



ASSIST
FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

Scotland's School Meals in a Good Food Nation

Executive Summary

The Scottish Government have set out a vision for Scotland to be “a Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day.”

Local Authority Caterers (LAC) are at the front line of the Good Food Nation’s ambitions. Their work shaping public food systems is a key linchpin in the delivery of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act (GFNA).

This paper sets out the 6 outcomes of the GFNA and highlights the work, sometimes hidden by Local Authorities, to deliver on these outcomes.

It also explores the limitations of Local Authorities and the challenges surrounding sustainable and long-term funding, amongst a landscape of extremely challenging financial outlooks by many.

The passion of individuals working in the industry should be celebrated and spoken about more widely, their engagement with the next generation will ensure that Scotland can truly be a Good Food Nation.

ASSIST FM is the member led organisation representing all 32 Local Authority Facilities Management Service Providers across Scotland. Together our members collectively deliver over 450,000 meals across the country every day. Our aim is to promote the work of our members in improving service delivery across all of Scotland’s Local Authorities and promote best practices across the industry.

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Foreword

ASSIST FM have emphasised the importance of seeing school kitchens as whole food systems. This paper highlights the numerous opportunities around how food can play a broader role in schools and their local communities, as well as the work of Local Authorities (LAs) to build upon the Good Food Nation's ambitions.

The Scottish Government have set out a vision for Scotland to be "a Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day." The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 provides the legislative framework that enables us to take steps towards realising our vision. The Act underpins in law, the work that is already being undertaken within the Scottish Government to make Scotland a Good Food Nation. It is the foundation upon which we will build our Good Food Nation. The Act places duties on Scottish Ministers, Local Authorities, and health boards, to produce Good Food Nation Plans. These Plans will set out the main outcomes that are to be achieved about food-related issues, the policies needed to do this and the measures that will be used to assess progress.

These plans will deliver outcomes which support, amongst other things:

- Our nation's social and economic well-being
- The environment
- People's health, physical and mental wellbeing
- Economic development
- Animal welfare
- Education
- Child poverty

A statutory Scottish Food Commission will also be established to scrutinise and make recommendations about the Good Food Nation Plans. The Commission will conduct research and provide advice to Scottish Ministers, Local Authorities (LAs) and Health Boards (HB) in carrying out their duties under the Act.

Key dates:

- Draft (National Good Food Nation Plan) NGFNP was consulted from February to April 2024.
- Draft NGFNP needs 30 sitting days in Parliament and will go to secondary amendments expected in September.
- Now enshrined in law and due to be published in Spring 2025. This is when duty hits LAs and HBs and the statutory Scottish Food Commission will be established and start its work.
- Recruitment for a new Chair of the Scottish Food Commission is ongoing with an appointment expected to be announced, and to start, in September 2024.

LAC across Scotland produce and serve over 450,000 meals per day, making them the largest food service provider in Scotland. With this, comes a commitment to utilising suppliers on both a local and national level, to balance price, volume and quality. All LAC through the procurement process, utilise an element of quality scoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These KPIs can include sustainability, maximising local produce, fair work practices and community benefits to name just a few. The paper looks at some best practice exemplars from across Scotland and highlights the need for fair and equitable funding across LAC to allow them all to deliver upon the aims of the Good Food Nation.

Good Food Nation – How School Food Contributes

Outcome 1 - Everyone in Scotland eats well with reliable access to safe, nutritious, affordable, sustainable, and age and culturally-appropriate food.

Through the school nutritional standards, the 1140 Early Years Expansion and the ongoing rollout of Universal Free School Meals provision in primary schools – LAs are already significantly contributing to the first outcome:

- The introduction of mandatory quality indicators which are externally audited in schools against a wide range of nutritional standards helps to ensure the food served in schools is of high nutritional content.
- LAC are working ahead of any policy changes around breakfast provision in schools with many supporting breakfast provision in schools.

Glasgow City Council Breakfast Clubs

Glasgow City Council is committed to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children and targeting resources to those in the most need.

Glasgow has 163 Breakfast clubs across the Primary and Secondary estate and this provides an opportunity to ensure that children consume a healthy breakfast in an environment that supports physical and mental wellbeing. Studies have shown that children who unfortunately don't get breakfast at home benefit from the opportunity to consume healthier food options in the company of their friends, thus leading to better social interaction skills, motivation, and self-confidence.

Breakfast contributes to improved nutritional uptake and ensures that positive eating habits are developed. By providing pupils with support and knowledge about the foods on offer, we can encourage the consumption of lower sugar, higher fibre cereal options, higher fibre bread options, milk and fruit provision contributing to one of the 5 a day.

Pupils benefit from the variety of foods on offer giving the opportunity to try foods which may not be provided at home.

In addition to nutritional and long-term health benefits, Breakfast Clubs can improve attendance and ensure pupils arrive at school on time. It is recognised that pupil behaviour and overall concentration are improved throughout the day leading to improve academic attainment.

A low-cost breakfast can have financial benefits for low-income families and also impact positively on the ability for some parents to contribute effectively to the workforce.

In conclusion, Breakfast Clubs provide Glasgow pupils with the best possible start to the day whilst supporting working families.

- Food education in schools is an integral part of the LAC role – linking the service to further community engagement. For example, activity nights in schools teaching families who are struggling with how to cook good nutritional food that is affordable, using food as a hook to get them in and then see if there are other ways, we can help them too (benefit checks, housing issues, help with debt etc.).
- 1140 and universal school meals in P1- P5 mean all these pupils benefit from a free nutritionally balanced lunch. With expansion to all pupils imminent, the focus on LAs is to continue to deliver to a high standard assuming the appropriate funding is provided, ensuring universality doesn't impact those pupils in most need.
- Emphasising the importance of food quality over cost with all food supplied required to have been produced in compliance with rigorous standards.
- Utilising the school food standards to recommend serving less but better-quality meat and more whole grains, fruit, vegetables and pulses, all whilst maintaining nutritional balance.
- Many Local Authorities participate in the Food for Life Scotland Programme, this is listed as an indicator in the draft National Plan. Other Authorities maintain similar quality indicators through internal monitoring or compliance schemes.
- As part of the LA menu design process to maximise the health and sustainability of the food served.
- Working with Scotland Excel and in-house procurement teams to increase the participation of small and local businesses in food procurement.
- As ASSIST FM, the national body of LACs, developing a monitoring mechanism to ensure that food served is healthy and sustainable in line with the GFNA outcomes.

Local Authorities set up their inclusive offering

Local Authority Caterers are under increasing pressure to provide a range of special/adapted diets for young people. These include Medical Diets, Allergy-related diets and Neurodivergent requirements.

