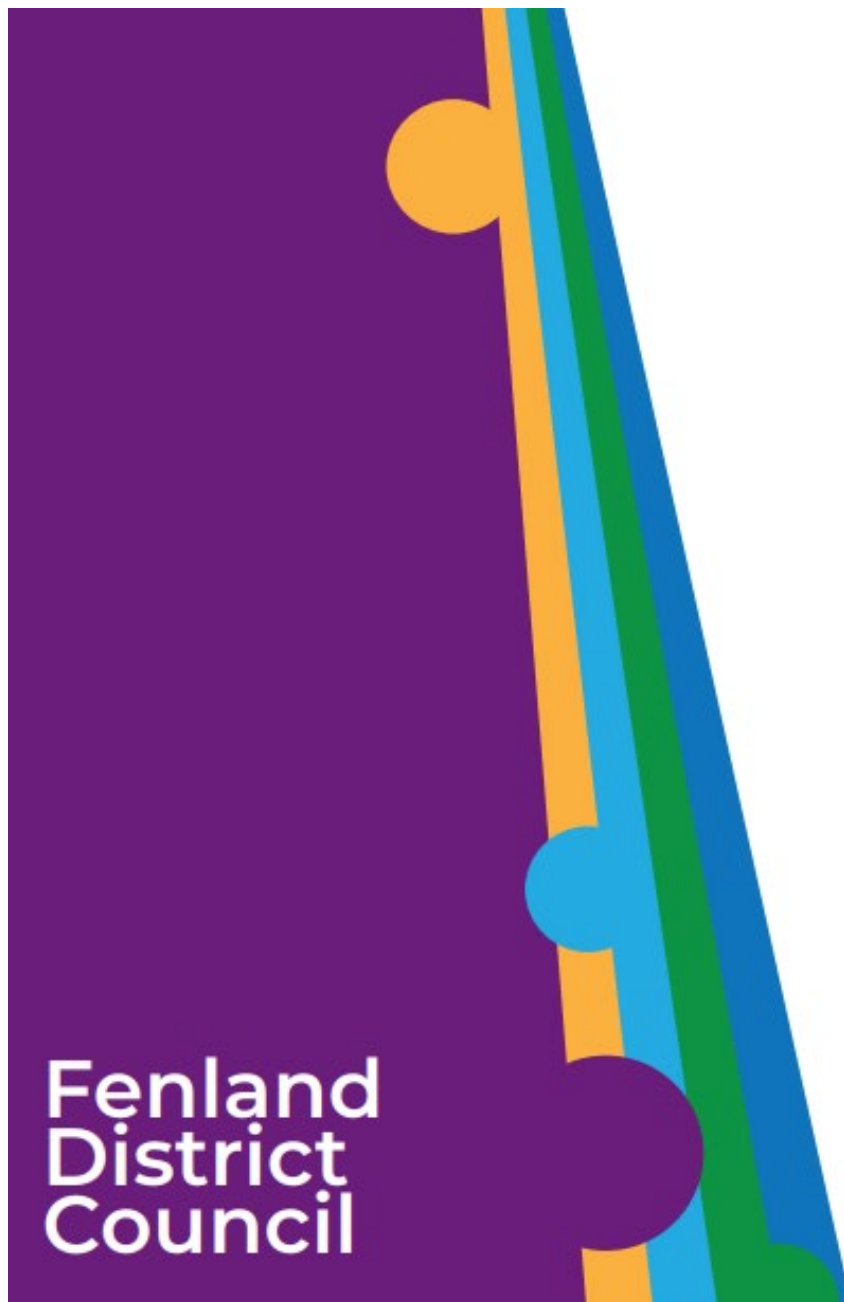


# Food & Water Sampling Policy

December 2022



## Introduction

Fenland District Council is required to prepare and publish a food sampling policy and make it available to businesses and consumers in accordance with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Code of Practice and Guidance and in accordance with our annual Food Service Plan. Together with the FSA we recognise that effective routine sampling is an essential part of a well-balanced enforcement service.

Microbiological food and food environment sampling plays an important role in monitoring food safety standards. The result of such sampling helps to inform food businesses on areas for improvement.

An annual food safety sampling programme is formulated for examination of food for microbiological safety and quality at the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Laboratory. The programme includes routine sampling agreed by all District Councils in Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. Fenland District Council will contribute to the sampling programme where resources allow (the sampling programme does not require to be published).

This Policy sets out our general approach to food sampling and its approach to specific situations. It does not include sampling for food composition and labelling issues or feeding stuffs which are the responsibility of Cambridgeshire County Council Trading Standards Service.

