

Local Authority Recovery Plan Assurance Assessment: Introduction

1.1 In June 2021 the Food Standards Agency (FSA) provided local authorities (LAs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (NI) with the [COVID-19 Local Authority Recovery Plan: guidance and advice to local authorities](#) (the Recovery Plan). The Recovery Plan and associated [Q&A](#) set out the FSA's guidance and advice to local authorities for delivering Food Hygiene and Food Standards services during the pandemic.

1.2 The Recovery Plan will apply in each of the three countries until the end of March 2023, when decisions are made in relation to the proposed new delivery models for food hygiene and food standards.

1.3 To provide assurance on LA implementation of the Recovery Plan milestones, the FSA delivered a programme of initial assessments between April and July 2022. The programme involved eleven assessments of LAs (seven in England, two in Wales and two in NI). The participating LAs are listed in section nine of the report and were chosen across a range of geographical locations, service delivery responsibilities and taking into account any relevant information supplied through LA surveys. This report summarises the findings and outcomes of the eleven assessments.

1.4 The key phases and milestones of the Recovery Plan are shown in Figure 1 below:

1.5 There are two phases to the Recovery Plan:

- Phase 1 – 1 July to 30 September 2021

- Phase 2 – 1 October 2021 to March 2023

1.6 Phase 1 required LAs to undertake a prioritisation exercise for interventions at new businesses and to start planning a suitable intervention programme for the beginning of Phase 2.

1.7 Phase 2 set five milestones for LAs in relation to the undertaking of onsite interventions at food businesses. The first milestone of Phase 2 required LAs to have completed an onsite intervention at all businesses risk rated category A for food hygiene by the end of March 2022. The second milestone required LAs to have completed onsite interventions at all businesses risk rated category B for food hygiene, and category A for food standards by the end of June 2022. Milestones three to five set out future requirements for onsite intervention by LAs, particularly concerning lower risk category businesses for food hygiene and food standards.

1.8 In relation to food standards, during phase 2 LAs also needed to prioritise interventions at Category B and C rated premises if they were considered a priority for intervention due to the impact on the establishment of the new requirements on allergen labelling for products prepacked for direct sale (PPDS).

1.9 Throughout Phase 1 and Phase 2, LAs were also expected to deliver the following:

- official controls where the nature and frequency are prescribed in specific legislation and official controls recommended by FSA guidance that are undertaken to support trade and enable export
- reactive work including, enforcement in the case of non-compliance, managing food incidents and food hazards, and investigating and managing complaints
- sampling in accordance with the local authority sampling programme or as required in the context of assessing food business compliance, and any follow-up necessary in relation to the FSA Surveillance Sampling Programme
- ongoing proactive surveillance to obtain an accurate picture of the local business landscape and to identify open/closed/recently re-opened/new businesses; as well as businesses where there has been a change of operation, activities or FBO
- for 'new businesses', consideration of registration information and intelligence with appropriate onsite interventions carried out where there are concerns around public health/consumer protection
- for 'new businesses' where consideration of registration information and intelligence indicates lower risk, initial visits should be prioritised and undertaken in accordance with the Codes of Practice and Practice Guidance taking account of the flexibilities provided
- implementing planned intervention programmes for high-risk category and non-compliant establishments in accordance with the timeline in figure 1
- implementing an intelligence/information-based approach for lower risk category establishments
- responding to Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) requested re-visits in line with the timelines specified in the FHRS Brand Standard for England or the statutory guidance in Wales and Northern Ireland

1.10 The objectives of the assessment programme were to:

- gain assurance that LAs in England, Wales and NI have implemented the guidance in the Recovery Plan and delivered official controls in accordance with legislation and statutory guidance
- identify any areas of innovation or good practice
- establish how LAs had interpreted the Recovery Plan and to gather feedback
- highlight any emerging issues or concerns to inform any future amendments or changes to the Recovery Plan

1.11 To reduce the impact on LAs, the assessments were carried out by asking participating LAs to submit information on their official food control activities during the recovery period via a pre-assessment questionnaire. This data was analysed by the assessment teams in the three countries, who then organised interviews with the LA's senior managers and lead officers. During the assessments a small sample of records were also reviewed and assessed to verify the information provided.

1.12 Most of these interviews were carried out remotely and we have received positive feedback from LAs on both the assessment process, and the opportunity it offered for them to ask questions about the Recovery Plan.