ASSIST FM are in the process of compiling a Best Practice Guidance to aid local authority caterers when planning and dealing with the numerous special diets that are requested.

We have sought and gathered information from many Local Authorities to provide this guidance and those contributing have been open and honest about the challenges they face when being asked to provide a special/adapted diet and this guidance is a result of many hours of discussion and dedication.

Outcome 2 - Scotland's food system is sustainable and contributes to a flourishing natural environment. It supports our net zero ambitions and plays an important role in maintaining and improving animal welfare and in restoring and regenerating biodiversity.

- LAs, as part of the tender process, take into consideration sourcing ethical and sustainable school food ingredients which supports the transition towards more environmentally sustainable food production systems. It also allows the use of public money to contribute to the mitigation of climate change and biodiversity loss. If adequately funded, the GFNA should consider mandating a minimum requirement of Scottish ingredients to be used in public kitchens. This would act as a policy driver to encourage more environmentally friendly food production systems and change the culture of public food service.

Dumfries and Galloway Council - Naturally D&G

Food provenance is important to us at Dumfries and Galloway Council, so we created our 'Naturally D&G' sustainable school meals food strategy. This strategy is about more than just food. It is everything we do from procuring our food sustainably, contributing positively to tackling climate change, providing nutritious food to our customers while implementing legislation that contributes to a healthier lifestyle and taking our staff and communities on our journey. Naturally D&G highlights to our customers where the food we serve comes from and the importance of buying quality produce. We are committed to local economic growth by promoting local and national origin, whilst delivering a sustainable approach to our school meals service. School and nursery meals are our key priority, and we are committed to providing a sustainable service that buys local food where possible.

As part of our strategy, we operate a central buying and distribution store (central store). One of the key benefits of this operating model is the reduction of food miles and carbon emissions. We are the only local authority in Scotland with a central store operation, so we don't have to ask 82% of our suppliers to deliver across our region. Most of our suppliers deliver their products to the central store in Dumfries, we then distribute to our catering units. This helps with cutting greenhouse gases, and food miles and supports local Small/Medium Enterprise businesses (SMEs). Our unique internal storage and transportation provision covers 97 of our kitchen's food requirements every week.

All ordering and contract management is carried out in the central store leaving our first-line operational staff to concentrate on providing nutritious meals rather than dealing with suppliers directly. Internally we have approved ordering lists, which monitor costs, deliveries, quality, compliance, and allergens.

Our central store facility allows us to engage with and support local SME businesses to get their products into Dumfries and Galloway schools. Our store's team manages the logistics of product movement, essential in supporting SMEs, and reduces food miles/ carbon footprint, CO2 emissions and administration costs for our current providers.

Our aims are to:

- Support our Council's Strategic Outcomes to "Get it right for every child"
- Support our Council's principles to "Safeguard our future" by supporting in the urgent response to climate change and transition to a carbon-neutral region
- Follow Nutrition Bill Legislation
- Work with our partners on the delivery of the Good Food Nation
- Provide a Sustainable Service
- Buy Local and Fresh Food where possible

'Naturally D&G' enables Dumfries and Galloway Council to support our local economy while supporting the health of our communities. Our strategy supports purchasing good food locally while promoting the use of local businesses and farmers. We can support not only our local economy but also both the Scottish and British economy when sourcing food and drink. We are committed to working alongside the Scottish Government to tackle both obesity and poverty in the region. We are determined to act as a role model within the public sector, by carrying out our activities responsibly and sustainably, considering how we can improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

- As of May 2021, 82% of councils had declared a climate emergency (Climate Emergency UK). Following these declarations, councils strengthened the embedded strategies in their service delivery to meet the targets including in the catering service, with all aspects of the service being reviewed and initiatives being implemented including LAs reviewing food miles, supplier environmental responses as part of their procurement strategies, carbon mapping and removing single-use plastic.
- With a continued investment in higher quality produce, further support must be given to LAs to support food waste reduction to balance the increase in food costs. The waste of food and drink in schools leads to significant nutritional value being lost and has a significant impact on the morale of catering staff, who work hard to prepare these meals. Plate waste is currently the main driver for food waste in schools and weak feedback loops often mean that service providers have little or no visibility of the volume or what is driving plate waste. Active engagement, along with learning about food provenance and sustainability, supports children and young people to develop an appreciation of where their food comes from. Working with catering staff, teachers, and children to co-create menus can instil a sense of pride and ownership of the food served. Ensuring that food is served in a manner which owes to its quality and value (i.e. adequate plate size) and that pupils have sufficient time to eat can have positive impacts on food waste reduction. Pre-ordering of menus can be effective in reducing operational (kitchen and counter) waste in certain contexts. Investment is needed for further research into the drivers and solutions for food waste to better understand which variables and behaviours are contributing to plate waste in schools.
- Reminding pupils what it takes in terms of energy, water, land use, labour and finance to produce the food being cooked and served is seen to have a positive impact on waste reduction. Many LAs talk to pupils about the type of food produced and how the food they waste has a significant contribution to Greenhouse Gas Emissions.
- LAC has worked incredibly hard since the implementation of 'Better Eating Better Learning' to improve the sustainability and welfare standards of products on their menus. The vast majority of LA school meals websites detail purchasing food that is fresh and seasonal and the value that their menu places on local farming, animal welfare standards and certified sustainable fish – with the majority only buying free-range eggs, Red Tractor chicken and MSC fish. LAs need to be bolder in communicating this to staff, parents and pupils to instil confidence in the school meal service. We should all ask "How well does your school food service 'sell the story' of school menus and the quality of food used to deliver them?" Is it clear to all staff, parents, and pupils where the food used for school meals comes from? Do parents, staff and customers know how much care has been put into producing sustainable menus and sourcing great food? If we can answer yes to the above, we are making an active contribution to a Good Food Nation.

Waste Warriors Campaign

South Lanarkshire Council's 'Waste Warrior' Campaign aims to create a lasting impact on reducing food waste and fostering environmental consciousness among pupils. The food waste reduction initiative has made significant strides in promoting sustainability in schools. The 'Waste Warriors' program has been key to this success, leading to tangible changes in food preparation and consumption. The initiative's future focus will be on expanding to all primary schools, integrating food waste education into the curriculum, and further empowering the 'Waste Warriors'.

