

East Herts Council Report

Licensing Committee

Date of meeting: 07/01/2026

Report by: Councillor Sarah Hopewell, Executive Member for Wellbeing

Report title: Environmental Health Regulated and Licenced Activities Performance Update

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary – The Licensing Committee's responsibilities, set out in paragraph 6.5.2 of the council's Constitution, include overseeing the registration and regulation of food premises.

This report gives an overview of the work Environmental Health carries out to regulate and license food premises. Although some of the team's wider activities fall outside the Licensing Committee's remit, this report also includes information about other licensing work to help members understand the full range of services delivered by Environmental Health.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR Licensing Committee members:

- a) consider and scrutinise the performance of Environmental Health with regards to regulated and licenced activities pertaining to food premises and pass any comments to the Executive Member for Wellbeing for consideration

- b) consider the performance of other activities regulated and licenced activities by Environmental Health and pass any comments to the Executive Member for Wellbeing for consideration.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Licensing Committee's responsibilities, as set out in paragraph 6.5.2 of the council's Constitution, include overseeing the registration and regulation of food premises.
- 1.2 To provide context, this report also includes information about other Environmental Health functions. These additional services are not within the Licensing Committee's remit, but are included to support members' understanding of the team's wider work.
- 1.3 Environmental Health issues licences, registrations and permits on behalf of the council. For simplicity, this report refers to all of these as licences, although each term has a distinct meaning:
 - a) **Licence** – Official permission granted by the council that allows a person or business to carry out a specific activity. This usually involves meeting certain standards or criteria.
 - b) **Registration** – The formal recording of a person or activity with the council. This is required for legal, tracking or identification purposes.
 - c) **Permit** – Permission for a business to carry out specific activities that may otherwise be restricted. Permits are often related to activities that could affect the environment.

2.0 Environmental Health overview

- 2.1 Although this report focuses on activities that require licensing, it is important to understand the wider context. Environmental Health delivers a broad range of statutory public health functions. These include:
 - a) the air we breathe,
 - b) the food we eat,
 - c) the water we drink, and
 - d) the wider impacts on health caused by poor air quality or poor housing conditions.

2.2 **Appendix A** lists the functions undertaken by the three teams within Environmental Health:

- a) **Commercial** – covering business-related activities
- b) **Environment** – focusing on environmental protection
- c) **Residential** – dealing with housing standards

2.3 The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) published its latest workforce survey in 2021. It found that 56% of local authorities had environmental health vacancies unfilled for six months or more. The full survey is available on the [CIEH website](#).

2.4 East Herts Council faces similar challenges. We have struggled to recruit and retain qualified staff. For example, one of our Technical Officer (Commercial) posts has been vacant since October 2024 due to a shortage of suitably experienced candidates.

2.5 To help address staffing gaps, the council appointed two trainees to the vacant Technical Officer (Commercial) posts. Unfortunately, both individuals have since left East Herts Council. We have now successfully recruited new trainees to fill these posts.

2.6 Having a high number of vacancies and trainee posts affects the team's performance and ability to deliver statutory services. To manage this, we use underspends from vacant posts to fund temporary agency cover. We match agency spend to staffing underspend to avoid creating budget pressures.

3.0 Summary of licences issued by Environmental Health

3.1 Below summarises the licences issued by Environmental Health. It includes:

- a) the type of licence,
- b) the duration of each licence, and
- c) the current number of licences issued by the council.

3.2 The table shows that food premises licences make up the largest single area of licensing activity within the service. For comparison, figures from the last report to the Licensing Committee are also included.

3.3 Some of the licensable activities listed in Table 1 have been grouped together based on their similarities. Where this is the case additional tables are included in the following paragraphs to provide more detail about each grouping.

