

Cross-Party Group on Food

17 May 2023, 6pm, Committee Room 5 and Teams

Minute

Present

MSPs

Rhoda Grant (joint Chair)
Jim Fairlie (joint Chair)
Annie Wells (virtually)
Brian Whittle

Non-MSP Group Members

In person

Dr Gillian Purdon	Food Standards Scotland
Claire Hislop	Public Health Scotland
Marie-Amélie Viatte	Founder of the Power of Food
Festival/Trustee of the Granton Community Gardeners	
Ewan MacDonald-Russell	The Scottish Retail Consortium
Kirsty Tinsdale	CPG Food Secretariat
Cat Hay	Food and Drink Federation Scotland
Jon Wilkin	Abertay University
Boon-Seang Chu	Abertay University
Sally Measom	Company Shop
Anneli Lofstedt	The Rowett Institute
Baukje de Roos	The Rowett Institute
Michelle McWilliams	The Rowett Institute
Pat Abel	Transition Edinburgh South
Gavin Mair	The Scottish Parliament
Laura Wilson	Food Standards Scotland
Alistair Williams	National Manufacturing Institute Scotland
Hamish Macdonell	Quality Meat Scotland
Mads Fischer-Moller	WWF Scotland
Beatrice Morrice	National Farmers Union of Scotland
Lorna Jackson-Hall	Charlesfield Farms
Andy Williams	56 Degrees North
Rhys Ainsworth	56 Degrees North
Jack Sinclair	56 Degrees North
Faith Davies	Community Gardener

Virtually

Simon Macdonald	West Coast Regional Inshore Fisheries
Rosa Holt	Registered Dietitian
Orchid Lui	UK Chinese Times
Vivien Collie	Vivid Ideas and Solutions
Martin Meteyard	Consultant
Christine Graham	Kettle Produce
Joe Hind	Scotland Food & Drink
Simon Macdonald	Fisheries Aquaculture and Processing
Consultant	
Lorraine Tulloch	Obesity Action Scotland
Yvonne Traynor	Public Health Scotland
Iain Clunie	Food and Drink Federation Scotland
Charlotte Maltin	Biomics Ltd
Graeme Findlay	SQA
Jackie McCabe	The Royal Environmental Health Institute of
Scotland	
Liz Barron-Majerik	Lantra Scotland
Michelle Carruthers	The Food Train
David Watts	Aberdeen University
Amy Glass	The Food and Drink Federation
Martin Carle	CFINE
Peter Faassen de Heer	The Scottish Government
Ylva Haglund	Scottish Wholesale Association
Ruth Watson	Keep Scotland the Brand
Wendy Barrie	Scottish Food Guide
Bosse Dahlgren	Scottish Food Guide
Laura-Alexandra Smith	Royal Society of Chemistry
Cate Devine	Freelance journalist and food writer
Joanne Burns	Food and Drink Federation Scotland

1. Apologies

These were received from David Thomson, Sue Whittle, Mary Lawton, Lesley Stanley, Jayne Jones, Geoff Ogle, Julie Hesketh-Laird, Clare O'Keefe, Jon Molyneux, Tilly Robinson-Miles, John Whitehead, Ann Packard, Kim Newstead, Colin Smith, Howell Davies, Sandra Williamson, Lesley Atkins, Mary Brennan.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting (25 January 2023)

The minutes of the last meeting were proposed by Jon Wilkin and seconded by Cat Hay and therefore approved and noted as a fair reflection of proceedings.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising noted.

4. Collaborating on dietary health inequalities - where can we best focus our efforts to help tackle this issue?

Rhoda Grant (RG) apologised for the meeting starting slightly late due to Parliamentary business. RG advised that Jim Fairlie MSP was due to Chair this meeting but was speaking in a debate in the Chamber and that she would cover the duties of Chair until he was able to join the meeting. She introduced the theme and thanked the speakers for joining us.

