

# The Future of Food Recall Notifications

Report for



Food  
Standards  
Agency

**Food**  
Standards  
Scotland

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## 1. Executive summary

### Background and methodology

In 2016 the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) commenced a review to assess the effectiveness of food withdrawal and recall processes in the UK food retail sector. The purpose of the review was to better understand how industry and enforcement authorities complied with their legal obligations to ensure unsafe food was withdrawn from the market and recalled from consumers. The research (conducted by Kantar Public<sup>1</sup>) established that consumers' level of engagement with recall notices was low. They had low awareness of the channels of communication and were generally not proactive in seeking out recalls. This was in part because recall notices were not effectively placed and designed for reaching them. There is no industry standard across food businesses as to what food recall notifications look like or what information they include, and consumers see a need for a more consistent and efficient communication approach.

The Kantar Public research recommended that the way consumers are notified about food recalls needed to be improved and the introduction of **“a standard industry recall notification template accompanied by best practice procedures for food businesses to follow in their communications with customers”**.

**“Kantar Public suggests that the FSA/FSS introduces a standard industry recall notification template accompanied by best practice procedures for food businesses to follow in their communications with consumers. These should be based on the consumer feedback discussed in section 5 of the report and ideally be validated by further consumer research before being introduced. Further message testing research with consumers could be usefully undertaken to ensure the communications are effective.”**

FSA/FSS commissioned further research to build on the existing evidence base and provide further insight work with consumers to better understand the exact nature of their requirements for a **standardised food recall/allergy notice template**, which food businesses can use to alert people to a food recall. Further to this, FSA/FSS wanted to test their own digital assets used to communicate about food recalls (social media and website) to test how well these are performing for consumers, and how they could be improved.

This report covers a multi-method (qualitative and quantitative) exploration and development of a recall notification template that fits the needs of the UK public. This piece of work used an iterative approach: with a UK wide digital task testing existing recall notifications; 4 x days of fast paced iteration and development of potential new designs and content in London, Cardiff, Glasgow and Belfast and a nationally representative online survey to test final content and design. All research was conducted by 2CV and Community Research, the FSA's Citizens' Forum research partners.

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<sup>1</sup> FSA/FSS Efficacy of Recalls. London: Kantar Public, 2017. Accessed December 17, 2018.  
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171207163607/https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/recalls-efficacy-report.pdf>

## Main findings

**Consumers currently have little awareness of food recalls/allergy alerts – they expect information to be pushed to them and very few proactively put measures in place to be notified of recalls when they occur.**

Overall, consumers have relatively low awareness of food recalls or allergy alerts – it is not something they are actively looking out for or paying attention to<sup>2</sup>. As a result, very few put proactive measures in place to keep themselves informed; when people do find out about a recall or allergy alert, it is usually because it has received a lot of media attention and the information has been pushed to consumers.

Given that most people are not actively seeking out information about recalls, point of sale notices (POS) for both food recalls and allergy alerts often go unnoticed. Some consumers in our qualitative sample could recall having seen a POS notice in their local supermarket, but very few could recall what the notice said or what action it was asking them to take. There was consensus among consumers that current notices are not working hard enough to grab their attention, and that the way information is presented within notices can often make it difficult to discern i) what the issue is ii) what has been done about it and iii) what (if any action) is required of them as a consumer.

Similarly, consumers had little knowledge of the different channels and sources of information they could draw on to find out about food recalls or allergy alerts. As part of this research, we explored awareness and understanding of FSA/FSS digital assets (website and social media channels). As with POS notices, consumers had little knowledge that these sources of information exist and when they were asked to interrogate the information, they similarly found it difficult to understand what the core message was and what they were expected to do as a result.<sup>3</sup>

**There are key content and design needs that need to be met for consumers to engage with, understand and take action off the back of food recall notifications/allergy alerts.**

The content of current notices (whether at the POS or through FSA/FSS digital assets) can be confusing to many consumers: the key job of telling them what they need to do and what has already been done on their behalf is often not achieved. For example, many consumers reported believing affected products were still on the shelf and many felt unsure where to find batch codes or even what a batch code is.

This research confirmed the need for a clear information hierarchy and accompanying design guidelines to form the basis of an ‘industry wide’ template that can be used to better inform the public of food recalls/allergy alerts. The quantitative findings of this work echo the principles identified in the qualitative work that are important in driving understanding, engagement and action.

In terms of **information principles**, consumers want to be told:

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<sup>2</sup> The exception being people with allergies and food intolerances, who were more likely to pay attention to food/allergy recalls and have some awareness of how to find out this information- via e-mail alerts or social media.

<sup>3</sup> This was less pronounced for FSA/FSS social media notices, which were felt to be quite eye-catching. However, it was still hard for consumers to confidently identify the issue or affected product.

**What the problem is:** Make it easy for customers to identify the issue/problem

- ✓ Use a clear title to indicate what this is– this is a recall / allergy alert
- ✓ Use titles in header to communicate what the danger / risk to consumers is – e.g. salmonella; small metal pieces, etc.
- ✓ Use large/clear pictures of products to help identify relevance of product (where feasible)

**What they can do about it:** Clearly communicate what consumers need to do next if the issue is relevant

- ✓ Use clear and plain language (*'What you should do'* vs *'Our advice to consumers'*) to communicate next steps for consumers
- ✓ Use bullet points to break down information into simple and easy to follow steps
- ✓ Clear instruction on where to find detail (batch codes; sell by dates) to identify affected products
- ✓ Reassure consumers about the actions that have already been taken (e.g. *all affected products have already been removed from the shelves*)

**Exactly how to do it:** Clearly communicate *how* consumers take next steps

- ✓ Clear direction of what to do if you have purchased the product
- ✓ Clear method/channel for more information
- ✓ Use boxing and borders to draw attention to detail

In terms of **key design principles**, consumers want to be able to understand what it is they are looking at and whether the information is relevant to them, at a glance. To this end, the recall needs to:

**Be bright and eye-catching: Make it easy for people to identify what the communication is**

- ✓ Clear and easy to read: Using a simple layout; large font; banners with clear headings and sub-headings
- ✓ Use colour and iconography to grab attention: Use of the colour red to denote risk; and use of iconography (e.g., an exclamation mark), banners, boxes and bordering to draw attention to crucial information
- ✓ Include a product image: Where feasible, using an image of the affected product to draw attention
- ✓ Concisely worded: Lay out information in a clear, simple and jargon-free manner, using bullet points or numbers to help organise information clearly.

We put these principles into action and road-tested them by creating new iterations of the POS notices and FSA/FSS digital assets and comparing how they performed in terms of engagement, understanding and likelihood to act, compared to existing POS notices and FSA/FSS digital assets, using an online, nationally representative quantitative survey. The new designs outperformed existing POS notices and existing FSA/FSS digital assets across all of the above-mentioned principles (though less so for social media).

The research evidenced that the newly designed POS notices and FSA/FSS digital assets also work better to increase consumer understanding that:

- Retailers have already removed products from shelves (particularly for POS notices)

- Only certain batches (not all products) are affected by recalls
- Only affected items should be returned to the store
- The product is not safe to consume and should not be eaten (particularly for POS notices)

Importantly, none of the redesigned POS notices or FSA/FSS digital assets had any negative impact on how consumers feel towards retailers or brands.

Based on these findings, the research recommends following these principles when communicating to the public about food/allergy recalls going forward, to help drive consumer engagement, understanding and propensity to take the required action.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background and context

Currently, when food needs to be recalled from consumers for food safety reasons, the food industry will often use a point of sale (POS) notification to alert consumers to the recall. This will often be displayed physically in stores and on company websites. Some companies will also contact consumers directly where they have relevant customer contact details, for example through customer loyalty schemes and from on-line sales, although this is not standard industry practice. In addition, the FSA and FSS will issue a food alert.

### 2.2 Research objectives

In July 2018 the FSA commissioned 2CV and Community Research to conduct research with the general public to understand the channels, content and style that most support effective consumer awareness of, attention to and (if desired/necessary) action around food recalls. The overarching research aims were to inform:

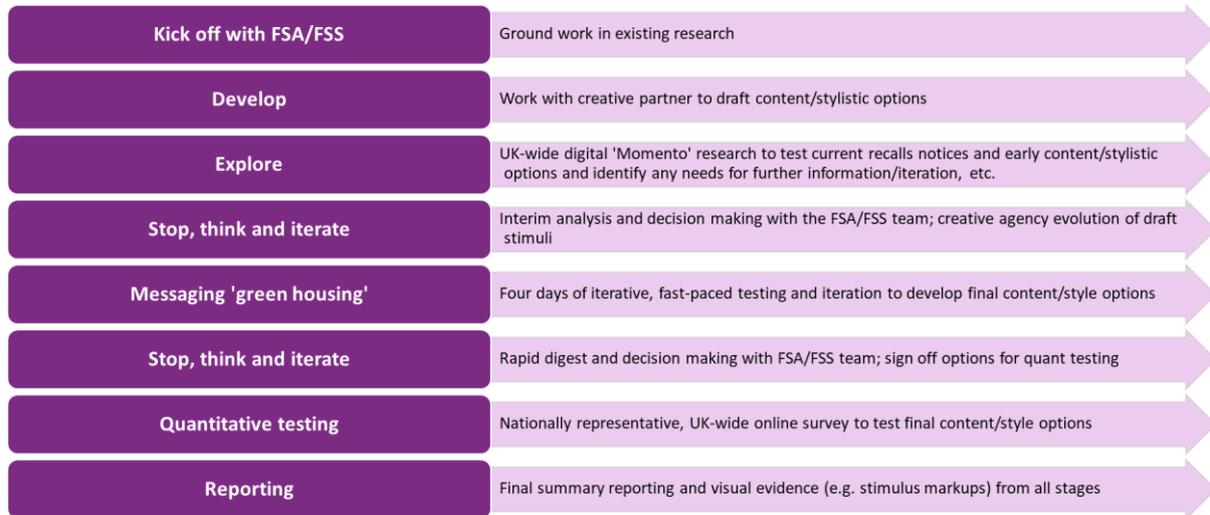
- Style and appearance for a standardised food industry recall notice/allergy alert for consumers;
  - Including informing the style and appearance of FSA/FSS's digital assets (website and social media)
- Necessary content to be contained within a standardised food industry recall notice/allergy alert for consumers;
  - Including informing the content of FSA/FSS's digital assets (website and social media)
- Best location for food industry food recall notices (both in store and on-line)
- Effective channels for industry to use to communicate recall notices to consumers

