

UPDATE ON THE WORK OF AGENCY REGIONAL TEAMS ACROSS ENGLAND

Executive Summary

1. This paper updates the Board on evaluation of the work of the Agency's Regional Teams and further work proposed to look at options for their future across all Government Regions.
2. The paper presents the results of an independent evaluation by Birmingham University on the impact the Regional Teams have had on the Agency's relationships with key local and regional stakeholders, and the delivery of key Agency priorities. The evaluation shows clear evidence of a more developed and positive FSA partnership with key food stakeholders and delivery agents in English Regions where an Agency Regional Team was in place.
3. The Agency Regional Teams were also considered as part of the Hampton Implementation Review. The review team saw the teams as being successful in building partnership working with local authorities and thought they may be an appropriate vehicle to improve the efficiency and impact of the relationship with local authorities and in providing leadership and direction.
4. Evaluation confirms that small Agency teams placed in the Government Offices for the Regions can have a positive impact on the FSA relationship with local and regional delivery partners and help embed key Agency priorities in local strategies and action plans. However, taking into account wider financial pressures on the Agency there is a need to consider this approach against other options to achieve local/regional delivery, and the extent to which options would command priority funding from across the Agency.
5. The Board is asked to:
 - **note** the update on the work of the Agency's Regional Teams and their positive impact on FSA partnerships and the local delivery of FSA priorities
 - **note** that decisions on the future of the Regional Teams will be considered as part of a cost \ benefit review of the current and alternative approaches to local \ regional delivery, with a report back to the Board in early 2009.

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Issue

1. This paper updates the Board on the work of the Agency Regional Teams and presents the results of independent evaluation on the impact the Teams have had on the Agency's relationship with key stakeholders and the local delivery of Agency priorities.
2. Whilst acknowledging the benefits from this greater regional engagement the paper flags up the need for further work to compare the current approach against alternative approaches, including on a cost benefit basis.

Strategic Aims

3. The current Regional Team approach is part of the Agency's work to strengthen links with regional and local partners to help deliver key Agency strategic targets on food safety, healthy eating and consumer choice.

Background

4. The Agency's 2005/2010 Strategic Plan recognised the need to strengthen links and develop better partnerships with organisations working at the regional and local level. As a first step, from May 2006, Regional Teams of two officers were established in four of the nine English Government Offices for the Regions (GOs) – the East Midlands, South West, North West and South East. The teams are supported by a small central management and coordination capacity based at Aviation House. The Unit has a current staffing of 10 at a cost of £710K per annum.
5. The remit of the Regional Teams is to:
 - help secure effective and sustainable regional and local partnerships;
 - embed Agency food safety and nutrition priorities within relevant regional and local strategies and action plans; and
 - support the local delivery of Agency food safety and nutrition targets.
6. Having Agency staff working out of regional GOs has allowed closer working relationships with a range of organisations involved in the local delivery of Agency policy or with a remit covering the food and health agenda. These organisations

include Other Government Departments (OGDs) such as Department of Health (DH) and Defra working out of the GOs, School Food Trust and Healthy Schools Coordinators, Regional Development Agencies, Local Authorities, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), Community and Voluntary organisations and food industry groups. This capacity for more local engagement in England builds on the Agency's experience in the devolved offices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland where it has helped to support closer working relationships with local authorities and other organisations actively involved in the local delivery of the Agency's Agenda.

7. The May 2007 Board meeting received a paper [PRO 07/05/01] describing the work of the Regional Teams. The Board acknowledged the positive response to the initiative but agreed considerations about its future, including in respect of the remaining five English Regions be left open and brought back to the Board in July 2008 based on an evaluation of the impact of the initiative and to consider its future taking account of the wider budgetary influences.

Impact of the Regional Teams

Evaluation by The University of Birmingham

8. Independent evaluation of the regional initiative was carried out by The University of Birmingham between October 07 and March 08. The evaluation involved a **survey questionnaire to all English local authorities and Regional Public Health Teams**, followed by **structured interviews with a sample of key stakeholders** who had worked with teams on local initiatives in the previous 12 months. The aim of the evaluation was to measure the quality of key regional and local stakeholder partnerships with the FSA and the impact the Regional Teams were having on these partnerships.
9. The evaluation focused on key characteristics common to successful partnerships identified from a previous study commissioned by the Agency through Greenstreet Berman and which as part of its work reviewed effective partnership arrangements¹. The characteristics include good cooperation and collaboration; sharing of risk, resources, information, skills and decision making; and identified areas of mutual benefit. The evaluation compared the responses from regions with an Agency Regional Team and those without.
10. Based on the responses from 137 organisations, the results show clear evidence of a more developed and positive FSA partnership with key food stakeholders and delivery agents in English Regions where an Agency Regional Team was in place. Further information on the study and findings is at Annex A. The Birmingham

¹ 'Working Effectively with Industry – Report for the Food Standards Agency' – Greenstreet Berman 2006

University evaluation shows that in regions with an Agency Regional Team, there was:

- Better partnership working;
- Greater knowledge of key Agency priorities;
- Increased understanding and awareness of Agency priorities and resources;
- Greater FSA contribution to local decision making; and
- Increased local initiatives delivering FSA priorities.

