

Advertising & Sponsorship Policy: High Fat, Salt or Sugar (HFSS) Policy Guidance Note



Barnsley – the place
of possibilities.



Application

This policy guidance note applies to:

- a) All Barnsley Council owned advertising sites (traditional, digital, and online)
- b) Advertisements at Barnsley Council premises open to the public (e.g., libraries, leisure centres, museums)
- c) Advertisements in Barnsley Council leased premises (subject to existing lease issues)

Background

Evidence shows that advertisements for unhealthy food and drink products directly and indirectly impact what we eat ¹. Both children and adults from lower socio-economic groups are 50% more likely to be exposed to such advertisements for high fat, salt, or sugar (HFSS) foods².

This is concerning for Barnsley as the 38th most deprived Local Authority in England where one in three of our primary school leavers and two in three our adults are classed as overweight or obese.

The Government's [Tackling Obesity Strategy](#) recognises these issues nationally and has moved to ban HFSS advertising on TV before 9pm and online as well as restricting volume promotions such as 'buy one get one free'. Our Healthy Barnsley ambition within the [Barnsley 2030](#) strategy aims to keep ourselves and our families in good mental and physical health. Implementation of a healthier food advertising policy across our borough aims to protect children from exposure to HFSS products whilst being a forward step towards achieving our Healthy Barnsley ambition, where everyone can enjoy life in good physical and mental health.

Purpose

This Guidance Note constitutes a formal addendum to the council's [Advertising and Sponsorship Policy](#) and should be read and applied in concert with that policy. It details further guidance relating to restrictions of High Fat, Salt or Sugar (HFSS) products and requirements for advertising or sponsorship approvals.

Acknowledgement

The contents and criteria within this document have been adapted from the HFSS Policy Guidance Note published by Bristol City Council in 2021.

¹ Critchlow, N. et al. (2020) 'Awareness of marketing for high fat, salt or sugar foods, and the association with higher weekly consumption among adolescents: a rejoinder to the UK government's consultations on marketing regulation'. Accessed via: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32434618/>

² Yau, A. et al. (2021) 'Sociodemographic differences in self-reported exposure to high fat, salt and sugar food and drink advertising: A cross-sectional analysis of 2019 UK panel data', Accessed via: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/11/4/e048139>

1. General Principles

1.1 The UK Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) has been identified as the best way of identifying food that is high in fat, salt or sugar and therefore contributes to child obesity. It is widely used and has been subject to rigorous scientific scrutiny, extensive stakeholder consultation, and review. Furthermore, the scoring system it uses balances the contribution made by beneficial nutrients important in children's diets with food components that children should eat less of³. Such food and drink are not only purchased directly by children but are also bought for them by others.

Consistent with similar advertising policies implemented by Bristol City Council, as well as the London Boroughs of Greenwich, Southwark, Haringey, and Merton, the NPM has been adopted by Barnsley Council to define HFSS products.

1.2 Guidance on how to identify whether a product is considered HFSS under the NPM is available [here in the technical guidance](#). All potential advertisers should familiarise themselves with the NPM.

1.3 The outcome of any reviews or revisions on the NPM will be taken into consideration in applying our⁴ policy.

2. Exceptions

2.1 There are no standard exceptions to the policy offered on council-owned advertising sites.

2.2 The only circumstance in which an exception will be considered is within the boundary of an event happening on council-owned land, where the application of the policy would make the event unviable or logistically unfeasible to run. For example, directional signage to stalls at a food and drink festival or a Christmas market.

2.3 In the event of a dispute on any application for an event, a final and binding decision will be made by the Head of Communications and Marketing and Director of Public Health.

3. Content featuring only non-HFSS products

3.1 These would normally be approved but would still need to comply with the Council's overarching [Advertising and Sponsorship Policy](#).

4. Content featuring only HFSS products

4.1 Where proposed content features only food and/or drink which is HFSS, the advert would be rejected.

4.2 It is the responsibility of advertisers and/or sponsors and their agents to verify the status of the products featured using [the NPM](#). If further assistance is required, please contact our Communications & Marketing team; communications@barnsley.gov.uk.

³ The terms 'Children' and 'child' in this document refer to people under the age of 18

⁴ The terms to 'we' or 'us' or 'our' refer to Barnsley Council

5. Content featuring a range of food and/or drink products, some of which is HFSS

5.1 The advertising or promotion of HFSS products is unacceptable under the policy, so a range or meal could not feature them (e.g., beef, potatoes, and roasted vegetables could only be advertised if all individual products were non-HFSS). This would also apply to any meal or eating settings being shown, including those for restaurants, aggregator platforms and delivery services.

6. Content featuring no food or drink directly, but the advertisement is from (or features) a food/drink brand

6.1 This may include:

- Advertisements where the brand's logo is included but no products, such as a brand values campaign
- Directional signage to a store, app, or website
- Promotional advertising which is price-led but features no products, e.g., "50% off everything"
- Advertising about a business or its performance
- Slides delivered by a sponsor at an event sponsored by a food or drink brand

6.2 Food and drink brands (including food and drink service companies or ordering services) will only be able to place such advertisements if it promotes healthier options (i.e., non-HFSS products) as the basis of the copy.

6.3 Where advertisers and/or sponsors are uncertain about the classification of proposed copy under these guidelines, they should discuss this with the council through the email addresses listed in section 4.2.

