

Restricting promotions of products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS)

Northern Ireland Department of Health and Food Standards Agency Consultation

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Northern Ireland.
For information only: Scotland, England and Wales.

1 Executive Summary

The Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland have launched a consultation seeking views on proposals to introduce restrictions on the promotion of products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS). The proposals aim to reduce the impact of price and placement promotions that encourage the purchase of less healthy food and drink, support healthier food environments and maintain consistency with similar measures already introduced elsewhere in the UK.

The consultation proposes restrictions on volume price promotions, such as multi-buy offers, the placement of HFSS products in prominent retail locations including store entrances, checkouts and aisle ends, and free refill promotions for sugar-sweetened soft drinks. The proposals would apply to qualifying retailers and food businesses and are intended to support healthier consumer choices while reducing exposure to promotions that can encourage impulse purchasing. The consultation also seeks views on implementation and enforcement, including whether local councils should have responsibility for enforcing the proposed restrictions and the resources that would be required to support this role.

Obesity remains one of the most significant public health challenges facing Northern Ireland, with approximately 67% of adults overweight or living with obesity, with prevalence highest in more deprived communities. The consultation forms part of wider efforts to improve population health and reduce diet-related illness.

The Department of Health is seeking views from a wide range of stakeholders, including local councils, recognising their role in supporting healthier communities, engaging with local businesses and contributing to the practical implementation of public health measures.

Responses are due by **Wednesday 21 October 2026**.

[Click here](#) for further information and to submit your response.

[Click here](#) to read the full report.

2 Overview

The consultation seeks views on the practical implementation of restrictions on the promotion of HFSS products in Northern Ireland. The proposals are intended to encourage healthier purchasing decisions by reducing the prominence and availability of promotional offers on less healthy food and drink while ensuring a broadly consistent approach with other UK nations. The consultation also considers the scope of the regulations, exemptions, enforcement arrangements and the potential impacts on businesses, consumers and public authorities.

Improving diet and tackling obesity remain key priorities for the Northern Ireland Executive. Excess weight is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and other preventable health conditions, placing considerable pressure on health and care services. The Department of Health's 2025 [Healthy Futures](#) obesity strategic framework identifies the food environment as a significant determinant of dietary choices and recognises that making healthier choices easier is a critical component of improving population health.

The consultation also reflects a wider UK policy direction. Comparable restrictions on HFSS promotions are already in place across the UK. The [Food \(Promotion and Placement\) \(England\) Regulations 2021](#) and [Food \(Promotion and Presentation \(Wales\) Regulations 2025](#) are already enforced, while the [Food \(Promotion and Placement\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2025](#) will come into force in October 2026. Introducing similar arrangements in Northern Ireland is intended to support policy coherence across the UK food retail market, reducing complexity for retailers operating across nations while maintaining consistent public health objectives.

The proposals are informed by evidence indicating that prominent placement, multi-buy offers and other promotional techniques can influence purchasing behaviour and increase the purchase of less healthy food and drink. By reducing consumers' exposure to these promotions, the Department of Health aims to support healthier food environments without restricting consumer choice.

2.1 Why local authorities should engage

The consultation is directly relevant to councils as it seeks views on the role local authorities could play in enforcing the proposed restrictions. In particular, the Department of Health asks respondents to consider whether local councils are the appropriate enforcement authority and, if so, what resources would be required to support this role.

Local councils already undertake a wide range of regulatory functions through environmental health and consumer protection services, working closely with businesses and local communities to promote compliance with legislation and protect public health. The consultation therefore provides an opportunity for councils to draw on this experience to comment on the practicality of the proposed measures, the likely resource implications of any enforcement responsibilities and how a proportionate and effective enforcement regime could be implemented.

Beyond enforcement, the proposals are also relevant to councils' wider responsibilities for community planning, health improvement and engagement with local businesses. Responses from local government can help ensure that any new arrangements are practical, appropriately resourced and capable of supporting healthier food environments while reflecting local circumstances.

3 Consultation Questions

The consultation questions are available in full below:

1. Are you responding on behalf of an organisation?
Yes; No
2. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please state what type of organisation it is.
Retailer; Out of home food business; Trade association; Public Health Organisation; NGO; Consumer advocacy body; Local council; Community and Voluntary Organisation; Not Applicable; Other (please add your organisation below)
3. Do you agree that restrictions on the promotion and placement of products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) should be introduced in Northern Ireland?
Yes; No; Not sure
4. Do you agree that a legislative approach should be considered for Northern Ireland similar to England, Scotland and Wales?
Yes; No; Not sure
5. Are there any considerations specific to Northern Ireland that should be taken into account regarding the proposals in this consultation?
6. Do you agree with the proposed product categories that would be subject to HFSS promotion restrictions in Northern Ireland?
Yes; No; Not sure
7. Do you agree that non-prepacked products should remain out of scope (consistent with England, Wales and Scotland), except for soft drink refills?
Yes; No; Not sure

