

Report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services

## **FOOD HYGIENE ‘SCORES ON THE DOORS’ UPDATE**

### **Summary**

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Executive Member on the progress of the food hygiene ‘Scores on the Doors’ scheme that was launched in June 2009 and to seek the approval of the Executive Member to continue with the York scheme pending introduction of a national scheme by the Food Standards Agency.

### **Background**

2. Scores on the Doors (SOTD) is an initiative that allows members of the public to access certain information gathered during food hygiene inspections, allowing them to gain information about the standards of hygiene within a particular food premises.
3. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has been consulting on a national approach to ‘scores on the doors’ for a number of years, but to date has not made a final decision.
4. Because of this delay, and the potential benefits that a SOTD scheme would deliver, the council’s food and safety unit launched SOTD in York during Food Safety Week 2009.
5. Access to star ratings through a web site is an essential part of SOTD. The organisation Transparency Data, which has been running a SOTD web site since 2005, was selected to run York’s scheme. The web site is currently used by over 100 local authorities.

### **Implementation of the York Scheme**

6. The York scheme involves rating a food premises from 0 stars (very poor) to 5 stars (excellent). Prior to going live with the scheme, the Food & Safety Unit wrote to every food business in the city. An explanatory leaflet was provided and each premises informed of their star rating. A copy of this explanatory leaflet is attached to this report as Annex A

7. This generated a large number of enquiries from businesses, most of which related to the star ratings they would receive. These enquiries placed a significant burden on the team. In most cases, officers were able to satisfy the business as to why they were receiving a particular star rating.
8. In a small number of cases, businesses lodged an appeal about their star rating. The only grounds for appeal are whether the risk rating score given to the premises is correct.
9. The risk rating system for food hygiene relies upon interpretation and judgement, so there is the potential for minor discrepancies, which can affect the star rating. As anticipated, a small number of star ratings were amended following appeals, as a result of reviewing the risk rating.
10. Another impact of the scheme has been the increased number of businesses requesting advice visits, to find out what improvements they need to make to improve their star rating. Whilst this has been an additional burden on the team, it is a very encouraging response.
11. An important part of SOTD is giving the general public access to the star ratings. To achieve this, York's SOTD scheme is available on a dedicated web site, which is currently used by 100 local authorities. There is a link to this site on the council's web site, or there is direct access at [www.scoresonthedoors.co.uk](http://www.scoresonthedoors.co.uk)
12. On the first day the scheme went live, the web site dealt with over 10,000 searches.
13. It continues to receive several thousand searches every month. The figure for December 2009, the last complete month, is 10,290 searches, which shows the continued high interest in the initiative. To date there has been over 100,000 searches.

## **Improvements**

14. A key benefit of SOTD, is that it encourages food businesses to improve their levels of hygiene, so they receive a better star rating. An improved star rating has clear benefits for the business, but there are also benefits for the local authority.
15. In simple terms, an improved star rating means the business has achieved a better risk assessment score. In a number of cases, this means that the premises needs to be inspected less often by the local authority. Officers are then freed up to tackle poor premises that continue to flout hygiene rules. The number of poor premises is monitored by National Performance Indicator 184.
16. Since the scheme has been launched, we have seen some significant improvements in the star ratings of existing food premises (ie those premises that had a star rating at the launch of the scheme).
17. Another significant contribution to this improvement is the work of officers, who have been focusing their attention on businesses that are 'not broadly complaint'

with food hygiene law. Through the use of advice, education and a graduated approach to enforcement, officers have steadily been improving poorer premises.

18. An example of the improvements achieved, is that 48% of premises that were already part of the scheme, and that have received another inspection since the launch received an improved star rating.
19. At the same time, it should also be noted that 14% of premises in the same group saw a drop in their star ratings, due to a fall in standards. This highlights the importance of regular visits to food premises, to ensure that standards are being maintained.

## **Future Developments**

20. It has always been the intention to participate in a national SOTD scheme. One reason there have been delays in launching a national scheme, is because industry has raised concerns about what form the scheme might take.
21. To address this, the FSA have recently set up a steering group to look at developing a national scheme. The key areas they are considering include:
  - The banding of star ratings – This is a key decision area, as it will determine how many stars a premises receives in relation to its risk assessment score.
  - Appeals against star ratings – The FSA is keen to have a policy where food premises can request a re-inspection following a poor star rating. Due to limited resources, we are not currently able to offer this in York.
  - National web site – City of York Council currently pay to use a web site (see paragraphs 10 & 11). The FSA is considering providing a single web site that all local authorities can use, which is hoped to be cost free.
22. If the FSA develop a national scheme, it will be evaluated and a paper presented to the Executive Member to seek approval over what direction York's scheme should take.

## **Options**

23. (a) Continue with York's SOTD scheme and evaluate a national scheme should one be launched.  
  
(b) Withdraw York's SOTD scheme and wait for the possible launch of a national scheme.

## **Analysis**

24. Option (a) will allow the council to continue operating SOTD, a scheme that is being widely used by the public and is helping to improve levels of food hygiene.

25. Option (b) would result in the withdrawal of a service that is widely used by residents and visitors to the city, and may see a drop in food hygiene levels.

### **Corporate Priorities**

26. The SOTD scheme feeds into the council's corporate strategy in a number of areas:

- Thriving City
- Healthy City
- Effective Organisation

### **Financial Implications**

27. The cost of operating SOTD can be met from existing budgets therefore there are no financial implications associated with this report.

### **Human Resources**

28. There are no human resource implications.

### **Equalities**

29. There are no equalities implications.

### **Legal Implications**

30. There are no legal implications.

### **Crime and Disorder**

31. There are no crime and disorder implications.

### **Information Technology (IT)**

32. There are no IT implications.

### **Risk Management**

33. There are no risk management issues.

### **Recommendations**

34. The executive member is advised to :

**Approve option (a)** - Continue with York's SOTD scheme and evaluate a national scheme should one be launched.

*Reason:* SOTD has been very successful. It provides the public with easy access to information that would otherwise not be readily available. The scheme is also having a positive impact on food hygiene across the city.

Adoption of a national scheme at a later date would be relatively straightforward

## Contact Details

### Author:

Sean Suckling  
Food & Safety Unit Manager  
Tel (01904) 551599

### Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Andy Hudson  
Assistant Director (Neighbourhoods & Community  
Safety)

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

### Background Papers:

EMAP Report – The implementation of a food hygiene ‘scores on the doors’ scheme (6 December 2007)