

Cross-Party Group on Food

14 May 2025 at 6pm, Committee Room 5 and Teams

Minute

Present

MSPs

- Rhoda Grant MSP
- Annie Wells MSP
- Elena Whitham (Chair)

Member speaker

- Tilly Robinson-Miles, Living Good Food Nation Lab - University of Edinburgh

Guest speakers

- Dan Jenkins, Senior Health Improvement Specialist, NHS Highland (virtually)
- Jill Muirie, Public Health Programme Manager, Glasgow Centre for Population Health
- Dennis Overton OBE, Chair, the Scottish Food Commission

Non-MSP Group Members

In person

- Kirsty Tinsdale, Food and Drink Federation Scotland/CPG Food Secretary
- Pat Abel, Transition Edinburgh South (Scotland) Ltd
- Professor Mary Brennan, University of Edinburgh
- Iain Clunie, Food and Drink Federation Scotland
- Sarah Duley, Soil Association Scotland
- Lisa Hislop, NFU Scotland
- Kirsty Jenkins, OneKind
- Jayne Jones, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde
- Ifeyinwa Kanu, IntelliDigest
- Caroline Litts, Food Standards Scotland
- Tracy McCollin, the Scottish Government
- Michelle McWilliams, the Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen
- Sarah Millar, Quality Meat Scotland
- Julie Milne

- Pete Ritchie, Nourish Scotland
- Baukje de Roos, University of Aberdeen
- Colin Smith, Scottish Wholesale Association
- Kirsty Tait, Food, Farming and Countryside Commission
- Laura Wilson, Food Standards Scotland
- Agnieszka Wojtas, Food and Drink Federation Scotland
- Laura Wyness, Nutrition, research and communications

Virtually

- Liz Barron-Majerik, Lantra
- Sarah Bowyer, NHS Highland
- Jane Bunting, REHIS
- Beth Cloughton, University of Edinburgh
- Viv Collie, Vivid Ideas & Solutions
- Cate Devine, Freelance food journalist
- Alastair Dobson, Taste of Arran and Arran Dairies
- Pamela Docherty, East Ayrshire Council
- Peter Faassen de Heer, Scottish Government
- Graeme Findlay, SQA
- Claire Hislop, Public Health Scotland
- Rosa Holt, Scottish Organic Producers Association
- Ali Karley, The James Hutton Institute
- Jennifer Kerr, South Lanarkshire Council
- Simon Macdonald, Consultant
- Sarah MacKenzie, NHS Highland
- Debbie Maguire, The Scottish Government
- Rosie McLuskie, the Food Train
- Kim Newstead, Public Health Scotland
- Ann Packard, RSA Fellows
- Claire Perier, University of Edinburgh
- Joanne Riach, NHS Grampian
- Sara Smith, RHET
- Lesley Stanley, Freelance
- Jayne Swanson, Scottish Wholesale Association
- Laura Thomson, MECOPP
- Ruth Watson, Watson Consultants Ltd
- David Watts, University of Aberdeen
- Sandra Williamson, REHIS (The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland)

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Elena Whitham (EW) welcomed all to the meeting. She emphasised the importance of the concept of a Good Food Nation for everyone in Scotland and highlighted the need for awareness about the origins and impact of food on people and the planet. EW noted it was very helpful to have the local authorities and health boards taking part in the discussion at the meeting, noting the significant role these bodies play in the food system.

Apologies were received from:

- Brian Whittle MSP
- Colin Smyth MSP
- Wendy Barrie and Bosse Dahlgren, Scottish Food Guide
- Jackie McCabe, REHIS
- Nicola Holden, SRUC
- David Thomson, Food and Drink Federation Scotland
- Lucy Ozanne, Quality Meat Scotland
- Alistair Williams, National Manufacturing Institute Scotland
- Martin Meteyard, Co-operative consultant
- Mary Lawton
- Lucy Crapper, Company Shop Group

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting (26 February 2025)

The minutes of the last meeting were proposed by Simon Macdonald (SM) and seconded by EW and therefore approved and noted as a fair reflection of proceedings.

EW reminded members of the group that minutes from these meetings are publicly available and so if you feel anything needs corrected please get in touch with [Kirsty Tinsdale](#).

