

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2024/25



Forward

It gives me great pleasure as Portfolio Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Public Protection to present this year's Environmental Health Food Law Enforcement Service Plan for 2024/25.

The Local authority has a statutory duty to enforce food safety and standards legislation, and to produce and publish a bilingual annual service plan, setting out the arrangements in place to discharge this duty, in accordance with the Food Standards Agency's (FSAs) *Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls by Local Authorities*. This Food Law Enforcement Service Plan (the Plan) has been produced in response to that requirement, and is designed to inform residents, the business community and other interested parties of the arrangements Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has in place to regulate food safety.

The Environmental Health food service is essential to safeguarding public health, protecting the interest of consumers and provide a support to businesses in achieving compliance. This Plan actively contributes to the visions and objectives of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Corporate Plan, 'Acting Today for a Better Tomorrow' [Corporate well being Plan 2023-2028].

The Plan sets out how the Council will ensure food produced, sold, stored, distributed, and consumed in Merthyr Tydfil is safe, what it says it is, and that businesses comply with food law. Environmental Health Officers provide advice, education and guidance on what the law requires, conduct interventions, investigations, sampling, and take enforcement action to secure compliance, where appropriate.

Whilst the Food Standards Agency Local Authority Recovery Plan ended on 31st March 2023 and the service successfully delivered against each milestone, there still remains significant challenges for the service in addressing the backlog of lower risk premises. There is a three year intervention strategy in place (2023-26) which has been approved by the FSA. The service remains on track with the successful delivery of this strategy due to existing staff working overtime to achieve inspection targets.

The delivery of food service plans in protecting consumers and supporting businesses prior to the pandemic had been largely invisible. The ongoing recovery period however has consistently year on year demonstrated that when there is a scaling back of interventions there is a corresponding deterioration in food hygiene and standards. This combined with the ongoing cost of living crisis continues to impact the service as enforcement activity remains higher than pre-pandemic years. The council recognises the importance of continuing its commitment to effectively resource and support the critical proactive work that the food service undertakes to prevent against severe public health outcomes such as outbreaks of food/ water borne infections.

I am convinced by adopting a proportionate, risk based approach to enforcement, the Council remains committed to providing the greatest possible protection for consumers and supporting food businesses in Merthyr to thrive.

Councillor Michelle Symonds – Portfolio Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Public Protection



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1. Introduction

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) has a statutory duty to enforce a range of food safety and standards legislation.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has a key role in overseeing local authority enforcement activities in respect of food matters, and has issued guidance on the annual production of food enforcement service plans by local authorities.

This plan has been produced in accordance with guidance issued to Local Authorities by the FSA in the Framework Agreement. The plan is intended to inform residents and the business community about the arrangements MTCBC has in place to regulate and improve both food safety and food standards within the Borough.

The plan is approved by Cabinet and a review of performance against the plan is carried out. The plan is therefore an important tool for ensuring that national and local priorities are addressed and delivered within the Borough.

1.1 Food Service Aims and Objectives

1.1.1 AIMS

The overall aim of the service is to prevent food poisoning, food-borne and water-borne illness by helping to ensure that food and drink intended for sale for human consumption is produced, stored, distributed, handled and consumed within the Borough without risk to the health and safety of the consumer.

In delivering this service the team aims to:

- ❖ Protect public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food, and to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food.
- ❖ Support the priorities set out by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) for regulation.
- ❖ Provide support and take targeted, proportionate risk-based enforcement action, including inspections, to protect food safety and prevent food-borne disease.
- ❖ Tackle rogue businesses and take appropriate measures to safeguard the food supply from adulteration, contamination, fraud and mis-description.
- ❖ Provide appropriate targeted, specific, transparent and robust advice, support and incentives to businesses to maximise compliance with food hygiene regulations and general food law.
- ❖ Provide advice and support to consumers to protect public health and promote healthier lifestyles and consumer choice.
- ❖ Provide transparent, robust and consistent approaches to investigating and resolving consumer complaints about food products and food businesses.
- ❖ Improve continuously the quality of services through the effective use and enhancement of staff skills and knowledge.

1.1.2 **OBJECTIVES**

The key objective of the service is to promote and maintain high standards of food hygiene and food standards in premises. This will be achieved by:

- ❖ Ensuring the health and wellbeing of the public by promoting and enforcing safe standards of hygiene and food safety in the preparation, manufacture, storage, distribution, handling and sale of food in all relevant food premises in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough in accordance with the requirements of all relevant food safety legislation.
- ❖ Carrying out a programme of planned food hygiene and food standards enforcement interventions in accordance with statutory requirements
- ❖ Assisting, advising and educating all parties in matters relating to food safety and standards and communicable disease control.
- ❖ Monitoring the safety of food on sale to the public, composition and accuracy of labelling of food by means of a structured sampling programme.
- ❖ Providing and maintaining a fail-safe and informed trading environment for the residents of and visitors to Merthyr Tydfil County Borough
- ❖ Ensuring that human food does not pose health risks and that labelling and compositional standards are complied with.
- ❖ Responding to and investigating consumer and trader complaints relating to food that may be contaminated, unsound or unfit for human consumption.
- ❖ Responding to and investigating cases and outbreaks of communicable and infectious disease notified to the Authority.
- ❖ Protecting consumers from food fraud.
- ❖ Liaising with other Local Authorities, parties and stakeholders.
- ❖ Providing food hygiene advice and information to businesses and the public.
- ❖ Responding promptly and effectively to food alerts and threats to the safety of food sold within Merthyr Tydfil County Borough
- ❖ Ensuring that staff working within the service are adequately qualified and competent to carry out food safety and food standards work and to ensure that adequate equipment and resources are in place.
- ❖ Delivering the service in accordance with quality management systems.

1.2 **LINK TO CORPORATE OBJECTIVES, SHARED PRIORITIES AND PLANS**

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC) has developed a Corporate and Well-being Plan – ‘*Acting Today for a Better Tomorrow*’¹. The plan sets out the vision, values and priorities for MTCBC from 2023 to 2028. The plan was developed through collaborative effort, involving Elected Members, officers, and partners. The four well-being objectives for MTCBC have been identified as:

¹ [Corporate Well-being Plan 2023-2028 \(merthyr.gov.uk\)](https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/corporate-well-being-plan-2023-2028)

An Aspirational Merthyr Tydfil focused on learning	A Healthier Merthyr Tydfil	A Safe & Prosperous Merthyr Tydfil	A Clean and Green Merthyr Tydfil
We will strengthen how we enable people to grow and reach their potential	We will empower people to live independent and dignified lives	We will support how our economy recovers and grows	We will support the creation of a clean and green environment now and in the future

The four well-being objectives filter down to the Environmental Health Service via the Public Protection Service Plan/SOAP. The 'Golden Thread' is visible from the Corporate plan through the Public Protection Plan (SOAP) and within this Food Service Plan and individual officers annual review and performance plan.

In addition Welsh Government (WG)² has published a set of national enforcement priorities for Welsh local authorities which are:

- i. Protecting individuals from harm and promoting health improvement.
- ii. Ensuring the safety and quality of the food chain to minimise risk to human and animal health.
- iii. Promoting a fair and just trading environment for citizens and business.
- iv. Improving the local environment to positively influence quality of life and promote sustainability.

This Food Service Delivery Plan contributes to each of the four national enforcement priorities.

1.2.1 Links to Our Wellbeing Objectives and WG National Priorities

The food service will contribute to the local authority's wellbeing objectives and the WG enforcement priorities by:-

- Undertaking risk based food hygiene and food standards interventions in food premises within the Borough to improve standards of food hygiene and cleanliness. This will contribute to a positive perception of the Borough as a whole. Improved standards will also mean businesses will become more attractive to customers thereby enhancing the local economy.
- Implementations of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme to facilitate consumer choice and help traders promote good businesses.
- Investigating complaints about food and food premises.
- Taking appropriate enforcement action in accordance with our Compliance and Enforcement Policy against businesses, or individuals, who break Food Laws.
- Undertaking a food sampling programme to monitor the microbiological quality of ready to eat food either manufactured or sold within the Borough on the basis of risk and in conjunction with regional and national initiatives.

² [National Enforcement Priorities for Wales \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

- Undertake food standards surveillance programme to ensure that food is:
 - of acceptable nature, substance and quality;
 - is not potentially injurious to the consumer's health or safety;
 - is not falsely described or labelled so as to mislead the consumer;
- Responding promptly and appropriately to all food alerts issued by the Food Standards Agency.
- Ensuring a level playing field for food businesses operators through the provision of advice and consistency of enforcement.
- Working in collaboration with other Local Authorities and Organisations to maximise public health outcomes and financial efficiencies.
- Providing advice and support to new businesses thereby encouraging them to locate within the Borough, allow them to develop in the initial stages without making costly mistakes and to achieve the best possible rating under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme
- Providing advice and support to existing businesses as they expand their product ranges and distribution network.
- Protecting businesses from damage to their reputation as a result of food fraud/crime.
- Tackling food fraud/crime to protect our most vulnerable members of society.
- Working closely with our partners to identify and resolve cross border food safety risks.
- Working with other agencies to promote food safety to the public, young and old, through initiatives such as National Food Safety Week.
- Investigating of cases of food poisoning and provision of advice to cases and contacts.
- Promotion of healthy eating.

2. Background

2.1 Profile of the Local Authority

Merthyr Tydfil is situated in the Heads of the Valleys Region and is the smallest local authority in Wales with an area of around 11,100 hectares. Approximately one fifth of the County Borough lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park to the north, leaving some 8,668 hectares of land under the planning control of the County Borough Council. The County Borough's other neighbouring authorities are Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council to the west and Caerphilly County Borough Council to the east and south.

Merthyr Tydfil has a population of approximately 60,000 of which, approximately 44,000 reside in the main town of Merthyr Tydfil which functions as the main commercial, retail and service centre of the County Borough and the Heads of the Valleys Region. As such, the main town of Merthyr Tydfil contains administrative headquarters (e.g. the County Borough Council), the primary shopping areas, the majority of employment opportunities, a hospital, and many other higher order services and facilities which serve surrounding settlements. The remainder of the population is distributed amongst eight interdependent settlements situated further south along the Taff and Taff Bargoed river valleys. These settlements contain more limited job opportunities and a range of lower order services and facilities serving local needs.

Merthyr Tydfil fulfils a key strategic role at the centre of the Heads of the Valleys region, benefiting from high levels of accessibility through its location at the intersection of the A470 (T) and A465 (T) strategic transport corridors in the north, and the A470 (T) and A472 strategic transport corridors in the south. The County Borough lies just 25 minutes north of Cardiff and the M4 corridor. Currently 1,499,5473 people and 679,4004 jobs are within the South East Wales Region.

2.2 Organisational Structure

2.2.1 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is composed of 30 Councillors who are elected every 4 years as democratic representatives to the constituents in each of the eleven wards.

Independent Councillors hold the political administration. These elected Councillors are nominated into the decision making process which operates under a Cabinet system with individual portfolios. All decisions made by the Cabinet are subject to full Council approval and scrutiny review.

Corporate Management Team (CMT) work alongside the elected Cabinet and this is comprised of the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Directors.

The Council is divided into 3 directorates: -

- People and Performance.
- Place and Transformation.
- Corporate Functions

2.2.2 Directorate Structure

The Environmental Health Service sits within the Public Protection Division within the Place and Transformation Directorate.

The food hygiene / standards service is delivered by a team of 6 officers made up of 5 full-time and 1 part-time Environmental Health Officers, all of whom have responsibilities for other functions.

The Public Health Team is directly responsible to the Principal Environmental Health Officer who acts as lead officer for food safety and has a shared Lead responsibility for Food standards with another Senior Environmental Health officer within the team.

A copy of the current Departmental Management Structure is attached in **Appendix 1**. A copy of the Organisational Management structure for the Council and how the Department fits into this structure is attached in **Appendices 2a and 2b**.

Officers are authorised under the Council's Constitution to a level, which is commensurate with their qualifications and experience in accordance with the Statutory Food Law Code of Practice.

2.2.3 Links to Other External Specialist Services

Specialist Services

Chemical and physical analysis of feed and foodstuffs- The Authority has appointed Mr Alastair Low, B.Sc.(Hons), M.Sc., M.Chem.A., C.Chem of Minton, Treharne & Davies (MTD) Ltd, Laboratories Division, Long Wood Drive, Forest Farm Industrial Estate, Coryton, Cardiff, Wales CF14 7HY to act as Public Analyst to the Authority, as required by Section 27 of the Food Safety Act 1990. There is a charge to the Local Authority for the use of this service.

Food Examiner for microbiological examination of foodstuffs and faecal samples- The Authority also has an agreement with Public Health Wales who provide a microbiological analysis and an advice service based at the Microbiology Department, Llandough Hospital, Penlan Road, Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan and a faecal analysis service based at the University of Wales Hospital, The Heath, Cardiff. The service is subject to a formal Service Level Agreement (SLA) that determines the funding allocated to the LA and the types of samples that can be submitted as a part of that allocation.

Campden BRI- The Local Authority is a member of Campden BRI based in Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire who provides advice on various specialist food matters, as necessary. Analytical services are also available and there is a charge for each sample submitted.

Specialist Contractors- Employed as and when required.

2.3 Scope of the Food Service

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is designated as a Food Authority under the Food Safety Act 1990.

The Council's Public Health Team that sits within the Environmental Health Department are responsible for the delivery of a food safety, food standards services as well as the control of infectious disease, health and safety functions, special procedures regulation, private water supplies and public health funerals. The team undertake a wide range of activities in order to provide a comprehensive service to its customers combining enforcement, educational and advisory elements. The team will: -

- ❖ **Maintain an up to date register of food business establishments**
- ❖ **Receive, respond to and process all applications for the registration of food premises** - A number of applications for the registration of food premises are received every year and a significant increase has been noted in the past few years
- ❖ **Undertake risk based interventions at premises where food is produced or sold to verify compliance with food hygiene / standards legislation in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice** - A large proportion of officer time is spent carrying out food hygiene/standards inspections and other interventions in food premises throughout the County Borough.
- ❖ **Approve and inspect food businesses handling food products of animal origin within the scope of Assimilated Regulation (EC) No. 853/2004** - The team is responsible for processing and responding to all applications and ultimately approving or refusing them. In some instances conditional approval may be granted.
- ❖ **Carry out visits/re-visits between programmed interventions where significant contraventions were highlighted** - Following an inspection of premises where significant issues are found, officers are required to carry out a follow up inspection.
- ❖ **Implement the requirements of the statutory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme**
- ❖ **Implement a food sampling programme for the microbiological and compositional analysis of food** - Officers regularly take food samples for the purpose of determining the microbiological quality, the compositional requirement of food and allergen testing. Where samples fail to meet the required standards officer follow up any issues and further analysis is carried out.
- ❖ **Delivering imported food controls as an Inland Authority through sampling, inspection and enforcement**
- ❖ **Issuing Export Health certificates to businesses exporting certain foods**

- ❖ **Respond to and investigate complaints relating to the condition of food premises and the sale of food which may be unfit for consumption or contaminated** - These complaints may be food-related or relate to a food premises. Complaints originating within the Council are investigated by the food service. Where a complaint originates outside of the County Borough, officers work closely with the relevant food authority. Where premises have a Primary Authority, officers liaise with that Primary Authority to resolve the issue. This may also include the detention and/or seizure of unsound and unwholesome food stuffs.
- ❖ **Respond to and investigate complaints/notifications relation to infectious and food borne disease** - The service regularly receives notifications of cases of food poisoning. Officers investigate all notifications of sporadic and any outbreaks of food borne and viral infections.
- ❖ **React promptly and appropriately to notifications of Food Alerts which are received from the Food Standards Agency** - Throughout the year the service receives a number of food alerts. Food alerts which require action are actioned as appropriate by officers.
- ❖ **Collect and submit intelligence on food incidents and criminal activity involving food.**
- ❖ **Investigate actual and alleged cases of food and water-borne illnesses.**
- ❖ **Provide advice to business and the wider community on infectious disease matters.**
- ❖ **Undertake special projects, surveys etc. as the need arises and when resources permit.**
- ❖ **Examine and respond to planning and licensing applications in relation to food establishments.**
- ❖ **Act as Home/Primary Authority for premises** – The Council acts informally as Home Authority for OP Chocolates, a large manufacturer located within the County Borough. The authority does not currently have any formal Primary Authority agreement in place.
- ❖ **Provision of advice and guidance to food premises** – Providing advice and guidance to local businesses and members of the public is a key part of our work. We provide advice / guidance / advisory leaflets to food businesses on how to comply with legislative requirements.
- ❖ **Undertake food hygiene awareness and promotional activities** – the Department utilises the Local Authorities website and social media platforms to engage the public / businesses and promote the Food Standards Agency's Food Hygiene Awareness Campaigns.

