

Cross-Party Group on Food

10 September 2025 at 6pm, Committee Room 5 and Teams

Minute

Present

MSPs

- Annie Wells MSP
- Elena Whitham MSP

Member speakers

- Anna Chworow, Nourish (Scotland)
- Baukje de Roos, University of Aberdeen
- Ifeyinwa Kanu, IntelliDigest

Non-MSP Group Members

In person

- Kirsty Tinsdale, Food and Drink Federation Scotland/CPG Food Secretary
- Ryan Brown, Food and Drink Federation Scotland
- Joe Churcher, the Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen
- Jen Grant, Food Train
- Jules Griffin, the Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen
- Kirsty Jenkins, OneKind
- Michelle McWilliams, the Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen
- Louise Thompson, Quality Meat Scotland
- Laura Wilson, Food Standards Scotland
- Alexander Walker, NFU Scotland

Virtually

- Pat Abel, Transition Edinburgh South (Scotland) Ltd
- Liz Barron-Majerik, Lantra
- Jane Bunting, REHIS
- Martin Carle, CFINE/ Granite City Good Food (Sustainable Food Places Partnership)
- Iain Clunie, Food and Drink Federation Scotland
- Viv Collie, Vivid Ideas & Solutions
- Bosse Dahlgren and Wendy Barrie, Scottish Food Guide

- Lorna Dawson, James Hutton Institute
- Sarah Duley, Soil Association Scotland
- Graeme Findlay, SQA
- Stuart Grant, the Scottish Parliament
- Lisa Hislop, NFU Scotland
- Claire Hislop, Public Health Scotland
- Jayne Jones, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde
- Simon Macdonald, Consultant
- Charlotte Maltin, Biomix Ltd
- Martin Meteyard, Consultant
- Abi Mordin, Propagate (Scotland)
- Shashika Rathnayaka, University of Aberdeen
- Tilly Robinson-Miles, Living Good Food Nation Lab - University of Edinburgh
- Sara Smith, RHET
- David Watts, University of Aberdeen
- Sandra Williamson, REHIS

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Annie Wells MSP (AW) welcomed all to the meeting.

Apologies were received from:

- Rhoda Grant MSP
- Iain Baxter, Scotland Food & Drink
- Mary Brennan, University of Edinburgh
- Amanda Brown, Scotland Food & Drink
- Mary Lawton
- Ms Eluned Michael, Queen Margaret University
- Angela Mitchell, Nesta
- Ceri Ritchie, SAC Consulting
- Sara Smith, RHET
- Colin Smith, Scottish Wholesale Association
- David Thomson, Food and Drink Federation Scotland
- Caroline Timmins

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting (14 May 2025)

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

AW 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. **Election of Co-Conveners and Secretariat**

SM proposed the election of the Co-Convenors, Baukje de Roos was the seconder, the following were elected:

Co-Conveners

- Annie Wells (Conservative)
- Rhoda Grant (Labour)
- Elena Whitham (SNP)

AW proposed the election of the Secretariat, Michelle McWilliams (MM) was the seconder, the following were elected:

Secretariat

- Kirsty Tinsdale, Food and Drink Federation Scotland

5. **Priorities for the next Scottish Parliament and Government**

There were presentations from:

Anna Chworow (AC), Deputy Director of Nourish (Scotland). The key points from AC's presentation included:

- The concept of public diners is state-supported affordable restaurants serving healthy meals to all. These are not targeted or charity-based but open to everyone. The idea was inspired by historical UK models and international examples from Poland, Turkey, China, and Indonesia. public diners are distinct from community meals, food banks, or pay-as-you-feel models. They operate as full-service restaurants with paid staff, open multiple days a week, and offer dignified dining experiences.
- The rationale for public diners is:
 - Public Health: Diet now rivals smoking as the leading cause of preventable ill health. Poor diets contribute significantly to NHS costs and personal suffering. public diners offer a bold state intervention to make healthy food more accessible and normalised.
 - Cost of Living: While income support is vital, public diners address the cost side of food access. They provide affordable meals that reduce financial pressure on households.
 - Equality: Public diners promote: Gender equality (reducing the domestic burden of meal preparation, which disproportionately falls on women) and disability inclusion (supporting those who may lack the physical ability to cook, regardless of skill).

