

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting:

9th January 2003

Title: FOOD SAFETY PERFORMANCE

Report of: Head of Environmental Protection Services

Report reference: EP.04/03

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.

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Background

1. Following a report to Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21st November 2002, TC226/02, regarding the performance of Environmental Protection Services Food Safety Team, Members asked for a further report outlining options for maintaining and improving performance levels in the future.

1.1 The previous report made it clear that the ability of the Food Safety Team to meet targets set internally as well as by external agencies such as the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Health and Safety Executive, relies on the Team having an adequate number of suitably qualified staff at all times.

Options

2. The FSA and Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) are currently considering alternative enforcement strategies for those food businesses which pose the lowest risk to public health. The aim is to free up officer time to concentrate on higher risk businesses.

2.1 Implementation of any of their suggested strategies at Carlisle would remove less than 4 businesses per month from the inspection programme – having a minimal effect of available resources. Resources would still be required to deal with these businesses by alternative enforcement options.

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.

Recommendation

4.0 Members are recommended to note the options for improved performance and to consider the financial implications.