

# Local Authority Shellfish Traceability Audit Summary Report (England) - July 2025

## Local Authority Shellfish Traceability Audit Summary Report - Foreword

Audits of local authority (LA) feed and food law enforcement functions are part of the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) arrangements to improve the consistency and effectiveness of enforcement.

These arrangements recognise that the enforcement of UK feed and food law relating to feed and food safety, hygiene, composition, labelling, imported food and feeding stuffs is largely the responsibility of LAs. These LA regulatory functions are principally delivered through Environmental Health and Trading Standards Services.

Audits assess LAs' conformance against the Feed and Food Law Enforcement Standard contained within the Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls by LAs (the Framework Agreement), the [Food Law Code of Practice](#) (FLCoP) and relevant official enforcement guidance.

It should be acknowledged that there will be considerable diversity in the way and manner in which LAs may provide their feed and food enforcement services reflecting local needs and priorities. The main aim of the audit scheme is to maintain and improve consumer protection and confidence by ensuring that LAs are providing an effective feed and food law enforcement service. The scheme also provides the opportunity to identify and disseminate good practice and to provide information to inform FSA policy.

The power to set standards, monitor and audit feed and food law enforcement authorities was conferred on the Food Standards Agency by the Food Standards Act 1999 and The Official Feed and Food Control (England) Regulations 2009. The FSA's audits of LAs are undertaken under section 12(4) of the Act. [Assimilated Regulation \(EU\) 2017/625](#) on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with food and feed law, includes a requirement under Article 6(1) for competent authorities to carry out internal audits or to have external audits carried out. To fulfil this requirement, the FSA, as the central competent authority for food and feed law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has established external audit arrangements. The purpose of these audits is to verify whether official controls relating to feed and food law are implemented effectively. In developing these, the FSA has taken account of the [European Commission guidance](#) on how such audits should be conducted.

[Further information on the FSAs LA audit scheme.](#)

A glossary of technical terms used within the audit report can be found at Annex G.

# Background

Background information for the Local Authority Shellfish Traceability Audit Summary Report (England) - July 2025

The FSA is the central competent authority in England, Northern Ireland and Wales responsible for protecting public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food and otherwise to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food.

The aim of this audit programme was to highlight any specific issues that need addressing in regard to the delivery of official controls by local authorities in relation to shellfish traceability in England, and in particular the use of shellfish registration documents (SRDs). This work is in line with the FSA's strategy, ensuring that food produced or sold in the UK is safe to eat and consumer interests are protected from any risks.

In discharging its responsibilities, the FSA has, through the Secretary of State for Health in England, issued the Food Law Code of Practice England 2023 (FLCoP), a statutory Code of Practice for the delivery and enforcement of food legislation, including shellfish traceability.

The Food Law Practice Guidance (FLPG) is non-statutory guidance which complements the FLCoP and provides general advice on approaches to enforcement of the law where its intention might be unclear. The Code is also supplemented by the Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls by Local Authorities, 2010.

## Nature of the Industry

The exact number of shellfish harvesters can vary throughout the year and from year to year. The industry is made up of a range of establishments, from small scale sole traders with ad hoc harvesting, to larger scale businesses having control over several stages of the harvesting and production process, including approved establishments, auction houses and wholesalers.

Shellfish can be harvested along large stretches of the English coastline, intertidal waters and estuaries, posing a unique challenge to LAs responsible delivering official controls in this area and helping to provide assurance on the origin and traceability of any shellfish harvested. Given the large geographical area involved, intelligence networks and regular liaison with neighbouring authorities and other official bodies is an essential part of ensuring adequate oversight of shellfish harvesting.

LAs are required upon request by any individual or business to provide a shellfish registration document (SRD) for completion by the harvester. The primary purpose of this document is to record the name and contact details of the harvester, the nature and volume of the product harvested and the location. This document is generally the start of the traceability chain for shellfish being sold and consumed in England and further afield. It is therefore vital that these SRDs are appropriately completed, monitored and whenever possible, verified.

In addition to the geographical challenge, LAs have to deal with other issues, such as paused or inactive harvesting, due to the transient and ad hoc nature of the industry. LAs may still however have to maintain shellfish bed classifications and continue sampling areas unless waters are declassified, despite harvesting being temporarily paused in an area. This can be costly and time consuming for LAs.

## Traceability

Assimilated Regulation (EC) No.178/2002 introduces a traceability requirement with the objective to ensure food safety and to assist in enabling unsafe food/feed to be removed from the market. Effective traceability ensures that targeted and accurate withdrawals or recalls can be undertaken, appropriate information can be given to consumers and food business operators, risk assessment can be performed by control authorities and unnecessary wider disruption of trade can be avoided.

The traceability requirement relies on the “one step back -one step forward” approach which implies for food business operators that:

- they shall have in place a system enabling them to identify the immediate supplier(s) and immediate customer(s) of their products
- a link “supplier-product” shall be established (which products supplied from which suppliers)
- a link “customer-product” shall be established (which products supplied to which customers)

In December 2004 the European Community issued guidance on the implementation of Articles 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 of Regulation (EC) No. 178/2002. The guidance aims to assist all players in the food chain to better understand and to apply correctly and in a uniform way the Regulation.

