Food safety strategy

Name of Council

2013
Acknowledgements:

This strategy is based on a template developed by Queensland University of Technology’s School of Public Health and Social Work in partnership with the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government.
Contents

Executive summary .................................................................................................................. 3

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 4
   1.1. Aims and objectives ......................................................................................................... 4
   1.2. Links to Council’s corporate plan .................................................................................. 5
   1.3. Links to the Customer Service Charter ......................................................................... 5

2. Our approach to food safety .................................................................................................. 6
   2.1. Food safety laws ........................................................................................................... 6
   2.2. Risk-based compliance ................................................................................................. 7
   2.3. Council’s compliance policy .......................................................................................... 8

3. Food safety services ............................................................................................................. 9
   3.1. Council’s systems and processes ................................................................................... 9
       3.1.1. Accessing information ......................................................................................... 9
       3.1.2. Council’s processes .............................................................................................. 9
       3.1.3. Consistency ........................................................................................................... 9
       3.1.4. Communication .................................................................................................... 9
       3.1.5. EHO’s skills and knowledge .................................................................................. 9
       3.1.6. Inspections ........................................................................................................... 9
       3.1.7. Food safety complaints and food-borne illness investigations ............................ 9
       3.1.8. Targeted programs ............................................................................................... 9
       3.1.9. Liaison with other organisations .......................................................................... 9
       3.1.10. Advocacy for our local food businesses ............................................................. 9
   3.2. Support for food businesses ........................................................................................... 9
       3.2.1. Understanding of the food industry ....................................................................... 9
       3.2.2. Business support .................................................................................................. 9
       3.2.3. Resources for food businesses .............................................................................. 9
       3.2.4. Training ................................................................................................................ 9
       3.2.5. Incentives ............................................................................................................. 10
   3.3. Support for the community ............................................................................................ 10
       3.3.1. Food safety promotion ......................................................................................... 10
       3.3.2. Food business rating schemes ............................................................................ 10

4. Program evaluation ............................................................................................................. 11

References ............................................................................................................................... 12
Executive summary

Food safety is an issue that affects everyone. In Australia there are approximately 5.4 million cases of food-borne illness annually which costs the community $1.2 billion per annum (Department of Health and Ageing 2006).

Name of Council is committed to supporting the food industry continually implement safe food practices. This food safety strategy details how Council will advance food safety by focusing on Council’s processes, systems and services including support services for local food businesses and consumers. Key programs include:

•
1. Introduction

Food safety is an issue that affects everyone. In Australia there are approximately 5.4 million cases of food-borne gastroenteritis annually which leads to 1.2 million visits to doctors and 2.1 million days of work lost each year. Food-borne illness is responsible for over 18,000 hospital admissions and approximately 120 deaths per year in Australia. In total, food-borne illness costs the community $1.2 billion per annum. (Department of Health and Ageing 2005; Department of Health and Ageing 2006).

Several factors may have influenced changes in frequency and occurrence of food-borne illnesses, including:

- Changing food consumption patterns including:
  - increasing diversity of food (e.g. cultural diversity has resulted in a wider selection of food using a variety of ingredients); and
  - changing consumer demands (e.g. increased reliance on ready-to-cook, ready-to-eat and takeaway meals; trends towards eating foods with minimal processing and preservatives);
- Changes in food manufacturing, retail, food distribution and storage;
- Emergence of new food pathogens; and
- Increasing numbers of more susceptible individuals (e.g. the young, the elderly, pregnant women, people with compromised immune systems). (Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services 1997).

Name of Council is committed to advancing food safety for the benefit of the food industry, residents and consumers. Council recognises that to advance food safety we need to ensure effective systems which support local food businesses to continually adopt safe food practices are implemented and that consumers are supported to make informed choices about food safety. To protect consumers and the reputation of the local food industry, Council also recognises that breaches of the food safety laws need to be dealt with in a manner that is proportionate to the risk (e.g. situations that create serious food safety risks will be dealt with swiftly and using legal tools; less serious risks may be dealt with using education and other support tools).

This Food Safety Strategy details how Council will advance food safety by focusing on Council’s processes, systems and services including support services for local food businesses and consumers. Implementation of this strategy will also help Council meet its legal obligations, prioritise work based on risk and maximise efficiency in the administration of the food safety laws.

1.1. Aims and objectives

Name of Council aims to advance food safety to protect the health and well-being of local residents and consumers by reducing the risk of food-borne illness. Council will use the range of programs and services detailed in this strategy to promote and improve food safety and maximise ongoing compliance with the Food Act 2006.

Council aims to be a leader in food safety regulation who collaborates with the food industry and adopts a holistic approach to achieving food safety. This Food Safety Strategy will assist Council to achieve this goal.
The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Strengthen Council’s relationship with and support for the food industry.
- Ensure the owners, managers and employees of food businesses understand food safety principles, continually adopt safe food practices and understand their legal responsibility to ensure food safety.
- Encourage a culture of ongoing compliance with the Food Act 2006 within the food industry.
- Recognise and reward businesses that do consistently adopt safe food practices and continually comply with the Food Act 2006.
- Deter unsafe food practices and breaches of the Food Act 2006.

1.2. Links to Council’s corporate plan

1.3. Links to the Customer Service Charter
2. Our approach to food safety

Name of Council prefers adopt a supportive and collaborative approach to food safety. However, Council will take enforcement action when necessary to protect consumers from unsafe food practices.

A brief explanation of the laws used to regulate food safety and Council’s obligations under the food safety laws are provided below. A detailed explanation of Council’s approach to food safety is also provided.

2.1. Food safety laws

In Queensland the Food Act 2006 is the primary law that regulates food safety in food manufacturers, restaurants, cafés, coffee shops, fast food businesses, bakeries, supermarkets and other food shops.

