

Local Authority Delivery

The Local Authority Recovery Plan set out our guidance and advice for local authorities.

COVID-19 has created unprecedented challenges for local authorities across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland in delivering their statutory food function. Ultimately local authorities had to prioritise combatting the spread of the disease. In response, the Local Authority Recovery Plan, agreed by the Board in May 2021, sets out our guidance and advice for local authorities on delivery of official food controls and provides a risk-based framework for restarting the system in line with the Food Law Code of Practice.

The recovery plan details expectations for undertaking inspections of new food establishments and high-risk and/or non-compliant establishments, whilst providing flexibility for undertaking interventions at lower risk establishments. The guidance and advice to local authorities were kept under close review.

Objectives in 2021/22

Our objectives within 2021/22 were driven by a need to support local authorities in returning to pre-pandemic activities and reduce the backlog of work created from flexibilities introduced to free up local authority resources to combat COVID-19. These comprise three overall goals:

- **Monitor the delivery of official food controls and recovery plan:** having agreed a recovery plan with local authorities we seek to monitor progress.
- **Engagement with local authorities:** keep lines of communication open to quickly identify and work to offset issues arising and capitalise on successes as they emerged.
- **Assisting and supporting local authorities:** offer local authority partners support where we can to maximise the recovery plan's chance at success.

Progress against objectives

Monitor the delivery of official food controls and recovery plan

To monitor local authority performance in delivering the minimum expectations of the plan, a programme of interim surveys, bespoke end of year returns, Food Hygiene Rating Scheme data and intelligence from Food Liaison Groups were utilised to identify those that can move at a faster pace or are struggling to deliver.

The baseline position in May 2021²⁹ gave a clear indication of the impact that the pandemic had on resources and the ability of local authorities to deliver food controls with approximately 50% of professional technical resource being diverted or redeployed to other tasks, leading to a reduction for planned interventions achieved and a rise in the number of unrated establishments reported as awaiting a first inspection.

In October 2021, we conducted an interim survey with every local authority across all three countries providing a response. This identified that resources were returning to food teams.

Food Hygiene levels back up to:

- England 81%

- Wales 64%
- Northern Ireland 75%

For food standards levels were back up to:

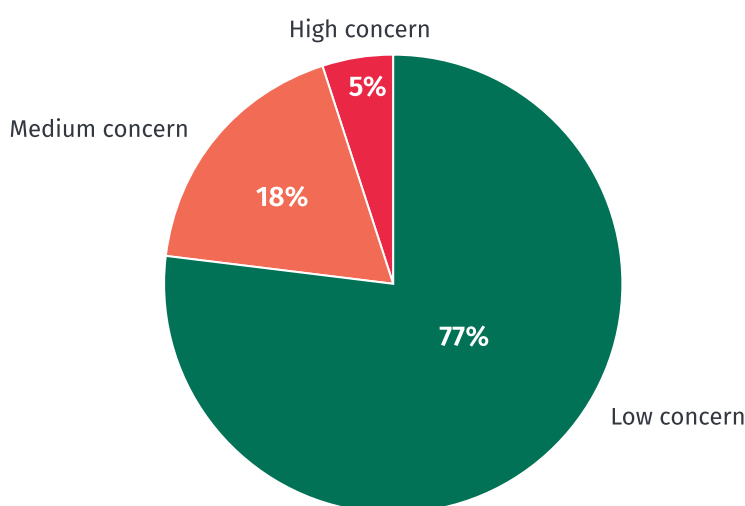
- England 88%
- Wales 68%
- Northern Ireland 84%

Evidence of the impact of staff returning to food teams can be seen in the FHRS section below. Across the three countries, all the local authority responses to the October survey were assessed utilising an agreed matrix and categorised as either High, Medium or Low regarding the level of concern in relation to delivering the plan's requirements. This ensured the performance management activity by the FSA was appropriately targeted.

Engagement with local authorities

Evidence of the impact of staff returning to food teams can be seen in the FHRS section below. Across the three nations, all the local authority responses to the October survey were assessed utilising an agreed matrix and categorised as either High, Medium or Low regarding the level of concern in relation to delivering the plan requirements. This ensured the performance management activity by the FSA was appropriately targeted.

