

Subject: Draft Food and Health Strategy

Status: For Publication

Report to: Cabinet
Council

Date: 2nd September 2009
7th October 2009

Report of: Director of Business

Portfolio

Holder: Environmental Services

Key Decision: Yes

Forward Plan / General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To implement a comprehensive consultation exercise for the development of a Food and Health Strategy for Rossendale and to note the Rossendale Food Forum Action Plan.
- 1.2 To obtain approval by Members of the Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2009-2010 as attached.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:-
- Delivering quality Services to our customers
 - Delivering regeneration across the Borough
 - Encouraging healthy and respectful communities
 - Keeping our Borough clean, green and safe
 - Promoting the Borough
 - Providing value for money services

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Food Standards Act 1999 gives the Food Standards Agency power to monitor and audit local authorities. The Framework Agreement provides the Agency with a mechanism for implementing its powers under this Act to

influence and oversee local authority enforcement activity. Following an audit, the Food Standards Agency make reports to individual authorities, including guidance on improving performance and require local authorities to publish these reports, and state what action they propose in response.

- 3.2 The Council was last audited by the Food Standards Agency in 2004 and is audited in part by the other members of Lancashire Food Officers Group annually.
- 3.3 The ultimate sanction for continuing failure to comply with the framework agreement is that the Food Standards Agency could strip this Authority of its enforcement powers and substitute an alternative Authority at this Council's expense.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 Food is vital for sustaining life and the quality and sufficiency of that food plays a large part in determining the quality of life of consumers. The food that is consumed is the outcome of a complex pattern of activities and influences involving farmers, importers, contract caterers, restaurants, advertisers, consumers and many others. Their decisions and actions have an effect on the types, quantities and quality of food eaten and therefore any action by Rossendale Borough Council in relation to food and health needs to impact on many parts of the food chain.
- 4.2 What we eat can make a big difference to our health and well-being. A poor diet can affect your heart, result in obesity, diabetes or nutrient deficiency. Unsafe food can result in food poisoning, both acute and chronic conditions, and allergenic reactions. Impurities in food can cause poisoning, physical damage, and even cancer. Consumers need information to help them make the best choices and, where they cannot check for themselves, they need to trust food agencies to ensure that they are being protected and can rely on the information available to them. Different parts of the community have different abilities to access healthy food for a range of reasons and this can cause health inequalities.
- 4.3 The following paragraphs identify a number of reports that have influenced the development of a Rossendale approach to food issues.
- 4.4 The National Consumer Council published a report in 2005 "Putting food access on the radar – how to target and prioritise communities at risk". This recommended that Local Authorities should identify areas where food access difficulties exist, assess the nutritional quality of food in local outlets and improve the quality of data about food premises.
- 4.5 The Government's White Paper "Choosing Health: making healthy choices easier" outlined the Government's commitment to tackling the causes of ill health and reducing inequalities, representing a shift in emphasis towards health promotion and prevention. The role of diet is an integral part of this as diet has a range of influences on people's health.

- 4.6 “Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: a Cross Government strategy for England”, was published on 23 January 2008 by the Cross-Government Obesity Unity, Department of Health and Department of Children, Schools and Families. This identified a number of key plans for immediate implementation. A toolkit was published in October 2008 to aid the development of local strategies.
- 4.7 In July 2008 the Cabinet Office published the results of a ten-month Strategy Unit project looking at food policy across Government. This found that issues concerning food production and climate change, local food production and production methods, wastage of food and poor nutrition required attention. The report also recommends that the Food Standards Agency takes forward work to make it easier for consumers to access food information and access healthier options and further work on the whole food chain approach to food safety risks.
- 4.8 The Foresight Report “Tackling Obesities: Future Choices – Project Report” published in 2007 estimated that about 28% of women and 33% of men in the UK will be obese by 2010. Similar trends are seen in children. The report sets out the key recommendations and actions of the Foresight Report and its relevance to local government. The publication of a survey in March 2008 by the School Food Trust described the rising level of obesity being fuelled by the ready availability to schoolchildren of fast food.
- 4.9 The North West Public Health Observatory issued a synthesis report in November 2008 that brought together policy, evidence and intelligence regarding the healthy weight in the North West population. This report highlights that although the most deprived populations in the North West have 1.6 to 1.8 times higher prevalence of obesity in children than the more affluent groups, “unhealthy weight” is a problem across the entire region and cannot be tackled by only targeting deprived areas.
- 4.10 Ambition Lancashire – Strategic Vision for the future of Lancashire 2005-2025 contains ambitions 93-95 which, amongst other things, relate to the need to tackle the underlying causes of ill health, reducing health inequalities and helping people make good lifestyle choices about diet.
- 4.11 Rossendale’s Local Strategic Partnership, in its Vision for Rossendale “Rossendale Alive”, identified the Health Theme as one of their priorities for working together to improve the live of local people. The strategic objective is to make Rossendale a place where vulnerable people are looked after and all residents can look forward to a long healthy life. Making the right food choices will contribute to the achievement of this objective. The food industry contributes in many ways towards the local economy and is a significant local employer.
- 4.12 The Food Standards Agency has recently completed a consultation exercise on its Strategy for 2010 to 2015. Their draft purpose is to ensure “Safe Food and Healthy Eating for all”. Their draft objectives are as follows:-
Objective: Improve food safety –
- Imported food entering the UK market is safe to eat
 - Food produced or sold in the UK is safe to eat

