

HM Government

## Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

### Note of meeting with Quantum Care

**Location:** Nobel House

**Date:** 19 December 2013

**Attendees:**

Rebecca Kenner – Secretariat – Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

Donna Steeden (DS) - Support Services Manager - Quantum Care, and National Association of Care Caterers

Chris Elliott (CE) – Reviewer – Review into the Integrity and Assurance of Food Supply Networks

#### **1. Introduction to the Elliott Review**

CE gave an overview of the work of the Review, its remit and the process, particularly emphasising what the Review is looking at in terms of the controls in place to ensure the security and authenticity of those catering for particularly vulnerable people, such as care homes and schools.

#### **2. What systems do you already have in place to assure your supply chains?**

DS explained that the starting point is the tender document that is sent out to suppliers, which will include the relevant accreditation document, for example Meat Marketing Board Standards. The second part of the process is that those responding to a tender are asked to explain the various systems they have in place to protect authenticity. Finally prospective suppliers are then judged as to whether they have membership or accreditation from any other authenticated group, for example the BRC.

CE asked of the importance of being a member of the BRC in terms of a business potentially winning a contract.

DS felt that, although a business does not necessarily have to be BRC accredited, not being a member of a similar organisation/accreditation scheme would prevent them from becoming a supplier. From her perspective, having BRC accreditation gives you another level of confidence in their operation.

CE explained that the Review's interim report had suggested that the BRC scheme should move towards more unannounced audits. BRC is an excellent scheme, but at the moment they are not looking for authenticity, so that is something they should be directing their focus on.

### **3. What sort of relationship do you try and build with suppliers?**

DS explained that, on the food side, a typical contract will last for two years, with an option to extend for a third year. For their businesses it is important to be comfortable with their suppliers and be able to visit their premises and see the systems that are in place.

CE agreed as and noted that that is exactly the sort of system the Review is trying to promote; developing long term relationships with suppliers.

CE asked whether there had been any particular changes to suppliers in the light of the horsemeat issues? DS said she had to do some tenders quite soon after the horsemeat scandal, and as a consequence there was a greater level of detail within the tender documents regarding assurance and authenticity to add more focus to what she was doing. From her perspective, it is really useful to have an organisation that you can go back to and check you are doing the right thing. DS said she really benefited from the National Association of Care Catering, as they share information and knowledge, but being able to get further reassurance from an external body, to check they are doing enough would be really useful.

CE explained that one of the key recommendations of the review is to organise an information sharing “safe haven”, which would give businesses access to a database of information about current fraud issues, but would also be a place where businesses could share their own intelligence.

DS agreed that that would be really useful.

CE explained that the ‘safe haven’ is something that retailers are very keen on, but stressed that it is important that it is independent from Government, because otherwise businesses would be concerned that that information would be subject to public scrutiny. He asked DS whether she would be concerned if she had a supplier that she considered ‘too’ cheap? Does Quantum Care have measures in place to report that?

DS has regular review meetings with suppliers to find out more about their systems, including whether their own suppliers that they use are certificated etc. but some kind of information sharing system would be really useful.

RK asked if they have any measures in place to predict fluctuations in food prices.

DS explained that she has quarterly meeting with suppliers about price fluctuations, and if there is a change, suppliers are asked to provide a justification as to why those prices will be going up. It is particularly important as care homes will have a fixed budget for a year, so price fluctuations can have a serious impact. However, their main focus is always on quality rather than cost so they do what they can to be flexible. For example, when the price of lamb went up, they didn’t move to a cheaper line or change their menus, but instead just used lamb less often.

DS also tracks their supplier prices annually and asks them to give the data that explains their prices. Much of it is in the press anyway, or is noticeable when you go to the supermarket, but it is useful to know and to see that price reflected across different lines. It’s always reflected across fresh meat prices, but is it reflected across frozen prices? It’s important to keep a really close eye on that.

CE agreed that all the information you might need is there, but you just have to look for it yourself. He noted that this is one of the recommendations he had made in his Review; that there needs to be more in the way of commodity price tracking and a system you can draw information down from.

DS explained that Quantum Care operates 26 Care Homes; they are not contractors and DS's role as Support Services Manager covers housekeeping, catering & laundry. With that breadth of responsibility, she noted that you do have to rely on the certification of others, but it is always reassuring to have more information, so having somewhere else you can go to verify knowledge and prices would be really useful.

DS asked what standards CE feels can be relied upon?

In CE's view, the BRC certificate is a very good standard; what we have learnt is that most people would not buy from people that did not have a BRC accreditation, but many retailers do their own audits in addition to their checks. CE explained that moving BRC to additional inspections looking at fraud and more unannounced audits should strengthen the standard.

DS explained that in a recent tender exercise, someone stated an STS certificate, which she hadn't heard of, is that equivalent to BRC?

**ACTION:** Secretariat to find more information about the STS certificate and go back to DS.

CE thanked DS for her time. He commented that the systems that they have in place at the moment seem comprehensive and CE can't think that there would be anything more that they could do in terms of making their supply chains more secure.

19 December