

Report on	Allergen Compliance Initiative
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Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to inform Members about the Environmental Health Team's progress with the Allergen Compliance Strategy. This regional initiative, to improve compliance with the Regulations, has been ongoing since April 2017.
2.0	Background
2.1	The Food Information Regulations (FIR) (NI) 2014 came into force on 13 th December 2014. These Regulations require that all food sold loose or prepacked must be labelled with a list of any allergenic ingredients.
2.2	Food allergens are a significant hazard to those sensitive to them, whether present in the food as a deliberate ingredient; through cross contamination in the manufacturing, preparation or service of food; or through deliberate/fraudulent substitution of high value ingredients with cheaper ingredients which are not declared.
2.3	Food Business Operators (FBOs) must have robust systems in place to identify and verify the allergen information on any foods supplied to them and by them and have confidence in the supply chain. Failure to have allergen labelling on prepacked foods not only presents a risk to allergenic final consumers directly consuming the foods but also invalidates the controls being introduced by caterers or other users of the products when preparing foods for the final consumer.
2.4	Since the introduction of the Regulations, there have been a number of incidents and recalls due to the absence of allergen information or provision of incomplete/incorrect allergen information. This has resulted in costs to the businesses involved and officer costs in terms of time required to deal with the incident
2.5	Since the introduction of the requirements, regionally there have been a number of instances reported where consumers have suffered allergic reactions due to inadvertently consuming a meal containing an allergen, which had not been identified or correctly communicated. The requirement to declare allergens on loose foods should make it safer for an allergenic consumer to purchase food safely, however it may in certain cases, lead to a greater risk for the allergenic consumer if it is not done correctly.

3.1

Since the introduction of the Regulations in 2014, EHO's have found that the level of compliance with the allergen requirements has not been as high as is required; particularly concerning the identification and declaration of the presence of allergens. As a result, the Food Standards and Food Fraud Sub Group (FSFF) of the Northern Ireland Food Managers Group (NIFMG) developed an allergen strategy aimed at improving compliance levels amongst businesses regionally.

Implementation of the initiatives suggested within the strategy aims at improving compliance by food businesses with the allergen requirements. The initiatives also aim to provide a consistent approach in addressing issues relating to known allergens added to foods as allergenic ingredients and to those introduced by cross contamination.

3.2

To achieve this improved compliance, a number of measures have been undertaken by the Food Team at Mid Ulster District Council, including:

- **Letters were issued to all relevant food businesses in the Mid Ulster District Council area.**

The letter, sent prior to the commencement of the Initiative, reminded food business operators of their legal obligations under the Regulations and their responsibilities to control cross contamination. It also informed the business owners that allergen assessments would be carried out at the next programmed visit.

- **Officers have been, and will continue to undertake additional assessments at food premises to determine the level of allergen compliance at these premises.**

In assessing compliance at these visits, EHO's have been determining if the business has adequate procedures to identify, manage and monitor allergic ingredients used to prepare the food and if they have an effective means to communicate information about allergens to both the consumer and staff members. Where inadequate controls have been identified, businesses have been provided with advice on how to comply, in line with the enforcement policy.

- **Organised seminars on the management of allergens for businesses across the district council area.**

The purpose of the seminars was to remind food business operators of their legal obligations and assist with their compliance. There were three seminars to accommodate as many food business operators across the district as possible. The seminars were very well attended at all three locations. Feedback, via evaluation forms completed at the seminars, has been positive.

Delivery of the Allergen Compliance Initiative contributes towards Theme 1 (economic growth through supporting micro and small to medium sized enterprise) and Theme 4 (health and wellbeing) of the Community Plan.

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p><u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u></p> <p>Financial: Funding from the Food Standards Agency was made available to support the Allergen Strategy within District Councils in the 2017/18 financial year.</p> <p>Human: Additional officer time.</p>
4.2	<p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
4.3	<p><u>Risk Management Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	Members are asked to note the work of the Environmental Health Department's food team in their implementation of the Allergen Compliance Strategy.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix1: Allergen photograph

Appendix 1

