

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**

Date of meeting: **21<sup>st</sup> February 2024**

Report Subject: **Food Standards Agency Audit of Local Authority Service delivery planning processes and arrangements**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Helen Cunningham, Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member Environment**

Report Submitted by: **David Thompson, Service Manager Public Protection**

| Reporting Pathway           |                           |                          |                                |                               |                    |         |         |                      |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Governance and Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Cabinet | Council | Other (please state) |
| 6.2.24                      | 8.2.24                    | 12.02.24                 | 21.02.24                       |                               |                    |         |         |                      |

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with outcome of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) audit of Local Authority Food Safety & Standards Regulatory Service delivery planning processes and arrangements.
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 The Council was audited by the Food Standards Agency during September 2023. The audit covered Service delivery planning processes and arrangements relating to Authority's Food Safety and Standards services. It also covered a check on open audit actions from 2 previous audits dating back to the previous full audit in 2014 and 2017/18. (These checks had been delayed due to the covid pandemic.)
  - 2.2 The Food Standards Agency letter (Appendix 1) details the outcome of the audit visit. In Summary, the FSA's view was that the Authority has provided a service plan that broadly meets the requirements of the service planning guidance issued by the FSA. A small number of improvements were required to bring the process fully up to the required standard and verbal feedback was provided to officers and these were actioned at the time of the Audit.
  - 2.3 Members are reminded that Environmental Health and Trading Standards Services were severely impacted during the pandemic emergency with almost all the establishment Food Hygiene and Standards Officers being deployed for lengthy periods to deal with Covid advice and support and the enforcement of temporary regulations as they related to high-risk settings and businesses. As such, programmed inspections of food businesses and other work was put on hold until the emergency abated. The purpose of the FSA Audit was to assess the service delivery and planning processes as they related to catch up and recovery work post pandemic, against the FSA Food Law Code of Practice.
  - 2.5 Food Hygiene – the FSA Audit concluded that *“The food hygiene service has recovered significantly from the pandemic demonstrating progress towards*

*re-alignment with the intervention frequencies contained within the Food Law Code of Practice (the Code). The service plan highlighted that officer resources were slightly lower than required (0.32 Full Time Equivalent (FTE)), however, there is a plan in place to address the backlog of outstanding premises interventions. These findings indicate that the authority is making good progress on recovery and is taking a risk-based approach.”*

- 2.6 Food Standards – The FSA Audit concluded that *“The food standards service has also recovered significantly from the pandemic to make progress in re-aligning with the Code. The service plan highlighted the lack of officer resources with a deficit of 2.75 FTE. There is also a plan in place to address resources from within and tackle the backlog of overdue and unrated establishments. The food standards service is making good progress despite resource difficulties and is also taking a risk-based approach.”*
- 2.7 In the letter, the FSA’s assessment of the overall assurance level for these services was “moderate”, as outlined in Appendix 2 (Annex 1 to their letter) i.e. *“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”.*
- 2.8 Previous Audit Actions: The FSA found that *“The actions taken to address the 24 food hygiene and food standards recommendations, detailed in the authority’s full audit action plan from 2014 were assessed along with the findings from the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) audit of 2017/18. Auditors were able to verify conformance with 23 recommendations from the full audit and all of the actions from the FHRS audit, in which there were two. Auditors were also able to confirm that the authority had made progress towards addressing the remaining recommendation but the action that had been taken was not sufficient to verify full conformance.”*
- 2.9 The action plan attached at Appendix 3 details the findings relating to the open audit actions. A response to the outstanding action is outlined in the *Management response* (Appendix 4).

### **Options for Recommendation**

#### **3.1 Option 1**

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the Council’s Management Response, identified in Appendix 4, will appropriately respond to the Food Standards Agency recommendations.

#### **3.2 Option 2**

Provide comment on the Food Standards Agency letter and Council’s Management Response, to address the recommendations for Officers to implement in order to provide continuous improvement.

### **4. Monitoring Arrangements**

- 4.1 The recommendations from Food Standards Agency will be included within the business plan and updated on a quarterly basis.

Information will be reported within the Community Services and Regeneration Directorate report to Places Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

*Appendix 1 – Food Standards Agency Letter*

*Appendix 2 – Assessment of assurance for Blaenau Gwent Food Hygiene Service Planning and Delivery (September 2023)*

*Appendix 3 – Action Plan for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council*

*Appendix 4 – Council's Management Response*