

## FOOD HYGIENE RATING

[food.gov.uk/ratings](http://food.gov.uk/ratings)

Introducing the national 'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme' in Three Rivers District Council - Briefing note for Members, portfolio holders and council leaders

### What is the purpose of this briefing note?

- Support from elected Members is being sought for Three Rivers Council to migrate from the local "Scores on The Doors Scheme" to the new national 'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme' (FHRS).
- This note provides information about the FHRS – it explains in brief what this national scheme is, why and how it was developed, progress on its rollout, why this Council might wish to migrate to this, what support the Food Standards Agency (FSA) will provide, what the benefits are for local consumers and for local businesses, and the potential impact on Council resources.

### What is the national 'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme'?

- The FHRS, which is for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, is a local authority/FSA partnership initiative - it is key to the FSA's strategic objective: safer food for the nation.
- Like the Scores on The Doors Scheme, it will help consumers choose where to eat out or shop for food by giving them information about the hygiene standards in food premises at the time they are inspected to check compliance with legal requirements, and through this, will encourage businesses to improve their standards.
- The overarching aim is to reduce the incidence of food-borne illness and the associated costs to the economy – around one million people suffer from food poisoning every year at an estimated cost to the economy of £1.5 billion.
- Restaurants, takeaways, cafés, sandwich shops, pubs, hotels, supermarkets and other retail food outlets, as well as other businesses where consumers can eat or buy food, will be given a hygiene rating as part of the scheme.
- There are six hygiene ratings on a simple numerical scale ranging from '0' (urgent improvement necessary) at the bottom to '5' (very good) at the top.
- Consumers can access ratings at [food.gov.uk/ratings](http://food.gov.uk/ratings) and businesses will be encouraged to display stickers and certificates showing their rating at their premises.

### Why & how was the FHRS developed and what progress has been made in rolling it out?

- Three Rivers has been operating the "Scores on The Doors" scheme since 2007 – this has been popular and, like similar schemes operating in local authorities across the UK, our experience suggests that it has been successful in encouraging businesses to improve hygiene standards.
- Our 'local' scheme and those of other local authorities vary in a number of key respects and local authorities, consumers, and the food industry all told the FSA in a major public consultation in 2008 that they wanted a single national scheme.
- The FHRS was developed collaboratively through a Steering Group involving local authorities, the Local Government Group, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, consumers, the food industry, the Better Regulation Executive and the Local Better Regulation Office.
- The distinctive FHRS branding is based on the findings of research with consumers about what they find easiest to understand and use.
- The FSA has an on-going programme for developing the IT system for publishing ratings to ensure that it has the functionality needed by local authorities and is as easy as possible for consumers to use – this includes working in partnership with Transparency Data, a company that has a number of years of experience of providing a similar service to local authorities.

- The FHRS, which was launched formally in November 2010, is backed by the Government, and the aim is that it will be up and running in all local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in time for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics.
- Increasing numbers of local authorities are committing to it and, by the end of March 2012, it is anticipated that over 65% will be operating the scheme or preparing to launch it.

#### **Why should Three Rivers DC migrate to the national scheme?**

- Although the local Scores On The Doors scheme has been successful, there are additional benefits of operating the national model.
- Having a single scheme operating in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will help to ensure consistency for businesses and clarity for consumers across local authority boundaries.
- The scheme will be supported and promoted nationally by the FSA – see below.

#### **How will the Food Standards Agency support the scheme?**

- It is providing a free IT platform (with helpdesk support) for publishing ratings.
- It is covering the cost of certificates and stickers for businesses.
- It is providing grant funding for local authorities to cover the costs of preparatory activities necessary prior to launch.
- It has established a 'Priorities Fund' to cover the costs that authorities may face from unexpectedly high levels of re-visit requests from businesses – this will provide insurance for the period in which the FHRS is bedding in and likely demand for re-visits becomes clearer.
- It has organised and funded consistency training for local authority food safety officers.
- It has issued the FHRS 'Brand Standard' which provides advice and guidance to local authorities on implementation and operation of the scheme.
- It has produced a 'Communications Toolkit' that includes advice and guidance on promoting the scheme locally, including case studies and template press releases.
- It is providing template materials for use with businesses and consumers and leaflets to explain what the scheme is about.
- It is working with local authorities to promote the scheme locally to raise awareness among consumers and businesses and will promote the scheme on a national basis.

#### **What are the benefits to local consumers and local businesses?**

- For consumers, the national promotional activities will raise awareness and understanding of food hygiene ratings and will help them to use the scheme, and they will be able to easily compare one business with another not just within their own area but also further afield.
- For businesses, they will have reassurance that they are being treated fairly and consistently with their local competitors and with competitors more widely. All businesses, no matter the size or nature of their operation, should be able to achieve the top rating.

#### **What are the resource implications for the Food Safety Team?**

- The scheme is based around the planned food hygiene intervention programme in order to minimise any burdens on the Food Safety Service.
- Given the support being provided by the FSA – see above - the set-up and on-going costs are minimised.
- If evidence emerges that operation of the mechanism that allows businesses to request a re-visit when improvements have been made is significantly affecting planned intervention programmes, the FSA will ask the Steering Group to consider again the way that the safeguard operates.