## 3. Research methodology

### 3.1 Overview

The research approach was designed to ensure that this research moved the FSA and FSS beyond its existing starting point of relative consumer understanding surrounding food recalls/allergy alerts communications to a position of confidence regarding the needs and priorities of both businesses and consumers. As such, a staged, iterative approach (taking on board the views of FSA/FSS's industry stakeholders at critical stages of the research) was chosen to gather public views on how to co-create and develop designs that would meet consumer needs. A critical element of our approach was to work closely with a creative design partner, *Perfect Day* London, to design and tweak recall notifications to test throughout the process.

**Figure 1 Methodology overview**



### 3.2 Methodology break-down

Three separate research phases were used:

#### Stage 1 – Qualitative exploration of the current landscape

Consumer research with **36 people** covering all UK countries via 2CV’s proprietary Digital Research app *Momento* exploring ‘what happens now’ with the public, their needs and priorities for ‘what should happen’. We ran online activity for one week, with structured questions and prompts designed to: get feedback on the current content<sup>4</sup> and style of recalls and then returning for iterative follow-up, with new tasks designed to explore reasons for any points of confusion/gaps/particularly helpful or unhelpful style and content, etc.

#### Stage 2 - Qualitative notification development and evaluation using a ‘green housing’ methodology

The focus of the face-to-face methodology was to iteratively test and develop new recall notifications across different channels (POS notices, FSA/FSS social media and the FSA/FSS websites). This method involved four days of iterative testing (‘green housing’) with the general public, including specialist audiences (People with specific allergies; specific health issues e.g. poor health, immunocompromised, pregnant women, sensory needs, etc.) across the UK. These sessions were a series of rolling, back-to-back co-design sessions with the public lasting approximately one hour: 3 mini-groups of 3-4 people each per day - **46 consumer voices represented**. 2CV and Community Research ran the sessions while FSA/ FSS, industry stakeholders and creative partners *Perfect Day* watched sessions from behind the one-way mirror at a viewing facility. After each session, iterative informal brainstorms were held to agree potential tweaks and new approaches to test. These mock-ups were re-designed by a *Perfect Day* designer, before being re tested with a fresh group of participants.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of all notifications (in situ and sole notices) tested in the digital phase are included in Appendix A

**Figure 2 Illustration of the green housing process**



**Sample summary**

<b>Gender</b>	
Male	23 x respondents
Female	23 x respondents
<b>Lifestage</b>	
Younger Family (at least one child <11);	18x respondents
Older Family (at least one child 11+);	16 x respondents
Empty Nesters	12 x respondents
<b>Specialist audience</b>	
Food allergies (themselves or family member); Specific health issues (e.g. poor health, immunocompromised, pregnant women, sensory needs)	10 x respondents
<b>Social grade</b>	
BC1	23 x respondents
C2DE	23 x respondents
<b>Geography</b>	
Urban/suburban	25 x respondents
Rural	21 x respondents

Additional sample criteria:

- All were solely or jointly responsible for food purchasing in the household
- Cultural background: A mix of different religious and ethnic groups
- Shopping: A mix of shopping habits (big weekly, local stores, on-line; in-store)

**Stage 3 – Quantitative testing**

The final phase was a quantitative 15-minute online survey with a UK-wide nationally representative sample of 973 respondents. All respondents had some responsibility for their household food shopping. This phase of research looked at attention, understanding and likelihood of taking correct action for the redesigned notices as developed at the qualitative stage (POS notices, FSA/FSS social media and the FSA/FSS websites), compared with existing notices.

The quantitative survey covered 3 key elements:

**1. Consumer interaction with food recall/ allergy notices**

- Awareness of food recall/allergy notices
- Expected locations for food recall/allergy alert notices
- Likelihood of sharing food recall/ allergy notices

**2. Quantitative testing of food recall/ allergy notices.** Respondents were allocated into one of 8 cells, with the profile of each cell demographically matched to the overall nationally representative quotas. Respondents were allocated to the cell which had the fewest number of respondents who shared the same demographic characteristics (age, gender, region, and social grade) as the respondent in question. This ensures an even spread of demographics across each of the eight cells. Each respondent answered questions in depth about one notice, either re-designed or original, depending on which cell they were allocated to.

Cell structure:

Alert type	Channel	Notice seen
Food recall	Website	Original
		Redesigned
	Social media	Original
		Redesigned
	Point of Sale	Original
		Redesigned
Allergy alert	Point of Sale	Original
		Redesigned

Cell quotas:

Gender	
Male	49%
Female	51%
<b>Age</b>	
16-24	14%
25-34	17%
35-44	16%
45-54	17%
55-64	14%
65+	22%
<b>Region</b>	
Scotland	8%
Northern Ireland	3%
Wales	5%
England, North	24%
England, Mid	25%
England, South	35%
<b>Social Economic Status</b>	
AB	22%
C1	31%
C2	21%
DE	26%

### 3. Our analysis compares the performance of each notice

- Redesigned notices were evaluated on multiple measures:
  - Attention, understanding and clarity of action needed
  - Consumer take out of messaging
  - Likelihood of consumers to take correct action
  - Impact on perceptions of the brand/retailer
- This was followed by a direct comparison of existing and redesigned notices, with respondents rating the notice they had just seen against the equivalent original or redesigned notice.

### 4. Key elements to include in Food Recall/ Allergy notices

- Using Hotspots, consumers identified which areas of the notices help to:
  - Grab attention
  - Identify the product
  - Work out if affected
  - Work out who to contact/ where to go for further information
  - Communicate what to do if purchased

A summary of existing and redesigned notices shown in the quantitative survey is included in Appendix B.

## 4. Main findings

### 4.1 Context – how recalls currently fit into consumers’ lives

All phases of this project reiterated what previous research established - that consumers have a fairly high awareness of recent food recall events but overall awareness and understanding of the process and other examples of recalls was vague. In the exploration phase, over half the sample spontaneously mentioned the Listeria outbreak in frozen vegetable products that occurred at the time of research. This recollection was prompted primarily due to large-scale media coverage<sup>5 6 7</sup>. that occurred at the time.

**“Recently there was a recall for frozen peas + sweetcorn, recalled from Iceland, Tesco, Sainsburys and some other stores. It was in the newspapers (Record, Times) and in the media.”**  
**Male, 36, Scotland, Digital phase**

<sup>5</sup> "Supermarkets Recall Frozen Vegetables over Listeria Fears," BBC, July 06, 2018, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-44739472>.

<sup>6</sup> Hollie Borland, "Tesco, Lidl, Aldi, Iceland, Sainsbury's and Waitrose Products Pulled from Shelves Due to Deadly Listeria Outbreak," The Sun, July 9, 2018, , accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/money/6709461/tesco-lidl-aldi-iceland-products-pulled-from-shelves-due-to-deadly-listeria-outbreak/>

<sup>7</sup> Caitlin Morrison, "UK Supermarkets Recall Frozen Vegetables over Listeria Outbreak Fears," Independent, July 7, 2018, , accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/aldi-lidl-iceland-sainsburys-tesco-waitrose-recall-frozen-vegetables-listeria-outbreak-a8434571.html>.

In line with the *Kantar Public* research, news channels, POS notices and social media remained the three key sources of consumer awareness and finding out about recent recalls

Despite these sources of information, overall awareness of food recalls remained low with most consumers showing some vague awareness (referencing recalls for baby food, meat and bakery products, etc.) and others, very little to no awareness. Of those who had vague recollections, the reason for the recall was rarely remembered.

**“I can remember seeing a chocolate bar being recalled but I can’t remember why. I remember another time seeing pork products from certain supermarkets being recalled because they may have carried a disease”.**

**Female, 25, England, Digital phase**

Based on the feedback of respondents in both the digital and face-to-face qualitative phases, very few put proactive measures in place to notify themselves about recalls and very few mentioned a direct action because of seeing a recall announcement. Childcare professionals and families with allergy sufferers were the exception, with some reporting they had signed up to email alerts and had removed unsafe food items following a recall announcement.

**“I’ve had experience with several online recalls as I have two children with allergies so get alerts on foods recalled due to contamination etc.”**

**Male, 44, Northern Ireland, Digital phase**

[FOLLOWING LISTERIA OUTBREAK]

**“This was relevant to me as we use frozen sweetcorn in the Nursery where I work and had some stored in the freezer, this was immediately thrown away.”**

**Female, 54, Wales, Digital phase**

On balance, most consumers understand the ‘product recall’ and ‘allergy alert’ terminology but do not proactively look for such notices; they expect such information to come to them.

