



Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

Corrected oral evidence: Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

Tuesday 10 March 2020

11.40 am

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Members present: Lord Krebs (The Chair); Baroness Boycott; The Earl of Caithness; Lord Empey; Baroness Janke; Baroness Osamor; Baroness Parminter; Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick; Baroness Sanderson of Welton; Lord Whitty.

Evidence Session No. 16

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Questions 112 - 118

Witnesses

I: David Morris, Deputy Head of Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Strategy, Welsh Government; George Burgess, Head of Food and Drink, Scottish Government; Dr Donald Macaskill, Chief Executive, Scottish Care, Scottish Food Coalition.

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Examination of witnesses

David Morris, George Burgess and Dr Donald Macaskill.

Q112 **The Chair:** I welcome our panel of witnesses to this evidence session in our inquiry into food, poverty, health and the environment. Thank you very much for coming. We are looking forward to hearing what is going on in your respective countries.

The meeting is being broadcast live on the parliamentary website. There will be a transcript, and you will have a chance to make corrections to it before it is finally published on our website. Declarations of interest by members of the Committee are available in printed sheets on the seats behind you.

To begin with, I invite each of you briefly to introduce yourself for the record. I will then lead off with the questioning.

David Morris: I am the deputy head of the food division in the Welsh Government. We deal primarily with the food manufacturing sector and development policies to support the growth of the same.

George Burgess: I am the head of the food and drink division in the Scottish Government.

Dr Donald Macaskill: I am chief executive of Scottish Care, which is an independent representative body of the care sector in Scotland. We are also part of the Scottish Food Coalition, and that is why I am here today.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have read a bit about the food policies in Scotland and in Wales. To refresh our memories and to develop it a little bit further, could you tell us what the key priorities are in Wales and in Scotland for food policies, and how they impact on considerations of health, social inequality and environmental sustainability? Have they been embedded in the food policies?

David Morris: We are almost between strategies at the moment. Our current action plan, which was the operational way to deliver the food for Wales and food from Wales strategy, was published about 10 years ago and completes in 2020. It had a number of overriding objectives: to establish a food industry board in Wales; to grow the Welsh brand; and to upscale the industry, in the food manufacturing sector workforce primarily. It had lots of initiatives and actions to grow business and trade development, and a number of actions around the area of food safety and food security, which included some public health and nutrition actions.

That strategy is complete. We had an overall growth turnover target of £7 billion for what was the food and farming priority sector. That was the way it was defined. We aimed to achieve that target by 2020 from a baseline of just over £5 billion in 2013. We have exceeded that target. At the end of 2019, we had reached £7.473 billion.

That brings us to where we go next. We consulted on the follow-on food strategy last autumn. Our Minister will announce the new food strategy,

probably at the Royal Welsh Show in July. There is a mission and a vision about developing or further developing our thriving industry in a sustainable fashion, making sure that it delivers for the environment and for communities.

It has three main aims. The first is further to develop and grow our businesses in Wales. The second aim is to raise the profile on the world stage of Wales as a global food nation. The third strategic aim is to deliver benefits for people and communities. Then there are actions beneath those key aims. That is the direction of travel. It is very much about sustainability. It is built out of the framework in the future generations Act legislation.

The Chair: As I understand it, the primary objective is very much about growing the food industry in Wales.

David Morris: Yes.

The Chair: In your metric, you have gone from £5 billion to £7 billion. You have exceeded that, and that is your continuing focus.

David Morris: Yes, but very much in the sustainability context. It is not growth at all costs.

The Chair: Do you want to tell us about Scotland, George?

George Burgess: I will take it up a level from the individual strategies that we have in different sectors. All the work within the Scottish Government is informed by our national performance frameworks, a set of outcomes and indicators that we use across the whole of Government. In each of our policies we try to make sure that they address as many aspects of the national performance framework as possible.

On the industry growth side, we have a strategy, Ambition 2030. That was developed by Scotland Food and Drink, which is one of our industry leadership bodies, but it works very closely with the Government and their agencies. It aims for a doubling of the turnover in the sector in Scotland by 2030 to £30 billion. Similar to David, it is absolutely not growth at all costs. Responsibility is a very strong aspect of the strategy.

We are responsible for our good food nation policy and agenda. I understand that the Committee has already heard a little about that. That is very much a holistic approach. It looks at ensuring that it is, as we put it, the norm for Scots to take a keen interest in their food, knowing what constitutes good food, valuing it and seeking it out. It looks at everyone involved in food, from production to eating. It is about access to healthy and nutritious food. It is about tackling dietary diseases, which are a considerable issue in Scotland. It is making sure that there is a fair deal for producers as well. That is an important plank of both policy and some forthcoming legislation, which I think the Committee has already heard about.

