



Citizens Advice Scotland response Consultation on Good Food Nation Proposals for Legislation

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), our 59 member Citizen Advice Bureaux (CAB) and the Extra Help Unit, form Scotland's largest independent advice network. Advice provided by our service is free, independent, confidential, impartial and available to everyone.

In 2017-18 the Citizens Advice Service network helped over 295,100 clients and dealt with almost 800,000 advice issues for clients living in Scotland. With support from the network clients had financial gains of almost £142.2 million and our self-help website Advice in Scotland received approximately 3.2 million page views.

To what extent do you agree with the framework proposals for Ministers and public authorities to prepare statements of policy, have regard to them in the exercise of relevant functions, and report on implementation, with regard to international obligations and guidance?

Disagree

Please explain your answer.

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) welcomes that this consultation proposes a framework for making Scotland a Good Food Nation and will set out indicators or measures of success. This is a complex area of policy and it is positive to see that the proposed statement of policy would be required to cover a wide number of areas.

However, there are a number of areas where we think the proposals in this consultation do not go far enough. At present it is not clear what scrutiny there will be of the proposed statements of policy. In particular, if targets are not met to increase access to, and affordability of, food it is important that the next steps are agreed in advance.

Although we agree with the Scottish Government that becoming a Good Food Nation is wider than tackling food insecurity, there are other organisations and coalitions such as Nourish, the Royal Society for Protection of Birds and the Scottish Food Coalition who will be better able to speak to those other elements.

As the majority of CAS' evidence relates to accessibility and affordability of food, this evidence will form the basis of our response. The Citizens Advice Network across Scotland has seen a 202% rise in demand for advice relating to foodbanks in the last five years. This demonstrates that an increasing number of people are struggling to afford to eat. Similarly, the 2017 Scottish Health Survey found that 8% of people experienced food insecurity (as defined by being worried during the past 12 months that they would run out of food due to lack of money or resources).¹

¹ [Scottish Health Survey \(2017\)](#)

CAS would therefore recommend a commitment to measuring food insecurity in Scotland, potentially through the Scottish Health Survey, and a target for reducing this, which does not appear currently in the Scottish Government's proposals. We would also recommend that those measurements are based on a broader range of questions than were included in the last Scottish Health Survey, so that food accessibility and availability is captured, as well as just affordability. For example, our recent 'Food on the Table'² survey explored both access to food and affordability of food, and how these may interact, by asking a wider range of questions.

This research highlighted that many survey respondents³ struggled to access healthy food, both in terms of availability in stores and affordability. We found that some faced limited choices of food products in local shops; that cost plays a considerable role in food choices; and that those in employment can also struggle to afford food.

The majority of the top ten most unavailable foodstuffs and the top ten most unaffordable items (according to the survey) would be considered healthy. Furthermore, local work by Dumfries and Galloway Citizens Advice Service⁴ also suggests both a rural and a poverty premium in food prices in supermarkets across the region.

All these findings suggest more action needs to be taken so people across Scotland are able to access healthy and nutritious food. The proposal for a statement of policy to be laid before the Scottish Parliament is insufficient. Whilst reporting on implementation of policies and indicators or measures of success every two years is positive, without the space for comment or scrutiny this does not go far enough. In order for these targets to be effective there needs to be greater accountability.

CAS welcomes that the statements of policy, Ministers and public authorities should have regard to international obligations and human rights, including the right to food. However, to not explicitly ratify the ICESCR in Scots Law feels like a missed opportunity. [The UN Right to Food handbooks](#) are clear that:

"Regardless of whether or not the right to food is recognized under the constitution, the existence of a specific law will contribute to a more precise definition of this right, guide public policy and provide the means with which to enforce it at the administrative, judicial and quasi-judicial levels."

To not include the right to food explicitly in a Bill, because of potential forthcoming wider human rights legislation may lead to an unnecessary delay in introducing a right to food in Scotland. It also appears at odds with the proposed approach for "targeted legislation". The introduction of such a Bill, including an explicit right to food would be an international exemplar, and contribute to Scotland's place as a world leader on food. This would be a quicker way to bring this right into law compared to a wider Bill on human rights more generally, which may follow at a later date. CAS supports the enshrinement of right to food in legislation focused on making Scotland a Good Food Nation, in line with the recommendations of the Scottish Human Rights Commission⁵.