- Sustainable Diets: They model better dietary practices, reducing meat as the “hero” ingredient, supporting sustainable procurement and encouraging plant-forward meals and local sourcing.
- Social Connection: public diners offer “third spaces” where people can eat in a relaxed, welcoming environment. This combats isolation, especially in a digital age, and supports mental wellbeing.
- Key findings from consultations and workshops, organised by Nourish, highlight strong public support and democratic interest in menu and location decisions. Examples included people wanting alternatives to ready meals, being too tired or time-poor to cook, seeking support during life disruptions (e.g. redundancy), and managing shift work and childcare.
- A test site is launching in Dundee next year as part of academic research into the impact of public diners on diet, wellbeing, and procurement.
- Nourish Scotland is calling for a phase one rollout in two to three local authorities to trial the model at scale and assess its impact.
- A follow-up event is taking place in October which members of the Cross-Party Group are welcome to attend.
- More information on Nourish Scotland’s work on public diners can be found on their [website](#).

Baukje de Roos (BR), Professor of Human Nutrition at the Rowett Institute, University of Aberdeen. The key points from BR’s presentation included:

- Research has been carried out by the Rowett on Scotland’s food self-sufficiency and nutrient security. This has included the creation of a Food Balance Sheet for Scotland, a model assessing production, trade, and consumption of major commodities including barley, oats, dairy, wheat, eggs, pork, and poultry. Most commodities are produced in surplus except pork and poultry. A self-sufficiency ratio was developed to benchmark food availability.
- Key insights included:
 - Wheat contributes significantly to energy supply despite some being unsuitable for human consumption.
 - Dairy and eggs are major contributors to protein and fat supply.
 - Pork production meets only 25% of domestic demand, highlighting reliance on imports.
- BR provided an analysis of price policy modelling, focusing on the potential of fiscal interventions to influence consumer behaviour, improve nutritional outcomes, and support sustainable food systems. The modelling centred on the effects of a 10% subsidy on fruit and vegetable

prices, using econometric demand elasticity estimates derived from Scottish household consumption data.

- The analysis demonstrated that such a subsidy would result in a 4–8% increase in the consumption of fruits and vegetables. The variation in response was attributed to differences in income levels and baseline dietary habits, with lower-income households showing a more pronounced increase in demand.
 - This behavioural shift was linked to notable improvements in the intake of key nutrients, including calcium, magnesium, folate, and vitamin C, which are often under-consumed in the Scottish diet.
 - Modelling can also account for substitution effects, recognising that changes in the relative prices of food items can lead to unintended dietary shifts.
 - Such findings underscore the complexity of dietary behaviour and the need for holistic policy design.
- To support evidence-based policymaking, a decision support tool will be developed by the University of Aberdeen. This tool enables policymakers to simulate the nutritional, economic, and environmental impacts of various price and subsidy scenarios. It integrates data on domestic food production, trade flows, and nutrient composition, allowing for the assessment of policy options in terms of their alignment with public health goals, affordability, and sustainability. The self-sufficiency ratio will be used as a new indicator for Scotland's agricultural reform and the Good Food Nation Plan.

Dr Ifeyinwa Kanu (IK), CEO of IntelliDigest. The key points from IK's presentation included:

- Research was carried out in Scottish schools on food procurement and nutrition awareness. The research, funded by the Scottish Alliance for Food (SCAF) and UKRI Agri-food for Net Zero Network+ (AFN Network+), aimed to assess the resilience of Scotland's food system. Stakeholder engagement included pupils, parents, teachers, catering staff, farmers, and suppliers.
- Pupils were surveyed on their understanding of healthy diets, revealing that while they associated healthy eating with balance and health support, many struggled to identify and classify food groups. Only 27.8% recognised UK national dietary guidelines, indicating a significant gap in formal nutrition education.
- Parents demonstrated a better conceptual understanding of healthy eating, citing nutritional balance and avoidance of ultra-processed foods. However, many had difficulty linking specific foods to their nutritional content. Only 6.8% of respondents bought from local producers, with cost and family preferences being the primary factors in food purchasing decisions. Most families planned meals weekly to save money and reduce food waste.