#### 4.2 Establishing what consumers want from recall notifications

In spite of an often vague awareness of notifications, consumers did have some clear expectations and needs for recall notices in four priority areas:

1. *Style and appearance*: to help drive standout
2. *Necessary content*: the basic information required to help inform whether consumers need to engage with the recall
3. *Best location*: to ensure notifications are seen
4. *Effective channels*: to ensure breadth of coverage

Participants identified specific features for each priority area they felt added clarity to notifications and would likely prompt some form of action, if necessary:

## Style & Appearance

- Clear and easy to read:
  - Simple layout
  - Large, legible font
  - Headings + sub-headings to break up information for longer notices
- Bright and eye-catching visuals and design
- Use of intuitive colours and symbols to connote warning or danger (e.g. red colour and warning iconography)
- Concise information

## Necessary Content

- The brand/product name of the food affected
- Reason for the recall
- Specific dates when the product(s) deemed 'unsafe'
- Names of retailers stocking products
- Product image (ideally in colour)
- Actions for consumers to take
- Customer contact number
- Where to return items and claim refund
- Batch number affected/Barcode

## Best Location

Location preferences varied but there was a call for both online\*<sup>1</sup> and in-store notices.

### In-store:

- Prominent and visible
- At eye-level

\*<sup>1</sup> Online locations/channels (vs. in-store) split consumer attitudes more noticeably, depending on shopping preferences (in-store vs. online) and social media usage. Some also expressed concerns about false/malicious alerts' and the risk of emails being directed to 'Junk' mail boxes

## Effective Channels



- **Multi-channel strategy**  
Again, channel preferences varied but consumers expected to be notified via a *number* of channels to ensure widespread awareness
- **Targeted communications:** There was some appetite for more targeted communication via retailer loyalty schemes (e.g. store receipts, personalised emails, website), app notifications etc.

### 4.3 How current notifications perform against key criteria

When evaluating how well current examples of recall notifications delivered against the criteria referenced above, it was felt that they delivered relatively well in terms of *Style and appearance* and *Necessary Content* but areas for improvement were identified that could make notifications more effective. Areas included:

1. **Greater use of intuitive colours and symbols to connote warning or danger to aid with messages ‘cutting through’ to consumers**
2. **Specific dates of when product(s) deemed ‘unsafe’ to better understand if the notification was relevant to reader**
3. **Image of product to help determine relevance**
4. **A clear call to action**

With regards to *Best Location* and *Effective Channels* criteria participants views on how well these elements did were far more mixed. Consumers praised notifications which were easily noticeable (those located at entrances and exits) and away from any other store ‘distractions’.

**“The best place is probably on the front door to the store, but it needs to be easily spotted and not surrounded by advertisements.”**  
**Male, 56, Northern Ireland, Digital phase**

Other suggestions from consumers included: basket areas, trolley parks, petrol stations, dedicated noticeboards and doctor surgeries (depending on severity of the issue). In terms of best location/positioning of recalls, at ‘eye-level’ was regarded as important.

Awareness of the FSA/FSS as a source of food recall/allergy alert information was low (which is in line with findings from the Kantar research). None of the qualitative sample were familiar with the current FSA/FSS social media alerts. When discussing social media (*Twitter* and *Facebook* more specifically) as a platform for FSA/FSS alerts, there was also some concern that only a small minority would see the social media alerts or be directed to the FSA/FSS websites. Given the ‘scrolling’/‘scanning’ nature of navigating social media, others worried about ‘missing’ alerts unless friends ‘shared’ posts/ ‘tagged’ them - without proactively ‘following’ the FSA/FSS, it felt unlikely that such posts would come onto their radars.

**“I think the amount of people following FSA on social media would be fairly niche. I’ve just had a look and see they have 47k followers which is more than I would have thought. However, recent food recall notices have only been retweeted a handful of times out of this pool of 47k.”**

**Male, 36, Northern Ireland, Digital phase**

**“I do not remember seeing notices like this before, but if I had seen them and they were relevant to me I would definitely respond to them. They would be hard to find as it is unlikely you would be searching for these pages; however, they would be circulated by people sharing them over social media which is a useful way for messages to spread.”**

**Female, 25, England, Digital phase**

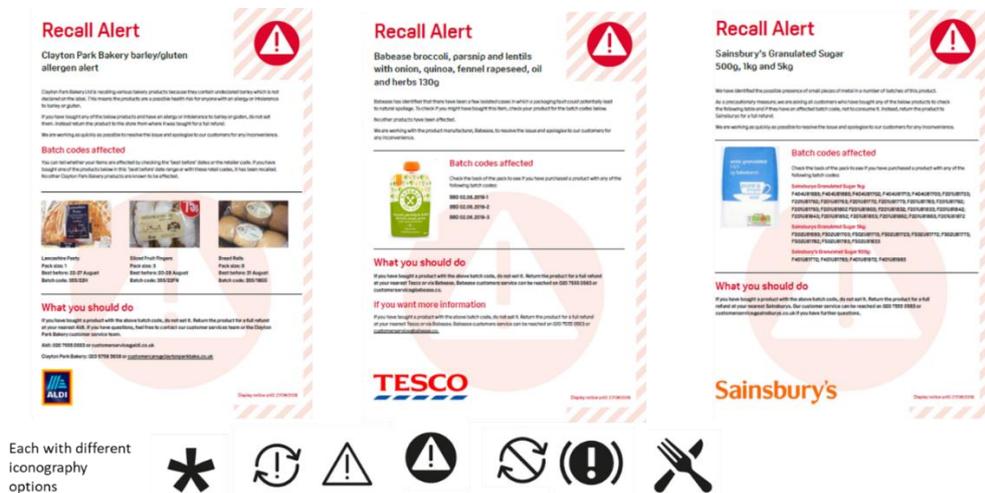
However, once consumers were presented with the FSA/FSS as a source of product recall/allergy information, they did tend to respond positively and showed support for the organisations’ role in disseminating information.

#### 4.4 The development of notifications

Following on from the digital phase, interim analysis with the research team, FSA/FSS and industry and special audiences stakeholders (representatives from retailers and allergy organisations) was conducted to help inform the look, feel and content of notifications to be tested and developed in the green housing phase. The 1<sup>st</sup> iteration of the design initially tested included the following key features:

Feature
Use of a graphic asset / icon used consistently to depict a product recall food alert or allergy alert
A large heading naming the communication i.e. Product recall - food alert or allergy alert
Brand and name of the product
The Name of the retailer stocking the product.
Image of the product
Product details including the <u>Best Before date</u> and the <u>Batch code</u>
What is the issue that necessitates a recall
What action consumers should take
A direction to further information regarding the recall or alert

**Figure 3 Initial point of sale notifications tested in the focus group**



Each with different iconography options

Figure 4 Initial FSA/FSS digital assets tested (Social Media and websites)



Each with different iconography options



#### 4.5 Consumer needs: food recalls information content and design

The face-to-face element of this research confirmed that when simply asked what they want, consumers often say they want a lot more information than they actually use. What soon becomes apparent is the public want messaging to be simple, easy to understand and stripped back. Imagery cuts through powerfully and circumvents the need for lots of detail. It is also the fastest way for consumers to decipher whether the information is relevant to them and needs to be acted upon.

The format and content of current messaging can be confusing to many consumers: the key job of telling them what they need to do and what has already been done is often not achieved. Many consumers believed affected products are still on the shelf; were unsure where to find the batch codes or more importantly, how to record details to check when they are home.

**“I find the line ‘our advice to consumers confusing’, just tell me what I need to do.” Session 2 Belfast, Green housing phase**

**“So does that mean the affected product is still on the shelf and I shouldn’t buy it?” Session 1 Cardiff, Green housing phase**

**“There are so many batch codes on here- how can I possibly remember them all and check if I’ve actually purchased this product?”  
Session 2 Cardiff, Green housing phase**

By and large, consumers want to be alerted of the issue and what they can do about it. Research quickly established participants’ information hierarchy and what they prioritised. Respondents broke the hierarchy down into three core elements: **Critical Information; Important information; ‘Nice-to-have’**.

Critical Information was defined by consumers as clear information that could help them identify the relevance of the communication and what they needed to. Critical information would need to answer the following types of questions:

1. *What is the problem?*
2. *What can I do about it?*
3. *How can I do it?*
4. *What has the retailer done to solve the issue?*

An example of how these questions might be answered can be found in the principles outlined below:

**Tell me what the problem is: Make it easy for customers to identify the issue/problem**

- ✓ Use clear title to indicate what this is– this is a recall / allergy alert
- ✓ Use titles in header communicate what the danger / risk to consumers is – e.g. salmonella; small metal pieces, etc.
- ✓ Use large/clear picture of products to help identify relevance of product (where feasible)

**Tell me what I can do about it: Clearly communicate what consumers need to do next if issue is relevant**

- ✓ Use clear and plain language (*‘What you should do’* vs *‘Our advice to consumers’*) to communicate next steps for consumers
- ✓ Use bullet points to break down information into simple and easy to follow steps
- ✓ Clear instruction on where to find detail (batch codes; sell by dates) to identify affected products
- ✓ Reassure consumers about the actions that have already been taken (e.g. *all affected products have already been removed from the shelves*)

**Tell me exactly how to do it: Clearly communicate *how* consumers take next steps**

- ✓ Clear direction of what to do if you have purchased the product
- ✓ Clear method/channel for more information
- ✓ Use boxing and borders to draw attention to detail

Important Information: This was defined as information that felt important to customers but was not critical to their understanding of the message and call to action. This was:

- Information on how to easily share recalls with friends and family

‘Nice-to-have’: Links or signposting on notices about where to go for more information were appreciated by consumers but didn’t feel critical nor important

In terms of the design of recall notifications, consumers want design elements that make it easy for them to decipher what the notification is telling them and whether or not it is relevant to them. An example of how this could be achieved can be found below:

**Make it bright and eye-catching: Make it easy for people to identify what the communication is**

- ✓ Clear and easy to read: Using a simple layout; large font; banners with clear headings and sub-headings
- ✓ Use colour and iconography to grab attention: Use of the colour red to denote risk; and use of iconography (e.g., an exclamation mark), banners, boxes and bordering to draw attention to crucial information
- ✓ Product image: Where feasible, using an image of the affected product to draw attention
- ✓ Concisely worded: Lay out information in a clear, simple and jargon-free manner, using bullet points or numbers to help organise information clearly.