We have a number of other important sectoral policies and programmes

on diet and healthy weight, and on child poverty. We can discuss those in more detail if the Committee is interested.

Dr Donald Macaskill: The Scottish Food Coalition, of which we are part, recognises that the Scottish Government have significantly progressed the area of trying to join up policy across different elements: agriculture, fisheries, sustainability, energy, health and care. Our civic group concerns are that there is still a lack of whole-system thinking in relation not just to policy but to the articulation of that policy in practice, and the impact on the lived experience of many of the individuals with whom our members have direct and daily contact.

We continually hear stories of individuals who struggle to access good food because, for instance, according to Kellogg's, we still have many food deserts. A food desert is defined as an area where an individual can only access one or two shops, and most of those happen to be in our areas of particular economic deprivation. An astonishing 69% of children in Scotland are either overweight or clinically obese. We still have statistics that show that we have a growing incidence, if not an epidemic, of diabetes 1 and other related illnesses and conditions.

While we recognise that great strides have been made at policy level in the attempt to join up the dots, our concern is that we need a system-wide and whole-system approach. From our perspective, that has to be rooted in the human right to food, in particular the incorporation of the economic and social convention right to food.

Lord Empey: Donald, did I hear you correctly when you said that 69% of children were either overweight or clinically obese?

Dr Donald Macaskill: I gave the wrong figure; 65% are recorded as being either overweight or clinically obese.

The Chair: Which age group is that?

Dr Donald Macaskill: It is zero to 16.

Baroness Boycott: Is that much higher than the UK?

Dr Donald Macaskill: It is marginally higher than the UK on the statistics for obesity in children, and the lack of ability to access vegetables and good food is palpably inadequate across the UK. We still have, on average, only three in five of the five a day being accessed. Hopefully, we will come on to share some of the insightful good practice that is occurring. For instance, in the city of Glasgow the local authority has decided to extend school meal provision to all primary schoolchildren, not just to those up to the age of primary four. That is making a remarkable difference.

In the midst of those significant statistics determining ill health, the impact of poverty and the difficulties of accessing good food, we have signs of improvement. Our coalition believes that we can go much further and that the way to do that is the incorporation of a human right to food.

The Chair: As we go through the next hour, we would like to learn more about how one could spread those examples of good practice and, now or afterwards in writing, whether there is any evaluation. You said that Glasgow's provision of free school meals is producing change. Is there data to show that obesity levels are going down or that consumption of fruit and vegetables is going up as a consequence? We will come back to that in the session, and, if we do not, perhaps you could write to fill in the details.

Q113 **Baroness Osamor:** Can you outline the frameworks you have used to achieve your food policy objectives? For the Welsh representative, what has been the impact of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015? For the Scottish representatives, please can you talk us through the thinking behind the right to food? What were the key messages from your recent consultation on the good food nation legislation?

David Morris: The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act legislation, which as you rightly said came into being in April 2015, was truly ground-breaking on the global stage. It placed sustainability at the heart of all policy-making in Wales. Since that time it has been, and continues to be, our guiding hand.

For example, when we are developing our food strategy, we must go through a policy gateway process. There is a mapping exercise of our proposals in relation to the well-being goals. There are seven well-being goals: a prosperous Wales; a healthier Wales; a more resilient Wales; a Wales of cohesive communities; a Wales of vibrant culture; a thriving Welsh language; and a globally responsible Wales.

We have to look at everything we propose to see whether it fits appropriately with each of those goals. On globally responsible Wales, for example, we do not want to be transferring responsibilities or problems overseas. We have check-in points along the way, during consultation and as we finalise our strategies and policies, to make sure that they fit.

It is not just food policy; all policy must be checked against the well-being goals. The future generations legislation itself is about the long term. It is short term, but it balances short-term needs with long-term gains and long-term benefits. It is also about prevention. It is preventing problems happening and trying to foresee things in advance. It is looking beyond the normal tenure of Government, four or five years, and getting buy-in to a much longer-term approach.

To ensure that happens there is a future generations commissioner. Public bodies have to identify their own future generations actions to deliver on the Act. They have to report annually to the commissioner on what they are doing and what they have achieved. The commissioner will then provide feedback and may make recommendations for change. There is quite a lot of governance around it. Public service boards in each of the local authorities take an active role for the local authority in delivering and taking forward actions appropriate to delivering the future generations Act and its well-being goals.