- Less than 50% of families used school meals, preferring home-cooked meals for quality and control. Parents expressed confidence in meal planning and portion control, though some struggled with aligning meals to nutritional requirements.
- A comparison of lunchbox contents with school-provided meals in Edinburgh and Fife Councils showed Edinburgh offered greater variety and nutritional quality. Researchers mapped schools against local farms to explore direct sourcing potential, revealing opportunities to strengthen local procurement and reduce reliance on centralised suppliers.
- Recommendations included the Balanced Bite Scheme, a salary sacrifice model to incentivise sustainable consumption, supporting structured meal planning, local sourcing, improved health outcomes, reduced carbon footprint, and stimulated local economies.
- The study also emphasised the need for auditing frameworks to monitor sustainable consumption and production and called for political support and investment in local food infrastructure and education initiatives.

This was followed by an open debate where the following was noted:

- SM – an Aquaculture and Fisheries Consultant - raised concerns about a lack of focus on aquaculture and fisheries in the Rowett Institute's Food Balance Sheet for Scotland research. BR noted that there is separate fish-focused research, this highlighted the export of nutrient-rich fish due to low domestic demand. Increasing oily fish in school meals was suggested, while SM emphasised the importance of nutritional education and the cost-effectiveness of salmon. AC added that public diners could inspire home cooking.
- Tilly Robinson-Miles acknowledged the depth and rigour of the research presented by the speakers, noting that the evidence-based nature of the discussion stood in contrast to the media-driven narratives that often dominate food policy debates. She then shifted the conversation towards implementation, emphasising that the meeting was an opportunity to identify priority areas for the Scottish Government, Parliament, and the Scottish Food Commission. She posed a central question to the panel: what are the key asks from their research that could be translated into tangible, actionable policy? She urged the presenters to articulate how their findings could be embedded in real-world practice, particularly with manifesto writers and strategic decision-makers potentially listening in. Her intervention was framed as a call to move beyond abstract research and parliamentary discussion to community-based and government-supported initiatives.
- IK highlighted the Balanced Bite Scheme as a key policy recommendation. She explained that the scheme is modelled on the electric vehicle salary sacrifice programme and is designed to help working people transition to sustainable food consumption. The scheme would incentivise individuals to plan meals aligned with their daily nutritional requirements and support them

in sourcing food from local, sustainable producers. She stressed that political support is essential to drive this initiative forward and that it could have wide-reaching impacts on public health, local economies, and environmental sustainability.

- BR responded by focusing on the importance of local sourcing and the ethical dimensions of food trade. She noted that while locally sourced food may not always be nutritionally superior, it contributes significantly to social welfare by supporting coastal and rural communities. She raised concerns about importing food from countries with high levels of malnutrition, arguing that Scotland should reduce its reliance on imports and instead invest in domestic production. She noted the need for policy frameworks that prioritise food sovereignty and ethical sourcing.
- AC advocated for a phase one rollout of public diners in two to three local authorities. She argued that the strength of international examples and domestic consultation provided ample justification for trialling the model at scale. She also emphasised the need to shift focus from individual education to systemic food environment interventions. She called for policies that make healthy, sustainable, and locally sourced food the default option across income levels and demographics, thereby embedding food culture and dignity into public provision.
- EW highlighted challenges faced by local food producers in Scotland, particularly in relation to public sector procurement. She began by referencing her experience with East Ayrshire Council, which had previously been a leader in short supply chains and local food sourcing. Two local producers - Mossgiel and Corrie Mains Farm - had been integral to the council's school catering system for years, not only supplying high-quality food but also contributing to educational efforts by engaging directly with schools at no extra cost. However, in the latest round of procurement, both producers lost their contracts despite the process being reported as following the same criteria as before. She felt this was a significant step backwards, undermining years of progress in local food sourcing, sustainability, and food education. She warned that such decisions risk alienating committed local suppliers who invest in staff training and infrastructure, only to have their efforts undercut by larger multinational providers. She urged the group to scrutinise procurement strategies more closely and ensure they align with the broader goals of sustainability, community engagement, and food system resilience. She argued that without reform, Scotland risks losing the very producers who have helped build its reputation for quality and sustainability in school meals.
- In response, AC agreed that the food environment - including procurement systems - plays a critical role in shaping population health. She emphasised that public diners could serve as a mechanism to restore dignity and choice in food provision, especially for older people and time-poor parents. Anna also noted that public diners could help people "fall in love with food again," offering a space where delicious, affordable meals inspire home cooking and deeper engagement with food culture.

