

London Healthier Catering Commitments Project
Guidelines for Boroughs on operation of the scheme
March 2011



This project has been designed by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (London), the Association of London Environmental Health Managers and the Greater London Authority.

1. Introduction

Over half of the adult population in London is either obese or overweight¹. Amongst adults, the prevalence is higher in outer London (54%) compared to inner London (46%) with little variation between the more deprived and less deprived areas, or amongst socio-economic groups².

In young Londoners, one in five is obese and one in three is either obese or overweight³. The risk of obesity tends to be higher in more deprived areas and in areas where there are large populations of certain BME groups including Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean, Black African, Other Black and other White (not British or Irish)⁴.

With around 48% of Londoners eating a takeaway at least once a week, and 1% of men in both the 25-34 and 45-54 groups eating out twice a day⁵, the food consumed out of the home can play a part in Londoners health. In Tower Hamlets, a City University survey found that 97% of households in Tower Hamlets are within a 10 minute walk of a fast food outlet.

Tools such as planning controls (such as in Barking and Dagenham⁶) clearly make a very useful contribution to limiting the number of new fast food outlets. This project will work with, or independently of, such controls and is designed for existing and new restaurants and takeaways to improve the offering made.

2. Aims

The project aims to deliver a healthier catering commitment (HCC) for food businesses operating in London.

It will:

- Utilise the "small changes make a big difference" principle,
- Be easy to administer,
- Be initially aimed at those businesses which cater in the "fast food" sector, although it can equally be applied to a range of businesses (except schools, nurseries, care homes and hospitals where different guidelines already exist⁷),
- Be available to businesses which meet the broadly compliant standard for food hygiene,

¹ Health Survey for England, 2008

² Health Survey for England 2006 London Boost

³ Health Survey for England, 2008

⁴ Weighty matters: The London findings of the Childhood measurement programme 2006 to 2008

⁵ YouGov survey Capital Cuisine, 2010

⁶ London Borough of Barking and Dagenham SPD Addressing the Health Impacts of Hot Food Takeaways)

⁷ Caroline Walker Trust

- Allow businesses to add in additional “commitments” and thus encourage them to think wider,
- Encourage joint working between the local authority and PCT
- Fit with the new public health agenda and aims of the Directors of Public Health.

3. Available materials to support delivery

- The criteria
- Guidelines and benefits for business
- Information leaflet
- Application form
- Assessment form
- Stickers for successful businesses
- Reduced (5) hole salt shakers (limited numbers)

4. The criteria

In order to be eligible to use the HCC logo, a business must meet the four essential criteria (plus a further three for those who fry food) and achieve a total of eight. They have all been designed to be simple to operate. A pre-requisite is that the business must achieve the “broad compliance” standard or above for food hygiene.

A business can also sign up to other optional criteria, and this is absolutely encouraged. The criteria cover the main areas of healthier frying, reducing salt and sugar, increasing carbohydrates, health promotion and access to fruit or vegetables. A copy of the criteria can be found in Appendix 1.

5. Operation of the scheme

The local authority can choose how to run the scheme in terms of business sign up and assessment. There are two suggested options, although others may exist and authorities are free to choose the most appropriate option for them.

Option one – write to all businesses which you wish to target, sending them the information leaflet, application form and criteria prior to the primary food hygiene inspection. Ask them to complete and return the application form either by post or email for assessment at their next primary inspection. If the business has queries, this can be dealt with by phone, inspector visiting the premises, or business visiting the council offices. When the primary inspection is carried out, assess the business as part of the inspection and notify the business of the outcome when discussing other matters at the end of the inspection.

Option two – give out the information leaflet and criteria to businesses at the primary food hygiene inspection. The officer can then explain the scheme and deal with any questions. The business can apply either at that point, or sometime later. This option will necessitate the officer to revisit the premises to carry out an assessment and notify the business of the outcome. Obviously this could be incorporated into a food hygiene revisit, for example.

It is, of course, possible that with either option, the business may only achieve partial compliance with the standard on the first visit. It is hoped that boroughs will want to work with businesses and help them achieve the HCC by allowing them time to make the necessary changes and then revisit to confirm the standard is being met.

However the visits are carried out, officers are recommended to use the scheme tips for businesses when helping explain the benefits. The scheme has been designed so as to not only make the business output healthier, but to also reduce costs for business and it is important that the business is aware of this as it might help with engagement.

The commitments are valid until the date of the next programmed food hygiene inspection (or a maximum of two years from date of awarding), and it is suggested that any future visits to the premises include a check on continued compliance with the standard.

It is recommended that at the end of year one, the authority consider carrying out a compliance visit to check the criteria are still being met. The simple nature of the criteria means that this should be quick to do and that it can be done by any officer who has been briefed on the HCC standards.

6. Withdrawal of the award

Should standards slip within the business (either on the food hygiene to a level below broadly complaint or in maintenance of the HCC) then the HCC should be withdrawn. The business should be notified immediately in writing and any official scheme materials removed from the premises by the inspector.

The business can reapply again at the time of the next programmed inspection, or earlier if the borough is able to take applications outside of the inspection cycle.

7. Changes within the business

If the business ownership changes, the HCC will need to be withdrawn as the method of operation within the business will likely change. The new operator, can of course, apply and should be encouraged to do so. It is suggested that information on the scheme

could be sent out with food business registration forms and this is one method of informing new owners of the scheme.

If the type of food that the business serves or handles changes, then the inspector will wish to consider whether the HCC is still valid and is being appropriately applied. The HCC may be withdrawn or could continue to operate, as appropriate.

8. Engagement with other parties

It is suggested that the authority consider engaging with their PCT on this work – both parties will likely share common aims and objectives which this type of work can fulfil. Nutritional support, for example, can be really helpful where a business wants to take the commitments further and will allow them to receive access to specialist advice which the local authority may not be able to provide. The new public health agenda may also open up funding avenues to help support this work and officers will want to try and engage accordingly.