



**Service Delivery – Environmental Health
Food Safety Service Plan
2022 – 23**

Introduction

This Service Plan sets out how South Somerset District Council intends to provide an effective food safety service that meets the requirements of the Food Standards (FSA) Framework Agreement. It covers the functions carried out by authorised officers of the South Somerset Food Safety Team under the provisions of the Food Safety Act 1990, the Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 and relevant regulations made under the European Communities Act 1992.

Links to Corporate Objectives and Plans

The Council's priorities are set out in the Council Plan. The Plan, approved unanimously by Full Council in early 2022, sets out the vision and aims for the Council and how these are going to be delivered through areas of focus and priority projects. The current Council Plan covers the period 2023 to 2024.

The priorities for this service are linked to the most appropriate corporate theme, which during this plan's term will focus heavily on Economy and Covid recovery plan and Healthy, Self-reliant Communities.

The Council has a very clear framework that links together the Council's plans at all levels and allows both service teams and individuals to understand how their work contributes to corporate objectives.

The Transformation Programme

During 2018-19 the programme delivered a new Specialist – Environmental Health Team that now sits within the Service Delivery Directorate. Food safety is now managed within this Specialist team, with support from both Case Management and Locality Services. Service Delivery is about delivering efficient, customer focussed, professional and commercially-minded services to the Council's external customers and is aligned to the Council's ambitions, managing performance to meet desired outcomes.

The New Somerset Council

During December 2021 the Minister for Levelling Up Communities, Kemi Badenoch MP, set out a firm legal intention for the current two-tier local government administration in Somerset to be created in to a new single unitary council, to be called Somerset Council. The new Somerset Council will be operational on 1 April 2023 and a Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Programme has been set up to design and manage the transition. The programme will be fast paced and ambitious with focus on devolved decision making and services, use of technology to open-up council services and reducing duplication and red-tape with the aim to deliver efficiencies that can be invested in communities and high-quality public services.

Whilst the LGR programme unfolds it may be necessary for the service to switch its focus over to aspects of the change agenda. Should this occur there may be unforeseen impacts on the service's ability to reach its target to complete all interventions identified as due on the programme.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

It goes without saying the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been huge and it is clear there will be a legacy left for years to come. Since the first national lockdown the service found itself under extreme and sustained pressure; and with the additional loss of 50% of the team's Specialist resource impacting within the first 6 months there have been acutely demanding times for all involved in the service. However, the team's commitment and dedication to keeping consumers safe in the face of the seemingly endless challenges has been impressive and a humble note of thanks to all involved is expressed.

Covid-19 Recovery Plans

To date the Food Standards Agency has provided Local Authorities with regular communication regards its guidance and advice on delivery of official controls and related activities. The service has embraced the proposed Covid-19 Recovery Plans and associated milestones in assisting our passage out of a heavy backload of routine and reactive work and on towards something more manageable as the next couple of years progress. The plan also sets out an expectation that LAs move at a faster pace where there is an ability to do so. Again, the service has embraced this approach and pushed on where feasible.

Key issues for 2022-23

Priorities for the year include:

- Assisting the LGR workstreams to transition the service to the single unitary model.
- Support LGR transition workstreams with both Case and Locality Teams.
- To follow the FSA's guidance and advice on delivery of official controls during the Covid-19 recovery period.
- To assist the recovery of the local economy and communities post-Covid 19.
- To maintain current service levels accounting for reducing resources.
- Ongoing delivery of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.
- Continue research for a suitable mobile working solution.
- Continue supporting UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to review and update the Regional Single Case and Outbreak Plans.
- Continue membership of the Somerset Health Protection Forum.
- Supporting the management of the South Somerset Safety Advisory Group.
- Continue membership of the South West Regional Zoonoses Liaison Group.
- Supporting national food safety campaigns, including Food Safety Week.
- Continue membership of the Somerset Food, Safety and Health Group.
- Engage with and support the Heart of the South West 'Better Business for All' Partnership.
- Maintain overview of the Food Standard Agency's Achieving Business Compliance programme.

