue if future staff losses to neighbouring, high paying, authorities occur.

1. Regarding the capability of the Food Safety Section to achieve a continuing satisfactory performance even where a single post is vacant either through illness or the loss of a postholder, two options only present themselves as follows.
2. Additional suitably qualified staff within the Team would help ensure that

higher levels of performance could be achieved. This would apply to both statutory food safety and health and safety enforcement activity. Importantly it would also allow resources to be used in the Councils development, co-ordination and implementation of health and well being strategies within the Community and the public health agenda of the Primary Care Trust.

3. Suitably qualified staff may be either Environmental Health Officers, (EHO) capable of carrying out the full range of Environmental Health duties, or technical officers, who may be less well qualified and therefore only able to inspect low risk food businesses or carry out more routine tasks.
4. Nationally there is a diminishing pool of EHO's and falling numbers of students enrolling on Environmental Health degrees. Until recently, Carlisle regularly sponsored a student EHO and had usually been able to offer them a full time post at the end of their 4 year training. Funding for this was removed 2 years ago.

Financial Implications

3.0 The cost of the above options would be as follows (based on current salary levels and inclusive of on costs))

Additional EHO (SO1/2) £30,000 per year
 Technical Officers (AP 4/5) £22000 per year

Student EHO £10000 (per year) for 4 years

Each of the options would however have to be funded by way of a supplementary estimate as the existing resources of Environmental Protection Services are inadequate to cover such an expansion in personnel.

4. CONSULTATION

1. Consultation to Date. N/A.
2. Consultation proposed. NIL

5. STAFFING/RESOURCES COMMENTS

N/A.

6. HEAD OF FINANCE'S COMMENTS

1. LEGAL COMMENTS

N/A.

8. CORPORATE COMMENTS

N/A.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT

N/A.

10. EQUALITY ISSUES

N/A.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

N/A.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to note the options for improved performance and to consider the financial implications of increasing the establishment levels within the Food Safety Section.

14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

N/A.