

## SCORES ON THE DOORS

### Questions and Answers

**Q: How does the scheme work?**

A: When one of our food officers carries out a full hygiene inspection the food business will be given a score based on the level of food safety found during the visit. The assessment is based on nationally set food hygiene regulations and standards. Each inspection results in the food business being rated against these standards. The key areas assessed are food hygiene practices, structural compliance and confidence in management.

The scores from this rating are converted to a star rating ranging from 5 stars (excellent) to 0 stars (very poor). Premises are provided with a certificate and details of the scores are entered onto the council's scores on the doors website.

**Q: How much will it cost me?**

A: The scheme is free of charge to businesses listed on the site. There is also no charge to anyone who wishes to view the information on the website.

**Q: Why has this scheme been introduced?**

A: Anyone now has the right to request information held by local authorities, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. A number of requests have been made to date and, in anticipation of further requests being made, Huntingdonshire has decided to publicise the hygiene ratings of the majority of food businesses in the district. The scheme will acknowledge and reward the hard work and commitment of many businesses, which up to now has generally gone unnoticed. It will also act as an incentive for poorer performing businesses to improve their standards. Studies show that where similar schemes have been introduced, businesses are keen to improve standards. There is also evidence that cases of food-borne illness have declined in areas which publicise hygiene ratings. Many local authorities have adopted this scheme.

**Q: I do not want to take part in the scheme, and would like my details removed from your database.**

A: Opting out of the scheme is not possible. All registered catering and retail food businesses trading in Huntingdonshire will be included in the scheme and will have details of their rating posted on the internet site.

**Q: I disagree with the rating I have been given. What can I do?**

A: The officer who carried out the inspection will have discussed your rating with you at the time of the inspection, or you will have been informed of your rating in writing shortly after your inspection. The officer will have advised you how your rating was calculated and offered advice on how to improve your rating at the next inspection. You can comment by using the 'Right to Reply' facility on the website and you can also write to the Commercial Team Leader. Further advice is available in our leaflet: 'Scores on the Doors: Guidance Notes'.

**Q: My business has won many awards and is listed in countless guidebooks, so why haven't I been given a 5 star rating?**

A: The Scores on the Doors scheme does not assess food quality, food presentation, customer service or the general eating experience. It is an assessment of food hygiene standards and compliance with food safety law.

**Q: Do I have to display the window sticker and certificate that I have been provided with?**

A: You are encouraged to display both the window sticker and certificate, but there is no requirement to do so. Displaying your rating will give your customers confidence; the absence of a certificate or window sticker may raise suspicion.

**Q: I am concerned that if my business is inspected when I am not present, a member of my staff could paint my operation in a bad light which will reflect on my scoring.**

A: You should discuss the importance and relevance of food hygiene inspections and the Scores on the Doors scheme with your members of staff. You should be confident that you are able to leave responsible members of staff in charge of your business in your absence. You are able to leave comments on the 'Right to Reply' facility on the website.

**Q: I have just moved into my new business and have noticed that I have inherited a very low Scores on the Doors rating. What can I do?**

A: You are required to complete a new Food Premises Registration Form (available from Commercial Team). On receipt of the form an authorised officer will carry out a food hygiene inspection within 2 months and rate your business according to conditions found under your ownership.

The 'old' business should have informed us about 'closing' and we would then remove it from the site. On receipt of the new form, the business would be added to the site as 'not yet inspected' until the inspection takes place.

**Q: A comparable business just down the road has a higher rating than my business. How can I improve my rating?**

A: The officer who carried out the inspection will happily offer you advice on what is needed to improve your rating. At each inspection you will be assessed on how well you are complying with food hygiene requirements and the suitability of the structure of your premises. The officer will also make an assessment of their confidence in the management of the business. These scores will translate into your rating, which the officer will discuss with you. The assessment is partly based on what is observed at the time of the inspection, and it is important that you maintain and improve upon these standards throughout the year.

**Q: I received a low rating at my last inspection. I have now completed everything that was requested of me in the letter and I understand that the officer will be revisiting to check this shortly. Will my business be re-rated at this visit as the low rating is affecting my trade?**

A: The rating which you received at the initial inspection is the one that remains until your next routine inspection. Only in very exceptional circumstances (for example substantial investment or refitting of the premises), will re-scoring of the business be considered. If the rating given was particularly low, it is likely that your next routine inspection will be carried out within 6 – 12 months, at which time the officer will re-assess the business based on conditions at that time. You may wish to use the Right to Reply facility to describe what improvements you have carried out.

**Q: My business is situated on the edge of the district. I am aware that the neighbouring authority has also implemented a Scores on the Doors scheme. I am concerned that if they have different standards they could award higher scores to their businesses, which may affect my trade.**

A: All local authority Environmental Health staff must carry out their duties in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the Food Standards Agency. Ratings given after each inspection must be calculated using set criteria detailed in the Code of Practice. This is national guidance and must be followed by all local authorities to determine the frequency of inspections. Managers at Huntingdonshire carry out regular reviews of inspectors' performance to ensure consistency and conduct training sessions to monitor consistency between staff in neighbouring councils. If you are concerned that your business has been wrongly rated please write to the Commercial Team Leader at Huntingdonshire District Council.

**Q: How long will it take to publicise my rating and receive my window sticker and certificate?**

A: We aim to update the website and issue window stickers and certificates within 28 days of your inspection being carried out.

**Q: I am relocating my business. Can I take my certificate and window sticker with me?**

A: The rating applies to the premises and is not transferable. You will need to re-register your business when you relocate. An officer will visit within 2 months to carry out an inspection and will reassess your new business premises.

**Q: I am suspicious that a neighbouring business has tampered with their certificate to increase their rating. What can I do?**

A: You can compare the rating with that promoted on our website. If they are not the same you should contact us and we will take action to remove the false certificate.

**Q: I recently had an inspection but my score is not on the website?**

A: The website is updated every 28 days.

**Q: I cannot find the rating of my local post office or childminders on the website. Why is this?**

A: Certain businesses are classified as 'low risk' and fall outside the scope of routine food hygiene inspections. Such businesses are assessed via other means sometimes referred to as an 'Alternative Enforcement Strategy' (AES). Certificates and window stickers are not allocated to these businesses, but most will be identified on our website as 'AES'. Childminders are not included in the scheme for child protection reasons.

**Q: I am delighted with my rating and would like to use it for advertising purposes. Is this OK?**

A: Your rating can be used to promote your achievements along with the Scores on the Doors logo. You must, of course, only use your current rating.

**Q: How is this scheme going to benefit me?**

A: Your rating will be promoted on the website and you can display your certificate and window sticker. A good rating will encourage customers to visit your premises in preference to others. Also, a photograph of your business and a link to your own website can be included on the Scores on the Doors website.