

THE WORK OF THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY REGIONAL UNIT

Executive Summary

1. This paper updates the Board on the work of the Agency's Regional Unit and future roll out plans. It is being circulated to Board members intersessionally as it could not be considered at the May 2007 open Board meeting (as paper PRO 07/05/01).
2. The Unit was established in 2006 as part of the Agency's work to strengthen its links with regional and local partners to help embed key Agency messages and the local delivery of Agency Strategic and Corporate Plan targets on food safety, dietary health and choice. As a first step, Agency staff were placed in 4 of the 9 English Government Offices for the Regions.
3. Stakeholder response to the Regional presence has been positive and has enabled better joint working and greater opportunities for Agency influence at a local level, resulting in gains in terms of furthering the Agency's strategic objectives.
4. However, the initiative is still at an early stage and too early to assess the impact of the current activity taking place on Agency policy delivery. Therefore, it is proposed that the timing of roll-out to the other 5 English Regions be left open and the decision be brought back to the Board, in the light of further evidence of the impact of the regional teams and also wider budgetary influences impacting on the Agency.

Board Action Required

5. The Board is invited to:
 - **note** the background to the setting up of the Agency's Regional Unit and regional teams;
 - **note** the work of the regional teams and early gains to date;
 - **agree** that timing of roll-out will be left open, and be brought back to the Board subject to assessment of impact and budgetary influence.

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Issue

1. The paper updates the Board on the work of the Agency's Regional Unit and future roll-out plans.

Strategic Aims

2. The Regional Unit is part of the Agency's work to strengthen its links with regional and local partners to help embed key Agency messages and the local delivery of key Agency Strategic and Corporate Plan targets on food safety, dietary health and choice

Background

3. The Agency's 2005/2010 Strategic Plan recognised the need to strengthen links and develop better partnerships with organisations working at a regional and local level to tackle food safety and dietary health issues more effectively. It also highlighted the role played by Food and Health Strategies being developed at the local and regional level as part of the *Choosing Health* White Paper agenda, and the need for the Agency to contribute to these strategies.
4. To help achieve this, it was agreed to establish a Regional Unit and as a first step to place Agency staff in 4 of the 9 English Government Offices for the Regions. The 4 teams were phased in from May to September 2006. Further background on the Unit, implementation and Government Offices for the Regions is provided in **Annex A**. Summary profiles of the 4 Regions with regional teams are provided at **Annex B**.
5. Agency staff located at and working out of the Government Offices (GO) were considered well placed to:
 - (a) Develop closer working relationships with other **government departments at GOs** around the local delivery of a shared cross Government food agenda.
 - (b) Build more effective Agency working relationships with key local stakeholders and embed relevant Agency messages and priorities in local plans and work programmes.
 - (c) Improve Agency links with local authority environmental health and trading standards services to influence the focus and effectiveness of enforcement activity.

6. There are two important strategic mechanisms through which Regional teams are able to develop partnerships, influence local priorities and deliver Agency policy. The first is through **Regional Food and Health Action Plans** and strategies developed as part of the *Choosing Health* agenda. The second is **Local Area Agreements (LAAs)**, which are now seen by government as the key vehicle for setting local authority priorities and delivering joined up services to promote healthier communities and economic development.

Regional Activity

7. The initial focus of the Regional initiative has been on 3 key areas:
 - (d) Establishing Agency teams of two staff at the 4 regional offices and the central support arrangements, including IT.
 - (e) Identifying and agreeing initial work priorities with relevant Agency Divisions i.e. where regionally led activity would add value to current work at the national level to deliver key Agency food safety and healthy eating targets.
 - (f) Embedding Agency priorities on healthy eating, choice and food safety into key regional strategic plans e.g. Food and Health Action Plans and Local Area Agreements.
8. The Agency's regional initiative has been welcomed by all key local and regional stakeholders engaged during this initial roll-out period.
9. Work with **Local authority EHOs, TSOs and LACORS** has focused on achieving improvements in communications and better linking their food law services with wider public health outcomes and partners. This activity is increasingly important in the light of the Roger's Review on local authority priorities and the sustained local resourcing of EHO\TSO regulatory services.
10. Strong working relationships are also being developed with **DH Regional Public Health Groups**, which have a significant presence in all Government Offices. This has allowed joint Agency working now and in the future across relevant shared priorities relating to health inequalities, obesity and coronary heart disease utilising also their formal links with both **Strategic Health Authorities** and local **Primary Care Trusts (PCTs)**.
11. Whilst the initial focus of the Unit has been on local authorities and key public health stakeholders the regional teams are well placed to engage with the local food industry. A key area of future activity will be to establish better links with **Regional Development Agencies** and their funded food groups and alliances. This has the potential to open additional funding streams and to develop better networks with SMEs not linked to national trade bodies, to help deliver relevant Agency targets on food safety and healthy eating.