Following attendance at Climate Change training, we embarked on a pilot to create greater awareness and encourage pupils and catering staff to consider and reduce food waste. Facility services worked in partnership with Education resources to have a whole-school approach to this campaign. The schools were asked to carry out a 6-week focus on food waste, where they were provided with weighing scales, Hi-Vis waistcoats for the pupils involved and the waste figures were recorded and analysed. At the end of the 6-week pilot, the pupils involved in 'Waste Warriors' were presented with a participation certificate. So far, we have rolled out the initiative to 4 groups of schools and our intention is to continue with the rollout to all 126 Primary Schools. Education appointed a lead within each school who selected pupils to be 'Waste Warriors' and we worked with our catering team to drive forward the initiative. We supplied both the Facilities' catering staff and the 'Waste Warrior' students with briefs and resource packs from Zero Waste Scotland. Catering staff weighed and recorded food waste from morning prep and lunchtime counter waste, while the 'Waste Warriors' were stationed at the clearing station to encourage their peers to eat some more from their plates and ensure any waste was properly segregated into the waste station in the dining rooms.

The aims of the rollout were to:

- Encourage pupils to eat more from their plates.
- Find out why pupils were leaving food on their plates.
- Assist with hunger and the cost-of-living crisis.
- Focus catering staff to consider any food waste they may have.
- Educate pupils and give some responsibility in reducing food waste.
- Involve waste awareness officers to give classroom talks to explain the food waste journey.
- Send packed lunch waste home stopping food waste from going into the school food waste stream and allowing parents/carers the opportunity to see what has been eaten from packed lunch.
- Ensure food waste is disposed of correctly and create a greater awareness of the harm caused by unnecessary food waste in school and at home.

Findings, Changes & Next Steps :

- Enjoyable learning experience and pupils took a proactive approach to being involved in the Waste Warriors campaign.
- Changes to menu items such as moving to smaller baguettes, and product changes were made.
- Washing and re-using of untouched whole fruit was introduced.
- The Cook in Charge considers the quantity of certain foods they are cooking to reduce waste.
- Reduction in menu choices on the menu – we can now see an improvement in the volumes of waste due to this.
- Greater awareness and confidence of the 'waste warrior' pupils on the benefits of reducing food waste.
- Food waste collection data showed that there was a reduction in waste during the pilot however it increased again once the pilot was finished. We recognised that to make a sustained difference this needs to be embedded into school curriculum. It should be noted due to this campaign and awareness raising across the service there has been an overall reduction in food waste and subsequent reduction in food waste disposal costs.
- Work is undergoing by Education Colleagues to have food waste education integrating into the school curriculum to ensure it remains a focus throughout the school year and not just a 6 week project.

Supporting the Local Environment - Argyll & Bute

There are approximately 6000 wild deer on Jura and 200 people. Large numbers of wild deer present an environmental challenge for landscapes and wildlife habitats. Excessive deer grazing can destroy vegetation, reduce woodland regeneration, damage peatlands, reduce heather cover and result in a loss of biodiversity. In order to maintain a stable, healthy population of deer and avoid ecological damage, a cull is required each year and the estates on Jura are obliged to fulfil this requirement, as agreed with NatureScot based on game and land management principles.

Venison meat is a nutrient dense food, providing a rich source of protein and high levels of amino acids, thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, iron and zinc, whilst containing low levels of saturated fat. Venison is a culturally relevant and appropriate food for the people of Jura, in addition to being hugely popular with tourists visiting the island. There is a high level of demand for this local, cultural food product on Jura and Islay.

However, whilst Jura deer are being culled every season, the venison meat is not accessible to local people on the island as there is no commercial butchery or processing facilities available.

The council are very keen to support the development of local and seasonal food supply and have agreed to explore using Wild Jura venison on the menu at all council-run facilities on Jura and Islay - (4 primary schools (200 daily meals), 1 high school (100 daily meals) and 1 care home).

Construction is ongoing at the Wild Jura Premises, working towards a completion date of Spring 2024. Food for Life Scotland in partnership with Argyll and Bute Council is currently collecting volume and price data on the existing meat products used on menus. Initial menu and recipe development work is taking place, and venison will be used instead of other meat products on the menu e.g. burgers, meatballs, sausages, mince, stewing steak.

Recipes will be developed in compliance with the Scottish Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools and the Food for Life Served Here standards.

Outcome 3 - Scotland's food system encourages a physically and mentally healthy population, leading to a reduction in diet-related conditions.

- Utilising school food connections LAC are able to link the wide variety of societal health outcomes school food contributes too - https://education.gov.scot/media/wfuixxio/food_in_schools_connections.pdf
- ASSIST FM act as a conduit for all LAs to celebrate and share best practices – sharing recipes or advice that leads to positive outcomes for children and young people across Scotland.
- A greater need to develop a whole system approach to public health – Many LAs will be actively engaging with their local health board to compile a joined-up GFN plan and the SG should be actively looking to support this. A good example of this is the NHS Forth Valley community-based Health Promotion and Public Health Nutrition Team, working in partnership with the Local Authority, Scottish Prison Service and others, have developed a model based on four Es: Education, Engagement, Employability and Environment.
 1. Using food, cooking and growing activities to engage with people in hospitals, schools, prison and staff.
 2. Consulting with residents about food across the estate via food focus groups, food surveys and comment cards.
 3. Offering opportunities to develop everyday cooking skills and basic nutrition knowledge.
 4. Offering support to transform an outdoor space into a learning and growing allotment area.

This will provide gardening skills, a qualification and contribute to better mental health and well-being.

5. Offering accredited food and health courses to prison service staff, NHS staff, family centre staff, volunteers and peer mentors to help build their capacity and support them to teach people in prison and their families essential food skills and a basic nutrition knowledge.
6. Using innovative and creative approaches that focus on food for example; multimedia campaigns, interactive quizzes, wellbeing challenges to incorporate mental wellbeing information and signpost to self-care.

More than just a meal - Let's Cook

Catering services across Scotland provide children and young people with quality, healthy and nutritious meals to enjoy on a daily basis but the service is more than just providing a meal. Catering teams often support schools with the education and learning of young people. School catering teams are trained with extensive knowledge about the industry and this knowledge, along with kitchen facilities, is a superb educational resource within all schools and can be used to support teaching and learning within any education setting.

For at least 10 years East Renfrewshire Council Education catering service has invited young people into school kitchens to learn to cook. This is multifaceted as not only do pupils enjoy the cooking sessions but also learn skills and can gain an understanding of healthy food and food safety that can be taken into adulthood. The cooking sessions are delivered in partnership with catering and teaching staff, which ensures curriculum learning outcomes can be met in a fun and interesting way. Many schools within East Renfrewshire Council run growing projects and ask for where possible that the cooking sessions integrate the fruit and vegetables harvested giving pupils an understanding of the farm to fork concept.