Dr Gillian Purdon (GP), Head of Public Health Nutrition, Food Standards Scotland (FSS)

The key points from GP's presentation included:

- The location of where we live has a big impact on what we eat – depending on the type of food/outlets that are more readily available. Transport links may also be challenging especially in areas suffering from poverty.
- Healthier foods could be more expensive and promotions tend to be more focused on foods high in fat, salt or sugar. She thought promotions could be more balanced to feature more healthier foods.
- FSS tracker survey reports that the key barriers to accessing healthy food include cost, time, and promotions on less healthier products.
- Research by the Food Foundation looked at the implications of the cost-of-living crisis on food purchases for a family:
 - A family's resources have a major impact - not just financially, but also the equipment they might have in their house and how they can store food.
 - Families on lower incomes don't have money to spare, so it's important that their kids eat what they buy and that the food won't go off quickly - wasting food waste is not an option. It may mean choices are based on what is quick to prepare, what's on discount and what's easy to find.
 - Lower income families eat less fruit, vegetables and fibre than higher income families and so they have a poorer dietary intake overall.
 - The number of families facing food insecurity has doubled in the last 10 years.
- FSS did a pulse survey recently which found that about 70% of adults are now reporting that they are concerned about being able to afford food. Stubbornly high inflation is putting a lot of pressure on those on the lower incomes.
- [FSS consumer attitudes to food research](#) found about 18% of people are going without essential food items and almost a fifth of people are skipping meals. Some people are having less takeaways, eating out a bit less or having less treats. There is a concern that more people may be eating food beyond their use-by dates.

- FSS has been monitoring dietary goals for a long time – data shows that those living in poverty eat less fruit and vegetables, oil rich fish, fibre, and eat more sugar than people in more affluent areas.
- 70% of adults in more deprived areas are living with overweight and obesity versus 60% in the more affluent areas. This has a big impact on our health and wellbeing and can impact levels of conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, strokes, certain types of cancer, and tooth decay. Those health conditions are more prevalent in more deprived areas.
- By treating overweight and obesity there could be a significant cost saving for government of between £300 and £600 million per annum. The wider cost to society due to loss of productivity is estimated to reach as high as £4.6 billion.
- GP indicated that the food environment incentivise and promotes low cost foods which over contribute to the diet to energy, fat, salt and sugar and that action is needed to improve the food environment to help progress towards the Scottish Dietary Goals.
- Reformulation can help improve diets without people actually having to make any conscious changes. FSS invested money towards Food and Drink Federation Scotland's Reformulation for Health Programme to allow small businesses that make bakery products to apply for grants to reformulate their products.
- The upcoming promotions restrictions on foods high in fat, salt and sugar and the out of home mandatory calorie labelling policies will include measures aimed at supporting healthier choices.
- [FSS' Public Health Nutrition Strategy](#) highlights that partnership working is key to improving dietary health.
- GP thought that we need a whole food system based approach to look at solutions - the Good Food Nation work may be a good vehicle to do that.

Claire Hislop (CH), Organisational Lead – Diet, Physical Activity & Healthy Weight, Public Health Scotland (PHS)

CH focused on the work PHS is doing in relation to community food initiatives. The key points from CH's presentation included:

- The 1996 Scottish Diet Action Plan recognised that many communities - specifically people who experience inequalities – could be at risk of limitations to food access and food insecurity.
- As a result of this, the plan recommended the establishment of Community Food and Health Scotland, which was set up as a team in 1996, firstly as part of the Scottish Consumer Council and subsequently NHS Health Scotland, which is now PHS.
- This work is still a key aspect of current Scottish Government policies and continues to be embedded as part of the work at PHS to address the challenges and inequalities faced by many when they're accessing food.

