



Hartlepool Borough Council

Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2025-26

FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT SERVICE PLAN 2025-26

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INTRODUCTION

This Service Plan details how Hartlepool Borough Council will deliver the food law service. The food law service covers both food and feed enforcement.

The Plan accords with the requirements of the Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement, and sets out the Council's aims in respect of its food law service and the means by which those aims are to be fulfilled. Whilst focussing primarily on the year 2025-26, longer-term objectives are identified where relevant. Additionally, there is a review of performance for 2024-25 and this aims to inform decisions about how best to build on past successes and address performance gaps.

The Plan is reviewed annually and the Neighbourhood Services Committee has approved previous plans.

1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Hartlepool Borough Council aims to:

- carry out our enforcement duties and deliver high quality services through the efficient and effective use of resources;
- supplement our enforcement role by providing targeted education and advice;
- encourage innovation through actively seeking out best practice and working in partnership with other agencies;
- actively contribute towards achieving nationally agreed strategic aims and objectives; and
- ensure our actions are consistent, proportionate and targeted and that we are transparent and open about what we do.

The service aims to ensure:

- that food and drink intended for human consumption which is produced, stored, distributed, handled or consumed in the borough is without risk to the health or safety of the consumer;
- food and food packaging meets standards of quality, composition and labelling and reputable food businesses are not prejudiced by unfair competition; and
- the effective delivery of its food law service so as to secure appropriate levels of public safety in relation to food hygiene, food standards and feeding stuffs enforcement.

In its delivery of the service the Council will have regard to directions and examples of best practice as disseminated by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), including Approved Codes of Practice, the Regulators' Code and other relevant guidance shared by Local Government Regulation and Central Government.

1.2 Links to Corporate Objectives and Plans

This service plan fits into the hierarchy of the Council's planning process as follows:

- Hartlepool Council's Plan 2030
- Hartlepool's Community Strategy – the Local Strategic Partnerships (the Safer Hartlepool Partnership) and the Health and Well Being Board
- Food Law Enforcement Service Plan - sets out how the Council aims to deliver this statutory service and the Public Protection service's contribution to corporate objectives.

1.2.1 Overall Aim / Vision

The Council Plan sets out our vision for the future of Hartlepool in 2030:

Hartlepool will be:

- a place where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)
- a place that is connected sustainable, clean and green. (Place)
- a place that is welcoming with an inclusive and growing economy providing opportunities for all. (Potential)
- a place with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects that diversity of its community. (Organisation)

To contribute to the Council's overall vision, through this Food Law Enforcement Service Plan, the team has made a commitment to protecting and improving the quality of life for residents of Hartlepool through effective promotion and enforcement of food hygiene and safety legislation.

This Food Law Enforcement Service Plan contributes towards elements of the Council Plan vision in the following ways:

- a place where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)

Through the effective delivery of its food law service, we aim to secure appropriate levels of public safety in relation to food hygiene, food standards and feeding stuffs enforcement.

By ensuring that businesses only provide safe products that comply with relevant food safety standards.

- a place that is welcoming with an inclusive and growing economy providing opportunities for all. (Potential)

By providing advice and information to new and existing businesses to assist them in meeting their legal requirements regarding food hygiene and safety requirements and avoid potential costly action at a later stage.

- a place with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects that diversity of its community. (Organisation)

By developing ways of communicating well with all customers, including business operators whose first language is not English, and ensuring that we deliver our service equitably to all.

To contribute towards the key outcomes of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation and to deliver effective customer focussed services, meeting the needs of diverse groups and maintaining customer satisfaction.

The Council is committed to the principles of equality and diversity. The Food Law Enforcement Service Plan consequently aims to ensure that the same high standards of service are offered to all, and that recognition is given to the varying needs and backgrounds of its customers.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Profile of the Local Authority

Hartlepool is located on the north-east coast of England to the north of the River Tees. The Borough consists of the main town of Hartlepool, the seaside resort of Seaton Carew and a number of small outlying villages. The total area of the Borough is 9,390 hectares. The residential population is 95,336 (ONS 2023 Mid-Year Estimate) an increase of 2,765.

Across Hartlepool 96.5% of people identified with a White ethnic group (compared with 97.7% in 2011), 1.7% as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh, 0.5% as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African, 0.7% with Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups and 0.6% with other ethnic groups.

Hartlepool is a unitary authority, providing a full range of services. To the south of Hartlepool is the wider Teesside conurbation which includes the boroughs of Middlesbrough, Stockton on Tees and Redcar and Cleveland, and which together with Hartlepool and Darlington makes up the Tees Valley sub-region. Bordering Hartlepool to the north is the administrative area of County Durham.

The borough has a long and proud history, with the original settlement of Hartlepool dating back to Saxon times. Originally, an important religious settlement the town's early development resulted from the existence of a safe harbour and its role as a port for the city of Durham and subsequent grant of a Royal Charter from King John in 1201.

The main phase of Hartlepool's expansion took place from the mid-19th Century with the building of a new railway and docks to serve the export of coal. The town continued to expand over the next 100 years as port trade increased and the development of heavy industries including steel making, shipbuilding and manufacturing. Like most industrialised towns in the north of England, Hartlepool has suffered over the last half century from structural

reform of these industries and the town has had to look for new opportunities to diversify the economy.

Hartlepool has experienced some transformational changes through public and private investment. This has included the transformation of the former South Docks area into a fabulous 500-berth marina where the town hosted The Tall Ships Race in 2010 and again in 2024.

The tourist industry affects recreational opportunities, shopping and leisure facilities, including the provision of food and drink outlets restaurants, bars and cafes. There are currently 777 food establishments in Hartlepool, all of which must be subject to intervention to ensure food safety and standards are being met.

2.2 Organisational Structure

Under the Council's governance arrangements, most day-to-day decisions are taken by five Policy Committees. These Policy Committees cover the following main service areas: -

- Finance and Corporate Affairs Committee
- Adult & Community Based Services Committee
- Children's Services Committee
- Neighbourhood Services Committee
- Economic Growth and Regeneration Committee

The Neighbourhood Services Committee provides political oversight for Food Law enforcement.

The Council is made up of four Departments:

- Children's & Joint Commissioning Services
- Adults & Community Based Services
- Development, Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services
- Legal, Governance and HR

The Food Law Enforcement Service Plan is delivered through the Public Protection section of the Regulatory Services division, which is contained within the Development, Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services Department.

2.3 Scope of the Food Service

The Council's Commercial Services team is a constituent part of the Public Protection division contained within the Development, Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services department and is responsible for delivery of the food service. The food service covers both food and feed enforcement.

Service delivery broadly comprises:

- programmed interventions of premises for food hygiene, food standards and feed hygiene;

- registration and approval of premises;
- microbiological sampling and chemical analysis of food and animal feed;
- food & feed inspection;
- checks of imported food/feed at retail and catering premises;
- provision of advice, educational materials and courses to food/feed businesses;
- investigation of food and feed related complaints;
- investigation of cases of food and water borne infectious disease, and outbreak control;
- dealing with food/feed safety incidents; and
- promotional and advisory work

Effective performance of the food law service necessitates a range of joint working arrangements with other local authorities and agencies such as the Food Standards Agency (FSA), UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) & the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD).

