



MINUTES OF LONDON FOOD CO-ORDINATING GROUP MEETING

Tuesday 19th August 2008 at 10.00 am

Walbrook Wharf Offices – Corporation of London

Present			
Peter Scott	(PS)	LB Havering	Chair / For NE Sector
Duncan Arthur	(DA)	Public Analyst	Eurofins
Tony Bride	(TB)	(HSE)	London Partnership & External Relations Team
Jackie Jewett	(JJ)	FSA	
Tay Potier	(TP)	CIEH	London Region Policy Officer
Carole Zelenka	(CZ)	LB Greenwich	For SE Sector
Brian Griffiths	(BG)	LB Croydon	For SW Sector
Sandra Edmeade-Walters	(SEW)	LB Tower Hamlets	London Food Study Group
Peter Kemp	(PK)		Minutes Taker

1. Apologies for absence / Introductions

Apologies were received from Susanne Surman-Lee (HPA)

2. Tony Bride (HSE)

PS welcomed TB to the meeting of the LFCG. TB explained in speaking to this item that one of the projects he was working on was primarily to:

- see how food teams in London who also enforce also health and safety are progressing with planned health and safety activities in food premises for 2008/9,

and

- to discuss the options for formalising arrangements for liaison between the London LA Food Sector governance structures and those of the London LA / HSE Partnership as a means to improving links between the Partnership and the food teams who also carry out health and safety enforcement.

TB said that this included identifying any problems the food teams might be experiencing so the London LA / HSE Partnership can consider ways they might help to overcome them, including what additional support might be needed.

TB said that so far he had had a good response from local authorities and he had been able to offer support to those where the food teams were also engaged in carrying out H & S inspections.

He had already attended a number of Sector meetings over the past year and he planned to visit the Sectors again. He would be visiting the NW Sector soon followed by the NE and SW. The SE Sector currently only had two authorities where health and safety inspections were carried out at the same time as food inspections.

Depending on the feedback from his visits he thought that there might be an opportunity of entering the work carried out in London to increase H & S activity in food premises for the HELA annual award for innovation.

TB reminded the meeting that the HSE had published guidance on the new Section 18 standards which LA's had to comply with by 2011. This was a mandatory requirement. Audits carried out against the former Section 18 guidance had revealed some failures in meeting the requirements in food premises with inspections focusing on the food side leading to officers becoming de-skilled.

TB said that funding from the Partnership was available to provide additional support to local authorities so they can meet the 2011 requirements.

TB had set out a number of possible options for improving and formalising communications between the London LA/HSE Partnership and the LA Food Teams;

1. Dedicated and additional H&S London wide meetings between Partnership (Partnership Manager (PM) and / or Partnership Liaison Officer (PLO)) and Food team managers, as part of the round of quarterly planned Partnership 'Quadrant' meetings;
2. Food Team Managers attend quarterly H&S Quadrant meetings
3. PLO / PM attend LFCG and Food Sector meetings to brief / discuss / obtain feedback from Food Team managers
4. E-mail H&S information relevant to food teams direct to Food Team Managers; encourage access to LA H&S Extranet (HELex)
5. Inclusion of Food team Managers in LA/HSE planning / process meetings.
6. Do nothing / carry on with ad hoc arrangements.

In discussing the options, TB said that there were about 16 LA's in London where the food team managers also had health and safety responsibilities. BG commented that he believed that Food Team Managers ought to attend the Quadrant meetings.

TB thought it was also important that food team managers input into the work plan at an early stage and this usually involved one meeting a year. TB explained that the London LA / HSE Partnership operated on two levels, SHELL which acted as the overseeing body and Four Quadrants organised in a similar way to the LFCG's Sectors.

In relation to Option 3, BG said that he thought that meetings of the LFCG should relate to food matters only, however SEW commented that in her authority, LB TH there was now a deliberate move to combine the two specialisms.

Commenting on the range of options, PS thought that, 3, 4 and 5 looked acceptable as set out in the email from TB. PS said he would put these to the NE Sector at its next meeting and report back at the October meeting of the LFCG. This will enable TB to receive some sense of consensus on the most favoured options.

This together with the results of TB's further visits to the Sectors would allow him to progress matters.