Service aims and objectives

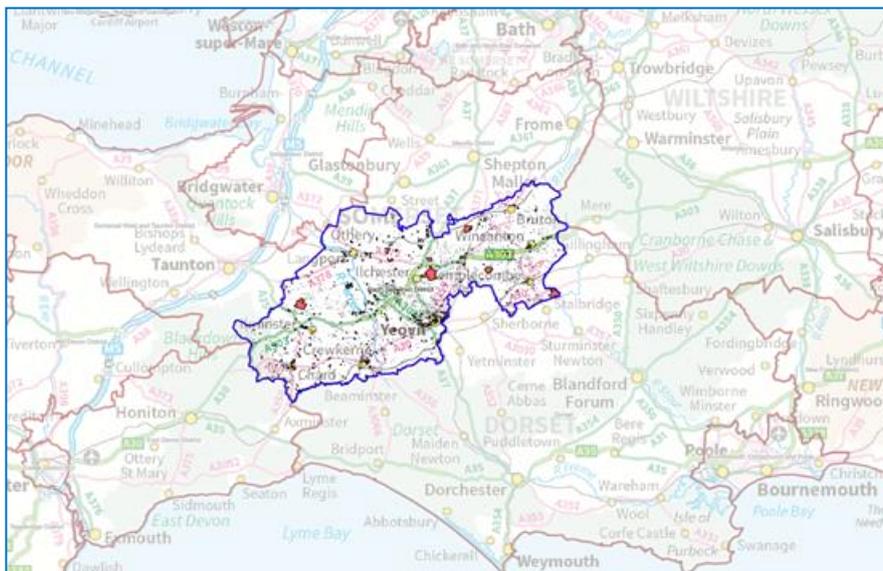
To ensure that all food and drink intended for sale for human consumption that is produced, stored, distributed, handled or consumed in South Somerset, is safe, hygienic and compliant with food hygiene legislation and that all food premises and food handlers comply with the Food Hygiene Regulations. This will be achieved through:

- Programmed inspections
- Targeted interventions
- Local delivery of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme
- Investigation of complaints
- Investigation and control of infectious diseases
- Sampling initiatives
- Advisory visits
- Promotional events
- Statutory consultation on relevant licensing and planning applications
- Other local authority actions

Background information

South Somerset is a large, mainly rural district council that borders Devon in the west, Wiltshire in the east, Dorset in the south. Some facts and figures about the District include:

Total Area	370 sq. miles
Total Population (approx)	163,000
Number of dwellings (approx)	71,400
Number of Parishes	121
Political Composition	39 wards returning 60 Members: 39LD, 13C, 6Ind, 1Green
Characteristic	Rural, with Yeovil & 9 other market towns
Adopted Model	Cabinet with leader
Main Towns	Population
Yeovil	43,000
Chard	13,000



Map data © Geosphere 2022

South Somerset is located in the County of Somerset and covers an area of 959 square kilometers. It is the largest of the five districts in the county. It consists of a mixture of both rural areas and a network of market towns. The main market town is Yeovil, and there are a further nine rural market towns including the larger centers of Chard, Ilminster, Wincanton and Crewkerne. A third of the population lives in the principal town of Yeovil and over 40 per cent live in settlements of fewer than 2,500 people.

South Somerset has a population of 163,000 that is expected to rise to around 180,000 over the next few years. The district has low-density rates at 1.7 persons per hectare which is half the national average. Seventy two per cent of the population lives in rural areas and 13 per cent of rural households do not have access to a car.

The population of the district has grown by one per cent each year over the last ten years and this is set to continue to increase. The proportion of elderly people is rising steadily with 25 per cent of the population over the age of 60 and a low number of people under nineteen compared to the national average. In the 2011 census 94.6% of the population described themselves as 'white British' which is well above the national average. The majority of new arrivals since 2007 are from eastern European countries with 91 per cent from Poland which is above the regional and national average. For further details and data on social, health and demographic trends in Somerset see the Somerset Intelligence website; <http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk/>

All interventions with businesses and members of the community are carried out with regard to the local authority's commitment to equality of opportunity for local people as stated in the Equal Opportunities Policy; <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/your-council/your-council-plan-and-strategies/equality-and-diversity/equality-act-and-our-responsibilities/>.