Note: The same iconography and colouring used as a consistent shorthand for recall across notifications can build familiarity

**Figure 5 Point of Sale notifications design at the end of the green housing phase**

# Recall Alert



## Salmonella Alert

Newbridge Meats is recalling Debbie & Andrew's Flexilicious Chilli Con Carne Beef sausages because of the possible presence of salmonella (an organism that causes food poisoning). This means the products are a possible health risk. All affected products have been removed from the shelf and are no longer being sold, but you should check your previously bought products.

**No other Newbridge Meats products are affected.**



**Newbridge Meats Debbie & Andrew's Flexilicious Chilli Con Carne beef Sausages in England and Wales**

Debbie & Andrew's Flexilicious Chilli Con Carne Beef Sausages

Pack size: 6

Best before: 22-27 August

Batch code: POR/NEW99

**⚠ What should you do**

If you have already bought the below product, do not eat it. If you have already eaten it please contact your GP.

- 1 Check to see if the product you have already bought has the 'batch code' and 'best before' date featured above. You may need to look at the back of the packaging.
- 2 You may want to take a picture of the above information, or write down the 'batch code' and 'best before' date, for easy reference at home.
- 3 Return the product to the store for a full refund (with or without receipt).

**Want more information?**

Contact the supermarket customer service line on 0800 734 4385 or the manufacturer (Newbridge Meat) on (07899 810649) if you want more information about actions taken.

1

**Figure 6 FSA/FSS social media notifications design at the end of the green housing phase**



As they navigated recall notifications, participants in the green housing phase identified some information that felt less important to them, namely:

- The detail around how the food recalls process works
- The actions taken by the company (anything besides reassurance it's been taken off the shelves)
- How to sign up or subscribe to future notices

#### 4.6 Consumer needs: food recall channels

When discussing how they wanted this information to reach them, people were open to it being communicated through a range of channels. Point of sale continued to play an important role with the majority of consumers wanting communications as close to the moment of purchase as possible. There was some preference for notices to be in multiple locations in-store (e.g. on shelves near where the product was sold or at check-out). The FSA/FSS websites were perceived to be a trustworthy source of information although with limited reach (even among those with specific dietary needs/allergies). As such, the websites could form part of a multi-channel approach that includes e-mail and social media. There was interest from some consumers in being sign-posted to the FSA/FSS website via the POS notice. There was agreement across age groups that social media plays an important role in keeping the public informed. There was some awareness of recall notices being shared already, via friends or family.

#### 4.7 Preparing for the quantitative phase

The findings from the green housing sessions were shared with the FSA/FSS and its stakeholder group to: evaluate the last iteration designs in terms of feasibility; and to discuss what elements to focus on for the final and quantitative phase of research. Following discussions with retail, industry and allergy interest groups the following design changes were made:

- 1. Removal of symptoms information to avoid possible panic and public presenting at GPs/A&E**

2. Removal of free phone number to keep costs manageable for retail and brands
3. Reintroduction of multiple batch codes rather than a range sell-by-dates to allow greater detection of affected products
4. Two ways of depicting multiple products with images when multiple products being recalled

Figure 7 Point of sale notification tested in quantitative phase

## Recall Alert

Product Recall - Listeria Alert

**Ewing Seafoods Organic Smoked Salmon, Original Recipe Smoked Salmon**

We are recalling batches of Organic Smoked Salmon and Original Recipe Smoked Salmon, as they may be contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes* (an organism that causes food borne illness). *Listeria monocytogenes* has been confirmed in one batch of the product (see below). All recalled items have been taken off the shelf.

**Ewing Seafoods Organic Smoked Salmon and Original Recipe Smoked Salmon**

**All pack sizes and batch codes affected:**

**Best before: 22-27 August 2020**

**Batch code: POR/NEW99**

**Check the 'batch code' and 'best before' date on the product you have purchased. The 'batch code' and 'best before' date can be found on the back of the packaging.**

No other Ewing Seafood products are affected.

---

**What you should do**

If you have bought any of the above products do not eat them. Instead, return them to the store from where they were bought for a full refund.

If you have already bought the above product, do not eat it. Instead:

- Check to see if the product you have already bought has the above 'batch code' and 'best before' date on the pack.
- You may want to take a picture of the below information, or write down the 'batch code' and 'best before' date, for easy reference at home
- Return the product to the store for a full refund (with or without receipt).

**Want more information?**

For more information contact the manufacturer ([Ewing Seafoods](#)) on 01234 567 890.

Date: 27/06/2020

## Food Allergy Alert

Barley/Gluten

We are recalling various bakery products because they contain undeclared barley which is not declared on the label. This means the products pose a possible health risk for anyone with an allergy or intolerance to barley or gluten. Affected products have already been taken off the shelf.

We are working as quickly as possible to resolve the issue and apologise to our customers for any inconvenience.

**Check the Batch codes affected**

You can tell whether your items are affected by checking the 'batch codes' and 'use by' date ranges listed below. Compare this information with the 'batch codes' and 'use by' date information on your purchased products. Batch code and 'use by' date information can be found on the back of the packaging of each product.

**Lancashire Pastry**  
Pack size: 1  
Use by: 22-27 August 2020  
Batch code: 355/2284

**What you should do**

If you have bought any of the affected products listed below and have an allergy or intolerance to barley or gluten, do not eat them. Return the product for a full refund at the store you purchased it from (with or without receipt). If you have questions, feel free to contact our customer service team.

Clayton Park Bakery: 09876 543 210 or [customers@claytonpark.com](#)

Display notice until: 27/06/2020

Figure 8 FSA/FSS Social media and website notifications tested in quantitative phase



#### 4.8 Performance of new food recall designs

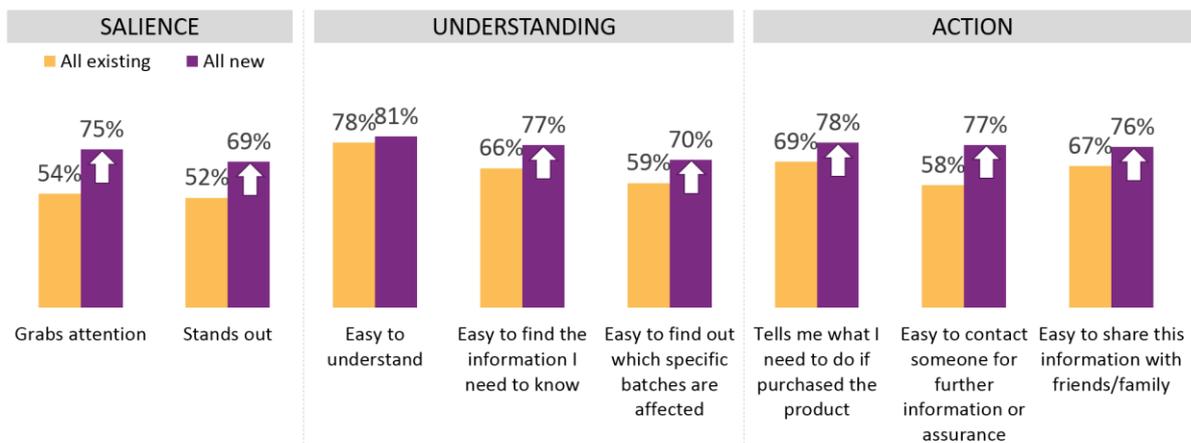
We put the principles<sup>8</sup> developed in the qualitative stages into action and tested them by creating new iterations of the POS notices and FSA/FSS digital assets and comparing how they performed in terms of engagement, understanding and likelihood to act, compared to existing notices, using a nationally representative quantitative survey.

For the quantitative stage, differences between the redesigned and original notices were subject to statistical significance testing to help identify whether changes in the scores could be attributed to chance. We used a proportion comparison (z-test) to test for statistically significant differences at the 95% level of confidence.

The redesigned food recall notices had a statistically significant (at 95% level of confidence) uplift in performance for a range of measures, including being more attention grabbing, easier to understand and easier to action.

Figure 9 shows the difference between existing and redesigned notices, comparing those who were shown any existing notice (POS notices, FSA/FSS social media and FSA/FSS websites) to those shown any redesigned notice on levels of salience, understanding and action.

**Figure 9 Comparison of salience, understanding and action (existing vs redesigned notices)**



**All notices** QUANT SURVEY Q6 Looking at this food recall notice, how strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Base: All who saw Any old notice (491), any new notice (482) ↑ = significantly different vs existing notice

The redesigned notices performed significantly better across a range of measures including: being more attention grabbing and standing out, ease of finding information and telling consumers what to do next.

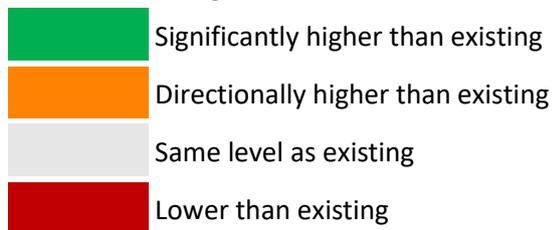
Improvement across the above measures was particularly strong for the redesigned point of sale food recall and allergy notices (as shown in Figure 10). Differences were less marked for social media.

