

## Food Safety Service Plan 2026-2027

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## **1.0 Service Aim, Objectives, Key Tasks and Targets**

### **1.1 Objective, Aims and Key Tasks**

- To meet statutory responsibilities in respect of national requirements concerning official controls of food in a cost effective and responsible manner in accordance with statutory guidance.
- To encourage best practice and publish advice on Food Safety to businesses and voluntary groups.
- To discharge food safety inspection and enforcement responsibilities in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice, Regulators Code and the Epsom & Ewell enforcement and compliance policy.
- To implement national and local food sampling programmes and to promote Food Safety.

### **1.2 Links to Corporate Objectives and Targets**

The food inspection service is relevant to several of the current key priorities.

#### **Opportunity and Prosperity**

By ensuring a level playing field through appropriate and proportional regulatory interventions, holding to account the worst offenders and supporting business by providing a degree of trusted technical advice.

#### **Safe and Well**

By ensuring a minimum standard of hygiene in business to reduce the occurrence of ill health through food borne disease and by promoting good hygiene practice in the home.

#### **Effective Council**

By discharging our duties in the most time and cost effective way.

## **2.0 Background**

### **2.1 Profile of the Local Authority**

The Borough of Epsom & Ewell is situated in the North East of Surrey, with an area of 3,411 hectares, of which over half is open space, particularly to the South and West. The Borough has a population of approximately 81,000 predominantly in suburban areas. There are in the region of 31,320 households in the Borough and the average household size is 2.58 people.

### **2.2 Organisational Structure**

The service exists as part of the general Environmental Health Team which is responsible for a range of statutory services, and which is positioned within the wider

public protection team comprising Environmental Health, Licensing and Community Safety. Owing to long term recruitment difficulties and in order to deliver the statutory minimum service, vacant posts are covered by agency contracted staff.

Specialist services, when required, are provided as follows

- (i) Public Analyst: Public Analyst Scientific Services 54 Business Park Valiant Way Wolverhampton. WV9 5GB
- (ii) Microbiological testing: UK Health Security Agency, Food, Water and Environmental Laboratory, Manor Farm Road, Porton Down Salisbury Wiltshire SP4 0JG

### **2.3 Scope of the Food Service**

The Food Safety Service exists to ensure that all food produced, purchased, stored or distributed in the Borough meets statutory requirements under conditions which are hygienic. It is a statutory service and is principally centred on the delivery of Official Controls such as inspections and audits in compliance with national requirements followed by appropriate enforcement action as necessary. By providing this service, the Council actively contributes to the maintenance of high standards of hygiene in processes of production, preparation and sale of food throughout the Borough. Advice is given to food businesses and handlers to ensure they meet legal requirements and observe best practice designed to protect public health.

The Service also undertakes occasional food sampling, a service which complements and reinforces the overall objective of protecting public health. Sampling exercises are typically carried out as part of national surveillance projects or in response to a local incident or complaint.

In certain circumstances the service works in association with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), in relation to the investigation of notifications of infectious disease and food poisoning.

In addition to programmed and demand driven food hygiene inspections, and the investigation of complaints related to food and food premises, other services are delivered in commercial business premises. These include health and safety interventions, infectious disease investigations and pollution emanating from premises where food is prepared, processed or sold. The full range of the environmental health service includes the varied elements of pollution control, conditions in private sector housing, health and safety in workplaces and other public protection and public health obligations.

### **2.4 Demands on the Food Service**

As at April 2026 there were 611 food premises in the Borough, of these 444 were restaurants, cafes, canteens or other caterers, and 139 were retailers. The remainder are made up of small scale producers and distributors. 133 premises fall into the higher risk categories of A to C. Category A requires inspection at 6 month intervals, category

B at 12 month intervals and category C at 18 month intervals in accordance with Food Law Code of Practice. There are 120 unrated businesses where the Council has received a registration but has yet to inspect. These mainly consist of low risk home caterers combined with recently established conventional catering premises. The service is currently implementing a desktop assessment process to categorise and then prioritise these businesses for inspection. Presently there are no approved (significant food manufacturing), establishments operating within the Borough.

Environmental Health Services are based at the Town Hall, and the service is available from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday although a substantial proportion of premises only open in the evening necessitating out of hours visits. In the event of a major incident or an outbreak of food poisoning, there are arrangements for contacting senior officers outside of normal office hours.

A significant proportion of catering establishments are operated by people whose first language is not English. In rare circumstances arrangements are in place for professional translation of necessary documentation and use of interpreters.

## **2.5 Enforcement Policy**

The Council's Enforcement and Compliance Policy was revised in 2025 and reflects the national Regulators Code.

## **3.0 Service Delivery**

### **3.1 Food Premises Inspections**

The service has the aim of carrying out interventions in line with the Food Law Code of Practice (England) issued by the Secretary of State.

Additional to programmed inspections, the service also carries out a proportion of revisits during the same period. These are necessary to check whether informal action has been successful, where compliance with notices needs to be assessed and where a formal request has been made by a food business operator as part of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme.

Any significant increase in the numbers of food related complaints or incidents would place additional demands on the service. Without additional resources this demand could only be met at the expense of the premises inspection programme and/or other areas of environmental health.

