



Complaints about food and/or the hygiene of food business establishments in Hounslow

Food Complaints Policy

1. Aims and objectives

- 1.1. This policy outlines how the London Borough of Hounslow (the food authority) handles and prioritises food complaints made to the Food Team.
- 1.2. Food complaints will usually fall into one of the following categories:
 - i. Food hygiene: a complaint about the safety or wholesomeness of food;
 - ii. Hygiene of premises: a complaint about the hygiene standards against an individual food business establishment;
 - iii. Food standards: a complaint about the labelling, composition, presentation or advertising of food.
- 1.3. The Food Team will apply a risk-based and proportionate response to all food complaints in line with available resources.
- 1.4. Food complaints will be investigated in accordance with this policy; internal procedures and the Food Law Code of Practice and Practice Guidance.

2. Policy on food complaints

- 2.1. A food complaint is a concern relating to food or the hygiene of a food business establishment for which the food authority is the enforcing authority, and the complaint is sufficiently specific to enable the identification of the issue, the food business operator and/or the location of the food business within Hounslow.
- 2.2. Where it is reasonable to do so, the food authority will disclose as soon as practicable whether it will investigate a food complaint based on the information provided and/or the information available to the food authority.
- 2.3. In some instances, complaints about food or the hygiene of a food business should be directed to the food business operator in the first instance (for example, poor cleaning in a food business or staff displaying poor personal hygiene). This does not prevent complaints also being made to the food authority.



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- 2.4. Some food businesses may refund consumers/customers and/or carry out their own investigation and act to remedy any non-compliance.
- 2.5. The food authority will investigate complaints where:
- A. The issue has caused or has the potential to cause significant harm to food or the public;
 - B. The issue appears to constitute a significant breach of food law for which the food authority is the enforcing authority;
 - C. The issue may impact vulnerable groups.
- 2.6. The food authority will use a risk-based and proportionate approach on a case-by-case basis when deciding to investigate food complaints where:
- A. The issue does not require immediate action and the issue can be dealt with at the next programmed inspection at the food business in question;
 - B. The food authority is not the enforcing authority;
 - C. There are no reasonably practicable precautions or measures that could be taken by the food business operator/food business;
 - D. There is no breach of food law;
 - E. There is negligible risk to food or members of the public;
 - F. It is impracticable to follow-up or investigate;
 - G. There has been a single case alleging food-related illness with no clinical evidence implicating a food business in Hounslow;
 - H. There are reasonable doubts of the food's provenance;
 - I. There are reasonable doubts relating to the 'continuity of evidence' of the food;
 - J. The food has deteriorated making examination or analysis of no practical use;
 - K. The complainant/reporter has subjected the food to processing or physical changes that affect the inherent chemical or microbiological characteristics of the food;
 - L. There is insufficient quantity of the food to carry out the required physical examination and/or microbiological examination or chemical analysis;
 - M. The complainant wishes to remain anonymous, will not allow the food authority to disclose that a complaint has been received and a vulnerable person is not at risk;
 - N. The food or its constituent ingredients were not manufactured or produced in Hounslow. However, steps will be taken to refer the



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complaint to the relevant Originating and/or Primary Authority and assist with any investigation.

- 2.7. In exceptional circumstances, the food authority may decide not to investigate where there are inadequate resources to follow-up / investigate.
 - 2.8. A decision not to investigate because of inadequate resources or other emerging priorities will be made by the Head of Service (or above).
- 3. Imported Food Complaints**
- 3.1. All products imported into the UK must comply with European Union (EU) law.
 - 3.2. For the purpose of import controls, food can be placed into one of two categories: Products of Animal Origin (POAO) and Food not of Animal Origin (FNAO) and can be imported commercially from third countries (i.e. non-EU countries). If they come from countries within the EU, they are considered as intra-Community trade.
 - 3.3. The London Borough of Hounslow have a long-standing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the London Borough of Hillingdon; Slough Borough Council, Spelthorne Borough Council and Surrey County Council relating to imported food entering the UK through London Heathrow Airport.
 - 3.4. The MoU sets out the arrangements establishing Hillingdon as the single designated food authority responsible for carrying out all imported food and feed checks at London Heathrow Airport.
 - 3.5. The food authority is responsible for investigating complaints about illegally imported POAO at retail, catering, market stalls or other food business establishments within Hounslow.
 - 3.6. Imported POAO is likely to be illegal if it was not presented to a Border Inspection Post (BIP) for required controls to be carried out, and/or if it does not comply with public or animal health requirements, such as being contaminated with veterinary residues.
 - 3.7. The food authority is responsible for investigating complaints about FNAO that may not comply with food hygiene/standards/contaminant/residue requirements at External Temporary Storage Facilities (ETSFs) and at



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retail, catering, market stalls or other food business establishments within Hounslow.

4. Referrals to the Food Standards Agency (FSA)

- 4.1. Some complaints, issues or incidents will be notified to the central competent authority, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) if one, or a combination of, the following apply:
- A. There is a potential big impact on health – the issue can make people severely ill, cause death or lead to long-term health impairment;
 - B. There is potential for other types of consumer harm – big financial loss or public distress/shock/disgust;
 - C. There is potentially a widespread issue which could affect large numbers of vulnerable consumers;
 - D. The incident could lead to national media reporting and/or large-scale loss of consumer confidence;
 - E. The issue is on a national, European or international scale;
 - F. The issue is widespread or has the potential to be widespread;
 - G. There are suspected breaches in the food supply chain integrity on a broad scale and/or evidence of widespread organised criminal activity.

5. Complaints about the service

- 5.1. If you are unhappy at the way your food complaint has been handled, please contact the Regulatory Manager (Food) by email: foodsafety@hounslow.gov.uk
- 5.2. If you have been unable to resolve your concerns with the Regulatory Manager (Food), information on how to make a formal complaint can be found on the council website: www.hounslow.gov.uk