

**REPORT FROM:** HOUSING, HEALTH AND ENGINEERING SERVICES  
MANAGER

**TO:** POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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## **CHARGING FOR SUPPORT AND ADVICE TO FOOD BUSINESSES**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To seek approval to introduce cost recovery charges to introduce a Food support and advisory service for new and existing local food businesses to improve food hygiene practices across the borough.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council be recommended to:-

- (1) Agree to the Housing, Health and Engineering Service charging for bespoke Food Safety advice for new and existing food businesses.
- (2) Agree a fee of £60 per hour plus VAT is set from the 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2019.

### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) When a food business starts trading the first contact they have with the Environmental Health Team is a formal food hygiene inspection. To help food businesses to comply with the law from the outset, improve their food hygiene practices we would like to offer this bespoke service.
- (2) To enable us to recover a cost for work over and above our statutory function.

### **ISSUE**

The Governments "Better Business for All" initiative sets out to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses, promote dialogue between businesses and regulators and to improve the perception that businesses have of regulators. So the Environmental Health Commercial team has considered how it can provide an improved advisory service to local food businesses

All new food businesses in the borough are required to register with the local authority. Once registered the businesses are subject to an initial visit usually within 28 days of opening. Businesses will then receive regular inspections as set out in guidance from the Food Standards Agency.

There is no requirement for a food business to be inspected before it opens. Often businesses open their doors to the public and the owners have not received any food handling training, their preparation and processes are inadequate. The premises are not suitable with kitchens and storage areas not appropriately designed to meet legal requirements.

The first contact with the Environmental Health officer can often feel quite confrontational and lead to the owners having to spend a lot of time and money on works to their premises to comply with the basic requirements of food hygiene legislation.

Recently we have seen a rise in proactive businesses asking for advice before they open their premises. Officer will spend time giving advice to these businesses. However, there is no statutory duty for the Environmental Health team to do this. In being helpful, resources are diverted away from statutory routine food inspections. However, we know that in giving this advice at the outset can save a significant amount of time at the next inspection as the business is already compliant. This also results in a good officer customer relationship being formed.

There are problems with this informal approach as some of the businesses that we advise never start up and others whilst accepting free advice from their regulating authority go on to seek advice and pay a consultant for the same advice as if the fee validates the advice.

We are proposing to introduce a food advisory service for new and existing businesses which will provide bespoke advice from qualified and experienced frontline Environmental Health Officers. The advice will be tailored to the business needs. We are proposing to offer this service at a charge of £60 plus VAT per hour or part thereof and will take place at the convenience of the food business operator. It is anticipated that advisory visits will last for two hours.

There will still be a need for food businesses to have regular unannounced food hygiene inspections from an officer in the Environmental Health Commercial team. In order to split the guidance and the enforcement roles the unannounced visits will be carried out by a different officer.

Both new and existing businesses will be able to take advantage of the service. The aim is to give people who are new to running a food business a head start towards compliance with the myriad of food legislation. It is also intended that food businesses that are receiving poor scores under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and need help to improve will benefit from this bespoke advice and improve their practices to gain higher rating. It is also hoped that existing businesses that are looking to grow their businesses and have complex food hygiene queries will access the service.

For those businesses that require cursory advice, they will still be able to speak to an officer or obtain the information from our website and the associated links.

In providing this charged service The Housing, Health and Engineering Service aims to:

- a) Improve the relationship between businesses and regulator
- b) Save businesses money by helping them to get things “right first time” before opening
- c) Reduce the number of revisits to food businesses
- d) Increase the confidence of the food business operator

- e) Promote business success and economic growth in Pendle

## **IMPLICATIONS**

**Policy:** The Councils fees and charges policy will need updating to take account of these changes.

**Financial:** The payment will be made online.

**Legal:** Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 gives local authorities the power to charge for a service which is not a statutory function.

**Risk Management:** None arising from this report.

**Health and Safety:** None arising from this report.

**Sustainability:** None arising from this report.

**Community Safety:** None arising from this report.

**Equality and Diversity:** There is no perceived impact on end users.

## **APPENDICES**

None

## **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None