

Value of FHRs Local Authority research:

Chapter 7 Aspects of the scheme that could be improved

LA representatives from Wales were unanimous in their support for the existing scheme, which they considered effective and consistent across Wales. They felt there were very few, if any, things that needed to be improved. Participants in one group suggested requiring ratings to be more visible for online businesses, and ensuring that the scheme keeps up to date with any developments on online platforms. Another suggested making the date of inspection details more visible on the FHRs ratings stickers. However, overall they felt the scheme was very effective in its current form.

“No, I think we've been quite clear on what we said. The scheme works well, it's a collaborative approach. As we said, the main thing is the businesses. We're here to really help businesses and it's getting them to understand the differences.” (LA representative from Wales)

LA representatives from England suggested more potential improvements to the current scheme than LA representatives from Wales. LA representatives from England prioritised addressing issues discussed previously, such as introducing mandatory display, and reviewing the types of low risk businesses included in the scheme.

Another area for improvement which was discussed by several LA representatives in England in more than one workshop, was changing the range of ratings awarded. These LA representatives felt that the current 0-5 ratings were potentially confusing for consumers and not well understood. Different options were discussed but there was no consensus. Some LA representatives proposed a simple pass/fail rating, while other suggested three ratings to incentivise higher standards (fail, pass, excellent).

“We've just got too many categories, that's my thinking. I just think 0 to 5 is too many.” (LA representative from England)

LA representatives from Northern Ireland felt that there was room for some changes and improvements within the current system. On the current rating system they felt that on the whole the 0 to 5 worked well, but felt that the three rating (satisfactory) was too broad and could be changed. They explained that they felt some businesses were content to stick with a three, because they felt it was good, when actually it is a satisfactory.

“I think that the 3 rating, which is just satisfactory, it's too broad. 3 is a satisfactory is not a great rating. People think a 3 is maybe okay, but maybe there needs to be more explanation or change there because 3 is not very good.” (LA representative from Northern Ireland)

LA representatives from England spontaneously discussed views on whether remote inspections could be an alternative intervention for low risk businesses, as a way of maximising resources and time. One group felt this would be helpful in allowing them to prioritise visiting businesses that were in more need of an in-person inspection.

“Can we start doing remote inspections for low risk premises because we have got a massive backlog. Loads of premises have been waiting inspection that we can't even get to. They've been there for quite a while.”

(LA representative from England)

However, some LAs in England felt that remote inspections were not an appropriate alternative to in-person inspections, because they did not allow for a comprehensive and consistent assessment of food hygiene standards.

There were also some discussions in England about making changes to the parts of the inspections that related to confidence in management. They explained that they are required to apply these criteria on a revisit, but inspectors often have doubts about whether managers are actually serious about food hygiene. This is particularly the case if they have recently given a business a poor rating, and they think the main driver of the requests for reinspection is to meet requirements for online aggregators. Others wanted specific improvements to aspects of the Brand Standard (a guide that ensures consistency in the implementation and operation of the scheme by LAs) to improve clarity and ensure consistency in how businesses are inspected. Discussing this in detail was beyond the scope of the study.

“As a region, even if everything's great at that point, we'll still consider not giving a top score for confidence in management because it's only 3 months since they were very poor.”

(LA representative from England)

Furthermore, LA representatives from England and Northern Ireland suggested making alterations to the confidence in management part of the rating structure. A number of representatives from both nations suggested that the lack of flexibility around rating confidence in management meant that they could not always give a fair assessment of the business. LA representatives also suggested it is sometimes hard to have confidence in management if they have only recently given out a low rating to a business.

“The thing that I wanted to raise was about the confidence in management scoring and the fact that there isn't a 15 and sometimes I wish there was.” (LA representative from England)

“With food hygiene, essentially, there's a score of 15, and structures are 15, whereas confidence in management there's no 15. So, you're either a 4 or a 1. So, there's no 0 or 5, 10, 20 and 30. It'd be good if there was an in between”

(LA representative from Northern Ireland)