The Council aims to ensure that effective joint working arrangements are in place and that officers of the service contribute to the on-going development of those arrangements.

Whilst undertaking food safety interventions, officers are expected to carry out the following additional functions:

- health and safety enforcement where the local authority is the relevant enforcing authority (this includes carrying out hazard spotting in relation to health and safety issues and carrying out priority based health & safety inspections)
- the provision of guidance, advice and enforcement in respect of smoke free legislation in public places;
- the provision of guidance, advice and taking enforcement action in response to certain public health legislation;
- water sampling; including both private and mains supplies & bathing water;
- port health;
- provision of assistance for animal health and welfare inspections, complaint investigation and animal movement issues; and
- acting as a statutory consultee for applications made under the Licensing Act 2003

2.4 Demands on the Food Service

The Council is responsible for 777 food premises within the borough mostly comprising retailers, manufacturers and caterers. The food businesses are predominantly micro or small establishments and the majority of these are liable to food hygiene and food standards interventions.

In addition, the Council is the enforcing authority for 88 registered feed businesses.

The delivery point for the food enforcement service is at:

Civic Centre, Victoria Road, Hartlepool TS24 8AY
Tel: (01429) 266522

Members of the public and businesses may access the service at this point from 08.30 - 17.00 Monday to Thursday and 08.30 - 16.30 on Friday.

A 24-hour emergency call-out also operates to deal with Environmental Health emergencies that occur out of hours. Contact can be made on (01429) 266522, Option 1, followed by Option 2.

2.5 Enforcement Policy

Hartlepool Borough Council adopted its current Enforcement Policy in 2021. Supplementary to this, there is a Public Protection Enforcement Policy, which deals with those enforcement issues specific, or unique, to the service.

The Commercial Services team, which is responsible for food law enforcement, will take account of the 2014 Regulator's Code when carrying out its interactions with food business operators.

3 SERVICE DELIVERY

3.1.1 Interventions Programme

The Council has a wide range of duties and powers conferred on it in relation to food law enforcement. The Council must appoint and authorise inspectors, having suitable qualifications and competencies for carrying out duties under the Food Safety Act 1990 and Regulations made under it.

Authorised officers can inspect food at any stage of the production, manufacturing, distribution and retail chain. The Council must draw up and implement an annual programme of risk-based interventions to ensure that food and feeding stuffs are inspected in accordance with relevant legislation, the Food Law Code of Practice and centrally issued guidance.

The Code allows local authorities to choose the most appropriate action to be taken to drive up levels of compliance with food law by food establishments. In so doing, it takes account of the recommendations in the 'Reducing Administrative Burdens: Effective Inspection and Enforcement'.

Interventions are defined as activities that are designed to monitor, support and increase food law compliance within a food establishment. They fall into two categories of either official control or non-official control as follows:

Official Controls include:

- Monitoring
- Surveillance
- Verification;

- Audit;
- Inspection
- Sampling and Analysis;

Interventions which are not Official Controls include:

- Targeted education, advice
- Information and intelligence gathering.

Other activities that monitor, promote and drive-up compliance with food law in food establishments, for instance 'Alternative Enforcement Strategies' for low risk establishments and education and advisory work with businesses away from the premises (e.g. seminars/training events) remain available for local authorities to use.

3.1.2 Broadly Compliant Food Establishments

The Code established the concept of 'Broadly Compliant' food establishments. In respect of food hygiene, "broadly compliant", is defined as an establishment that has an intervention rating score of not more than 10 points under each of the following components:

- Level of (Current) Hygiene Compliance;
- Level of (Current) Structural Compliance; and
- Confidence in Management/Control Systems

"Broadly Compliant", in respect of food standards, is defined as an establishment that has an intervention rating score of 3,4 or 5 for all four Compliance Assessment Risk factors under the new Food Standards Delivery Model scheme. These are:

- Management Systems & Procedures
- Allergen Information
- Current Compliance Level
- Confidence in Management (CIM)

As at the 1st April 2025, 99.7% of businesses in the borough were "Broadly Compliant" with food safety requirements. For food standards 98.3% of businesses achieved broad compliance.

The Food Law Enforcement Plan will help to promote efficient and effective approaches to regulatory inspection and enforcement that will improve regulatory outcomes without imposing unnecessary burdens. The term enforcement does not only refer to formal actions, it can also relate to advisory visits and inspections.

3.2 Service Delivery Mechanisms

3.2.1 Intervention Programme

Local Authorities must document, maintain and implement an interventions programme, which includes all establishments for which they have food law enforcement responsibility.

Interventions carried out for food hygiene, food standards and for feeding stuffs are carried out in accordance with the Council's policy and standard operating procedures on food/feed premises inspections and relevant national guidance.

Information on premises liable to interventions is held on the APP computerised system. An intervention schedule is produced from this system at the commencement of each reporting year.

The food hygiene, food standards and feeding stuffs intervention programmes are risk-based systems that accord with current guidance. The current premises profiles (as at 1 April 2025) are shown in the tables below:

Food Hygiene:

Risk Category	Frequency of Inspection	No of Premises
A	6 months	0
B	12 months	12
C	18 months	82
D	24 months	367
E	36 months or other enforcement	316
Unclassified	Requiring inspection / risk rating	0
No Inspectable Risk (NIR)		0
Total		777

Food Standards:

Risk Category	Frequency of Inspection	No of Premises
A	12 months	1
B	24 months	102
C	36 months or other enforcement	674
Unclassified		0
No Inspectable Risk (NIR)		0
Total		777

*We are currently in the process of implementing the new FSA Food Standards Delivery Model which will make the system more risk based. The risk category and frequency of inspection will change. This will impact the profile of premises. Further details are provided below.

Feed Hygiene:

Registered Activity		No of Premises
R5	Distributor	1
R6	Pet Food Manufacturer	1
R7	Supplier of Surplus Food	10
R8	Transporter	1
R9	Stores	1
R10/11	On Farm Mixer	13
R12	Co Product Producer	2
R13	Livestock Farm	39
R14	Arable Farm	20
Total		88

The intervention programme for 2025-26 comprises the following number of scheduled food hygiene and food standards interventions (this includes the 38 low-risk (Category C) food standards interventions that were overdue for 2024-25.

Food Hygiene:

Risk Category	Frequency of Inspection	No of Interventions
A	6 months	0
B	12 months	12
C	18 months	46
D	24 months	143
E	36 months or alternative enforcement strategy	122
Unclassified		0
Unrated		0
Total		323

Food Standards:

Risk Category	Frequency of Inspection	No of Interventions
A	12 months	1
B	24 months	47
C	36 months or alternative enforcement	41
Unrated		0
Unclassified		0
Total		89

*The food standards intervention programme will change once we fully implement the new Food Standard Delivery Model.