### **3.2 Food Complaints and requests for service**

Procedures exist to deal with food complaints which allows for working with Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards when necessary.

Enforcement of food safety is undertaken in accordance with the Food Safety Act 1990, Retained EU Regulation 852/2004, the Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 and associated legislation. Decisions to bring enforcement and legal proceedings in appropriate cases are made in accordance with the Compliance and Enforcement Policy and the Scheme of Delegated Authority to Officers.

### **3.3 Primary Authority**

The Council is committed to the Primary Authority principle whereby, in order to ensure consistency of enforcement, a business can form a partnership with a local authority, often, but not always the authority where its head office exists and enforcement issues can be moderated by that authority.

Epsom & Ewell have no formal partnerships with any food business at this time.

### **3.4 Advice to Business**

Businesses are encouraged to consult the Council's website in the first instance or else the advice displayed on the website of the Food Standards Agency. Enquiries of a specific and/or technically complex nature will normally be dealt with by telephone. However officers frequently advise businesses during programmed inspections and other food hygiene interventions such as complaints or sampling visits.

### **3.5 Food Sampling**

The authority undertakes occasional planned food sampling in coordination with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and local initiatives.

Samples may also be submitted to the UKHSA laboratory or to the Public Analyst in support of food complaint investigations.

### **3.6 Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Disease**

In respect of an outbreak of food poisoning or infectious disease, procedures are set out in the Surrey Outbreak Control Plan and the Environmental Health Service will act in conjunction with UKHSA under the guidance of the Consultant in Communicable Disease Control (CCDC).

Typically Environmental Health Services receive around 150 notifications of infectious disease annually including food poisoning, actual or suspected, and some notable instances of Hepatitis, Ecoli and legionnaire's disease which require careful handling and which require priority over the majority of other areas of work.

### **3.7 Food Safety Incidents**

Food Alerts are part of a national system of letting local authorities and consumers know about problems associated with food and, in some cases, provide details of specific action to be taken.

Where necessary a media release or high priority visits to premises are arranged.

The resource implications are very much dependent on the category of any given alert 'For Action' alerts can potentially involve a considerable amount of work contacting and inspecting food outlets, whilst 'For information' may involve less response. To date, all work relating to food alerts has been undertaken by environmental health staff and resources are considered adequate. In the event of a large-scale warning, support staff will be drawn from other areas of the Council as required.

### **3.8 Liaison with Other Organisations**

The authority has in place various arrangements to ensure that enforcement action taken in its area is consistent with that in neighbouring local authorities.

Epsom & Ewell is represented on the Surrey Food Liaison and Study Group that includes the other Surrey local authorities, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards, UK Health Security Agency and the Food Standards Agency.

Joint working with, in particular, Trading Standards will continue and where possible, inspections will be coordinated as will action on food alerts.

Epsom & Ewell is also represented on the Surrey Infection and Environmental Control Group, which is chaired by UKHSA.

The service responds to planning consultations involving new food premises or alterations to existing premises.

Applications received by the Borough's Licensing Service that includes food preparation or sales are individually screened for likely public risk on health grounds.

### **3.9 Food Safety Promotion**

Resource constraints are such that food safety promotion is largely confined to the point of service delivery and mostly at the time of food premises inspection.

The service will seek to publicise any enforcement action which results in a fine or other sanction issued by the courts.

## **4.0 Resources**

### **4.1 Staffing Allocation**

As at the date of this plan, the retention and deployment of qualified officers, together with competing demands on their time remains a challenge. The Council has responded to this difficulty by adding an additional post however it has not been possible to fill and is presently covered by agency staff. Owing to the size of the team and the competency requirements to fulfil the roles, there is an ongoing vulnerability where even a single experienced staff member leaving exposes the risk of non-compliance with statutory obligations.

However the service has been successful in working with a part time individual who is part qualified and a further person who is competent in food hygiene, but who also carries some of the health and safety service area.

Historically a level of 1.2 FTE has been shown to be sufficient to deliver the requirements of the Food Law Code of Practice in the Epsom and Ewell area. Presently the service can achieve that as long as the contracted support is maintained and staffing levels remain stable.

#### **4.2 Staff Development Plan**

The Council operates a system of developmental one to one meetings with staff members and their manager. From this, learning needs are identified and provision made to fulfil them. The Food Law Code of Practice requires at least 10 hours of continuing professional development per authorised officer per year.

#### **5.0 Quality Assessment**

In line with the Food Law Code of Practice, monitoring measures are in place to assess performance of food officers and adherence to standard working methodology.

Any newly recruited officer will be assessed in accordance with the team monitoring procedure involving shadowed visits and follow up. This also applies periodically for food officers already in post and for consultancy members of staff. Team meetings address consistency issues within the team and food service matters are discussed.

#### **6.0 Reviewing the 2025-2026 year**

##### **6.2 Interventions in 2025-2026**

Performance of the service was directly monitored by the Principal Environmental Health Officer in their role as Lead Officer for Food.