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

4. What to expect from the National Good Food Nation Plan and what does this mean for local authorities and health boards?

EW noted that Good Food Nation is such a broad topic. She is a member of both the Rural Affairs and Health Committees, which Good Food Nation is a part of as well as various other areas, including the economy and community wealth building. She introduced the speakers who provided presentations:

Dennis Overton OBE (DO), Chair, the Scottish Food Commission

- DO began by referencing the "Nourishing Britain" report, which included interviews with 20 Westminster leaders from the past 30 years. The report revealed a consensus among these leaders that not enough had been done to

tackle food-related ill health, which they described as a significant problem for the country.

- DO expressed that it was a privilege being the founding chair of the Scottish Food Commission and noted that the first meeting he attended with "good food nation" on the agenda was in 2014.
- He emphasised Scotland's commitment to transforming its food system through primary legislation which is now in place. The six aspirational outcomes set out in the Act were tested through the consultation process, which received over 450 conventional responses, 800 responses from teenagers, and 200 from primary school teachers.
- The first national food plan will be presented to the Scottish Parliament by the end of June and local authorities and regional health boards will begin creating their food plans early next year.
- The Commission's role will include supporting relevant authorities, sharing best practices, acting as a clearing house, and challenging lack of ambition if necessary. He also highlighted the importance of working across Scottish Government and connecting with food system transformers elsewhere in the UK.
- DO acknowledged the challenges of transforming the food system, particularly in public health, but also noted progress in areas like carbon reduction and biodiversity in farming practices. He stressed the importance of building links with the third and private sectors and the need for a collaborative approach to achieve the Act's outcomes.

EW thanked DO for his presentation. She expressed the hope that the Commission's enforcing powers would not be needed soon, as the current focus is on motivating the sector. She appreciated the emphasis on horizontal collaborative working and positive thinking, noting that it takes a village to raise a policy. EW highlighted the importance of engaging all spheres of government, including national and local authorities

Tilly Robinson-Miles (TR), Partner and Stakeholder Relationship Fellow, Living Good Food Nation Lab - University of Edinburgh

- TR acknowledged the challenges in getting speakers from local authorities and health boards due to the current climate of food policy.

- She emphasised the importance of moving the conversation from a national level to a local and regional level, highlighting the power of local authorities and health boards in this process.
- The Living Good Food Nation Lab is an interconnected, multidisciplinary lab situated within the University of Edinburgh, working with partners across the food landscape.
- The lab is living and dynamic and aims to support the implementation of the Good Food Nation Scotland Act, particularly by assisting health boards and local authorities. It also focuses on building evidence and understanding around food system transformation in the Scottish context.
- The lab consists of four units, each with a specific focus:
 - **Grassroots and Community Unit:** Led by Dr Niamh Moore and Dr Beth Cloughton, this unit works on grassroots and community food, drawing on best practices and addressing systemic challenges within the community food sector.
 - **Systems Thinking Unit:** Led by Professor Mary Brennan, Professor Simon Pringle and Dr Ndungu Nyokabi, this unit aims to understand Scotland's broader food system, identifying barriers and enablers in the policy landscape and building capacity for systems thinking.
 - **Policy Unit:** Led by Dr Isabel Fletcher and Dr Claire Perry, this unit focuses on understanding how the Good Food Nation plans are developed at both national and local levels, exploring horizontal and vertical policy approaches.
 - **Analytical Unit:** This unit supports the development of plans by mapping indicators onto each outcome of the national plan, using publicly available data sets and developing innovative indicators.
- TR encouraged relevant authorities to engage with the lab and contribute to the ongoing process.

EW thanked TR for demonstrating how the Living Good Food Nation Lab is dynamic, evolving, and changing. She emphasised that these qualities are essential in the current context. EW agreed with TR about the importance of developing relationships across different areas of the system to bring the bill to life and maximise the benefits of the legislation for the people of Scotland.