Traceability has different objectives such as food safety, fair trading between operators and reliability of the information provided to consumers. Assimilated Regulation (EC) No.178/2002 introduces the traceability requirement with in particular the objective to ensure food safety and to assist in enabling unsafe feed/food to be removed from the market.

Assimilated Regulation (EC) 853/2004 requires that each batch of product is accompanied by a shellfish registration document and includes the information it must contain and the procedures to be followed on receipt of a batch at another establishment. It also specifies how long the documents must be kept.

Guidance for local authorities on the implementation of the regulations is set out in the Food Law Code of Practice (FLCoP) Section 7 and the Practice Guidance, including SRD requirements in particular. The guidance assists LAs with the interpretation and implementation of the relevant food legislation and regulations as they apply to the traceability of shellfish.

## Scope and Key Objectives of the Audit Programme (and Audit Methodology and Design)

Scope and Key Objectives of the Audit Programme, and the Audit Methodology and Design, for the Local Authority Shellfish Traceability Audit Summary Report (England) - July 2025

For the purposes of the audit programme, “shellfish” means live bivalve molluscs (LBM) which are defined by assimilated Regulation (EU) No. 853/2004 as filter feeding lamellibranch molluscs and can include oysters (pacific and native), mussels, clams, cockles. The programme also included checks on pectinadae in particular scallops and on gastropods such as periwinkles and whelks.

The audit examined LA delivery of official controls particularly in relation to Article 18 of assimilated Regulation (EU) No.178/2002 and relevant sections of assimilated Regulation (EU) No. 853/2004, assimilated Regulation (EU) 2017/625 and 2019/627 at establishments selling,

storing and/or otherwise handling shellfish against the relevant legislation and any centrally issued guidance including the 'Standard' in Chapter 2 of the Framework Agreement, FLCoP and FLPG.

The audit programme sought to gain assurance that relevant LA food law enforcement services (including any relevant Port Health Authorities) are effective in their control of shellfish traceability, and to disseminate good practice related to the delivery of controls in this area.

The objectives of the audit programme were to:

- verify compliance with planned arrangements in order to provide assurance that controls are carried out as intended and required by the FLCoP, the Framework Agreement, relevant, central and locally issued guidance
- verify the effective implementation of planned arrangements by LAs
- assess whether planned arrangements are suitable to achieve the objectives of relevant legislation. In particular, the strategic objectives stemming from Assimilated Regulations (EC) 178/2002, (EU) No.625/2017 and specific legislation relating to the approval of establishments e.g., Assimilated Regulations (EC) 852/2004, (EC) 853/2004, (EC) 210/2013 and (EC) 2073/2005
- disseminate good practice
- identify issues that relate to FSA delivery policy

As of January 2024 there were 43 coastal LAs across England with shellfish harvesting activities taking place in their area. Only authorities with harvesting activities in their area were considered for the audit programme.

The audit programme consisted of audits of eight LA Food Safety Services across England. The audits focused on arrangements for delivery of official controls in relation to shellfish traceability and in particular the issuing of SRDs to harvesters by LAs. For the purposes of the statistics in this report, any shared services are considered as being single entities, as audited.

The programme was split into two phases, taking place between February 2024 and December 2024. As a starting point for the traceability assessment, Phase 1 of the programme began with the selection of batches of LBM from relevant coastal LAs in England, based upon the nature and scale of shellfish harvesting activities in their areas and their geographical location. A total of six LAs were audited as part of Phase 1.

Phase 2 of the programme involved following these batches of LBM to the next location in the supply chains and the corresponding LAs. These secondary LAs received a focused audit assessment of the delivery of traceability controls in relation to the batches of LBM. Phase 2 tracked the shellfish product through the supply chain and relevant LAs to the point at which an identification mark was required to be added to the product, normally a shellfish dispatch centre. Two LAs were audited as part of phase 2.

LAs for audit were initially selected based on the authority type and geographical location, excluding LAs that had been audited by the FSA in the previous five years. A list of the authorities audited can be found at Annex C.

The audit programme focused on controls that LAs had in place to deliver shellfish traceability requirements. These included the following areas, specifically in relation to shellfish traceability controls and issues:

- Organisation, Service Planning and Management
- Officer Authorisation, Competency and Training
- Guidance for Officers-Documented Policies and Procedures
- Food Establishments Database

- SRDs
- Food Establishments Interventions
- Reality Visits
- Enforcement
- Food Safety Incidents, Complaints and Infectious Disease Outbreaks
- Internal Monitoring and Corrective Actions

## Audit Methodology and Design

Details of the audit methodology, design, and the evaluation and assessment framework used during the audits are set out in Annex D.

## Executive Summary

Executive Summary for Local Authority Shellfish Traceability Audit Summary Report (England) - July 2025

This report highlights the findings and conclusions of the planned audit programme of local authority (LA) Food Safety Services in England, focusing on arrangements for the delivery of official controls in relation to shellfish traceability and in particular the issuing of shellfish registration documents (SRDs) to harvesters by LAs.

Based on the evidence found across all 8 audits, we have provided a **Moderate** audit opinion. Further details can be found in part 6 of this report.

