

Complaints about Food

The food safety team will investigate complaints concerning food products sold within the Newtownabbey Borough Council Area. Complaints usually fall into 3 categories:

• Foods causing illness

If you are a resident of the borough we can investigate allegations of food poisoning. If you live outside the borough you should contact the local authority in which you live to report your illness.

• Foreign Objects in food

A foreign object can be anything that has found its way into foods that shouldn't be there, such as glass, insects and plastic.

• Labelling

Complaints are often received about food sold 'out of date'. There are two types of date codes on pre-packed foods. A **Best Before** date is the date up to when the food will be in its best condition, it is **not illegal** to sell a food item beyond a **best before** date. (Although this is not a practice encouraged). A **Use By** date is found on highly perishable foods and is the date up to which the food can safely be consumed. It is **illegal** for a business to sell a food item beyond a **Use By** date.

You can bring a food complaint to Newtownabbey Borough Council Offices at Mossley Mill, Mon-Fri 9:00 -17:00. An officer will take the complaint from you and advise you of the complaint procedure.

Foods purchased outside of Newtownabbey Borough Council Area

If your complaint is regarding a food item purchased outside the borough you should take it to that local authority for investigation.

Investigation Procedure

Our procedures require the officer to contact the following:

1. The premises where you bought the food, or their head office.
2. The manufacturer or importer of the food.
3. The local authority in which that manufacturer or importer is based.

Information will be requested from such parties especially concerning any precautions that they may be taking to prevent such food complaints from occurring. If necessary, the food may be sent to a laboratory for analysis. It may be necessary during this analysis to conduct tests, which will result in the destruction of the food.

You may be asked to provide a written statement detailing where you purchased the food and the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the complaint.

Enforcement Options

At the end of an investigation there are a range of options open to the council ranging from taking no action at all to prosecuting the person or company at fault. This decision will depend on a number of factors including;

- o The nature of the complaint
- o Whether there have been other similar complaints
- o The measures already in place to try and prevent such a complaint occurring
- o What is going to be done to prevent it happening again

What we can't do

Seek compensation

The primary purpose of investigating food complaints is to safeguard public health. We cannot get refunds or seek compensation for any damages you may have suffered as a result of purchasing the food. If you wish to seek compensation you should retain the food and seek legal advice.

How long will the investigation take

Investigations often take several weeks or months to complete, because of the delays caused by waiting for reports from companies, local authorities and laboratories.