

## **Food Hygiene Rating (Wales) Bill**

At the last Health and Social Care Committee meeting, Members received print outs of web pages from Norwich City Council and a consortium of local authorities in the Staffordshire area relating to food hygiene ratings. I also wrote to both asking a number of questions and their responses are below.

### **Norwich City Council**

Norwich City Council has been publishing its inspection reports online since October 2005 without major incident or complaint. We have effectively assimilated the publication of reports into our existing procedures. To answer your questions in turn:

#### **1. Have you found publishing inspection reports to be burdensome and do you redact any information prior to publication?**

Although time must be spent pdf'ing documents, naming them correctly and filing them electronically in the right place (where the report we run for our website can pick up the link) the process, at least from the officer's perspective, is not burdensome. I suspect that is also the case for our web team.

From the outset we designed our reports and procedures with the eventual publication of the report in mind. For instance, our aim is to create an inspection document that does not need redacting. Personal information is kept to the covering letter (which is not published) and care is taken not to identify individuals in the published report. We peer review inspection reports which hopefully ensures errors, of which there are some, are picked up.

#### **2. Has publishing the reports incurred any extra costs to the council?**

Yes, I am sure there is an additional cost to the publishing of reports but I suspect these are minimal. However I am unable to quantify this for you.

#### **3. Have you employed any additional staff to undertake management of the food hygiene element of the website?**

We have not employed any additional staff to manage the food hygiene element of the website.

Publication has ensured that our reports are easier to understand than previously, have a summary of each compliance area which serves to qualify and balance the content (bringing out the good points as well as the bad)

and ensured the content of the report relates to the hygiene rating awarded – especially in regard to where improvements are needed.

All this came out of the need to communicate to a different audience, be fairer to the food business operator, be transparent in our thinking and accountable for the rating we give. It has been such a worthwhile exercise that in my opinion the benefits more than meet the costs of publication, such as they are. I would strongly recommend all local authorities do something similar.

## **Lichfield District Council (member of ratemyplace)**

### **1. Have you found publishing inspection reports to be burdensome and do you redact any information prior to publication?**

We have been publishing food hygiene inspection reports since 2007. Publishing couldn't be easier. We remove confidential information such as names and then secure the document using Adobe Writer. We include this task as part of the overall inspection process and essentially on average it takes 5 minutes to do.

Publishing our reports has been positive in a number of ways:

- it allows the public to rightly see what we do and ask questions of our work
- it has changed the way we write letters to our customers. No longer do we quote legislation or make our sentences long and verbose, we try to come straight to the point e.g. clean the wall or paint the ceiling. Customers like this and officers find it easier to do.
- press coverage (both positive & negative) has led to an increased interest in food safety and has driven up standards without the need for regulation in some instances

### **2. Has publishing the reports incurred any extra costs to the council?**

In terms of costs, if you take the running of ratemyplace it costs each partner council about £600 per year. This includes hosting, training, website development and website management.

### **3. Have you employed any additional staff to undertake management of the food hygiene element of the website?**

No additional staff have been employed. The site is run by ourselves at Lichfield DC and the time element to it is part of everyday roles.

All 8 partner councils have recently joined the NFHRS even so, ratemyplace continues to thrive. We re-launched the site to coincide with this move to the NFHRS.

From the ratemyplace site we populate all the information to the national site automatically. Locally the brand is well known. Future developments include photographs of the business and menus (which will allow us to do trading standards checks), charges will be levied for this service to our business customers.

Finally this is how we display in the windows! The square in the corner is a 3D barcode which takes you to ratemyplace, the scores and access to the reports!