LAs audited were issued with an audit report including an agreed action plan to address any issues identified, which will be monitored until the actions are implemented. All the LAs involved received at least one recommendation, with 28 recommendations being made in total. The distribution of recommendations made can be seen at Annex A. In addition, observations for the FSA can be seen at Annex B.

Areas of good practice were identified during the audits. These can be seen throughout the main body of the report.

## Key Findings

### Service Planning

All but one of the Services audited had documented and appropriately approved service plans in place, used to describe and explain how they would use their resources in the year ahead to deliver official controls.

Authorities could strengthen service plans by ensuring that the resources required to deliver official controls in relation to shellfish and the issuing and monitoring of SRDs are accurately estimated. This should also include an estimation of the resources required for undertaking internal monitoring, maintenance of key business files and records and appropriate follow up actions to achieve timely business compliance.

In common with other specialist areas of work, LAs, appeared to be highly dependent upon a small number of experienced and trained officers for the delivery of specialist shellfish traceability controls, leaving them potentially vulnerable should these officers leave the organisation. LAs were advised to improve the resilience of their service by training and developing other officers to carry out delivery of these controls.

## **Liaison with other organisations**

There was evidence that this was currently a key strength of the LAs involved in the audit. Effective liaison with other key stakeholders such as the regional IFCAs, MMO, harbour masters and shellfish liaison groups is essential to create an intelligence network to identify shellfish harvesting across the country, maintaining confidence in the shellfish traceability system.

## **Officer Authorisation and Training**

All the officers assessed were able to provide some evidence of appropriate specific training on matters relating to shellfish. It was apparent that many Authorities were finding it difficult to source appropriate update training in this area to help maintain officer knowledge and competency.

## **Issuing and monitoring SRDs**

All the LAs involved were able to provide evidence that SRDs were being issued by them upon request. For the sake of efficiency, most LAs were issuing SRDs to established harvesting businesses in batches. All of the SRDs assessed as part of the audit were traceable back to the harvester, and then up the chain to the point where relevant ID marks were applied to individual batches of shellfish. In most cases some form of monitoring of the SRDs was taking place to ensure that they were returned fully completed and contained all the relevant information required.

One audit did demonstrate some of the difficulties that can be experienced in delivering traceability controls and SRDs when there are complex commercial arrangements involved, sometimes with businesses performing multiple roles at the same time. LAs would welcome further guidance from the FSA with worked examples in these situations.

## **Food Establishments Interventions and Inspections**

Interventions were being delivered by LAs at shellfish harvesters, although the majority were rated as low risk primary producers and potentially subject to Alternative Enforcement Strategies (AES). Some improvements were identified, to ensure that traceability checks, including checks on any SRDs issued, are routinely carried out and documented in inspection records.

Reality visits to a range of shellfish harvesters were carried out as part of the audits. Auditors were able to verify that the business activities matched Authority file records and officers were able to describe and explain the traceability systems being operated by the businesses.

## **Internal Monitoring and Corrective Actions**

One of the areas that required strengthening based on the audit findings was qualitative monitoring of service activities. All the Services audited had some form of appropriate quantitative monitoring in place, but most Authorities had only limited qualitative monitoring of service activities. To help ensure that LAs provide a consistent and effective service, it is recommended that LAs review, update and implement suitable internal monitoring procedures considering the whole range of food enforcement activities carried out including any activities associated with shellfish traceability and to use a risk-based internal monitoring approach.

# **Audit Findings**

## Service Planning Arrangements

Effective planning is vital when delivering a consistent and effective service. The Framework Agreement and centrally issued guidance require that LAs maintain an up to date and appropriately approved Service Plan to identify the demands on services and to set out how they will use their available resources to meet these demands.

All the LAs audited except one had documented service plans in place or in draft format. Six plans had been approved at an appropriate level within the organisation, to make sure that senior council officials were made aware of plans and any service issues, with the remaining two awaiting sign off at the time of the audit. Only one Authority had a policy of publishing its past approved service plans on its website, although all the LAs audited provided assurances that service plans would be made available to the public and businesses upon request. Auditors discussed the benefits of ensuring that stakeholders were aware of service plans.

All the plans assessed broadly met the service planning guidance within the Framework Agreement and the FLCoP and FLPG. Whilst all the plans assessed made some reference to their responsibilities regarding the delivery of shellfish controls, all the LAs audited could strengthen their service plans and raise the profile of this area of work by including more detail on the size and scale of shellfish harvesting in their areas, its importance to the local economy and some of the particular challenges that can be faced when delivering official controls for this type of high risk product along large stretches of the English coastline and tributaries.

In addition, all the LAs audited needed to provide further details on the resources required to assess the delivery of official controls relating to shellfish, using an objective methodology documented in their plans. This includes the issuing of SRDs, maintaining the SRD register and verification of any relevant documentation. Any work involved in monitoring illegal harvesting, shellfish traceability and internal monitoring should also be referenced to allow a more accurate calculation of the resources needed to deliver these controls and the rest of the Food Safety Service.

The audit showed that most of the LAs audited were highly reliant on one or two experienced members of staff with appropriate experience and training to deliver shellfish controls. Auditors noted this dependence and were concerned about the resilience of services in the event of key members of staff retiring or otherwise leaving their authorities. Appropriate contingencies were discussed with the LAs audited, with two authorities meeting this challenge by providing appropriate training to all their authorised officers, to make more staff available in the event of an incident or the lead officer for shellfish not being available.