The main purposes of the Food Act are:

- Ensuring food for sale is safe for human consumption. Food is considered ‘unsafe’ if it likely to cause physical harm to a person who may eat it. For example, food that contains enough bacteria to make a person very sick would be unsafe.
- Ensuring food for sale is suitable for human consumption. Food is considered ‘unsuitable’ if it damaged, deteriorated or perished to an extent that affects its use; is from a diseased animal; or contains a biological (e.g. bacteria, virus), chemical or other substances that should not be in the food. For example, if food is contaminated by a cleaning chemical that affects how it tastes, but there is not enough chemical in the food to a consumer sick, the food would be considered unsuitable.
- Preventing misleading conduct relating to the sale of food. ‘Misleading conduct’ can involve misleading or deceptive behaviour associated with advertising, packaging or labelling food. For example, making a health claim on packaging that has not been proven would be misleading conduct.
- Applying the Food Standards Code. The Food Standards Code is a document that specified what can and can’t be in food (e.g. the maximum levels of food additives) and includes ‘Food Safety Standards’ which detail what food businesses must do including the structural requirements of food businesses, cleaning, maintenance, safe food handling, etc. The Food Standards Code is a national document which is used to improve consistency in requirements of food businesses across Australia.

Responsibility for enforcing the Food Act is shared between the State government (i.e. Queensland Health) and local governments. Queensland Health is responsible for investigating and regulating:

- The cause of food-borne illness;
- Foreign matter (e.g. pieces of plastic) found in food;
- Food composition issues (e.g. the meat content in sausages);
- Labelling requirements;
- Misleading and deceptive advertising, packaging or labelling; and
- Food safety issues at government institutions (e.g. public hospitals, public schools).

Local governments are responsible for:
• Licensing food businesses;
• Enforcing the Food Standards Code in relation to the conduct of a food business and food intended for sale;
• Assessing and approving Food Safety Programs (i.e. a document that identifies the food safety risks in a business and how they will be controlled) which some businesses (e.g. private hospitals, child care centres) must have; and
• Ensuring food safety programs are audited.

Queensland Health and local governments are both able to investigate and enforce the legal requirements relating to the sale of unsafe food and handling food in an unsafe manner.

Council employs Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) who have specialised knowledge in food safety to monitor and regulate food safety issues in our area. Council’s EHOs are involved in:

• Assessing applications for new food businesses or businesses that will be renovated or expanded;
• Assessing applications for food business licences;
• Assessing Food Safety Programs and ensuring they are accredited and audited as required by the Food Act;
• Inspecting licensed food businesses to ensure they are adhering to the requirements of the Food Act and Food Standards Code including ensuring food is being handled and stored safely, food is not being contaminated, food handlers have the skills and knowledge they need to be able to prepare food safely, the premises are clean and well maintained, there are no pests in the premises, etc.; and
• Investigating complaints about licensed food businesses, illegal food businesses, unsafe food handling, etc.

2.2. Risk-based compliance

Council has adopted a risk-based compliance approach to ensure that our limited resources are used to target the food safety issues that create the biggest risks to consumers. During the development of this Food Safety Strategy Council has reviewed relevant programs and services to ensure we are supporting businesses to comply with the food safety laws and we can identify and focus on businesses that pose a risk to the community.

The benefits of adopting a risk-based compliance approach include:

• Improved compliance outcomes by customising actions to effectively deal with the most significant risks.
• Efficiency gains by targeting programs to concentrate on issues that will have the greatest outcomes.
• Reduced business compliance costs by only imposing requirements that are needed.
• Greater business support for compliance measures by ensuring the compliance approach taken is widely understood by business. (The Better Regulation Office 2008).

Risk-based compliance is achieved by working through the series of steps shown in figure 1.
2.3. **Council’s compliance policy**

Name of Council will be fair, objective and professional in carrying out regulatory activities to ensure safe food practices are adopted and the requirements of the *Food Act 2006* are obeyed. Council’s approach to food safety regulation is documented in ‘title of document’ which is available via web address. Adoption of the protocols set out in ‘title of document’ will ensure consistency, transparency and accountability.

---

### Figure 1: The risk assessment steps involved in developing a risk-based compliance approach.
(Source: The Better Regulation Office 2008, p.4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identifying the risks of non-compliance</strong></td>
<td>What can happen? When and where? How and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysing the risks of non-compliance</strong></td>
<td>Determine the level of each risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prioritising the risks of non-compliance</strong></td>
<td>Set priorities for addressing the risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identifying and selecting compliance measures</strong></td>
<td>Examine the options and choose the most suitable actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning for implementation</strong></td>
<td>Plan when and how the compliance measures will be carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reporting and reviewing</strong></td>
<td>Monitor and evaluate the plan to ensure it remains effective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. **Food safety services**  
This section of the strategy details how Council has implemented systems and services that support food businesses to understand food safety requirements and comply with the food safety laws at all times.

3.1. **Council’s systems and processes**

3.1.1. Accessing information

3.1.2. Council’s processes

3.1.3. Consistency

3.1.4. Communication

3.1.5. EHO’s skills and knowledge

3.1.6. Inspections

3.1.7. Food safety complaints and food-borne illness investigations

3.1.8. Targeted programs

3.1.9. Liaison with other organisations

3.1.10. Advocacy for our local food businesses

3.2. **Support for food businesses**

3.2.1. Understanding of the food industry

3.2.2. Business support

3.2.3. Resources for food businesses

3.2.4. Training
3.2.5. Incentives

3.2.5.1. Food business rating schemes

3.2.5.2. Other incentives

3.3. Support for the community

3.3.1. Food safety promotion

3.3.2. Food business rating schemes
4. Program evaluation
References