In addition to the above scheduled inspections, officers will carry out interventions at newly registered premises and other additional workload is generated from requests for a food hygiene re-rating inspection. Officers will also carry out interventions at some mobile food traders, including those visiting the borough in connection with events.

***New Food Standards Delivery Model**

The FSA has developed a new model for the delivery of food standards official controls for LAs. The main proposals involve fundamental changes which are contained within the Food Law Code of Practice (England), which was issued in June 2023, and associated content. The changes include the introduction of a:

- new food standards intervention rating scheme that LA officers will use to evaluate the risk posed by a food business
- new decision matrix to determine the frequency at which food standards official controls should be delivered in line with the outcome of the risk assessment

The food standards intervention rating scheme involves the calculation of a risk profile for food establishments that is based on its 'inherent risk profile' – this considers the inherent risks associated with the business, such as the scale of supply and the potential for product harm and a 'compliance assessment', which considers the FBO's performance and track record.

The new model enables LAs to focus their resources on those businesses creating the greatest risk.

Transitional arrangements applied until 31 March 2025 to enable a phased rollout of the programme. During the transitional period the FSA engaged with Management Information Providers to agree the programme's implementation. It was planned that our MIS provider (CIVICA APP) would implement the new delivery programme in Autumn 2024 however this was delayed until Summer 2025.

We have introduced the new scheme and are manually recording the results whilst we are awaiting the update of our MIS system. Once completed this data can be added.

Figures provided are based on the profile as at 1.4.2025 however they will change once the MIS system is updated.

Approved Establishments:

There are 3 approved food establishments in the borough; a fishery products establishment, a manufacturer of food ingredients and a manufacturer of chicken parmesans.

A fourth premises was formerly approved. It was determined that they have now discontinued activities requiring approval and as such their licence is to be surrendered.

Details of the Approved Premises are given below:

Establishment Name	Type of Approval	Approval Number
W Hodgson (Hartlepool) Limited, Fish Quay, Hartlepool	Fishery Products	HP0002
Kerry Ingredients and Flavours Ltd c/o Kerry Ingredients (UK) Ltd, Unit 6, Park View Industrial Estate, Brenda Road, Hartlepool, TS25 1PE	Meat Products Fishery products Dairy products Rendered Animal Fats & Greaves	HP003
M&S Parmo Ltd, 249 Raby Road, Hartlepool	Meat Products	HP005

These premises are inspected in accordance with our risk rating programme. They are subject to more stringent hygiene provisions than those applied to registered food businesses. These premises require considerably more staff resources for inspection, supervision and advice on meeting enhanced standards. Additionally, there is a need for ongoing specialist training for those who inspect approved premises.

Primary Producers:

The service has 73 primary producers. Inspections are combined with visits to farms for animal welfare and/or feed legislation as far as possible.

Feed Hygiene Intervention Programme 2025-26:

The National Trading Standards Board (NTSB) is responsible for the co-ordination of grant funding allocations for the FSA Feed Delivery Programme. A regional lead feed co-ordinator has been appointed. As a member of the NETSA (North East Trading Standards Association) group Hartlepool Council will receive funding to meet the costs of the following feed inspections:

Feed Hygiene:

Activity	No of Interventions
Distributor (R05)	0
Pet Food Manufacturer (R06)	1
Feed/Materials / Ingredients/Surplus Food (R07)	1
Transporter (R08)	0
Stores (R09)	0
On-farm Mixer (R10/ R11)	0
Co-Product Producer (R12)	1

Livestock Farms (R13)	0
Arable Farms (R14)	0
Total	3

We have also committed to participating in a national sampling programme looking at compliance issues with dog chews. The cost of this sampling will be met by National Trading Standards (NTS). Details are included in 3.2.3 below.

Visits outside of standard hours

An estimated 10% of all programmed interventions relate to premises where it is more appropriate to conduct visits outside the standard working time hours. Arrangements are in place to visit these premises out of hours by making use of the Council's flexible working arrangements, lieu time facilities and, if necessary, paid overtime provisions. In addition, these arrangements will permit the occasional inspection of premises, which open outside of, as well as during standard work time hours. The Food Law Code of Practice requires inspections of these premises at varying times of operation.

Revisits

All businesses less than satisfactory (with a food hygiene rating of 0,1 and 2) are revisited to ensure that the necessary improvements are carried out. Re-visits and appropriate enforcement for all non-compliant food premises (i.e. hygiene rating less than 3) is a requirement under the Food Law Code of Practice.

As a follow-up to primary inspections, the service undertakes revisits in accordance with current policy.

For the year 2025-26, the intervention programme is expected to generate an estimated 75 revisits. A number of these premises revisits will be undertaken outside standard working hours and arrangements are in place as described above to facilitate this.

Hygiene standards in premises declined during the Covid-19 pandemic and recovery period. The cost of living crisis further exacerbated this situation. Consequently, the service has had to carry out more revisits to premises. It is anticipated that consistent, high quality programmed interventions by the service will, over time, result in a general improvement in standards, reducing the frequency for recourse to formal action.

The performance against intervention targets for all food hygiene and food standards inspections is reported annually to the Neighbourhood Services Committee via the Service Plan.

Port Health

Hartlepool is a Port Health Authority. To date there has been no significant changes at the Port because of EU exit in that it remains the case that no food or feed enters the port.

Work in relation to imported food control can therefore ordinarily be accommodated within the day-to-day workload of the service, however if circumstances were to change whereby food or feed was imported/exported additional resources would be required which would have an effect on the programmed intervention workload and other service demands.

Since 1st April 2022 and on request we have carried out ship sanitation inspections and certification. We will also undertake water sampling as required. During 2024-25, 11 ship sanitation inspections were undertaken and exemption certificates issued. Water samples were collected from 1 vessel and these were submitted for microbiological examination and testing for the presence of Legionella bacteria.

Fish Quay

There is a Fish Quay within the Authority's area, which provides a market hall although it is not currently operational and there are associated fish processing units, one of which is an approved establishment.

During 2023-24, 25 fishing vessels registered with Hartlepool Borough Council as food business establishments. All fishing vessels were inspected in accordance with directions issued by the Food Standards Agency.

3.2.2 Registration and Approval of Premises

Food and feed business operators must register their establishments with the relevant local authority. This provision allows the service to maintain an up-to-date premises database and facilitates the timely inspection of new premises and, when considered necessary, premises that have changed food/feed business operator or type of use.

The receipt of a food/feed premises registration form initiates an inspection of all new premises. In the case of existing premises, where a change of food/feed business operator is notified, other than at the time of a programmed intervention, an assessment is made of the need for inspection based on the date of the next programmed intervention, premises history, and whether any significant change in the type of business are being notified.

During 2024-25, 104 new registrations were received and all businesses received face-to-face visits and/or were provided with advice. During 2023-24, work was successfully undertaken to ensure that all food business registration forms are up to date.

The number of small food businesses changing hands and requiring re-registration and inspection each year remains at a steady high level of approximately 100, made up of new start up businesses and those changing hands with new incoming proprietors. It is not known what number of businesses will change hands or even cease to trade because of the current economic environment. It is nevertheless anticipated that approximately 100 additional food premises inspections will be generated for new food businesses during 2025-26.