- ❖ **Examine and respond to planning / licensing / ESAG and regeneration grant applications in relation to food premises and events.**

2.3.1 Other services delivered alongside the Food Service

Alongside the food hygiene / standards service function, the Public Health Team also deliver the Local Authority's:

- ❖ Communicable disease control service
- ❖ health and safety service
- ❖ licencing of special procedures which is due to come into force in October 2024
- ❖ public health funerals
- ❖ Enforcement of no smoking legislation and public health regulations.
- ❖ Licencing of sports grounds
- ❖ Enforcement of discharge of food waste to sewers in commercial outlets

2.4 Demands on the Food Service

a) The Public:

We serve 3 'types' of customer:

- ❖ The 60,000 residents of the Borough,
- ❖ An unknown number of consumers who live outside the Borough but who shop/eat in the Borough,
- ❖ An unknown number of consumers who live outside of the Borough but who have purchased food that is manufactured at premises located within the Borough.

b) Businesses:

At 1st April 2024 the Borough had **587** food premises registered on its database. All of the businesses are subject to a programme of risk-based interventions determined in accordance with by the Statutory Food Law Code of Practice (Wales).

2.4.1 Food Premises

There are **587** registered food premises in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough as of 1st April 2024. The profile of these businesses is set out below. Food business Operators (FBO's) must register their businesses with the Council, except where the establishment requires approval.

Food Business Profile by Premises Category – 1 April 2024

Type of Premises (by former LAEMS category)	Number of Premises 2024/2025
Distributors	10
Manufacturers/Packers	5
Producers	3
Supermarket/hypermarket	11
Small retailers	82
Retailers others	37
Restaurant/café/canteen	95
Hostel/guest house	6
Pub/club	77
Take-away	81
Caring establishment	68
School/college	34
Mobile food unit	26
Restaurant/caterer – others	52
TOTAL	587

Food Hygiene Premises Profile by Risk Rating – 1 April 2024

Premises Rating category	No. of Premises 2024/2025
A	3
B	35
C	243
D	56
E	229
Unrated	18
Outside risk rating scheme	2
Total	586

<u>Food Standards Premises Profile by Risk Rating – 1 April 2024</u>	
Premises Rating category	No. of Premises 2024/2025
A	0
B	42
C	526
Unrated	17
Outside risk rating scheme	2
Total	587

2.4.2 Approved Premises

Approved Establishments - 1 April 2024	
Establishment type	Number
Cold store	1
Cold Store with re-wrapping and/or re-packaging	1
Total	2

The Authority currently has **two** approved premises located within the County Borough, both of which are stand-alone cold stores. One cold store is also approved for re- wrapping activities.

A major cutting plant is also based within the Borough which is approved by the Food Standards Agency Wales (FSA) , however the enforcement of food standards legislation falls within the remit of this service.

2.4.3 Service delivery points

The service operates out of one conveniently located central point i.e. the Civic Centre, Castle Street, Merthyr Tydfil. The Civic Centre is accessible to our customers by road, rail and bus services. Normal office hours are 8.30am – 5.00pm Monday to Thursday and 8.30am – 4.30pm on Friday. Tel: 01685 725000.

The Authority has moved to a model of agile working where officers mainly work from home and from the Civic Centre.

Officers who are not office-based are contactable by mobile telephone or soft phones installed on their laptops. Service users can also email PublicHealth@merthyr.gov.uk.

2.4.4 Out of Hours Service

The service primarily operates during office hours from Monday to Friday. However, increasingly businesses are open outside of these hours and officers regularly carry out unannounced routine inspections during evenings and weekends where this is necessary (for example routine unannounced inspections of takeaways etc).

The Authority does not operate a formal out-of-hours service specifically for food matters. Outside office hours, there is a Lifeline call handling service :

- **01685 384489**

The above telephone service is manned by staff that do not have any specialist food hygiene , food standards or infectious disease control knowledge.

To build further resilience into the above system, a reciprocal arrangement has been adopted with one of the neighbouring local authorities, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council where, if contact cannot be made with any of the relevant Merthyr Tydfil C.B.C Senior managers within a defined time period , then contact will be made to Rhondda Cynon Taf out-of-hours service which operates a formal standby system for Environmental Health 365 days a year. Whilst there are issues with this arrangement in terms of authorisation to take legal action, most of the service requests that are received out-of-hours can be dealt with without recourse to formal action.

2.4.5 External demands on the service

Ongoing Covid – 19 Food Recovery work

The legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a significant backlog of overdue inspections as many businesses closed for extended periods and Officers were fully diverted to provide a front line response to protect public health in vulnerable settings up until 1st July 2022.

Local Authority Food hygiene/ standards services were provided with ministerial dispensation to depart from the Food Law Codes of Practice up until 1st April 2023 and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) developed a 'Recovery Plan' which ran up until the 31st March 2023.

The service successfully completed the FSA Recovery plan ensuring that **all** category A-C food hygiene inspections were inspected and brought back within the statutory framework for planned interventions by the end of March 2023. Pro-active and re-active work was also successfully completed, along with the resumption of food sampling work.

Whilst the service moved at a faster pace than the milestones within the Recovery Plan and started to make in -roads into dealing with outstanding lower risk rated premises, there still remained a significant backlog of overdue Category D and E food hygiene inspections that need to be carefully programmed into the service intervention plan.

There is a three year strategy in place to address the backlog of Category D and E premises which commenced in 2023-24. The rationale for spreading the Category E inspections over a 3 year period is that the backlog needed to be gradually and carefully integrated back into the system to avoid the creation of several peak waves of inspections which would place an additional demand on service resource in both current and future years.

As of 1st April 2023 there were 200 inspections overdue – (39 Category D and 161 Category E premises). This figure does not include the Category A- E inspections that are naturally due for inspection in each financial year so the backlog has to be absorbed into the natural inspection programme as an additional workload. As these premises have not been inspected for approx. 3-4 years this has created an unprecedentedly low number of category D and E inspections naturally due for inspection both last year and this year and this trend will continue to manifest itself over the next few years until recovery is fully completed.

The Food service plan for the financial year 2023-24 outlined that all 39 overdue Category D premises would be inspected and 50 out of 161 Category E's inspected. As of 1st April 2024, all outstanding Category D premises have been inspected and 58 Category E premises have either been inspected or have ceased trading leaving 103 Category E rated inspections now overdue, so the recovery programme remains on track with the service plan.

This 3 year strategy has been approved by the FSA and the service will continue to focus on using a risk based approach to prioritise inspections within this low risk category, whilst ensuring food hygiene ratings are updated to maintain the integrity of Welsh Government's flagship food hygiene rating scheme.

Standards of compliance have however slipped within category E premises due to a lack of intervention and the team is encountering issues such as rodent infestations, out of date food sales etc, resulting in increased enforcement action and these premises moving into higher risk categories for future inspection. This demonstrates the importance of regulatory controls being in place and that businesses are not able to self regulate.

In terms of food standards, there are **52** Category C rated inspections overdue from the COVID backlog

Allergen control and management

Food allergies can be fatal, and an estimated 1-2% of adults and 5-8% of children have a food allergy, which accounts for around 2 million people in the UK. There have been several high-profile cases involving the deaths of teenagers following the consumption of undeclared allergens. Generally, business compliance with new allergen labelling requirements has been found to be poor. The provision of information and assistance to businesses to help them comply with the requirements has had, and continues to have, resource implications for the service.

Each inspection is also taking on average 1 hour longer to complete because of the increasing demands of Food standards work relating to allergen management and ensuring compliance with new legislation relating to products which are pre-packed for direct sale (PPDS) as a result of the introduction of Natasha's Law in October 2021.

Officers developing competencies.

One full time officer recruited in 2022 is continuing to work toward full food law competency status. Currently there are restrictions within the officers authorisation in terms of the functions that he is able to perform and it is hoped that full competency status will be achieved by September 2024.

One fully competent experienced officer left the Authority to work in the Private sector in July 2023 and despite several rounds of advertising the post remained vacant between August 2023 – March 2024. As of 1st April, the service has now managed to successfully recruit a new officer who has a pollution background and will therefore require training and development over a two year period to enable them to attain full competency status. Currently that officer will be extremely limited in terms of the functions that they can perform.

Retention and Recruitment of Staff

The service, despite several rounds of advertising was unable to recruit a suitable qualified Environmental health officer during the period August 2023-March 2024, resulting in an empty post and significant pressures being placed on the service to achieve inspection targets which could only be addressed via existing officers working extra hours, selling their annual leave entitlements, the temporary suspension of pro-active food hygiene and standards sampling work and health and safety inspections. The vacant post has now been filled however the newly appointed officer does not have the relevant competencies. These will need to be developed over a two year period which will place additional pressures on the remaining team.

There continues to be a significant workforce resilience issue within the Environmental Health profession as outlined in the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH's) Environmental Health Workforce Survey report.

Recruiting competent and experienced Environmental Health Officers is a significant challenge and this is reflective of the current landscape across Wales and England. The situation is further compounded by the differentiation in salary rates which results in Officers moving from one Local Authority to another.

In addition, there are several factors at play which are contributing to the significantly depleting and limited pool of professionals within Environmental Health. These include: an ageing workforce, senior officers retiring, the loss of officers to other sectors /agencies such as the Food Standards Agency / Public Health Wales / Private Consultancy firms/ secondment to Welsh Government, all of whom often offer higher remuneration / benefits than Local Government.

The Directors of Public Protection Wales report, *Building for the Future*, highlighted the vital importance of Public Protection services and their important contribution to public health. The report made a number of recommendations, which included Local Authorities, and Welsh Government recognising the vital role of Public Protection / Environmental Health services and commit to increase the investment in budgets for those services to enable growth in frontline

staffing levels to a more resilient level, utilising core budget investment or long-term grant funding mechanisms. The creation of a funded Public Protection workforce development programme to recruit and retain a workforce with the requisite skills to meet existing and emerging demands and the establishment and financial support of a fully funded Regulatory Compliance Officer apprenticeship in Wales was also recommended.

Increased Enforcement Activity

There is continued evidence to indicate that both the legacy of the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with the ongoing cost of living crisis is causing a decline in standards of compliance at food premises with some businesses implementing cost saving measures such as turning refrigeration equipment off over night, using / selling foods past their use by dates and committing food fraud eg. substitution of products, illegally sourcing meats etc. Recruitment/ retention of staff is also an issue in this sector which can have impacts on food hygiene standards as a result of inadequately trained staff / insufficient staff to perform cleaning duties.

Officers within our Department, are reporting an increasing number of premises that are being rated 0-2 (non-broadly compliant). There is a consequent corresponding increase in the level of enforcement action being taken.

This has an impact on service delivery, as enforcement action is time consuming due to increased legal paperwork, multiple revisits to ensure urgently required remedial actions are addressed, court attendances, all of which detracts officer resources away from conducting inspections. These businesses are then re-categorised as high risk for a new intervention.

In addition, when businesses receive a poor food hygiene rating, they typically request a re-rating visit in attempt to improve their 'scores on the doors' which they have to legally display. These re-rating visits will also have to be prioritised, in line with the statutory requirement to complete the re-rating inspection within 3 months of a paid application being submitted to the Authority.

Introduction of Welsh Government's Special procedures Licencing Scheme

The new scheme to licence special practitioners that perform tattooing/ piercing/ semi permanent tattooing / acupuncture is due to come into force in October 2024, this will place significant pressure on service delivery in Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 of this financial year and the following financial year, as all existing registered practitioners/ premises have to be inspected and migrated into the new licencing scheme over a specified period which is estimated to be 9 months. No additional resource has been provided to the Service to deliver this scheme and any additional resource that has been gained for the food service this year will have to be re-diverted to achieve this work.

Welsh Government Free School Meals Initiative

The introduction of the Welsh Government Free School Meals Initiative has resulted in an increase in the number of Local Authority schools that have now moved from Category C to B and Category D to C for food hygiene inspection premises risk rating. This is attributable to an extra score that is given for high risk vulnerable groups where more than 20 meals are served to under 5 year olds. This migration is reflected in **Table 1** and places additional demands on the service as inspections have to be undertaken more frequently.

New business demands

The number of registered food businesses fluctuates because of new businesses opening for trade, existing businesses which cease trading, and businesses where there is a change in ownership, management and/or food activities.

All new food businesses need to be inspected to assess compliance with food hygiene / standards legislation and receive a food hygiene rating. It is always difficult to predict the number of new businesses that will commence trading, although it should be noted that in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of new businesses registering with the Council. This impacts other areas of programmed work carried out by food hygiene and food standards officers.

On 1 April 2024, there were **12 newly** registered businesses awaiting inspection in respect of food hygiene and standards, a number of which have not yet started trading. These businesses are desk top risk assessed based on inherent risk and prioritised accordingly for inspection.

In recent years it has been noted that businesses often start up and then cease trading within a relatively short time period, this proves to be an unavoidable waste of resources. The business typically will then be re-opened by a new food business operator and will require another new inspection. The current 'cost of living crisis' is likely to see this trend continue as the small business sector continues to be unstable.

Statutory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) safeguards

The FHRS incorporates safeguards to ensure it is fair for businesses. This includes an appeals procedure, a 'right to reply' and a mechanism for requesting a re-inspection or revisit for a re-rating. The additional work these safeguards generate cannot be predicted year on year, although a fee is payable where re-visits are requested.

Improved intelligence

Better intelligence in relation to local, regional, and national food crime has increased the number of requests to work with partner agencies. Again, the impact is difficult to quantify but it can be significant and affect planned intervention programmes.

Impact of new laboratory molecular diagnostic techniques

The Authority is anticipating a significant increase in the number of confirmed cases of pathogens requiring investigation due to the introduction of new molecular testing methods in microbiology laboratories. The new (PCR) testing regime is more sensitive than traditional methods putting increased demands on the service. There are already signs of this increasing trend.

Freedom of Information and Environmental Information requests

Increased public awareness has led to a rise in Freedom of Information and Environmental Information requests, placing increased demands on officers.

FSA transformation programmes

For several years, the FSA has been focusing on programmes to modernise how businesses are regulated. The [Operational Transformation Programme](#) and [Achieving Business Compliance](#) (ABC) Programme places increased demands on local authorities to inform this work. Increased requests for data, consultations, requests to participate in pilot studies have all added to pressures on already stretched food hygiene / standards services across Wales, particularly during an ongoing period of post pandemic recovery.

FSA demands for additional Performance monitoring data returns

Pre-covid, Local Authorities submitted annual end of year data enforcement monitoring returns to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) via the Local Authority Enforcement Management system (LAEMS) which was specifically configured to easily generate the required data. However since 2020, bespoke 'temperature check' returns have been required by the FSA at quarterly intervals which has now reduced to a bi-annual return. This work places additional burdens on the service and is extremely time consuming in comparison to the original end of year reporting system. It is particularly problematic at the end of each financial year where two different sets of figures have to be produced – annual figures for the service plan and six monthly figures for the FSA.

Cultural and Ethnic Diversity

The number of food businesses in the County Borough whose first language is not English has traditionally been low. However in recent years there has been an increase in the number of businesses run by food business operators of Eastern European origin and other ethnicities. That said, this still accounts for only a small percentage of food businesses within the Borough and the impact on the service is low.

