



Leicester
City Council

MINUTE EXTRACT

Minutes of the Meeting of the NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: MONDAY, 4 APRIL 2016 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Dawood (Chair)
Councillor Gugnani (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Corral
Councillor Halford

Councillor Hunter
Councillor Khote

In Attendance:

Councillor Master, Assistant City Mayor - Neighbourhood Services
Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor - Communities & Equalities
Councillor Waddington, Assistant City Mayor - Jobs & Skills

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51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cutkelvin.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Although not a member of the Commission, Councillor Sood, Assistant City Mayor (Communities and Equalities), declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting, in that she was Chair of the Leicester Council of Faiths, was a JHMT Board member and was a Patron for CLASP.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice Councillors Sood's judgement of the public interest. She was not, therefore, required to withdraw from the meeting.

57. LEICESTER'S FOOD SECTOR: PUBLIC PROTECTION AND REGULATION BY LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report on public protection and regulation in Leicester's food sector.

The Head of Regulatory Services presented the report, explaining that:

- The city had approximately 3,000 food businesses at any time, approximately two-thirds of which were restaurants and caterers;
- There was a high degree of churn amongst food businesses, with approximately 500 new businesses at any time. This affected performance figures for compliance with food regulation requirements;
- Some locations had a high level of churn, often with buildings that were less well built and/or maintained. This also could affect the food safety rating these businesses received, as it was more difficult to prevent issues such as rodent infestations;
- A key regulatory activity for officers was programmed inspections. This included advice visits, inspections and follow-up visits;
- 82% of establishments in the city were now compliant. However, the national average was over 90%. The city's figure reflected the high level of churn and that many businesses were located in old buildings that were difficult to maintain to the appropriate standards;
- Nationally, the number of complaints about food establishments was rising, but the number of inspections was down, reflecting that resources available to local authorities had reduced;
- The Food Safety Agency (FSA) was developing a Regulatory Strategy. To date, no proposals had arisen from this, but it provided useful discussion points;
- There currently was a lack of customer pressure to improve standards, possibly as customers did not see storage and preparation facilities at many food establishments; and
- The Council did not have the power to fine businesses for food safety contraventions, but if legal action was taken against a business, the court could impose a fine.

Councillor Waddington, (Assistant City Mayor – Jobs and Skills), explained that food establishments currently were not required by law to display their food hygiene ratings. The Council was campaigning for this to be changed and this campaign was supported by the FSA. Councillor Waddington had written to the Department for Health requesting this and had received the reply attached at the end of these minutes.

The Team Manager (Environmental Health) advised Members that all regulatory visits to food establishments were unannounced. Officers tried to visit these premises when they were busy preparing food, in order to get a better impression of arrangements. If officers were aware of a language difficulty, they would try and arrange for a translator to be present. In addition, the FSA produced some information in languages other than English.

The Food Safety Team Manager confirmed that cleanliness was one of the most important aspects of food safety. This applied to all food premises, irrespective of their size.

The Commission noted that information on a premises' food hygiene rating currently could be found on the Council's website. It also was noted that, although customers could ask a food establishment what its food hygiene rating was, the establishment did not have to tell the customer. Local media often ran stories about failings in food safety, which were very helpful in raising awareness, but there was still a lack of knowledge of how the system worked. The Council therefore wanted to give people that knowledge to empower them to make choices about where they ate.

The Head of Regulatory Services explained that the FSA had done a periodic inspection of the food function in 2014 and had made some criticisms. As a result, the FSA had required a number of actions to be taken and these had been included in an Improvement Action Plan. This included more stable resourcing to reduce the backlog of inspections, documenting procedures and introducing clearer oversight at local manager and senior manager levels.

These all had been achieved, along with an increase in compliance from 70% to over 80%. The FSA therefore had signed off the Improvement Action Plan, commenting very positively on the work being done.

The FSA also commented that the service should not be comparing itself to those in Nottingham and Derby. Instead, due to the nature of the food businesses in the city, comparisons should be made to an area such as the London Borough of Camden.

Councillor Waddington welcomed FSA recognition of the good work being done on food regulation and safety in the city and thanked all concerned for this work.

AGREED:

- 1) That officers involved in the Council's food function be thanked for their work;
- 2) That the improvements made to the Council's food function be commended;
- 3) That a report be made to this Commission on progress with implementing the 2016-2017 Food Regulation Service Plan and

including a report on the arrangements that were subject matter of the Food Improvement Action Plan; and

- 4) That this Commission expresses its concern at the reducing levels of resources being made available by the government to public protection and regulation in the food sector.