

## Confidence and Consistency

### Case Study – Iceland Primary Authority Partnership with Flintshire County Council

*“The formation of partnerships by companies is a positive step, showing their intention to improve their standards and level of compliance.”*



### Origin

Dealing with regulatory officers from local authorities is an everyday event for Iceland Foods, as this fast-growing retailer has over 700 sites across the UK. Before 2009 – a year in which the company enjoyed record sales and profits – it had a longstanding voluntary partnership with Flintshire County Council for health and safety. Although this thrived, there was a lack of consistency in the interpretation of legal requirements by other local authorities, leading to interventions regarded as inappropriate and unnecessary.

### Conception

Due to its existing relationship, Iceland Foods saw a Primary Authority agreement with Flintshire as a natural progression, and this was signed in April 2009. The council already had a good understanding of the company’s activities and their resulting risks, as well as consistently demonstrating an appreciation of the demands of private enterprise. At the outset, the scope of the arrangement was expanded to cover new areas, including consumer credit, fair trading and food standards.



Local Better Regulation Office  
duncan.johnson@lbro.org.uk  
www.lbro.org.uk  
0121 226 4000

CS03 / January 2010



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## Evolution

Since Flintshire was already well acquainted with the tried and tested safety management system of Iceland Foods – after visiting many stores to see working and training procedures in action – its feedback to date has been general rather than specific, but still welcomed nevertheless. The partners have now jointly agreed risk priorities and developed an inspection plan. This provides local authorities with useful background information and guidelines so that they can avoid making superfluous checks and tests.

Iceland Foods Health and Safety Manager Stephen Dean comments: “In the long run, we should benefit from fewer, more focused inspections and consistent enforcement that is appropriate to the risk posed. To this end, I hope that local authorities increase their support for Primary Authority. Some appear to view it as an additional hurdle to jump if they wish to take enforcement action. This is misplaced. The formation of partnerships by companies is a positive step, showing their intention to improve their standards and level of compliance. It is not an erosion of regulatory powers. Local authorities should be confident that any concerns that they pass on to Flintshire Council will be addressed in the proper manner, including enforcement action. Ideally, I would like more clarification on the role of the Primary Authority regarding matters where it has not previously issued advice.”

## Project Summary

**Any company trading across council boundaries is entitled to robust and reliable advice about its regulatory responsibilities. This is provided through a legal partnership with a single primary authority, which liaises with other councils to ensure that any enforcement action proposed elsewhere in the UK reflects the advice given. A national inspection plan can also be produced, to avoid unnecessary checks and tests. Agreements can cover the full range of regulatory services or specific functions such as food safety. The question of resourcing is up to the participants: where necessary, cost recovery is permitted. LBRO registers new partnerships, provides guidance and helps resolve any disputes.**



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