Dan Jenkins (DJ), Senior Health Improvement Specialist, NHS Highland

- DJ emphasised the importance of reducing inequalities and food insecurity to improve food-related health outcomes. He argued that weight should not be a target in the plan, as it risks focusing on individuals rather than a whole system approach. Instead, the focus should be on improving food choices and availability, regardless of weight status. He highlighted the need for clear measures to reduce proportions of food high in fat, sugar, and salt, and suggested including mental health outcomes related to food consumption.
- DJ raised the issue around more robust inclusion of alcohol-related harms to physical and mental health within the plan. Its associations with food are powerful, and the complexity of its place in our culture needs a sophisticated but clearly defined approach. We need to balance in how we support our food and drink industries that associate with alcohol, whilst also prioritising the reduction of harmful outcomes. This work is also closely linked with inequalities.
- DJ discussed the collaborative efforts in Highland, involving the Highland Council and the Highland Good Food Partnership. He stressed the importance of multi-departmental collaboration, including facilities, sustainability, procurement, and public health. He acknowledged the challenges of prioritising food-related work amidst busy service providers but emphasised the need for a joint planning process to achieve cohesive goals.
- DJ highlighted the importance of dialogue and understanding between different agendas to finalise the plan and raise opportunities for future development. He noted the need for a health-first approach, focusing on positive attitudes to food and relationships with food, rather than weight reduction.

EW thanked DJ for his contribution, highlighting the importance of a whole systems approach rather than focusing on individual responsibility. She appreciated his emphasis on the concept of food and mood, noting that reducing food inequalities can lead to overall health improvements at the population level. She thanked DJ for the mention of alcohol, stressing the need to address it within a whole systems approach.

Jill Muirie (JM), Public Health Programme Manager, Glasgow Centre for Population Health

- JM emphasised the importance of building a food system that prioritises equity, sustainability, and health to enhance public health.
- JM agreed with DJ on the need to focus on equity, creating supportive environments for healthy eating, and using positive language around food.

- JM discussed the Glasgow City Food Plan, developed by the Glasgow Food Policy Partnership, which includes public, private, and community sector partners. The plan aims to create a fairer, healthier, and more sustainable food system in Glasgow. It was developed collaboratively over two years and launched in June 2021. The partnership includes 21 members and works with a broader range of stakeholders through eight working groups focusing on various aspects of the food system.
- JM highlighted the importance of collaboration, dedicated resources, regular communication, and senior leadership in implementing the food plan. Glasgow City Council have an elected member that leads on food and the food plan, and a cross-council officers group who meet to discuss where their own portfolios intersect.
- She stressed that the plan is a long-term endeavour and that progress should be measured realistically. JM also mentioned the significance of involving the community sector as an equal partner and the need to think about the levers that can be pulled at the city level to support community-level work.

EW thanked JM for her update on the developments in Glasgow. She noted it was helpful to hear about the work on collaboration to avoid duplication and work towards a common goal. EW was pleased to hear about the community sector being involved as an equal partner. As a former councillor and member of a Community Planning Partnership, she recognised the significance of having the buy-in from the Community Planning Partnership, as it sets the agenda for all partners.

EW also highlighted the concept of having an elected member as a local food champion. She found this idea interesting and stressed the importance of senior officer buy-in across the partnership.

Open debate

EW opened up the debate encouraging everyone to keep the discussion broad focusing on areas such as health, procurement, sustainability, net zero, and food resilience which are all part of a whole systems approach:

Sarah Millar from Quality Meat Scotland asked about the role of farmers and crofters in the local plans being developed by health board and local authorities. JM responded by highlighting the challenges in Glasgow due to its urban nature but mentioned efforts to support local producers through procurement. DJ acknowledged the complexity of procurement processes and emphasised the importance of local suppliers and employment opportunities. EW noted the challenges with public procurement with cost pressures while supporting local producers.

Alastair Dobson, Taste of Arran/Arran Dairies and the Chair of the Ayrshire Regional Economic Strategy Delivery Group, praised the procurement practices in East Ayrshire. He suggested a regional approach to deliver the Good Food Nation

outcomes. He noted that FDF Scotland's Reformulation for Health Programme has had great successes in removing billions of calories from the Scottish diet. He thought that a whole systems approach was needed, as well as sharing good ideas to help Scotland become a Good Food Nation.