12. Examples of specific local activity led by the Regional Unit are attached as **Annex C**.

Future Roll Out of Regional Teams

13. As expected, stakeholder responses to the Regional presence has been positive. Even at this early stage experience in the 4 regions has shown achievements in strong joint working and examples of Agency influence, which have resulted in gains in terms of furthering the Agency's strategic objectives.

14. However, implementation of regional teams and their operation is still at an early stage and it is too early to assess the impact of the current activity on Agency policy delivery. However, an assessment framework is being developed that will take into account the nature of partnership working developed and the delivery outputs and outcomes arising from it. In the meantime it is proposed that the timing of roll-out to the other 5 English Regions be left open and any decision on it be brought back to the Board in the light of further evidence of the impact of the regional teams and also wider budgetary influences.

Costs

15. The full year cost of the Regional Unit is currently £800K per annum. Based on the current delivery arrangements the full year costs for rolling out teams to the remaining 5 Government Offices would be an additional £800K per annum.

Board Action Required

16. The Board is invited to:

- **note** the background to the setting up of the Agency's Regional Unit and regional teams;
- **note** the work of the regional teams and early gains to date;
- **agree** that timing of roll-out will be left open, and be brought back to the Board subject to assessment of impact and budgetary influence.

FURTHER BACKGROUND ON THE REGIONAL UNIT AND GOVERNMENT OFFICES

1. Following, a pilot during 2005, where an Agency official was sited in the Government Office of the South East, it was decided to extend the initiative and site Agency teams in 4 regions. A national recruitment exercise was carried out early 2006, and an Agency Regional Unit was established with a 2006/2007 target of putting Agency teams of two staff in four Government (GO) Offices – GO East Midlands (Nottingham), GO South East (Guildford), GO South West (Bristol) and GO North West (Manchester).
2. The first Agency team started in the East Midlands, May 06 and the final team was in place in the North West, September 2006. The Regional Unit forms part of the Agency's Food Hygiene Implementation and Regions (FHIR) Division. The Unit currently has a staffing of 10, including a central management and coordination capacity based at Aviation House.
3. Government Offices for the Regions were established in 1994 to work with regional partners and local communities to help deliver government policy in the regions and represent regional issues to central government. The GO network is part of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and a typical Office has approximately 200/300 staff representing up to ten sponsoring departments – DCLG, DTI, Home Office, DfT, DWP, DfES, DCMS, Cabinet Office, Defra and a DH Public Health Group with its own regional targets and activities linked to the reduction of health inequalities, Obesity and Coronary Heart Disease.

REGIONAL PROFILES

South West Region

- Largest area of the 9 English Regions – 23.8K Sq Km / 18% of England – and the region has the highest percentage of rural land
- Population of just over 5m, but the Region is the fastest growing over the last decade.
- Region has a total of **52,359 food businesses** according to 2006 LA returns – 37,516 caterers, 12,957 retailers and 1,888 manufacturers.
- Region made up of 10 Unitary authorities, 6 County Councils and 35 District Councils
- **Safer food better business** (HACCP Compliance) – 33 local authorities have received grants to date, totalling £1.9m with 11,000 businesses targeted to adopt SFBB.
- **Hygiene and Nutrition Grants** – since April 2004 ten local authorities in the region have been awarded Agency hygiene and nutrition grants, with 4 authorities currently receiving 2006/2007 grant funding.
- **Dame Sheila McKechnie Awards** – Dorset Food and Health Trust received an award in 2005 for a project to source local food and sell it to the community at affordable prices and assist young parents and single men with cooking skills. The Food Skills for Life project in Bournemouth received a runners-up award in 2007. This project aims to increase people's self confidence, health and wellbeing, through developing an interest in preparing, cooking and eating healthy food.
- **Phase 3 Salt Campaign** – Bristol PCT is currently working on an Agency funded project targeting black and minority ethnic communities on salt awareness, including cooking and shopping skills.

South East Region

- England's most populous region with over 8m, and in terms of area the third largest.
- Region has a total of **69,697 food businesses** according to 2006 LA returns – 50,801 caterers, 17,280 retailers and 1,616 manufacturers.
- Region made up of 12 Unitary authorities, 7 County Councils and 55 District Councils.
- **Safer food better business** (HACCP Compliance) – 49 local authorities have received grants to date, totalling £1.5m.
- **Hygiene and Nutrition Grants** – since April 2004 3 local authorities in the region have been awarded Agency hygiene and nutrition grants.
- **Dame Sheila McKechnie Awards** – the charity Sandown Bay in the Isle of Wight received the 2007 award for a project to increase young mothers' awareness of healthy eating, food content and labelling.
- **Phase 3 Salt Campaign** – Kent County Council Trading Standards have received funding for a programme encouraging employers to address the issue of better meal choice at the place of work. Portsmouth City Council is

working with the Regional team on a project targeting areas of high health inequality to raise salt awareness and reduce salt intake, working collaboratively with local schools, GPs and their Bangladeshi and Chinese communities.