Table 1 – Break down of licences issued by Environmental Health

Licensable activity	Licence type	Licence duration	Number as of 04/02/25	Number as of 16/12/25
Food premises <i>See Table 2</i>	Registration / Approval	In perpetuity	1,592	1,558
Skin piercing <i>See Table 3</i>	Registration	In perpetuity	546	608
Houses in multiple occupation	Licence	Up to 5 years	106	111
Animal activities <i>See Table 4</i>	Licence	Up to 3 years	57	60
Environmental permits <i>See Table 5</i>	Permit	In perpetuity	34	34
Mobile homes sites	Licence	In perpetuity ^[1]	11	11
Cooling towers	Registration	In perpetuity	7	7
Dangerous wild animals	Licence	Up to 2 years	1	1
Zoos	Licence	Up to 6 years	1	1
Camp sites	Licence	In perpetuity ^[1]	0	0

^[1] Or until planning permission for the site expires.

4.0 Food hygiene interventions

- 4.1 As noted earlier, the Licensing Committee has a specific remit under the council's Constitution relating to activities involving food premises.
- 4.2 All food businesses must be registered with the council. In addition, businesses that process meat, fish or other animal products may require formal approval and are subject to stricter regulatory controls.
- 4.3 Table 2 below shows the number of food businesses in the district, grouped by categories used by the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

Table 2 – Breakdown of food premises within East Hertfordshire

Category of food premises	Number as of 16/12/25
Restaurants and catering	1,149
Retail	337
Manufacturers and packers	33
Distributors and transporters	20
Primary producers	13
Importers and exporters	6

- 4.4 As reported to the Licensing Committee on [22 October 2024](#), the Food Standards Agency (FSA) carried out a focused audit of the council's food safety service. Following this, in February 2024, the Council was placed on Stage 1 of the FSA's four-stage Performance Improvement Process (PIP). This required the council to produce an action plan to address identified shortfalls.
- 4.5 The FSA approved the action plan and subsequently de-escalated the Council. They continue to monitor our progress against the agreed actions.

4.6 On the 2 December 2025, following the 6-monthly LAEMS Return to the FSA in October 2025, the FSA wrote to the Council (Appendix C) confirming they are closing their engagement with us on the understanding that we:

- a) continue to realign to the Food Law Code of Practice and clear the backlog of interventions, and
- b) inform the FSA if there is a change in our circumstances which negatively impact on our ability to realign with the Code of Practice.

4.7 Appendix B includes the full action plan and an update on progress for each action. Of the 21 actions:

- a) 16 have been completed,
- b) one is on track to be completed within the target timeframe,
- c) two are confirmed as delayed,
- d) one is at risk of being delayed, and
- e) one has missed their target.

4.8 Update on missed actions:

- a) Three category 'D' premises remain uninspected. Of these, one is not currently trading as it is undergoing major refurbishment and two are home caterers whom we believe are no-longer trading.

4.9 Update on delayed actions:

- a) The two delayed actions relate to reviewing the structure of the team to increase capacity and the recruitment and retention of staff. Both of these have been paused until a deep dive is completed. This will allow Leadership Team to consider any financial implications in full.
- b) The review and deep dive will be important to help us decide how best to maintain the improvements achieved through the action plan over the long term.

4.10 The next performance report to the FSA is due in April 2026.

5.0 Overview of other activities regulated and licensed by Environmental Health

5.1 As noted in the report to the Licensing Committee on [22 October 2024](#), the Environmental Health team is still developing reporting tools to help the council extract meaningful management information about the licences it issues. Because of this, the data in this section is limited to the number of licences issued. It does not yet include information about whether licences were issued within target times.

5.2 **Skin piercing activities** include ear piercing, tattooing, acupuncture and electrolysis. To operate a skin piercing business, both the business and the individual carrying out the procedure must be registered with the council. Table 3 below shows the current number of registrations.

Table 3 - Breakdown of the current skin piercing registrations

Type of skin piercing registration	Number of premises as of 16/12/25	Number of operators as of 16/12/25
Acupuncture	46	79
Cosmetic piercing including ear piercing	40	101
Derma-rolling	3	2
Electrolysis	18	19
Microneedling	10	15
Semi-permanent skin colouring	70	80
Tattooing	51	74

5.3 **Animal activity licences** cover a range of different activities. Table 4 breaks these down by type of activity, rather than by the number of

premises. This is because a single premises may hold more than one type of licence.