The identification of shellfish harvesting activities including any illegal harvesting was seen as a particular challenge by all the authorities audited, due to the practical issues of carrying out sufficient physical surveillance of large stretches of coastline and the ongoing financial pressures on LA resources at this time. The scale and nature of shellfish harvesting in the LAs audited was therefore a “best estimate” of the activity taking place.

All the Authorities audited were using an informal network of relevant stakeholders to help to identify businesses and individuals involved in shellfish harvesting. These included useful liaison with other LAs through attendance of local Shellfish Liaison Groups, conversations with CEFAS, the MMO, the various IFCAs, local police, Harbour Masters and other shellfish businesses. These organisations routinely pass on and share intelligence and information on shellfish harvesting activity, particularly anything of concern. Evidence was provided during the audit programme to demonstrate specific cases where the sharing of intelligence had directly led to the identification of illegal activity relating to shellfish.

All eight LAs audited provided evidence of their regular attendance at SLGs. These groups are seen as a valuable way of sharing information and intelligence between neighbouring LAs as well as a useful forum for discussing any practical issues and solutions that have emerged when delivering official controls for shellfish. Where practical solutions cannot be agreed, these are passed on to the National Shellfish Liaison Group for further discussion, including liaison if needed with the FSA.

All the LAs audited had arrangements in place to deal with any incidents, including those relating to shellfish, that may occur out of hours (OHS). Only one authority used a formal, paid for OHS service, with the other seven depending instead on an informal system based on volunteers and the good will of officers. Auditors discussed the inherent risks associated with this informal approach, however these systems appeared to be working in practice, and no issues or concerns were cited during the audits.

Two of the LAs audited had direct links to information on shellfish controls and the registration of shellfish harvester on their LA websites. The benefits of using LA websites to signpost businesses and individuals was discussed with all the LAs, as well as the potential opportunity to make more use of websites to provide links to information on the need for SRDs and how to obtain them.

Best practice

Service Planning Arrangements:

- notifying portfolio holders with monthly updates on the delivery of the planned activities outlined in the Service Plan - this is beneficial as it identifies any potential issues early on, allowing timely remedial action to be taken
- All Authorities had developed and maintained effective liaison and partnership arrangements with key stakeholders involved in shellfish harvesting and conservation - these relationships help the Authority to deliver its duties in relation to the delivery of shellfish controls by providing local intelligence on any emerging issues that could affect shellfish harvesting in their area, as well as acting as a source of technical expertise on shellfish issues
- useful information for shellfish harvesters and other types of food businesses handling or processing shellfish was contained within the Service Plan, including links to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) classification list, information on the commercial status of shellfish harvesting areas and links to classification maps

## **Officer Authorisation, Competency and Training**

LAs are required to ensure that officers are appropriately authorised and competent to carry out food/feed law enforcement activities, including, where relevant, the delivery of official controls in relation to shellfish.

Six of the eight LAs audited (75%) had a fully documented procedure for the authorisation of officers. The remaining two LAs received a recommendation to draft and implement an appropriate procedure to ensure consistency. All the services assessed had appropriately authorised their officers in relation to the delivery of official controls including shellfish controls. Authorisation documents had been signed by a senior officer within each council, with the delegated power to do so in accordance with the constitutional framework of each council. In one case (13%) however, the legislation quoted in the officer authorisation needed to be expanded to include specific reference to all the relevant regulations as required by the FLCoP/FLPG. A failure to identify and appropriately authorise officers under all relevant legislation could potentially undermine any current or future formal enforcement and follow up actions taken by LAs.



In addition, officer authorisations in two LAs (25%) had not been restricted for certain officers, such as newly qualified officers, who were unable to fully demonstrate their competence to deliver the full range of controls granted under the legislation referenced in the documents. In practice however, most of the work allocated to new officers in these cases was closely monitored by the lead food officer to ensure that new officers do not deliver controls or other activities beyond their experience and competence.

All the Services assessed also had a system in place to identify officer competency requirements in relation to the delivery of official controls including shellfish controls, with all authorities being aware of the requirements of the FSA's Competency Framework. There was evidence that LAs were following the requirements for implementing the Framework for new officers, as well as having a suitable competency assessment process in place for existing officers. Authorities considered that the FSA should have a greater role in organising, coordinating, and providing formal training courses relative to official controls on approved establishments.

All the LAs bar one (13%) had developed a formal method of identifying ongoing training needs, linking this to their officer competency assessments. Training records for those officers involved in the delivery of controls in relation to shellfish controls and the issuing of SRDs were assessed. In all cases officers were able to provide evidence of appropriate specific training in the past on shellfish controls, including the delivery of controls at shellfish purification centres.

It was apparent though that some of the LAs audited were struggling to deliver appropriate update training on shellfish controls including shellfish traceability, to help maintain officer knowledge and competency. This is important to ensure that officers are able to keep up to date with any legislative changes or technological changes to industry processes and practices. Often this was cited as being due to a lack of appropriate training courses being provided. Several authorities felt that the FSA should help to provide more specific training for LAs in this subject and for other controls delivered by LAs. Some Services had addressed the gap in formal training courses by developing their own specific in-house update training for officers. Most Authorities were making use of online training packages to deliver training rather than face to face training courses.