In making his closing remarks, TB confirmed that his secondment to the HSE was ending this October and he would be returning to his previous post with the City of London Corporation. The HSE have advertised for his replacement but so far this has not generated very much interest. TP offered to help in getting the position advertised.

PS thanked TB for his interesting contribution to the meeting.

All To Note

PS to discuss Options at NE Sector Meeting and feedback at the October meeting of the LFCG

TB to forward details of the Partnership Liaison Officers Secondment vacancy to TP who will arrange for them to be circulated at PEHO level

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 25th June 2008 – accuracy and matters arising

On matters of accuracy:

Page 6 (Para 5) – Second line should read “and could not also undertake a large scale information gathering exercise which was often required as well”.

Page 7 (SW Sector Report)(Para 6) – Correction, Helen Clark is the new Sector representative on the Scores on the Doors (SotD) Implementation Panel, not SF-BB.

Page 8 (NE Sector Report)(Para 6) – Second line should read “Olympics, the National Pest Advisory Panel (NPAP) had been established”.

Matters Arising & Action Points not covered elsewhere on the Agenda

To Note: Next Olympic Co-ordinating Committee Meeting will be held on 3rd September 2008

Page 7 (SW Sector Report) – In relation to the food survey carried out in conjunction with Eurofins, looking at levels of trans fats, salt etc in take-away foods, BG confirmed that the results of the survey had not yet been released to the press. This was still being considered

Page(s) 9 & 10 (Public Analyst – Eurofins Report) – PS said that a further meeting to discuss the problems relating to Sushi was to be held towards the end of September. DA, Carol Milligan (LB Islington) and PS would be attending.

Page 11 (AOB)(Emergency Scenarios) – PS said that he had so far heard nothing back from SSL regarding organising and hosting workshop sessions to examine out of hours service levels and emergency call-out issues

All To Note

4. FSA meeting 7th August 2008

PS reported back on a meeting CZ, BG, Rick Mason and he had with the FSA. The FSA made it clear that they were anxious to avoid any breakdown in the relationship with the LFCG or the Sectors irrespective of the outcome of the consultation exercise on the SotD schemes. The FSA had also explained why they had preferred a three-star based scheme.

The meeting had also discussed issues around the meaning of the term “broadly compliant” and the FSA had indicated that a revision of the Practice Guidance to accompany the recently published revised CoP might be some time in coming as it was not currently on their list of priorities.

Problems had been encountered with a number of software houses who had not yet developing the applications required to enable the new FSA monitoring returns to be generated. The meeting discussed the problems they had encountered in relation to their own authority’s systems and the fact that to provide the upgrades required, additional expense was being incurred

JJ said that the FSA continued to press the software houses to progress this matter and asked that local authorities also maintain pressure on their own software provider. PS remarked that this was important as the FSA would need some figures to feed back to the EC.

The FSA will therefore still require LA’s to make monitoring returns including details of how premises are scoring on the three parameters that are used to assess whether it is broadly compliant – to enable the FSA to report on activity against National Performance Indicator 184.

BG mentioned that the meeting had also discussed a particular problem he had identified in relation to the service of Hygiene Prohibition Notices (HPN). He had initially referred this to Shaheen Zar (SZ) at the FSA and SZ was seeking advice on the matter from the Agency lawyers.

SZ had also said that he thought this was a matter best dealt with by LACORS. BG explained that the problem related to a premises that wished to re-open before the application for the HPN could be given a court date for hearing. BG referred to a “Declaration” procedure in which a document was drafted confirming that the required health-risk condition existed at the time the premises was closed.

SEW confirmed that her authority LB TH had always used this procedure in the circumstances described by BG, backed up by verbal evidence. BG said that guidance needed to be included in the Practice Guidance document when this was finally revised.

It was therefore suggested that the LFCG should write to the FSA and request that when the Practice Guidance was revised it should include guidance on the correct procedure to be followed in cases as described by BG. It was also agreed that LACORS should be asked for an opinion.

In his concluding comments on the meeting with the FSA, PS said that he had gained the impression from them that the move to raise premises to a broadly complaint baseline was not the final objective to be reached, more likely this was the beginning of a programme to bring all premises up to a standard where over time they were all fully compliant.

