

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities held at 9.30
am on Thursday, 2 February 2023

Present:

Members: Councillor AS Khan (Chair)
Councillor P Male (Shadow Cabinet Member)
Councillor P Akhtar (Deputy Cabinet Member)

Employees Present:

Law and Governance: U Patel
Streetscene & Regulatory Services D Blackburn, N Castledine

Public Business

20. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

21. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2022 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

22. Food and Safety - Introduction of a Discretionary, Chargeable Advisory Service

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Streetscene and Regulatory Services which sought approval to the introduction of a charge for discretionary food and safety advice to local businesses.

The Food and Safety Team is responsible for overseeing a wide range of legislation and are committed to working with local businesses to ensure they have the correct advice necessary to run businesses to ensure they have the correct advice necessary to run businesses safely and to ensure that food produced, prepared or sold in the city is safe to eat and without risks to health and that places of work are safe for employees, for members of the public who visit such premises, and for contractors who undertake work at the premises.

Providing advice to local businesses is not a statutory function of the team. Section 93 (1) (a) of the Local Government Act 2003 and the Food Law Code of Practice (England) permits Local Authorities to charge for the provision of discretionary services, such as the provision of business advice.

Currently, the Food and Safety Team offers advice free of charge to any local businesses that requests it. The Team has a wealth of resources on the Council's website so businesses can help themselves to food safety and health and safety advice and support, however, many businesses request a more detailed and

bespoke advice service from a trusted professional that they already have a rapport with.

The time spent with a business providing this more detailed advice can take a considerable amount of time and has a direct impact on the resource available to provide statutory services. Sometimes, if requested, officers would visit a food premises to give advice e.g. to help advise on the completion of documentation, give advice on surface finishes in a food business or give advice on the set up of a new food business. Officers do not provide on-site health and safety advice as the nature of that is significantly different in that to give specialist health and safety advice, the advisor would need to have full and comprehensive understanding of how a business operates. The team simply do not have the resource at the current time to deliver this type of service.

The team received approximately 200 requests for advice each year and on average, each one of them takes an officer about one hour to deal with in total. On occasions, an on-site advice visit would be made which would take longer to complete and also incurs the associated costs of return travel and parking. As this work is discretionary, it was proposed that this type of advice is charged for. It was anticipated that even if only half the number of current requests for advice is received in future, a new income stream of approximately £8,000 could be achieved.

The provision of completely free business advice is no longer considered to be appropriate given the high number of requests for advice made by local businesses each year. The provision of business advice is discretionary and is given by officers in addition to any visits or interventions undertaken as part of the team's statutory functions.

It was noted that significant free support for businesses was available on the Council's website for businesses to 'self help' themselves to. It was proposed that businesses would also be provided with 30 minutes of initial general advice on food and safety legislation, for free per annum. This advice would include signposting of businesses to alternative sources of advice and self-help and would normally be delivered over the telephone or by email.

It was proposed that if this was not sufficient or did not meet the needs of the business, the customer would be given the opportunity to pay for either an online advisory service or pay for a site visit which could provide bespoke advice on food and safety legislation. Chargeable advice provided would include tailored advice on for example, documented procedures, cleaning, layout of the food premises etc. All advice would be appropriate and proportionate to the business to give reassurance on compliance.

The report provided further information on the type of advice and support that could be given and the different packages that were available. The proposed fees were set out on Appendix 1 of the report.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities:

- 1. Approves the provision of a charge for discretionary food and safety advice.**

2. Adopts the proposed fees set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

23. Outstanding Issues

There were no outstanding issues.

24. Any Other Business

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 9.50 am)