Best practice

Authorisations, Competency and Training:

- developing existing employees through the provision of appropriate training - this investment can help to ensure that the Authority is able to maintain its workforce, helping to improve the resilience of its Service and possibly reducing the need to recruit new staff in the future

## **Guidance for Officers - Documented Policies and Procedures**

LAs should provide officers with appropriate documented guidance for the range of duties and activities they carry out. Appropriate guidance helps to ensure that official controls are delivered in accordance with relevant legislation and centrally issued guidance, are effective and delivered consistently between officers.

Four of the Services assessed, (50%), had provided appropriate procedures and work instructions for their officers in relation to the issuing and monitoring of SRDs and other shellfish controls. In some cases, it was noted that these guidance documents had only recently been developed, making it difficult to assess whether or not they had been fully implemented. Although most of the LAs had a system in place for reviewing their documentation, two LAs, (25%) received a recommendation requiring the development of an appropriate process to ensure that their policies and procedures are regularly updated to include reference to the latest legislation and guidance. It was clear that despite having an update and review system in place, several LAs

were having difficulty finding the time to review and update their range of procedures and guidance for officers due to other demands on their time and resources.

## **Food Establishment Database**

Authorities must have the necessary facilities and equipment that are required for the effective delivery of all activities associated with the service. LAs are required to set up and maintain a database of the food establishments in their areas and a documented procedure to ensure that the database is accurate, reliable and up to date.

All the Services audited maintained a food premises database, which included all food businesses in their area. All the LA except one had a suitable documented procedure for maintaining and verifying its accuracy. Shellfish harvesters had been registered and one LA they had also tagged harvesters with a specific code to enable them to be easily identified through their MIS if needed.

## **Delivery of Official Controls**

### **Shellfish Registration Documents (SRDs)**

Authorities should issue and record SRDs to shellfish harvesters upon request, in accordance with the FLCoP and any centrally issued guidance.

All of the Services audited had developed a suitable system for issuing SRDs upon request by shellfish harvesters and FBOs, although only half of the LAs had developed and implemented a documented procedure covering this activity. All the LAs issued paper SRDs, usually in triplicate, with returned copies being kept by the LA, the FBO and the operator at the next destination for the shellfish.

The audit included an assessment of recent returned SRDs issued by each Authority, as well as looking at any arrangements for Permanent Transport Authorisations (PTAs). PTAs can be arranged between LAs and businesses where the staff gathering shellfish also operate the purification centre, dispatch centre, relaying area or processing establishment receiving shellfish throughout the year and all establishments are supervised by the same local authority, removing the need for individual SRDs to be issued every time a batch of shellfish is harvested.

All the LAs audited had some form of register, either paper or digital to record the SRDs that had been issued and returned. All the LAs audited had pre-populated the SRDs with unique numbers to allow the records to be easily traced. Most of the LAs had provided useful guidance for harvesters completing the SRDs on how to complete the form. Most LAs had a process of issuing batches of up to 50 blank SRDs to regular harvesters to save time for the LA and the harvesters. This did lead to the possibility though of very old SRDs being submitted, well after the initial date that the SRD was issued. There was evidence that all the LAs audited kept records of the SRDs issued for at least 12 months in accordance with the FLCOP, with most LAs keeping records for considerably longer than this.

Most of the SRDs assessed had been completed appropriately, with harvester names, addresses, species caught, size of the catch and harvest location details being provided. Only minor errors and gaps in a small number of forms were occasionally noted, however these errors did highlight the need for LAs to carry out some form of regular monitoring of the returned forms, to ensure that they are accurately and fully completed. There was evidence of effective routine monitoring of SRDs found in three LAs (38%), with incomplete forms being returned to harvesters or queries on the accuracy of the forms being followed up by the LAs. The remaining LAs were advised to introduce a system for the monitoring of issued and returned SRDs, to ensure that the LAs have effective oversight of the harvesting activities in their area, and to have better oversight of the

SRDs that have been issued by the LA.

Current PTAs had been arranged with businesses in three of the LAs audited. Evidence of the arrangements made was seen in two of these Authorities, however one Authority could not provide documentary evidence of the PTA in place.

The audit programme highlighted the sometimes complex commercial arrangements associated with the shellfish industry and the difficulties of understanding and applying the legislation in some cases. One such example involved a large fish auction house with multiple landings of different species of shellfish happening throughout the year. To help with efficiency and the commercial viability of the process, practical arrangements had been made by the auction house with the large number of different harvesters landing produce at the site. In addition, the transport chain involved very large national wholesalers and retailers dealing in higher volumes of shellfish, along with very small volumes of ad hoc random landings from time to time.

Identifying the various legal entities and legal responsibilities around the issuing of SRDs for all of the businesses and agents involved in the transport chain, whilst trying to be supportive of local business in the area was a challenge for the LA involved. Shellfish traceability was possible but mainly centred around the use of GPS technology and financial receipts rather than always using the prescribed documentation. The LA has since sought advice from the FSA and its local shellfish liaison group (SLG). The Authority was advised to also seek advice from the National Shellfish Liaison Group on the use of express agreements.