The service uses both Language line and the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS) to assist with communication if required. Businesses are also directed to the Food Standards Agency's website www.food.gov.uk to obtain Safer Food Better Business packs which are available in various languages to reduce the language barrier. Multi-lingual information leaflets are enclosed with notices, if deemed necessary, to advise of the importance of issued legal documents.

Where necessary, consideration will be given to equality and diversity when policies and procedures are being revised to ensure there is no discrimination or exclusion.

Food Manufacturers

There are 5 businesses within the Borough that are classified as manufacturers under the former LAEMS guidance document. This constitutes less than 1% of registered businesses so there is no significant impact on the Service. OP Chocolates which is the main manufacturing premises does however regularly request export certificates for their products which does place additional demands on the service.

Imported Food responsibilities

Although Merthyr Tydfil is an inland Local Authority the service still has an important role to play in food security checks to ensure that imported foods meet food safety requirements. This role has become increasingly important as a result of EU exit and the delays in the Government introducing physical checks on imported foods at border control posts..

A new global regime for controlling imported food and feed products entering the U.K. in the form of a Border Target operating Model (BTOM) has been phased in and is due to be fully operational from 30 April 2024.

During the inspection of food premises, officers consider the origin of imported foods. Any indications that food may not have been subject to correct import controls are investigated and, where necessary, the food is removed from the food chain. Imported foods may also be subject to examination as part of our sampling programme which is informed by the Food standards Agency's UK National Monitoring plan which outlines sampling priorities for 2024-25 based on global intelligence and also via notifications from the Food Standards Agency's Smarter Communications platform.

Enforcement activity in this area increased in 2023, particularly in relation to the imports of products originally intended for the American market and which do not comply with U.K. legislative food safety requirements in that they contain illegal additives.

In April 2023, **106** bottles of Prime drinks containing tri-magnesium citrate were formally seized by Environmental Health Officers and removed from the market and 8 bottles were subject to voluntary surrender. **18** bars of prime chocolate were also seized for failing to meet food labelling requirements. Three incidents were raised with the Food standards Agency Wales and the National Food crime Unit and the Primary Authority for Mars Confectionary were notified of brand protection issues as their Galaxy bars were being overwrapped with Prime wrapping. This reactive and investigatory work diverted three officers away from being able to conduct routine food hygiene inspections for a 2 week period.



In addition, In July 2023, **10** boxes of imported Swedish Confectionary containing an unauthorised white mineral oil additive were removed from the food chain in Merthyr Tydfil by voluntary surrender as these products were not legally permitted to be sold within the U.K. market.



Based on recent trends, it is anticipated that this type of work will continue to increase in 2024/25 as new and emerging imported American and other third country products continue to be illegally imported in to the U.K.

Seasonal Businesses

The number of seasonal businesses is low and does not present any significant difficulties.

2.5 Compliance and Enforcement Policy

The Authority has formally adopted a Compliance and Enforcement Policy⁵. The policy was subject to 5 year review in line with the requirements of the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008 and was approved by Council in March 2019. The next review is due in this financial year (2024).

In coming to any enforcement decisions, consideration will be given to the following factors:

- ❖ The seriousness of the offence
- ❖ The past history of the business

⁵ [Compliance and Enforcement Policy 2019 \(merthyr.gov.uk\)](https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/compliance-and-enforcement-policy-2019)

- ❖ Confidence in management
- ❖ The consequences of non-compliance
- ❖ The likely effectiveness of various enforcement options
- ❖ The attitude of the operator/proprietor

The Policy reflects the principles of proportionality, targeting, consistency, transparency and accountability. The policy sets out our current approach to law enforcement and is based upon the principles espoused by, the Regulators Code⁶ and has regard to current government guidance. The policy is available on the Local Authority's website and a hard copy can be obtained by contacting the Environmental Health Manager, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Environmental Health Department, Civic Centre, Castle Street, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 8AN.

⁶ [Regulators' Code \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

3. Service Delivery

3.1 Food Hygiene/Standards Interventions

The Food Law Code of Practice (Wales) allows a flexible approach to food law enforcement whereby Local Authorities can use a range of interventions to monitor, support and increase business compliance. It is the policy of Merthyr Tydfil's Food Service to ensure that all food businesses within the Borough receive interventions in accordance with The Food Law Code of Practice (Wales) and Practice Guidance.

3.1.1 Food Hygiene

Interventions consist of official and non-official controls:

Official Controls

- Inspections
- Monitoring
- Surveillance
- Verification
- Audit
- Sampling where analysis is to be carried out by an official laboratory

Non-Official Controls

- Education, advice and coaching
- Information and intelligence gathering (including sampling where the analysis or examination is not to be carried out by an official laboratory).

Interventions are applied on a risk-based approach such that more intensive regulation can be directed at those food businesses that present the greatest risk to public health.

The Covid 19 pandemic has resulted in a significant backlog of overdue interventions and this years service plans interventions again take into account the Authorities 3 year recovery plan to address the outstanding Category E food hygiene overdue inspections and Category C food standards interventions.

The Food Standards Agency's Recovery Plan ran until 31st March 2023 and there is now an expectation for Local authorities to return to adherence to the food hygiene and standards intervention frequencies prescribed within the Food Law Code of Practice. The FSA have acknowledged that all Local Authorities are in varying positions with the numbers of premises that are still outstanding for intervention.

The Code of Practice requires that the highest risk rated premises be subject to a full or part inspection, or audit. The service is committed to carrying out full inspections in our highest risk premises categorised as A or B rated at intervals specified in the Code.

There is an opportunity for the service to alternate between one or more interventions comprising official controls in category C premises if the premise is deemed to be broadly compliant, rather than carrying out a full inspection, partial inspection or audit. Our experience has shown us that in the current economic climate businesses are increasingly willing to cut corners or branch out into new markets or processes to make ends meet. We believe that shortfalls in food hygiene are more likely to be identified as a result of a thorough inspection and we will continue to use a full, partial inspection or audit as our chosen method of intervention in these premises. Conducting full, partial inspections or audits of Category C businesses also means that the interval between awards of a food hygiene rating will not be more than 18 months. Leaving long periods between re ratings has the potential to undermine the statutory food hygiene rating scheme.

Category D premises can be subject to interventions, which alternate between interventions that are official and non-official controls. The team currently has a policy of carrying out official controls in D rated businesses.

Category E premises can be subject to an alternative enforcement strategy which could include making use of questionnaires / surveys / project based inspections / intelligence gathering visits. We will however carry out an inspection:

- ❖ when they are subject of a complaint.
- ❖ When we become aware of a significant change in the nature of the business, which is likely to alter the risk rating e.g. through planning applications, local knowledge, requests for advice from the proprietor
- ❖ We will identify and target specific groups of premises for food safety initiatives.
- ❖ We will make contact with all low risk premises at least once every 3 years to ascertain their status.

Due to the current backlog of category E inspections, a mixture of approaches will be taken dependant upon risk and in a way that 'effectively flattens the peak' of inspections for future service years. The backlog is being managed over a 3 year period running from 2023-2026, with the aim of being able to fully re-align with the Food Law Code of Practice by 1st April 2026.

Establishment Profile

Table 1 below provides a profile of the number of premises within each food hygiene risk rating category within the Borough. The table illustrates that since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Hygiene Category A and B premises has increased. The Category A profile has risen from 0 in 2021/22 and has remained consistently higher in the last three financial years. The most notable increase however has occurred within the Category B risk rating since 2022/23. It is also of note that the service has effectively reduced the number of unrated businesses in the past two financial years.

Table 1 – Profile of premises within each food hygiene risk rating category

CATEGORY	Number of Premises 2021/2022	Number of premises 2022/2023	Numbers of premises 2023/24	Number of Premises 2024/2025
Risk Rating A	0	3	3	3
Risk Rating B	26	25	43	35
Risk Rating C	269	246	227	243
Risk Rating D	66	67	65	56
Risk Rating E	197	222	237	229
Unrated	48	40	14	18

Premises which are subject to food inspections and interventions are risk-rated. The risk rating is carried out in accordance with Annex 1 of the Food Law Code of Practice Wales (July 2021) the frequency of the inspection/intervention is determined by the risk rating as outlined in **Table 2** below. Frequency of inspection can vary from once every 6 months, if the premises are a category A, to once every 3 years for category E. The minimum frequency that a food business should receive an intervention in accordance with the Food law Code of Practice is set out below:

Table 2 – Food Hygiene minimum intervention frequencies

Category	Intervention Frequency
A	At least every 6 months
B	At least every 12 months
C	At least every 18 months
D	At least every 2 years
E	At least every 3 years

The database is updated to reflect any changes to existing businesses, new businesses which have commenced trading and businesses which have ceased trading. New businesses will be visited and risk-rated in accordance with The Food Law Code of Practice Wales.

It is the aim of the food service to carry out a programme of **planned due** inspections and interventions of food premises for 2024/25 in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice requirement, also utilising the flexibilities contained within the Code as outlined in **Table 3**.

Table 3 Summary of Work Programme for Food hygiene inspections for 2024 /25 based on risk, inspection due dates and including overdue inspections generated by the COVID-19 pandemic

Risk Category	No. of Due / Overdue Inspections	No of Interventions / inspections Planned	Type of Visit
A	3	6	Full Inspection
B	34	34	Full inspection
C	131	131	Full inspection
D	13	13	Full inspection
E (due)	32	32	AES / Full inspection dependant upon risk /
E (overdue)	103	52	AES / Full inspection dependant upon risk
New premises (including unrated)	18 at start of year	90	Full inspection
Revisits to all categories	Approx 70	70	Official control-verification/ monitoring visit to check compliance
Re rating requested under the FHRS	Approx 20	20	Full inspection
Total	334	448	

3.1.2 Food Standards

Table 4 Establishment Profile

CATEGORY	Number of Premises 2021/2022	Number of premises 2022/2023	Numbers of premises 2023/24	Numbers of Premises 2024/25
Risk Rating A	0	0	0	0
Risk Rating B	27	29	39	42
Risk Rating C	446	498	539	526
Unrated	*	*	*	17
Outside programme	2	2	2	2

- Figures not available

Table 5 Summary of Work Programme for Food standards inspections for 2024 /25 based on risk, inspection due dates and including overdue inspections generated by the COVID-19 pandemic

Risk Category	No of Inspections Due / overdue	No of visits Planned	Type of Visit
A	0	0	n/a
B (due)	8	8	Full inspection
C	56	56	Full inspection /partial audit
C (overdue)	52	52	Full inspection
Unrated	17	17	Full inspection
Total	133	133	

Table 6 – Food standards minimum Intervention frequencies

Category	Intervention Frequency
A	At least every 12 months
B	At least every 24 months
C	Alternative enforcement strategy or intervention every 5 years

Trading Standards have traditionally enforced food standards legislation including composition, labelling claims, allergens, chemical contamination, compositional standards, additives genetically modified ingredients and foods, and articles that come into contact with food such as plastics. However, the function was transferred to the Environmental Health Service in 2014 as part of an efficiency agenda without any additional resource in terms of finance or personnel.

As a result the frequency of food standards interventions, in all but a few cases, follow the food hygiene rating which has been given as this will usually be more frequent than a scheduled standards inspection. This will ensure that only one visit is undertaken where hygiene and standards inspections are undertaken at the same time. Our customer survey results show that businesses value enforcement visits and want coordination of Council functions to reduce the burden on their business. Where a standards visit is due before the hygiene (this is usually a very small number) this will either be carried out separately or the hygiene inspection brought forward so that the inspections are carried out at the same time. Standards visits becoming naturally due for inspection and the requirement to return to the intervention frequencies stipulated within the Food Law Code of Practice will continue to be a significant issue in 2024-25 as it was in the previous financial year due to the backlog of Category E Hygiene inspections which are also Category C for standards.

The impact of legislation surrounding labelling requirements for pre-packed for direct sale foods (PPDS) and the requirements surrounding allergen management as part of a food hygiene management system has resulted in a substantial increase in the duration of inspections.

There is one Food Standards Agency approved premise, namely a large slaughterhouse and cutting plant, where food hygiene is the responsibility of the FSA but standards and labelling is enforced by the local authority's public health team.

3.1.3 New Businesses

The service will continue to proactively identify new businesses by a variety of methods i.e. routine arrangements with other internal Local Authority departments such as Economic Grant Regeneration, Planning, Business Rates, Licensing, Trading Standards and Environmental Services, as well as local intelligence via surveillance on social media websites.

All new businesses are recorded on the shared new premises and Tascomi databases. As soon as a new business, or change of ownership is identified new food business operators are sent a link to the Food Standards Agency's online food premises registration form (or provided with a paper copy if they do not have access to the internet), food safety enforcement questionnaire and information about the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme as a matter of course.

Once a registration form / new business questionnaire is received the business is desk top risk rated based on perceived inherent risk utilising a Red/ Amber /Green (RAG) rating system which effectively categorises the business as high, medium or low risk for prioritising hygiene / standards inspections.

It is impossible to predict how many new businesses will open or change ownership but based on historical data the team typically inspects approximately **80 - 90** new food businesses each year.

It is also worth noting that many of the new business fail within their first year of trading and this has consistently been the case since March 2020. This has had a knock on impact on the inspection programme and this work is not reflected in our overall reportable figures. Mobile premises continue to present a particular problem, a lot of investment is made in these businesses by the service but this is not reflected in the end of year statistics as many cease trading after a few months.

The Food Law Practice Guidance (Wales) stipulates that all new food businesses should receive an inspection within 28 days of opening or registering. The turnover of premises means that this continues to be a challenge to achieve. The Food Law Practice Guidance states that "where the establishment is believed to be undertaking high risk food activities the Authority should undertake an initial inspection within 28 days of commencement of operations". There are also flexibilities around the 28 day timescale within the code to ensure that lower risk premises are not inspected at the expense of higher risk premises, this ensures that we are targeting our resources at premises which present the greatest public health risk.

The service will continue to undertake desk top risk assessments of new businesses, RAG rate them and prioritise inspections on the basis of the information provided on the food premises

registration form, food safety enforcement questionnaire and/or local knowledge, with those that potentially pose the greatest risk to public health being inspected first.

The service aims to inspect these premises within the following time scales, utilising the flexibilities contained within the Food Law Code of Practice:

Red – high risk - 28 days
Amber – medium risk - 2 months
Green – low risk - 3 months

3.1.4 Revisits

Revisits are an essential part of any effective intervention programme and the service has adopted the All Wales Food Safety Expert Panels Policy on undertaking revisits.

- **Food Hygiene-** Revisits and any appropriate follow up action will be carried out in all Category A & B premises and all premises which are found not to be broadly compliant with the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. The timing of the revisit will be dependent upon the nature of the food safety contraventions identified and in accordance with the revisit policy. In addition, as a result of conducting a focussed audit on 3 rated premises the service established that businesses with food safety management failings that were not revisited tended not to undertake the required improvements and dropped to a lower non-broadly compliant rating on the next scheduled inspection. Officers will therefore exercise discretion and revisit some premises that are deemed broadly compliant in order to mitigate future non-compliance / poor food hygiene ratings being awarded. Where necessary further enforcement visits, coupled with legal action in some cases, may be undertaken.

It is difficult to give an exact number of revisits but historical data allows us to predict that approximately **70 - 80** food hygiene revisits will be required. **72** revisits were recorded on Tascomi as having been undertaken in 2023/24.

- **Food Standards-** As for food hygiene where significant breaches of food standards legislation are identified revisits and follow up enforcement action will be taken in accordance with the revisit policy. **6** Food standards re-visits were recorded as being undertaken in 2023-24 but it is believed that these figures are being under reported on the Tascomi system as numbers of revisits are likely to be much higher.

3.1.5 Specific Project work

This financial year the service intends to undertake the following project work:

- Participate in relevant microbiological sampling specific projects that have been agreed through the Welsh Food Microbiological Forum
- Participate in food standards sampling project work as agreed through the Glamorgan Food Standards Group
- Continue to promote information on Pre-packed for direct sale (PPDS) legislation
- Undertake a focused project in relation to the management of cross contamination of food allergens within catering premises, resources permitting

3.1.6 Specialised processes

Approved premises - Only officers that are fully competent and authorised to undertake inspections of approved premises are permitted to undertake these inspections. The County Borough has two stand alone cold stores which undertake low risk operations.

