

Report to Place, Economic Growth and Environment Scrutiny Board

Food Safety - Service Delivery Briefing

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Reason for Report

The Council has a statutory duty to enforce food law and the Council's aim is to protect the health of residents, visitors and those working in the Borough through the efficient and effective enforcement of food safety laws.

This report outlines the key challenges the service faces and the control measures in place to ensure the Local Authority meets its statutory duties in relation to the delivery of official food controls.

Food Safety Service Delivery

1 Background

- 1.1 Oldham has approximately 2,025 registered food businesses. The Commercial Protection Team is responsible for both food safety and food standards enforcement in food businesses.

In accordance with Food Standards Agency (FSA) Statutory Codes of Practice, food safety and food standards inspections are carried out on a risk priority basis with higher risk premises being inspected more frequently. After each inspection, the food business receives a risk rating. The frequency of inspection is determined by these risk scores. Food officers carry out both safety and standards inspections during the same visit where possible to ensure efficient use of resources.

- 1.2 Local Authority performance is monitored by the FSA. Authorities are required to submit twice yearly returns. During 2024, the FSA contacted the Local Authority and commenced performance engagement due to the number of overdue interventions. Subsequently, an action plan was put into place for the authority to realign to the inspection frequencies in the code of practice. The authority has been progressing well through the delivery of the intervention programme and in June 2026, the FSA reduced the status of engagement with our authority from Level 1 engagement to monitoring. The action plan remains in place, with an objective to ensure full realignment to the code of practice by 31st March 2027.

2 Service Demands

- 2.1 Since Covid, the service has been dealing with an ongoing backlog of inspections. Demand for the service has increased due to a continual rise in newly registered food businesses, and there are significant resource pressures due to recruitment difficulties and staff vacancies. Recruitment efforts have been unsuccessful and alternative measures, including agency staff and overtime, are being used to maintain service delivery. To combat an industry shortage of qualified Environmental Health Officers, the service has introduced a career graded Environmental Health Officer position to attract graduate students and currently have a Regulatory Compliance Trainee in post, due to working with the Greater Manchester Regulatory Centre for Excellence.

3 Service Delivery

- 3.1 The following inspections are due for inspection/intervention during 2026/2027.

Category	Number of Food Hygiene Inspections Due
A	7
B	49
C	152
D	205
E's	191
New Food Businesses	400 (Approx based on 24/26)
Overdue Inspections	245
Total	1249

3.2 The service continues to face significant resource pressures due to recruitment difficulties and staff vacancies. However, during 2025/2026 the number of food hygiene inspections increased by 40%, with 891 carried out at premises due/overdue for an inspection. In comparison 638 inspections were carried out during 2024/2025.

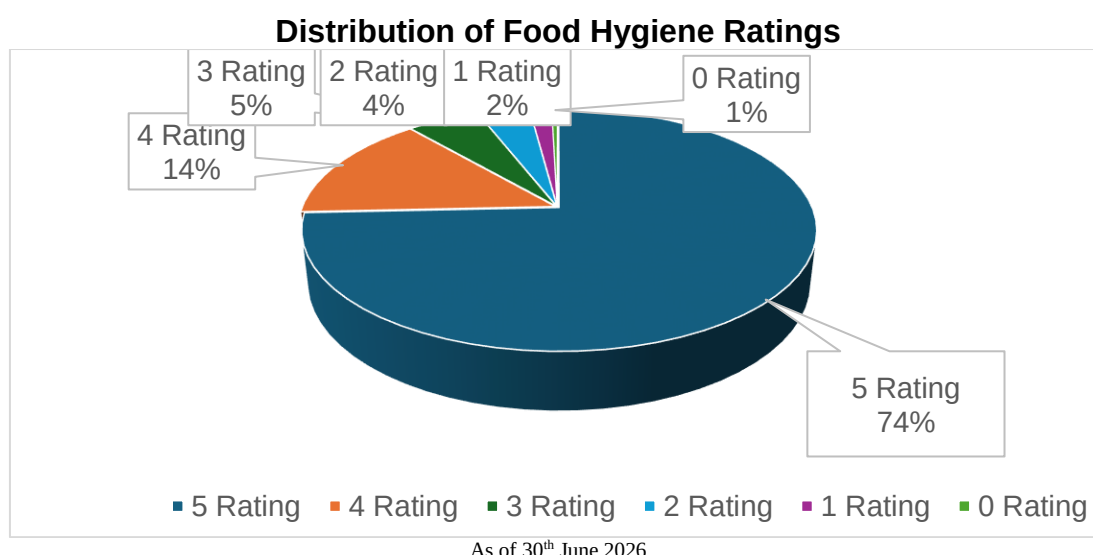
3.3 There is a total of 1,249 premises due a food hygiene inspection during 2026/2027. Considering current resources and vacant posts in the team, the delivery of all due interventions poses a challenge, however, the service is striving to complete all interventions in 2026/2027 to ensure realignment with the Food Law Code of Practice.

The volume of inspections and other associated work, for example revisits and enforcement work, cannot be met with the allocated resources available, particularly as 1.7 FTE Food Environmental Health Officer posts in the team are currently vacant. Therefore, funding via the vacant posts will be utilised for agency staff and overtime for qualified food officers to ensure the work detailed above can be completed. Alongside this, recruitment will still be driven to fill the vacant positions.

3.4 Food Standards inspections will be prioritised on a risk basis, i.e., all category priority 1,3 & 6 inspections will be completed, and unrated premises will be inspected as they are due a hygiene inspection. The premises overdue a food standards inspection will be completed alongside their food hygiene inspection.

4. Food Hygiene National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme – Food Standards Agency

4.1 Oldham Council participates in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme whereby qualifying businesses receive a food hygiene rating after their food hygiene inspection. The highest rating is '5' – 'Very Good' and the lowest rating is 'zero' – 'Urgent Improvement Required'. The scheme includes catering and retail premises and consumers can search for current food hygiene score ratings on the FSA or Oldham Council's websites. This allows consumers to make an informed choice as to where to eat out or buy food. The publication of food hygiene ratings helps to drive up standards.



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- 4.2 Whilst the team carried out 8 voluntary closures of food premises and have instigated legal proceedings against 5 businesses for poor food hygiene standards, the vast majority of food businesses in the Borough are compliant, with 93% of establishments achieving a rating of 3 (generally satisfactory) or higher. 74% hold the highest possible rating of 5 (very good).