Advising and assisting new proprietors places an extra pressure on the inspection programme in terms of additional inspections required for new starts and businesses changing hands which may not have otherwise been due for inspection and often will require extra support for proprietors.

A competent authority must with some exceptions, approve food business establishments that handle food of animal origin. If an establishment needs approval, it does not need to be registered as well.

Food premises which require approval include those that are producing any, or any combination of the following: minced meat, meat preparations, mechanically separated meat, meat products, live bivalve molluscs, fishery products, raw milk (other than raw cows' milk), dairy products, eggs (not primary production) and egg products, frogs legs and snails, rendered animal fats and greaves, treated stomachs, bladders and intestines, gelatine and collagen and certain cold stores and wholesale markets.

The approval regime necessitates full compliance with the relevant requirements of Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 and Regulation (EC) 853/2004. There are 3 premises in the Borough which are subject to approval; a fishery products establishment, a manufacturer of food ingredients and a recently approved business that manufactures chicken parmesans.

Since 1 January 2006, feed businesses have been required to be approved or registered with their local authority under the terms of the EC Feed Hygiene Regulation (1831/2005). This legislation relates to nearly all feed businesses. This means, for example, that importers and sellers of feed, hauliers and storage businesses now require approval or registration. Livestock and arable farms growing and selling crops for feed are also within the scope of the provisions of the regulation.

3.2.3 Microbiological and Chemical Analysis of Food/Feed

An annual food/feed sampling programme is undertaken with samples being procured for the purposes of microbiological or chemical analyses. This programme is undertaken in accordance with the service's Food/Feed Sampling Policy.

All officers taking formal samples must follow the guidance contained in and be qualified in accordance with relevant legislative requirements and centrally issued guidance, including that contained in the Food Law Code of Practice/Feed Law Code of Practice and associated Practice Guidance. Follow-up action is carried out in accordance with the service's sampling policy.

Microbiological analysis of food and water samples is undertaken by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Food, Water & Environmental Laboratory based at York. An appointed Public / Agricultural Analyst undertakes chemical analysis.

Sampling allocations from UKHSA are based on a credits system dependant on the type of sample being submitted and examination required.

The baseline allocation for Hartlepool is 8,300 credits for the year 2025-26.

Points are allocated as follows:

Sample type	No of credits
F1:Food Screen	10
F2:Food Basic	25
F3:Food Complex	35
W1:Water Screen	10
W2:Water Basic	20
W3:Water Complex	25
M1:Dairy Products	10
E1:Environmental Screen	10
E2:Environmental Basic	25
E3:Environmental Complex	35
Certification	15

The allocation is subject to annual review. It is possible that the allocation will be reduced if an authority uses substantially less than its allocation.

A sampling programme is produced each year for the start of April to assess the microbiological quality of food, water and environmental surfaces and composition and labelling of food.

The results of the sampling programme carried out during 2024-25 are provided in **6.2.3**.

In addition to local intelligence, the sampling programme for 2025-26 will take account of national and regional surveys and local interventions and the availability of local resources.

Sampling programmes have been agreed with the Food Examiners and Public/Agricultural Analysts. These have regard to the nature of food/feed businesses in Hartlepool and will focus on locally manufactured/processed foods/feed and food/feed targeted because of previous sampling and complaints.

The service aims to meet a national target set in 2007 by the Food Standards Agency, the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) and the Association of Port Health Authorities that imported food should make up 10% of the food samples taken by local and port health authorities.

The sampling plans for 2025-26 are detailed below.

Microbiological Food Sampling Plan 2025-26

April Local Survey – swabs in catering premises	May Study 83 – nuts/seeds/dried fruit/snacks	June Study 83 – nuts/seeds/dried fruit/snacks
July Study 84 – Root vegetables	August Study 84 – Root vegetables	September Study 84 – Root vegetables
October Local Survey – swabs in catering premises	November Study 83 – nuts/seeds/dried fruit/snacks	December Study 83 – nuts/seeds/dried fruit/snacks
January Study 85 - tbc	February Study 85 - tbc	March Raw milk sampling

Food Standards Sampling Plan 2025-26

Survey	Number of Samples
Allergens (peanuts) in meals from restaurants and takeaways (Re samples)	Unknown
FSA Food Standards Directed Sampling Programme 2025/26 – Allergens in loose prepared meals* Gluten free foods from catering establishments	8
FSA Imported Food LA/PHA Sampling Programme*	8
Ad hoc samples arising from emerging priorities identified during the year	tbc

(*Hartlepool has bid to sample certain food commodities as part of the FSA's national food sampling programme and are awaiting confirmation as to whether our bids have been successful.)

Feeding Stuffs Sampling Plan 2025-26

At present feeding stuffs sampling is being given a low priority due to the lack of local manufacturers and packers, accordingly no sampling of animal feeding stuffs was carried out during 2024-25.

We will respond to emerging national or local issues and have agreed to participate in the FSA Feed Delivery National Sampling Project 2025-26. The aim of this sampling project is to understand if there are compliance issues with dog chews, which are commonly fed to many pet dogs and found in a large proportion of homes.

Dog chews have been the subject of several RASFF alerts, with Salmonella contamination being the most common issue. During 2025-26 our sampling plan is as follows:

Survey	Number of Samples
FSA Feed Delivery National Sampling Project 2025-26 – Dog Chews	4

Regional funding provided by the National Trading Standards Board and Food Standards Agency will supplement our sampling budget.

Private Water Supplies

A local brewery uses a private water supply in its food production. Regular sampling is carried out of this supply in accordance with relevant legislative regulations.

3.2.4 Food Inspection

The purpose of food inspection is to check that food complies with food safety requirements and is fit for human consumption and is properly described and labelled. As such, the activity of inspecting food commodities, including imported food where relevant, forms an integral part of the food premises intervention programme. Food inspection activities are undertaken in accordance with national guidelines.

3.2.5 Provision of Advice and Information to Food/Feed Businesses

It is recognised that for most local food businesses contact with an officer of the service provides the best opportunity to obtain information and tailored advice on legislative requirements and good practice. Officers are mindful of this and aim to ensure that when undertaking premises interventions sufficient opportunity exists for food business operators to seek advice.

When providing advice to food businesses, advisory leaflets including those produced by the Food Standards Agency, are made available.

Significant resources have been directed towards assisting businesses to fully implement a documented food safety management system, including Safer Food Better Business (SFBB). The FSA introduced this system to assist smaller catering businesses introduce a documented food safety management system.

Guidance is also prepared and distributed to food businesses relating to changes in legislative requirements. The service also encourages new food/feed business operators and existing businesses to seek guidance and advice on their business. It is estimated that 50 such advisory visits will be carried out during the year.

The Council operates the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme whereby each business is awarded a rating, which reflects the hygiene conditions found at the time of the primary inspection. The business' rating is made available to the public via the Food Standards Agency's website and the business is provided with a sticker to display on their premises. The service has made a commitment to work with businesses to improve their rating; in particular, those awarded a rating of less than '3' (generally satisfactory).