The catering team developed the cooking sessions into the "Let's Cook" programme, which included eight recipes that take an hour to create, allergy guidance, risk assessments and food safety information. Schools often ask for the programme to be delivered during the school day but also as twilight sessions which facilitate parents being able to attend and enjoy the learning experience with their child.

As with any programme, it is important that the sessions have value. It was identified at the onset that the cooking sessions could also benefit the wider family unit, with the pupil's enthusiasm and the right tools, the healthy recipes could be replicated in the home environment. The Let's Cook catering team often supply the recipes from the cooking sessions with details of where to purchase the products locally and the cost of the dish.

This also supports parents with budgeting when recreating the dish in the home environment for everyone to enjoy.

One of the best ways to end a cooking session is for the group to sit together and enjoy the dish created whilst discussing what has been learned during the session and what benefits can be taken from the learning as well as pupils receiving a completion certificate.

Young people learning to cook with catering staff benefits the catering service as it builds relationships between catering staff and pupils. Sessions often provide pupils insight into the catering service at lunchtime and frequently give ideas on service improvements, or catering teams can discuss new ideas and gain pupil feedback, a positive outcome for all involved.

Outcome 4 - Our food and drink sector is prosperous, diverse, innovative, and vital to national and local economic and social wellbeing. It is key to making Scotland food secure and food resilient and creates and sustains jobs and businesses underpinned by fair work standards.

- The primary vision of many LAC is to serve food that's good for the economy, supplied by local producers, prepared by skilled and knowledgeable people who are paid a fair wage, and which contributes to supporting a thriving economy.
- ASSIST FM acknowledges that there are overlooked opportunities for promoting training and skills, not just for LAC colleagues, but also potential longer term employment opportunities for pupils. There is also value to the wider benefits of self-sufficiency to health, education, the environment and to meaningfully engage in activity with students who may choose a career in the food industry. Ensuring workforce security is vital in the public sector catering industry and the GFNA should be used as leverage to better encourage people to consider a career in the food sector.
- LAC often have the highest terms and conditions of any hospitality sector employer, promoting fair work practices and job security.
- Catering staff across the 32 LAs in Scotland play a vital role in the provision of freshly prepared, healthy, and nutritious school meals. Their skills, knowledge, and commitment to putting good quality meals on pupils' plates are key for school meal quality, attractiveness and uptake, food waste reduction, and the promotion of a positive school food culture. Investing in catering skills, knowledge and sharing of good practices among catering staff is not only crucial for school meal success but also values their important contribution to school food and raises the profile and status of the catering profession. Developing clear career paths and opportunities for professional development ensures that catering professionals are inspired, engaged, and valued, thus making public food service an attractive job prospect for young people.

- ASSIST FM have been piloting a programme with Hospitality Industry Trust (HIT) to create tailored training programmes for public sector caterers along with a wider campaign by many LAs to highlight the fair work advantages of working in the public sector.
- A review of data provided through the APSE returns shows that LAC are already significantly contributing to creating and sustaining the local economy. For every pound spent with SMEs, it is reported that 63p stays within the local economy. When focusing on this approach in the context of school meals, the New Economics Foundation was commissioned by the Food for Life Partnership (FFLP) to research the social, economic and environmental impacts of FFLP procurement practices for a school meal. It found that on average for every pound spent on catering it returned £4.41 in social, economic and environmental value (source FFL Scotland).

Local wealth creation - working with the third sector – Edinburgh Community Food

Edinburgh Community Food (ECF) are an experienced community training course provider, having been delivering Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS)-accredited courses since 2006. The courses currently offered by ECF include: Elementary Food and Health, Eating Well for Older People, Elementary Nutrition, Cooking Skills, Allergy Awareness and Elementary Food Hygiene. To date, we have trained around 2,400 people in Food Hygiene alone and currently have four experienced trainers, assessed by REHIS.

To ensure competency, all Elementary Food Hygiene trainers must undergo the Diploma in Food Hygiene. Two of our staff received the National Highfield Award for Excellence in the Diploma having achieved the top marks in Scotland.

In 2021 ECF received the REHIS President's Award for services to community training during the pandemic.

In the same year, and having piloted the Food and Health training online for the City of Edinburgh Council catering managers during the pandemic, we were delighted to team up with Catering and Facilities Management to co-design and deliver a programme of 40 catered Food Hygiene courses. All courses are in-person to enable experience sharing and peer-to-peer learning and the programmes values, invests in, supports and grows 600 team members from across the city, ensuring a skilled and knowledgeable workforce accessing lifelong learning. Conversations with Catering and Facilities Management highlighted needs and areas for skills development, to enable staff to prepare food for and serve the city's children with confidence, especially around allergen control. With this in mind, ECF shaped a bespoke training package for Schools' catering staff. Following site visits, hygiene resource sharing and consultation, this programme was tailored to ensure appropriateness, relevance and best fit for the candidates. Content was adapted to enhance learning around allergen control, providing key

skills and confidence for front line staff serving pupils with often complex dietary needs.

ECF and Catering and Facilities managers created and shared a welcoming 'Meet the Trainer' short video to address any candidate anxiety. Our trainers are adept at creating warm and welcoming learning environments where all are included and all voices may be heard. Our locality and community-based training sessions – grounded in the community for the community – centre around hands-on activities and hygiene games, with plenty of opportunities for dialogue and skills-sharing across the groups. Each day-long course culminated in a short exam, with foreign language resources or scribing being provided as required. To provide flexibility for part-time staff we also run courses split over two days. Marks have been exceedingly high (and feedback very positive) and we celebrate their success with the presentation of framed certificates.

"An amazing teacher, very knowledgeable, very helpful, kept us focussed and entertained. We'll be making some changes at work - I am grateful for this training course."

Third sector organisations such as ECF really benefit from the consistency and reliability this type of partnership work entails, from the meaningful investment in what is a significant community asset. ECF looks forward to continuing this highly successful and beneficial partnership as we provide further training, skills and confidence for catering staff across 2024 and into 2025.

Working to identify the supply chain

Argyll and Bute Council have developed a map to illustrate a deeper understanding of the food supply chain, specifically to help support untangling some of the food procurement knots that currently exist. The original purpose of this work was to scope the feasibility of dynamic procurement within the area and to understand what producers were available for a potential pilot.

With a strong focus on Community Wealth Building, both nationally and locally, it is important to be able to use and visualise data in order to help use it to inform decision making and support action. A big hurdle for public food procurement in A&B is distribution, due to the geographic nature of the area. PowerBI was used to create a map as this platform allows driving distances to be determined, rather than 'as the crow flies' distances. It also has the functionality of adding a layer to show procurement spend information at each of the council-owned/supplied premises.