Organisational structure

Where expertise or facilities cannot be provided from in-house resourcing, provision will be made by outsourcing such requirements to specialist services capable of delivering for the needs of the day, for example, by engaging specialist laboratory services or expert witnesses, such as those provided by UKHSA's laboratory service at Porton Down, the Public Analyst Scientific Service, Food Standards Agency or Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

The service is also tasked with delivery of the Council's statutory health and safety enforcement function. Appropriately qualified, experienced and authorised staff within the service carry out these day-to-day health and safety functions alongside their food hygiene responsibilities.

Out of hours arrangements for food and public health emergencies are dealt with on a cascade basis. Calls are directed through to the Deane Helpline Contact Centre where they are screened and cascaded for response as deemed necessary.

South Somerset DC is supported by the UKHSA's South West Centre in its infectious disease role. Food examination support is provided by UKHSA's Porton

Food, Water and Environmental Microbiology Laboratory. Food analysis support is provided by the Public Analyst Support Service on an ad hoc basis.

Scope of the service

The Food Service is responsible for the enforcement of the Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 and the food hygiene legislation made thereunder. Officers of the Service also carry out health and safety and smoke-free interventions in a range of food premises. Interventions are also undertaken with the outdoor event industry throughout the year in support of the South Somerset Safety Advisory Group.

South Somerset carries out all functions relating to food safety matters, including:

- Carrying out interventions e.g. inspections, audits, surveillance sampling at food establishments.
- Providing advice to food business operators, including help on implementing food safety management systems.
- Operating inland imported food control at retail and catering establishments.
- Registration of food establishments.
- Identifying and assessing premises that require approval for specific food product manufacturing.
- Undertaking food sampling.
- Issuing export certificates.
- Investigation of complaints concerning food establishments and food handling practices.
- Investigation of cases of suspected and confirmed food poisoning.
- Local administration of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.

Demands on the food enforcement service

The service is delivered from The Council Offices, South Somerset District Council, Brympton Way, Yeovil, Somerset, BA20 2HT. Telephone 01935 462462.

The district also benefits from a network of localised offices;

<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/our-offices/>

As of 1st April 2022 the Council supports a total of 2111 registered food premises, of which 1684 are included with the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and subject to a programmed food hygiene intervention as per the table below.

FSA Categories	Totals
Primary Producer	7
Manufacturers & Packers	42
Distributors/Transporters	13
Supermarket/Hypermarket	33
Hotel/Guest House	60
Mobile Food Unit	99
Caring Establishments	142

Restaurants and Caterers - Other	382
Pub/Club	180
Smaller Retailers	213
Restaurant/Cafe/Canteen	236
School/College	130
Takeaway	97
Retailer - Other	50
Grand Total	1684

Of the 111 registered food manufacturers or packers, 28 have achieved approved status. Key food industries in the district are associated with the handling and production of dairy and meat products. These bring a variety of complex processes requiring officers attaining additional specialist knowledge and understanding. Officers within the food safety team have a high degree of expertise in this area of work, especially with the dairy industry.

The Council does not deal with high volumes of imported food as it is not a port authority, it does however maintain an eye on imported foods handled by specialist establishments. The Council continues to deal with seasonal work such as on-farm poultry slaughtering at Christmas and increased summer work related to the tourist industry and weekend music festivals, events and shows.

Although the number has been steadily rising in recent years, proprietors, whose primary language is not English, in general, operate less than 5% of food businesses. To assist this sector, food hygiene training courses have in the past been run in a variety of foreign languages.

In addition to businesses that form part of the programme, the local authority inspected approximately 158 new food businesses during 2021-22.

During the same period the local authority also dealt with a range of incidents and enquiries. These are set out in the following table.