PS asked JJ if she had anything to add to the comments already made concerning the meeting with the FSA. JJ informed the meeting that with the recently announced departure of David Statham, the FSA no longer has an Enforcement Group. Most of the work of the former Enforcement Group has moved to the Food Safety Group. As part of this, the teams responsible for the CoP, SotD and SF-BB have moved to the Enforcement Support Division headed by Sarah Appleby. The Local Authority Audit and Liaison Division which is made up of the Regional Unit, Monitoring and Audit, is now part of the Strategy and Resources Group. This Division is currently headed by Tom Murray, but John Barnes will take over when Tom retires in October, 08.

JJ said that a report evaluating the Regional Unit of the FSA was recently considered by the FSA Board. Although the evaluation of the Unit was very positive, any further roll-out is to be considered as part of a wider exercise on partnership working across the Agency. In the meantime, JJ said that the Regional Unit would consider supporting events / meetings in other regions wherever possible.

JJ also said that LACORS were originally going to host a Food Champions event but this is now going to be expanded into an Update event for those areas where the FSA doesn't have a regional presence. LACORS will be sending out details of this event planned for December in Birmingham.

PS asked JJ if there was any news on the SotD evaluation exercise. JJ said that this was scheduled for the October Board meeting but this may need to be postponed. There had been a huge response and additional resources had been drafted in to analyse these and draft the report.

In relation to the Food Champions Award, TP mentioned the possibility of an event to celebrate the London winners which would provide further information on the individual applications of the authorities that entered and in particular on those whose applications were based on nutrition.

JJ responded and said that the FSA would be willing to contribute to towards the funding of such an event.

She also suggested inviting some of the London authorities who had received Food Hygiene and Nutrition grant funding from the FSA to showcase their projects.

All To Note

JJ will check with John Barnes (FSA) on the current position regarding the guidance on the particular problem with HPN identified by BG and the timetable for the revision of the Practice Guidance

PS to draft and circulate a note to the Sectors on this issue

LACORS also be asked to give an opinion on the problem identified by BG in relation to HPN's

TP to prepare a paper for discussion for the next meeting of the LFCG on a London Food Champions Award event

5. Hammersmith & Fulham request to move from the SW Sector food group to the NW Sector food group

BG informed the meeting that the move of LB H & F from the SW Sector to the NW Sector discussed at the last meeting of the LFCG appears to have been implemented. He had spoken with Stephanie Needham, the LB H & F Sector representative and drawn her attention to the minutes of the last meeting of the LFCG held on the 25th June 2008 where this move was discussed and the decision of the LFCG that LB H & F seek and obtain the permission of the Association of London Environmental Health Managers (ALEHM) before any move could be considered.

All To Note

The Minutes of the meeting of the LFCG held on the 25th June 2008 to be clarified to reinforce the decision of the LFCG that no Sector can comprise of less than 7 London Boroughs

6. Imported Foods Return

PS spoke to this item and referred to an email he had recently received from Paul Stubbington at the FSA which identified 14 London Boroughs that had not yet submitted the required imported food returns.

DA said that a number of the Boroughs listed had not received any funding to carry out imported food sampling.

PS said that Paul Stubbington needed information on what had been achieved in dealing with imported food and also non-imported food. Because of the way data is currently collected a number of persons at the meeting thought that a new enforcement monitoring scheme might have to be devised to identify the two areas of work using separate codes. This would enable the samples of imported foods taken to be separately monitored.

All To Note

Sector Co-ordinators to remind their respective sector authorities to try to return some information to the FSA, in particular those that had received specific funding for this function

7. Sector Feedback –

- **NW Sector** – Deferred – No representative present
- **SW Sector** – BG reported that at the last Sector meeting SotD was discussed at length. It was likely that the LB's of Sutton and Lambeth would go with the nationally agreed (3 star based option). The views of the Sector on the most suitable scheme

were quite fragmented. PS remarked that ultimately the decision as to which SotD scheme was adopted (if any) by an LA lay with the respective LA Cabinet member.

On the fast food, trans-fat and salt levels survey reported at the last meeting, BG said that further work had been undertaken with an organisation called CASH (Consensus Action on Salt and Health).

A possible press release was still being discussed but was being held pending further work on the project. Catering meals and pub meals were now being suggested as possible areas for further investigation as an extension to the original project.

