

Online display of food hygiene ratings by food businesses in Wales: Introduction

1.1. Background

In November 2013 the statutory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) was launched in Wales. The Scheme provides consumers with a quick and easy way to obtain information about the hygiene standards at food businesses. Food hygiene ratings are determined by local authorities (LAs) following inspections carried out to verify food business compliance with food hygiene laws. Food businesses are given a rating from 0 (urgent improvement necessary) to 5 (very good) which reflects the hygiene standards found at the time of inspection.

Food hygiene ratings must be displayed using a prescribed sticker at customer entrances to food establishments. Where there are no entrances, e.g. market stalls, stickers must be displayed in a conspicuous place where they are visible to consumers. Ratings are also available on the FSA's website. The Scheme initially applied to all establishments supplying food directly to consumers, provided they were not exempt. In 2014, the Scheme was extended to include food establishments involved in business-to-business trade, for example food manufacturers, and in November 2016, the Scheme was further developed to require businesses that supply takeaway food to publish a bilingual statement on certain hardcopy publicity materials directing consumers to food hygiene ratings information.

In February 2018, the FSA published its [first three-year review into the implementation and operation of the Scheme](#). The review found that mandatory display of food hygiene ratings has been a success in Wales. Food businesses with a rating of '5' (Very Good) increased 21 percentage points since the introduction of the scheme and 95% of businesses had achieved a rating of '3' (Generally Satisfactory) or above. The display of ratings had also risen from 21% in 2012 to 88% in 2019 and consumer recognition of FHRS stickers was found to be at an all-time high (91%).

One of the recommendations of the review is that the FSA works with relevant stakeholders to explore the feasibility of introducing a requirement for the provision of ratings information on online food ordering platforms.

Acknowledging the trend towards more online purchase of food by consumers, in June 2019 the Welsh Minister for Health and Social Services commissioned the FSA to scope options for extending the scope of the Scheme to ensure the display of food hygiene ratings information by food businesses on their websites.

Looking ahead, the continuing success of the Scheme will depend on consumers having access to ratings at the right time and in the right place for them to make informed choices about where they purchase their food. The provision of easily accessible, online ratings by food businesses has the potential to assist consumers in their purchasing decisions and ensure the Scheme remains relevant.

The FSA commissioned the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) to explore LA officers' views of proposals to require food businesses to display their ratings online.

1.2 Objectives

To gauge LA officer views on proposals to mandate online display of food hygiene ratings by food businesses in Wales. Specifically, to obtain their views on:

- The scope of the proposals
- The perceived barriers for businesses
- Implementation challenges
- Enforcement challenges
- Solutions to implementation and enforcement challenges
- The tools businesses and local authorities may require to support implementation

1.3 Methodology

LAs in Wales were invited to participate in a workshop to explore their views on proposals to require online display of food hygiene ratings by food businesses. Invites were issued by the FSA requesting one representative from each LA with the stipulation that those attending needed to be knowledgeable and experienced in the operation of the statutory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. Officers were self-selecting and the workshop took place in Llandrindod Wells on 18 December 2019.

In order to better understand the consumer perspective, in advance of the workshop delegates were set a task to assume the role of an 'average consumer' and either book a table at one of their favourite restaurants remotely or order food online, having regard to the food hygiene ratings information available at the time of their booking/order, and document their experience as a consumer. Further, they were asked to be prepared to share their experience with other delegates at the workshop.

The workshop began with an icebreaker, where delegates provided feedback on the accessibility of accurate ratings information found during the pre-workshop task.

Delegates then worked in small groups to discuss their responses to a series of questions embedded in a powerpoint presentation and documented their views on flipcharts provided.

A further opportunity was provided for officers to participate in a CIEH facilitated discussion and share their views of the proposals at workshops offered as part of a wider face-to face FSA engagement event on 27 February 2020.