- Consumers make informed choices about food safety when eating outside the home, prepare and cook food safely at home

Objective: Improve the balance of the diet –

- Retail products and catering meals are healthier
- Retailers, manufacturers and caterers provide the nutrition information consumers need to make healthier choices
- Consumers understand about food and a healthy diet, prepare and cook healthy meals at home.

An overall objective is to operate a proportionate, risk-based regulatory regime relating to food, which is clear about the responsibilities of food business operators and others, and which generates public confidence in food. The final Strategy is due for publication early in 2010.

- 4.13 A Food and Nutrition Alliance is currently being convened by the Department of Health Northwest to develop a workplan in support of current food and health priorities and take forward the ongoing monitoring of the Food and Health Action Plan. These priorities will be reflected in a refresh of the North West Food and Health Action Plan, anticipated for completion in Summer 2009.
- 4.14 In order that Rossendale can formulate a relevant and comprehensive Food and Health Strategy not only is it essential to make sure we are in line with national and regional policy and objectives but also to involve local organisations, businesses and consumers. It is therefore proposed that a consultation exercise be undertaken between September and December 2009, during which time the national and regional priorities should also become apparent.
- 4.15 A report published by the Healthcare Commission and the Audit Commission entitled “Are we choosing health? The impact of policy on the delivery of health improvement programmes and services (July 2008), made the recommendation that “objectives at all levels must be backed up by effective delivery plans. These plans need to be developed with local partners and communities, based on evidence of effectiveness, with identified resources and investment in building capacity and capability. They must have clear accountabilities for delivery and appropriate information systems to track and report on progress”.

FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT SERVICE PLAN

- 4.16 The Food Standards Agency oversees local authority food law enforcement activities and has set standards for achievement. The Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement requires that a Food Law Enforcement Service Plan forms the basis of activities and that this plan, in a prescribed format, is approved by Members.
- 4.17 Service Plans play an important part in ensuring national standards and priorities are delivered locally and that they are delivered in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice published by the Food Standards Agency.
- 4.18 This year is the second year of implementation of a range of interventions in line with the revised Code of Practice published in June 2008. Previously food

inspections have been very prescriptive with the local authority's performance being assessed by the number of inspections carried out in a financial year. This has now changed and performance is now assessed by the number of food businesses (as a percentage) that comply with food safety law. This is represented by a National Indicator - N1 184. This allows flexibility to use different enforcement activities depending on compliance and the degree of risk involved.

- 4.19 The service is continuing to progress the Recipe 4 Health Award to food businesses in Rossendale in partnership with Lancashire Trading Standards Service. The award recognises good standards of food hygiene and compliance with food standards. In addition the award encourages the provision and promotion of healthy options, alcohol and allergen awareness and environmental factors. Food premises achieving the award receive a certificate and window sticker to display at their premises.
- 4.20 The implementation of a project to reduce salt usage amongst takeaway customers in partnership with Preston City Council was completed in 2008-2009. This involved promotional information and the distribution of saltshakers with fewer holes, free of charge, to targeted businesses in Rossendale. Evaluation of this project is to take place later in 2009.
- 4.21 Safer Food Better Business is a documented food safety pack provided nationally by the Food Standards Agency. Food premises are legally required to have a documented food safety system and the Council is promoting the implementation of this pack in all food premises in Rossendale. Following the announcement by the Food Standards Agency that funds were available to progress the implementation of Safer Food Better Business, the Council, in partnership with Burnley and Hyndburn Borough Councils, Blackburn with Darwen Council and Food Northwest submitted a bid to the Food Standards Agency in 2008 to provide coaching (with bi-lingual support where requested) to ethnic minority businesses in the area. This bid was successful and delivery to businesses was completed in March 2009 in Rossendale. This promoted compliance with food law in non-compliant businesses, a proportion of which were ethnic minority businesses. This addresses the possible negative impact on this group that was identified in the Equality Impact Assessment carried out on The Food Law Enforcement Service Plan in 08/09. The project was managed by Food Northwest and consisted of one to one coaching which was offered to businesses that have been identified as being likely to benefit from such support.
- 4.22 The Scores on the Doors initiative has progressed with the National Scheme having been announced in 08/09, however the Food Standards Agency has launched a comprehensive review of the scheme and its practical operation. It will be many more months before the details of the scheme are known and before it is launched. Rossendale Borough Council is proposing to undertake some research in readiness for implementation when the scheme is finally launched as agreed by Cabinet in 2008/09.