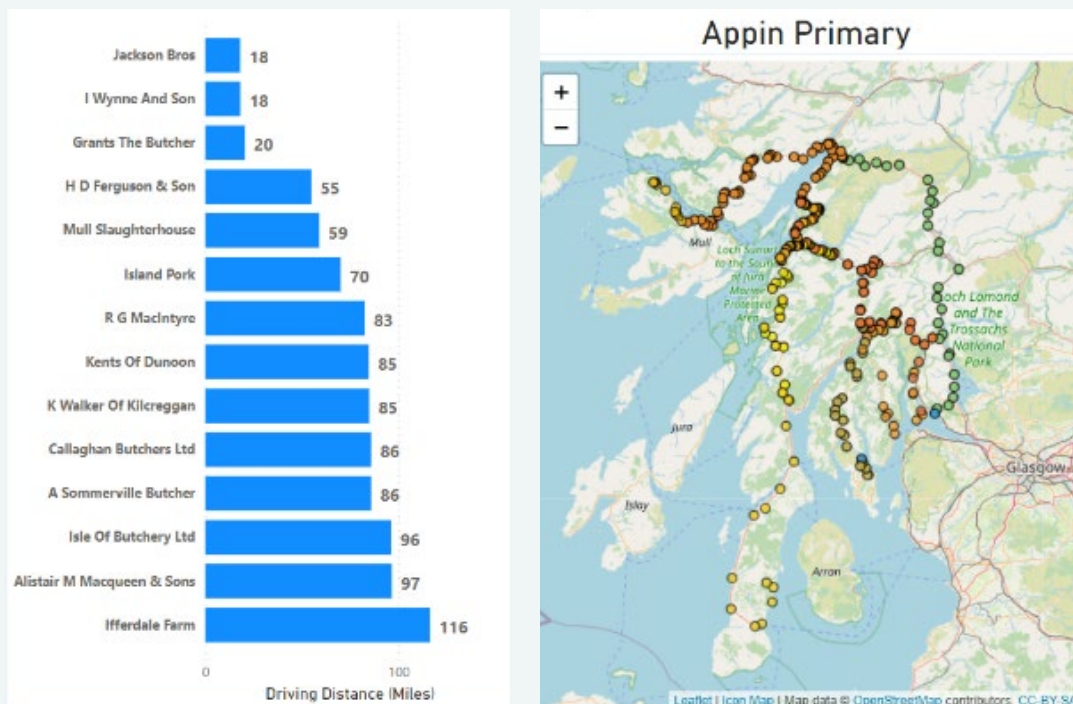
The Food Law Rating Scheme from Environmental Health was used to allow potential suppliers to be identified and spend with existing suppliers to be analysed.

Map A shows the proximity of Appin Primary school (in the north of A&B) to butchers, for example. This knowledge could facilitate conversations around and stimulate action to increasing local meat procurement into the public sector.

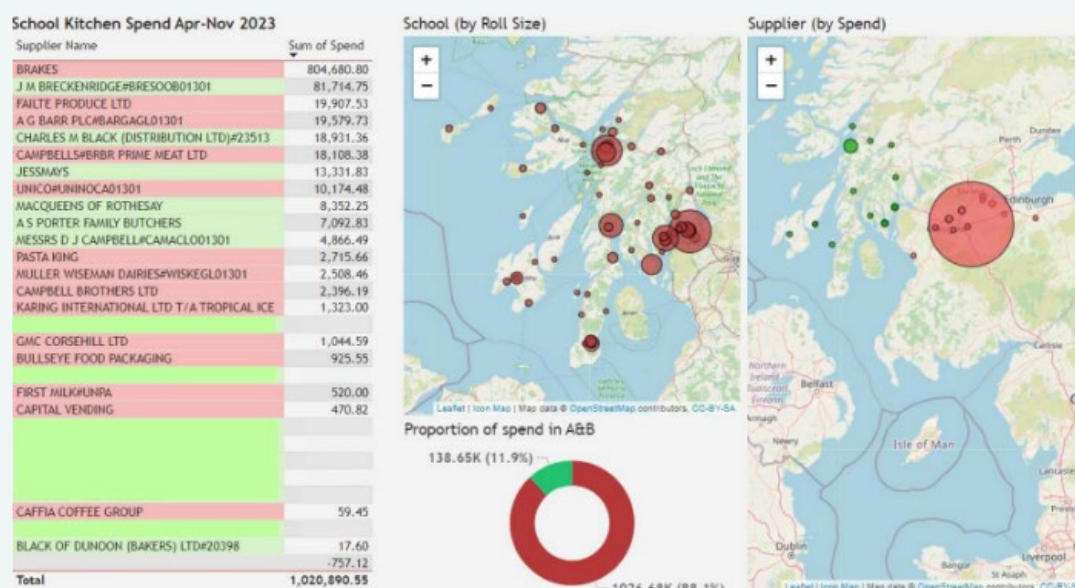
Map B shows the proportion of spend by the Local Authority to each of the suppliers. This information is useful for understanding the opportunities to increase spend with local suppliers and makes it possible to visualise other aspects relating to the public sector food procurement e.g. the difference between the number of children within the school, the number of children eating school meals and the amount spent by that school.

This work provides an example of utilising already existing data to enable an increased understanding of the food system along with potentially identifying opportunities to increase local food procurement. This aligns with Outcomes 1 and 4 of the GFN and supports the ethos of working towards a Good Food Nation by being able to visualise data and capitalise on the pre-existing resources. Each Local Authority has access to this information, meaning there is potential for this work to be used across the nation.

Map A: Distance from School to Suppliers (miles)



Map B: Proportion of Spend by the Local Authority to Each of the Suppliers



Outcome 5 - Scotland has a thriving food culture with a population who are interested in and educated about good and sustainable food.

- LAC aspire to broaden the range of projects related to growing and food preparation in schools – linking the lunch service to wider educational attainment.
- LAs across Scotland promote parents coming to school for transition days/parents evenings and having the opportunity to try some of the food that is served to pupils as well as seeing what LAs are trying to achieve. LAs find this extremely beneficial and highlights the need to work with parents and carers to continue the positive messaging around a balanced diet both at school and at home.
- This includes seeking to develop growing projects working in tandem with kitchens and creating more food production initiatives – with curriculum links and projects for school caterers and pupils to engage with
- Many LAC support school growing projects or school allotments – whilst some products can be tasted by pupils or in classroom activities the volume and specification of products grown is not substantial enough to be incorporated into school menus. Growing projects are seen by educationalists as a key method for increasing the consumption of a healthy diet.