Type of Incident / Action	Number
Food hygiene complaints	72
Food complaints	61
Home Authority/Primary Authority enquiries	0
FSA Food alerts for action	0
Training requests	0
Advisory visits	17
Infectious disease cases	302
Microbiological food sampling	125

All food premises are rated according to their level of risk, as defined by the Food Law Code of Practice. The risk rating determines the frequency and nature of the

interventions that are classed as official controls. The table below provides a summary:

Category	Totals	Intervention Type	Frequency
A	1	Full inspection; audit	6 months
B	62	Full inspection; audit	12 months
C: non-broadly compliant	5	Full inspection; audit	18 months
C: broadly compliant	275	Full inspection; partial inspection; audit	18 months
D	676	Full inspection; partial inspection; audit	24 months
E	861	Full inspection; partial inspection; audit; Alternative Enforcement Questionnaire	36 months

Service delivery

Food interventions

South Somerset aims to visit and inspect all premises over which it has enforcement responsibility on a regular basis. Intervention frequency is based on risk, which is determined by the inspecting officer using the food establishment intervention rating scheme set out in Chapter 4 and Annex 1 of the Food Law Code of Practice. All officers are issued with programmes of interventions that ensure all premises are regularly subjected to an official control based on priority and need. All available official controls, including inspection, monitoring, surveillance, verification, audit and sampling will be considered and carried out during a visit by an Officer. Other interventions, including information and intelligence gathering, as well as education, advice and coaching will also be considered depending on circumstances.

Traditionally the service has aimed to complete 100% of all interventions due each year. The Local Authority Enforcement Monitoring System (LAEMS) return for 2021-22 showed a 100% completion rate.

The resource allocation for 2022-23 is 5.0 full time equivalents (FTE), inclusive of time allocated to the service by the Lead Specialist, Locality and Case teams.

Alternative Enforcement Strategy (AES)

“Low-risk” establishments (category ‘E’) should be subject to an AES at least once during any three year period. The preferred surveillance option has traditionally been for a partial inspection visit with the aim of confirming relevant changes to the business food activities, along with assessment of hygiene conditions prevailing at the time. There are many benefits from taking this approach with low risk establishments, particularly in terms of maintaining assurances that the risk rating and Food Hygiene Rating score remains relevant.

The current AES applies to those establishments outside the scope of the FHRS. These businesses no longer receive a visit and are subject to a process of self-assessment questionnaire.

During the course of delivering the food safety service, officers may need to resort to formal action in some circumstances. Details of formal action taken in 2021-22 are set out in the following table:

Type of formal action	Number
Hygiene Improvement Notice	2
Remedial Action Notice	0
Suspension/withdrawal of Approval status	1
Emergency Prohibition Notice Prohibition Order	0
Seizure/detention of food	0
Simple Caution	0
Prosecution	0
Prohibition of people following prosecution	0

Enforcement policy

The Environmental Health Service adopts the principles laid down in the Regulators Code, which states that enforcement must be fair, consistent and equitable. The SSDC Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy outlines the enforcement options available for dealing with problems relating to non-compliance with the legislation: <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/services/environmental-health/environmental-health-enforcement/>.

Food complaints

Complaints about the hygienic condition of a food premises, or of the hygiene practices carried out, usually receive an initial assessment within 48 hours of receipt. Complaints about the safety of food usually receive an initial assessment as soon as practicably possible, usually within 24 hours of receipt. Our aim is that Those assessed as non-urgent complaints concerning food and food premises will be dealt with within 5 working days of receipt. Discretion will be applied when anonymous complaints are received.

Based on trends from previous years the likely demand on the service is expected to be 75-100 complaints involving the hygiene of food premises and between 80-100 complaints involving the safety of foods purchased. These are not evenly spread across the district due to the nature of shopping patterns and the concentration of retail food shops in Yeovil and the larger towns. There is no discernible seasonal pattern connected with complaints. The upward trends may be explained by factors such as the increasing numbers of food businesses registering with the service, along with an increasing awareness by consumers on how and where to complain.

Primary and home authority principle

The Home Authority Principle was developed by food and trading standards authorities to aid consistent enforcement. The scheme provides businesses with a home authority source of guidance and advice and provides a system for the resolution of disputes.

Alternatively, businesses can form a 'Primary Authority' statutory partnership with a local authority to assist with consistent enforcement. The guidance and advice the local authority provides must be taken into consideration by officers carrying out inspections and dealing with instances of non-compliance.

South Somerset DC fully endorses the Primary Authority principle.

Advice to business

The current policy of SSDC is to give advice to food businesses and the public on request in order to facilitate development in the food industry and domestic sectors. Our aim is to provide A full response to all enquiries within 5 working days of receipt. Officers follow guidelines for the time they should spend giving advice to business and in particular to new 'start-ups' and refurbishments to balance our roles as advisor and enforcer.