Nigel Whiteley was organising and delivering an Approvals Training Seminar on the 6th November at the LB Wandsworth for the Sector and the Sector was also considering organising a Faith and Food or the FSA Diversity Training courses

Inter-authority auditing had been discussed within the context of SotD and it was believed that an auditing component would make the London Scheme more robust

BG reported on a customer care initiative developed by the LB Croydon using text-messages enabling customers to contact the Council about food service requests. There had been a few teething problems but the authority now had the facility to send and receive text messages via email. It was thought this might be useful for sending allergy alerts. The system is called "See and Tell" and it covers a number of the Council's services.

- **SE Sector** – CZ said the original date of the Sector meeting had been changed and this had resulted in a limited attendance. The meeting discussed revisions to the Food Premises Registration Form to maintain the existing level of information, the guidance in the new CoP and interventions, with general thoughts that A, B and non-compliant C risk rated premises would be inspected while the other would have to wait. Differing policies on when a premises could be re-risk rated were also discussed and how these might operate with whatever SotD scheme is finally adopted.

CZ continued with her report on the Sector meeting said that in relation to the qualifications of staff undertaking sampling work, differences had been identified in the qualifications of these staff working in the Sector LA's. The introduction of a new term "Sampling for Analysis" had been noted and PS suggested that Para 8:8:2 of the new CoP be referred to for guidance. PS also thought that a possible conflict within the CoP existed.

CZ raised a query in relation to the Pan London Sampling programme that had been discussed at the last meeting of the LFCG, in particular, the sampling of water used for food preparation in temporary mobile premises. Did this include water used on boats? PK looked at the minutes of the last LFCG meeting and confirmed that at the meeting SSL had said that water samples from temporary mobile premises included boats where previously some real public health issues had been identified.

In concluding her report, CZ said the Sector meeting had discussed the interim report of the investigation into the 2006 Bridgend E.coli 0157 outbreak in which the qualifications of one of the officers involved had been the subject of criticism. CZ

asked if this ought to form a matter for discussion at the next meeting of the LFCG and PS said he would include it on the agenda.

In relation to this matter TP said she believed the FSA were drafting a food competency matrix. TP said she would make further enquiries.

Bridgend E.coli 0157 Investigation Report. Qualifications of Officers carrying out the original investigation. Item for the Agenda of the next meeting of the LFCG

- **NE Sector** – PS reported that at the last NE Sector meeting the recent LB TH closure case had been discussed. LB Camden raised difficulties it was experiencing in trying to identify a GM product which was a project their Members had asked to be carried out, in particular in relation to organic products and food being served in restaurants.

DA explained to the meeting the analytical difficulties that are associated with trying to identify GM foods in particular with Soya based products. It was easier to detect GM foods in corn or maize based products. PS asked DA if it would be possible for him to draft a guidance note explaining the range of GM products to look out for and what is analytically possible in trying to detect them.

The LB Redbridge had discovered a food importer adding a year to the shelf life of packets of imported fish. The Sector also discussed SotD and it will be arranging an imported food exercise. It is also looking at specific authorisations of officers in relation to the requirements of the official controls so that they match.

PS said that Dave Tolly (LB TH) was half-way through approving all the fish stalls in Billingsgate Fish Market that require approval and he had asked that during inspections could officers please check that the premises selling fish are sourcing it from only approved establishments. This might encourage those traders at the market who have yet to seek approval to come forward.

DA to draft a note detailing what is analytically possible when attempting to identify GM foods

8. HPA Update

Deferred – No representative present

9. Public Analyst (Eurofins) Update

DA said that the time to complete the imported Food Project funded by the FSA was running out and a few samples were still outstanding. The deadline was October so could these samples be submitted by the end of this month.

Looking at aflatoxin levels in edible seeds, a question had arisen as to an acceptable level in melon seeds. DA reported that Codex have recently approved levels in pistachios and almonds, The current FSA standard related to ground nuts but it had been agreed by the EU that the higher Codex standard would be adopted in relation to pistachios and almonds. DA was not able to confirm if any decision had been made in respect of melon seeds.

DA reported that no further progress had been made in relation to the review of the PA service.

All To Note

DA to email Sector Co-ordinators reminding them of the deadline for submission of imported food samples in connection with this years FSA funded programme

10. LACORS update

Deferred – No representative present

11. Any Other Business

11.1 SEW reported on recent activity of the London Region Food Study Group (LRFSG). A FSA sponsored course on Working Effectively with Diverse Communities was being arranged for 7th October, with 25 places available (no more than two delegates per LA). This was being delivered at Chadwick Court. If the October date is oversubscribed there may be an opportunity to arrange a second course. THE LRFSG will need to charge approx £35 – 40 per delegate to part cover the costs in arranging the course.

