

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 12 July 2018

Report of the Head of Learning and Skills

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Primary Authority Status

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

The report seeks approval for the formation of an Environmental Health Primary Authority working status with Preston City Council, to enable the Schools and Residential Care Catering Service to operate effectively across Lancashire.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) approve the formation of an Environmental Health Primary Authority working relationship with Preston City Council.
- (ii) approve that the Lancashire School and Residential Care Catering Service establishes future safe systems of work within Lancashire's catering establishments, and for the current and future systems to be scrutinised and ratified by Preston City Council.

Background and Advice

The Lancashire School and Residential Care Catering Service operates a traded catering service to over 500 schools across Lancashire, Blackburn, Blackpool and neighbouring authorities, and also provides the catering provision to the Older People's Service.

The catering service is responsible for the compliant procurement of £10m of foodstuffs per annum and the safe receipt, storage, preparation and service of approximately 13 million meals per annum.

This activity takes place across approximately 530 operating establishments which are assessed for legal compliance by 15 different borough and city Environmental Health Departments covering Lancashire and neighbouring authorities.

In 2011, the Lancashire School and Residential Care Catering Service renewed statutory Food Business Operator documentation, known as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, in conjunction and consultation with Preston City Council's Environmental Health department. The documents were renewed in an effort to work to one unified set of Food Business Operator principles, which would be viewed and scrutinised for compliance equally by all 15 of the Environmental Health Officers operating within the borough and city Environmental Health Departments.

In the intervening years, there have been a number of incidents within the food industry which have led to the Food Standards Agency, which acts as the governing body on food regulatory matters, to consider changes to the way that the food industry will be regulated in the future. These considerations have, in turn, prompted borough and city Environmental Health Departments to review their own operating models and how they will fit within a new regulatory framework. This has resulted in differing approaches being taken within borough or city council Environmental Health Departments, which undermines the benefit of working to a unified set of Food Business Operator principles.

Entering a Primary Authority relationship enables the council to have a strategic dialogue through one district environmental authority rather than the 15 in our operating area.

Primary Authority was launched by government in 2009, to make the local regulation of businesses operating at multiple premises across the UK, or regions within, more consistent. The principles of Primary Authority are administered by the Office for Product Safety and Standards and, in the case of an Environmental Health arrangement, are intended to be a collaborative and binding partnership between food business operators and an appointed local authority. The Office for Product Safety and Standards is working towards a regulatory environment in which businesses have the confidence to invest and grow, and citizens and communities are properly protected. This is done by operating Primary Authority to ensure consistent regulation and giving businesses a say in their regulation.

It is inefficient for an authority the size of Lancashire to be assessed on Environmental Health standards independently by 15 differing borough and city councils, particularly when there is the opportunity for individual interpretation to influence the outcome of Environmental Health audits. It is therefore proposed that the Lancashire School and Residential Care Catering Service forms a Primary Authority relationship with Preston City Council, which would act as Lancashire's advisory body on food regulation and premises standards across all sites in all parts of Lancashire, and which would also coordinate with other borough Environmental Health Departments, where queries and inconsistencies arise.

There is no cost associated to the forming of a Primary Authority relationship, although there is a requirement to pay an hourly rate for consultation services, once

the relationship is operational. There is also no direct impact on other borough councils carrying out their Environmental Health responsibilities.

It would be possible to establish a Primary Authority relationship with any Environmental Health body, either within or outside of Lancashire. The decision to recommend Preston City Environmental Health is made on the basis of previous collaborative working arrangements, Preston City Council's Environmental Health experience, the relationship being non-profit making and the geographic location being at the centre of Lancashire. Primary Authority working status would also enable Preston City Council's Environmental Health Department to act in an advisory capacity over other districts.

The Preston City food team has significant expertise in auditing food safety systems. The Environmental Health department is accredited to an externally audited ISO: 9001 quality assurance scheme. One senior Environmental Health Officer and the manager hold Lead Auditor qualifications and both hold Chartered status. The Environmental Health manager re-wrote and updated the Lancashire Inter Authority Auditing scheme in 2012, and continues to annually review, update and moderate the scheme. The Food Standards Agency has reported positively on the Lancashire Inter Authority Auditing system. Preston City Council also holds Primary Authority status with Booths supermarkets and therefore has experience of working across boroughs within and outside of Lancashire.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

Risk management

Not following a Primary Authority relationship will potentially result in the Lancashire School and Residential Care Catering Service being regulated in different ways, borough by borough. The drive towards a more commercial Environmental health operating model could also result in unnecessary costs if a Primary Authority status is not adopted.

Financial

There are no financial implications attached to this report

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A