

By email:

5 September 2012

Our reference: RDOC-CEO

Dear Colleague,

FSA REVIEW OF THE DELIVERY OF OFFICIAL CONTROLS FOR FOOD SAFETY AND STANDARDS

You received a letter in February of last year after the Food Standards Agency (FSA) announced it would be reviewing local authority delivery of official controls for food safety and standards. The review is now at the stage where we need information from local authorities.

The review aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the current delegated delivery model and consider the scope for making improvements. Specifically, it will evaluate the delivery of all food safety and standards controls undertaken by local and port health authorities for which the FSA is the Central Competent Authority (CCA). This will include consideration of how the FSA performs in supporting this delivery.

As the CCA we need to assure ourselves that official controls are being delivered effectively in the UK to protect consumers. We must also consider how best to secure efficiency, consistency, resilience and sustainability in this fundamental public health protection function. The following have prompted this review:

- Some evidence suggesting there are inconsistencies in the delivery of food controls in terms of the number of enforcement actions taken, the levels of food business compliance and officer resource. This warrants further investigation.
- Budgetary pressures, both on the FSA and those delivering official controls, which make the review timely. We need to understand the impact of these resource constraints on food service delivery to ensure the system is efficient, sustainable and aligned to the needs and risks of the food industry in the UK.
- Different local authorities are responding to the various regulatory and economic challenges in different ways. The FSA needs to get a fuller picture

of these ongoing changes to the delivery landscape to help us understand the potential impact on consumers.

Consumer protection is the priority for the review. We are not assessing individual local authority performance, but will look at delivery structures to identify where improvements may be required and to assess the impact of any proposed changes. The review programme of work has been specifically designed to fulfil this aim and to supplement the information we already hold. The information gathered will be useful to the review and to the FSA's business as usual activities in supporting the delivery of official controls and acting as CCA. We also hope to identify examples of good practice and enhance horizon scanning and identification of future risks to local authority delivery to test whether the model will remain fit for purpose in the future.

We do not yet know what the evidence will reveal and we remain completely open minded about what the outcomes of the review will be. However, the FSA's ability to assess the system and make robust recommendations depends entirely on the quality of the data gathered. This is the opportunity for officers in your authority to contribute and ensure the needs of consumers and food businesses in your area are included.

The first key piece of work we are undertaking is a survey which aims to provide an overview of the current delivery system, providing high level, consistent data on the delivery of official controls. All local and port health authorities in the UK will be invited to participate. In order to ensure we account for the unique situation in your area we would hope you would encourage your staff to respond. Heads of Service will be contacted from 13 September to ask them to complete the survey.

This work will be followed by an in-depth study. This will collect detailed information from a selected number of local authorities' to provide a range of illustrative examples of how official controls delivery works in practice. This work will begin in late October, and again I would like to encourage your involvement should your authority be approached.

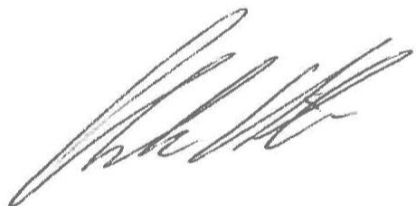
We are also planning to carry out some targeted research work with a number of individual food safety and standards professionals. Heads of Service in a small number of authorities will be contacted shortly to ask if they can nominate participants. The time commitment will be minimal but the information they provide will be essential to ensure any recommendations for change or improvement are workable for local authorities.

Please be assured that the FSA will make every effort to try and minimise the burdens on your staff but it is crucial that we work with you on these important areas. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

More information about the review can be found on our website at:
<http://www.food.gov.uk/safereating/ocreview/>.

If you or your staff have any general questions or comments on the review please do contact the Review Team via review.officialcontrols@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charles Milne', written in a cursive style.

Charles Milne