² The findings of this survey are reported in *Citizens Advice Scotland (2019)*, [Bringing Food to the Table](#)

³ We received 2,651 responses from people across Scotland

⁴ *Dumfries & Galloway Citizens Advice Service (2018)*, [Cost of Living in Dumfries and Galloway](#)

⁵ *Scottish Human Rights Commission (2019)*, Response to Scottish Government Consultation on Good Food Nation Proposals

Consultation question 2:

Whilst we do not plan to require all sectors to prepare statements of policy on food, they do all have a role to play in achieving our Good Food Nation ambition. To what extent do you agree that Government should encourage and enable businesses in particular to play their part?

Agree

Please explain your answer.

Good Food policy can cover a wide range of policy areas. CAS hopes that the framework nature of this legislation will allow it to cover a broad number of areas and ensure that different parts of policy are working in a joined up manner. The Government encouraging businesses to play their part would help contribute to this joined up work and CAS supports that measure. In order for Scotland to become a Good Food Nation it is important that different groups work together to achieve this goal, including the business sector.

CAS' 'Food on the Table' survey highlighted that people across Scotland are struggling to eat healthily, and that this may be due to the affordability of food. For example, respondents commented they would like to buy fresh food, such as fresh fish, but they can't afford to. One survey respondent said:

"Fresh fruit shouldn't be a luxury"

Affordability of food was also an issue for those in employment as well as those not in employment, suggesting that wages are not keeping pace with even the basic costs of living. Survey respondents who told us they were in full-time or part-time employment expressed that in some cases they couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. Business decisions can impact on affordability in a number of ways, from supply chain efficiency and agricultural practices, through to the price of food on supermarket shelves, and the level of wages paid to employees.

As mentioned in response to Question 1, access to healthy food, rather than affordability was also an issue for some respondents. Furthermore, in a free-text box survey respondents mentioned a lack of diet-specific foods, particularly for intolerances and vegan diets. One survey respondent commented that they:

"can only buy fresh fish when working away from home, Ridiculous as I live a 19 minute walk from dock where fishing boats land catch"

Businesses should be encouraged to improve access to nutritional affordable locally sourced food too.

Consultation question 3:

To what extent do you agree with the proposed approach to accountability of Scottish Ministers and specified public authorities?

Disagree

Please explain your answer.

CAS agrees that accountability of Scottish Ministers and specified public authorities is necessary. However, the current proposals for accountability need to be strengthened. It is unclear from the consultation what, if any consequences, there would be if the indicators or measures of success were not met. CAS would suggest that one area which could be measured is household food insecurity, using the questions from the Food Standards Agency 'Food and You' Survey. CAS would also note that in order for Scotland to become a Good Food Nation a wide range of measures and indicators of success will be necessary, as food insecurity is only one of a number of areas which need to be addressed to deal with this complex area. CAS would also be happy to share more in depth detail of responses to our survey in order to assist with the development of measures and indicators of success, if that would be of assistance to the Scottish Government.

One way in which to ensure sufficient accountability of indicators or measures of success and the implementation of any statements of policy would be to establish an Independent Statutory Body. This could set targets and indicators or measures of success for both Scottish Ministers and specified public bodies. It could also report on progress being made by businesses. This would ensure that sufficient accountability and monitoring was in place. This was recommended by the Scottish Food Commission and is a measure which CAS supports.

Consultation question 4:

To what extent do you agree with the proposal for targeted legislation relevant to specific policy areas as an alternative to a single piece of legislation?

Disagree

Please explain your answer.

Evidence from across the Citizens Advice Network in Scotland highlights concerns regarding the affordability of and access to affordable, local, nutritious and culturally appropriate food. This is one of a number of areas which need to be looked at in order for Scotland to become a Good Food Nation. However, these should not be viewed in isolation or tackled alone. CAS is concerned that targeted legislation is not in the spirit of joined up framework legislation.

Proposing targeted legislation instead of a single piece of legislation also appears inconsistent with the Scottish Government's justification for not including a right to food on the basis that a single wider human rights Bill at a later date would be more appropriate.