- IK responded by reinforcing the importance of creating an environment where healthy choices are the default. She highlighted the challenges faced by urban farmers, including high business rates, and called for policy support to enable local food production. She also stressed that public sector catering has significant funding that could be better deployed to support local sourcing and sustainable practices. She advocated for auditing frameworks to monitor sustainable consumption and production, ensuring that procurement decisions reflect broader societal goals.
- Laura Wilson, Head of Public Health Nutrition at Food Standards Scotland, acknowledged the importance of education, particularly in helping people understand where their food comes from and why healthy eating matters. Drawing on her experience working in school food provision, she noted that Scotland is ahead of other parts of the UK in terms of the quality of school meals but thought that this progress is undermined by the broader food environment children encounter once they leave school. She noted examples of the locations and offering from convenience stores, fast food outlets, and even bus shelters advertising high fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) products. She emphasised that this exposure is not limited to physical spaces but extends into digital environments as well. She called for a shift in the conversation, from blaming individuals for poor dietary choices to creating a food environment that supports and enables healthier decisions.
- MM, the Rowett Institute at the University of Aberdeen, reinforced the importance of the food environment and its influence on consumer behaviour. She shared findings from recent research conducted in collaboration with the University of Aberdeen which examined the impact of HFSS legislation in England, which restricts the placement of unhealthy food items in prominent supermarket locations. Scotland was used as a control group in the research. The findings revealed that repositioning HFSS products away from high-visibility areas, such as end-of-aisle displays and checkouts, led to a measurable reduction in purchases of those items. She emphasised that this evidence demonstrates how environmental interventions, such as product placement regulations, can effectively influence consumer choices and reduce the consumption of less healthy foods. She noted similar HFSS legislation will be put in place in Scotland soon and that such policy measures can be a powerful tool in improving public health outcomes.
- Jen Grant, the Food Train, focused on the unique challenges faced by older adults, particularly those who are housebound or living alone. She emphasised that for many of the individuals Food Train works with, simply getting to a shop is not possible. This lack of mobility severely limits their ability to access fresh produce and healthy food options. She highlighted how the current food environment is poorly suited to the needs of older people. Supermarkets often sell produce in bulk - such as kilogramme bags of carrots or whole cucumbers - which are impractical for single-person households. This packaging model not only leads to food waste but also discourages older adults from purchasing fresh items altogether. She argued that the way food is marketed and packaged must be reconsidered to better serve older populations.

- EW endorsed the concept of public diners as a dignified and empowering solution for older people. She described how such spaces could offer choice, social connection, and access to nutritious meals without the stigma often associated with charity-based food provision. AC shared examples from Poland of older people and those with young children as being key demographics that have made use of public diners.
- Jules Griffin, from the Rowett Institute, drew parallels between food policy and health economics. He noted that in health economics, pharmaceutical interventions are routinely assessed in terms of cost versus long-term benefit. He suggested that food policy should adopt a similar framework - evaluating the long-term health and economic benefits of dietary interventions with the same rigour as we do for medicines. He argued that if we can maintain good nutrition in older adults, they are more likely to remain independent, which reduces pressure on health and social care systems. He called for more robust modelling and policy frameworks that account for the economic and social value of good nutrition.
- Wendy Barrie (Scottish Food Guide) praised the many inspiring initiatives and individuals promoting good food across Scotland. She strongly endorsed the Food for Life campaign and public diners – effective ways to tackle food poverty and improve school meals. Wendy emphasised the need to embed food culture in primary education – not just through facts, but by fostering genuine enthusiasm. She highlighted teachers’ lack of confidence in discussing local produce and called for a shift from restrictive dietary messaging to one that celebrates participation and cultural pride. She also urged support for sustainable seafood – like herring and mackerel – over farmed salmon, noting depleted stocks elsewhere as a warning. Finally, she stressed the importance of reconnecting consumers with producers and prioritising experiential food education in policy.
- EW encouraged members of the group to respond to Food Standards Scotland’s consultation on their strategy which was due to close on Sunday 14 September.

6. AOB

No other business was noted.