

Update on development of National Inspection Strategies for food

National Inspection Strategies (NIS) have existed as a concept since Primary Authority was introduced, but no NIS has been developed for food partnerships to date. We see a potential for NIS to be part of our work to recognise compliant and transparent food businesses and help focus local authority activity towards those food businesses that are performing poorly or need more help.

NIS involves one local authority – called the primary authority – working with a multi-site food business, for example a chain of restaurants or supermarkets, to ensure the business is meeting its food hygiene responsibilities through assessment of its central systems and other business data. The primary authority will use this intelligence to inform the frequency and nature of local authority inspections of individual outlets.

In a NIS recognised by the FSA, routine inspections of individual outlets by local authorities will be less frequent than now and, importantly, the findings from those inspections will be fed back to the primary authority to provide assurance that the NIS is working as intended.

The Primary Authority scheme is overseen by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and enables businesses to form a legal partnership with one local authority, which then provides assured and tailored advice on complying with regulations.

The [pathfinder trial](#) we are publishing today looked at whether primary authorities can access and use business data to predict how businesses are complying with hygiene regulations. We found an 80% match between the predicted food hygiene ratings based on a food business' data and the actual rating given by an LA following an inspection

We have also published [three draft standards](#) that will ensure all parties in a NIS meet robust and demanding criteria and that the FSA's oversight and assurance of NIS is clear and transparent.

Nina Purcell, Director, Regulating Our Future said:

“These are crucial developments as we start to deliver important parts of the Regulating Our Future programme. We are pleased that the evaluation report found that 80% of the results between business data and actual inspection matched. We have investigated some of the differences between interpretation of data and actual inspections and are confident that through the NIS Standards and further testing we can resolve the underlying issues to minimise discrepancies in the future.

“We have developed the robust and stringent standards in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and these will be absolutely key to making NIS effective. Our next steps are to work with a number of primary authority partnerships in England who are considering developing NIS. This will give us an opportunity to develop and refine our standards and test how they work in practice.

“It’s important to remember that if all those involved do not meet our robust and demanding standards then we will not recognise the NIS. In practice this would mean that the businesses’ individual outlets would continue to be inspected by the local authority as they are at present.

“We are aware that the use of NIS may impact on the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) and we are working to ensure that this trusted and successful scheme remains robust and credible. Work is underway to look at possible options and we are commissioning consumer, business and other user insight work to inform our thinking. We are also following up on the recommendations in the report.”

Graham Russell, Chief Executive at the Office for Product Safety and Standards, which oversees the Primary Authority scheme, said:

“This work plays a great role in Primary Authority and I’m delighted the FSA is exploring national inspection strategies for food. The next steps will help refine and test the robust standards to ensure these strategies benefit the food business partner and protect public health.”