

Agenda Item No 8

'Scores on the Doors' Food Safety Scheme**Food and Safety Manager**

Summary: This report proposes the introduction of a 'Scores on the Doors' scheme to promote improved standards of food safety in the district. The proposed scheme will be part of a Norfolk-wide initiative, using national guidelines produced by the Food Standards Agency.

Conclusions: The introduction of a 'Scores on the Doors' scheme will promote greater public awareness of food safety in South Norfolk and encourage food businesses to achieve higher standards.

The adoption of a Norfolk-wide scheme that follows national guidelines will remove the potential for inconsistency and confusion, as currently exists from having numerous different local schemes in operation.

Recommendations: It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Agrees with the recommendation of the Environment, Health, Recycling and Safety Overview Sub Committee that a 'Scores on the Doors' scheme should be introduced for food businesses in South Norfolk;
- b) Supports the proposal that any scheme should be part of a Norfolk-wide initiative and in-line with national guidelines produced by the Food Standards Agency; and
- c) Supports the introduction of a scheme for South Norfolk businesses in early 2009/10.

Cabinet member(s):	Ward(s) affected:
David Bills	All

Contact Officer, telephone number, and e-mail:

Tim Durell 01508 533711
tdurell@s-norfolk.gov.uk

1. Background

- 1.1. In 2006, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) set up a pilot project involving several local authorities to look at creating a national scheme to provide consumers with meaningful information about food hygiene standards in local food businesses. Prior to this, a number of local authorities had created their own schemes, but these often contained inconsistencies in the way food businesses were being “scored”. These are commonly known as ‘Scores on the Doors’ schemes.
- 1.2. Since the introduction of these pilot projects, more than 200 other councils have developed their own ‘Scores on the Doors’ schemes. Most Councils use a star rating system to denote how good or bad a food business is, although one council uses tulips because of local associations.
- 1.3. In December 2008, the FSA met to review the findings of the pilots and to consider proposals for setting up a national ‘Scores on the Doors’ scheme. They decided that:
- A six-tier scheme should be established in England, Wales and Northern Ireland;
 - The “score” should be derived from the numerical risk rating system that local authorities are required to use when they inspect a food business as part of their routine food safety work. (A high scoring food business poses a greater risk than one that has a low score and thus will be inspected more frequently);
 - The schemes should cover restaurants, cafes, takeaways, sandwich shops and other retail places that are producing ready to eat food for the consumer;
 - The display of scores at premises should be voluntary;
 - There should be mechanisms for re-inspection/re-visits for re-scoring, and for appeals;
 - Consumer research should be undertaken to inform decisions on symbols and descriptors; and
 - A local authority support package should be developed (guidance, training, IT platform).
- 1.4 A typical 6 tier scheme of the type proposed by the FSA will have the following features:

5 stars	Full compliance with legal requirements and full confidence in management/procedures
4 stars	Satisfactory compliance with legal requirements
3 stars	Minor improvements needed to meet legal requirements
2 stars	Improvements needed in key areas to meet legal requirements
1 star	Improvements needed in a significant number of key areas
No star	Serious non compliance but no imminent risk to public health

- 1.5 Businesses are not obliged to publicly display their 'Score on the Door' rating under existing schemes, nor are they likely to have to do so under the proposed national scheme. However, most local authorities have made the information publicly available via their web sites. There is an expectation by the FSA that this will be done, so that anybody, anywhere in the country, can access the information.
- 1.6 Locally, there are 'Scores on the Doors' schemes operated by Norwich City and Gt Yarmouth Borough Councils. Both councils report that they have brought about significant improvements in food safety standards, with proprietors requesting re-inspections so that they can have their star rating raised.
- 1.7 At their meeting on 2 February 2009, members of the Environment, Health, Recycling & Safety Overview Subcommittee considered a report outlining details of the national proposals and agreed to recommend to Cabinet that such a scheme should be introduced in South Norfolk.

2. Decision Sought

- 2.1. Cabinet is asked to approve the introduction of a 'Scores on the Doors' scheme for food businesses in South Norfolk. This will be part of a Norfolk-wide initiative and in-line with national guidelines produced by the Food Standards Agency.

3. Proposal and Reasons

- 3.1. It is proposed that a 'Scores on the Doors' scheme is introduced in South Norfolk during early 2009/10. This will be part of a Norfolk-wide initiative that will:
 - Provide consistent information to the public so that they can make informed judgements about where they eat and purchase food
 - Follow the national guidelines produced by the Food Standards Agency
 - Enable meaningful comparisons to be made between this Council and others with regard to the overall standard being achieved by food businesses
 - Provide a nationally recognised scheme which will acknowledge the high standards achieved by many of the food businesses in South Norfolk
 - Provide an incentive to encourage those food businesses that are not fully meeting legal requirements to improve their standards. In particular, this has the potential to assist the Council improve the overall number of food establishments in South Norfolk that are "broadly compliant with food hygiene law" (National Indicator 184)
- 3.2. It is further proposed that details of the score for all relevant premises should be published on the Council's website for public information.
- 3.3. Premises will be assessed at the time of routine food safety inspections, ensuring that the scheme can be introduced within existing resource allocations.

4. Relevant Corporate Objectives

4.1. The following corporate priorities are relevant:

- Be businesslike in providing services people value the most
- Preserve the special character of our market towns and villages
- Make South Norfolk a culturally and economically richer place to live
- Improve the health and well-being of everyone who lives or works in South Norfolk

5. Other Options

5.1. There is an expectation that existing 'Scores on the Doors' schemes will be adapted so that they become consistent with the proposed FSA scheme. It is also the intention of the FSA that 'Scores on the Doors' will cover all parts of the country; therefore not to participate is not an option. It would however be ill advised to develop our own scheme or adopt someone else's, only to have to change it later.

6. Implication – Risk, Financial, Legal, Environmental, Climate Change, Equalities, Biodiversity and Crime Reduction

6.1. By adopting a national scheme that has been developed from the FSA pilot study, the risks of going it alone are eliminated. The FSA has indicated that there will be a package of support provided to local authorities to assist with the implementation of the scheme. Guidance, officer training and IT enhancements will be funded by central government. Although food hygiene inspections will probably take a bit longer, procedures can be modified so that the additional workload can be absorbed within the existing resources of the Food & Safety Team.

7. Conclusion

7.1. A national 'Scores on the Doors' scheme will remove the inconsistency and confusion that currently exists from having numerous different schemes in operation. It will publicly acknowledge the best businesses but can also provide extra impetus to encourage businesses to improve their standards.