## Aims and Objectives of Food/Water Sampling in Fenland

- Provide microbiological and chemical surveillance arrangements of food/water produced or handled in Fenland.
- Examine high-risk foods that pose a hazard to the consumer because they may contain significant levels of pathogenic bacteria.
- Evaluate temperature control, food handling and processing practices at food premises in relation to hazard analysis, including evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of cleaning, disinfection, and food safety risk management.
- Help determine whether advice or enforcement action would be appropriate where it is suspected that poor practices and procedures exist.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of stock rotation and control, and to assess the microbiological quality of food manufactured, distributed or retailed in the local area.
- Identify contraventions of food safety legislation.
- Act as a mechanism to improve hygiene standards through giving advice and guidance in feedback following sampling
- Contribute to knowledge of food bacteriological levels and the development of definitive standards
- Monitor classifications and associated hazards in relation to shellfish that are harvested in the Wash.
- Monitoring the water supply on commercial shipping visiting ports and also quay side water points to ensure that they are potable.

## Types of sampling initiatives

Fenland District Council will participate in the following types of sampling:

- General and ad hoc local sampling to assess local food handling practices (e.g. local events and initiatives concerning issues particularly relevant within the authority's boundary; in response to food contamination and food poisoning incidents; in response to complaints; local projects or as part of a food hygiene inspection to help assess hygiene standards and procedures).
- Monitoring CEFAS classifications of shellfish beds in the Wash.
- Monitoring ship water supplies and quayside water points to ensure the water is potable.
- National or regional where specific foods are targeted.
- Food sampling defined by statute e.g. shellfish - as the Port Health Authority, the Fenland District Council has responsibility for monitoring the classification of shellfish beds around the mouth of the River Nene. The cost of this sampling activity is recharged equally to the Borough of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk and South Holland District Council under the provision of the Port Health Authority Order 1982.

## Policy Implementation

Suitably qualified, trained and authorised Environmental Health Officers and Environmental Health Protection Officers will be responsible for undertaking the food sampling functions of the Council. Samples are taken in compliance with the Food Law Code of Practice, and guidelines issued by the FSA, UKHSA or Local Government Association.

Our Food & Water Sampling Standard Operating Procedure gives practical advice on obtaining samples. Food samples will, in normal circumstances, be submitted to the Public Analyst for chemical analysis and comment and to the UKHSA for bacteriological examination.

## Follow-up to Results

Results are divided into three categories:

- Satisfactory
- Borderline
- Unsatisfactory

In certain instances, where the levels of a known pathogen are found to be out of specification, a fourth category of classification may be used, "potentially injurious to health and/or unfit for human consumption". However, not all instances where pathogenic organisms are identified warrant formal action/investigation and the appropriate officer should consult the available guidance for further information.

In most cases the laboratory refers to the "*Guidelines for Assessing the Microbiological Safety of Ready to Eat Foods Placed on the Market*" when making a judgment on the results and in other cases they will form an opinion based on their knowledge of that particular foodstuff.

When the results of the laboratory examination of the samples are received by the local authority, a decision must be made as to whether any further sampling, enforcement action or notification to other authorities is necessary.

## Enforcement Action

The proprietor of the premises from which the sample is taken will be advised of the result and any appropriate action, as soon as possible. It is as important to inform proprietors about satisfactory results as it is about unsatisfactory results.

If the alleged offence is thought to be related to the manufacturer, then the manufacturer will be informed immediately by the quickest possible means.

Before considering taking enforcement action on the basis of a poor result, officers may consider taking further samples particularly in the following circumstances:

- Where the laboratory treated the first sample as informal.
- Where the premises sampled from has a good record of compliance.
- Where, in the view of the food examiner, the result obtained does not render the food 'unsafe' but raises concerns about hygienic practices.
- Where the result only relates to a small proportion of the food, and other similar batches within the same consignment need investigation to gain statistical information about the rest of the consignment.

## Follow-up sampling

Where re-sampling is undertaken, the sample will be taken on the basis that formal legal proceedings may result in the event of a poor result being obtained. All samples which may be used for legal action must be submitted to a laboratory accredited for the purpose of examination and which appears on the official list of official food control laboratories.

The circumstances where legal proceedings might be considered following a poor sampling result may include:

- A previous history of non-compliance at a particular premises.
- Observation of poor practices at the premises concerned.
- Poor compliance with HACCP requirements.
- Lack of adequate temperature control relating to the food sampled.
- Where previous sampling results obtained have been poor.

## Policy review

To ensure this policy remains current and up to date it shall be subject to full review and revision once every 3 years or following any significant changes to legislation, practice or procedure.