FM Teams Supporting Local Growing

Aith Junior High School is located on the west mainland of Shetland and is made up of 17 nurseries, 101 primary and 118 secondary school children and is just one example of many schools across Scotland supporting growing projects.

The school's head janitor Duncan is the linchpin in the school's growing strategy. For the last 10 years Duncan has not only been involved in the schools' growing projects, he runs the school gardening club and ensures the school always has an impressive range of prize-winning fruit & vegetables for the local agricultural shows. On top of this, Duncan personally maintains the school's outdoor growing area and its polytunnel throughout all the school holidays helping to ensure that everything is looking tip-top for the return of the students.

The growing starts every new school year with Duncan meeting with the growing club to make a plan based on what the children want to grow. Duncan and his young team of green-fingered enthusiasts then set to finding out how best to grow the things whether it is something that they have grown before or something altogether new (pineapples & corn this year!). Duncan says he never lets anything beat him, and even if a crop does not work one year, Duncan will dig deeper and ensure that it flourishes the following year. The gardening club have a small glass house attached to the back of a science room and once things are ready they are either brought into the polytunnel or planted outside to grow. The children are then placed on a rota and take their turns in doing whatever needs to be done to help things grow.

The food that they grow is shared between the community, the gardening club and also the canteen where anything grown in the school is labelled and the children are always keen to taste it.

During COVID when schools were shut, Duncan carried on tending to the school grounds, the polytunnel and the outdoor growing spaces when he could. When Duncan caught COVID he was hit hard and had numerous trips to the hospital with his condition concerning for everyone. At one point Duncan was forced to isolate and he was not enjoying being kept indoors, thankfully his son brought some seeds and Duncan was able to start propagating from home and the new crops started life from Duncan's own house and Duncan says working with the crops really saved his mental health. The children have developed at the school could easily be a blueprint for growing in schools across Scotland.

- Not all LAs are sitting in a position of parity, due to broader funding commitments. Whilst many have smaller initiatives in place, what is less clear is the scope for change in terms of the investment in the infrastructure of the existing estate and how quickly this aspiration can realistically be achieved given the funding constraints.

- LAs are actively contributing to the policy outcomes by implementing a 'whole school approach' to food provision which integrates learning in the classroom, with learning in the dining hall. Food education is already firmly rooted in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence and Education Scotland provides a wealth of resources for food education in the classroom. <https://education.gov.scot/inspection-and-review/hm-chief-inspector-reports-and-guidance/inspection-and-review-guidance/school-and-elc/health-and-nutrition-inspections/>
- The Royal Highland Education Trust facilitates experiential learning beyond the school campus through farm visits, cookery sessions and events. Ensuring that this existing commitment and solid foundations for food education ties in with the 'Good Food' approach to school meals will provide a powerful tool for the transformation of food culture in schools and beyond.
- LAs are passionate about engaging with and educating pupils on the nutritional content and sourcing of their lunches. The ASSIST FM national menu bank for example, features recipes that have all been tried and tested on pupils.

Outcome 6 - Scotland has a global reputation for high-quality food that we want to continue to grow. Decisions we make in Scotland contribute positively to local and global food systems transformation. We share and learn from best practices internationally.

- ASSIST FM work with bodies from across the devolved nations and beyond – sharing best practice, lessons learned and collaborating on global food systems.
- Scotland's food system should be a world leader, utilising the public sector to lead the way through appropriately funded Universal Feeding programmes will support and underpin the commitment by the government.
- At a recent ASSIST FM event – Dr. Katie Wilson from America's Urban School Food Alliance discussed in depth with members lessons learned from America's school food transformation and how the GFNA can be used as a catalyst for change in the procurement of more sustainable and ethical produce.

ASSIST FM – LACA WALES

ASSIST FM and LACA work to breakdown borders within the school meals sector in the UK. ASSIST have been working with our Welsh counterparts to share best practices and learn lessons from each other including the rollout of UFSM and school food standards. Sharing many commonalities the group work to promote each service and benchmark best practices.

The group have discussed the merits of properly planned UFSM – looking at each approach to delivery and how we can expand sustainably.

Moving on, the group has discussed approaches to managing medical diets and has committed to data sharing for the benefit of both pupils in Wales and Scotland.

The Role of Food in Schools

School food is a hugely important factor in the whole school day. LAC provide more than simply a meal on a plate and contribute more widely to the whole learning community. There have been numerous studies and papers written on the importance of school food, which can be found in the appendixes to this paper, to summarise the key themes:

- Building relationships and social skills – many pupils rely on the lunch experience to build relationships and develop social skills. ASSIST FM have been clear in their drive to ensure the dining hall experience is enhanced as part of the Universal Free School Meals programme and it is essential that pupils not only have access to a nutritionally balanced hot meal, but also in an environment that allows them to enjoy the whole lunch experience.
- Food as a source of 'pride and pleasure' as per the GFN introduction to the plan. This includes the dining hall environment. More pupils enjoy their food, in a suitable environment links also to less waste. School food can too often be seen as an inconvenient break in lessons. It is a vitally important part of the school day and education. It's an investment not a cost!
- There is clear evidence that school meals can improve children's dietary habits. It is a promising avenue for the equitable enhancement of children's diets. With their extensive reach across populations, schools play a significant role as children spend approximately 40% of their time and consume 30% of their meals within the school environment and this statistic continues to grow year on year.
- Promoting education – the school meals service doesn't stop at the lunch bell – catering providers have links well beyond the dinner hall. As part of Education Scotland's monitoring of school food standards, inspectors consider the wider role of food culture within the school, this could be via links to cookery skills, pupils' understanding of environmental and sustainability impacts or local food growing initiatives.
- Improving cultural understanding, promoting diversity, and fostering inclusion – one of the key pillars of the Universal Free School Meals Programme is to promote whole school inclusivity. Healthy, free meals at school help enable all children to have the same opportunities to learn and thrive, no matter where they grow up. The impact has been shown to last well into adulthood, with evidence linking free school meals to improved educational attainment and a host of social, financial and health benefits.

Universal Free School Meals

An Investment in the Good Food Nation

School meals provide access to a daily healthy and nutritious meal for Scotland's children and young people, supporting their wellbeing and fuelling their learning, whilst also playing an integral part in food education and culture. The introduction of UFSM represents a key step on Scotland's journey of becoming a 'Good Food Nation' as well as an opportunity for delivering multiple policy objectives to public health, child poverty reduction, community wealth building, environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation.