Figure 18: Local authority October 2021 Interim Survey – level of concern for food hygiene and/or food standards



Of those considered high concern

64% have given the necessary assurance that they are now meeting the minimum expectations and the cases have been closed

36% have open cases where active engagement is still in progress, or the local authority has submitted an action plan where implementation is currently being monitored. All open cases are in England.

Of those considered medium concern

58% have given the necessary assurance that they are now meeting the minimum expectations and the cases have been closed.

18% are open cases, where the active engagement is still in progress, or they have submitted an action plan where implementation is currently being monitored.

24% remain in a pipeline for engagement.

Of those considered low concern

The decision was made to not routinely engage yet with these, except where information from Food Liaison Groups has led to performance management engagement.

0 escalations

No local authority has reached the threshold where escalation should be initiated if there were concerns that had not been addressed.

We undertook some targeted data gathering and delivery of the minimum expectations are discussed at meetings with various local authority representative groups in each of the three nations.

Information obtained from local authority engagement

- **Improvement in the delivery of official controls:** compared to 12 months ago linked to the return to duty of the professionals who were abstracted to other duties.
- **Local Authorities able to focus on high-risk businesses and to react to identified emerging risk:** providing the necessary public protection where it is most needed.
- **Local Authorities remain concerned about the number of new registrations** and those outstanding to be prioritised and inspected
- **Report deterioration in FBO compliance since reopening:** leading to more complaints, longer inspection visits and more enforcement action being required.
- **Recruiting qualified staff into food teams is challenging,** exacerbated by a lack of qualified contractors to boost officer numbers on a temporary basis.

The position is still dynamic and local authorities remain under pressure but are continuing to follow our guidance and advice and are delivering activities in accordance with the prioritisation we set as resources permit.

The enhanced data set obtained from the 2021/22 end of year return, subsequent quarterly milestone interim surveys and the proposed verification programme will provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of progress with implementation of the recovery plan.

Assisting and supporting local authorities

Prompted by the ongoing recruitment and retention issues, we are commissioning a research project to understand the nature and scale of the problem. To support this, we collected data in the 2021/22 end of year return.

As a result of the reported drop in business compliance levels, we are looking into what additional communications activities the FSA can undertake to reinforce the message to businesses and support the work of the food teams in local authorities. We also continued to roll out our [Register a Food Business \(RAFB\) service](#).

Campaign Register a food business

Aims:

The campaign aimed to motivate more food businesses to register with their local authority, particularly those trading from home and online.

When:

24 February 2022 to 20 March 2022

Spend:

£110,000 (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

What we did:

The COVID-19 period has seen a huge increase in food being sold from people's homes with the internet making it easier for this type of market. According to our digital registration service, 37% of new ventures registered since the start of the pandemic (March 2020) are run from domestic kitchens at private addresses. We wanted to encourage as many of these new start-ups to register with their local authority. We developed a suite of assets that were used across a variety of channels to try and reach and engage with those who may be operating an unregistered business, with a particular focus on those trading from home or online. This included podcasts, Facebook and Instagram, and online advertising via Google Search. Along with the targeted channel promotion, we also worked with a range of partners all of which supported the campaign in various ways, these include the Federation of Small Businesses, the Nationwide Caterers Association and the National Federation of Women's Institutes across all three countries. The support of local authorities was integral to the success of this campaign. We developed a communications toolkit for all our partners to use, which included a template press release, suggested social media posts and access to the campaign assets.

The results:

The main goal of this campaign was to increase the number of businesses registering with their local authority. However, registration data used from local authorities that signed up before April 2021 showed that there was no significant change in the number of registrations in the weeks after the campaign. There was some form of increase in those businesses registering who had been trading for over 90 days in March 2022 than all previous months (back to March 2020). There was also an increase in restaurant registrations, however, this could have been caused by other factors and wasn't the group we were actively trying to target.

We reached 1.4 million potential businesses across social media, Google Search and advertising. Our food business registration landing page received over 24,000 visitors during the campaign. Across our social channels we achieved 22,658 clicks and reached 853,631 through paid social posts. The results in reach and clicks through to the website, demonstrate that we achieved the campaign objective of raising awareness of registration and educating the Register a Food Business target audience groups (through clicks for more information).

Campaign materials and toolkits were shared with 42,650 business owners and managers, with the Federation of Small Businesses directing over 7,000 visitors to our webpages.

Back to the [Main report: Activities and Performances 2021/22](#).