<sup>8</sup> These key principles are: Tell the consumer what to do; tell the consumer what they can do about it; tell the consumer exactly how to do it; reassure the consumer that you have taken appropriate action; use simple, consumer facing language and strip out unnecessary words

**Figure 10 Performance of redesigned notices**

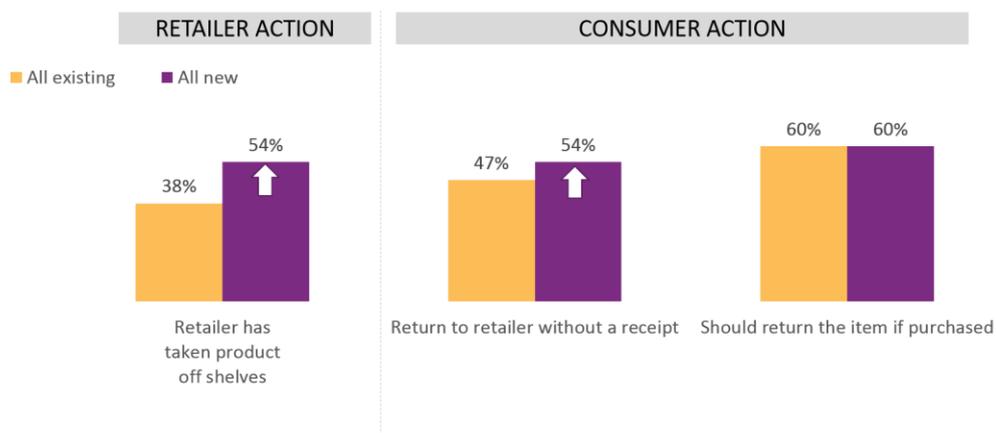
	Recall Notice	Allergy Notice	FSA/FSS Website	FSA/FSS Social Media
Grabs attention	✓	✓	✓	
Stands out		✓	✓	
Easy to understand		✓		
Easy to find the information I need to know	✓	✓		
Easy to find out which specific batches are affected	✓	✓		
Tells me what I need to do if purchased the product	✓			
Easy to contact someone for further information or assurance	✓	✓	✓	
Easy to share this information with friends/family	✓	✓		

**Result for redesigned notice**



The redesigned notices also increased the likelihood of consumers recognising the key actions to take (Figure 11).

**Figure 11 Message take out: retailer and consumer action**



**All notices** QUANT SURVEY Q7 Which of the following messages do you take out from this notice?  
 Base: All who saw Any old notice (491), any new notice (482), excluding allergy notices old notice (369), new notice (358)

 = significantly different vs existing notice

Those who saw a redesigned notice were significantly more likely to take out the message that the retailer has already taken the product off the shelves (54% compared with 38% who saw an existing notice). This difference was significant for both the point of sale food recall and allergy notices.

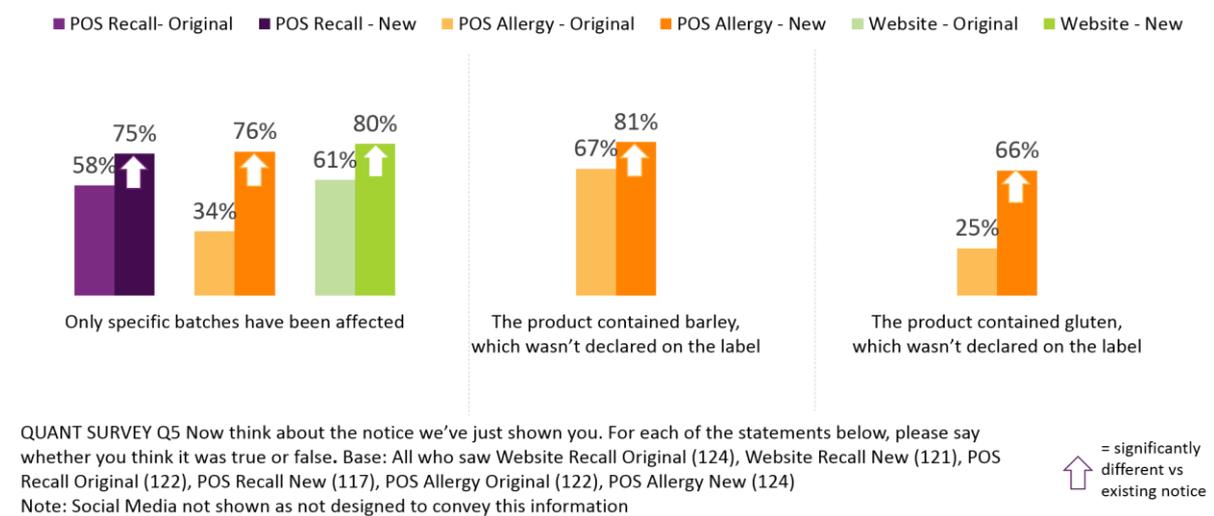
Message take out that consumers are able to return products to a retailer without a receipt was also significantly higher for the redesigned notices (54% compared with 47% for existing notices). This was also significantly higher for both point of sale food recall and allergy notices. Although not statistically significant, the redesigned point of sale recall notices were directionally more likely to make consumers aware that the product is not safe to consume and that if purchased, the item should not be eaten.

**Figure 12 Message take out: Product safety**



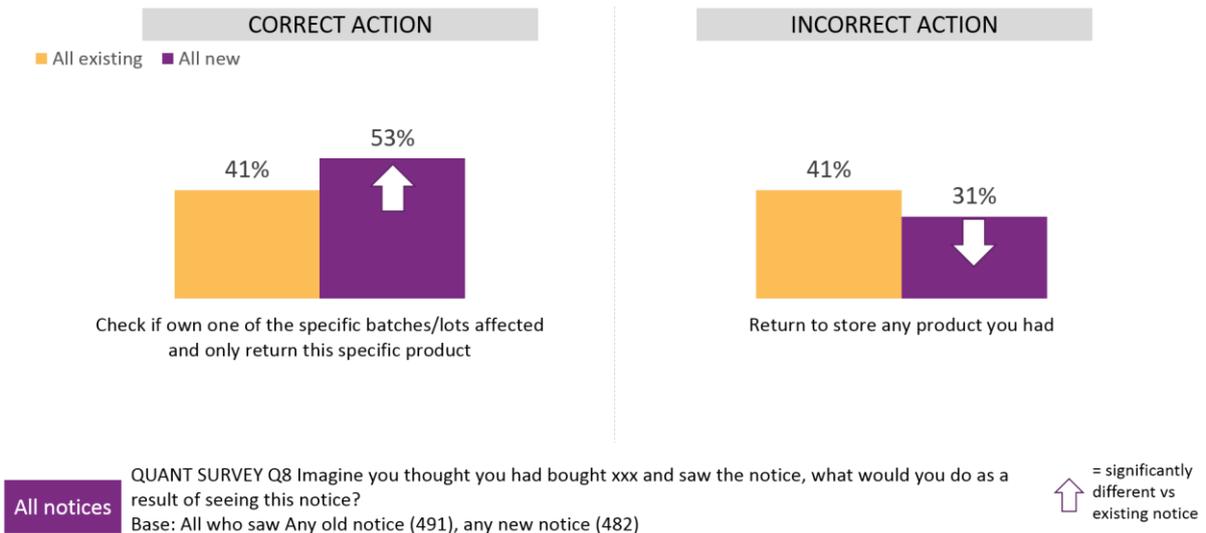
Across the point of sale notices and the website, the redesigned notices were more likely to convey the message that only specific batches of the product have been affected. For allergy point of sale notices, clarity over the allergen concerned was also significantly higher.

**Figure 13 Understanding of notice**



When asked what they would do as a result of seeing a notice, the redesigned notices were more likely to result in correct action by consumers (Figure 14).

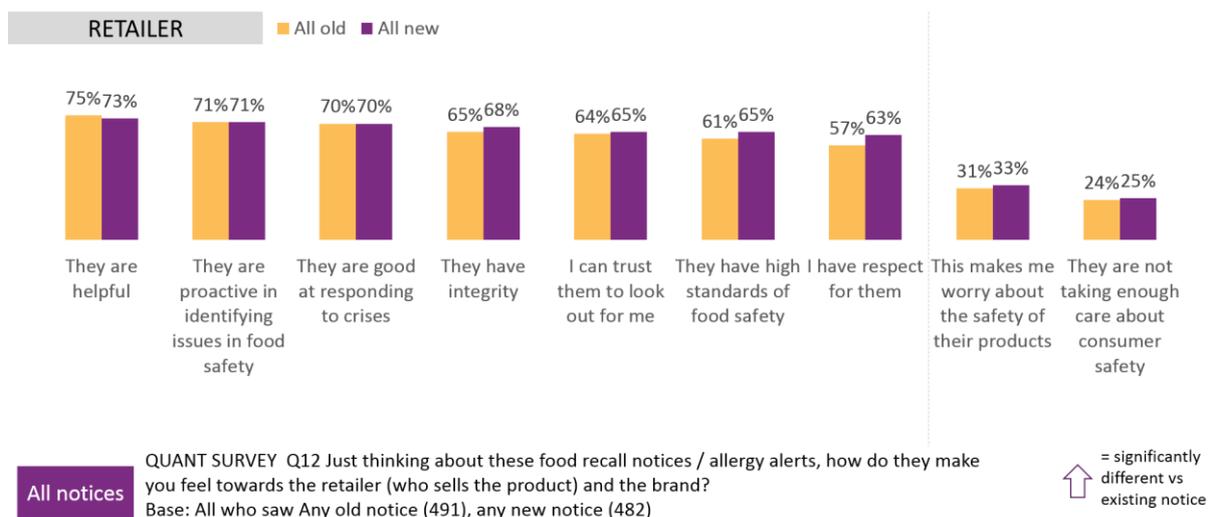
**Figure 14 Consumers taking correct action as a result of seeing notices**