- The aim of this work is to support community food initiatives across Scotland to address access to and take up of affordable, acceptable, sustainable and healthy food.
- The community food sector has become more focused on food aid and making use of surplus food. Community food initiatives adapted quickly to the COVID pandemic by working with the public sector agencies as part of a coordinated approach to reach people in need in their communities. They supported the local response to lockdowns by making sure vulnerable people had access to food. More recently some of the community food initiatives provided tailored food boxes to Ukrainian families and groups, including supplies from local growers.
- Community food initiatives bring people together in a dignified way to help address the inequalities faced by many by addressing things that are pertinent to individual communities at that point in time. Many examples of this work include community food growing and cooking, shopping services for people who can't get to the shops, befriending services, community cafes and lunch clubs. These initiatives provide access to foods at a reasonable cost, but also focus on reducing social isolation within our communities.
- Social supermarkets are often seen as a more dignified approach to help poverty compared to emergency food aid.
- As well as providing access to food – community initiatives support families with young children, signpost to other services around health such as weight management programs, oral health programs, or advice on mental well-being.
- Many now offer advice on income maximisation, support and access to funds, such as Best Start or other available grants. Many also offer training and support in areas such as employability skills.
- There is evidence that stress, depression and anxiety associated with food and security affect more than half of households who are referred to food banks, and that children who grow up in food insecure homes are more likely to have worse educational outcomes compared with children going up in food secure homes.
- PHS has set up a national reference group which consists of members from Scottish Government, PHS and four of the larger community food organisations – that are well established and support smaller grassroots organisations within their communities in different ways.
- The aim of this approach is to have an overall stronger, more coordinated community food sector in Scotland through increased collaboration between relevant agencies.
- PHS welcome proposals and changes in both policy and in practice to end the use of any type of emergency food provision to be used as a primary response to food insecurity and to maximise cash burst responses to this issue.

Marie-Amélie Viatte (MAV) - Advocate for regenerative, localised food ecosystems / Founder of the Power of Food Festival / Trustee of the Granton Community Gardeners

The key points from MAV's presentation included:

- There is a diverse range of skills and knowledge in communities to create a more resilient food system.
- Community food initiatives can be a big part of the solution in terms of tackling dietary health inequalities – in a non-stigmatising way. The Granton Community Gardeners is an example of this.
- It can make cooking from scratch a shared experience, one that is fun, that's sociable and takes away the risk of experimenting with different types of food.
- Community food action taps right into the heart of the social determinants of health that enable us to tackle broader health inequalities by creating a sense of shared purpose, of boosting the self-esteem of confidence of positive relationships, a sense of belonging.
- The people working in community food initiatives are mostly unpaid or poorly paid. There's a lack of investment in the sector – funding is typically piecemeal, short-term, hard to get and demanding. This means that, as a country, we're not harnessing the sector's full potential, not for health, not for the environment, not for economy.
- MAV put forward the need for the following actions:
 1. Showcase and celebrate the critical importance and further potential of community food initiatives and to join in, in our own local community.
 2. Commit meaningful long-term investment in people and places by developing a lasting investment strategy to support community food action.
 3. Shift our language. Recognise our gifts and riches, individual and collective. Our people, land, buildings. Shift our view of 'poor' people and communities, who are in fact full of knowledge, skills, and capacity. Focus on people's strengths, not their problems, put them on the path to empower themselves.
 4. Make it easier for communities to empower themselves. Smooth the path; remove barriers (financial and bureaucratic); create a more level playing field; rein in the power of a few large economic players and boost the power of a myriad of small players rooted in our local communities (e.g. by improving the financial and regulatory landscape e.g. current Agriculture Bill, the Good Food Nation plan, economic regulations and incentives, planning and procurement etc).

Ewan MacDonald-Russell (EM), Deputy Head, the Scottish Retail Consortium (SRC)

The key points from EM's presentation included:

- The retail and food and drink industries are suffering from competing pressures – trying to recover from the pandemic, deal with the cost-of-living crisis and the increase in the cost of energy and the impact of policy. EM felt that Governments want industry to tackle obesity and health and inequalities, to reduce carbon emissions, to help rebuild the economy, and to build a circular economy.
- The retail industry supports good regulation – it means that there's more of a level playing field for other businesses to catch up with good progressive businesses but policy can make business really hard.
- He thought that the great work the retail industry does to support healthier diets is not always recognised. Retailers and FDF and their members have done a tremendous amount of work on reformulation. EM suggested it's an amazing mechanism to allow consumers to eat food that's healthier than they think it is. He expressed that it is important to find the right incentives to provide direct support for smaller businesses so they can do what the bigger businesses are already doing.
- It is important that public policy supports this good work. EM thought there is a conflict between reformulating foods that are considered discretionary foods to make them healthier and discouraging people to buy them.
- It can be more difficult to access a wide range of food including healthier options if you live far away from a big supermarket.
- There are other factors that drive people to eat poorly, it's not just the direct environment, it's often the other things that are leading them to make those choices and EM thought that we need to be careful not to be too judgmental.
- Retailers source food from across the world and will continue to do so. This helps reduce the amount of money that households spend on food and provides choice – this has been an incredibly progressive movement over the last 30 years.
- Retailers have spent an enormous amount of money investing in fresh fruit and vegetable promotions. The fruit and vegetable aisle is usually the first thing you'll see in the food retail shop.
- The availability of healthy snacks has increased a great deal, giving customers choice and the quantity of fruit, vegetables in products like sandwiches and ready meals has increased. This is combination of reformulation and improving choice. Voluntary traffic light labelling, healthy recipes on retailers' websites and