A number of businesses, in particular butcher shops utilise vacuum packing machines and only officers that have the necessary competencies will inspect these premises.

Officers completed sous vide refresher training in the first quarter of 2023/24, however the service is not currently aware of any business that employs this method of cooking.

In the event that any new business undertakes a specialist process which Officers do not have the relevant competency / experience in, then informal cross boundary arrangements agreed through the South East Wales Regional Food Group are in place to seek the expertise of an officer in another Local Authority.

A register of expertise is currently being developed by the Welsh Heads of Environmental Health Group, which can also be used to access expertise / gain practical experience in specific manufacturing / approved premises/ complex processes inspections.

3.1.7 Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

The service is committed to the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) which aims to promote consumer choice.

There was **1** appeal received by the service against the hygiene ratings awarded in 2023/24

The scheme has resulted in an increase in workload as a result of requests for re ratings.

16 re rating applications were received in 2023/24 this represents a decrease in comparison to last years figures.

In order to retain credibility it is also necessary to police the scheme to ensure ratings are correctly displayed. In 2023/24, a total of **6** fixed penalty notices were served for either failure to display a valid / conspicuous food hygiene rating or for failure to have the correct bilingual statement on promotional material.

The Estimated Resources Required to deliver Food Hygiene/Food Standards interventions is 3.8 F.T.E

3.2 Food Complaints

Investigation of food complaints is an important part of the Environmental Health Food Service. It is the policy of the service to investigate every food complaint relating to unfit, unsound or

unwholesome food that is sold and manufactured within our area that is brought to its attention. Complaints into the labelling and composition of food are also investigated along with complaints of unsatisfactory conditions in food premises.

Complaints are investigated in accordance with the Food Complaints procedure and Food Law Code of Practice (Wales). In practice this means that all food complaints will be assessed by an officer upon receipt and the most appropriate course of action determined. Complaints are generally received by the service from members of the public or via the Food Standards Agency's on line Local Government complaint referral service. Details of service requests are recorded on the TASCOMI Database.

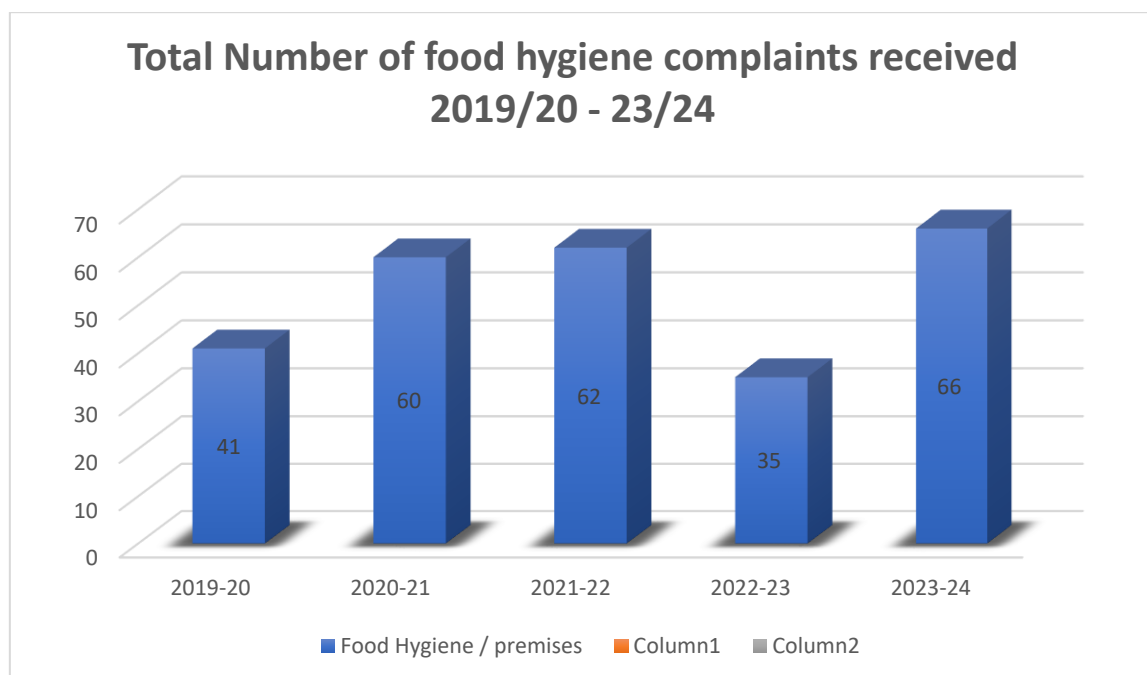
In circumstances when the food, which is the subject of complaint, was manufactured outside of the County Borough, details of the complaint are also referred to the Originating, Home and/or Primary Authority. When a resident of the Borough has purchased food in another Local Authority's area the food is collected and referred to the appropriate Local Authority for investigation.

The investigation of complaints may also involve microbiological or chemical analysis being undertaken and this has a financial implication for the service.

We act as a home authority to one manufacturer in the area and therefore investigate complaints arising from this premises.

Complaints have generally remained steady over recent years as depicted in the graph below, however there was a notable unexplained decline in the number of complaints received in 2022/23. The graph serves to illustrate that it is extremely difficult to predict the exact number volume of complaints that will be received in 2024/2025 and consequently the exact level of resources that will be required.

On previous years trends it is estimated that approximately **65** complaints are likely to be received in 2024/25.



During 2023/24 a total number of **66** food hygiene complaints were received, **36** relating to food and **30** relating to the hygiene of premises. A further **12** complaints were received about food standards issues. All of these complaints were investigated and enforcement action taken in accordance with the LA's food safety enforcement policy.

The Estimated Resources Required to deliver this service is 0.2 F.T.E

3.3 Home Authority Principle/Primary Authority Scheme

3.3.1 Home Authority Principle

The Home Authority Principle applies to businesses that have their 'decision making' base within the Borough and whose decisions have national or international impact. The principle provides a mechanism for efficient liaison between Authorities with multiple-site businesses and it is the policy of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to operate the Home Authority Principle in accordance with guidance issued. The Local Authority has no formal arrangements with the manufacturers located within the Borough however does informally act as home authority for 1 major manufacturer .

Furthermore the service will:-

- Provide advice to all Home Authority businesses on matters relating to food, either when requested, or in response to a referral from another Local Authority.

- Have regard to any information or advice it has received as a result of liaison with home and/or originating Authorities.
- Having initiated liaison with any home and/ or originating Authority, notify that Authority of the outcome.

3.3.2 Primary Authority Scheme

Primary Authority enables businesses to obtain consistent advice on compliance with regulation from local authorities. The Primary Authority may direct against enforcement action if it is inconsistent with assured advice given. The scheme is statutory and was established by the Regulatory and Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008. The service will:

- Consult with the Primary Authority where the service has concerns about compliance of a multi-site business operating in the Borough.
- Have regard to any advice or inspection plan issued by a Primary Authority.
- Notify the Primary Authority of any proposed enforcement action.

The Service does not have a Primary Authority relationship with any business in Merthyr Tydfil, however as an increasing number of National businesses are looking to develop Primary Authority partnerships with Local Authorities in Wales this is an area of the service that we would look to develop, resources permitting.

3.4 Advice to Business

Business advice is offered to all businesses at the point of contact and this service remains free of charge.

In addition we aim to assist businesses wherever possible by providing food safety advice disseminated through a variety of channels, such as:-

- ❖ Upon receipt of a food premises registration form
- Advice provided as part of the intervention process;
- A variety of information leaflets are available in various languages;
- The provision of training and seminars subject to external funding.
- Participation in national events, such as National Food Safety Week;
- Providing advice to organisers of events;
- Advice in response to planning / ESAG applications and on receipt of Temporary Events Notices where applicable;
- When new legislation or guidance is issued information is provided by the most effective means to appropriate target groups e.g. mail shot, workshops/seminars/ social media posts
- Bespoke coaching sessions for businesses subject to external funding e.g. town centre food and drink improvement grant.
- Bespoke coaching where inspections have revealed that businesses are struggling to understand and meet specific legal requirements e.g. allergen control or businesses with poor FHRs ratings
- Use of the Council website and social media.

- Working in conjunction with the Local Authority's regeneration team to provide advice to businesses that have received grant aid funding.

We continue to support and promote the Food Standards Agency's Safer Food Better Business Pack in assisting businesses with complying with the requirements of Article 5.

It is difficult to predict the number of requests for advice that will be received each year. Factors such as the introduction of new legislation and/or guidance or an influx of new businesses may increase the number of requests received. However, based on the trends over the past two financial years, it is estimated that approximately **70** requests for business advice will be received for food hygiene and **20** for food standards.

During **2023/24** the service responded to **65** requests for Hygiene / safety advice from food businesses and **12** requests for food standards advice.

3.4.1 Food Hygiene & Other Training

The service does not have the resource to be able to deliver food hygiene courses as this provision is better met by the private sector, thus enabling the officers within the Team to concentrate on the core statutory duties of the Authority in relation to food safety enforcement. Other Training in relation to Food Law issues is facilitated as and when the need arises and where resources are available. Where appropriate the Council will write to food business operators in the area highlighting training opportunities which may be relevant to their food business.

3.5 Food Sampling

Sampling carried out for Food Hygiene (both surveillance and targeted) is undertaken to protect public health and to improve the microbiological quality of food. The service is required to undertake a suitable and sufficient sampling programme as part of the framework arrangement between the FSA and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.

The sampling programme includes:

- a) Welsh Food Microbiological Forum (WFMF) programme;
- b) Public Health Wales (where appropriate);
- c) Risk based sampling;
- d) Intelligence lead;
- e) Imported foods (where appropriate).

The proactive sampling programme is based on a notional monetary allocation which is contained within the service level agreement between the Local Authority and Public Health Wales. Merthyr Tydfil has a baseline allocation equivalent to **£6044.00** for **2024/25**. This sampling allocation relates to all food, water and environmental samples requiring a microbiological examination. The Local Authority must resource samples taken in excess of this allowance unless they are specifically associated with an outbreak investigation.

The Service plays an active role in the Welsh Food Microbiological Forum (WFMF). The Forum's main strengths are the ability to produce a co-ordinated food-sampling programme for the whole of Wales, which allows standardisation of protocols, pooling of data and the sharing of information derived from it.

There are currently two targeted microbiological surveys running until the end of June 2024 which are focused on assessing the microbiological quality of :

- ready to eat cooked chicken approaching end of shelf life
- microgreens used as garnishes on completed dishes.

The service will participate in collecting samples of cooked chicken between April – June 2023, however envisages difficulties in obtaining microgreens due to the limited nature of their use within the County Borough.

Sampling surveys to be undertaken post June 2023 have yet to be determined by the WFMF at the time of writing this plan.

The number and type of samples collected for analysis varies year on year. This is partly due to the availability of human resource to collect the samples and deliver them to the laboratories and also on unpredictable events such as outbreaks of food poisoning. Samples are normally collected on a routine basis once a fortnight.

Samples that give rise to poor results will also have to be followed up in accordance with the services policies and procedures, this will typically involve an investigation as to how the failure occurred. Since the producer or manufacturer of the food will often be located outside of the Borough this will necessitate liaison with other Local Authorities.

Samples requiring chemical analysis or identification of foreign matter, are usually associated with complaints and are submitted to the Public Analyst appointed by the Local Authority and are paid for on an individual basis.

Bids for additional funding to carry out local or collaborative sampling projects will also be made when monies are available.

The local authority is required to produce a sampling plan contained in **Appendix 3** which must be drawn up in consultation with Public Health Wales. The sampling programme is based on a risk-based approach and only samples with public health significance will be taken. The planned programme of sampling will include: -

- Welsh Food Microbiological Forum (WFMF) shopping basket survey, which is an ongoing routine surveillance programme, but is suspended, when specific targeted WFMF surveys are taking place.

- Participation in proactive structured sampling programmes coordinated through WFMF, FSA, Health Protection Agency surveys and Local Government Regulation.
- Samples taken during a food poisoning investigation.
- Samples taken in response to local need which will include food and environmental samples taken during inspections, following complaints.

At the start of the year it is not possible to stipulate exactly how many samples will be taken from each of the above categories.

Other non-food samples that may be taken include:

- Drinking water samples as a result of a complaint or as part of an inspection.
- Private water supplies
- Swimming pool waters for verification purposes
- Recreational waters
- Environmental samples e.g. swabs of equipment, surfaces etc. taken as part of an investigation.

The timing and number of samples is approximate and may vary from the plan. Additional surveys and sampling according to local need will be undertaken throughout the year.

The Local Authority recognises that sampling makes an important contribution to the protection of Public Health and the Food Law enforcement function.

The Local Authority's Food Service will therefore continue its policy of taking food samples in the following situations: -

- To participate in National, Regional and locally co-ordinated surveys/programmes.
- From local food producers.
- Home/originating Authority samples
- In response to complaints
- In order to monitor processes
- As part of a special investigations/initiatives
- During inspections to validate the effectiveness of food safety management systems
- To assess durability of products

- For surveillance/screening processes
- Targeting premises which present the highest risk to consumers within the Borough ie. premises rated 0-2

In order to carry out the above the food service will:-

- Comply with the requirements of the Statutory Food Law Code of Practice (Wales).
- Have regard to guidance issued by Food Standards Agency and industry guides.
- Have regard to the Food Standards Agency's UK National Monitoring Plan (NMP) sampling priorities table for the import of products of animal origin (POAO) and foods not of animal origin (FNAO).
The objective of the NMP is to help ensure that food imported into the UK complies with relevant legislation, and to detect residues, pathogenic organisms, or other substances hazardous to humans, animals, or the environment.
- Resources permitting take part in regional and national sampling initiatives put forward by the Food Standards Agency, Welsh Food Microbiological Forum, Food Standards and Agriculture Group, Welsh Heads of Trading Standards (WHoTS), Glamorgan Trading Standards Food Group, Public Health Wales and the Food Safety Task Groups.
- When microbiological examination is required submit samples to Public Health Wales based in Llandough Hospital, Penarth who provide the services of a formal food examiner.
- When samples require analysis for extraneous matter, chemical contamination, composition etc. samples are to the Public Analyst appointed by the Local Authority or other appropriate laboratory.
- Produce a sampling programme for both food hygiene and food standards. The food hygiene programme is a "live document" and is updated on a monthly basis in consultation with Public Health Wales.
- Respond to referrals of unsatisfactory results generated by the Food Standards Agency's Surveillance Sampling programme

3.5.1 Food Hygiene Samples

During 2023-24, **88** samples were obtained for microbiological analysis.

It is estimated that approximately **120** microbiological samples will be taken during 2024-25, resources permitting.

Samples taken in connection with complaints, alleged outbreaks of food poisoning etc. may be submitted at any time.

Proprietors will always be advised when samples produce a borderline or unsatisfactory result in line with the services food sampling policy and procedure. Action will then be taken to identify the reason for the borderline / unsatisfactory result and follow up samples will be taken as necessary.

3.5.2 Food Standards Samples

Food Standards sampling (both initiative & targeted) is undertaken to ensure food meets safety requirements, specific legislative criteria as set by food standards legislation and is labelled correctly and described correctly.

As part of the Councils efficiency programme there is no longer a specific budget allocated for food standards sampling however a recent Food Standards Agency Audit report has highlighted that the Authority **must** provide a sampling budget for food standards work as this is a statutory function, this accordingly has been highlighted in the 'Areas for Improvement' section of the plan.. Sampling will only be undertaken where local intelligence suggests there is a need including response to complaints, or where external funding can be secured to participate in targeted surveys.

In **2024/2025** the service is again looking to participate in the Glamorgan Trading Standards Food Groups sampling project work, resources permitting.

The Glamorgan Trading Standards Groups sampling programme for the **2024/25** financial year has not been determined at the time of writing this service plan.