ROSSENDALE FOOD FORUM

- 4.23 Work with Rossendale Food Forum will also continue, particularly with regard to the implementation of initiatives funded by the Communities for Health initiative and the participation by the Environmental Health Department in activities contributing to the wider public health agenda in Rossendale. East Lancashire PCT allocated funds to support work on reducing health inequalities with £20,000 allocated to Rossendale Food Forum for work in relation to food and health. The outline action plan for 2009-2010 is attached to this report as Appendix 2.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF FOOD

- 4.24 In addition to the direct health effects of food, the environmental effects of food production, preparation and transport are becoming increasingly important. In times of economic pressure, food waste, the consumption of energy by agriculture and transport is a considerable cost to the environment. Water scarcity is increasing with an estimated 50% of the UK's vegetables being imported, many from water stressed nations. Biodiversity is stressed through uniform agricultural practices. Urbanisation and increasing population are both putting pressure of food production capacity.

ROSSENDALE FOOD AND HEALTH STRATEGY

- 4.25 Appendix 3 shows the scope of the possible Food and Health Strategy, which would form the framework for the proposed Strategy. Annual Action Plans would then be developed and implemented by the various agencies and organisations involved. The final Strategy would be informed and prioritised by feedback from consumers, businesses and other agencies and implemented from March 2010 onwards. Achievements would be reported to and monitored by the Health & Wellbeing Theme Group of the Local Strategic Partnership as well as through this Council's performance management systems.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 5.1 The implementation of the Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2009-2010 will be met from existing budget resources

6. MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1 The Food Law Enforcement Service Plan is an essential component of the work the Regulatory Service carries out. The approval of the annual plan allows the team to be clear on areas of focus for the forthcoming year and to also report on last years achievements / meeting of targets.

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

- 7.1 No HR implications.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2009-2010 has been produced in accordance with the requirements of the Food Standards Agency and the Food Law Code of Practice and requires the approval of Members. It becomes a public document therefore showing businesses and consumers how food law enforcement is undertaken.
- 8.2 Food quality and availability impinges on people's lives in many ways. By bringing the different aspects of food together in one overall strategy, those involved can work better together to the benefit of consumers and businesses alike.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 9.1 That a consultation process be undertaken to develop a comprehensive and prioritised Food and Health Strategy for Rossendale by March 2010.
- 9.2 That the Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2009-2010 be approved.
- 9.3 That the Rossendale Food Forum Action Plan 2009-2010 be noted.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

- 10.1 A comprehensive consultation exercise will be carried out during the period September – December 2009 to include local agencies, organisations, communities and businesses with the intention of ensuring its completion by March 2010 and which will incorporate the outcome of the NW Food and Health Action Plan and the FSA Strategy consultation.

11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Community Impact Assessment required	No – to be completed in parallel with the consultation.
Is a Community Impact Assessment attached	No

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required	No
Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required	No

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Putting food access on the radar – how to target and prioritise communities at risk. National Consumer Council. 2005. 2. Choosing health: making healthy choices easier. Department of Health. 2004 3. Healthy weight, healthy lives: a cross Government strategy for England. Department of Health & Department of children, schools and families. 2008 4. Tackling obesities: future choices – project report. Foresight Report. 2007. 5. Synthesis report. North West Public Health Observatory. 2008 6. Ambition Lancashire – strategic vision for the future of Lancashire 2005 – 2025. The Lancashire Partnership. 7. Rossendale Alive; Our sustainable community strategy 2008 – 2018. 8. Are we choosing health? The impact of policy on the delivery of health improvement programmes and services. Healthcare Commission & Audit Commission. 2008 	<p>Environmental Health Service Stubblee Hall Stubblee Lane Bacup Lancashire OL13 0DE</p>