



Title	Food Service Plan 2025-2026
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Emma Gee, Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
Report author	Katie Heath, Principal Environmental Health Officer, Food & Safety
Lead Councillor	Cllr Rachel Eden – Education & Public Health
Council priority	Deliver a sustainable & healthy environment & reduce Reading's carbon footprint
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That Members note the content of the statutory Food Service Plan for 2025-2026

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report sets out the updated Food Service Plan for the period 2025-2026 (Appendix 1). The Food Service Plan is a statutory requirement for all Local Authorities who undertake official food controls and is detailed within the Food Law Code of Practice set by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The Food Service Plan outlines the Local Authorities commitment to development of the food service.
- 1.2. The FSA set a standard template for the Food Service Plan which must be drawn up in accordance with the FSA Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls by Local Authorities. The Food Service Plan must include qualitative and quantitative performance reviews of delivery against previous plans and outline how national priorities and standards will be addressed and delivered locally. The Food Service Plan serves to assist Local Authorities in aligning with the principles of good regulation, focus on key delivery issues, provide an essential link with corporate and financial planning, set objectives, manage performance and provide information on service delivery to key stakeholders.
- 1.3. The Local Authority must put in place arrangements for the regular review and update of the Food Service Plan. We find it useful to complete this on an annual basis after the close of year figures have become available (End of April).
- 1.4. It was recommended in a previous FSA Audit that the Food Service Plan be presented to Members.
- 1.5. This Food Service Plan outlines the Food Services key achievements for 2024-2025 and outlines service objectives and work plans for 2025-2026.
- 1.6. The Food & Safety Team would like to draw particular attention to its enforcement achievements in 2024-2025. These are detailed within the Food Service Plan at para 6.4.4 and demonstrates a significant increase in the number of voluntary closures, seizure, detention and surrender of food and Hygiene Emergency Prohibition (formal closures). The authority also initiated legal proceedings under food hygiene legislation

against a persistently non-compliant business and has increased the number of written warnings issued for both food hygiene and food standards in comparison to recent years. The authority has had a number of high-profile enforcement matters publicised throughout the year including condemnation of a large quantity of illegal meat products which gained national attention.

- 1.7. The authority has worked hard throughout the year to realign with the requirements of the Food Law Code of Practice (FLCOP) and has inspected a high percentage of high-risk premises (category A-D). As detailed in Table 1, below, the authority has completed 100% of A and B premises inspections for food hygiene, 99% of C rated premises and 97% of D rated premises. We have however fell short of delivering our targets to inspect our lower risk, E, premises. The authority was unable to realign with the requirements of the Food Law Code of Practice (FLCOP) during 2024-2025. The current backlog is due to a loss of officers in the team in Q3 and Q4, secondment to the Arcus Management Information System (MIS) project and ongoing issues with the implementation of the Arcus MIS.
- 1.8. The authority has continued to liaise, throughout 2024-2025, with the FSA's Performance Management Team. Despite ongoing concerns throughout the year the authority has now provided an enhanced Improvement Plan, detailing how we will realign with the FLCOP and complete all due official controls for food hygiene by the end of 2025-2026. The FSA was encouraged by the authority's performance and annual returns submitted for 2024-2025 and the authority performed better than it expected. The FSA is satisfied with the authority's plans and has acknowledged the hard work of the Food & Safety Team for its progress to date. A copy of the Improvement Plan can be found at Appendix 2.
- 1.9. The Food & Safety Team currently have 4.73 FTE vacant (including an apprenticeship level post) and is working hard to address and overcome these challenges as detailed in appendix 2. An update on the team's recruitment position can be found at 3.1.11. These challenges will need to be overcome to realign with the requirements of the FLCOP and deliver all due/overdue food hygiene interventions for 2025-2026. There is additional work that falls within the remit of the Food Service which is priority and falls outside the scope of the Food Service Plan. Further details on this area are detailed within the Food Service Plan (Appendix 1), including full details on the total number of inspections that are due/overdue.
- 1.10. The Food Service Plan makes reference to Dark Kitchens, these are businesses that operate without a customer facing premises and supply food direct to the final consumer through online aggregators. Known dark kitchens operating within Reading are registered with the authority and undergo the same level of inspection scrutiny as any other registered food business. The authority also seeks to investigate any information or intelligence provided about these businesses, whether currently registered or not. As they provide food direct to the final consumer their food hygiene rating score is also displayed publicly online. Nationally the central competent authority, the Food Standards Agency, liaises with the online aggregators to try and achieve compliance and high standards of hygiene across the businesses they represent.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The FSA is an independent Government department responsible for protecting public health and consumers' wider interests in food. Part of their role is to ensure that local authorities comply with the 'Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls by Local Authorities'. The Agreement details:
 - That publicly available local service plans to increase transparency of local enforcement services should be published (i.e. the Food Service Plan).
 - agreed food law enforcement standards for local authorities.
 - enhanced monitoring data with greater focus on inspection outcomes and which provides more detailed information on local authority performance.
 - an audit scheme aimed at securing improvements and sharing good practice.

