

Briefing 19-25 July 2019

National Food Strategy

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

For information: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Key Points

On the 27 June 2019, an independent review was launched into the National Food Strategy and this briefing provides an overview of the purpose, scope and proposed reporting and timings for the review.

1.0 Background

In 2013, Henry Dimbleby, collaborated and co-authored the Government backed School Food Plan, which set out to transform what children eat in schools and how they learn about food.

The plan they created contains 17 separate and detailed recommendations on what should be done.

Henry Dimbleby has now been appointed by the Environment Secretary to conduct a year-long independent review on the National Food Strategy and within six months of the completion of the review set out recommendations for Government.

2.0 Purpose of the review

On launching the review, an overview of its purpose has been published which reports that no part of our economy matters more than food. Food is vital to life and, for one in eight of us, it is the source of our livelihoods. And no decisions have such a direct impact on our lives and wellbeing as the choices we make about what we eat.

Food shapes our sense of ourselves, too. Cooking and eating together is perhaps the defining communal act. The character of the English landscape and the culture of many rural communities are defined by the way farmers use the land. And although the vast majority of us now live in cities, growing food, seeing how it is grown, knowing that we can feed ourselves –and it is commented that these are all important to our sense of national belonging.

The way we produce, distribute, market and consume food raises a series of difficult policy questions which Government cannot shirk. The state already regulates in minute detail how food is grown, and livestock are reared, in order to safeguard both human health and our natural environment. Food Producers are subsidised to an extent no other industry enjoys and the sale and marketing of food for health and other reasons is regulated. From the national curriculum to hospital meals, the availability of migrant labour to the public health impacts of obesity, Government is responsible for a myriad of actions which shape the nation's relationship with food.

It is stated, that the need for Government to review and rethink its influence and role is only increasing. It is not just the case there is a need to reconsider how our biggest manufacturing industry, food and drink, fits into the Government's broader Industrial Strategy; there are other urgent and inescapable policy questions with which Government must grapple.

Globally, this is the first generation more likely to die as a result of lifestyle choices than infectious disease. Diabetes, cardiac disease and other obesity-related conditions are costing the NHS billions and drastically harming the lives of millions. Obesity is a particular issue for poorer communities and young people. Children from the most deprived areas are three times as likely to be obese as those from the least deprived.

Intensive farming, of the kind that has increased production so much since the Second World War, also generates environmental problems. The impacts on soil health, air quality, river freshness, biodiversity and climate change have raised urgent questions about how we can make food production genuinely sustainable.

It is also commented that we cannot afford to ignore new challenges to food security. The world's population is growing, with mass migration to cities, resource competition intensifying between nations, huge stress on water supplies and climate change altering what the land is capable of supplying. Trade barriers are re-emerging and new public health dangers growing, from anti-microbial resistance to viral mutations.

It is seen that it is critical to review how we secure the food of the future. To address these growing problems, to ensure the security of our food supply and to maximise the benefits of the coming revolution in agricultural technology, the Government proposes to develop a new integrated National Food Strategy.

It is proposed that the National Food Strategy will build on the work underway in the Agriculture Bill, the Environment Bill, the Fisheries Bill, the Industrial Strategy and the Childhood Obesity Plan and it is intended to be an overarching strategy for Government, designed to ensure that our food system:

- Delivers safe, healthy, affordable food; regardless of where people live or how much they earn;
- Is robust in the face of future shocks;
- Restores and enhances the natural environment for the next generation in this country;
- Is built upon a resilient, sustainable and humane agriculture sector; and

- Is a thriving contributor to our urban and rural economies, delivering well paid jobs and supporting innovative producers and manufacturers across the country;
- Delivers all this in an efficient and cost-effective way.

In conclusion, Henry Dimbleby states that there is a moral, as well as practical, responsibility to consider the role and impacts of the food system. The purpose of the National Food Strategy is to set out a vision for the kind of food system we should be building for the future, and a plan for how to achieve that vision.

3.0 Scope of the Review

The scope will be England, but the strategy will take into consideration the relationships with the devolved administrations, the European Union and other partners.

It is proposed that the strategy will cover the entire food chain, from field to fork: the production, marketing, processing, sale and purchase of food (for consumption in the home and out of it), and the consumer practices, resources and institutions involved in these processes.

In addition, the strategy is also going to consider the role of central government departments, arms-length bodies, local councils and city authorities. It is also stated that in doing so consideration will also be given to the role that individuals, the private sector and social enterprises should play.

4.0 Reporting, activities and timing

Henry Dimbleby has been invited by Defra's Secretary of State to lead an independent review which will consider how the UK's food sector operates currently, and set out options (underpinned by details evidence which includes the associated pros, cons and trade-offs) for adjusting Government policies to achieve the objectives for the strategy.

Subsequently it is proposed that the Government will develop a National Food Strategy white paper informed by the independent review, among other things. This is planned for six months after the publication of the review.

The independent review will be supported by Defra officials and there will be consultations with stakeholders from across the country and with all relevant government departments. It is intended that an advisory group will be selected from across the food system to support the review, and the recently formed Food and Drink Sector Council will also be a source of close advice and counsel.

As the review progresses there will be ongoing reporting to ministers regarding the content of the findings. A call for evidence will be launched in the summer with a view to publishing details of the review in 2020.

5.0 APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the launch of the independent review into the National Food Strategy and the proposals set out to consult and seek evidence from across all aspects of the food sector.

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

-

- 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 acknowledge 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 city 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.

On a final point, APSE will be looking to engage with the review and will be seeking the views in due course to respond to the call of evidence on behalf of APSE Members.

Further information regarding the review and details of how to sign up to get involved can be found on the National Food Strategy website, which can be accessed via the below link

[National Food Strategy](#)

Vickie Hacking
Principal Advisor, APSE