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HospitalityGEM – availability of ‘free from’ foods when eating out has improved but more still needs to be done: Customers feel the availability of “free from” foods when eating out has improved particularly at restaurants but more still needs to be done, according to a new survey. Twelve months after the introduction of the EU Food Information for Consumers legislation, 89% of people surveyed by guest experience management experts HospitalityGEM felt it had improved. Restaurants are the clear leader in providing the best choice of dishes with 72% of respondents recognising this. When it comes to eating out, 23% said they had special dietary requirements, with vegetarianism the number one need, and shellfish the most avoided food (44%). Women are twice as likely to identify as having special food requirements, with just 14% of men saying they do. Those aged 36-45 years old are also most likely to have dietary needs. The survey also found 58% felt while the ingredients in dishes are clearly communicated by operators, there is room for improvement. 30% said team members were not well trained on the ingredients in dishes. While restaurants were highlighted as having the best choice of “free from” dishes, 0% identified takeaways with fast food outlets not far behind at 2%. The lack of choice of suitable dishes at these venues is the greatest concern for those who have special dietary requirements (40%). For grab-and-go outlets, M&S Foodhall was seen as the best caterer for those with special dietary requirements (43%) followed by Pret A Manger (18%). HospitalityGEM managing director Steven Pike said: “One year on from the introduction of the EU allergen legislation and it’s clear many operators are doing what they can to make consumers more confident when eating out, through clearer communication about ingredients and a greater range of ‘free-from’ dishes. However, the identification of staff training as an area in need of improvement should encourage the operator to look hard at their sites and how team members are briefed on this important aspect of food service. It should be part of any induction and also revisited regularly as menus and teams change.”