

Use of Resources

Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) are trained in sampling techniques. Within Surrey greater consistency and efficiency is achieved by linking the sampling activity of the various Councils through a liaison group.

The majority of sampling work falls within the routine food safety activity of EHOs but where a particular need arises, such as a food poisoning outbreak, resources would be redeployed temporarily.

Limited funding is provided by central government for microbiological sampling via the PHLS whereas the Council pays for each sample submitted to the Public Analyst.

More Information?

If you would like to learn more about the food sampling activity of the Council or any other food safety matter, please contact the Food Safety Team telephone number 01737 276417, Fax 01737 276404 or email us at food.safety@reigate-banstead.gov.uk.

A range of free literature on various food safety topics is also available on request.

Food Sampling Policy



Environmental
Health
Services

An Explanatory Leaflet

What is Food Sampling?

In general terms, Food Sampling is a scientific method used to confirm the safety and wholesomeness of food. As such it is a useful support tool for officers inspecting food businesses and to food law enforcement generally.

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's 'Food Sampling Policy' is explained in this leaflet. It outlines the overall approach taken by the Council's Environmental Health Services and the arrangements for processing samples taken.

In addition to the Food Sampling Policy, a sampling programme is prepared for each year outlining the sampling activity to be undertaken.

Food Sampling: How it Works

Samples can be submitted for two different types of test: -

- § Microbiological *examination* to determine both the general level of microbes and the presence of specific pathogens (e.g. Salmonella, E.coli O157).
- § *Analysis* for non-microbiological contamination (e.g. glass in a manufactured lasagne).

In addition to sampling food, other techniques are available that assist in determining food safety, e.g. swab testing of equipment and work surfaces.

Formal and Informal Samples

Sampling officers endeavour to take samples in accordance with any official Code of Practice, and guidance, and such samples are known as Formal Samples (and may be used in any prosecution). Informal samples are occasionally collected but cannot usually be used as evidence.

Sampling Priorities

The Council will focus food sampling activity on:-

- § The investigation of food contamination and food poisoning incidents.
- § Complaints concerning the sale or supply of contaminated foodstuffs.
- § National and European (EU) co-ordinated sampling programmes.
- § Locally manufactured products; local events and initiatives.
- § Local high risk premises (EU approved or licensed food businesses).
- § Food businesses for which it acts as the 'Home Authority.'

However, there has to be sufficient flexibility to allow for emergency responses or where other issues of particular concern arise.

Laboratory Arrangements

Depending on the type of test required a sample is sent to either a *public analyst* or a *food examiner* – qualified specialists in their field. The Council currently uses the laboratories of Hampshire Scientific Service and the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) respectively. The laboratory provides a certificate upon completion of the sample testing and, depending on those results, may be called upon to provide evidence should enforcement or prosecution action be necessary.

The annual sampling programme is prepared in consultation with these laboratory services.

Keeping Businesses Informed

Normal practice is to advise any business of the sampling results. In the event of an *unsatisfactory* laboratory result the business will be given relevant advice and a second sample will be taken, after an appropriate interval. In situations where enforcement is considered the Council will be guided by its *Food Enforcement Policy*. (available on request)