8. Which approach should be used to determine which products are in scope of restrictions?
Option 1: Use the existing 2004/05 Nutrient Profiling Model;
Option 2: Use the updated 2018 Nutrient Profiling Model;
Option 3: Use the 2004/05 Nutrient Profiling Model and review at a later date.
9. Do you have evidence on the challenges or operational issues businesses may face if the 2018 Nutrient Profiling Model is applied in Northern Ireland, including impacts on product classification?
10. Do you agree with the proposal to restrict multibuy and volume promotions (e.g., "3 for 2", "BOGOF", extra-free offers) for HFSS products in Northern Ireland?
Yes; No; Not sure
11. Do you agree with restricting the placement of HFSS products in the following in-store locations: a) store entrances; b) covered external areas; c) checkouts and queuing areas; and d) aisle ends?
Yes; No; Not sure
12. Do you agree that equivalent restrictions (both volume price and location) should apply to online retail environments (e.g., homepages, pop-ups, checkout pages)?
Yes; No; Not sure
13. Do you agree with prohibiting free refills of sugar sweetened soft drinks in Northern Ireland?
Yes; No; Not sure
14. Do you agree that the volume price and location restrictions should apply only to retailers with 50 or more employees?
Yes; No; Not sure
15. Do you agree that location restrictions should apply only to stores with a relevant floor area of 2,000 square feet or more?
Yes; No; Not sure
16. Should specialist retailers that sell one type of food product e.g. chocolatiers or confectioners, be exempt from location restrictions?
Yes; No; Not sure
17. Do you agree with the proposed exemptions (e.g., micro and small businesses, care homes, educational settings)?
Yes; No; Not sure
18. Do you have evidence on how the proposals may impact small and micro-businesses that may be in scope due to an association with a franchise or symbol group?

19. Do you agree that local councils should be the enforcing authorities for HFSS promotion restrictions in Northern Ireland?
Yes; No; Not sure
20. Which enforcement approach do you consider most appropriate for Northern Ireland, and why? Option 1) Enforcement through improvement notices and criminal prosecution only; or Option 2) Explore the introduction of monetary sanctions as an alternative to criminal prosecution (while progressing the policy initially with the approach outlined in Option 1). Please explain why you chose option 1 or 2.
Option 1; Option 2
21. If local councils were to enforce the policy, what resources do you think would be required to support enforcement?
22. Do you have evidence on any challenges that may affect the ability to enforce the policy in a proportionate and consistent way in Northern Ireland?
23. Do you agree that a lead in period of 12 months is appropriate to allow preparation for implementation of the policy?
Yes; No; Not sure
24. Are there specific operational barriers that should be considered when determining implementation timelines?
25. Do you have evidence on the potential health impacts of the proposed restrictions in Northern Ireland?
26. Do you have evidence on how the proposed restrictions may impact businesses, including compliance costs, operational and supply chain impacts, product reformulation, and competitiveness between larger and smaller retailers?
27. Do you have evidence on the potential impacts of the proposed restrictions on consumers, including impacts on household food budgets, consumer perceptions of fairness and choice, the extent to which promotions influence purchasing behaviour, and whether the restrictions may support healthier default choices for families?
28. What impacts, if any, do you think the proposed policy would have on people on the basis of their: age, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, disability, gender reassignment and marriage/civil partnership?
29. Are there population groups or communities who may be disproportionately affected, positively or negatively, by the proposals. Please list below.
30. Do you have any additional comments or evidence not covered elsewhere in this consultation?

4 APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the Department of Health's recognition of local councils as key stakeholders in the development of these proposals. Councils have extensive experience of delivering proportionate, risk-based regulatory services through environmental health and related functions, placing them in a strong position to provide practical insight into the implementation of any future restrictions on the promotion of HFSS products.

The consultation's consideration of a potential enforcement role for local councils is of particular importance. Should councils be given responsibility for enforcing the proposed regulations, it will be essential that any additional statutory duties are accompanied by appropriate funding, clear guidance, training and implementation support. New enforcement responsibilities should be proportionate and deliverable, ensuring councils have the capacity to achieve consistent compliance while avoiding unnecessary pressures on existing local authority services.

APSE encourages member authorities to engage with the consultation and share their experience of regulatory enforcement, partnership working and business engagement. Responses from local government will help ensure that any future regulatory framework is practical and appropriately resourced, while supporting the wider objective of improving public health and creating healthier food environments across Northern Ireland.

5 How can APSE help?

All APSE members can access the APSE Northern Ireland network, which provides updates, information, and opportunities to engage with colleagues across local government in Northern Ireland. Members can keep up to date with regional activities, events, policy developments, and networking opportunities by visiting the Northern Ireland members' area. You can access the network using this link: [APSE Northern Ireland](#).

David Hinds,
Research and Information Officer
dhinds@apse.org.uk

Matt Ellis,
Principal Advisor (Northern Ireland)
mellis@apse.org.uk

Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular network meetings, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE Network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national networks include:-

- FM and Building Cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Waste Management, Recycling and Street Cleansing

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more details.



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Gold

Association for Public Service Excellence
3rd floor,
Trafford House,
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.
telephone: 0161 772 1810
web: www.apse.org.uk

NEW MUNICIPALISM
Delivering for local people and local economies