

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 25 February 2026
5th Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

PE2173: Ban ultra-processed foods in school meals

Introduction

Petitioner Lauren Houstoun

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban the use of ultra-processed food in school meals across Scotland, in order to give our children healthier options.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2173>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 8 October 2025](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government and relevant school meal providers.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from the Scottish Government which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 1 August 2025](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 5,885 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
February 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2173: Ban ultra-processed foods in school meals

Petitioner

Lauren Houstoun

Date Lodged

7 July 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban the use of ultra-processed food in school meals across Scotland, in order to give our children healthier options.

Background information

The Perth and Kinross Council school menu relies heavily on ultra-processed products, particularly meat substitutes, while claiming to meet government regulations. I therefore believe these regulations need to be reviewed.

My children don't eat processed meat substitutes, as we do not believe they are beneficial for the environment or for our children's health and well-being.

There are days when no suitable meal is available for them at all. Even when a vegetarian option is offered, it often relies on highly processed substitutes. There are many nutritious vegetarian dishes that don't require ultra-processed ingredients.

Unfortunately, many of the meat options on the menu are also heavily processed, raising further concerns about the overall nutritional value of these meals. For many children, a school lunch is the only hot meal they receive each day, and I believe the current menu is failing those children.

Furthermore, I believe ultra-processed foods have no place on a school menu and should be banned across Scotland.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2173 on 8 October 2025

The Convener: Our final new petition for consideration today is PE2173, which was lodged by Lauren Houstoun. It calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban the use of ultra-processed food in school meals across Scotland in order to give our children healthier options.

The SPICe briefing explains that there is no single, universally agreed definition for “ultra-processed food”. Examples of ultra-processed foods might include sweetened breakfast cereals, carbonated soft drinks or confectionery. They might also include low-fat spreads or some flavoured yogurts.

The Scottish Government’s response to the petition states that all food and drink that is served in education authority and grant-aided schools in Scotland are under a statutory duty to comply with the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020. Compliance with the regulations is monitored by Education Scotland’s health and nutrition inspectors as part of the school inspection programme.

The Scottish Government’s response also states that current scientific evidence does not support a change to dietary advice in relation to the consumption of ultra-processed foods and notes that the evidence base remains of insufficient quality to propose changes at this time. The submission highlights that not all ultra-processed foods are unhealthy, with many playing an important part in ensuring food safety and standards. The issue of processed and ultra-processed foods is kept under review by the scientific advisory committee on nutrition.

The Government’s submission notes that an outright ban of ultra-processed products would mean that products such as bread, yoghurts and breakfast cereals would no longer be provided in schools. That could have a significant impact on the nutritional content of school meals, including fibre, calcium and vitamins, some of which would be difficult to get in sufficient quantities from other food sources that are available. As such, the Scottish Government does not currently consider that a ban on ultra-processed products in schools would be in the best interests of child nutrition in the light of current scientific evidence and dietary advice.

10:45

Maurice Golden: The aim of the petition, which is to ban ultra-processed food in school meals, is quite a big ask. Nonetheless, the response from the Scottish Government is extremely disappointing. As you have highlighted, convener, the Scottish Government says that an outright ban on ultra-processed food would mean that products such as bread, yoghurts and breakfast cereals would no longer be provided in schools. I cannot fathom how that would be the case, and I am happy to provide the Scottish Government with examples of bread, yoghurts and breakfast cereals that are not ultra-processed and that can be provided.

It would be helpful for the committee to write to the Scottish Government to ask for a percentage of school meals to be provided that are fresh, which is one of the Scottish Government's priorities. I know what I would consider to be sustainable, but it would be useful for the Scottish Government to define "sustainable produce". We should, as I have highlighted, ask the Scottish Government whether it believes that there are no alternatives to bread, yoghurt and breakfast cereals that are not ultra-processed. Finally, if the Scottish Government could highlight and put in the public domain the data on how it monitors the local authority provision of school menus, that would at least help to inform consideration of the petition.

In addition, we might want to consider writing to the providers of school meals, given the position that we are in and our need to progress quickly. For example, in my region, Tayside Contracts would be one such provider that we could ask for similar information. It is important that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament have an overview of school meal provision across Scotland.

The Convener: That is a comprehensive set of suggestions, Mr Golden. As no other colleagues have any thoughts on the matter, do we agree to those suggestions?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submission

Scottish Government written submission, 24 November 2025

PE2173/B: Ban ultra-processed foods in school meals

Thank you for your letter of 14 October 2025 seeking further information in relation to the public petition calling for a ban on ultra processed foods in schools. I have responded below to each of the four points you raise:

1) Clarity on whether the Scottish Government's position is that there are no alternative options to ultra-processed bread, yoghurt and breakfast cereals

While there is no universally agreed definition of 'ultra-processed foods', they can broadly be defined as foods with many ingredients used in the industrial production process. The widely used NOVA classification categorises foods by the nature, extent and purpose of processing but does not consider the nutritional content of foods. A wide range of products may be categorised as ultra-processed if using the NOVA classification. While the term ultra-processed may include products commonly high in fat, salt and sugar, such as sweet and savoury pre-packaged snacks and soft drinks, it also includes products which are fortified with vitamins and minerals and have nutritionally beneficial components such as fibre, including bread and yoghurts. As such, a ban on all products considered to be ultra-processed, based on the NOVA classification, is challenging and for example would exclude the provision of products which are fortified with vitamins and minerals.

2) The percentage of school meals provided to children that are fresh

The Scottish Government does not use a single definition of 'fresh' as this will depend on the context, and nor do we collect data on 'fresh' provision. Instead the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020 focus on the nutritional value of school food, drink and meals to support the healthy growth and development of children.

For example some local authorities cook the main component of a meal (e.g., lasagne) at a central location, freeze and transport for reheating at several local school locations and serve alongside fruit, vegetables and salad prepared at each site. As such, while the meal as a whole delivers the desired amount of energy and key nutrients, it would be difficult to determine whether that meal would be deemed as 'fresh'. For others while the whole meal might be cooked on site daily, it could include frozen vegetables which deliver high nutritional value but may or may not be considered as 'fresh' as vegetables that have been cooked hours before and kept warm until service, or include prepackaged bread products that contains as much energy and fibre, and as many nutrients, as bread cooked on site daily.

3) The Scottish Government's definition of sustainable produce

The Scottish Government does not use a single definition of 'sustainable produce', recognising that the context and intention of each policy or piece of legislation is

relevant. For example the Good Food Nation Act notes that '*a sustainable food system is one that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations is not compromised. (The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations)*'.

The Scottish Government also recognises that responsibility for procurement of food and drink for use in school menus rests with local authorities, each of whom will have their own robust approaches in defining sustainability for procurement contracts which are based on local needs and circumstances including nutritional, environmental and local economy [considerations](#).

4) details of how the Scottish Government monitors and assesses local authority school meal provision, including any relevant data that is collected.

Compliance with the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020 is monitored by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) Health and Nutrition Inspectors as part of the annual school inspection programme. Feedback from those inspections is shared with the head teacher, the local authority catering manager, and the local authority director of education and central officers at the end of the inspection, in order to inform areas for development.

Statistics on [uptake of school meals](#) are published annually. The most recent statistics cover 2023-24 and were published in September 2025. Statistics for 2024-25 are scheduled for publication in 2026.

I hope this information is helpful to the Committee.

Learning Directorate