Best practice

Issuing and monitoring SRDs:

the provision of information to shellfish harvesters on the correct use of SRDs and ensuring registration of harvesters prior to issuing SRDs

restricting and varying the number of SRDs issued to new FBO's considering the confidence in management

an electronic summary of each SRD issued and returned is recorded on a spreadsheet - this provides all the information on each SRD on one sheet and is a useful overview

a unique code for identifying shellfish harvesters has been set up on the LAs MIS - this allows quick identification of all shellfish businesses in the event of an incident

information had been provided to harvesters at the shoreline to encourage the correct use of SRDs, registration of businesses and to raise awareness of enforcement options available to the Authority

an effective electronic system whereby FBOs can apply for SRDs

## **Interventions**

Authorities should carry out interventions/inspections and approve or register establishments in accordance with the relevant legislation, Codes of Practice, centrally issued guidance and the Authority's policies and procedures.

Shellfish harvesting generally falls within the definition of primary production, and as such, once registered, these activities were seen as low risk, falling within the lower risk category of food business, usually category D or E. All the LAs audited had a policy of carrying out unannounced inspections where possible. There were some situations, usually involving fishing/harvesting vessels, where it was necessary to provide some notice for practical reasons.

All the LAs audited had a documented procedure for delivering interventions, providing officers with appropriate guidance for most of the interventions carried out. These procedures could be improved by making appropriate references to traceability checks, including checks on SRDs in relevant businesses. A sample of intervention records from businesses involved in handling or distributing shellfish were assessed as part of the audit. In each case the interventions had been carried out at the appropriate frequency in accordance with the FLCoP. Whilst most of the records seen contained appropriate detailed inspection findings, one LA received a recommendation in relation to the recording of their low risk alternative enforcement strategy interventions (AES) and another LA required more detailed inspection notes to be recorded to allow the LA to clearly demonstrate that businesses had been appropriately assessed against all the relevant legislation during interventions.

LAs were using a range of inspection aides-memoire to record officer findings, based on the nature of the business involved. Most LAs were using the FSAs inspection form template for fishing vessel inspections to record their findings, amending the form to make it more suitable for shellfish harvesting. However, it was noted that in most cases this form lacked a suitable prompt to record any assessment concerning the examination of SRDs or other traceability checks. Appropriate approved establishment aides-memoire had been used for the inspection of approved businesses, which did include sufficient prompts requiring officers to comment on shellfish traceability.

## **Reality Visits**

In order to complete the traceability element of the audit programme, visits were carried out in each LA to a business identified on the SRDs provided. LA officers accompanied FSA auditors on these visits, which were carried out to the point where batches of shellfish had an appropriate ID mark applied, as prescribed by legislation.

In every case, copies of the appropriate SRD were found on site in each of the businesses. Businesses all had a suitable system for recording and storing these SRDS either physically or digitally. The SRDs had been further completed by the businesses to show the next destination point for the shellfish, with ID marks applied to batches for further transportation to the retail sector. Based on the sample of batches selected, it was possible in each case to trace the origin of the shellfish back to its harvest location. Where appropriate, PTA arrangements were also discussed with the businesses and found to be appropriate in each case based on the nature of shellfish harvesting activities.

On each visit, LA officers were able to demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the businesses involved, and the range of business activities that took place on site. Officers were able to offer support and guidance to businesses to enable them to meet their legal obligations as efficiently and as effectively as possible. Through discussions during the visits, FBOs stated that they frequently discussed detailed practical issues with LA officers concerning any changes to business practices and legal guidance.

LAs are required to set up, maintain and implement a documented enforcement policy, in accordance with the relevant Codes of Practice and other official guidance. This policy should be approved by the relevant local authority member forum or relevant senior officer (where delegated).

All the Services had a suitable enforcement policy in place, and all had a range of appropriate enforcement procedures in place. These procedures play an important role in helping to ensure consistency between officers when delivering official controls. None of the eight LAs had found it necessary to carry out any formal enforcement activity in relation to shellfish traceability or the issuing of SRDs in the last 12 months. The LAs all had suitable guidance for officers though, should the need arise.

## Food Safety Incidents, Complaints and Infectious Disease Outbreaks

LAs are required to set up, maintain and implement documented policies and procedures for initiating and responding to food alerts, dealing with complaints and investigating outbreaks of infectious disease in accordance with the relevant Codes of Practice.

All the Services audited had appropriate documented policies and procedures in place, which required regular review to ensure they contain up to date legal references. All complaints and incidents relating to shellfish that were reviewed had been dealt with appropriately. No specific infectious disease outbreaks had been reported by the Services audited in relation to shellfish in the last 12 months.

## Internal Monitoring and Corrective Actions

LAs are required to set up, maintain and implement documented internal monitoring procedures to verify conformance with the Standard, relevant legislation and Codes of Practice, relevant centrally issued guidance and the Authority's own documented policies and procedures. They are also required to record all internal monitoring undertaken and to keep this for at least two years.