As a nation, we face an unprecedented cost of living crisis and Local Authorities are faced with significant funding challenges. In cognisance of this, it is vital that leaders view school meals as an 'investment' not a 'cost'. The rollout of UFSM undoubtedly presents logistical and financial challenges at a time when public budgets are under significant pressure.

Investing in 'Good Food' provision in schools is an investment in Scotland's priorities across public health, the economy, and the environment.

Local Authorities have set strong foundations (P1-5) (1140) for providing universal, good quality and sustainably sourced school food. UFSM is a unique opportunity to build on these foundations and allow the public food sector to lead the way towards realising access to 'Good Food' with meals served setting the tone for Scotland's relationship with producers and providers as a 'Good Food Nation' and constituting an example at a time when interest in school food quality and sustainability is high on the agenda.

To ensure the delivery of a universal programme, in which all LAs can deliver collectively, achieving the objectives of the Good Food Nation, ASSIST FM members seek fair and equitable funding and continue to push on the need to ringfence catering budgets.

- Multi-year settlements which account for inflationary and wider policy pressures – with cognisance of LAs where access to locally sourced food comes at a premium.
- Investing in school food provision to ensure that budget pressures do not compromise the multiple opportunities offered by UFSM.
- Ensuring capital funding delivers on objectives to ensure the dining environment is as important as the meal on the plate.
- Ensure that funding for school food is spent on the delivery of school food, protecting the quality of the meal that reaches our children and young people.

Good School Food

Scottish School Food Standards

The promotion of healthier eating is a key factor in achieving our ambitions for a healthier Scotland and this starts at the school level with our frontline catering colleagues, the eyes and ears of driving forward great school food. The whole school approach to health and wellbeing ensures that our children and young people are given the right facts and information on the importance of making positive food and drink choices as they develop and grow. Of equal importance, is that these messages are reinforced through the provision of balanced and nutritious food and drink as part of their school day. Not just at lunchtime but across the whole school day.

Scotland was the first of the four nations to have mandatory school food standards with the foundation of the "Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008" which have been in place in all schools since 2009.

The regulations were refreshed in 2020 with the “Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020”, which took effect in 2021. The updates ensured the regulations aligned more closely to the Scottish Dietary Goals and are centred around four key themes to make school meals even healthier. The new Regulations increase access to fruit and vegetables, reduce the amount of sugar that can be accessed in school, bring the provision of red and red processed meat in line with the Scottish Dietary Goals and change the way food and drink are offered in secondary schools to better meet the needs of young people.

All education authorities are required to comply with the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations. They are also under a duty within the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) to ensure that schools are health promoting, linking school food with wider school health and inclusion goals.

Driving Quality and Standards

The Procurement Journey

Local Authority Caterers are identified as one of the four main sectors of public expenditure on food and catering. Every year the public sector in Scotland spends almost £150 million on food and drink. Over one third of LA money is spent through Scotland Excel frameworks, with the rest spent directly with suppliers through internal or regional procurement.

Scotland Excel is the procurement body for Local Authorities, with many (not all) utilising some of their food contracts to engage with suppliers. Over the last 15 years, Scotland Excel utilises its food portfolio to deliver value and quality produce for councils, while also creating wider benefits for Scotland’s economy.

There are 6 frameworks within the Scotland Excel Food portfolio. Groceries and Provisions framework includes 3 lots – Dairy and Chilled, Dried Goods & Ambient and Crisps, Confectionery, Soft Drinks and Water. Frameworks also cover Frozen Foods; Fresh Meats, Cooked Meats and Fresh Fish; Fresh Milk, Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and Fresh Bread, Rolls and Bakery Products. Within Milk and Fruit & Vegetables frameworks there are product categories dedicated to organic products, and all other frameworks have organic product groupings, currently spend on these product lines are comparatively low, due to higher costs or lack of Scottish supply. There is the work through the Scottish Organic Action Plan with recommendations that will be forthcoming from the public procurement subgroup who have been supporting the Scottish Organic Stakeholders Group with their overall recommendations.

There is a continued need to prioritise local procurement of ethical and sustainably produced school food ingredients. The GFNA should actively support LAs to invest in a collaborative network of locally based intermediaries who are tasked with identifying bureaucratically light routes to market for local suppliers and supporting them to participate in school food procurement and review procurement legislation to mandate more local procurement. A continued barrier to supporting SMEs is the shrinking of LA procurement teams and the loss of key skills and experience. Much of the food safety aspects in the supply chain are managed by Scotland Excel such as compliance to banned ingredients, food safety inspections and certification. The GFNA should help facilitate skills training and know-how for both procurement teams and local suppliers.

When developing the frozen food framework, Scotland Excel gave suppliers the opportunity to bid to supply food only to create opportunities for smaller companies that didn't have national delivery logistics in place. As a result, an Aberdeenshire-based fish supplier secured a place on the contract to supply Scottish haddock which has created the potential for £1m of new business for this small, family-owned company. This approach was so successful that SXL also followed it for our Groceries and Provisions framework, leading to the appointment of 5 SME manufacturers to the framework.

Local Sourcing

Locally sourced produce has become an increasing priority for councils, with several councils leading the way in procurement policy, already including the aims of the Good Food Nation in their procurement policies (an excerpt from East Ayrshire below).

Improve Health, Wellbeing, Education of Communities and Promote Animal Welfare

Improve Health, Wellbeing, Education of Communities and Promote Animal Welfare
East Ayrshire Council, in addition to the requirements of the procurement legislation, have continued to develop a more sustainable approach to providing school meals in all areas of Early Years, Primary/Secondary, Community Meals and Council-run Facilities. There has been a clear focus on supporting local suppliers and producers, which in turn leads to economic growth, training and development for the local workforce leading to national recognition.

Our focus is:

- Adhering to the Scottish Healthy Eating in Schools Guidance 2021
- Adhering to the Scottish Dietary Goals
- Freshly prepared meals
- Recipe and menu development
- Dietary and allergy recipe development
- Culinary Skills development for catering staff
- Supporting welfare standards for, dairy, eggs, meat and chicken
- Support for Marine Stewardship Council for sustainable caught fishing
- Supporting organic milk and dry goods
- The use of seasonal fresh and fresh organic vegetables and fruit
- Food education within our schools and community

The Council continues to promote the value of the produce we cook and the approach that we provide a quality product within our catering service to all end users, therefore

high-quality food that demonstrates higher welfare standards, sustainable sourcing, ethical approach to farming and production leading to a stronger workforce and community growth.

We will continue to investigate ways to work with our suppliers to provide healthy, fresh, seasonal and sustainable grown food, which represents the best value for money improves health, wellbeing and dietary education of our customers, members and employees and engage with all users to promote best practice.