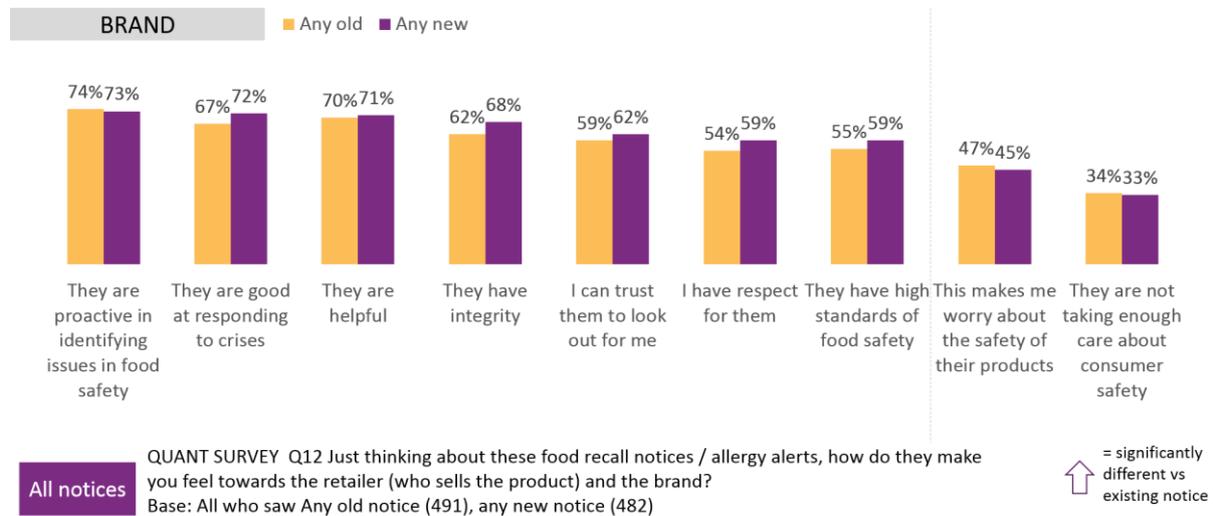
Consumers who saw a redesigned notice were significantly more likely to say they would take the correct action of checking whether they have bought a product that is one of the batches affected, and only return that batch (53% who saw a redesigned notice compared with 41% who saw an existing design). Conversely, consumers were significantly less likely to say that they would take an incorrect action of returning to store any product they had, regardless of whether the product was impacted.

Importantly, none of the redesigned notices had any negative impact on how consumers feel towards retailers or brands (Figure 15 and 16).

**Figure 15 Perceptions of retailers**



**Figure 16 Perception of brands**



Regardless of whether consumers were shown existing or redesigned notices, the majority stated that the notices made them feel positive towards the retailer or brand, including thinking they are helpful, proactive in identifying issues in food safety and good at responding to crises.

There were no significant differences in perception of retailers or brands based on whether respondents were shown the existing or redesigned notices.

As well as answering in depth about one notice, consumers were also asked to directly compare an existing and new redesigned notice of the same type (Figure 17).

**Figure 17 Direct comparison of existing and redesigned notices**

	Existing	New
<b>Easiest to understand...</b>	what the problem is	25%    75% ↑
	what I need to do	23%    77% ↑
	how I need to take the next steps	22%    78% ↑
	what the retailer/brand has done on my behalf	22%    78% ↑
<b>Most attention grabbing</b>	11%	89% ↑
<b>Simplest design</b>	51%	49%

**All notices**    QUANT SURVEY Q15 And comparing these two notices, which of the below would you say is?  
Base: All who saw Any old notice (491), any new notice (482)

↑ = significantly different vs existing notice

The majority stated that the new redesigned notices were easier to understand in terms of what the problem is, what consumers need to do as a result, and what the brand or retailer has done. Consumers also found them to be more attention grabbing.

Additionally, we asked consumers at the quantitative stage about which presentation of images they find to be clearer when there are multiple products being recalled (as shown in Figure 18). When there are multiple products being recalled, consumers find a vertical presentation of images better, with 59% stating that a vertical ordering of images is easier to understand and most attention grabbing (compared with 41% for horizontal images).

**Figure 18 Horizontal vs vertical presentation of product images**



The Hotspot methodology allows respondents to select the specific areas on the new redesigned notices that indicated to the consumer the necessary information as listed below. In the online survey, respondents were asked to click on the individual elements that did each of the following:

- Grabs their attention
- Identify the product
- Identify whether or not the recall is relevant to them
- Work out who to contact/ where to go for further information
- Communicate what to do if purchased

If nothing in the notice communicated any of these principles, then respondents were able to indicate this also.

Figure 19 summarises which areas are most important to include across each of the recall notification channels. Further detail on which elements of the notices consumers selected as performing each of these roles can be found in Appendix C.

**Figure 19 Key elements drive understanding, engagement and action**

	Recall Notice	Allergy Notice	FSA/FSS Website	FSA/FSS Social Media
<b>Attention grabbing</b>	Red banner, exclamation mark and alert title work together to grab attention			
<b>Identifying product</b>	Include product name and picture			
<b>How to work out if affected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Best before date</li> <li>▪ Batch code</li> <li>▪ Information about how to find these on the product</li> </ul>			Short URL
<b>Who to contact/ where to go for further information</b>	Telephone contact number/ email address			Short URL
<b>What to do if purchased</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do not eat</li> <li>▪ How to check batch code</li> <li>▪ Return without receipt for full refund</li> </ul>			Short URL

## 5. Recommendations: from principles to practice

### 5.1 Applying the principles to POS notices

Based on these findings, the research recommends implementing the principles identified in the qualitative phase of research and validated by the quantitative research. For food recall notices to grab consumer attention, aid understanding and drive action, they must:

#### **Make it bright and eye-catching: Make it easy for people to identify what the communication is**

- ✓ Clear and easy to read: Using a simple layout; large font; banners with clear headings and sub-headings
- ✓ Use colour and iconography to grab attention: Use of the colour red to denote risk; and use of iconography (e.g., an exclamation mark), banners, boxes and bordering to draw attention to crucial information
- ✓ Product image: Where feasible, using an image of the affected product to draw attention
- ✓ Concisely worded: Lay out information in a clear, simple and jargon-free manner, using bullet points or numbers to help organise information clearly

#### **Tell me what the problem is: Make it easy for customers to identify the issue/problem**

- ✓ Use clear title to indicate what this is– this is a recall / allergy alert
- ✓ Use titles in header to communicate what the danger / risk to consumers is – e.g. salmonella; small metal pieces, etc.
- ✓ Use large/clear pictures of products to help identify relevance of product (where feasible)

#### **Tell me what I can do about: Clearly communicate what consumers need to do next if the issue is relevant**

- ✓ Use clear and plain language ('What you should do' vs 'Our advice to consumers') to communicate next steps for consumers
- ✓ Use bullet points to break down information into simple and easy to follow steps

- ✓ Clear instruction on where to find detail (batch codes; sell by dates) to identify affected products
- ✓ Reassure consumers about the actions that have already been taken (e.g. *all affected products have already been removed from the shelves*)

**Tell me exactly how to do it: Clearly communicate *how* consumers take next steps**

- ✓ Clear direction of what to do if you have purchased the product
- ✓ Clear method/channel for more information
- ✓ Use boxing and borders to draw attention to detail

The research also evidenced that the newly designed notices work better to increase consumer understanding that:

- Retailers have already removed products from shelves
- Only certain batches (not all products) are affected by recalls
- Only affected items should be returned to the store
- The product is not safe to consume and should not be eaten

Importantly, none of the redesigned notices had any negative impact on how consumers feel towards retailers or brands. Below is the final template for a food recall or allergy notice, taking these principles into account.

## 5.2 Suitable locations for POS notices

Consumers want communications as close to the moment of purchase as possible. There was some preference for notices to be in multiple locations in-store (to ensure they'd be spotted by consumers in at least one location), such as on shelves near where the product was sold, at check-out and at store entry and exit points. Given the challenges identified by retailers of putting POS notices on the shelf (e.g. notices covering up other products; being taken down by consumers, etc.) this research recommends putting POS notices at the entry and exit of the store, in colour and clearly legible, where possible.

Figure 20 Recommended point of sale notice template

# Food Recall Alert

Type of Recall - Nature of alert/risk

Image of product

**Tells the consumer what the product is – details the brand and product name, alongside the image (left).**

Details the action taken.  
Details the risk in red 'may be contaminated' xxxxx.  
Further detail regarding confirmed findings.

**Details about the product.**

**All pack sizes and batch codes affected:  
This information lets the consumer know how to check if they may have been affected.**

Detailed instructions on how to check 'batch code' and 'best before' date on the product they have purchased. The 'batch codes' and 'best before' date can be found on the back of the packaging.

Assurance that no other brand XXX products have been affected.

---

**What you should do**

Tells the consumer what to do if they have purchased or consumed the product.

Instructions on what to do if a consumer has already bought the above product: do not eat it. Instead:

- Tells the consumer what to do if they have purchased or consumed the product and details of how to check the information above.
- Tells the consumer what to do if they have purchased or consumed the product and details how to check the information above.
- Tells the consumer how to return the product.