A limited level of promotional work is also undertaken by the service on food safety, with minimal impact on programmed enforcement work. Feeding stuffs advice is available via the Council's web site.

3.2.6 Public Health Initiatives

Wherever possible the service will contribute to the Public Health Framework Outcomes. Examples of initiatives that we have supported include:

1) Government Obesity Strategy

We have supported the Government's Obesity Strategy through awareness raising and are responsible for enforcement of legislation that was introduced in 2022 relating to food and drink high in fat, salt or sugar.

The legislation includes The Calorie Labelling (Out of Home Sector) (England) Regulations 2021 and The Food (Promotion and Placement) (England) Regulations 2021. (The latter legislation is intended to restrict retailer promotions on food and drink high in fat, salt or sugar.)

Research has shown that fast food takeaways provide a source of food that is high in fat, salt or sugar. We will continue to work with other regulators, including colleagues in the Planning team to encourage good practice within the takeaway sector. We will support the use of planning measures to restrict the proliferation of hot food takeaways in areas of over concentration, and where vulnerable groups of children and young people are a concern.

All relevant hot food takeaways in Hartlepool have been identified and mapped. The density of local and future provision of takeaways is addressed in the Council's Local Plan.

2) Allergy Awareness

We will continue to use a range of interventions including sampling, provision of information and advice and working in partnership with colleagues in the other North-East local authorities as part of a regional group to raise awareness regarding allergens. We will continue to raise awareness of changes in food labelling legislation relating to foods that are pre-packed for direct sale.

As part of the Regional Work Programme, we have together with the other North-East local authorities produced a range of video clips to raise awareness of allergies and duties placed on food business operators. These videos were promoted during contact with food businesses and by using social media.

We have introduced a single point of contact for people seeking to report allergen related incidents which are then referred to the relevant local authority for investigation. We have also participated in a regional sampling programme specifically looking for allergens.

3.2.7 Investigation of Food / Feed Complaints

The service receives on average 40 complaints each year concerning food/feed, all of which are subject to investigation. During 2024-25, 17 complaints were received concerning food. An initial response is made to these complaints within two working days. Whilst many complaints are investigated with minimal resource requirements, some more complex cases may be resource-intensive and potentially affect programmed intervention workloads.

No complaints were received concerning feed.

All investigations are conducted having regard to the guidance on the 'Home Authority Principle'.

The procedures for receipt and investigation of food/feed complaints are set out in detailed guidance and internal policy documents.

3.2.8 Investigation of Cases of Food Poisoning and Outbreak Control

Incidents of food related infectious disease are investigated in liaison with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) North-East Public Health Team and in the case of outbreaks in accordance with the Outbreak Control Policy.

Where it appears that an outbreak exists the Environmental Health Manager (Commercial Services) or an EHO, will liaise with UKHSA North-East Health Protection Team to determine the need to convene an Outbreak Control Team. Further liaison may be necessary with agencies such as the Food Standards Agency, UKHSA Food, Water and Environmental Laboratory, Public Analyst(s), Anglian Water and Northumbrian Water.

It is estimated that approximately 150 food poisoning notifications are received each year, a large proportion of which are confirmed cases of Campylobacter.

Investigations of foodborne illness and any suspected food poisoning/food borne outbreaks (with the exception of Campylobacter notifications) are undertaken in order to attempt to identify the source of the illness, prevent further spread, raise awareness of hygiene issues and carry out any necessary food hygiene visits or enforcement action.

As relatively little benefit has been demonstrated from the investigation of individual sporadic cases of Campylobacter only those who are in high-risk groups (e.g. food handlers or those who live/work in a residential care home) are routinely investigated. All cases of Campylobacter are followed up with a standard letter and receive an information leaflet.

Any cluster or outbreak identified by UKHSA North-East Public Health Team or the Commercial services team will be investigated following the agreed outbreak investigation arrangements. In the event of any major food poisoning outbreak, a significant burden is likely to be placed on the service and this would inevitably affect the performance of the intervention programme.

3.2.9 Dealing with Food / Feed Safety Incidents

A national alert system exists for the rapid dissemination of information about food and feed hazards and product recalls, this is known as the food/feed alert warning system.

All food and feed alerts received by the service are dealt with in accordance with national guidance and internal quality procedures. Food and feed alert warnings are received by the service from The Food Standards Agency via an electronic mail system. Several officers have also subscribed to receive alerts via their personal mobile phones.

The Environmental Health Manager (Commercial Services) ensures that a timely and appropriate response is made to each alert.

The out of hours contact telephone number for the service is (01429) 266522, then Option 1, then Option 2.

In the event of a serious local incident, or a wider food safety problem emanating from production in Hartlepool, the Food Standards Agency will be alerted in accordance with guidance.

We continue to receive food alerts for action or information, food allergy alerts and food recall notices throughout the year. Whilst it is difficult to predict with any certainty the number of food safety incidents that will arise based on previous years it is anticipated that approximately 75 food alerts (not including allergy alerts) will be notified in 2025-26, with an estimated 4 or 5 requiring action.

This level of work can ordinarily be accommodated within the day-to-day workload of the service, but incidents that are more serious may require additional resources, which may have an effect on the programmed intervention workload and other service demands.

3.2.10 Complaints relating to Food / Feed Premises

The service investigates all complaints that it receives about food/feed safety and food standards conditions and practices in food/feed businesses.

An initial response to any complaint is made within two working days. In such cases, the confidentiality of the complainant is paramount. All anonymous complaints are also currently investigated.

During 2024-25, 62 complaints about hygiene standards in food premises were received. All were investigated within our 2-day response time.

The purpose of investigation is to determine the validity of the complaint and, where appropriate, to seek to ensure that any deficiency is properly addressed. The general approach is to assist the food/feed business operator in ensuring good standards of compliance, although enforcement action may be necessary where there is failure in the management of food/feed safety, or regulatory non-compliance.

Based on the average number of complaints received during previous years it is estimated that approximately 60 such complaints will be received in 2025-26.

3.3 Complaints against Our Staff/Service

Anyone who is aggrieved by the actions of a member of staff is encouraged, in the first instance, to contact the employee's line manager. Details of how and who to make contact with are contained in the inspection report left at the time of an inspection.

Formal complaints are investigated in accordance with the Council's corporate complaint procedure.

3.4 Liaison Arrangements

To ensure consistency in enforcement and approach in all food safety matters the service has a number of formal and informal liaison arrangements with other local authorities, Government bodies and local liaison groups.

The service actively participates in local and regional activities and is represented on the following:

- Tees Valley Heads of Public Protection Group
- Tees Valley Food Liaison Group
- UKHSA/Local Authority Sampling Group
- Tees Valley Public Health Group

- North East Public Protection Partnership (NEPPP) (representing the 12 North East local authorities)
- North East Trading Standards Liaison Group, which incorporates the
- North East Trading Standards Animal Feed Group (NETSA) (representing the 12 North East local authorities)

There is also liaison with other organisations including the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Trading Standards Institute, Consultant in Communicable Disease, UKHSA, Drinking Water Inspectorate, Defra / Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA), Cleveland Police, OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Officers also work in liaison with other Council departments including the planning services and licensing teams.