- 2.2. The Framework Agreement recognises that all Food officers should be correctly authorised, and a documented procedure must be in place for the authorisation of officers based on qualifications, competence and in accordance with the Food Safety Act Code of Practice and centrally issued guidance.
- 2.3. Food Officers carry out inspections of food premises, undertake food sampling, investigate complaints about food premises including infectious diseases or food poisoning cases. Environmental Health Officers consider the hygiene of food premises (including operating the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme) and ensure that food is microbiologically fit and safe for consumption while Trading Standards and Environmental Health Officers consider food standards. Food Standards includes ensuring food is described accurately and not in a misleading manner as well as ensuring food is not chemically contaminated.

3. The Proposal

3.1. Current Position:

- 3.1.1. As part of the Framework Agreement, the Council submits monitoring data to the Food Standards Agency, this is carried out bi-annually. Monitoring data is used to form the basis of the Food Service Plan and review of the previous year's performance. It also informs the forthcoming targets and Key Performance Indicators (KPI).
- 3.1.2. The Food Service Plan 2025-2026 outlines that within the Borough there are approximately 1,611 premises producing, retailing or serving food. There was a further increase of 12% in 2024-2025 of the number of new food business registrations within the borough.
- 3.1.3. Throughout 2024-2025 the Food Service focussed its resources on carrying out priority work in line with internal key performance indicators and to address our most longstanding overdue premises. Details of achieved inspections in 2024-2025 and remaining inspections that have been carried over into 2025-2026 can be found in sections 3.1.14, 3.1.15, 6.4.2 and 6.4.3 of the Food Service Plan. Table 1, below, provides an overview of the completed inspections in 2024-2025 and the number of targets that were met. A comparison against the previous year 2023-2024 is also provided. Overall, the authority considers that it has completed 84% of the total due inspections in 2024-2025.

Table 1

Objective	Priority/Source	Target Set (2024-2025) (%)	Achieved (2024-2025) (%)	Met/Not Met (2024-2025)	Target Set (2023-2024) (%)	Achieved (2023-2024) (%)	Met/Not Met (2023-2024)
Inspection of Food Hygiene Premises risk rated A (due/overdue)	Corporate KPI Food Law Code of Practice	100 100	100	Met	100 100	100	Met
Inspection of Food Hygiene Premises risk rated B (due/overdue)	Corporate KPI Food Law Code of Practice	80 100	100	Met	80 100	89	Met ¹
Inspection of Food Hygiene Premises risk rated C	Food Law Code of Practice	100	99	Not Met	100	63	Not Met
Inspection of Food Hygiene Premises risk rated D (overdue)	Food Law Code of Practice	100	97	Not Met	100	38	Not Met
Inspection of Food Hygiene Premises risk rated E (overdue)	Food Law Code of Practice	100	51	Not Met	100	3	Not Met
Inspection of Food Standards Premises risk rated A	Corporate KPI Food Law Code of Practice	100 100	100	Met	100 100	100	Met
Inspection of Food Standards Premises risk rated B (due/overdue)	Food Law Code of Practice	100	45	Not Met	100	45	Not Met

¹ There were no remaining B's awaiting inspection at the end of March 24 that were open, trading and available for inspection.

