

From Katie Pettifer  
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12 November 2024  
Our ref: BC2024/00343

Dear Adrian,

**Implementation of a new approach to food standards regulation by District Councils in Northern Ireland**

I am writing to update you on the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) plans for rollout of a new approach to how District Councils (DCs) deliver their regulatory responsibilities on food standards which is more risk-based and intelligence-driven. This is a significant programme of work, representing the biggest change to the delivery model for food law official controls in over 30 years. The FSA will continue to work closely with district councils that have responsibility for food standards to ensure it is implemented successfully and as smoothly as possible.

Ensuring food safety including accurate labelling and composition of food is a key aspect of protecting consumers. Implementing the new approach will enable the risks to be identified more readily, such as those posed by lack of accurate or clear allergen information. It also supports district councils in taking relevant follow-up action with a food business until any issues have been addressed, particularly where these pose a significant risk to consumers.

The greater sharing and use of intelligence to inform food standards work by district councils recognises the resourcing pressures that authorities are facing and enables them to prioritise more effectively according to risk. This will in turn ensure a more

targeted and responsive approach to food standards enforcement. Our pilots<sup>1</sup> demonstrated that the new model is three times as effective in targeting non-compliant businesses than the approach previously followed. This means that your officers will spend less time dealing with already compliant businesses and more time affecting improvements in businesses where consumers are at risk.

We have worked closely with district councils throughout the design and development of the new model and feedback across authorities indicates that it is widely seen as a very positive development.

The FSA is responsible for the statutory Food Law Code of Practice, which sets expectations for district councils' responsibilities under food law and how these are delivered. The Code was updated in May 2023 to reflect the changes required to implement the new approach to food standards and we are now embarking on a phased rollout to district councils.

### **Implementation and rollout**

Each district council has been assigned to a specific cohort for implementation of the new approach, with each cohort onboarding at a different stage of the year (April 2024-March 2025). Cohort implementation dates align with the essential updates that are being made to district councils Management Information Systems (MIS) to allow for the recording of food standards official control activity. This is a critical first step to ensure that local authorities can continue to record accurate information about the food businesses in their area and to support effective, risk-based planning of interventions in line with the new model. The roll-out date for your district council is currently scheduled from the month of November.

The FSA has engaged regularly throughout this period of preparation with the team in your district council that is responsible for food standards enforcement, to keep them updated on progress. [A letter](#) (PLGNI24029) published on 16 September 2024 (an FSA

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/evaluation-of-food-standards-pilot-introduction>

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LINK account via registration is required to access) provided an update on the rollout programme and the support measures we have put in place to help district councils through the transition process. In the 2024/25 financial year, the FSA provided core grant funding to District Councils in Northern Ireland and the implementation of the new Food Standards Delivery Model (FSDM) was stated in the core grant letter as one of the five key FSA priorities for the 2024/25 financial year. A letter has been sent to your Head of Service for food standards to confirm the planned rollout date for your council and what is expected.

For more information on the new model, you can view a series of short digital clips titled [FSA Explains: Key elements of the Food Standards Delivery Model \(FSDM\)](#) that have recently been launched. These offer an overview of the new model, with more detailed training and support material being provided to food officers.

A dedicated email address for any queries regarding the rollout has been established. Should you or your officials wish to discuss any aspect of the model or how it will impact your council please contact our team at [FSDenquiries@food.gov.uk](mailto:FSDenquiries@food.gov.uk).

I have copied this letter to Andy Cole, as Director for FSA in Northern Ireland. Thank you for your council's support to date and your continued cooperation in implementing this positive step forward in modernising the food control system.

Yours sincerely,



Katie Pettifer  
Interim Chief Executive

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