DO supported the idea of sharing good practices across regions and emphasised the importance of accelerating the transfer of good ideas. TR agreed noting that although the Act puts in place duties for local authorities and health board to create local plans it doesn't mean that regional approaches cannot be taken.

Ruth Watson, a journalist, noted there are examples of best practice in local authorities in Scotland on Good Food Nation and food policy such as local procurement. But she noted concerns about the lack of engagement from some local councils in supporting local procurement and community-supported agriculture. She highlighted the enthusiasm of local farmers and the interest of primary school children in sustainability and good food. She asked how we can encourage excellence in local authorities across Scotland.

EW noted the need to have enthusiastic food champions across local authorities but noted challenges with staff moving on and keeping that momentum going.

TR noted how positive it was that we are having these conversations on Good Food Nation at a local level. She noted that the Living Good Food Nation Lab has spoken with about half of the relevant authorities that will need to create local plans and that there's a lot of excitement and energy and passion to take this work forward while recognising the challenges.

Jennifer Kerr from South Lanarkshire Council discussed her role in working with communities to develop and integrate various policy areas across councils and other partners. She mentioned that they are part of the Glasgow City Region Deal and are using some of the funding for town centre master planning in East Kilbride. Their focus is on addressing inequalities, particularly in access to affordable and sustainable food, and improving health outcomes. She highlighted the importance of integrating different policy areas and mentioned that their current food plan is more focused on social policy compared to their previous economic development-focused plan. She stressed the importance of continuous learning and collaboration to improve the food system and health outcomes in the area.

Jayne Jones (JJ), from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde raised a question about the role of the Food Commission in ensuring coherence among independent plans while allowing for local autonomy. She also wondered if there's a way to use the Good Food Nation to knit together the various food related plans within local authorities, health boards and national government.

DO responded by emphasising the importance of learning and improving over time. He noted that the Good Food Nation draft plan has mapped out all the food related policies that are already in place and that there's an opportunity to connect these policies at the relevant authority level. In addition, he noted that the Act placed a duty for departments across the Scottish Government to take into account food policy when carrying out their work.

Pete Ritchie from Nourish asked local authorities or health boards in attendance about the importance of aligning to one set of national outcomes versus having local autonomy. He asked whether it is more important to have a unified set of national outcomes that everyone agrees on and can measure, or to allow each local authority in Scotland to develop their own outcomes.

DJ responded by acknowledging the helpfulness of having a consensus on national outcomes. He emphasised the importance of local implementation, noting that there are differences between urban and rural settings. He highlighted the value of having a common set of national outcomes for shared practices and future planning. He also mentioned the importance of learning from different regions, such as Glasgow, and the role of initiatives such as the Living Lab in supporting future iterations and long-term vision.

Colin Smith, Chief Executive at the Scottish Wholesale Association, highlighted the role of wholesalers in enabling the Good Food Nation plan and suggested changes to public procurement frameworks to support local food delivery. DO acknowledged the importance of wholesalers and the need to work through financial challenges.

Ann Packard raised questions about the nutritional needs of care homes and elderly people, as well as prisons. DO and DJ discussed the opportunities for improving food systems in these settings, including food growing initiatives in prisons and the importance of social care in the Good Food Nation plans. TR and JJ noted the importance of ensuring those receiving social care at home have access to good food.

Kirsty Tait from the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission emphasised the need to connect land and food policies and suggested that we need to make local authorities and health boards more aware of the work being done in land reform. There was then a discussion on the importance of the Food Commission and Land Commission working together.

Ifeyinwa Kanu from IntelliDigest raised points about the use of land spaces for growing fruits and vegetables, the importance of nutritional awareness, and the potential role of NHS in providing food vouchers and biochemical analysis.

Pat Abel from Transition Edinburgh South (Scotland) spoke about work in Gracemount with a GP practise to turn their garden into biodiversity garden for the patients. There was then a discussion on people using land available in their communities for growing such as schools or farms.

Michelle McWilliams from the Rowett Institute discussed research on social prescribing for nutrition and the importance of scientific research in supporting the Good Food Nation outcomes.

5. AOB

No other business was noted.

6. Dates of next meeting

The next meeting is the AGM and will take place on 10 September 2025 at 6pm.