

NOTES P&F CHAIR'S BRIEFING – Version 1 WEDNESDAY 29TH JANUARY 2014

ATTENDING:

Councillor Sue Anderson (chair P&F), Councillor Anthony Seymour (Vice-Chairman P&F)

Taiq Chowdry (Service Manager, Environmental Services Delivery), Martin Randall (Senior Professional Corporate Performance and Planning), Lynne Margetts (Service Manager Scrutiny)

NOTES

Inspection of Food Premises

As a result of concerns with regard to performance on NI184 which has been monitored by the Chair and Vice Chairman of P&F, Taiq Chowdry, Service Manager, Environmental Services Delivery, had been invited to the briefing to discuss the indicator with the Chair and Vice Chairman.

The Service Manager explained the construction of the indicator. It was introduced in 2007 to give residents notice of those food premises which are broadly compliant with the food hygiene legislation. It measures the total number of premises compliant, in terms of those which the council has inspected, as a proportion of the total number of food premises registered. However, in Harrow there is a huge amount of 'churn' in premises and each time ownership changes, the council is required to re-register and inspect the premises. These premises count towards the total number of premises and thus, prior to inspection, count automatically as 'non-compliant'.

The target for compliant is 75%, the council currently performs at 70%

The indicator was withdrawn as a national requirement in 2010 as it was considered very problematic but the council, like many others, decided to retain the measure in order to give some reassurance to the public.

The Service Manager explained that the main cause for the poor performance has been the level of churn and turmoil in the team as the Environment and Enterprise directorate has been reconfigured. In order to address the performance issues, he advised that following the reconfiguration, he is now expecting some stability in the team and he is also about to recruit additional staff.

He also explained that change in guidance from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is likely to increase the council's capacity. Currently all premises are categorised from 'A' (high risk) to 'E' (low risk). The FSA has recognised that the largest number of premises are categorised at level 'C' but that there is a degree of flexibility in this categorisation in that a number of premises could in fact drop to either 'D' or 'E' categories. Shifting more premises in this direction will reduce the requirement on the council to physically inspect premises as compliance can be measured through other, non face-to-face means for these lower risk establishments. This will obviously increase the capacity of the team by

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decreasing the number of inspections required enabling inspectors to focus on the higher risk establishments and increase the number of premises deemed to be compliant.

The Service Manager advised that the regularity of inspections is determined by the level of risk associated with the premises, thus premises rated as 'A' or 'B' could expect to be inspected every 6 – 12 months but those with lower risk ratings would be inspected less frequently. Also if in breach, premises could expect more frequent inspection.

Inspections consider structure, systems and competence but inspectors are proportionate in their responses, and recognise the importance to the borough of a healthy local economy. This means that rather than for example, serving notice to close premises down, they will work with owners to address failings through a period of voluntary closure to deliver the required improvements.

Of a total of approximately 5,000 premises, 3,500 are inspected annually, high risk premises will all be inspected with approximately 50% of lower risk establishments inspected.

The councillors thanked the Service Manager for his briefing and proposed that further information is provided with regard to performance against this indicator or its successor as the new team settles in.

Performance Update

The Senior Professional Corporate Performance and Planning provided the Chair and Vice Chairman with further information with regard to staff sickness – this information had also been requested by the Communications, Performance and Resources Portfolio Holder . Councillors were very disappointed with the quality of the information provided, in particular the significant level of returns which included no reason for absence and which therefore could not be analysed. The councillors requested further information what action is being taken to ensure the capture of full and accurate absence data and protect the wellbeing of staff. The Senior Professional will attempt to get an initial response to the councillors' enquiry but the Chair and Vice Chairman agreed to recommend to their successors that this is something which is investigated further in the next administration.

Cllr Anderson's request with regard to comparative information re care leavers will be pursued.

P&F Agenda

The agenda was agreed as:

- P&F chairs' report Q3
- Revenue and Capital Monitoring Q£
- Children's Service Performance
- 3rd Sector Strategy Update
- Business Continuity and IT Disaster Recovery
- Draft P&F Annual Report

The Chair asked that relevant scrutiny performance leads be invited to attend the committee