It is estimated that approximately **30 - 40** samples will be obtained in 2024-25. Food standards samples will be collected in blocks as part of the targeted programme, however complaint samples may be submitted at any time and it is difficult to predict the numbers of the latter that will be received.

Proprietors will always be advised when samples produce an unsatisfactory result in line with the services food sampling policy and procedure. Action will then be taken to identify the reason for the unsatisfactory result and follow up samples will be taken as necessary.

The authority has appointed the following for the purposes of food analysis:

Food Analyst- The County Borough has appointed Mr Alistair Low of Alastair Low, B.Sc.(Hons), M.Sc., M.Chem.A., C.Chem Minton, Treharne & Davies (MTD) , Long Wood Drive, Forest Farm Industrial Estate, Coryton, Cardiff, Wales CF14 7HY to act as Public Analyst to the Authority, as required by Section 27 of the Food Safety Act 1990. There is a charge to the Local Authority for the use of this service.

Food Examiner- The Authority also has an agreement with the Public Health Wales who provide a microbiological analysis and an advice service, which is based at the Microbiology Department, Llandough Hospital, Penlan Road, Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan. The service is subject to a formal Service Level Agreement (SLA) that determines the funding allocated to the LA and the types of samples that can be submitted as a part of that allocation.

Campden BRI- The Local Authority is a member of Campden BRI based in Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire who provides advice on various specialist food matters, as necessary. Analytical services are also available and there is a charge for each sample submitted.

The Estimated Resources required to undertake Food Hygiene and food Standards sampling is 0.3 F.T.E

3.6 Food Safety Incidents

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) Incidents Branch deals with environmental contamination incidents with the potential to affect the food chain.

All food officers have access to the internet and e-mail facilities. The FSA has contact details for officers to allow for direct communication of alerts via their Smarter Communications platform and they also hold contact details of the Lead Officer for Food safety.

The service responds to all Food Alerts and Product Withdrawal / Recall information Notices in accordance with the advice and guidance issued by the FSA and the Food Law Codes of Practice.

The level of action required is determined by the Category assigned to the alert and its relevance to premises, and the food offered for sale within the County Borough.

A Product Withdrawal Information Notice or a Product Recall Information Notice is issued where a solution to the problem has been put in place; the product has been, or is being, withdrawn from sale or recalled from consumers, for example. A Food Alert for Action is issued where intervention by enforcement authorities is required. The latest product withdrawals and recalls are listed on the Food Standards Agency website and are regularly posted on their social media websites.

Our service is making increasing use of the Council's social media platforms to share the Food Standards Agency's posts relating to Product Withdrawal and Product Recall Information Notices/ Allergy alerts.

Alerts requiring substantial reactive action will occur occasionally and irregularly, though it is noted that this work has doubled from the previous financial year. Sufficient resources will be allocated to deal with each warning as it arises, although this may require diversion from the planned programme of work dependant upon the scale / severity of the incident.

In the period **2023/24**, the service responded to **1** incident for action from the Food Standards Agency Wales Incident team and effectively removed from sale affected products.

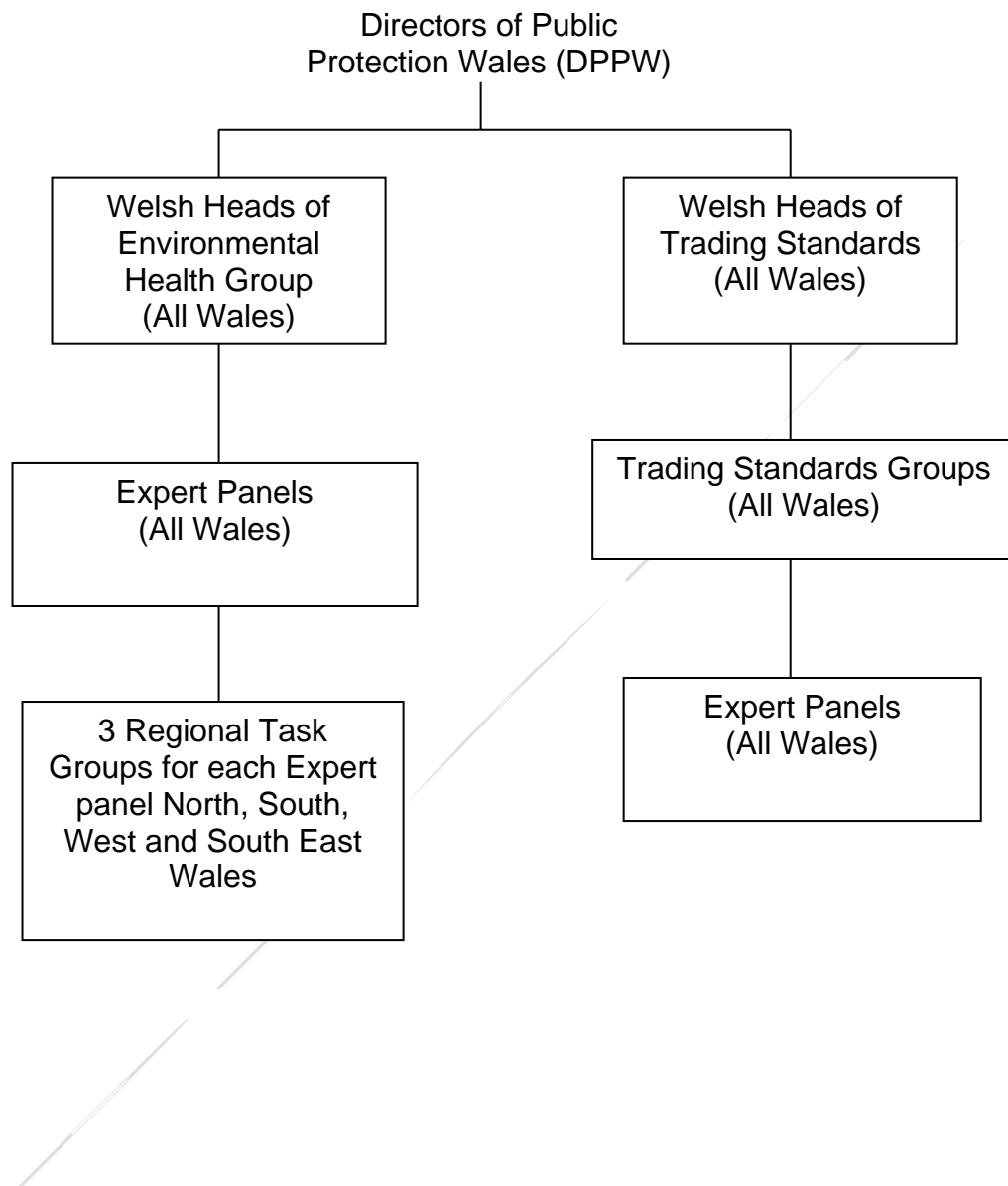
The number of incidents requests for action is unpredictable as it is governed by external factors beyond the services control. It is estimated upon historical data that approximately 2-4 requests for action are received each year.

The Estimated Resources required to deliver this service is 0.10 F.T.E

3.7 Liaison with Other Organisations

The Environmental Health Food Service endeavours to ensure that its actions are consistent with those of neighbouring Local Authorities.

Liaison between the Local Authorities is facilitated through a number of groups and panels:



Regionally and nationally liaison takes place as follows:-

Membership of Group	Frequency of Meetings /year (Approx)
SE Wales Food Safety task group	6
SE Wales Infectious Disease task group	4
Glamorgan Food Group(standards)	4
Trading Standards Wales	4
All Wales Food Safety Expert Panel and consultative group	6 and when required
All Wales Communicable Disease Expert Panel	4
Welsh Food Microbiological Forum	2
Wales National Food Hygiene rating scheme steering group	2
Environmental Health Wales	5
National Exports working	4

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is represented on all of the above Groups / panels, with the exception of the National Exports Working Group which is typically attended by the Chair or secretary of the Food safety Expert Panel.

Close liaison is also maintained with the following bodies: -

- Food Standards Agency;
- Public Health Wales;
- Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre;
- Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, The Royal Society of Health, and the Royal Institute of Public Health & Hygiene;
- Liaison with other Council Services, such as Planning, Building Control, Education, School Meals Service, Social Services, Regeneration, Procurement;
- Welsh Government;
- Welsh Food Microbiological Forum;
- H M Revenue and Customs;
- Home Office;
- Liaison with and commitment to Better Regulation;
- Food Standards and Agriculture Group;
- National Food Crime Unit.

The Estimated Resources required to deliver this function is 0.10 F.T.E

3.8 Food Safety and Standards Promotion

The Service will participate in promotional activities whenever these are appropriate to local needs and priorities, and where resources permit, but not at the expense of the other food and

feed safety and standards activities such as inspections, complaint investigations, etc. Consequently, it is difficult to estimate the resource implication for promotional activities.

The Public Health Team is committed to promoting a positive food safety culture through a variety of channels, some of which are externally funded and are not always available.

- Provision of advice and information to businesses and members of the public through inspections, complaints and notifications;
- Provision of Food Hygiene training courses in various languages;
- Provision of training courses in other languages based on local need;
- Leaflets in different languages covering food issues;
- Participation in national events such as Food Safety Week;
- Promotion of Food Hygiene Rating Scheme;
- Guidance to assist businesses in particular sectors such as childminders, and mobile traders;
- Advice through Council's website and social media including links to other sources of information;
- Targeted education, advice and seminars in various languages;
- Newspaper Publications such as the Contact magazine which is distributed to every household in the Borough;
- Working with other colleagues responsible for Regeneration and the town centre to promote and improve food safety in local businesses and at events.
- Bespoke coaching and advice to individual businesses upon request.

In **2024-25** the service will again promote the following campaigns via social media platforms:

'Speak up for Allergens' - this campaign has a dual focus targeting both food businesses to increase their awareness of allergies and also young people aged 18-21 to provide them with the confidence to speak up about their allergies.

'Register your food business' campaign aimed at increasing business awareness around the legal requirement to register food businesses with the Local Authority.

The service will continue to support and promote any new food hygiene awareness campaigns throughout the financial year and share on-line resources made available by the Food Standards Agency in relation to free on line allergen training, promotion of Safer Food Better Business packs and their newly launched 'Here to help' food business advisory/ guidance hub. References to the FSA's new business guidance hub will also be included within routine correspondence sent to businesses so as to maximise the use of limited resources and ensure a wider audience base is reached.



Promotional work will continue to be undertaken in 2024 -25 around promoting Natasha's Law which required changes to the labelling of food which is pre-packed for Direct Sale (PPDS), through sharing social media posts and also via information contained within letters sent to new and existing businesses.

The Council remains committed to continuing to promote Welsh Government's flagship mandatory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme in Wales. 28 November 2023 marked 10 years since the Senedd introduced a statutory Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) for Wales under the Food Hygiene Rating (Wales) Act 2013. Throughout the year the service will also seek to promote through social media the importance of the public checking the food hygiene rating of a business when eating out particularly around celebratory dates.

The service regularly shares the Food Standards Agency's social media posts on our various social media platforms, drawing attention to product recalls / Allergen alerts.

Historically there has been no specific mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness of any food safety / standards promotional work that has been undertaken. In order to address this, it is intended this year to amend the Customer satisfaction questionnaire that is issued to food business operators following an inspection, to determine whether information via social media posts and within the informal notices is reaching the targeted audience.

3.9 Control and Investigation of Outbreaks and Food Related Infectious Disease

The Communicable Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales lays out the approach to managing all communicable disease outbreaks with public health implications across Wales. The Plan is overseen by the Welsh Government and prescribes the manner in which outbreaks are identified, managed and controlled.

Consultants in Communicable Disease (CCDC) have been appointed by the Local Authority as the proper officer for the purposes of the Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984 as amended by the Health and Social Care Act 2008. Environmental Health Officers have also been appointed as proper officers for the purpose of power of entry.

It is the policy of the Public Health Team to investigate all reported cases of confirmed and suspected food and water borne illness including food poisoning.

Reports of illness may originate from a number of sources: -

- Public Health Wales (PHW) laboratories
- Medical Practitioners
- Patients
- Employers
- Other Local Authorities

All cases are investigated wherever possible by direct contact with the case via telephone and/or visit as appropriate. The purpose of this is to: -

- Determine the cause;
- Prevent the spread of infection;
- Provide infection control advice to households;
- To trace carriers and cases;
- Detect outbreaks/clusters of disease;
- Assist surveillance systems;
- Determine whether criminal offences have been committed.

The nature of communicable disease control means that the Public Health Team has a number of partners with whom it works to deliver communicable disease function:-

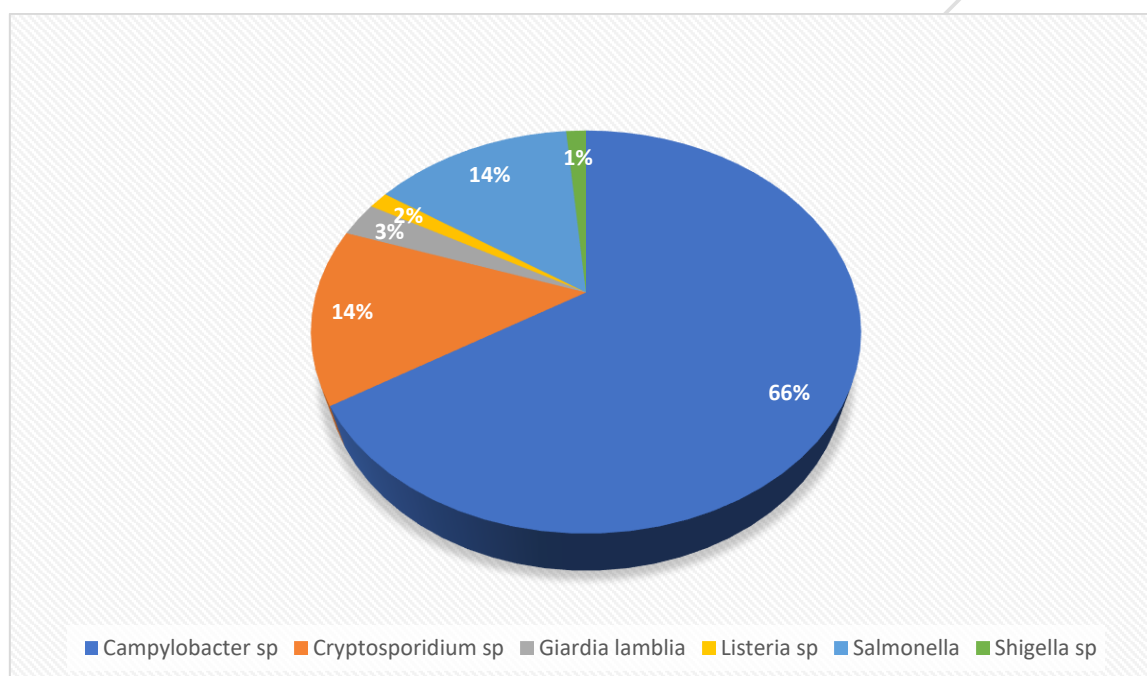
- Public Health Wales who provide specialist services to the Local Authority.
- PHW Consultant in Microbiology – all faeces, food and environmental samples obtained in connection with a food poisoning investigation are submitted to the Microbiology Department based at Llandough Hospital, Cardiff.
- Regional Epidemiologist – The Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC) is part of the PHW and has a specific responsibility for co-ordinating the national response to communicable disease.
- CDSC provides advice and information to Local Authorities through the regional Epidemiologist when dealing with problematical communicable diseases, in outbreaks

where more than one Local Authority is involved, or when there are national/international implications.

- The Local Authority is represented on the South East Wales Communicable Disease Task Group, the South East Wales Communicable Disease Liaison Group and the All Wales Communicable Disease Expert panel group.

During 2023/24 **71** confirmed cases of communicable disease were investigated as a result of notifications via the TARIAN system. The pie chart below shows the percentage distribution of diseases investigated by organism.

Chart Showing Types of Communicable Diseases Notifications Received During 2023/24 (Non COVID-19)



In addition, the team investigated an additional **6** norovirus type incidents in settings which included schools, private nurseries and care homes.