Inspection of Food Standards Premises risk rated C (due/overdue)	Food Law Code of Practice	100	44	Not Met	100	34	Not Met
Unrated (newly registered) Food Hygiene Premises	Corporate KPI Food Law Code of Practice	70 100	92	Met Not Met	70 100	47	Not Met

Key –

Risk Rating A – These are the premises presenting the highest risk to consumers either from the methods of processing, distribution reach and clientele served, poor levels of compliance or a combination of the above. Food Hygiene premises risk rated A require an intervention/inspection every 6 months. For Food Standards this is every 12 months.

Risk Rating B – the risk rating is again determined through scores awarded under the categories of processing methods, distribution, clientele served and level of compliance. For food hygiene those premises rated B require an intervention/inspection every 12 months.

Risk Rating C – for Food Hygiene these premises require an inspection every 18 months.

N.B. The risk rating categories are set nationally by the FSA in the Food Law Code of Practice.

- 3.1.4. Please see paras 6.4.2 and 6.4.3 of the Food Service Plan for further details on inspections completed in 2024-2025.
- 3.1.5. From the total number of inspections due and overdue in 2024-2025 the Food Service achieved 70% of the total number of Food Hygiene Inspections due and 41% of the total Food Standards Inspections due. These numbers do not account for premises that have subsequently been closed during the year or new food business registrations received. Considering the number of outstanding premises that were not inspected and including the number of premises that have closed or changed hands and subsequently re-registered as a new business the authority views that it completed 84% of its total due interventions for food hygiene.
- 3.1.6. The breakdown of food hygiene ratings of food premises in the borough as at 30 April 2025 is:

Food Hygiene Rating	Descriptor	Number of Premises
5	Very Good	865
4	Good	258
3	Generally Satisfactory	138
2	Improvement Necessary	30
1	Major Improvement Necessary	22
0	Urgent Improvement Necessary	2

Awaiting Inspection		56
Exempt from scheme		94

N.B. The information in this table has been obtained from our upload to the food hygiene rating website. The total number of premises recorded with food hygiene ratings does not correlate with the total number of food business premises within Reading. Not all premises on our register fall within the scope of regular inspection and are considered outside of scope, these premises do not have a food hygiene rating. It is not currently possible to compare the list of premises within this table and our premises register due to the database.

- 3.1.9 The Authority has responded reactively in line with the Food Law Code of Practice requirements and has received 382 recorded food related service requests in 2024-2025 including, but not limited to, food incidents and alerts, food hygiene complaints and food standards complaints.
- 3.1.10 The Food & Safety Team has carried out an increase in enforcement activity throughout 2024-2025; 64 food related notices have been served. Enforcement activity includes closing of premises that present an imminent risk through service of a Hygiene Improvement Notice or Voluntary Closure, Detention, seizure and destruction notices for contaminated food and service of Hygiene Improvement Notices or Imported Food Notices for non-compliant premises/food. A breakdown of the notices served can be found in para 6.4.4 of the Food Service Plan.
- 3.1.11 We have gone out to advert to fill the vacant posts within the team to bring the establishment up from 4.22 FTE to the 8.95 FTE (maximum allocation). Interviewing is scheduled for mid-July, and we anticipate posts being substantively filled by mid-October, where interviewing is successful. In the meantime, the team has authorisation to increase the number of contractors allocated to clear the remaining backlog of food inspections and maintain our progress. Fully resourcing the team will provide greater resilience to meet the food intervention requirements and wider work remit of the team.

3.2. Options Proposed

- 3.2.1. The Local Authority is required to deliver all official controls as detailed within the Food Law Code of Practice. The Authority has continued to not meet this requirement in 2024-2025 and the FSA escalated their involvement to stage 2. The FSA has identified two significant areas where further improvement is required. These areas are:
 - a) Resolve shortfall of resources and deliver the required official controls, with particular regard to Food Hygiene, under the FLCOP.
 - b) Address issues with the MIS to enable accurate reporting

In response and as required by the FSAs escalation the Authority has produced a detailed improvement plan to address these areas. The improvement plan can be found at Appendix 2 of this report.