All eight LAs in the programme were able to provide an internal monitoring procedure, although not all LAs were currently implementing them. There was significant variation in the type and amount of internal monitoring activities being carried out by all eight LAs in the programme. Seven of the eight LAs (88%) were able to provide evidence of a range of internal monitoring activity across some elements of their service, including quantitative and qualitative monitoring. For most LAs, quantitative monitoring of intervention programmes was a strength, with detailed information on progress with intervention plans regularly issued and reported, often through the use of KPIs.

Seven of the eight LAs (88%) were also able to provide evidence of a range of qualitative monitoring of files, letters and inspection records across some of its service activities. Three of the eight LAs carried out monitoring in relation to completed SRDs and their SRD register. Five of the eight LAs were advised to extend the range of their internal monitoring activities to include all aspects of service delivery, including monitoring relating to shellfish traceability checks and SRDs. They should also ensure any identified corrective actions required as part of the internal monitoring process are implemented, completed and recorded. Appropriate risk based qualitative monitoring is essential to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and any centrally issued guidance and to ensure the effectiveness and consistency of the official controls being delivered.

Best practice

Internal monitoring:

- the development of a customer satisfaction survey that includes outcome focused questions on the business impacts of interventions - these questions should help the Service understand the impact of its official controls on FBO behaviours and allow it to make any necessary improvements
- the development of consistency exercises for officers based on real local examples - this should help the Service to deliver consistent and effective official controls

## Conclusions and Audit Opinion

Conclusions and Audit Opinion for Local Authority Shellfish Traceability Audit Summary Report (England) - July 2025

Based on the findings from the sample of LAs assessed, the system for the delivery of official controls in relation to shellfish traceability and in particular the issuing and monitoring of SRDs has been given a **moderate opinion** (see Annex E). All the SRDs issued by the LAs in the programme could be traced to point where ID marks were required. Suitable ID marks had been applied in all cases.

LAs were able to evidence effective liaison with other key stakeholders such as the various regional Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), Marine Management Organisation (MMO), local harbour masters, and other neighbouring LAs through the National and regional shellfish liaison groups.

These organisations all have different roles, responsibilities and powers in relation to shellfish harvesting. Continuing liaison is essential in maintaining and developing intelligence networks in relation to shellfish traceability. In the auditors' opinion, the traceability system could be strengthened through:

- improved LA service planning and service reviews, including better estimates of the resources needed to deliver controls including the issuing and monitoring of SRDs
- authorities improving the resilience of their service in relation to the delivery of shellfish controls, possibly through training and developing officers in this area of controls - most of the services audited were highly dependent upon a small number of very experienced officers to deliver specialist shellfish controls, including SRDs - this poses a potential threat to the delivery of these controls in the event of experienced staff retiring or otherwise leaving the profession
- greater focus on the checking of SRDs and shellfish ID marks during any relevant routine food safety interventions, to help to provide assurance on the safety and origins of any shellfish found for sale
- more qualitative internal monitoring of SRDs to ensure they are accurately completed and returned

The sharing of this report with all LAs and the improvements identified, along with any changes made by the FSA in response to the observations made at Annex B, should enhance the consistency and effectiveness of the official controls being delivered by these LAs and the wider enforcement community.

## Annexes

Annexes for Local Authority Shellfish Traceability Audit Summary Report (England) - July 2025

### Annex A : Summary of Recommendations Raised Against The Standard within the Framework Agreement

The number and percentage of LAs in the programme receiving a recommendation for each relevant area of the Standard in the Framework Agreement.

The Standard	Requirement	Total number of services
3.1, 3.2, 3.3 - Organisation, Service Planning and Management	Draw up, document and implement a service delivery plan	1 (13%)

The Standard	Requirement	Total number of services
3.1, 3.2, 3.3 - Organisation, Service Planning and Management	LA Service Plans should include an estimate of the staff resources required to deliver all the demands of the service including those needed to deliver controls related to shellfish traceability and compare it to the resources available, establishing any short fall and the plan to address it	7 (88%)
3.1, 3.2, 3.3 - Organisation, Service Planning and Management	A performance review should be carried out by the Authority at least once a year based on the service delivery plan, documented and submitted for approval to either the relevant member forum or, where approval and management of service delivery plans has been delegated to senior officers, to the relevant senior officer.	3 (38%)
5.1, 5.3, 5.5 - Authorised Officers	Records of relevant academic or other qualifications, training and experience of each authorised officer and appropriate support staff shall be maintained by the Authority in accordance with the relevant Codes of Practice.	1 (13%)
5.1, 5.3, 5.5 - Authorised Officers	Authorities should review their competency and training arrangements to ensure that there is a clear link between competency, training, and officer authorisations.	1 (13%)
4.1 & 4.2 - Review and Updating of Documented Policies and Procedures	Ensure that there are documented policies and procedures for each of its enforcement activities are in place.	1 (13%)
4.1 & 4.2 - Review and Updating of Documented Policies and Procedures	The Authority shall set-up, maintain and implement a control system for all documented policies and procedures including for its shellfish related enforcement activities in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice, the Food Law Practice Guidance.	5 (63%)
7.2 & 7.4 - Food and Feedingstuffs Establishments Interventions and Inspections	Carry out and document appropriate traceability checks at all relevant parts of the food chain, including shellfish harvesters.	2 (25%)
7.2 & 7.4 - Food and Feedingstuffs Establishments Interventions and Inspections	Record sufficient information of the officer's findings to indicate what was examined/inspected, how compliance with food law is achieved at the food business establishment, and any deficiencies identified.	2 (25%)
19.1 & 19.3 - Internal Monitoring	LAs must ensure internal monitoring procedures covering the full scope of the service delivery, are developed and implemented and that a risk-based approach to internal monitoring is applied.	3 (38%)
19.1 & 19.3 - Internal Monitoring	A record shall be made of all internal monitoring. This should be kept for 2 years.	2 (25%)

