

Managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic within LA Food teams

2.1 Within the LAs subject to assessment, it was found that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on most LA food teams, many of whom had to balance delivery of new COVID-19 responsibilities alongside their official food controls.

2.2 It was established that:

- from the start of the pandemic in March 2020, most LAs in England (5/7), diverted food qualified officers to engage, encourage, and enforce the new COVID-19 regulations and deal with local outbreaks
- in Wales, LAs diverted experienced food qualified officers to COVID-19 related work, including staff secondments to the “Test, Trace, Protect” response. COVID-19 restrictions also lasted longer in Wales than the rest of the UK, with the last restrictions ending on 30 May 2022 which impacted on service delivery
- while the pandemic had a significant impact on DCs in NI, they were less affected by the loss of key staff than other LAs across the nations, although one DC had an officer diverted to COVID-19 related work from March 2021 to April 2022. The DCs provided detailed evidence of planning to manage the impact of the pandemic
- to support the COVID-19 response, LAs in England were able to access the Containment Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) from central government to obtain additional resources, which was used to employ temporary staff and COVID-19 Marshals. LAs in Wales also received funding from the Welsh Government’s COVID-19 Test, Trace, Protect strategy
- all LAs managed the pressures of the pandemic positively, largely due to their well-established and experienced teams. LAs ensured there was sufficient officer cover to deal with reactive food safety issues and communication channels with members of the public remained open
- LAs in all three nations reported that they had strengthened their relationships with internal and external partners and felt that the profile of Environmental Health and Trading Standards teams had increased locally due to the work carried out during the pandemic
- throughout the pandemic LAs continued to use their Management Information Systems (MIS’s) which were also used as part of the intervention planning process. LAs MIS’s contain details of all registered food businesses in an authority’s area and contain inspection and enforcement histories as well as generating next inspection dates
- LAs continued to risk-rate food business in line with the Food Law Codes of Practice (FLCoP), for both food hygiene and food standards