

14TH NOVEMBER 2023

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, GROWTH AND REGENERATION

Environmental Health staffing proposals

EXEMPT INFORMATION

None.

PURPOSE

To agree the proposed changes to the staffing of the Environmental Health Team ensuring they can continue to undertake food hygiene inspections and comply with the requirements of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

RECOMMENDATIONS

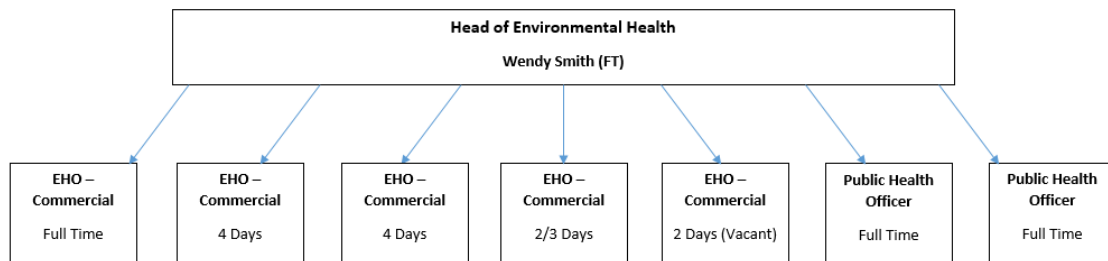
That the Committee-

1. Approve the proposed staffing structure as set out in this report.
2. Authorise the Chief Executive to implement the changes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a back log of food hygiene inspections (lower risk categories) which was created during the pandemic as officers were redirected to enforce covid regulations. As officers have returned to statutory duties including routine inspections they are noting significant interventions are required to bring premises up to standard which is requiring considerable officer time resulting in a slower pace in completing overdue inspections. In addition a large number of new businesses have been established since the pandemic increasing numbers of registered establishments requiring inspection.

At present the Food and Safety section of the Environmental Health team has a flat structure with seven officers reporting directly to the Head of Service.



The below table shows the number of premises due to be inspected in 2023/24 as at 1st April 2023. Whilst the team has been working hard to ensure that the highest risk and new premises have been inspected since the pandemic, there is still a considerable backlog of lower risk category D and E premises. Many of these have not been inspected for 4-5 years

and therefore in many cases their standards are likely to have slipped and will require more input to bring them back into compliance.

Food premises risk band	Total due in 2023-24
A – Highest risk	0
B	14
C	36
D	125
E – Lowest risk	171
Unrated (rolled over from 2022-23)	42
Estimated number of new premises	100
Estimated number of revisits	20
Grand Total	508

A part time EHO post recently became vacant resulting in reduced capacity to undertake food hygiene inspections and continue to address the backlog. Recruitment and retention issues are being experienced nationally with a significant reduction in the number of qualified Environmental Health Officers entering the job market with many experienced officers leaving to join the private sector or retire. Previous experience of recruiting EHO's to the authority has proved difficult. It is therefore anticipated that the creation of a Public Health Officer – Food Safety may result in a stronger prospect of successful recruitment.

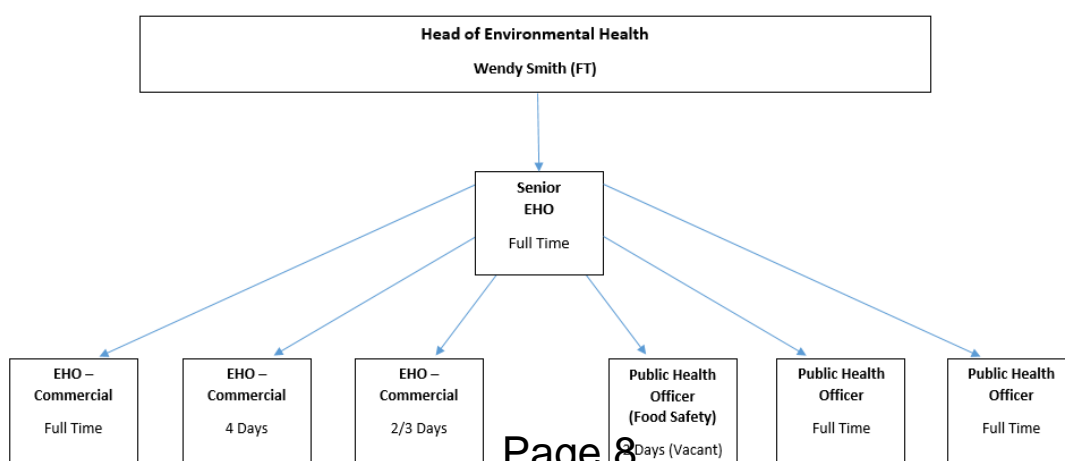
There is a requirement in the food law code of practice that Competent Authorities must appoint a suitably qualified and competent lead food officer, who is responsible for the operational management of food law matters including:

- developing, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing documented policies, procedures, and plans
- management of the response to an incident and alert
- collating and reporting data

this named person must be notified to the FSA to facilitate contact in the event of an incident or alert. Creation of a Senior Environmental Health Officer post designated as Food Lead would ensure compliance with the above requirements. The introduction of the Senior EHO post would also relieve the Head of Environmental Health of day to day management of six officers within the Food and Safety section allowing the Head of Service to more effectively line manage the Environmental Protection section and senior officers within the licensing section and food and safety section in addition to progressing strategic departmental work.

The Proposal

- Amend and upgrade a current permanent (FT) EHO post to create a permanent Senior EHO post.
- Recruit a permanent part time (2 day) Public Health Officer (Food Safety)



Deleting the vacant EHO post and replacing it with a Public Health Officer – Food Safety and upgrading a current EHO post to a senior EHO would allow programmed inspections to continue whilst the senior officer focuses on day to day management of the Food and Safety service addressing outstanding policy and procedural issues. The requirement for a Senior EHO - Lead Food Officer is to be further exacerbated by the Food Standards Agency's current consultation on substantial changes to the Food Hygiene Delivery Model.

Senior Environmental Health Officer:

It is proposed that the introduction of a Senior Environmental Health Officer would have supervisory responsibility of the Environmental Health Officers and Public Health Officers providing them with technical support and supervision. In addition this post would be responsible for reviewing, renewing policies and procedures many of which are ready for revision and are required by the Food Standards Agency. There is a concern that if the authority was audited by the FSA it is likely a number of failings would be identified owing to the Covid workload during 2020-22 and the subsequent focus on starting important food safety inspections, leaving little capacity for dealing with additional statutory processes. At present one of the more experienced EHO's within the team been designated the role of lead food officer and has been in an unofficial capacity acting up as the senior officer and focusing on ensuring systems and procedures are in place and to the relevant standards. The role would be open to all EHO's with five or more years experience within food safety. The result has meant this post has been less operational and available to carry out a significant number of routine inspections in the short term, however in the longer term when policies and processes are in place, this post can then contribute more fully to the inspections rota.

This post is a Grade H and would be permanent.

Public Health Officer - Food Safety:

The Food Safety officers main duties would include but are not limited to food safety, including food hygiene inspections and food complaints. Routine health and safety inspections and accident investigations. Public Health registrations and inspections which includes tattooing and skin piercing. Food poisoning and infectious disease investigations.

This post is a Grade E and would be permanent.

Finances

It is proposed these posts would be funded from the current salary of a vacant 2 day a week EHO post.

CURRENT	GRADE	24/25 BUDGET INCL ON- COSTS
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER	GR G	47,819
VACANT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER	GR G	19,728
		67,547
PROPOSED		
SENIOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER	GR H	52,430
FOOD SAFETY OFFICER	GR E	9,771
		62,201

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS

The authority is also under a statutory duty to inspect registered food premises. The longer premises remain operational with an overdue inspection the more likely the risk of a serious food poisoning incident or outbreak. The authority is required by the Food Standards Agency to have a number of policies and procedures in place. There is a risk if the authority was audited by the FSA and found to be lacking with areas of weakness across its food service action against the authority could be taken ultimately resulting in the FSA taking over delivery of the service.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

None.

REPORT AUTHOR

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Senior EHO Job Profile