11. The structured interviews with local authorities, regional public health and industry bodies who had worked with the Regional Teams were consistent with these findings and seen as facilitating better communications, regional strategic planning and collaborative working.

Hampton Review

12. The Regional Teams were considered during the Hampton Implementation Review. The Report, published on 20th March 08, saw the Teams as being successful in building partnership working with local authorities and thought they may be an appropriate vehicle to improve the efficiency and impact of the relationship with local authorities and in providing leadership and direction.

Local Government Feedback

13. The Chair of LACORS wrote to the Agency on 11th March 08 supporting the roll-out of the initiative (to the remaining five English regions) based on the positive feedback on joint working experience from local councils in regions with Agency Teams.

Delivery Across Key Objectives

14. Being closer to local organisations involved in the delivery of Agency priorities or the wider food and health agenda has enabled the Regional Teams to develop **better partnerships** with (and between) key regional and local Agency stakeholders. This has helped to **increase the local profile of the Agency's national food safety and healthy eating priorities** and to embed these in relevant regional strategy documents, local action plans, and funding streams. For example, in all regions there has been joint working with local authorities and PCTs on targeted salt reduction activity. The better partnership arrangements have also led to **additional regional funding**, from public health and PCTs budgets, to further support the local delivery of Agency targets eg promoting Traffic Light Labelling and improving food safety in the home. Regional teams have also helped to **organise local**

stakeholder events and target communications for other Agency policy branches through their regional contacts and GO facilities.

15. Some further examples of the work and achievements of the Regional Teams are given in Annex B.

Review of Alternative Approaches to Local \ Regional Delivery

16. Notwithstanding the improvements in stakeholder relationships achieved by the current Regional Teams, financial pressures on the Agency have increased in recent years. Taking these pressures into account decisions on the future of Regional Teams needs to consider alternative approaches to partnership working and local \ regional delivery against the current approach. To include:

- the work areas where targets could be delivered more effectively through a closer relationship with local\regional stakeholders
- differences in how alternative approaches could deliver particular objectives
- value for money considerations
- the case for funding alternative approaches to partnership working and local/regional delivery on a cross-Agency basis

17. This work will go ahead over the next few months, with a view to reporting back to the Board in early 2009

Board Action required

18. The Board is asked to:

- **note** the update on the work of the Agency's Regional Teams and their positive impact on FSA partnerships and the local delivery of FSA priorities; and
- **note** that decisions on the future of the Regional Teams will be considered as part of a cost \ benefit review of the current and alternative approaches to local \ regional delivery, with a report back to the Board in early 2009.

EVALUATION OF THE FSA REGIONAL UNIT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Independent evaluation of the Agency's Regional Unit was carried out by The University of Birmingham between October 07 and March 08. The first stage of the evaluation was the design and implementation of two surveys to assess the quality of the relationships between local and regional stakeholders and the FSA. The surveys were designed, conducted and analysed by Birmingham University with input from the Agency's Analysis Research Division.
2. The first phase of the evaluation was carried out during October and November 2007. It consisted of an electronic survey questionnaire sent to all English Local Authorities and Regional Public Health Teams to measure the quality of their partnership with the FSA and the impact the Regional Teams were having. A series of questions assessed key characteristics common to successful partnerships, previously identified by Greenstreet Berman (2006) in research commissioned by the Agency². These characteristics include good cooperation and collaboration; sharing of risk, resources, information, skills and decision making; and identified areas of mutual benefit.
3. In order to assess the impact the Regional Teams had made on the quality and extent of these partnerships, the embedding of key Agency messages and the delivery of national Agency targets, a comparison was made between the responses from regions with an Agency Regional Team and those without.
4. The second phase of the evaluation took place between February and March 2008. A series of structured interviews were carried out by the University to explore the nature of the partnership the Teams had developed with key local government, public health and industry stakeholders and their views on the initiative and its future roll-out.
5. Based on the responses from 137 organisations, the results show clear evidence of a more developed and positive FSA partnership with key food stakeholders and delivery agents in English Regions where an Agency Regional Team was in place. Top line findings show that in regions where an Agency Regional Team (RT) was in place, there was:
 - **Better partnership working** - a higher proportion of respondents from the RT areas felt they had a partnership with the FSA (69% compared to 41% in non RT areas). In RT areas, the three most commonly used descriptors of their

² 'Working Effectively with Industry – Report for the Food Standards Agency' – Greenstreet Berman 2006

relationship with the FSA were respectively, 'developing', 'collaborative' and 'reliable'. In non RT areas they were 'remote', 'developing', and 'one sided'. As one respondent put it:

"The Council's relationship with the FSA has improved significantly since the appointment of (Regional Coordinators) in our local GO office. Before this regional presence initiative, I would have described our relationship with the FSA as one sided and remote".

