

National Food Strategy – Part one

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England,

For information: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Key Points

Following the launch of an independent review into the National Food Strategy on 27 June 2019 and a Call for Evidence to support the development of the Strategy. Part one of the National Food Strategy was published on 29 July 2020.

1.0 Background

On 27 June 2019, an independent review was launched to gain evidence and make recommendations to the government as to what should be included in a National Food Strategy and a 12-week consultation was undertaken.

Part one of the strategy was published on 29 July 2020, and extends to 110 pages which is formed of six sections titled the purpose; system shock; health-a wakeup call; jobs and hunger; 1846 and all that – food security and trade; and a new green revolution. The report also includes the following five appendices: -

- a) Part one recommendations in full
- b) Food-based guidelines for free school meal parcel scheme
- c) Terms of reference
- d) What we have read
- e) References

This briefing provides an overview of the recommendations set out in the report. The report can be viewed via the following link: -

[National Food Strategy - Part one](#)

2.0 Context

The report states that the publication of part one of the strategy does not present a comprehensive plan for transforming the food system. However, it contains what are described as urgent recommendations to support the country through the turbulence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and to prepare for the end of the EU exit transition period on 31 December 2020.

The recommendations set out in the report cover two main themes: -

- Making sure a generation of the most disadvantaged children do not get left behind.
- Grasping the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to decide what kind of trading nation we want to be.

3.0 Summary of Recommendations

3.1 Our most disadvantaged children

In introducing these recommendations, the report highlights that one of the legacies of COVID-19 is likely to be a dramatic increase in unemployment and poverty and that there is a need for Government to move quickly to shore up the diets of the most deprived children using existing mechanisms and the report recommends the following: -

1. Expand eligibility for the Free School Meal scheme to include every child (up to the age of 16) from a household where the parent or guardian is in receipt of Universal Credit (or equivalent benefits).
2. Extend the Holiday Activity and Food Programme to all areas in England, so that summer holiday support is available to all children in receipt of Free School Meals.
3. Increase the value of Healthy Start vouchers to £4.25 per week, and expand the scheme to every pregnant woman and to all households with children under 4 where a parent or guardian is in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent
4. Extend the work of the Food to the Vulnerable Ministerial Task Force for a further 12 months up until July 2021. It should collect, assess and monitor data on the number of people suffering from food insecurity at any time, and agree cross-departmental actions, where necessary, to support those who cannot access or afford food.

Appendix B of the document sets out food guidelines for those school caterers who are supplying free school meal parcels over the summer that have been devised and evaluated. It is reported that the guidelines are designed to assist caterers in providing the nutrition children require.

3.2 Sovereignty, Standards, Scrutiny

The second part of the report sets out three recommendations that relate to Britain's exit from the European Union and outline a mechanism which it is believed can be put in place without requiring a universal ban. These recommendations are as follows: -

5. The Government should only agree to cut tariffs in new trade deals on products which meet our core standards. Verification programmes – along the lines of those currently operated by the US Department of Agriculture to enable American farmers to sell non-hormone-treated beef to the EU – should be established, so that producers wishing to sell into the UK market can, and must, prove they meet these minimum standards. At a minimum, these certification schemes should cover animal welfare concerns and environmental and climate concerns where the impact of particular goods are severe (for example, beef reared on land recently cleared of rainforest). The core standards should be defined by the newly formed Trade and Agriculture Commission.
6. The Government should adopt a statutory responsibility to commission and publish an independent report on any proposed trade agreements. The Government should decide whether this impact assessment function requires the establishment of a new body – similar to those which exist in many mature trading nations, including Australia, Canada and the USA – or whether it could be performed by an existing body or by independent consultants (as is the case in the EU).
7. The Government should adopt a statutory duty to give Parliament the time and opportunity to properly scrutinise any new trade deal. It must allow time for relevant select committees to produce reports on any final deal, and allow a debate in the House of Commons.

4.0 APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the work of the independent review into the National Food Strategy and as highlighted in the report, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted social inequalities.

Local Authorities play a key role in the food sector and there are several examples such as:

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- Environment Health teams enforcing the relevant laws for food and animal feed ensuring the food consumed is safe to eat;
- Public Health taking an active role in combating childhood obesity which has been acknowledged in the Childhood Obesity Plan – Part Two, with local authorities leading on the pilot for the Trailblazer Programme and
- Local Authority catering services providing high quality, nutritious meals to children and the elderly, through social care and meals on wheels services.

APSE welcomes that consideration is being given to not only the role of central government departments but also the role that local councils and combined authorities can play in meeting the aims of the strategy.

APSE also supports the proposal to look at how food production can be made genuinely sustainable for the future.

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