LAC, whether working with Scotland Excel and/or procuring directly, have been stepping up their role to ensure public sector food contracts are more accessible to Scottish businesses. This also underpins the Scottish Government's drive to make sure the power of public spending is used to boost Scotland's economy. However, balancing this with ever increasing budgetary pressures often put service managers in a difficult dilemma.

Scotland Excel were keen to support the government's Dairy Action Plan to include more Scottish produce in our groceries contract for yoghurt, butter, cheese, and margarine. So, they included a secondary price list within the tender to allow suppliers to offer Scottish dairy products to give Local Authorities the option of Scottish products.

When developing the Scotland Excel frozen food framework, suppliers had the opportunity to bid to supply food only to create opportunities for smaller companies that didn't have national delivery logistics in place. This approach was so successful, that it was followed for Groceries and Provisions framework, leading to the appointment of 5 SME manufacturers to the framework.

LAs have been working to bring more Scottish produce onto butchery contracts, whilst still remaining compliant with procurement regulations. This has been achieved by requesting Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb and where possible including Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) in the tender. As a result, more than 77% of produce purchased on the meat framework last year was sourced from Scotland. Many LAs work with local butchers to improve the provenance of their butcher meat – this has to be balanced from a cost perspective, through using less but better quality of meat in a variety of dishes.

Across all food contracts, spending by LAs on Scottish products has continued to rise. Over the past six years, it has increased year on year. Not only is this approach good for Scottish businesses, but it also promotes and supports the Good Food Nation Act helping to create a greener Scotland by reducing food miles.

Given Scotland's geography, not all LAs are able to access national suppliers with more remote or rural LAs having to tender independently. Whilst this is great for supporting SMEs in the local area, it comes at a significantly higher food cost – with some reporting a 40% increase in food costs in comparison to their more urban counterparts.

The challenges to procurement in remote and rural areas

Shetland's cost of living has been estimated as being 20-65% higher than the UK average for an acceptable standard of living based on 2016 figures. Energy costs for an average household are double those of an average UK household. We can struggle to get all the produce available to Authorities on the Scottish mainland, and the products we do get are always more expensive. All items on the national frameworks have an additional cost for Island Authorities, Brakes, for example, can deliver our food to the Ferry terminal in Aberdeen where we would then have to pay for onward transport plus delivery to our schools across our 6 separate islands that have schools.

All food that is imported to Shetland must make the overnight, 223-mile journey from Aberdeen to Lerwick and on days when the seas are too rough the boats don't sail. At the same time, we are perhaps lucky that many of our supplies can be procured without the need for a formal tender agreement, as the total value is often below the thresholds where this would be necessary. Shetland Islands Council recognises that by supporting local producers and growers we are ensuring they are here in the future, ensuring our long-term food security is safe, especially with an uncertain energy future and our current reliance on fossil fuels to produce, package, transport and store food.

At present we procure all of our fresh fish, all of our lamb, all of our milk, most of our bread & rolls and a large proportion of eggs through local producers, we can also get up to 40% of our potatoes and root vegetables at certain times of the year. These are procured through locally arranged procurement exercises giving us an extra burden of work that many mainland authorities do not face.

Covid showed us that long and complex supply chains are fragile, by supporting local growers and producers we can build local resilience and encourage skills like farming, butchery and bakery. A Food For Life study has shown that for every £1 invested in local food, it yields a social return on investment of over £4. By encouraging local suppliers to engage with the Council, we are providing a valuable route to market. Reliable, long-term contracts also help them grow and plan their business as the Council is a reliable paying customer. Every time we buy produce from someone other than a local producer, our money leaves the Shetland economy. By shortening supply chains, we keep money in Shetland, which helps to sustain local producers and create local jobs.

Engaging with suppliers

Suppliers can often be discouraged from bidding for public sector contracts or be unsure how to tender for these contracts. The need to procure more locally in some cases can be in contradiction to the vast volumes and multiple delivery locations (e.g. a typical Local Authority can often have 70+ locations to be serviced in one day, within very tight time-windows). They also have incredibly tight specifications for products, driven by either the school food regulations or efficiency standards (i.e. the use of pre-prepared vegetables).

As the Scottish Government continue to work towards their Good Food Nation ambitions it is vital that LAC play a significant role in discussions – through ensuring suppliers are aware of regulations, specifications, and budget realities for LAs, thusly ensuring that we create a joined-up food system. Many LAs will be able to cite, following changes to school food regulations Scottish products that were taken off menus, after becoming uncompliant.

SMEs were unable to invest in re-engineering of products and subsequently lost out on school contracts. It is vital moving forward we engage and support these suppliers to evolve and innovate.

As contracts continue to evolve, both Scotland Excel and Local Authority procurement boards will continue engaging with Scottish food producers and manufacturers, whilst continuing to support the delivery of healthy and nutritious school meals and balance increased budget pressures. They continue to work with several key stakeholders across Scotland including the Scottish Government, the Soil Association/Food for Life Scotland, Scotland Food and Drink, Quality Meat Scotland, APSE and Nourish Scotland to name a few.

To support the work around catering and procurement, a need was identified to provide a space for local authority officers to be able to come together to share good practices. This resulted in the setting up of the 'Scottish Public Food Forum'. Co-hosted by Scotland Excel, ASSIST FM and Nourish Scotland, the group - attended by almost all Local Authorities, SFP coordinators and key national stakeholders - meets quarterly to facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange around procurement. The forum also offers a way to effectively communicate with all 32 LAs at the same time – for example, the last forum was used by the Scottish Government to run a 'soft' consultation in advance of the refresh of the 'Catering for Change' guidance on sustainable procurement. The refresh of Catering for Change has faced significant delays and it was deemed a key deliverable of the SG Local Food Steering Group, represented by Nourish Scotland, Food for Life Scotland and ASSIST FM.

ASSIST FM represents LAs on the Scottish Government Public Sector Food Forum and are members of the Scottish Organic Stakeholders Group, Scottish Government Local Food Steering Group and the Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme - Implementation and Operation Group, this ensures a desire to deliver upon key policy aims is balances with the operational realities.

Closing Remarks

Scotland's Local Authorities are at the forefront of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act. As much as there is a long journey ahead to 2026, recognition must be given to the miles already travelled by Local Authorities. The passion, pride and professionalism of front-line local authority catering and procurement teams across Scotland's public sector is key to leading the way to truly delivering a Good Food Nation for Scotland.

With special thanks to those who contributed to the paper including the many Local Authorities, Scotland Excel, Professor Mary Brennan, Nourish Scotland and Food for Life Scotland.