3.5 Home Authority Principle / Primary Authority Scheme

The Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008 introduced Primary Authority agreements. It placed a statutory obligation on the Council to provide a significantly expanded range of Home Authority services to local businesses when requested by that business. There are opportunities for local authorities to recover costs from businesses to provide this premium service.

The Council continues to fully support the National Primary Authority Scheme for businesses. When inspecting businesses which have a primary authority agreement in place with another local authority, officers will have regard to any relevant inspection plans or primary authority advice published on the register.

The Council will contact the Primary Authority and liaise over:

- any proposed formal enforcement action
- service of Notices
- shortcomings in the companies' policies that have wider implications

There are currently no formal Primary Authority arrangements in place with a Hartlepool based trader however the service works closely with some local businesses on an informal basis.

The level of resourcing will have to be reviewed if an opportunity to enter into a formal Primary Authority arrangement arises.

4 RESOURCES

4.1 Financial Resources

The annual budget for the Consumer Services section in the year 2025-26 is:

	£ 000
Employees	740
Other Expenditure	55
Public Health Grant	(306)
Other Grant Funding	(35)
Income	<u>(11)</u>
Net Budget	443

This budget is for all services provided by this section including Health & Safety, Animal Health, Trading Standards and resources are allocated in accordance with service demands.

4.2 Staffing Allocation

The Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services has overall responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the Council's Public Protection service, including delivery of the food/feed law service, in accordance with the service plan.

The Assistant Director (Regulatory Services), with the requisite qualifications and experience, has responsibility for the strategic management of the Food Service.

The resources determined necessary to deliver the food service in 2025-26 are as follows:

Food Hygiene

1 x 0.5 FTE Environmental Health Manager (Commercial Services) (with responsibility also for Port Health, Health and Animal Health and Welfare)

4 x 0.5 FTE EHO* (with requisite qualifications and experience and with responsibility also for Health & Safety)

**One of these posts is currently vacant*

1 x 0.3 FTE Part-time EHO (with requisite qualifications and experience and with responsibility for Health & Safety)

1 x 1 FTE Technical Officer Food (with requisite qualifications and experience)

Food Standards

1 x 0.2 FTE Environmental Health Manager (Commercial Services) (with responsibility also for Port Health, Health and Animal Health and Welfare)

4 x 0.3 FTE EHO* (with requisite qualifications and experience and with responsibility for Health & Safety)

**One of these posts is currently vacant*

1 x 0.16 FTE Part-time EHO (with requisite qualifications and experience and with responsibility for Health & Safety)

The Assistant Director (Regulatory Services) has responsibility for planning service delivery and strategic management of the Food Law Service. These duties are in addition to their general management responsibilities of the Development, Neighbourhoods & Regulatory Services Department.

The Environmental Health Manager (Commercial Services) has responsibility for the day-to-day supervision of the Food/Feed Law Service, Port Health, Health & Safety at Work, Public Health, Water Quality and Animal Health & Welfare.

The EHOs have responsibility for the performance of the food premises intervention programme as well as the delivery of all other aspects of the food law service, particularly more complex investigations. In addition, these officers undertake Health & Safety at Work enforcement.

The Technical Officer (Food) is also responsible for interventions, including inspections as well as revisits, investigation of less complex complaints and investigation of incidents of food-borne disease.

Feed Hygiene

The Environmental Health Manager (Commercial Services) and the Trading Standards and Licensing Manager are designated as lead officers for imported food / feed control and animal feed enforcement.

The Full Time Equivalent (FTE) allocated resource for carrying out official controls for feed hygiene is 0.25 FTE.

Authorised Trading Standards Officers have responsibility for the performance of the feed premises intervention programme as well as the delivery of all other aspects of the feed law service.

Support Services based within the department provide administrative support.

All staff engaged in food/feed safety law enforcement activity are suitably trained, qualified, and appropriately authorised in accordance with guidance and internal policy.

Staff undertaking educational and other support duties are suitably qualified and experienced to carry out this work.

4.3 Staff Development

The Council recognises that there is a need to invest in the continuing development of staff. Within the Commercial Services team such development is needed in order to meet the continuing professional development (CPD) requirements of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and more specifically requirements contained in the Food Standard Agency's Food Law Code of Practice.

The qualifications and training of staff engaged in food/feed law enforcement are prescribed and this will be reflected in the Council's policy in respect of appointment and authorisation of officers.

It is a mandatory requirement for officers of the food/feed law service to maintain their professional competency by undertaking a minimum of 20 hours continuous professional development (CPD) training each year, which may involve inhouse training, attendance at accredited short courses, seminars or conferences. This is also consistent with the requirements of the relevant professional bodies.

The priorities for the service are concerned with ensuring up to date knowledge and awareness of legislation, building capacity within the team including training and development of new staff. Detailed records are maintained by the service relating to all training received by officers.

4.4 Equipment and Facilities

A range of equipment and facilities are required for the effective operation of the food/feed law service. The service has a documented standard operating procedure that ensures the proper maintenance and calibration of equipment and its removal from use if found to be defective.

The service has a computerised performance management system, the Authority Public Protection computer system (APP). This is capable of maintaining up to date accurate data relating to the activities of the food/feed law service. A documented database management standard operating procedure has been produced to ensure that the system is properly maintained, up to date and secure. The system is used for the generation of the intervention programmes, the recording and tracking of all food/feed interventions, the production of statutory returns and the effective management of performance.

5. QUALITY ASSESSMENT

The Council is committed to quality service provision. To support this commitment the food law service seeks to ensure consistent, effective, efficient and ethical service delivery that constitutes value for money.

A range of performance monitoring information will be used to assess the extent to which the food service achieves this objective and will include on-going monitoring against pre-set targets, both internal and external audits and stakeholder feedback.

The Environmental Health Manager (Commercial Services) will carry out accompanied visits with officers undertaking interventions, investigations and other duties for the purpose of monitoring consistency and quality of the inspection and other visits carried out as well as maintaining and giving feedback with regard to associated documentation and reports.

It is possible that the Food Standards Agency will at any time notify the Council of their intention to carry out an audit of the service.

6 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

6.1 Overview

It is recognised that a key element of the service planning process is the rational review of past performance. In the formulation of this service plan, a review has been conducted of performance against those targets established for the year 2024-25.

This service plan will be reviewed at the conclusion of the year 2025-26 and at any point during the year where significant legislative changes or other relevant factors occur during the year.

It is the responsibility of the Assistant Director (Regulatory Services) to carry out that review with the Executive Director of Development, Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services.

The service plan review will identify any shortfalls in service delivery and will inform decisions about future staffing and resource allocation, service standards, targets and priorities.

Following any review leading to proposed revision of the service plan Council approval will be sought.

6.2 Performance Review 2024-25

This section describes performance of the service in key areas during 2024-25.

6.2.1 Intervention Programme

During 2024-25, we successfully completed 359 food hygiene, 242 food standards and 7 feed hygiene interventions.