- 3.2.2. The Food Service Plan identifies that there remains a deficit of resources to undertake all work allocated to the Food Service. The full remit of the Food Services work is outlined in Appendix 5 of the Food Service Plan and identifies that with all posts filled there remains a deficit of resources to complete all required work. Officers delivering the Food Service are also responsible for delivering a wider remit of work including sports ground safety, health and safety enforcement, accident investigation, special treatment licensing and infectious disease investigation. We will continue to mitigate this, and find efficiencies, working with the FSA to develop ways of working within available resources.
- 3.2.3. We are continuing to engage with a single contact point at the FSA, and continue working and engaging on the food service plan and improvement plans.

3.2.4. The Food Service will continue to prioritise the following key pieces of work which align with the Council's corporate objectives:

- Carry out a planned inspection programme focussing on high-risk activities first and foremost which keep consumers safe, whilst supporting the business to improve.
- Continue to operate a reactive food hygiene and standards sampling programme to support interventions carried out within Reading's premises and ensure that the food sold is safe to eat and not misleading to the consumer whilst supporting wider national programmes to achieve this across England.
- Continue to advertise our paid advice service for food hygiene and standards within our local community and Reading based businesses.
- Improve digital access to our Food Service through our webpages and enable interaction through social media platforms.
- Undertaking a review of officer authorisations in line with a larger corporate piece on delegations and enforcement to ensure that all officers are appropriately and correctly authorised to carry out their remit of work.
- Ensure that all officers are appropriately qualified, trained with documented competency in line with Food Law Code of Practice.
- Ensure that the service works to correct and up to date standard operating procedures to ensure consistency and to work within the parameters of the Food Law Code of Practice and Practice Guidance.

3.3. Other Options Considered

3.3.1. The Food Service has a number of other responsibilities beyond delivery of Food Hygiene and Food Standards Services, this includes but is not limited to investigation of infectious disease, health and safety accidents, sports ground safety work at our designated stadium and regulated stand and registration and inspection of Special Treatments. A number of these work streams are also high priority to ensure the safety of residents and visitors to Reading. A full breakdown of the Service's work responsibilities can be found in Appendix 5 of the Food Service Plan.

3.3.2. The Service continues to risk assess incoming and existing work to focus resources on priority matters.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1. The Food Service Plan 2025-2026 supports the Council's Vision 'To help Reading realise its potential – and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its successes at its core. The Service Plan supports and aligns with the following corporate priorities and the Food & Safety Team Plan has prioritised work activities around these:

Promote more equal communities in Reading	Providing advice to existing and potential food businesses. Investigation of food safety, labelling and composition complaints Investigation of allegations of food borne illness and outbreak management. Management of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and encouraging higher food hygiene ratings through the re-rating process.
Secure Reading's economic and cultural success	Providing advice to existing and potential food businesses. Providing a paid advice service for complex and bespoke business needs.

Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce Reading's carbon footprint	<p>Undertaking food hygiene and standards inspections, revisits to non-compliant premises and enforcement action where necessary.</p> <p>Investigation of food safety, labelling and composition complaints</p> <p>Investigation of allegations of food borne illness and outbreak management.</p> <p>Management of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and encouraging higher food hygiene ratings through the re-rating process.</p> <p>Providing advice to existing and potential food businesses</p> <p>Encouraging the adoption of good hygiene practices at all stages of the food chain</p>
Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children	<p>Undertaking food hygiene and standards inspections, revisits to non-compliant premises and enforcement action where necessary.</p> <p>Investigation of food safety, labelling and composition complaints</p> <p>Investigation of allegations of food borne illness and outbreak management.</p> <p>Management of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and encouraging higher food hygiene ratings through the re-rating process.</p> <p>Providing advice to existing and potential food businesses</p> <p>Encouraging the adoption of good hygiene practices at all stages of the food chain</p>
Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future	<p>Developing our social media and web presence to ensure our services are accessible to all.</p>

4.2. In delivering these priorities, we will be guided by the following set of principles:

- Putting residents first
- Building on strong foundations
- Recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities
- Involving, collaborating and empowering residents
- Being proudly ambitious for Reading

4.3. Full details of the Council Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the Council's website - [Council plan - Reading Borough Council](#). These priorities and the Council Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. The environmental or climate implications arising from the Food Service Plan 2025-2026 or its implementation is 'Net Nil'. Consideration has been given to the potential implications that could arise from this Plan and there are no additional points outside of general Council working practice that apply.