## Annex B: Observations for the FSA

The Standard	Observation
1. Training	Some of the Authorities audited felt that the FSA should have a greater role in organising, coordinating, and providing formal training courses relative to official controls relating to shellfish traceability and issuing SRDs.
2. Competency Assessment	Authorities raised concerns regarding the complexity and work involved in applying the FSAs Competency Framework.
3. Guidance	<p>Authorities would value further guidance and worked examples on the roles and responsibilities relating to shellfish traceability controls and issuing SRDs and PTAs. The nature of the shellfish industry can sometimes make it difficult to easily identify key responsibilities, especially when some organisations and individuals can have more than one legal entity in the supply chain.</p> <p>Further guidance on expectations regarding the issuing and monitoring of SRDs would be welcome.</p> <p>Some LAs mentioned that they would like to see an inspection template developed specifically for shellfish harvesting, including traceability checks.</p>
4. Internal monitoring	Further guidance on the delivery of effective risk based internal monitoring of service activities may improve the consistency of monitoring by LAs. This in turn should lead to better oversight of higher risk areas of work and more effective controls being delivered in relation to food hygiene.

## Annex C: Participating LAs

The FSA is grateful for the cooperation and assistance provided by the following Services that were audited as part of the programme:

- North Norfolk District Council
- Boston Borough Council
- Dorset Council
- Teignbridge District Council
- Westmorland and Furness Council
- East Suffolk Council
- Torbay Council
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council

## Annex D: Audit Methodology

The audits assessed LA implementation of official controls through:

1. Use of structured audit protocols and checklists for checks of Service files and database records relating to routine official controls relating to food establishments audits/inspections in connection with approved establishment, sampling and any resulting follow-up enforcement activities.
2. Meetings and interviews with officers.
3. Document reviews including all relevant food law enforcement service plans, policies and procedures.
4. A review of selected SRDs and associated documentation.
5. Reality visits of selected approved establishments.

## Annex E: Audit Opinion Definitions

### Audit opinion - assessment of assurance

Assurance	Definition
Substantial	The system for delivering official controls demonstrate effective implementation of planned arrangements suitable to achieve the objectives of legal requirements and guidance.
Moderate	The system for delivering official controls requires some improvement to fully demonstrate effective implementation of planned arrangements suitable to achieve the objectives of legal requirements and guidance.
Limited	The system for delivering official controls requires significant improvement to fully demonstrate effective implementation of planned arrangements suitable to achieve the objectives of legal requirements and guidance.
Unsatisfactory	The system for delivering official controls requires substantial improvement to fully demonstrate effective implementation of planned arrangements suitable to achieve the objectives of legal requirements and guidance.

## Annex F: FSA Auditors

The FSA auditors conducting this audit programme were:

- Alison Dugan, Senior Regulatory Auditor
- Jamie McMeeking, Senior Regulatory Auditor
- Allan Riley, Senior Regulatory Auditor
- Andrew Webb, Senior Regulatory Auditor
- Andrew Gangakhedkar, Head of Regulatory Audit

## Annex G: Glossary



Term	Definition
Authorised Officer	A suitably competent officer who is authorised by the local authority to act on its behalf in, for example, the enforcement of legislation.
Codes of Practice (FLCoP)	Government Codes of Practice issued under Section 40 of the Food Safety Act 1990 as guidance to local authorities on the enforcement of food legislation.
County Council	A local authority whose geographical area corresponds to the county and whose responsibilities include food standards and feeding stuffs enforcement.
District Council	A local authority of a smaller geographical area and situated within a County Council whose responsibilities include food hygiene enforcement.
Environmental Health Officer (EHO)	Officer employed by the local authority to enforce food safety legislation.
Food Safety Management System	A written permanent procedure, or procedures, based on HACCP principles. It is structured so that this requirement can be applied flexibly and proportionately according to the size and nature of the food business.
Food hygiene	The legal requirements covering the safety and wholesomeness of food.
Full Time Equivalents (FTE)	A figure which represents that part of an individual officer's time available to a particular role or set of duties. It reflects the fact that individuals may work part-time or may have other responsibilities within the organisation not related to food and feed enforcement.
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point – a food safety management system used within food businesses to identify points in the production process where it is critical for food safety that the control measure is carried out correctly, thereby eliminating or reducing the hazard to a safe level.
Service Plan	A document produced by a local authority setting out their plans on providing and delivering a food service to the local community.
Unitary Authority	A local authority in which the County and District Council functions are combined, examples being Metropolitan District/Borough Councils, and London Boroughs. A Unitary Authority's responsibilities will include food hygiene, food standards and feeding stuffs enforcement.

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