We met our 2-working day response time for all complaints.

6.2.2 Registration and Approval of Premises

During 2024-25, 104 new food businesses were registered. This was a slight decrease on the previous year when 111 were registered.

Three premises subject to approval were inspected and given relevant guidance. A fourth premises was recently inspected but has now surrendered their approval as the activities requiring approval had discontinued.

6.2.3 Food Sampling Programme

Programmed food sampling in 2024-25 focussed on issues of public safety and took account of local and national priorities.

In total 208 hygiene samples and 18 food standards samples were taken. The results are discussed below:

Hygiene Samples

During 2024-25, the service participated in six microbiological surveys and took 208 hygiene samples.

- Two local surveys focused on the microbiological quality of imported foods. One survey focused on spices and savoury snacks and the other on dried and fresh fruit and nuts. In total 45 samples were taken and the Food Examiner deemed all but five samples to be satisfactory. All unsatisfactory products were re-sampled and satisfactory results were obtained for these products.
- During another local survey 108 hygiene swabs were taken from catering premises, such as schools, cafes and care homes. Five of the swabs were deemed to be unsatisfactory due to high levels of bacteria (Enterobacteriaceae). This is an indication of poor hygiene practices. Advice was given and re-samples with satisfactory results were obtained.
- Three national microbiological surveys were undertaken. These looked at:
 - (i) microbiological quality of cheese

During the survey 12 samples of prepacked cheese were sampled and checked for Listeria. All 12 samples were deemed to be satisfactory by the Food Examiner.

(ii) microbiological quality of tomatoes

During the survey 6 samples of prepacked tomatoes were sampled and checked for the presence of E Coli. All 6 samples were deemed to be satisfactory by the Food Examiner.

(iii) hygiene practices in tattoo/piercing premises

This survey was not related to hygiene in food premises. Nine premises were visited to carry out a survey that looked at hygiene in premises that carry out tattooing or piercing. A total of 22 swabs were taken, along with eight samples of green soap. Green soap is used to clean client's skin before treatments. All but one of the 22 swabs were deemed to be satisfactory. Two out of the eight samples of the green soap were deemed to be unsatisfactory, due to high levels of pseudomonas. Visits were made to the premises in question and advice was provided.

- A sample of locally produced raw drinking milk was also taken, and the result of the sample was deemed satisfactory.

Food Standards Sampling

A total of eighteen food standards samples were taken during 2024-25. Two Food Standards Agency (FSA) surveys were carried out and one ad hoc sample was taken in response to a Food Alert for Action. Details are discussed below:

- During the FSA Imported Foods Survey nine food standards samples were taken. These included spices, dried fruit, seeds and rice flour. The samples were analysed for Sudan Dyes, Pesticides and Aflatoxins. All nine samples were deemed to be satisfactory. In addition, six further samples of dried fruit were sent to the Public Analyst as part of the survey. The microbiological quality of these six samples were deemed to be satisfactory.
- A survey looking at Allergens in Caterers was carried out as part of a wider national study looking at allergens in food. The focus of the survey was peanuts in Indian Cuisine.

All twelve takeaways/restaurants serving Indian cuisine in Hartlepool were contacted. A meal suitable for a person with a peanut allergy was requested. Four of the premises said they were unable to provide a suitable meal and the remaining eight meals were sampled.

Of the eight samples taken, three were reported by the Public Analyst to contain peanut proteins at a level sufficient to induce an allergenic reaction in a susceptible person. The presence of peanut protein in the three meals renders the food injurious to health.

Legal action is currently being pursued against the three premises that provided the unsatisfactory results. A repeat of the survey will be conducted again later in the year.

- The FSA issued a Food Alert For Action in July 2024 regarding counterfeit Glen's Vodka. Officers from the department visited retail premises within the borough and one bottle of questionable source was seized. This sample of Glen's Vodka was sent to the Public Analyst for analysis. The Public Analyst reported that the sample contained Iso-Propanol, which is consistent with the alcohol being industrial rather than agricultural confirming that the vodka was not genuine Glen's Vodka.

As other counterfeit products (vapes) were seized during the visit the Premises Licence was called in for review by the Trading Standards team. This action was supported by the Commercial Services team. The Licensing Sub-Committee revoked the Premises Licence and whilst this decision was appealed the appeal was dismissed at the Magistrates' Court. The revocation of the premises licence is now in force.

Sampling continued in relation to private drinking water used by a local brewery. The results of the samples taken were all satisfactory.

A programme of sampling continued to be carried out to assess the microbiological quality of drinking water at premises within the borough and at the port.

Water sampling was also provided upon request to vessels visiting Hartlepool to assess the microbiological quality of drinking water.

6.2.4 Food Inspection

The service undertook no formal seizure of unfit food in the year.

Two voluntary surrenders were accepted from retail stores in respect of soft drinks containing additives (EDTA) which are not permitted in the UK. Calcium disodium EDTA is an additive used in some American imported soft drinks. It is not permitted in drinks within the UK as it does not comply with UK food standards and regulations.

6.2.5 Promotional Work

Food safety promotion whether by advice, education, training or other means is a key part of the food team's strategy in changing behaviour and increasing compliance in businesses.

In February 2006, the Food Standards Agency introduced Safer Food Better Business (SFBB) aimed at assisting smaller catering businesses to introduce a documented food safety management system. Since this time, our resources have been directed towards continuing to assist businesses to fully implement a documented food safety management system.

The team has continued to offer tailored advice and information on request with advisory visits to businesses being carried out during the year.

Circular letters are issued as required to inform food business operators of important food safety matters relevant to their operations e.g. changes in legislation, food alerts etc.

6.2.6 Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

Hartlepool Council introduced the 'Food Hygiene Rating Scheme' (FHRS) a Food Standards Agency / local authority partnership initiative to help consumers choose where to eat out, or shop for food.

The 'Food Law Code of Practice', requires that a risk rating is undertaken which is used to determine the frequency of intervention for the business. The hygiene rating is derived from the risk rating that is given to a business following every 'primary' inspection.

Of the seven main categories used to determine the overall rating score the following three factors are used to create a hygiene rating:

1. Food Hygiene and Safety
2. Structure and Cleaning
3. Management and Control

These ratings are the only ones that are directly controllable by the business and are the reason they have been used to obtain the food business' hygiene rating.

The total score from the 3 categories is then used to derive the hygiene rating ranging from '0' ('Urgent improvement necessary') through to '5' ('Very Good').

The profile of Hartlepool premises FHSR ratings is shown below.