healthier ranges are supporting consumers to eat more healthily. There's an element of personal choice but it is important to provide these healthier options.

- Record food inflation continues, that's being driven by everything from weak sterling, disrupted supply chains, energy costs and the impact of Black Sea grain rules. Retailers and manufacturers are doing everything they can to keep the cost of food down and this has meant absorbing some of these costs.
- EM thought that a lot of expensive public policy commitments are coming and that Governments need to be careful on how these are implemented as these policies could further increase the cost of food.
- Most of the big supermarket pay above the Scottish living wage and their staff are likely to receive discounts on purchases. Retailers are supporting their communities in a range of ways such as free meals to children or to older people and donations to food charities - both financially and through meals. In 2021, the Scottish retail industry donated about £16.6-16.8 million to good causes.
- If HFSS restrictions are implemented in the same ways across the UK it will make it easier and quicker to implement in store. If it's done in a different way across categories, it will be very expensive and will take a lot longer. That's an example of where we can get the right public health output without necessarily making it difficult for businesses.
- EM suggested that there can be tension in what matters more with parts of Government encouraging retailers to sell more Scottish products but other parts of Government saying not to sell less healthy products. This can be challenging when some iconic Scottish products wouldn't necessarily be considered healthy.
- It was great to see the announcement by Scottish Government on expanding Best Start Foods - to help families with food costs for their kids to make sure they get healthy food.
- It is important to decide whether regulation is the best way to improve public health. If regulation is used it is important to ensure it is implemented in the best way possible.

Open debate

Jim Fairlie (JF) apologised for being late due to taking part in a debate in the Chamber and took over responsibilities as Chair. JF noted that dietary health inequalities is very complex. He asked people speaking in the debate to focus on the efforts of how we can help this issue. The following was noted:

Cost of food/value of food

- Brian Whittle (BW) thought that the cost of our food is cheap compared to a lot of other countries. He added that it didn't cost a huge amount to eat more healthily and that people in this country don't value their food enough.
- MAV and Laura-Alexandra Smith (LS) - Royal Society of Chemistry - questioned how much value we place on our food.

- JF considered that the one thing we have to have in this country is cheap, accessible food. He noted that 50 years ago the basket of food for a household would cost approximately 30% of your income. Now it's around 7% or 8%.
- Simon Macdonald - Fisheries Aquaculture and Processing Consultant – believed that Scotland has had a reputation for having one of the unhealthiest diets in Europe but our food is probably cheaper than most other countries. He thought that some healthy foods are expensive but some healthy food is inexpensive.

Cost of living crisis/improving standard of living

- RG noted that the current cost of living has meant that costs are going up at the same rate if not more for those on lower incomes. Some people have prepayment meters which are much more expensive to run. Others may have scraped together enough money to get a mortgage when it was cheap. She thought that people are eating less healthy because they can't afford to do otherwise and that the Universal Credit pay packet is not enough to feed a family.
- RG highlighted how concerning it was that people that are working are going to food banks. She thought it was dehumanising - people wouldn't do that if they had choices and could actually make ends meet and feed their families.
- RG emphasised the need for everyone to have enough money to live on, to have a decent standard of living and if we do that – then we can change people's diets.
- EM thought that we need to work on how we achieve sustainable local economic growth. He asked how do we get well paid local jobs, how do we manage to drive up wages, but for particularly people on those lower levels, how do we give them the employment or support? He felt that if we give people better employment, better opportunities, these problems could be ameliorated. Ultimately, he considered if people are a little bit wealthier, have a little bit more time it becomes easier to do the right thing
- GP thought due to the cost of living, people are moving away from more traditional cooking methods because it's costly for energy - impacting on people's ability to eat and cook healthy.
- EM added that Jack Munroe has done some really interesting work focusing on the challenges of cooking on a budget. The cost-of-living crisis has seen people cooking in different ways with more people using air fryers and microwaves rather than the oven or hob.

