

**ACM/870**

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD**

**INFORMATION PAPER**

**Update on outbreak of *E. coli* O157 in South Wales and  
subsequent developments – September 2007**

The attached paper updates Members on the investigations and Public Inquiry linked to the outbreak of *E. coli* O157 in South Wales.

**Secretariat  
September 2007**

## **Update on outbreak of *E. coli* O157 in South Wales and subsequent developments – September 2007**

### **Background**

1. In September 2005 an outbreak of verotoxin positive *Escherichia coli* O157 occurred in south Wales. It was the largest *E.coli* O157 outbreak to have occurred in Wales and the second largest in the UK. There were 157 cases meeting the case definition and the majority of primary cases were amongst schoolchildren attending 44 schools in south east Wales. In all, 28 children and five adults were treated in hospital. The outbreak was declared over on 20 December 2005.
2. An Outbreak Control Team (OCT) was convened and a number of investigations were carried out to determine the cause. The Agency was invited to join the OCT and also provided support and assistance to local authorities. The OCT concluded that sliced cooked meats supplied to the school meals service were the source for the transmission of *E.coli* O157 to primary cases in the four main local authority areas affected, however the report was not published due to the ongoing criminal investigations.

### **Investigation**

3. In early October 2005 a young child died and the South Wales Police commenced a joint investigation with the local authorities. The Crown Prosecution Service advised that there was insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction in relation to an offence of manslaughter but the Police continued to support the local authorities who took legal action against Mr William John Tudor (food business operator) for food safety offences which had been identified during the investigation.
4. The defendant entered a 'Guilty' plea in relation to 6 charges of 'placing unsafe food on the market', and one of failing as the proprietor of a food business to protect food against the risk of contamination. At a sentencing hearing at Cardiff Crown Court on 7 September the Judge sentenced Mr Tudor to an immediate prison term of one year and said that he must serve a minimum of six months. A lifetime ban on Mr Tudor participating in the management of a food business was also imposed. Costs were not awarded on the basis that there was no evidence of an ability on the part of the defendant to pay.
5. Following the conclusion of the legal proceedings it was agreed that the Outbreak Control Team would publish the outbreak report and the Director for Wales participated in a press conference on 11 September. The report is now available on the National Public Health Service for Wales website via a link from the Agency's website

<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2007/sep/walesecoli>

## **Public Inquiry**

6. The National Assembly for Wales has established the Inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005 under the chairmanship of Professor Hugh Pennington with the following terms of reference:

“To inquire into the circumstances that led to the outbreak of the E.coli O157 investigation in South Wales in September 2005 and into the handling of the outbreak; and to consider the implications for the future and make recommendations accordingly.”

7. The Inquiry is independent of the National Assembly for Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government and any other body or organisation.
8. The conclusion of criminal proceedings means that the Public Inquiry is now able to proceed. The Inquiry will hear a substantial amount of evidence in public. The hearings, which are expected to start in February next year, are likely to last several weeks.
9. The Inquiry held its Preliminary Hearing in June 2006; a transcript of proceedings is available at [www.ecoliinquirywales.org](http://www.ecoliinquirywales.org)