

# HUSH NEWSLETTER

## Lack of cash and leadership threatens to derail food safety work

In a report launched at the Senedd in Cardiff on 23rd March, Consumer Focus Wales said a lack of Assembly Government funding and leadership is preventing local authorities implementing recommendations made by Professor Hugh Pennington in the wake of the deadly 2005 food poisoning outbreak.

In order to carry out Pennington's recommendations the Welsh Assembly Government currently only allocates an extra £180,000 per year to its 22 local authorities, yet it is estimated that between £2.5-£3 million per year additional money will be needed for the next 5 years.

Maria Battle, Senior Director of Consumer Focus Wales said: *"Much of the work undertaken by public authorities in response to the inquiry has been thorough, timely and appropriate. However, clearly more needs to be done."*



**Maria Battle, Senior Director of Consumer Focus Wales with Tory Assembly Member, Andrew RT Davies**

*"We want the Welsh Assembly Government to provide ring-fenced money to local authorities so they have the resources to implement the recommendations. We know money is going to be scarce but it is crucial that environmental health services are properly funded to prevent another E. coli outbreak."*

The Scottish Executive made an annual payment of £2.6m for five years following recommendations by Prof Pennington, after a similar outbreak of *E. coli* O157 in 1996. It was earmarked for food hygiene, a move which enabled environmental health departments to build capacity to focus efforts on making the improvements recommended.

The review also criticises the Welsh Assembly Government for not taking a stronger role on directing post-Pennington work, in order to ensure the best possible outcomes from the £2.3m that the inquiry cost.

Consumers have a right to know whether Prof Pennington's recommendations have been implemented in full and what has changed since the 2005 outbreak to increase food safety and prevent another major outbreak.

HUSH member Sharon Mills, who lost her 5-year-old son Mason in the 2005 outbreak in south Wales, was present at the launch of the report at the Senedd and said: "I believe the Welsh Assembly Government needs to ask itself if it has done all it can to protect its people.

"My five year old child lost his life and a number of other young children are still suffering in the aftermath of this outbreak. Some will need ongoing treatment and care for a long time.

"There are still people like William Tudor out there cutting corners and I think we are going to see a Pennington 3 if the authorities don't act now."

A further issue highlighted by the review relates to the separation of equipment for raw meat and ready-to-eat foods, which was the most likely cause of the 2005 outbreak and the 1996 Scottish outbreak.

The law is not clear on whether environmental health officers should be requiring food businesses to use separate machinery for raw meat and ready-to-eat foods. Different local authorities take different approaches to this issue. The review calls for the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to issue guidance making it clear that complex, hard-to-clean equipment should never be used for raw meat and ready-to-eat foods.

This has been acknowledged by the FSA, who plan to hold a public consultation on this guidance in the near future.

The watchdog also wants the new scores-on-the-doors system – where food businesses display their hygiene rating to customers – made mandatory. HUSH made this recommendation in its consultation response to the FSA in August 2008. We also suggested this once again to the Pennington public inquiry following the South Wales Outbreak.

HUSH were pleased to contribute to the Consumer Focus Wales report into the implementation of the Pennington recommendations in Wales and to attend its launch in March. The charity is keen to continue its work with Consumer Focus Wales to ensure that all of Prof. Pennington's recommendations are implemented as quickly as possible.

To read or download the report "Protecting Consumers from E.coli O157" go to: <http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/wales/>

## HUSH AGM

At the charity's recent AGM HUSH was once again pleased to welcome Dr Kevin Pollock of Health Protection Scotland (HPS), who discussed the findings of the enhanced surveillance in Scotland to date. The number of cases of HUS in 2009 was significantly reduced, with only 15 cases identified from 235 cases of VTEC infection (6.4%). This may be partly explained by better awareness of E. coli O157 and improved supportive care. The Royal Hospital for Sick Children (Yorkhill) in Glasgow is due to report to the Scottish Government shortly on their part in a successful pilot (with Professor Phil Tarr in USA) to admit cases and provide earlier intravenous rehydration with high saline loading rather than oral rehydration. It is hoped this technique will eventually be rolled out across the rest of the country and the paper, once published will be circulated to the British Paediatric Nephrology Society.

HPS is presently working with a US company on a microchip that will allow GP's to make earlier diagnosis of E. coli O157 and at the moment Research & Development approval is being sought by the appropriate NHS Health Board.

Dr Pollock also reported that a study has just been submitted on person-to-person spread of the bacterium and emphasises the difficulty of caring for children with bloody diarrhoea at home. Once accepted for publication a copy will be passed to HUSH for distribution to members.

The Scottish Government is funding a formal audit of the Task Force recommendations and a report is being finalised at present. It is also setting up a VTEC Action Group to revise the Public Health Guidance of 2008 and take on board Prof Pennington's recommendations of the Welsh Outbreak.

Early surveillance in England, which started in January 2009 has provided some interesting data, including new information on transmission routes during a 6 month period but this will need repeating to observe seasonal changes.

HUSH Treasurer, Debbie Holden, reported that the Scottish Government has agreed to fund HUSH by £9,300 for the period 2010-11. The charity will also receive £5,500 from HPS to carry out an economic assessment of E.coli O157 in Scotland.



**New HUSH Director  
Marilyn Chapman with her  
grand-daughter Millie**

Mrs Marilyn Chapman of Poulton-le-Fylde has agreed to become a director of HUSH. Marilyn became an active member of the charity in 2002 when her daughter, Amy, was in intensive care being treated for HUS. Since then both Marilyn and Amy have supported the work of HUSH and were responsible for the design and introduction of our safe BBQ posters.

## Keeping an eye on the abattoirs

The Food Standards Agency (FSA), which includes the Meat Hygiene Service, has been embarrassed, we believe yet again, by the 2009 European Union Food and Veterinary Office Report which exposes poor hygiene in some UK abattoirs and meat cutting plants. This issue also arose in their previous reports of 2001 and 2007.

Animal Aid, a welfare campaign group, have also secretly filmed cruelty to pigs and sheep at an organic certified abattoir in Devon.

FSA Chief Executive, Tim Smith, acknowledges that there are still concerns about standards in the meat industry and says: "I do believe we have to get tougher with the weaker points in the meat supply chain". In an attempt to ensure the highest standard of health, hygiene and animal welfare the FSA are now developing plan to install CCTV cameras in all Britain's 400 abattoirs.



**Tim Smith,  
FSA Chief Executive**

Mr Smith favours cameras and likened them to the tachographs that were introduced in lorries to check driving times of hauliers in the 1970s. He stressed that any footage from these cameras should be made available to customers such as supermarkets, manufacturers and wholesalers to ensure their contract specifications were being met by the operators.

However, The agency cannot force meat companies to install surveillance cameras, but Mr Smith hopes agreement will emerge and comments: "Where we find resistance it is from operators with something to hide".

Currently around half of the RSPCA's 'Freedom Food' accredited abattoirs have CCTV installed. It is backing compulsory cameras in all meat plants and hopes to make it a requirement for meat produced under its 'Freedom Food' label.

## Thank you ....

- ◆ To HUSH member Carol Halton of Wigan, who kindly thought of the charity when celebrating a 'special' birthday (*your secret's safe with me Carol!*) and sent a generous donation.
- ◆ To Consumer Focus Wales, who received the gift of an extra large Easter egg and decided to raffle it for HUSH. They raised £59. Well done!

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