7. Advertisements or other content where food and drink is shown 'incidentally' i.e. it is not the subject of the advertisement but is included (or implied) by visual or copy

7.1 HFSS products should not be promoted by being featured in advertisements for other products. It is the responsibility of advertisers and/or sponsors and their agents to verify the HFSS status of featured products using [NMP](#).

7.2 Where a food or drink item is featured incidentally and does not relate to a specific identifiable product which can be assessed for HFSS status, advertising copy may be rejected by the council or its agents on the basis that the advertisement promotes the consumption of HFSS foods.

8. Advertisements or other content where food and drink is referenced in the text, through graphical representations or other visual representation

8.1 HFSS products should not be promoted through textual references, graphic images or other visual representations. Where a food or drink item is featured in this way and does not relate to a specific identifiable product which can be assessed for its HFSS status, copy may be rejected by the council on the basis that it promotes the consumption of HFSS foods.

9. Indirect promotion of HFSS food and/or drink

9.1 Where a product is non-HFSS but falls within a category covered by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID - formerly PHE) [recommendations for sugar and calorie reduction](#), the product should always carry a prominent product descriptor to help differentiate it from non-compliant products (e.g. an advertisement featuring a non-HFSS burger or ice cream should include prominent text that accompanies the image naming the specific product and retailer). It's the responsibility of the advertiser and/or sponsor to determine whether products fall into a category covered by the OHID recommendations for sugar and calorie reduction.

9.2 Children should not usually be shown in advertisements for products which are compliant in a category which is covered by OHID's recommendations for sugar or calorie reduction.

10. Portion sizes

10.1 The NPM is based on nutrients per 100g of a product rather than the recommended portion size. Advertisers should always ensure that they promote products in portion sizes which encourage healthy eating. For products that are non-HFSS but fall within a category covered by OHID's recommendations for sugar or calorie reduction, the product should be displayed as a single portion.

11. Contact

11.1 If advertisers, sponsors, and/or agencies are unsure about how to interpret this, or any other aspect of these guidelines, they are encouraged to contact the council or its agents and work together on a solution to avoid submitted copy requiring changes or being rejected.

11.2 Contact details are outlined in on section 4.2 on page 3. All queries will be responded to within two weeks.

11.2 We retain the right to disapprove any advertisement or sponsorship content deemed inappropriate. We also reserve the right to withdraw any advert or sponsorship at any time that is not in accordance with the Advertising & Sponsorship Policy or accompanying Guidance Notes.

12. Example decision table

Please note that all decisions are subject to compliance with our Advertising & Sponsorship Policy.

| Advertisement Content | Outcome | Example(s) | Notes |
|--|--|---|---|
| Only non-HFSS products featured | Approved | An advertisement for fresh fruit and vegetables | Subject to compliance with our overall Advertising & Sponsorship Policy. |
| Only HFSS products features | Rejected | An advertisement for sweet pastries | |
| A range of products, some of which are HFSS and some of which are non-HFSS | Rejected | An advertisement for a meal deal that includes a chocolate bar (HFSS) as well as fruit (non-HFSS) | All food/drink items being advertised must be non-HFSS. |
| No food or drink directly displayed but the advertisement is from (or features) a food/drink brand | Possibly approved – only if healthier options (non-HFSS) are being promoted | A fast-food business advertising only non-HFSS products (approved) | Many brands and their logos have strong HFSS product association. Some HFSS products also share the same name as the actual brand name, making it difficult to separate the brand name from the associated product. |
| | | A fast-food business advertising a competition or an affiliation to an event (rejected). | |
| Food and drink is shown 'incidentally' i.e., it is not the subject of the advertisement but is included (or implied) by visual or copy | Possibly approved – only if healthy products (non-HFSS) are being displayed | A travel firm advertising holiday offers which happens to contain images of oranges (approved) | If the advertisement can be reasonably considered to promote HFSS products it will be rejected regardless of whether the food is intended focus of the advertisement. |
| | | A travel firm advertising holiday offers which happens to contain images of ice creams (rejected) | |
| Food and drink is referenced in the text, through graphical representations or other visual representation (not a real product being advertised) | Possibly approved – only if healthy products (non-HFSS) are being promoted | An advertisement that contains a cartoon image of carrots (accepted) | If the advertisement can be reasonably considered to promote HFSS products it will be rejected regardless of whether the food is an actual product. |
| | | An advertisement that contains a cartoon image of chocolate (rejected) | |
| Indirect promotion of HFSS food and/or drink | Possibly approved – only if prominent text accompanies the image naming the product and retailer | An advertisement featuring a non-HFSS ice cream that includes prominent text that accompanies the image naming the specific product and retailer (accepted) | A prominent product descriptor helps to differentiate it from non-compliant products. This is necessary where the product falls into a category typically associated with HFSS products (such as ice cream). |
| | | An advertisement featuring a non-HFSS ice cream but with no accompanying explanatory text (rejected) | |
| Portion sizes | Possibly approved – see Notes column | An advertisement for a non-HFSS 16-inch pizza that displays a portion (e.g., 3 slices) and that also displays clear text naming the product and retailer as per the row above (accepted) | Advertisers should always ensure that they promote products in portion sizes which encourage healthy eating. For products that are non-HFSS but fall within a category covered by OHID's recommendations for sugar or calorie reduction, the product should be displayed as a single portion. |
| | | An advertisement for a non-HFSS 16-inch pizza that displays an image of the full pizza (rejected) | |