It is difficult to predict the number of communicable disease notifications that will be received in any given year and hence the resource that will be required to undertake appropriate investigations. However the Local Authority undertakes to provide sufficient resources to investigating and controlling outbreaks of communicable disease by sacrificing routine work and if necessary by utilising reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring Local Authorities where necessary.

The Estimated Resources required to deliver this function is 0.7 F.T.E

4. Resources

4.1 Financial Allocation 2024/25

Food Safety, Food Standards and Prevention of Infectious Diseases: Investigation, Monitoring and Enforcement (4077)	Budget 2024/25 £
<u>Expenditure</u>	
-	
<u>Employee Costs</u>	
Salaries	276,143
Staff Training	3,000
<u>Transport Related Expenditure</u>	
Car Allowances	1,270
<u>Supplies & Services</u>	
Equipment, Furniture & Materials	1,030
Printing & Stationery	130
Professional Fees	590
Telephones, Broadband, & Postages	800
Protective Clothing & Uniforms	650
Analysis Fees	2,250
Gross Expenditure	285,863
<u>Income</u>	
Fees & Charges	4,300
Search Fees	2,200
Gross Income	6,500
Net Expenditure	279,363

The graph below shows the budgetary growth for the period 2020 - 2025

	Budget 2020/21 £	Budget 2021/22 £	Budget 2022/23 £	Budget 2023/24 £	Budget 2024/25
<u>Expenditure</u>					
-					
<u>Employee Costs</u>					
Salaries	175,080	183,965	241,301	252,305	276,143
Staff Training	380	380	380	3,000	3,000
<u>Transport Related Expenditure</u>					
Car Allowances	2,270	2,270	2,270	2,270	1,270
<u>Supplies & Services</u>					
Equipment Tools & Materials	1,030	1,030	1,030	1,030	1,030
Printing, Stationery & Advertising	130	130	130	130	130
Insurance					
Postage and Telephones	800	800	800	800	800
Notification Fees - General					
Professional Fees	590	590	590	590	590
Analysis Fees	2,250	2,250	2,250	2,250	2250
Holiday Cover Balance to be relinquished					
Budget Reduction Efficiencies					
Gross Expenditure	182,530	191,415	248,751	263,025	285,213
<u>Income</u>					
Re-rating Income	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,300	4,300
Court Costs	2,200	2,200	2,200	2,200	2,200
Gross Income	5,200	5,200	5,200	5,500	6,500
Net Expenditure	177,330	186,215	243,551	257,525	279,363

There is no specific allocated budget for legal fees and food standards sampling which needs to be addressed, should the need arise financial support will be found from within the Public Protection budget.

An earmark reserve of **£27,276.33** was secured in October 2021 and remains available exclusively to support the delivery of the **2024/25** Food service plan and the on-going recovery process until **2026/2027**.

4.2 Staffing Allocation

The Public Health Team comprises the following officers:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Function</u>	<u>EHRB Registration</u>	<u>Food Safety Experience</u>	<u>Food Standards Experience</u>
Principal Environmental Health Officer Manager (lead officer for food safety)	Environmental Health includes: Food Safety & standards, Communicable Disease, Health and Safety, special procedures , ,	1996	23 years	10 years
Environmental Health Officer (lead officer for communicable disease) Part Time post – 29.6 hours	Food Safety, Food Standards Communicable Disease, Health and Safety, special procedures	2002	21 years	10 years
Environmental Health Officer (lead officer for food standards and food fraud)	Food Safety, Food Standards Communicable Disease, Health and Safety, special procedures	1996	19 years	10 years
Environmental Health Officer (lead officer for health and safety)	Food Safety, Food Standards, Communicable Disease, Health and Safety, petroleum licencing. Special procedures	2015	9 years	9 years
Environmental Health Officer	Food Safety, Food Standards Communicable	2012	1.5 years	1.5 years

	Disease, Health and Safety, special procedures			
Environmental Health Officer Full time (newly appointed post)	Food Safety, Food Standards Communicable Disease, Health and Safety, special procedures	2014	0	0

It is difficult to estimate the number of full time equivalent (FTE) officers employed compared to the number that are necessary to perform a particular function, as the team is multi-disciplinary and resources are continuously being vired between functions to respond to demand for front line service delivery.

The estimated resources to provide the service outlined in Chapter 3 of the plan requires the following numbers of operational staff.

Service Activity	Estimated Resources FTE
Food Safety & Standards Interventions	3.8
Food Safety & Standards Complaints	0.2
Food Safety & Standards Business Advice	0.2
Food Safety & Standards Sampling	0.3
Control of Communicable Disease (excl COVID)	0.7
Food Safety/Standards Incidents	0.1
Liaison and Promotion	0.1
Total	5.4
Total Public Health Team Current Staff Resource	
Food Safety & Standards Interventions	3.4
Food Safety & Standards Complaints	0.2
Food Safety & Standards Business Advice	0.2
Food Safety & Standards Sampling	0.3
Control of Communicable Disease (exl.COVID)	0.7
Food Safety/Standards Incidents	0.1
Liaison and Promotion	0.1
Total	5.0

Food Service	Actual number of FTE for 24/25	Estimated Required FTE for 2024/25	Variance
	5.0	5.4	0.4

This service year, the Department has had a full time officer leaving the service in July 2023 for Private sector employment which offered a more lucrative salary and benefits. The post remained vacant until the end of March 2024 due to being unable to recruit for either a part time post or a full time temporary 2 year post. In February 2024, Corporate Management team approved funding to increase this part time position to a full time permanent post.

The current pool of officers who are actively seeking employment who meet the Competency framework of the Food Law Code of Practice (Wales) is extremely limited. As such, the service has appointed a qualified Environmental Health Practitioner who will require significant further development to meet the Competency framework to be available to deliver a full range of functions contained within this service plan. This process of gaining full authorisation and competency will take up to two years.

There is no dedicated business support for the service, but it has access to the business support officer within corporate services.

Use of Contractors

Where a shortfall in capacity is identified, the Council has in the past, and potentially would in the future appoint suitably qualified and competent contractors to assist in carrying out interventions in food establishments.

Contractors will need to satisfy the competency requirements outlined within the Competency framework of the Food Law Code of Practice (Wales), be validated and authorised by the Local Authority.

It is currently proving challenging to source suitable contractors due to high levels of demand for their services from all Local Authorities plus the fees for inspections have significantly increased in recent years based on the national shortage. The option of paying overtime to existing competent officers has been deemed a more suitable cost effective approach, whilst also maintaining a high level of quality assurance in the standard of interventions undertaken. It is therefore this option that the service will again seek to use in this financial year to address the shortfall in resource.

4.3 Staff Development Plan

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council attaches significant importance to the development and training of its staff to meet the needs of its customers.

All staff engaged in Food Safety work are qualified Environmental Health Officers. In determining the level of competency of officer, regard is had to the competency framework requirements stipulated within the Food Law Code of Practice (Wales), Service Authorisation and Training procedures.

At service level the Local Authority endeavours to provide support for all employees to fulfil their identified training needs. Currently two officers do not have the full range of food hygiene/standards competencies under the framework and an annual training plan is in place to develop the needs of these and other officers in line with the framework established by the Food Standards Agency.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer undertakes an annual review of individual training needs in addition to the corporately required Focus on Performance Annual Appraisals and regular one to ones. Officers are only authorised to act on behalf of the Local Authority in accordance with their established level of training and competency. Any identified training need is addressed during the year by way of internal and external training courses.

Food officers have access to up-to-date reference material, through:

- The FSA's Smarter Communications database (RIAMS)
- Online courses delivered through the Food Standards Agency
- Online training accounts for ABC Online Food Law training
- Peer to peer discussion on Knowledge Hub
- Dedicated shared team folders and access to the internet
- Access to National / International Food Safety news e-mails

Development opportunities arise throughout the year and officers are encouraged to attend training appropriate to their role. Examples include:

- FSA funded training
- Training offered by professional bodies e.g., CIEH, CTSI
- National consistency training exercises provided by the FSA

Continuing professional development is actively encouraged, monitored and recorded to ensure that every officer attains the minimum number of points required by the statutory Food Law Code of Practice and if applicable for membership of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. Officers carrying out official food controls and other official activities must undertake a minimum of 20 hours CPD each year and 30 hours to maintain Chartered Membership status. The Code requires that at least 10 hours CPD must be spent on subject matters set out in Chapter 1 of Annex II of Assimilated Regulation (EU) 2017/625.

Regular team meetings take place to afford officers the opportunity to discuss inspection and enforcement issues, promote consistency of enforcement and to enable them to be kept up to date on food safety enforcement issues. All officers also participate in National Consistency exercises organised by the Food Standards Agency.

A number of years ago the Food Standards function was transferred to the service from Trading Standards. Additional training needs have been identified to further develop officers in this area of work.

5. Quality Assessment

There are, at present, no formally recognised quality management systems in place. However the service recognises the need to measure effectiveness and strongly supports the ethos of continuous improvement.

The Service therefore participates and undertakes a number of activities to ensure that work is of a high standard and opportunities to identify and implement improvements are taken.

5.1 Documented Procedures

To ensure the quality and consistency of our activities the Environmental Health Department review all of its policies and procedures relating to food safety/standards annually. These are contained in the Quality Manual which is read only and available to all staff electronically.

5.2 Assessment and audits

The monitoring of the quality of our policies and procedures is assessed in a number of ways, namely:-

- Internal audit of documented procedures
- Audits undertaken by the Food Standards Agency.
- Customer consultation and feedback;
- Review of corporate complaints and compliments about the service.

In addition the actions are implemented:

- The Principal Environmental Health and Lead Food Safety Officer or other nominated senior officer reviews a selection of correspondence.
- The Principal Environmental Health and Lead Food Safety Officer or other nominated senior officer conducts a minimum of 1 peer audit with each officer per year.
- The Principal Environmental Health and Lead Food Safety Officer or other nominated senior officer audits a selection of inspections, complaints, and investigations on a risk based approach.
- Team meetings are held at regular intervals and action notes kept.
- Consistency exercises are undertaken both internally as well as participation in National Consistency Training exercises

5.3 Customer consultation and feedback

We are committed to involving customers in the continuous improvement of services and recognise the need to have structured methods of obtaining service users views and perception of the service. These include:-

- A customer satisfaction questionnaire is sent to all food businesses operators following an inspection .This can be returned using the reply paid envelope or completed online.

The questionnaires are regularly analysed and results disseminated to staff with a view to driving service improvements;

- Corporate complaints and compliments.

6. Review

6.1 Review against the service plan

Programmed interventions in Category A (Hygiene)

Full inspections of 100% of all businesses scheduled for inspection were undertaken.

Programmed interventions in Category B (Hygiene)

Full inspections of 100% of all businesses scheduled for inspection were undertaken.

Programmed interventions in Category C (Hygiene)

Full inspections of 99.2 % of all businesses scheduled for inspection that were actively trading were undertaken. The service was unable to inspect 2 Category C businesses which equates to 0.8% as despite repeated attempts, including on weekends / evenings the businesses were closed at the time of several unannounced visits.

Programmed interventions in D rated premises (Hygiene)

Full inspections of 100% of all businesses scheduled for inspection that were actively trading were undertaken.

100% of overdue Category D inspections received a full inspection and were issued with a new Food Hygiene rating

Programmed Interventions in E Rated premises (Hygiene)

Full inspections of 100 % of Category E (due) premises were undertaken so as to ensure that they were issued with a new valid food hygiene rating so as to maintain the integrity of the Welsh Government Food Hygiene Rating scheme.

In **2023/24**, the Council delivered the following number of food hygiene interventions which include on site inspections/ revisits/ sampling visits etc:

10 at A rated businesses

66 at B rated businesses
183 at C rated businesses
46 at D rated businesses
59 at E rated businesses 9 sampling visits
67 at Unrated new food businesses

Food Hygiene sampling

88 microbiological samples taken during 2023/24.

11 borderline /unsatisfactory results were followed up with investigations.

Food Standards

In **2023/24**, the Council delivered the following number of food standards interventions which include on site inspections/ revisits/ sampling visits etc:

Programmed Interventions in Category A (Standards)

The service does not have any Category A premises.

Programmed Interventions in Category B (Standards)

100% (35) interventions were undertaken at Category B rated premises.
100% of overdue Category B inspections received a full inspection

Programmed Interventions in Category C (Standards)

201 interventions were undertaken at Category C rated premises

Food Standards Sampling Project Based Activity

In **2023/2024** the service secured **£2910.00** external funding from the Food Standards Agency to participate in the Glamorgan Trading Standards Food Group Sampling Plan Programme.

Due to a combination of staffing resource issues and the regional group not finalising surveys, the service only participated in the Quarter 2 honey compositional survey. The purpose of the survey was to take samples of local and premium honey, which had been produced and/or sold within the local area. The Public Analyst had identified instances of 'premium honey' being substituted with baker's honey (honey suitable for industrial use or as an ingredient in another foodstuff which is then processed) and cheap supermarket honey being repackaged and sold as 'local'.

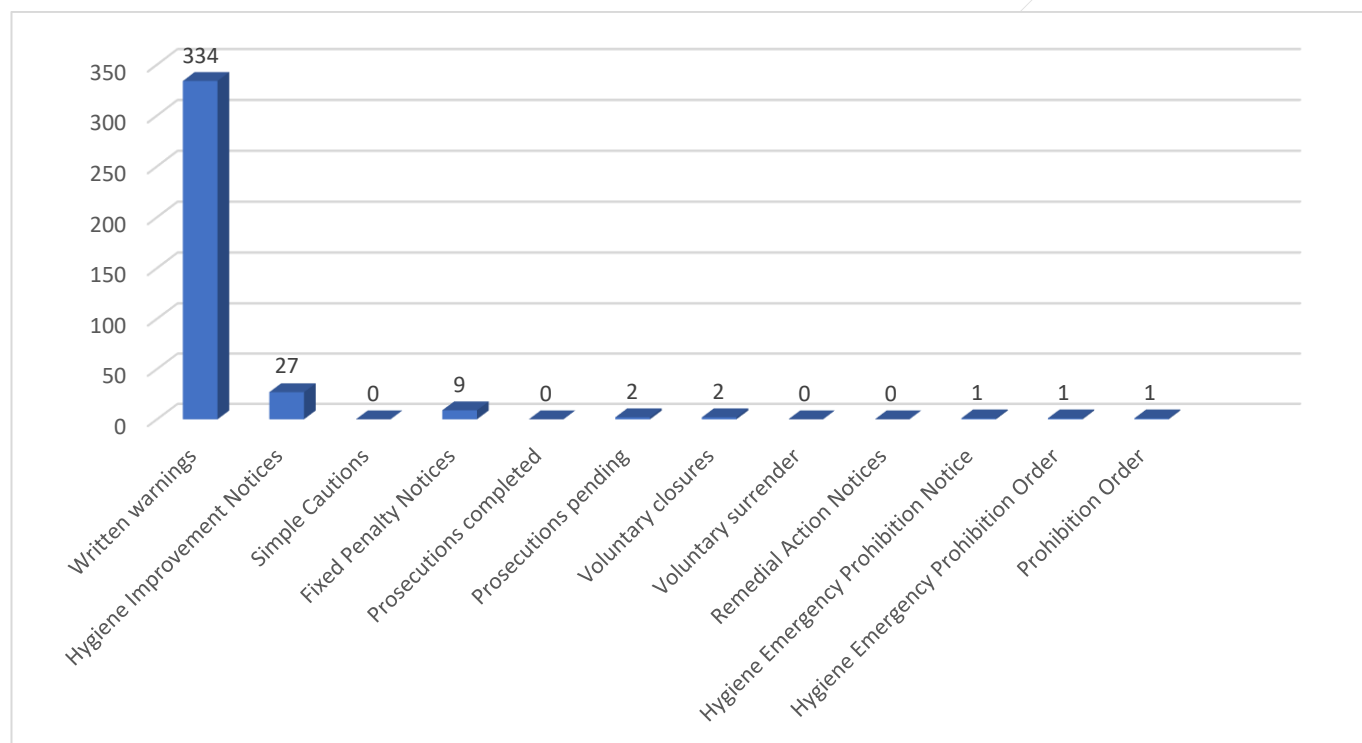
As part of this survey **10** samples were obtained and sent to the Public Analyst. All samples were found to be satisfactory for compositional standards however some labelling issues were identified and followed up.