Surplus food – prevents waste and gives dignity

- Sally Measom (SM) highlighted that the Company Shop initiative sells surplus food in low-income communities at 50-70% discount off retail prices. This food is considered not perfect enough for supermarkets to sell but is perfectly good to eat – the service gives choice, dignity and prevents food waste.

Manufacturers and retailers get a return for this food which would cost them to put in the bin.

- SM noted that Company Shop has two shops in Scotland - one in Edinburgh and one in Glasgow. She encouraged members of the group to promote this service.

Education/behaviours

- JF highlighted that we need to remember that many schools across the country are already doing great work on food education. He felt that food education has led to some people joining the industry, others will have learnt skills and for many it will just be a memory of something that they did in school.
- BW thought the fundamental issue is the educational environment in the wider sense of the word. He felt that we have lost the ability to adapt to crisis within cost. He expressed that we need to consider what more we can do to integrate social skills and food skills into the education environment. He thought that having pupils cook and serve their own food is part of the solution
- MAV thought that the education environment for food is best done when it's through the "back door" i.e. not in a didactic way, but through informal opportunities to experience growing, cooking, and/or eating good food. She raised that schools and nurseries are key part of community food growing and eating and thought it was best to make food education fun and not like a lecture.
- Pat Abel (PA) - Transition Edinburgh South – noted work she carried out with Gracemount High on their community garden. She thought that community gardens are a good way of improving mental health as well as learning about food.
- Mads Fischer-Moller WWF Scotland said we need to ensure we don't put all the burdens on schools and suggested by scaling up some of the community projects that are already happening could make it easier for the local government to step into it.
- CH stated that schools and early years settings in Scotland have very good, evidenced based nutritional standards in place as well as provision for things such as children within early years settings receiving free fruit and milk.
- GP said that nutrition and healthy eating is an important part within the Curriculum for Excellence. She highlighted that FSS' tracker survey shows that a high percentage of people know what a healthy diet is but don't necessarily follow it. Demonstrating that knowledge isn't transferring into action.
- GP advised that Food Standards Scotland has a new resource: [Eat Well, Your Way](#) to help people to take small manageable steps to eat healthier.
- BW thought that we need to look at how we tackle behavioural traits. Behaviours such as smoking and drinking are expensive but are more prevalent in areas considered deprived on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

- MAV thought that chronic poverty causes chronic stress which can impact the food choices that people make. GP agreed and said that Harry Burns has established that chronic stress impacts food choices.

Free school meals

- BW thought that the uptake of free school meals is very poor and that there's stigma attached to turning up for free food. He felt that it would be better to give children another reason to turn up such as art, music, drama, writing computer software, sport and have food available for them to eat. Sport can be a great driver – if someone wants to get better at sport, they have to have better nutrition.
- Liz Barron-Majerik - Lantra Scotland - thought when looking at childhood obesity it was worth considering lessons learnt from the Nordic countries. In Norway schools have banned crisps and sugary drinks but the country has similar overweight and obesity levels as we have in Scotland. In Finland a study found that by banning sugary snacks and providing free healthy school meals that their childhood overweight and obesity levels reduced significantly. The free school meals are well established – with everyone from farmers, teachers and pupils involved in the provision of the meals.