North West Region

- Area of 14.2K sq km, with 80 per cent of the region rural, agricultural or open woodland. However four-fifths of the population live in urban areas.
- The North West is the largest populated English Region outside London and the South East with a mid-2003 estimate of around 6.8 million.
- Region has a total of **64,009 food businesses** according to 2006 LA returns – 43,157 caterers, 19,034 retailers and 1,818 manufacturers.
- Region made up of 4 Unitary authorities, 3 County Councils and 39 District/Borough councils.
- **Safer food better business** (HACCP Compliance) – 30 local authorities in the Region have received grants totalling approximately £625,000.
- **Hygiene and Nutrition Grants** – since the scheme started in 2003/04, five local authorities have been awarded Agency hygiene and nutrition grants. One of these being awarded a grant on two separate occasions.
- **Dame Sheila McKechnie Awards** – The Sunshine Café in Sale, Manchester received an award in 2006 for a café that offers healthy and affordable food on an ongoing basis for residents of the Sale estates, and a catering business that delivers buffets to local organisations.
- **Phase 3 Salt Campaign** – the Food Futures Partnership in Manchester is currently working on an Agency funded project targeting South Asian and Caribbean communities on salt awareness, including cooking at home and reducing the amount of salt used in meals prepared in restaurants and take aways. The North West Regional team is currently working on a partnership project, managed by Heart of Mersey (a regional charity to tackle CHD), to run half-day salt awareness events at 6 community venues across Merseyside specifically targeting communities with high rates of CHD.

East Midlands Region

- The region covers an area of 15.6K Sq Km, with a mix of densely populated urban areas as well as rural areas.
- Population of around 5.5m, but the Region is the fastest growing over the last decade.
- Region has a total of **37,766 food businesses** according to 2006 LA returns – 25,532 caterers, 11,139 retailers and 1,095 manufacturers.
- Region made up of 4 Unitary authorities, 5 County Councils and 38 District Councils
- **Safer food better business** (HACCP Compliance) – 23 local authorities have received grants to date, totalling £510k.
- **Hygiene and Nutrition Grants** – since April 2004 two local authorities in the region have been awarded Agency hygiene and nutrition grants.

- **Phase 3 Salt Campaign** – Nottingham City PCT and Nottingham City Council (health inequalities spearhead status) have formed a partnership with the East Midlands Regional Team to devise a social marketing campaign for targeted BME communities around salt reduction in the diet.

Regions without Agency Presence

The 5 English Regions which currently do not have an Agency presence in the Government Office are the North East, East of England, Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands and London. These Regions between them account for approximately 50% of the English population and 171 local authorities.

EXAMPLES OF REGIONALLY LED ACTIVITY

Embedding Agency Messages and Building Partnerships

- 5 County partnership workshops held in the East Midlands, in conjunction with *Emphasis* (the East Midlands Public Health Network) to raise awareness of the roles played by different individuals and organisations working across the region on food issues and to facilitate ways of working together in the future.
- Workshops for local authority TSOs and EHOs on the Agency's healthy eating agenda – to increase awareness and LA contribution to Agency work on salt reduction and traffic light labelling with local businesses and communities, as part of their routine activity.
- Facilitating / delivering presentations on salt reduction and traffic light labelling to health partners at key regional public health seminars \ conferences.
- Profiling Agency priorities on healthy eating, food safety and local authority food law services in published Food & Health Action Plans for the East Midlands (EM), South East (SE) and North West (NW), and at launch events.
- Joint school food workshops in the South West and East Midlands, with DH regional public health teams and local Healthy School Coordinators – to increase the awareness of Agency food hygiene and health eating materials currently available for schools.

Improving Local Authority Liaison

- Regional teams attended or hosted meetings with all EHO and TSO Liaison Groups in the 4 regions with an Agency presence, and at relevant 2007\8 business planning meetings – with a view to Agency priorities featuring consistently in LA thinking and future activities.
- Draft Agency Food and Health LAA guidance piloted in the East Midlands. Developed in conjunction with the East Midlands Public Health Group and Lacors to support Agency priorities and food regulatory services featuring in key local authority priorities and agenda.
- Regional Safer food better business (SFBB) workshops in the East Midlands and South West to increase LA uptake, showcase good practice and improve business compliance.

Targeting Salt Messages

- Regional teams are working jointly with local authorities and PCTs in Manchester, Liverpool, Portsmouth, Nottingham and Bristol – as part of Phase 3 of the Agency Salt Campaign – targeting specific at risk groups in these local communities. The Regional teams have brought together PCTs, EHOs and TSOs to support local partnership events in community halls and shopping areas, and also using public health outreach workers to raise awareness of Agency salt messages and materials with at risk community groups.