A summary of the food standards sampling results for 2023/24 is contained within **Appendix 4**

Summary of Activities and Enforcement Action

The service collects a substantial amount of data each year which is used to analyse performance and improve service delivery and outcomes. The following chart summarises the enforcement actions taken during 2023/24:

Number of Different Food Enforcement Actions Taken in 2023-24 – Food Hygiene



Prosecutions

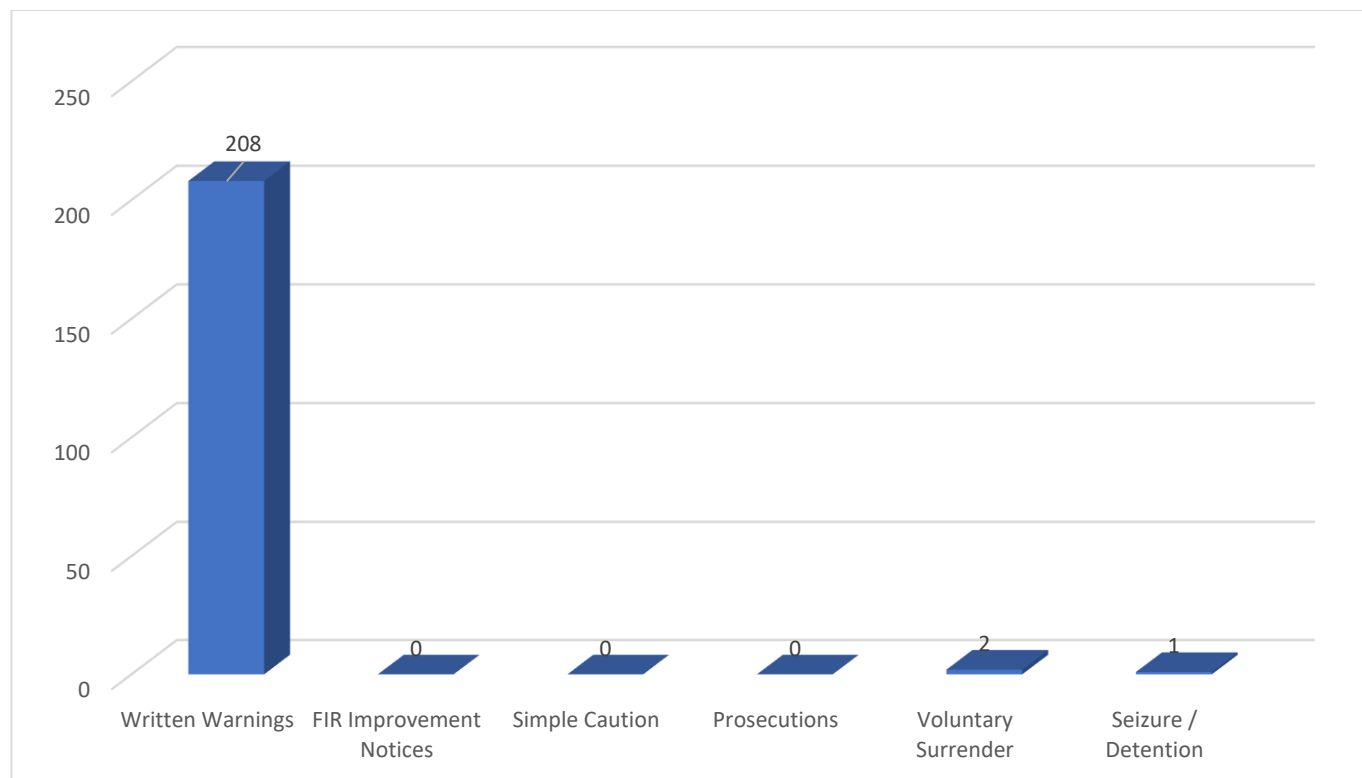
The service successfully completed **2** prosecutions in **2023-24**.

In August 2023, the service prosecuted a takeaway business for multiple hygiene offences, including obstruction of the inspecting officers. The food business operator was fined a total of £960 and ordered to pay costs of £507.82 and a victim surcharge of £384. Due to the seriousness of obstructing Officers and the fact this was the second time the food business operator faced prosecution in 2 years the Court prohibited the food business operator from participating in the management of any food business.

In November 2023, the service prosecuted a local convenience store for the sale of 27 items of out of date food. The company pleaded guilty to the sale of unsafe food, contrary to Regulation 4 of The General Food Regulations 2004. The company was fined £15,000, reduced to £10,000 for early guilty plea, and ordered to pay £543.20 costs and a victim surcharge of £2,000 making a sum total of £12,543.20.



Number of Different Food Enforcement Actions Taken in 2023/24 - Food Standards



Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

Number of Food Establishments Scoring 0-5 Rating 2020-2024	0	1	2	3	4	5
2023/2024	0.4%	3.4%	3.4%	14.1%	28.2%	50.5%
2022/2023	0.35%	10.25%	5.30%	18.73%	28.27%	37.10%
2021/2022	1.05%	14.14%	4.71%	18.85%	24.08%	37.17%
2020/2021	0%	18.84%	1.45%	15.94%	21.74%	42.03%

6.2 Identification of Variances

The mechanisms in place to review performance enable remedial action to be put in place should any shortfalls against targets or plans occur during the year. Consideration will be given to the various factors that may contribute to any shortfalls and whether additional resources, re-allocation of staff resources or re-prioritisation of workload is required to resolve any problems. Any issues that may not have been resolved at the end of the year will be included in the service Plan for the following year, particularly as some improvements will take a number of years to be fully implemented.

To this end some of the areas of improvement noted in last year's service plan have either been carried over into this year's service plan or put into abeyance. The service was and still is in a period of 'recovery' which will take another two years to address.

The service aimed to undertake **15** food standards / **180** microbiological samples in the **23-24** service plan, however only **10 standards and 88 microbiological** samples were obtained.

The reasons for this variance are two-fold. From July 2023 – end of March 2024, the service was operating without a full complement of officers. Resources were limited and had to be effectively targeted towards areas of highest risk priority. Secondly, Regional sampling surveys for standards were agreed at such late stages that participation was not possible. The service also does not have a designated food standards sampling budget and has been reliant on FSA funding for sampling activities since the service was transferred from Trading Standards in 2014. Uncertainties around the approval of FSA funding for the honey sampling in Q3 which was £2910.00 plus VAT meant that the service was unable to commit to any further sampling activities. The issue of a lack of food standards sampling budget has been highlighted in the 'Areas for Improvement' section of this plan.

The service therefore focused on prioritising higher risk work in Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 which included:

- completing all high risk inspections within Categories A-C,
- focusing on improving inspection targets for high risk new businesses
- following up any borderline / unsatisfactory micro-biological / standards sampling results.
- focusing on ensuring the service remained on track with the Recovery programme to complete all Category D overdue inspections and 50 Category E inspections.
- Responding to reactive work – incidents, complaints, notifications of infectious disease cases / outbreaks etc.

The Head of Public Protection (HOPP) is responsible for ensuring appropriate action to mitigate risks associated with any shortfalls in performance is identified, implemented, and where necessary, escalated to the Corporate Management Team. The HOPP has implemented a number of mitigating actions to support recovery, which include:

- The offer of paid overtime to officers to undertake additional food hygiene interventions
- Approval of a part time post (28 hrs) to be increased to a permanent full time post which served to assist recruitment and also make up the identified shortfall in the 2023-24 service plan.

6.2.1 Measuring Performance

In order to ensure continuous improvement, it is essential that performance is regularly monitored. The following actions are taken:

- The Council has developed its Service Improvement Framework (SIF), a simplified and more outcome focused approach to performance management and self-assessment. It outlines the mechanisms in place to ensure accountability. The framework places self-evaluation at its heart and mechanisms have been established to facilitate this, namely line of inquiry meetings and challenge sessions.
- Cabinet approves this Service Plan which sets out the work programme for the service and reviews performance against the programme via the self-evaluation process;
- Each department is required to produce a Strategy on a Page (SOAP) that details their overall vision, priority areas, measurable and desirable outcomes. Food safety is included within the SOAP. Performance is monitored on a quarterly basis with reports submitted to the relevant scrutiny committee;
- Monthly one to one meetings are held between the Head of Public Protection and the Environmental Health Manager on how the service is performing day to day;
- Overall performance of the service and individual performance is monitored monthly when inspections are allocated;
- Performance is reviewed at team meetings;
- Performance of individuals is managed through staff meetings and one to ones.
- Bi-annual temperature check returns to the Food Standards Agency

Any significant shortfalls in the service will be reported to the Environmental Health Manager, Head of Public Protection and the relevant member scrutiny committee, together with recommendations for appropriate remedial action.

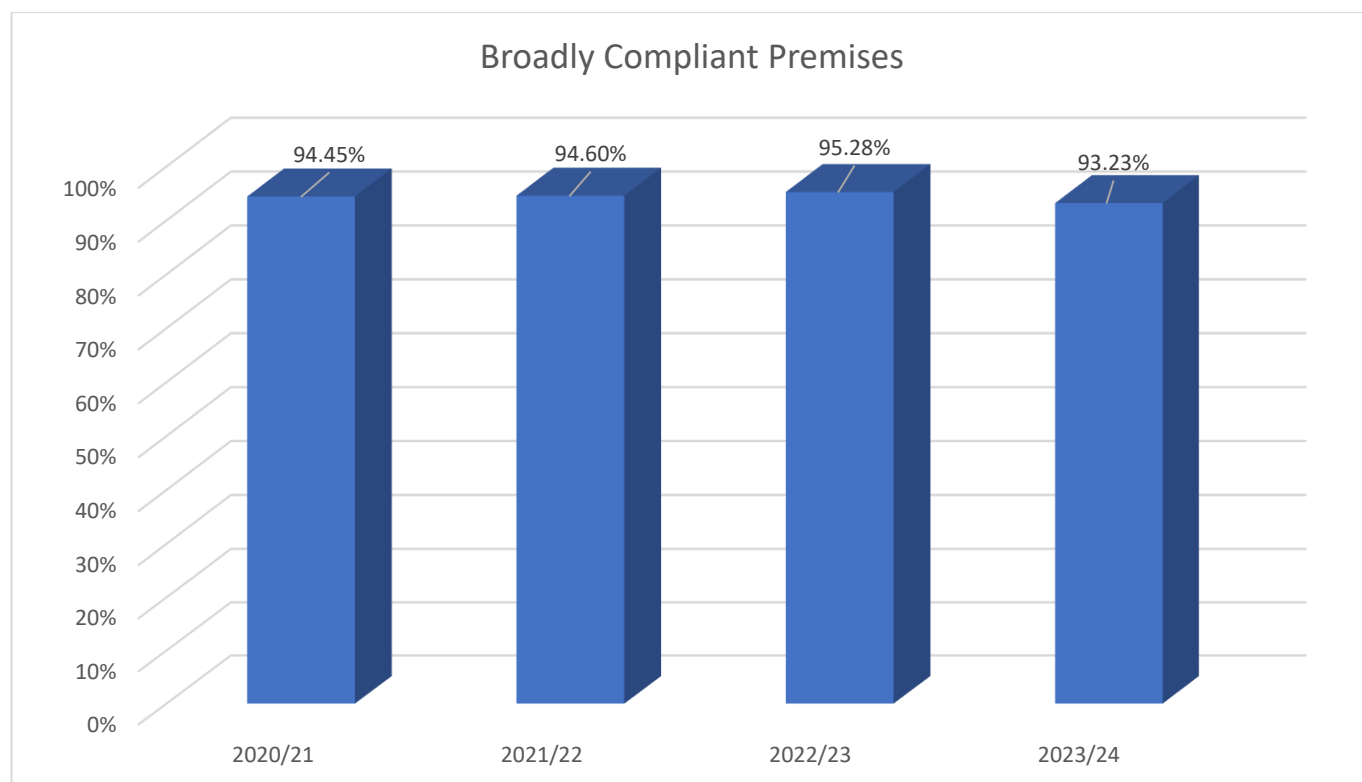
6.2.2 Food Hygiene

Benchmarking – Performance Indicators

The National Strategic Indicators (NSI) for Wales previously included a key performance indicator relevant to food safety. This included 'The percentage of food premises that are broadly compliant' (PAM23). Whilst this is no longer a specific NSI the Council still measures itself against this indicator as part of its internal performance monitoring arrangements.

On 1st April 2023, within Merthyr Tydfil an average of 93.23 % businesses were deemed to be broadly compliant, the graph below depicts the percentage fluctuations over the past five financial years. The number of food businesses within the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil is the smallest in Wales and small numbers of businesses which are not broadly compliant can affect the overall percentage disproportionately.

Graph Showing Percentage of Broadly compliant Premises 1/4/20 - 1/4/23



Full details of performance against National Strategic and Core Performance Indicators are available on the Wales Data Unit website at: <http://www.dataunitwales.gov.uk/data>

There are significant limitations in terms of the influence that the Council can have in respect of performance against the broadly compliant indicator as it is a measure of the level of compliance a food business is assessed as having achieved at the time of undertaking the statutory intervention. The level of compliance with the relevant legislation is a matter within the food business operator's control rather than that of the Council. The Council as the regulator can attempt to influence the overall level of compliance using a range of enforcement approaches, including for example provision of advice, issuing of written warnings, service of legal notices, prosecution etc. Therefore dependant on the level of non-compliance identified during the year the Council will adjust its approach accordingly.

Performance Indicators (PI's) Hygiene / Standards/ Communicable Disease

The following PIs have been internally identified for the food law enforcement service, with performance against these to be reported quarterly to the Public Protection Scrutiny committee via the Environmental Health Manager and Head of Public Protection:


- Percentage of food establishments which are 'broadly compliant' with food hygiene standards
- Percentage of planned food hygiene/ standards inspections / interventions carried out at higher-risk food businesses (category A, B) in accordance with Food Law Code of Practice Requirements.
- Percentage of 'category C risk' Food Hygiene/ standards Inspections/Interventions carried out in accordance with Food Law Code of Practice Requirements
- Percentage of 'category D risk' Food Hygiene Inspections/Interventions carried out in accordance with Food Law Code of Practice Requirements.
- Percentage of 'category E risk' Food Hygiene Inspections/Interventions carried out in accordance with Food Law Code of Practice Requirements.
- Percentage of **high risk** new unrated businesses inspected within 28 days of registration or date commenced trading
- Percentage of food hygiene rating appeals determined within 21 days
- Percentage of service requests responded to within 3 working days

6.3 Areas for Improvement

In **2022/23**, the Council's food law enforcement service was audited by the Regional Internal Audit service and given an overall 'reasonable assurance' audit opinion.

The service continues to work on areas of improvement identified from the audit which mainly focuses on improving the recording and accuracy of data held on the Tascomi database. It is the intention of this service over the next few years to migrate entirely over to using Tascomi as the main Management Information system.

In **January 2024** , the service was subject to a follow up audit by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and awarded a 'Moderate' assessment of assurance. The service is unable to attain the highest level of audit assurance (Substantial) until the Covid-19 Recovery Work is completed and inspection frequencies are fully re-aligned with the Food Law Code of Practice. It is pleasing to note that the highest assurance level that could be attained by the service at this juncture has been achieved.

Assessment of Assurance:	
	<p>Moderate Assurance: The system for delivering official controls requires some improvement to fully demonstrate effective implementation of planned arrangements suitable to achieve the objectives of legal requirements and guidance.</p>

,The following areas of improvement were identified from the FSA Audit :

- The Food Law Service needs to secure a designated budget for food standards sampling work to ensure the Local Authority fulfils its statutory duty and is not exclusively reliant on external financial funding from annual bids to the Food Standards Agency
- Ensure all information relating to the service of Hygiene Improvement Notices is recorded onto the data base system by business administration and Environmental Health officers

The Council is committed to the continual improvement of services and will ensure appropriate action is taken to implement the audit recommendations above.

