

Food Safety and Food Standards sampling

1.0 Introduction

The council's food health and safety team (from here on referred to as 'the service') recognises that effective routine sampling is not only an essential part of a well-balanced enforcement service but also informs the council and its partners on measures required to protect public health.

Microbiological and compositional food sampling provide information on the standards and safety of food produced, prepared, and retailed within the borough to both consumers and residents, as well as providing information to food business operators.

This policy sets out the Council's overall approach to food sampling and its approach to specific situations and considers formal and informal sampling within the context of:-

- process monitoring,
- inspections,
- complaints,
- surveillance (including national, regional and local co-ordinated programmes,)
- Special investigations.

2.0 Scope

The Policy has been drawn up in accordance with the Food Standards Agency Framework Agreement on Local Authority Food Law Enforcement, Food Law Code of Practice (England), and other relevant centrally issued guidance on sampling. It deals with sampling within the context of the Food Safety Act 1990, the Food Safety (Sampling and Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2013 and the Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013.

Private waters sampling for the purposes of Private Water Supplies Regulations 2016 is not within scope of this policy.

3.0 Informal Sampling

Samples shall normally be sent to a UKAS accredited laboratory. These are samples that are not taken in accordance with the requirements set out in the appropriate sampling regulation. Sampling will normally be for the purposes of surveillance and follow up enforcement action is not normally anticipated.

4.0 Formal Sampling

Samples will be taken in accordance with the appropriate sampling regulations and will always be submitted to the food examiner at a UKAS accredited laboratory.

5.0 Process Monitoring

Samples may be taken from manufacturers of foods, during the manufacturing process, for the purposes of ensuring food safety and for ensuring the effectiveness of the critical controls

in the process. The manufacturer will be notified of the result of any such sample analysis or examination.

6.0 Inspection

Samples will not normally form part of routine programmed inspection unless the environmental health officer identifies a particular problem that needs further investigation, or if there is a particular survey, special investigation or earlier poor sampling result.

7.0 Complaint sampling

Where a particular premise or food produced in the borough is implicated with a confirmed case or confirmed cases of food borne disease, food samples shall be taken and submitted for examination, for the purpose of identifying any likely source of infection, and controlling any risk to public health. These samples will normally be taken formally.

Other food samples that are the subject of a complaint concerning the fitness of the food and requiring microbiological analyses will not be accepted where there has been any reported temperature abuse by the consumer.

All samples submitted to the service by a consumer shall be handed over upon the agreement that the ownership of the food be surrendered for the purpose of the investigation. For more minor complaints the consumer shall be encouraged to return the food to the retailer.

In all instances where a consumer brings a food complaint to the service the investigating officer shall consider the enforcement expectation and advise the consumer accordingly. In determining whether or not to accept a food sample regard shall also be had to the Residents Services Enforcement Policy.

8.0 National / Regional Priorities

The service works in partnership with other local authorities through the regional London food groups and will periodically take samples as part of our participation in agreed food sampling surveys. Sampling survey priorities are aligned with Food Standards Agency priorities together with any sector specific priorities as agreed.

9.0 Special Investigations

Food samples may be taken and submitted as part of a special investigation e.g. in response to a food hazard warning, or to other intelligence received about potential food safety and quality issues. Regional or national intelligence on meat authenticity is an example.

10.0 Local Priorities

Premises that are subject to a high hygiene risk score may be subject to specific food sampling activities to determine whether or not an offence has been committed and also to provide process monitoring information for the investigating officer.

Other priorities will be based on local intelligence and/or earlier adverse sampling results. Wherever possible these will be captured within the food sampling program.

11.0 Food sampling program

The service will prepare a sampling programme which details our intended food sampling priorities. The programme will take into account the number, type and intervention ratings of the food businesses, and the type of food produced in the area. The program will run in conjunction with regional and national sampling surveys.

Unsatisfactory or unacceptable/potentially hazardous results.

Premises from which samples are procured that are subsequently analysed and yield poor results will be considered within the context of the overall management at the premises and the risk to health. Re sampling may often be necessary.

Unsatisfactory- test results will normally result in an environmental health officer investigating whether or not the hygiene practices in the premises are adequate.

Unacceptable/potentially hazardous- test results will escalate actions meaning more urgent attention is given to locate and remedy the source of the problem.

In the event of adverse sampling results that may suggest a serious localised or non-localised food hazard the authority will make a report to the Food Standards Agency.