

Updated Code of Practice for local authorities in England and Northern Ireland to focus inspection efforts on higher risk food businesses

[View updated Food Law Codes of Practice for England and Northern Ireland.](#)

Food standards controls are the checks carried out by local authorities (district councils in Northern Ireland) to make sure food produced and sold by food businesses is safe and what it says it is.

The changes published today will help local authorities to take a more risk-based and intelligence-driven approach to inspection, focusing their time and resources on food businesses that pose the greatest risk to consumers.

The new model will drive more frequent checks on non-compliant businesses, whilst reducing the checks on businesses that can demonstrate good levels of sustained compliance. It will give local authorities greater flexibility to check compliance in different ways, for example through remote checks where appropriate, and it will increase the use of intelligence to inform understanding of risk in the food chain. This will help to ensure that action taken at the right stage of the supply chain, for example one intervention at the single point of manufacture or import rather than multiple interventions in a range of retail outlets.

This follows a successful pilot with seven local authorities in England and Northern Ireland last year. The pilot indicated that the new model is more effective at directing officers to businesses where they are more likely to find non-compliance.

Katie Pettifer, FSA Director of Strategy and Regulatory Compliance, said;

“Local authorities are a critical line of defence against inauthentic or adulterated food.

The FSA is very concerned about the decline in local authority resources for food standards work. The number of professional staff working on food standards in local authorities has halved over the last decade or so. It is vital that local authorities have the resources they need to protect consumers.

The updated guidance will enable local authorities to use their resources more effectively, targeting their efforts towards the greatest risks within the supply chain. The new model emphasises the use of intelligence to disrupt the supply of fraudulent or unsafe food further up the food chain, before it hits the shelves.

The changes are also good news for responsible businesses. Many businesses with a good track record of compliance will face less frequent inspections, while those with a poor track record will face greater scrutiny. ”

David Pickering, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Council (pilot LA) and Chartered Trading Standards Institute Lead Officer for Food Issues

"A combination of changes in the ways food is supplied to consumers and how local authorities approach regulation with reduced resource meant that the code of practice was no longer best suited to support food standards officers.

"I am pleased that this updated code will support Local Authorities in their efforts to target their capacity in the most efficient way to protect consumers and achieve a level playing field for businesses.

"The new code introduces an approach that I believe will enable us to target the resources we have to deal effectively with the food businesses that pose most risk to the marketplace."

Paula O'Neill, Environmental Health Manager Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, said;

"The new food standards delivery model will enable district councils to target their resources in a more effective way towards the least compliant businesses. In turn, this will lead to greater protection for consumers in Northern Ireland and drive-up compliance in those less compliant businesses. "

Due to the scale and complexity of the project we intend to take a phased approach to the rollout of the new model across England and Northern Ireland, which is due to start this summer.??

We recognise that LAs will require support to transition to the new model therefore, we will be providing guidance and training on the use and implementation of the model in due course as part of the implementation process.?

The FSA have revised the Codes, following a 12-week consultation which ended in January 2023. Responses to the consultations for [England](#) and for [Northern Ireland](#) have both also been published today on food.gov.uk

A pilot of the proposed food standards model with local authorities in Wales is due to commence shortly and will inform a consultation on any amendments required to the Food Law Code of Practice in Wales.