The service has also identified its own areas for development and improvement in **2024/25**:

- ❖ Co - develop new standardised National key performance indicators for food service delivery in conjunction with 21 Welsh Local Authorities via the All Wales Food safety Expert Panel

- ❖ Continue to focus on achieving and improving the target times outlined in this service plan for the inspection of new businesses, with the aim that high risk businesses will be inspected within 28 days from the date of registration or opening
- ❖ Continue to highlight the need to Senior Management to increase resource in Business Administration support to ensure the effective implementation of the Services' policies and procedures and the accuracy of information held on the Tascomi database.
- ❖ Improve the reliability and accuracy of the information inputted into the Tascomi database, including checks by officers to ensure the accurate coding of service requests.
- ❖ Further develop officer use of the Tascomi data base system ensuring adequate training is provided with the long term aim of storing all information on one data base.
- ❖ Continue to respond to statutory consultations as necessary.
- ❖ Continue trialling the use of mobile ICT equipment to improve the efficiency of food hygiene/ standards inspections
- ❖ Review and modernise the customer satisfaction survey to include questions around assessing the effectiveness of promotional work via correspondence, mailshots and social media posts
- ❖ Develop web based on line services for the payment of Fixed Penalty Notices, Food Hygiene Re-ratings etc to improve customer accessibility
- ❖ Review the internal monitoring audit pro-formas and incorporate into the Internal monitoring procedure
- ❖ Develop a food service conflict of interest procedure
- ❖ Raise the importance of the provision of funding for the re-instatement of a Student Environmental Health Officer / apprenticeship post to ensure continuity planning and resilience of the Environmental Health profession

7. Service Plan Appendices.

Appendix 1 Departmental Management Structure

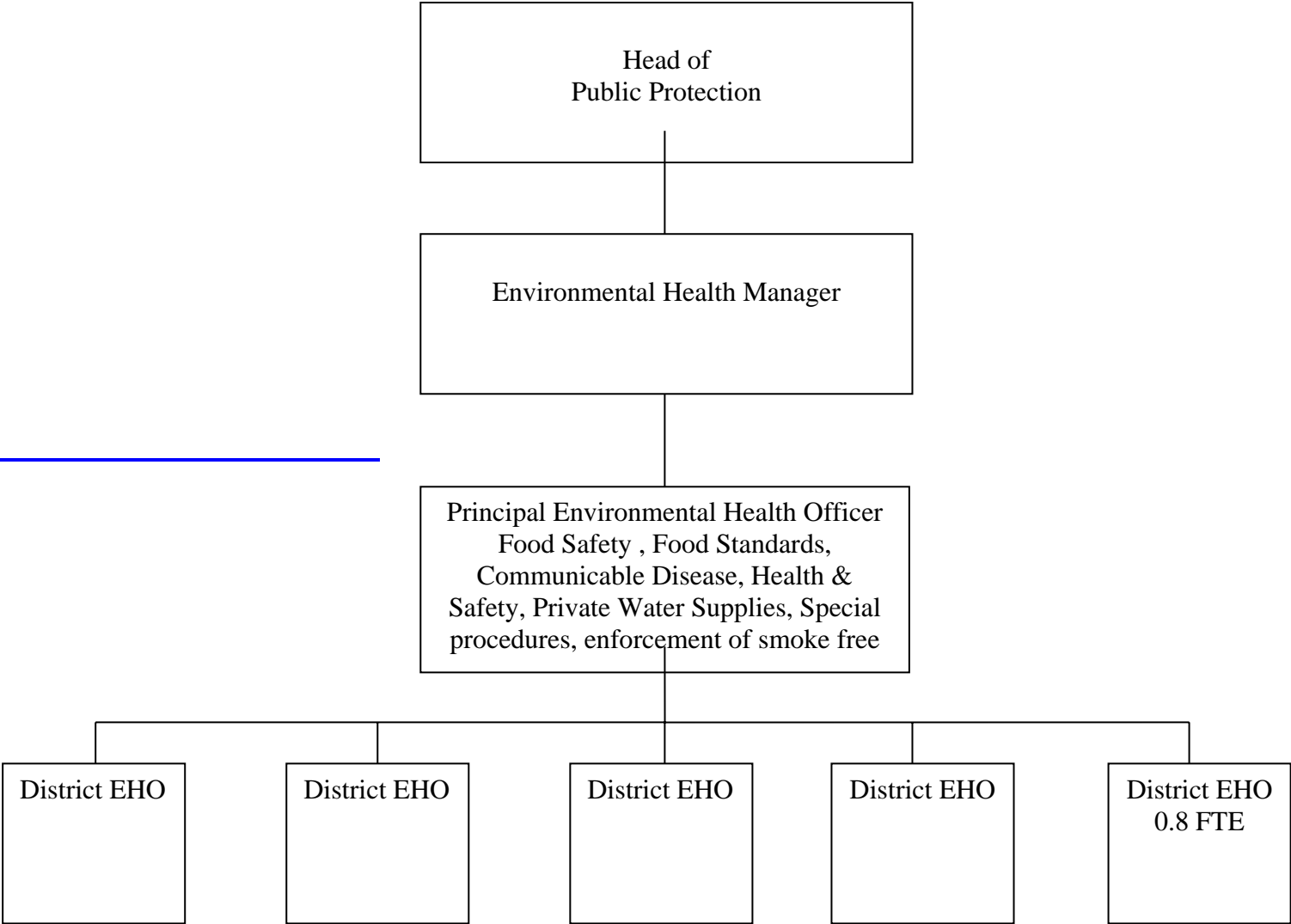
Appendix 2a Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Organisational Structure

Appendix 2b Public Protection structure in context of organisation

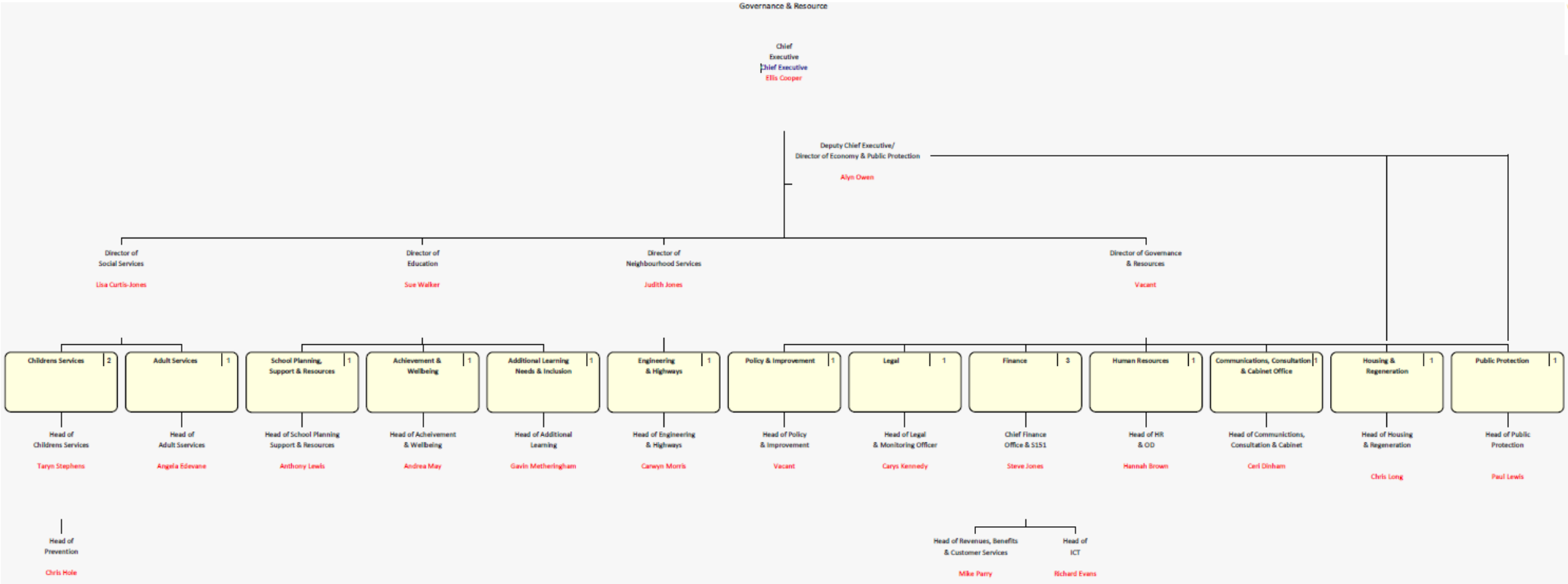
Appendix 3 Food Hygiene / Food Standards sampling plans 2024/25

Appendix 4 Food Standards Sampling Results 2023/24

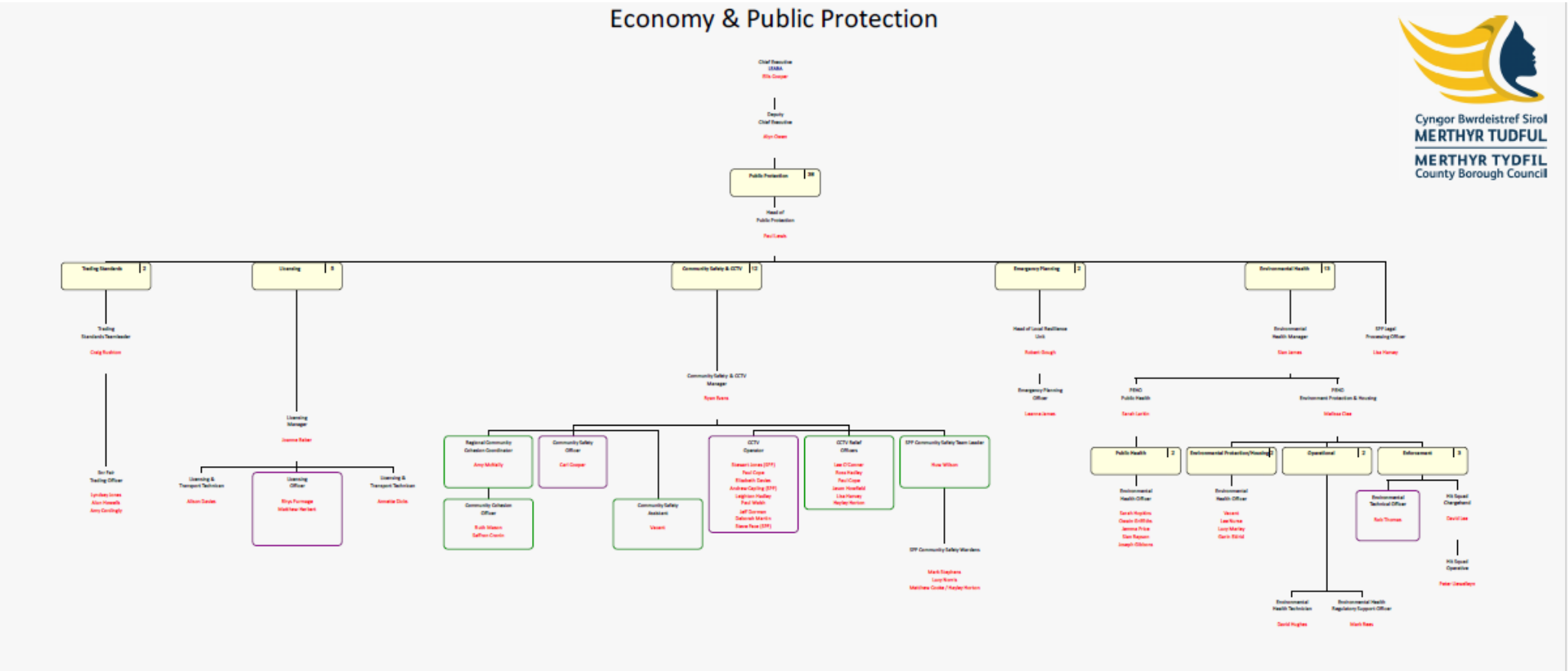
Appendix 1 –Departmental Management Structure



Appendix 2a: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Organisational Structure 2024-2025



Appendix 2b: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Organisational Structure 2024-2025



Appendix 3 – sampling plans 2024/25

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
WFMF - Targeted cooked chicken survey												
WFMF - Targeted microgreens survey												
WFMF - targeted/shopping basket surveys to be determined												
Imported Foods												
Environmental swabs												
	Imported Foods - as and when identified											
	Environmental swabs - as and when identified											

Appendix 4 - Food Standards Sampling results 2023/2024

SAMPLING DETAILS									RESULTS		FOLLOW-UP			
LA Sample Reference / Number	Date of Sampling (date sample was procured)	Time of Sampling	Type of Premises	Product Sampled	Description	Country of origin	Sample Tested For (e.g. specific allergen/s, speciation tests etc.)	Additional Sampling Information (e.g. declarations at point of sale, allergen claims etc.)	Results Detail	Comments / Observations	Specify Informal Follow-up Action Taken (other than advising of results e.g. advice provided)	Specify Formal Follow-up Action Taken (e.g. prosecution file prepared)	Incident Reported to FSA Incident Team Y/N	Details of Action Taken (please feel free to provide additional information in any accompanying email, particularly interested to hear details of outcomes of sampling undertaken)
MTCBC/Q2/1	30/08/2023	10:00 AM	Apiary	Honey		UK - Wales	Compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Compositional analysis etc all satisfactory - some labelling issues which need to be addressed		Letter	n/a	N	letter sent 4/1/24 with copy of results detailing labels identified and areas that need to be addressed.
MTCBC/Q2/2	31/08/2023	10:30 AM	Apiary	Honey		UK - Wales	Compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Compositional analysis etc all satisfactory - some labelling issues which need to be addressed		Letter	n/a	N	letter sent 5/1/24 with copy of results detailing labels identified and areas that need to be addressed with
MTCBC/Q2/3	31/08/2023	11:00 AM	Retail Shop	Scottish Honey		UK - Scotland	Compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Satisfactory		Letter	n/a	N	letter sent 11/1/24 with copy of results.
MTCBC/Q2/4	31/08/2023	11:00 AM	Retail Shop	Acacia Honey with Truffle		UK / Hungary	Compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Satisfactory		Letter	n/a	N	letter sent 11/1/24 with copy of results.
MTCBC/Q2/5	31/08/2023	11:00 AM	Retail Shop	Welsh Borders Honey		UK - Welsh	compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Compositional analysis etc all satisfactory - some labelling issues which need to be addressed		Letter	n/a	N	letter sent 11/1/24 with copy of results and to advise on issue. Letter to head office and PA
MTCBC/Q2/6	31/08/2023	12:30 PM	Retail Shop	Black Bee Honey British Autumn		UK	Compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Compositional analysis etc all satisfactory - some minor labelling issues around format		letter	n/a	n	letter sent 3/1/24 with copy of results and advice on voluntary labelling point areas around label format. LA copied in also (Somerset LA)
MTCBC/Q2/7	15/09/2023	11:00	Chemist	Merthyr Gold Honey		UK - Wales	Compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Satisfactory		Letter	N/a	N	letter sent 5/1/24 with copy of results
MTCBC/Q2/8	07/10/2023	12:00	Allotments	Honey		UK - Wales	Compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Compositional analysis etc all satisfactory - some labelling issues which need to be addressed		Letter	n/a	N	letter sent 5/1/24 with copy of results detailing labels identified and areas that need to be addressed with
MTCBC/Q2/9	13/09/2023	2pm	Apiary	Welsh Honey		UK - Wales	Compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Satisfactory		Letter	n/a	N	letter sent 5/1/24 with copy of results
MTCBC/Q2/10	07/11/2023	12:30pm	Retail Shop	Tesco Finest Orange Blossom Honey		Mexico and Spain	Compositional analysis - diastase activity, HMF content + pollen analysis	Informal sample	Satisfactory		Letter	n/a	N	letter sent 12/1/24 with copy of results