



Court agrees Council was right to close rat-infested store

A convenience store, which was closed by council inspectors due to a rat infestation, has been allowed to reopen after making significant improvements.

But, despite ridding the premises of rodents, 9 O’Clock Shop in Manchester Road, will maintain its zero food hygiene rating until it can demonstrate further improvements have been made.

Swindon Borough Council served an Emergency Hygiene Prohibition Notice and closed the store on 17 June after deeming it posed an imminent risk to health.

Swindon Magistrates’ Court was told on Friday afternoon (18 July) that the business was visited by the Council’s food hygiene inspectors after a member of the public made a complaint after spotting rats in the premises.

Upon arrival, council officers found holes under the butchery floor which were being used by the pests, evidence of rat droppings throughout the business, while several gnawed foods were found on shelves which were on display for sale. There was also a large hole around a waste pipe that was identified as an access point for pests, particularly as seven dead rats were found in the flat above.

Flies were found throughout the premises, regularly landing on the butchery equipment and on food packaging, with some trapped in display freezers and the walk-in chiller.

The standards of cleaning in the butchery area was very poor, chillers and display equipment had food debris built up within door runners and within vents. There were no suitable cleaning chemicals in use to ensure effective cleaning and a side room smelt strongly of rodents and had smear marks on the skirting boards.

Council officers said there was evidence incense sticks had previously been burnt in the room, which they thought may have been used to cover the smell.

Chair of the bench, Mrs Beverley Payne JP, heard that those running the store told council officers that they intended to replace the butchery floor and had engaged pest contractors.

Some documentation showed that the pest contractor had noted that the business had begun some pest proofing and advised this should continue until a further visit later in the month where next steps would be considered.

A subsequent visit to the store on 25 June revealed that pest proofing had been carried out throughout the premises, the butchery floor had been replaced, there was no evidence

of any pest activity and that cleaning had been significantly improved.

Council inspectors were therefore satisfied that the health risk condition no longer existed and allowed the shop to reopen.

Magistrates agreed the Council was right to issue the Emergency Prohibition Notice and awarded the Council full costs of £2,922.50.

Councillor Jim Grant, Swindon Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships, said: "Pest control should be an absolute priority for anyone who owns a food business and this case shows what can happen when you do not take it seriously.

"Once again, I'd like to thank the member of the public who reported these issues to us so we could take immediate action. It is important that we highlight cases like this so customers are aware of the problem and to show that we will deal with it to keep them safe.

"Significant improvements have been made, which is why our officers have allowed the store to reopen, but it is up to the business owner to keep improving standards for customers and to work on improving the zero food hygiene rating.

"A zero score is obviously the lowest rating on the scale, but it does not mean that a business poses a risk to health. The rating system is there to allow the public to make their own decision on whether they wish to use the food business and all ratings are available on the Food Standards Agency website."

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

Photos: the filthy conditions found by Swindon Borough Council's food hygiene inspectors at the 9 O'Clock Shop in Manchester Road on 17 June

Media contact: Kevin Burchall, Communications Lead – Media Relations. Email; kburchall@swindon.gov.uk, Tel: 07387 230818.