**Want more information?**

Tells the consumer where to go for further information and who to contact.  
Includes: Company name, email and telephone details where possible.

Date: 27/06/2020

### 5.3 Applying the principles to FSA/FSS digital channels

The same principles identified for POS notices should be applied to FSA/FSS digital assets going forward, though some will be more relevant for some channels than others.

For social media for example, the main job should be catch consumers' eyes as they are scrolling through an already saturated space and quickly communicate to them what the issue is. For social media, the priority principles are thus to:

**Make it bright and eye-catching: Make it easy for people to identify what the communication is**

- ✓ Clear and easy to read: Using a simple layout; large font; banners with clear headings and sub-headings
- ✓ Use colour and iconography to grab attention: Use of the colour red to denote risk; and use of iconography (e.g., an exclamation mark) to draw attention to crucial information
- ✓ Product image: Where feasible, using an image of the affected product to draw attention
- ✓ Concisely worded: Lay out information in a clear, simple and jargon-free manner

**Tell me what the problem is: Make it easy for customers to identify the issue/problem**

- ✓ Use clear title to indicate what this is– this is a recall / allergy alert
- ✓ Use titles in header communicate what the danger / risk to consumers is – e.g. salmonella; small metal pieces, etc.
- ✓ Use large/clear picture of products to help identify relevance of product (where feasible)

Whereas, the FSA/FSS website can be used to provide additional supplementary information and support with any clear direction to any non-critical detail:

**Tell me what I can do about: Clearly communicate what consumers need to do next if issue is relevant**

- ✓ Use clear and plain language (*'What you should do'* vs *'Our advice to consumers'*) to communicate next steps for consumers and consider using a click menu for less critical information that consumers can use should they want more details (e.g. Click here for more information on salmonella)
- ✓ Clear instruction on where to find detail (batch codes; sell by dates) to identify affected products
- ✓ Reassure consumers about the actions that have already been taken (e.g. *all affected products have already been removed from the shelves*)

**Tell me exactly how to do it: Clearly communicate *how* consumers take next steps**

- ✓ Clear direction of what to do if you have purchased the product
- ✓ Clear method/channel for more information

#### 5.4 Suitable channels for FSA/FSS digital assets

The FSA/FSS websites were perceived to be a trustworthy source of information although with limited reach (even among those with specific dietary needs/allergies). As such, the websites could form part of a multi-channel approach that includes e-mail and social media. There was agreement across age groups that social media plays an important role in keeping the public informed and should be used as much as possible. There was also some interest from some consumers in being sign-posted to the FSA/FSS website via the POS notice

Figure 21 & 22 Examples of recommended new FSA/FSS digital assets

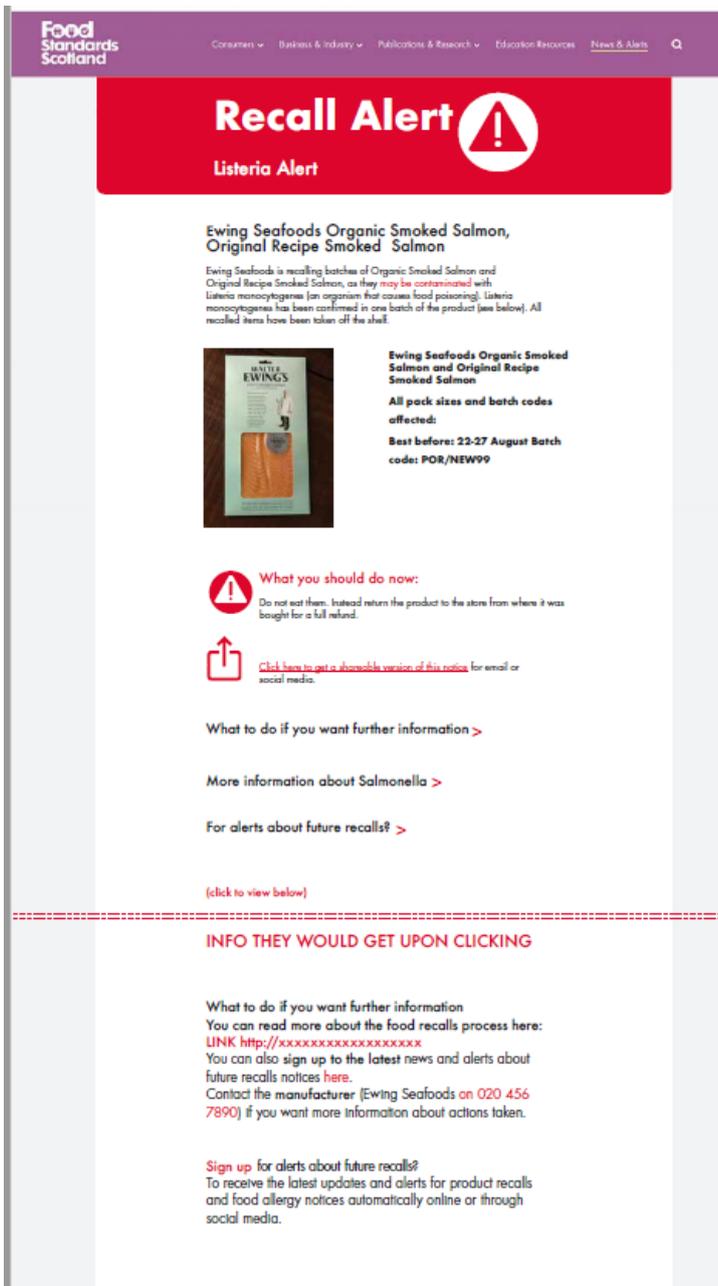


Figure 21 Recommended FSA/ FSS website design



Figure 22 Recommended FSA/ FSS social media design

## Appendix A: Notices and images used in digital phase testing

**Figure 23 Point of Sale notices used in initial digital testing**

At Customer Service Point



At Check-Out



**Figure 24 Instore locations of notices used in digital testing**

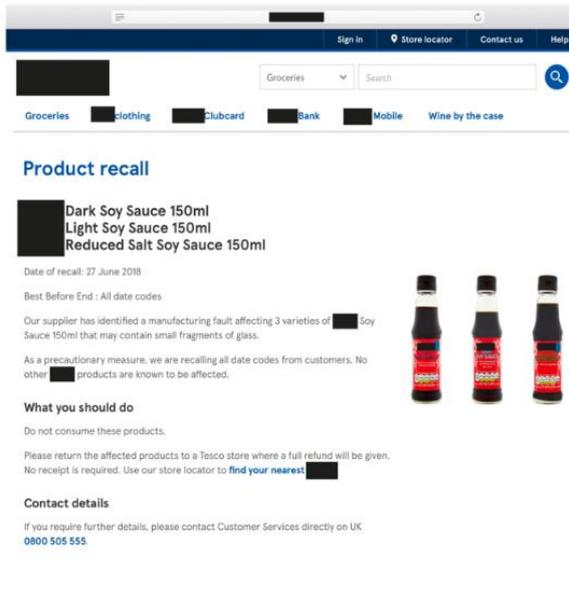
On shelf



At entrance/exit



Figure 25 Further instore locations of notices used in digital testing  
Website Example 1



Website Example 2

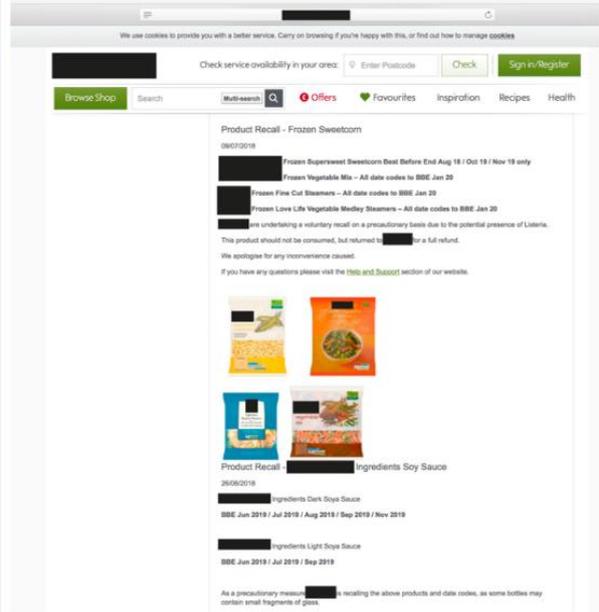
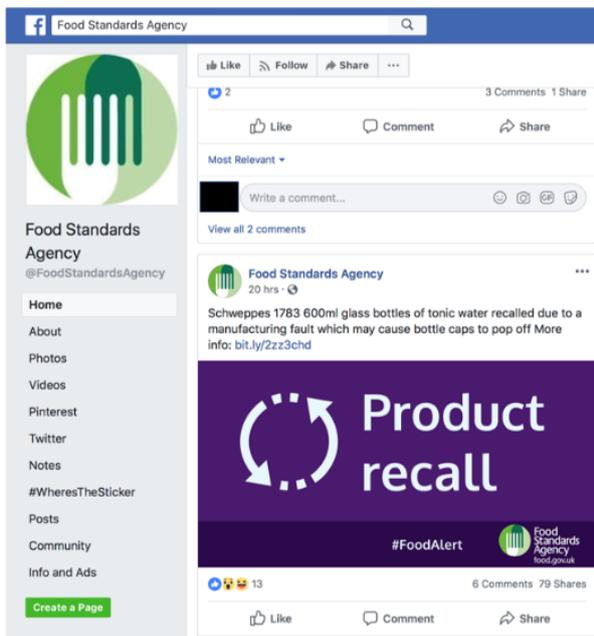