The collection of fees was discussed and it was agreed that the method used at the recent joint study groups CPD event, where delegates were asked to pay by cash or personal cheque on the day had worked well and would be used again.

It was pointed out by PS that his authority issued corporate credit cards as a means of payment in these situations and TP said she would check with CIEH if it was in a position to accept credit card payments in respect of course fees paid on the day.

SEW spoke about the very successful Joint London Region Food and Health and Safety Study Group CPD event held on the 20th June. Aleyne Fontenelle (AF) had agreed to act as the other Joint Secretary of the LRFSG with James Hoskin-Goode (JHG). SEW, AF and JHG were due to meet on the 20th August to plan the future meetings of the LRFSG to be held this year.

SEW to email details of the 7th October 2008 FSA Working Effectively with Diverse Communities Course to PS

PS to circulate details to Sector Co-ordinators with a request that they circulate their respective Sector LA's

Details and Names of any officers wishing to attend to be forwarded to SEW

TP to check with CIEH on the use of corporate credit cards to make payments for course fees etc

11.2 TP referred to the recent airing of programmes in the “Rogue Restaurants” television series on BBC1 . The CIEH was concerned that there appeared to be little involvement of the local authorities where these premises were located in making the programmes. TP reported that the CIEH had now been approached by the makers of “Panorama” with a proposal to make a programme on food safety that was more local authority focused. It was seeking the co-operation of the CIEH in making the programme.

SEW commented on her experiences in connection with the “Food Police” series which very nearly compromised a pending court case.

She urged caution when dealing with the media in connection with programmes and projects of this type. TP said that details of the proposed programme were being circulated to LA's via EHCnet

11.3 TP informed the meeting that the London and the CIEH responses to the SotD consultation exercise had been posted on the London Region and main CIEH websites respectively.

She and Rick Mason had been assisting in the provision of SotD Stickers.

They had also recently met with Transparency Data Services to discuss the future of the SotD schemes.

11.4 SEW raised an issue relating to food standards enforcement and asked if officers who have completed the Higher Certificate in Food Premises Inspection were also deemed competent to carry out food standards work. BG said that he taught the Higher Cert course at NESCOL and that the college were keen to offer the Food Standards endorsement. However, he was not aware of any syllabus that could be followed.

SEW said that she thought that there was an equivalent food standards course but that it had not yet received accreditation. She also believed that the Trading Standards profession also offered a food standards course but that it was very much orientated towards TSO's.

BG mentioned similar problems in relation to feedstuffs inspections and enforcement and at his authority, LB Croydon the possibility of contracting out this aspect of work to another TS Department was being actively considered.

TP thought that Middlesex University had developed a food standards course but progress towards offering it was very slow. She also understood that a food standards "endorsement" existed which could be taken in conjunction with the Higher Cert course and she said she would make further enquiries.

TP to make enquiries regarding the existence of food standards courses that can be taken as part of or in conjunction with the Higher Certificate in Food Premises Inspection course

11.5 CZ asked if anybody knew of any guidance or had any been developed for employment agencies to guide them on what information should be included in prospective employees CV's before they referred persons to local authorities for possible employment. PS said that he had drafted a guidance note.

PS to forward the guidance note to CZ

11.6 TP asked if anybody had a Job Description used in the recruitment of Student EHO's

An example of a JD for a Student EHO to be emailed to TP

11.7 BG said that in teaching the Higher Cert course at NESCOL many of the students on the course were not local authority based and in consequence had difficulty in gaining practical experience of carrying out inspections. Could any of the Sector LA's assist in this respect?

BG to email details to PS who will in turn circulate to the Sectors LA's to ask if any of them would be willing to host a student on the Higher Cert course for a period of unpaid practical training

**11.8 TP mentioned the revised London Student Consortium Scheme
TP to forward to BG details of the London Consortium Scheme**

The date of the next meeting of the LFCG will be Wednesday 15th October 2008. This will be held at the Corporation of London's Walbrook Wharf Offices commencing at 10.00 am.

There being no other business the LFCG meeting closed at 12.23 hrs