

CONSULTATION ON THE FOOD HYGIENE RATING (WALES) BILL

WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM PUBLIC HEALTH WALES TO THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES AT STAGE 1 OF ITS SCRUTINY

Executive Summary

Local Authorities inspect food businesses to ensure that they comply with food hygiene regulations. In the UK, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has rolled-out a “national” scheme, implemented in Wales from October 2010. Currently, display of information from the food hygiene rating is voluntary – only the highest scoring premises may choose to do so. Similar mandatory schemes that operate in other countries have demonstrated benefit to the population’s health as measured by reduced levels of serious foodborne illness.

Introduction

Public Health Wales was established as an NHS Trust on 1 October 2009. One of its four statutory functions is to provide and manage a range of public health, health protection, healthcare improvement, health advisory, child protection and microbiological laboratory services and services relating to the surveillance, prevention and control of communicable diseases. The Health Protection Division of Public Health Wales works in partnership with other parts of the National Health Service, Local Authorities, the Food Standard Agency and others to prevent, identify and manage single cases or outbreaks of food borne illness.

Is there a need for a bill to introduce a statutory food hygiene rating scheme in Wales. Please explain your answer.

Yes.

There is evidence from evaluation of similar schemes operating in other countries (USA, Canada, Denmark and Australia) to suggest that the mandatory display of food hygiene ratings have a positive effect. There is evidence from the evaluation of the Denmark scheme that it helps consumers make informed choices – leading to businesses carrying out improvements to avoid a poor score. An evaluation of the Los Angeles scheme concluded that there was a 20% decrease in food related hospitalisations since the introduction of the scheme in 1998.

Public Health Wales supports the compulsory display of food hygiene ratings. It will be important, however, to evaluate the scheme, as implemented in Wales, to ensure that the scoring scheme is optimised and the benefits for both consumers and businesses are maximised.

Question 2: How will the proposed Measure change what organisations do currently and what impact will such changes have, if any?

The bill proposes a statutory duty on Local Authorities in Wales to participate in the scheme – but it does not change the current system of inspections or the frequency with which they are undertaken. If implemented the bill would ensure consistency in approach across Wales and increase awareness among consumers.

With the current voluntary food hygiene rating scheme business may not display their rating – if the bill is implemented food businesses in Wales will be required by law to display their food hygiene rating in their premises.