5.3. The most significant activity from the Plan is inspection activity. The Food Service have access to pooled bus passes and a large number of premises are based within Reading Town Centre where inspections can be carried out by foot. In general, use of public transport and travel by foot or bicycle is encouraged over the use of personal or pool vehicles. Interventions are recorded on paper which requires a copy to be left at the premises at the time of the intervention. The Food Service Plan supports the wider request for mobile working solutions which will reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

5.4. A Climate and Impact Assessment has been completed and can be found at Appendix 3.

6. Community Engagement

6.1. There is no requirement to consult the community on the Food Service Plan.

7. Equality Implications

7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and can be found at Appendix 4 to this report. Agreement to and implementation of the Food Service Plan 2025-2026 does not have a differential impact on; racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

8.1. The work of the Food Service contributes to positive public health outcomes by ensuring that food businesses operating in the borough are required to comply with relevant food law and are safe places for residents and visitors to dine. The Service investigates incidents of infectious disease, complaints, and food incidents to ensure that businesses are legally compliant and do not pose a risk to consumers. Where businesses are found to be non-compliant a staged enforcement approach is undertaken to reach compliance. The Service also undertakes health and safety investigation work to reduce the risk to employees and visitors' health, safety in welfare, within business.

8.2. The Food Service Plan 2025-2026 has due regard for the relevant legal provisions, Food Law Code of Practice, and other statutory guidance. The Food Service Plan comments upon upcoming regulatory changes where applicable Work streams commented on within the Food Service Plan are prioritised in accordance with public health implications.

9. Legal Implications

9.1. The Food Service Plan is written in accordance with the nationally agreed Framework Agreement with the FSA. No delegation is required to implement the recommendations of this report or the Food Service Plan. The Plan sets out how the authority will meet its statutory obligations. There has been no change to the Public Protection Enforcement Policy or Food Enforcement Policy since consultation with the Legal Team in May 2025.

9.2. These legal comments have been agreed by Alison Beynon.

10. Financial Implications

10.1. The Food Service Plan sets out the service budget and resources required to deliver the Council's statutory services. There are no changes to agreed Revenue budgets as a result of this report, all costs will be delivered within the Approved Revenue budget.

10.2. The revenue Budgets arising from running the service are set out below for information:

	2023-2024 £000	2024-2025 £000	2025-2026
Employee costs	542	527	523
Other running costs	39	39	40
Expenditure	581	566	563
Income from: Fees and charges	-24	-24	-24
Other income	-2	-2	-2
Total Income	-26	-26	-26
Net Cost	555	540	537

10.3. There are no capital implications arising from implementation of the Food Service Plan or operation of the Food Service.

10.4. The current resource allocation does not permit full delivery of the requirements of the Food Law Code of Practice and other work allocated to the Food & Safety Team. The Team is therefore focussed on delivering an effective service, focussed on risk, within the approved budget provision.

10.5. These Financial Implications have been agreed with Stephen MacDonald Strategic Finance Business Partner.

Value for Money (VFM)

The Food Service Plan 2025-2026 outlines statutory work required to be undertaken by the Council. The Food & Safety Team Plan, which can be found at Appendix 5 of the Plan, details additional non-statutory work which is required to deliver a fit for purpose service. As part of this, revenue generating activities including expanding our paid advice service for local businesses, have been included within priority work.

11. Timetable for Implementation

11.1. Not Applicable

12. Background Papers

12.1. There are None.

Appendices

1. Food Service Plan 2025-2026
2. Stage 2 Improvement Plan
3. Climate and Impact Assessment
4. Equality Impact Assessment