Hygiene Rating	No @ 1.4.14	No @ 1.4.15	No @ 1.4.16	No @ 1.4.17	No @ 1.4.18	No @ 1.4.19	No @ 1.4.20	No @ 1.4.21	No @ 1.4.22	No @ 1.4.23	No @ 1.4.24	No @ 1.4.25
5 Very Good	456 (66.7%)	471 (68.3%)	502 (72.2%)	539 (76.9%)	561 (80.6%)	580 (82.9%)	596 (83.9%)	587 (73.2%)	688 (87.3%)	654 (85.9%)	647 (87.4%)	658 (88.9%)
4 Good	149 (21.8%)	136 (19.7%)	125 (18.0%)	107 (15.3%)	101 (14.5%)	76 (10.9%)	77 (10.8%)	72 (9%)	64 (8.1%)	66 (8.7%)	57 (7.7%)	55 (7.4%)
3 Generally Satisfactory	63 (9.2%)	56 (8.1%)	55 (7.9%)	43 (6.1%)	28 (4.0%)	38 (5.4%)	36 (5.1%)	32 (4%)	35 (4.4%)	32 (4.2%)	33 (4.5%)	25 (3.4%)
2 Improvement Necessary	9 (1.3%)	18 (2.6%)	8 (1.2%)	10 (1.4%)	4 (0.6%)	3 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.1%)	4 (0.5%)	3 (0.4%)	2 (0.3%)
1 Major Improvement Necessary	7 (1.0%)	9 (1.3%)	3 (0.4%)	2 (0.3%)	2 (0.3%)	3 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
0 Urgent Improvement Necessary	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (0.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Awaiting Inspection	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.01%)	111 (13.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Sub Total	684	690	695	701	696	700	710	802	788	761	740	740
Exempt	45	44	45	42	42	37	39	39	39	28	27	27
Excluded	10	10	1	1	10	12	2	2	8	6	4	3
Sensitive	32	1	8	9	1	1	10	10	2	3	5	7
Total	771	745	749	753	749	750	761	853	837	798	776	777
% of premises rated as 3 or above	97.7%	96.1%	98.1%	98.3%	99.1%	99.2%	99.8%	86.2%	99.8%	98.8%	99.6%	99.7%

Since the introduction of the FHSR national scheme in 2013, the number of premises rated as 3 (Generally Satisfactory) or better has remained consistently high. In 2024/25 the figure was 99.7%.

In their Post Pandemic Recovery Plan, the FSA acknowledged that hygiene standards had anecdotally fallen. This fall in standards has in part been a

consequence of the Covid-19 Pandemic, however it is also reflective of the cost of living crisis and the difficulties businesses are facing e.g. fewer people working in businesses, problems with recruitment and a lack of investment as businesses struggle financially due to the rising costs of utilities and food.

Officers are finding that inspections are taking longer to do with more advice/support being given to operators, and more frequent revisits. There is a requirement under the Food Law Code of Practice that all non-compliant premises (i.e. hygiene rating less than 3) receive a revisit.

The service is committed to focussing its resources on carrying out interventions at those businesses which are deemed not to be 'broadly compliant' and has liaised with businesses that have been awarded a hygiene rating of '2' or less offering advice and support. Where appropriate, enforcement action will be taken to secure compliance.

Under the FHRS, there is a procedure that affords food business operators the opportunity to request a re-visit inspection once they have taken action to rectify non-compliances identified during an inspection. At the re-visit, the establishment may be re-assessed and given a new hygiene rating.

During 2024-25, 10 businesses submitted applications for a re-rating. Further information is provided in **6.2.7**.

The food hygiene ratings are published online at www.food.gov.uk/ratings

6.2.7 FHRS Re-rating & Promotional visits

During 2024-25, officers worked closely with food business operators to improve food hygiene standards in our lowest rated premises. During the year, 10 businesses submitted applications for a FHRS re-rating.

All 10 of these businesses were re-inspected in accordance with the FHRS and all demonstrated an improvement in standards. Five improved from a 4 to a 5, three from a 3 to 5, one from a 2 to a 5 and one from a 2 to a 4.

On 1st April 2018, we introduced a dual system for dealing with re-rating requests. The five constituent members of the Tees Valley Food Liaison Group agreed this system.

The scheme enables food businesses to apply for one free re-rating revisit (as per the original scheme). To qualify they must have carried out the necessary improvements to their business and be willing to wait a minimum of three months from their last inspection (this period is known as a 'stand still' period). Businesses can elect to pay £155 if they wish to be inspected within three months of their inspection. They are also eligible to submit more than one application to be re-rated if they pay the £155 fee. During 2024-25, 2 businesses elected to pay for a re-rating inspection.

6.2.8 Food / Feed Complaints

During the year, the service dealt with 62 complaints relating to the condition of food premises and/or food handling practice (this was a significant increase on previous years, for example during 2019-20, 27 complaints were received). In addition, 17 complaints were received regarding unfit or out of condition food or extraneous matter. A further 25 complaints concerning the composition or labelling of food items were received.

No complaints were received regarding animal feeding stuffs.

Investigations into the above were undertaken within our target of 2 working days.

6.2.9 Food Poisoning

In conjunction with UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Hartlepool Council investigates cases of actual or suspected food poisoning and foodborne disease.

The majority of notifiable disease notifications received by the food service were cases of *Campylobacter*, all of which appeared to be sporadic (isolated) cases.

Campylobacter is the most common bacterial cause of food poisoning in England and Wales. National data shows that while the incidence of *Salmonella* infections has steadily declined since the late 1990s those caused by *Campylobacter* had significantly increased. As a result in recent years the FSA and UKHSA has been spearheading campaigns to address this.

6.2.10 Food Safety Incidents

The Service received Food Alerts and a number of Product Recall/Withdrawal notifications and Allergy Alerts from the Food Standards Agency during the year. All Food Alerts requiring action were dealt with expeditiously.

The Service also receives reports from the FSA regarding incidents involving food fraud, which may present a risk to health and require immediate investigation. Most relate to illicit alcohol due to the chemicals used as a substitution for genuine alcohol. In addition, intelligence is received from HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) regarding counterfeit alcohol.

6.2.11 Enforcement

No formal enforcement was undertaken in relation to official food controls during the year.

6.2.12 Complaints against Our Staff/Service

No complaints were made against our staff during 2024-25.

7. KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT & CHALLENGES FOR 2025-26

In addition to committing the service to specific operational activities such as performance of the intervention programme, the service planning process assists in highlighting areas where improvement is desirable. Detailed below are specifically identified key areas for improvement and/or challenges for 2025-26.

1. The Public Protection section continues to face significant financial pressures due to ongoing Council savings and maximise effectiveness remains paramount. During 2025-26, we will target our resources effectively using a range of interventions, including providing advice to businesses, with the aim of influencing behaviour and improving the management of food safety risks that will have an impact on wider public health outcomes. We will continue to explore how we can contribute to the Public Health Outcomes Framework.
2. The implementation of the new Food Standards Delivery Model continues to present a challenge during 2025-26. The FSA's deadline for implementation of the new scheme was 1.4.25, however there was a delay in our MIS provider updating APP and the migration of our data meaning that it will not occur until Summer 2025. Officers received training and are manually completing risk rating of premises following inspections. Until the implementation is complete it is impossible to know how many food standards interventions are due in 2025-26.
3. We will need to keep abreast of and respond to any changes to legislation, guidance and policy decision and monitor the impacts of any changes to the regulatory framework. This may involve reviewing and updating our Quality Management System/Standard Operating Procedures for Food and Feed as appropriate.