- **Greater knowledge of key Agency priorities** – 64% of respondents from RT areas felt they had a good or excellent knowledge of Agency salt reduction priorities and targets compared to 42% in non RT areas. For Traffic Light Labelling the figures were 67% compared to 44%.
 - **Increased understanding and awareness of Agency priorities and resources** - Respondents from areas with an RT generally feel more involved in FSA agenda delivery (45% compared to 25%); more aware of the available Agency resources (65% compared to 44%); and rate more highly the level of accessibility of the FSA (60% compared to 26%).
 - **Greater FSA contribution to local decision making** – 72% of respondents from RT areas felt that the FSA contributed to their decision making compared to 49% in non RT areas.
 - **Increased local initiatives delivering FSA priorities** – more than twice the proportion of respondents in RT areas had developed a new initiative in one of the three Agency priorities (reducing food-borne illness, traffic light labelling and salt reduction) in the previous twelve months compared to non RT areas (37% compared to 17%).
6. Overall, of the 19 questions asked, all of which explored characteristics common to successful partnerships, 14 received a more positive response from the RT areas, 5 were about the same, and none were more positive from the non- RT areas.
 7. The results from the structured interviews were consistent with these findings and showed unanimous support for maintaining the Teams and expanding them to the other GO regions.
 8. Participants cited improved relationship/partnership with the FSA as an important reason to support this initiative. The regional representatives are assisting with communication between the regions and the FSA centre, they are assisting with strategic plans, financial bids, training, joint events and other methods of collaborative working. They have improved the reputation of the Agency and also helped to embed national targets and strategies at local and regional level.

EXAMPLES OF REGIONAL DELIVERY

Securing effective and sustainable regional and local partnerships

Regional Teams have received additional regional funding to help support the local delivery of Agency priorities. This includes:

- £144,000 co-managed by East Midlands Regional Team to deliver shared regional food and health objectives as part of the regional Food and Health Action Plan (FAHAP);
- full time regional funded post managed by North West Regional Coordinator to take forward shared FAHAP and FSA priorities such as work streams to support industry reformulation of products to reduce levels of fats, sugars and salts; and
- £10K funding from East Midlands Food Forum for free Traffic Light Labelling (TLL) analyses for their members to encourage TLL adopters.

Embedding Agency food safety and nutrition priorities within relevant regional and local strategies and action plans

- All four Regional Teams have successfully embedded FSA key priorities within relevant regional health strategies or FAHAPs. This has led or will lead to the prioritisation of key Agency targets and the potential for regional resources to be released to deliver them.
- The Regional Teams worked with local authorities and the East Midlands Regional Public Health Group to develop and pilot guidance on Food & Health and Local Area Agreements (now seen as the key vehicle by Govt for setting local priorities and delivering joined up services to promote healthier communities). The Guidance was taken up nationally and produced as joint LACORs / FSA document.
- Developing a national Salt Toolkit with TSI and CIEH to encourage local authorities to contribute to the Agency's salt reduction work and embed this activity into relevant local work programmes.
- Regional Teams have linked into established regional networks and e-bulletins, and through these mechanisms cascade key Agency messages. These networks cover many thousands of food\public health organisations, including community groups who would be hard to contact or engage centrally.

Supporting the local delivery of Agency targets

- All 4 regions have facilitated partnership work with local authorities and PCTs to run targeted local salt initiatives as part of the Agency's salt campaign, focusing on vulnerable groups (identified through Agency research) by building on their established community networks.
- Regional partnership workshops have been hosted in all regions bringing together local authorities, PCTs and other local public health organisations involved in the food and health agenda. In the NW this has already resulted in PCT funding for local authority nutritional analysis of take away foods to support local reformulation initiatives.
- Responding to problems identifying schools for a national salt campaign initiative, the Regional Teams linked with their regional healthy schools coordinators. In the space of 1 month, the Regional Teams identified over 100 schools willing to participate in the project bringing the initiative back on track.
- Working with the East Midlands Food and Drink Forum, two joint workshops were organised and attended by over 60 local food manufacturers as part of the Agency's Incident Prevention Strategy.
- In the South West, Traffic Light Labelling workshops have been delivered alongside local authorities and public health teams, to over 2000 professionals in the last 12 months. This has resulted in a range of local follow up activity eg local funding of information packs for consumers, and PCTs factoring labelling awareness into their wider community activities.
- Regional update seminars, tailored with local authority representatives, held in all 4 regions. Attended by over 400 food enforcement officers, all events were evaluated very highly by delegates, and supported wider CPEG local authority engagement work.
- All Regional Teams have facilitated meetings bringing together the Chairs of local authority Food Liaison Groups within their region. This has improved regional working and communications between local authorities and with the Agency.