Table 4 – Breakdown of the current animal activities licences

Type of animal activity licence	Number as of 16/12/25
Animal boarding (home boarding for dogs)	19
Animal boarding (cats)	13
Animal boarding (dogs)	10
Riding establishments	5
Animal boarding (day care for dogs)	4
Dog breeding	3
Pet shops	3
Performing animals	3

5.4 **Environmental permits** are required for businesses whose activities could pollute air, water or land. These permits set out:

- the monitoring the business must carry out, and
- the environmental limits the business must stay within.

Table 5 below shows the current environmental permits issued by the council.

Table 5 – Breakdown of the current environmental permits

Type environmental permit	Number as of 12/09/25
Stage 1 & Stage 2 – Petrol vapor recovery	12
Bulk cement	6
Dry cleaning	6
Vehicle refinishing	4
Mobile crushing and screening	3
Crematorium	1
Road coating	1
Vehicle coating	1

5.5 **Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)** - Landlords must have a licence if they rent out a property to five or more people from more than one household, where tenants share amenities. The council currently licenses 111 HMOs, which house up to 735 people.

5.6 **Mobile homes sites** - A licence is usually needed if caravans are allowed on land for more than 28 days a year. Some exemptions apply, such as sites that are members of approved organisations like the Caravan and Camping Club. These sites still need planning permission. The council currently has 11 registered sites.

5.7 **Cooling towers** - The council registers cooling towers on premises where it enforces health and safety legislation, as well as those where the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is the enforcing authority. There are currently six registered sites with cooling towers.

5.8 **Dangerous Wild Animals** - A licence is required if someone keeps an animal listed in the [Schedule](#) of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and is not covered by a zoo licence. The council currently has one licence holder.

- 5.9 **Zoos** – A zoo licence is needed if someone keeps wild animals and opens the premises to the public for seven or more days a year. The council currently licenses one zoo in the district.
- 5.10 **Camp sites** – A campsite licence is needed if land is used for tents for more than 42 consecutive days or 60 days in a year. The council currently has no licensed campsites

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 This report highlights the important role Environmental Health plays in protecting public health through the regulation and licensing of food premises. It also provides wider context on the team's broader responsibilities and the challenges faced in maintaining service delivery, particularly around staffing and capacity.
- 6.2 Despite these challenges, significant progress has been made in delivering the FSA action plan, with most actions now completed or on track. Where delays or missed targets have occurred, clear steps are in place to address them, including a planned deep dive to support long-term service improvement.
- 6.3 Members are invited to consider the performance of Environmental Health in relation to both food premises and other licensable activities, and to pass any comments to the Executive Member for Wellbeing for consideration.

7.0 Implications/Consultations

7.1 Community Safety

- a) None arising directly from this report.

7.2 Data Protection

- a) None arising directly from this report.

7.3 Equalities

- a) None arising directly from this report.

7.4 Environmental Sustainability

- a) None arising directly from this report.

7.5 Financial

- a) None arising directly from this report, although the need to maintain capacity and avoid a future backlog of food premises inspections is under close review.

7.6 Health and Safety

- a) None arising directly from this report.

7.7 Human Resources

- a) None arising directly from this report.

7.8 Human Rights

- a) None arising directly from this report.

7.9 Legal

- a) None arising directly from this report.

7.10 Specific Wards

- a) Not applicable.

8.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

8.1 Background Information:

- a) Licensing Committee report from 22 October 2024
<https://democracy.eastherts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=120&MId=5388&Ver=4&J=2>

8.2 Appendices

- a) Appendix A – Overview of Environmental Health functions
- b) Appendix B – Update on the 2024 FSA action plan.
- c) Appendix C – Email from the Food Standards Agency

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