Food environment

- MAV thought the food environment affects our decisions, our behaviours and our attitudes - including what we see in our community and is being sold in the shops.
- CH felt that we need to focus on supporting people to have a healthier diet when eating outside the home. Larger portions of things like cakes in the out of home environment and a focus in store promotions on discretionary foods makes this difficult.
- CH noted that PHS is working with the Scottish Grocers Federation Healthy Living Programme, funded by Scottish Government, to support Scottish independent retailers to offer healthy options. This includes promoting healthier options throughout the store and providing meal options of lower cost ingredients with recipes.
- Simon Macdonald - Fisheries Aquaculture and Processing Consultant thought that we need to look at the way supermarkets and smaller stores are promoting and merchandising food.
- EM explained that merchandising of food depends on the size of store. In a larger store there can be more flexibility and capacity to showcase a wider range of products which means there is more space devoted to fresh produce. That's partly because of the economies of scale - in a 50,000 square foot store there is the ability to cross subsidise so that some of the less healthy food is paying for the healthier food. He thought that in a small format shop it's quite different because the economics are really different. There's less space for a

wide variety of products, with more instant food and discretionary foods being sold. He urged that we need to be careful as some policy levers may seem like a great initiative but if you end up closing down a local business or a local store, that might actually have concurrent wider effects.

- EM thought that if proposals on location restrictions of products are implemented this needs to be done so in the most straightforward way. He went on to say that it is important not to discourage businesses from making a product healthier by not allowing them to promote a reformulated product/healthier range.

Procurement

- Ruth Watson (RW) from Keep Scotland the Brand thought that in some schools the quality of food served and that pupils are being taught to cook with can be poor quality and low cost which discourages them from learning how to eat well. She felt that local procurement needs to be part of the answer – this would provide security to local producers. She noted that there's positive work happening in Argyle and Bute on local procurement that can be learnt from.
- RW felt that there was a need to encourage local councils to sign up for the Food for Life scheme and that we need to engage with Scotland Excel. She thought that trying to get hold of the good food project officers was challenging with many of them not in place yet.
- BW thought that we need to look at Scotland Excel contracts – he noted that he did a study which found that 16% of food provided by local authorities came from Scotland. He said that was terrible considering that we produce some of the highest quality food in the world.
- JF said in Angus all school food is cooked and frozen in Dundee and then redistributed so even if the food is good it wouldn't get Food for Life accreditation.

Shortage of skills, uptake of courses and jobs

- Jon Wilkin (JW) from Abertay University noted that he helps to run food nutrition and food science courses. One course is more designed for people going into nutrition and the other one is for the food industry.
- JW highlighted that some students from Abertay become food technology teachers. He found that some schools have a shortage of food technology teachers and some schools don't have the funding to pay for classes or for the food the students use to learn how to cook. He thought that as a society we have devalued food and food education and young people are missing out on cooking skills. He felt that we need to do more to promote this shortage of food technology teachers.
- JW noted there's a lack of students taking up food courses at university. Abertay University used to have 70 students on their course and now they have

12- 15 students – he thought that this is worrying for the future of food in Scotland.

- LS wondered how we put an external value on food and food education to ensure there are more graduates available with a passion for food to work in the industry. However, she heard that some graduates coming out of Abertay and Queen Margaret with food degrees are either really struggling to find graduate jobs or have felt that the jobs on offer are low paid.

Other

- BW thought that there is an issue with planning in how many fast food outlets are available in more deprived areas.
- PA considered that we need to look at improving the quality of our soil which could improve the quality of our food and its taste and nutritional content.

Bringing everything together/collaborating

- GP noted she was hopeful that the Good Food Nation national and local plans will be a mechanism to formally try to bring some of this work together.
- Mads Fischer-Moller WWF Scotland said that Denmark had a poor food culture until recently with a significant shift with good food nation thinking not only from policy but also from the food industry and from chefs who are saying we can do better.
- RW considered that we need to explore how do we reinvent our food system in a nice easy way using social tipping point methodology. She thought that lots of good ideas are out there, but the information and the people aren't quite connected in the way to help make perhaps the kind of meaningful change that we're working towards. She asked how we get in place the structure, information and the people so that we can work together to develop both community supported agriculture and get healthy food on our children's tables.
- CH thought it is not just about food that we put in our mouth, but we need to take a more holistic approach. She felt we need to get transport right so people can get to the shops, we need to make sure that the food that we serve across our public sector promotes health, we need to make sure that people have access to skills to be able to cook and we need to make changes to the food environment. She thought there is a need to work together to see the change that we want.

5. AOB

There was no other business raised.

6. Date of next meeting

The next meeting is the AGM. It will take place on 5 September 2023 at 6pm at the Scottish Parliament. There will also be an option to join online via Teams.