The service completed 237 inspections which exceeded the planned number of 161 through a concerted effort to tackle the number of outstanding inspections from previous years, deal with the backlog of businesses awaiting inspection having registered but not received a visit, and to deal with some of the historical low risk businesses. Separately the service made inroads into establishing whether some of the businesses in the database were actually still trading and to mark them as closed if not.

There were an additional 4 inspections requested by businesses having received an adverse food hygiene rating and paying for a reinspection.

## **6.2 Food Hygiene Rating Scheme**

Official food hygiene ratings appear on a national website available for public information at [www.food.gov.uk/ratings](http://www.food.gov.uk/ratings) as well as various mobile device apps. Where a business wishes to improve their score but not wait for the programmed inspection, they may pay a fee to the Council for an additional visit which will be unannounced within a three month window of making that request.

## **6.3 Complaints**

For 2025-2026 44 complaints and other service requests were received and investigated concerning both concerns about food and of food businesses. These ranged from allegations of food poisoning, complaints about hygiene of premises, reports of cockroaches and enquiries from food businesses. Where valid, these complaints were investigated and action taken.

## **6.4 Sampling**

The service took no food or environmental samples in 2025-2026 since priority was given to the delivery of the food inspection programme in accordance with the agreed action plan.

The financial allocation set aside for Epsom & Ewell by UKHSA is in the region of £2,800 per year and this is considered to be adequate. This allocation facilitates bacteriological and qualitative sampling and analysis of food, water and environmental monitoring.

## **6.5 Education and information**

The service does provide a degree of free advice to businesses who either make contact independently or request advice during inspections. Environmental Health staff are also in the position to be able to refer potential new businesses to the local Growth Hub and for Epsom – the Business Improvement District.

## **6.6 Partnership working**

Representation was made on the Surrey Food Liaison Group which includes trading standards officers to develop joint working relationships such as sampling initiatives and procedural guidance.

## **6.7 Document review**

The majority of documentation now exists on the internet and the service no longer carries hard copies of leaflets. The Council's website contains information for businesses and the consumer whilst the Food Standards Agency website contains more technical information for those involved in food production and catering.

**6.8 Enforcement**

Four hygiene improvement notices and 200 written warnings were issued in 2025-2026.

**6.9 Alternative Enforcement Strategy (AES)**


The service has an alternative enforcement policy in place for low risk food premises involving a self assessment process. The aim of this strategy is to enable the Council to focus attention on those businesses which present the greatest risk to consumer safety and/or who are failing to meet their statutory obligations whilst relieving low risk businesses from a proportion of formal inspection.

**7.0 Plan for 2026-2027**

Owing to the Surrey wide Local Government Reorganisation, the year 2026-2027 will be the final year of delivery of this service by this authority following 90 years of work in the field by Inspectors of Nuisances, Sanitary Inspectors, Public Health Officers and finally Environmental Health Officers. During this time the service inspected many thousands of food premises and ensured the production, service and retail of the food in the borough was safe and compliant.

**7.1 Programmed inspections 2026-2027**

In 2026-2027 207 premises interventions are due. These are broken down as follows.



Category	Number Due
A	2
B	25
C	77
D	101
E	3

There are an additional 74 inspections reported as overdue however all but 4 of them are low risk category E premises and the service will prioritise the higher risk categories before undertaking work with the lower risk whilst ensuring the planned inspection programme receives the necessary attention.

There are 110 relatively newly registered businesses who are awaiting their first inspections. Businesses are not required to have an inspection prior to opening, however the Food Law Code of Practice normally requires an assessment to take place within 28 days of registration and there are some barriers to becoming established on food delivery aggregators (Just Eat, Deliveroo, Uber Eats) for businesses who do not have a current Food Hygiene Rating. Currently the service is unable to meet this requirement but prioritises higher risk registrations above lower risk businesses.

An overriding element of service planning is to risk assess and prioritise. The expectation is therefore that businesses with a greater risk profile will continue to be prioritised over businesses which are inherently less risky.

## **7.2 Accuracy of database**

The accuracy of the commercial premises database will be ensured by the following means:

- Updating of details via intelligence gathered during other Council visits and reported to the Environmental Health team.
- Use of local knowledge.
- During projects to address category E premises which typically involve check first to see whether the business is still trading.

## **7.3 Sampling**

A shared investigation budget of £450 is available for chemical sampling of food and water. Where this is insufficient, underspends will be located elsewhere to supplement this budget. An allocation of around £2,800 is expected from UKHSA for the routine microbiological sampling of food, water and environmental.

## **7.4 Complaints**

Complaints and enquiries from members of the public will be assessed and priority given to situations representing immediate or urgent public health risks. In some circumstances it will be appropriate to follow the matter up at the next routine inspection or not at all.

## **7.6 Publicity**

The Service will seek to publicise successful initiatives which are of benefit and interest to the public. In particular the service will utilise the Council's social media channels to inform, advise and alert the public to issues pertaining to food safety. It will also publicise any prosecutions and sentencing of businesses who have broken the law and been taken to court by the Council.

## **7.7 Audit**

There are no plans to specifically audit the service in 2026-2027 however the existing agreed action plan arising from the previous Food Standards Agency's intervention is being worked through.