Generally 1 hour's advice would be given to a new start up business although there is discretion to provide more for particularly complex businesses. Officers are available to advise on any aspect of food safety and hygiene. Coaching in Safer Food Better Business is an integral part of the business support package

Information is available on the local authority website;
<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/services/environmental-health/food/>

Food inspection and sampling

A food sampling programme is produced every year which outlines the local authority's sampling strategy and approach to specific local and national demands.

The Somerset Health, Safety and Food Sampling Sub-Group co-ordinate the county sampling programme. The plan is developed by the group to incorporate priorities identified by LGR and the Food Standards Agency.

Microbiological examinations are undertaken by the Food, Water and Environmental Laboratory, Porton Down, Wiltshire. The baseline allocation for the period 2021-22 was 4018 credits and £6390. The allocation is subject to annual review. The allocation for 2022-23 has yet to be release but is expected to remain the same.

In 2021-22 the Food Safety Team took 134 food samples, 127 of which were reported as satisfactory with 7 unsatisfactory.

Sample reports notified as being unsatisfactory or borderline are followed up by the Specialist Officer. Action may range from over the telephone discussion with the business to help identify shortcomings, through to organising a follow up visit of the premises or production process. Follow up samples will usually be taken following any action taken by the business.

Other food samples are sent to the Public Analyst at Public Analyst Scientific Service, Wolverhampton for food testing. The analysis includes testing for food composition and contamination. Samples from food complaints are also submitted

for analysis. For the period 2021 to 2022, no food samples were required to be submitted for analysis.

Control and investigation of outbreaks and food-related infectious disease

The Food Safety team will investigate food-related infectious disease notifications in accordance with procedures agreed within the Public Health England South West Standard Operating Procedure for Single Cases of Infectious Disease. The target response to notifications of illness will be dependant on the severity of illness ranging from same day in the case of serious infections, e.g. E. coli, typhoid, to within two days for medium to low risk infections.

Investigation of outbreaks will be in accordance with the Outbreak Control Plan agreed with the Public Health England. The regional Outbreak Control Plan is currently under review.

The table below summarises the number of cases notified to South Somerset during 2021-22.

Disease	Number
Campylobacter	253
Salmonella	25
Suspected food poisoning	1
Norovirus	1
Hepatitis A	0
Shigella Dysentery	1
E. coli 0157	2
Cryptosporidium	11
Giardia lamblia	6
Leptospirosis	2

There were 6 outbreaks of illness investigated during 2021-22.

Food safety incidents

Food alerts are issued by the Food Standards Agency to relate information on national food issues to local authorities, the majority being for information only. Food alerts for action require officers to undertake a wide variety of courses of action dependent upon the issue at hand. During 2021 there were no national food hygiene alerts requiring action dealt with by the service.

Food alert information can be viewed here;
<https://www.food.gov.uk/news-alerts/search/alerts>

Liaison with other organisations

Environmental Health involves a number of stakeholders in the supply and operation of its food hygiene services including:

- UK Health Security Agency
- Somerset, Health, Safety and Food Group
- Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board
- The Food, Water and Environment Laboratory, Porton Down

- Heart of the South West Better Business for All Group
- Food Standards Agency
- Office for Product Safety and Standards

Food safety and food standards promotions

South Somerset DC participates in the Food Standards Agency National Food Hygiene Ratings Scheme. The scheme is designed to provide information about business hygiene standards to members of the public but is also a useful tool to drive up performance standards of food businesses.

Resources

Officer development

Lead Food and Authorised Officers must ensure they achieve 20 hours Continuing Professional Development each year. This can be split 10 hours on core food related subjects and 10 hours on other professional matters. CPD can be achieved in many different ways, including classroom taught training through to attendance on webinars or online courses.

Authorised Officers must undertake and regularly review their own competency and authorisation matrix as set out and advised within the Food law Code of Practice.

Support officers are not subject to minimum CPD hours requirements but must still receive relevant training appropriate to the activities they undertake.

Review

A review of this plan will be undertaken annually and a copy posted on the public facing website.