Figure 26 Retailer website examples used in digital testing

FSA Facebook – Product Recall

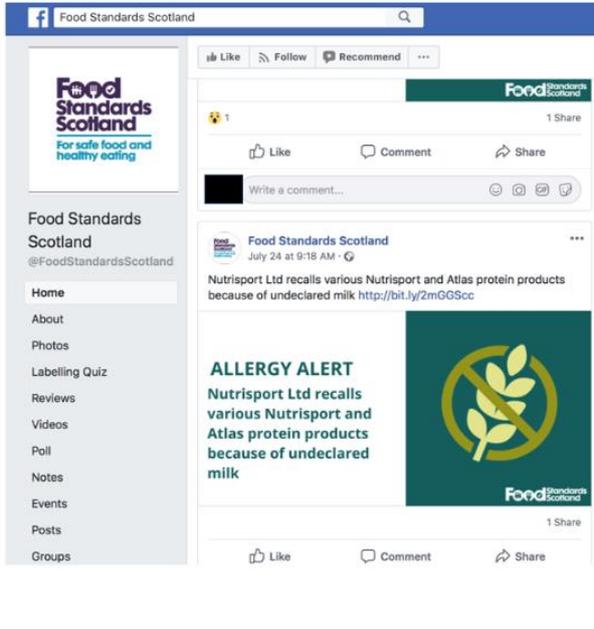


FSA Twitter – Allergy Alert

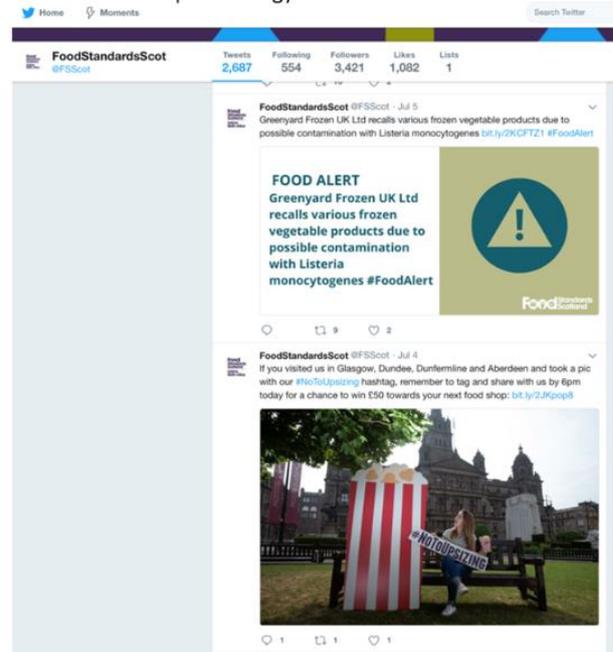


Figure 27 FSA digital assets used in digital testing

FSS Facebook Example – Product Recall



FSS Twitter Example – Allergy Alert



## Appendix B: Notices used in quantitative testing

Figure 28 Point of Sale – Food Recall

### Existing notices

Due to wide range of styles and information on existing POS notices, consumers were shown one of five example notices



### Redesigned notice



Figure 29 Point of Sale - Allergy Alert

### Existing notice



### Redesigned notice



Figure 30 FSA/ FSS Website

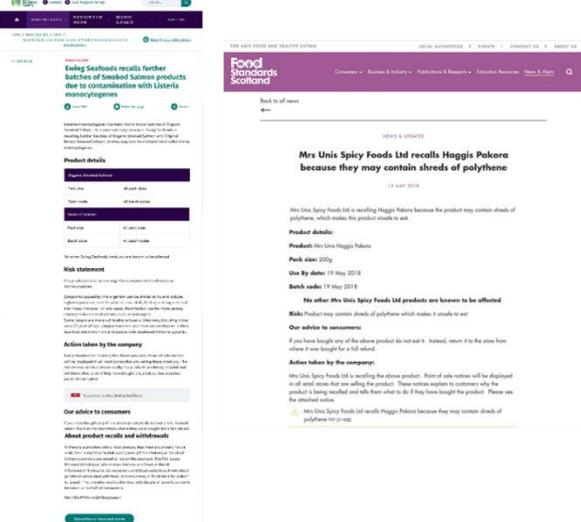
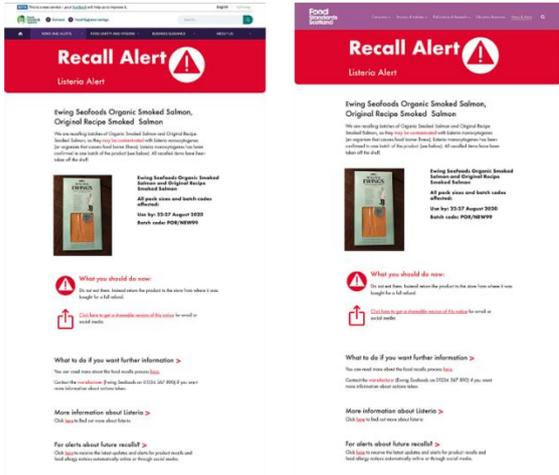
Existing notices	Redesigned notices
 <p>The screenshot shows a detailed, text-heavy notice on the FSA website. The title is "Mrs Unis Spicy Foods Ltd recalls Haggis Pakora because they may contain shreds of polythene". The notice includes sections for "Product details", "Risk statement", "Action taken by the company", and "Our advice to consumers". The layout is dense with small text and multiple sub-sections.</p>	 <p>The redesigned notice is more concise and visually appealing. It features a prominent red "Recall Alert" header with a warning icon. The text is organized into clear sections: "What you should do now" (with a red arrow icon), "What to do if you want further information", and "For alerts about future recalls". The overall design is cleaner and easier to read.</p>

Figure 31 FSA/ FSS Social Media

Existing notices	Redesigned notices
 <p>The existing social media notice for Montezuma's Chocolates is text-heavy and lacks a strong visual focus. It includes the agency name, date, and a link to the product recall page. The design is simple but not very engaging.</p>	 <p>The redesigned notice features a vibrant red background with a large white "Product Recall" text and a warning icon. It includes an image of the product and the hashtag #productrecall. The design is more eye-catching and clear.</p>
 <p>The existing social media notice for Dr Zak's is text-heavy and lacks a strong visual focus. It includes the agency name, date, and a link to the product recall page. The design is simple but not very engaging.</p>	 <p>The redesigned notice features a vibrant red background with a large white "Product Recall" text and a warning icon. It includes an image of the product and the hashtag #productrecall. The design is more eye-catching and clear.</p>

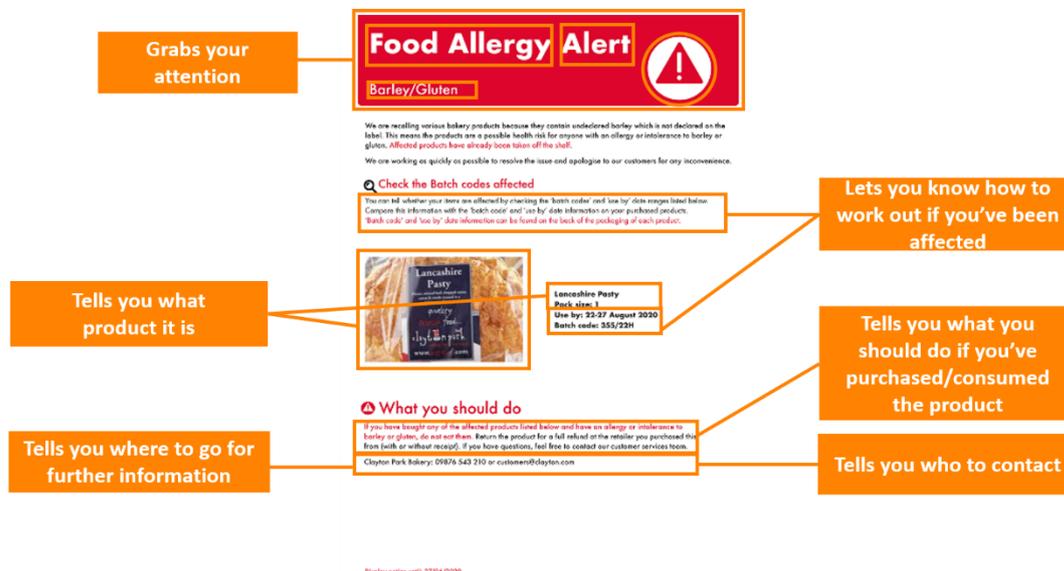
## Appendix C: Quantitative hotspot analysis

Figure 32 Point of Sale – Food Recall



Recall notice QUANT SURVEY Q11 Looking carefully at this notice, please click once on the areas of this notice that... If you make a mistake you can click on that part again to deselect it. Base: All who saw POS Recall New (117)

Figure 33 Point of Sale – Allergy Alert



Allergy notice QUANT SURVEY Q11 Looking carefully at this notice, please click once on the areas of this notice that... If you make a mistake you can click on that part again to deselect it. Base: POS Allergy New (124)

Figure 34 FSA/ FSS Website



Website QUANT SURVEY Q11 Looking carefully at this notice, please click once on the areas of this notice that... If you make a mistake you can click on that part again to deselect it. Base: All who saw Website Recall New (121)

Figure 35 FSA/ FSS Social Media



Social media QUANT SURVEY Q11 Looking carefully at this notice, please click once on the areas of this notice that... If you make a mistake you can click on that part again to deselect it. Base: Social Media Recall New (120)