

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: THURSDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2010  
title: FOOD SAFETY 'SCORES ON THE DOORS'  
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES  
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## 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To reconsider the principle of introducing a 'Scores on the Doors' scheme in relation to food premises within the Ribble Valley.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – To help make people's lives safer and healthier especially to ensure that we have safe and trouble free communities with healthy lifestyles.
- Community Objectives – To promote and support health, environmental, economic and social wellbeing of people who live, work and visit the Ribble Valley.
- Corporate Priorities – Provide quality services efficiently and effectively.
- Other Considerations – This scheme will enhance sharing information, transparency and enable people to make informed choices.

## 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Public sector information now underpins a growing part of the economy and the amount and influence of this data is increasing at a dramatic pace. The driver to this growth is the emergence of online tools that allow people to use information in new ways. National statistics reported that 15 million households in Great Britain (61%) had Internet access. Scores on the Doors Schemes (SotD) provides a pivotal opportunity to take advantage of both improving communication and involvement with the consumer who spends a significant amount of disposable income on food.

2.2 SotD schemes are part of an evolving movement to change the way in which consumers can make use of information. For example, having obtained information about hygiene conditions found at premises, consumers can use their judgement on how a premise is performing against required standards of food safety when making their purchasing choices.

2.3 These schemes consist of making available the 'risk score' of food premises resulting from a programmed food hygiene inspection. Currently food premises are scored in relation to potential hazards, consumers at risk, vulnerable groups, compliance with food hygiene, structural compliance and confidence in management. These schemes rate premises on the factors over which they have control ie compliance with food hygiene, structural compliance and confidence in management.

2.4 Since 2007, several pilot schemes have been undertaken nationally by selected food authorities seeking to develop a scheme to make compliance information available to the public, in relation to food safety inspections. Currently some 200 local authorities

have introduced a SotD scheme. We are told these have proved highly effective in raising and maintaining high standards and have proved popular with consumers.

- 2.5 In 2010, the Food Standards Agency in partnership with local authorities, plans to roll out the agreed national food hygiene 'six-tier' rating scheme for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This will involve awarding a 'zero to five star' rating to 'food establishments supplying food direct to consumers'. This includes restaurants, cafes, takeaways, sandwich shops and other places that people eat food prepared outside of the home, as well as food retailers such as supermarkets.
- 2.6 The Food Standards Agency have recently invited bids from Local Authorities and particularly welcomed group bids for wider implementation on a regional basis. Bids had to be submitted by the deadline of Friday, 27 August 2010. At a recent Food Officer Group Liaison meeting, the matter was discussed in detail when it was agreed in principle for 9 Lancashire authorities, including Ribble Valley, to apply for the available funding. The partner local authorities are Wyre, Chorley, West Lancs, Hyndburn, Preston, South Ribble, Burnley and Rossendale.

### 3 ISSUES

3.1 Scores on the Doors Schemes have developed with two main aims:

- (i) To improve standards of food hygiene in businesses to:
- provide a driver for safer food better business;
  - provide recognition and reward of good performance;
  - create competition amongst businesses;
  - generate peer pressure amongst businesses; and
  - encourage a healthy community.
- (ii) To inform customers including:
- enabling informed consumer choice';
  - fulfilling freedom of information duties; and
  - increase consumer confidence.

3.2 A number of schemes have been trialled, however, the Food Standards Agency has determined in line with consumer consultation favouring a scheme consisting of a scoring system of 0-5 stars, with blank stars being shown where below standard.

3.3 Feedback from authorities who have implemented such a scheme are positive with a vast majority indicating confidence of delivering worthwhile and cost effective benefits. Most local authorities have encountered few resources problems relating to the operation of the scheme once established. There are obvious resource requirements during the initial preparation and launch.

3.4 Several authorities have reported reduced work due to a decline in category A and B risk premises and a decline in freedom of information enquiries. This is unlikely to be the case in Ribble Valley, as historically, these have not been an issue.

3.5 Key success factors identified include securing and maintaining positive media attention, publicity of the scheme, effective web access, an accurate inspection data and records, and achieving a critical mass of display certificates.

3.6 There are two recognised approaches identified for introducing a SotD scheme namely:

'Staged and Gradual' Approach – the scheme being rolled out from a specific launch date with establishments scored as and when they receive their next planned inspection (this may take up to 3 years to implement) and,

'Critical Mass' Approach:

- a) where historical data is used to score premises retrospectively, normally from a pre-determined date, or
- b) establishments being scored during the current inspection programme and formal launch delayed until there are sufficient number of establishments in the scheme to create a critical mass

Option b is preferred by the Food Standards Agency

- 3.7 Many local authorities indicate that they have received far fewer complaints or adverse enquiries from businesses on launch of the scheme than inspected. In most cases, the number of complaints and adverse enquiries was considered to be very low. It is considered imperative to consult and inform local businesses and to give them prior notice (through letters and publicity) of the design and operation of such a scheme to minimise adverse feedback on the launching of the scheme.
- 3.8 It is recognised that there will be a cost to implementing such a scheme. The Food Standards Agency have now arranged a national portal system to hold and make available each authorities SotD rating data. As such an application has been submitted for the validation and processing of data and associated correspondence to businesses. A bid of £ 6,956.00 has been submitted on behalf of this Council for the initial implementation of a SotD Scheme in Ribble Valley by 31 March 2011. In line with the other Lancashire Authorities, the funding bid is based on the related work being undertaken by appropriate staff outside normal office hours on a 'piece rate' basis.
- 3.9 To access and view examples of the scheme, please go on line and select Google search and enter 'Food Standards Agency', then on homepage search 'Scores on the Doors'. Then select NW Region and local authority eg Blackburn, then business type for example butcher or public house and select 'search'. This will produce a comparison list for consideration and evaluation purposes.

#### 4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:
  - Resources – None additionally envisaged. Initiation funding to be provided by Food Standards Agency. However, approval of this initiative represents a significant piece of work and commitment.
  - Technical, Environmental and Legal – There is no legal requirement to introduce such a scheme.
  - Political – This initiative is in line with the Council's vision to make Ribble Valley of a 'centre of food excellence'. It will also enable more informed choice to residents and visitors and encourage the highest standards by food businesses.
  - Reputation – The Council will be viewed as being a proactive and enabling authority in relation to making available food safety information and encouraging customer choice.

**5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

- 5.1 Approve the introduction of a 'Scores on the Doors' Food Premise Rating Scheme subject to the successful outcome of the application for funding to the Food Standards Agency.
- 5.2 That implementation be by way of the Critical Mass Approach where historical data is used to score premises retrospectively (Option a - para 3.6).
- 5.3 The scheme to be given priority and implemented to the deadline agreed with the Food Standards Agency.

**DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

For further information please ask for James Russell, extension 4466.

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