The Chair: Does the future generations commissioner have powers? Can she administer sanctions against public authorities that do not comply, in her view, with the Act?

David Morris: I do not think it has ever progressed to sanctions, but they can certainly make strong recommendations for change. To date, local authorities have tended to comply.

The Chair: It is more name and shame than send to prison.

David Morris: Yes.

The Chair: George, would you like to pick up the story for Scotland?

George Burgess: I have already outlined the key frameworks overall, but it is perhaps worth explaining in a little more detail the one around the good food nation agenda. We are committed to introducing a Bill this year, and that will underpin the work that has already been done on a non-statutory basis.

We consulted on a proposal that Ministers and a range of public bodies would have to set out a statement of their policy on food, with a holistic approach to their policies. They would have to report on that and, to make sure that it is not just a policy that once written sits on a shelf, take it into account in delivering relevant functions. That applies to the Scottish Government themselves, and to local authorities and other key bodies. That is the proposal.

It was pretty widely welcomed by the stakeholders and respondents to our consultation. The legislation should be introduced fairly soon. Our consultation did not propose that a right to food would be contained in the good food nation legislation. We recognise the existence of a right to food as part of wider rights to an adequate standard of living, as Donald mentioned, in some of the international instruments. Our Bill will require Ministers and others, when setting their policy, to have regard to existing international instruments.

There is another strand of work under way at the moment, through our National Task Force for Human Rights Leadership, to look at a single, coherent package of rights legislation. Our approach is not to separate the food component of rights and deal with it in the good food nation Bill, but actually to deal with human rights in a package. As I mentioned, we are ensuring that when considering policies on food regard is had to the rights that already exist.

The Chair: Donald, would you like to expand that? You mentioned the right to food idea. Would you like to give us a bit of flavour as to what you think the justification for that is?

Dr Donald Macaskill: Your Lordships will appreciate that the right to food, as George has already highlighted, is part and parcel of what is considered to be included in the right to a reasonable standard of living. That exists in the United Nations declaration of 1948. It exists in the

rights of the child, and more explicitly it exists as Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Scottish Food Coalition believes that that provides the overarching legislative basis for the incorporation of a right to food, certainly in the proposed new Bill that may arise from the work of the First Minister's group on human rights leadership. That is envisioned, and they have been talking about the right to food within that.

However, we are very strongly of the view, backed up by the Scottish Human Rights Commission in its opinion and by the United Nations rapporteur on the right to food, that it is incumbent on states not only to have an overarching legislative umbrella in a Bill of rights, which mentions and includes the right to food, but that there should be "complementary and supportive" legislation in the national legislation of a country.

We see the good food Bill as a prime opportunity for Scotland to incorporate the right to food in areas that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, recognising that it does not include all areas, and we would argue that that provides consistency of application. It would enable read-across to, for instance, the right to social security, which is being much embedded in the new social security practice in Scotland, and the right to health that, through our national frameworks and standards, is embedding itself in health and social care. There are various elements of what is included in the right to food that I could go on to describe and that we suggest add weight to the policy intentions of the Scottish Government, and address some of the very real practical concerns of the failure to add up in practice the experience of food sustainability and environmental concern, both in the population and for those who are members of our group.

The Chair: Can I follow up your very helpful description of the right to food? In practical terms, can you give us a couple of examples of things that might change as a result of having the right to food in legislation?

Dr Donald Macaskill: There are four elements of the right to food internationally in law. In practice, Brazil is the nation that has joined the principal dots together. They are availability of food; accessible food, both economic and physical accessibility, which is significant in a nation such as Scotland; the adequate nature of food, so that food properly meets the dietary and nutritional needs of a community and a population, and is safe and culturally sensitive; and, lastly, that food and its production, delivery, use and control of waste is sustainable.

In Scotland, in no small part through legislation introduced by the Scottish Government—for instance, the Community Empowerment Act—we have seen the growth of various projects at local level through increased use of public land for allotments and priority being given to community projects, and the funding by the Scottish Government of a new approach to nutrition and well-being for the under-fives, taking over some of the healthy lives insights. There are clear exemplars of a policy

in practice being influenced by the four key components of the right to food.

Ultimately, however, the right to food enables good governance. It enables a system of oversight to be established that holds to a higher standard than that which may exist in national policy, or indeed national legislation in its disparate parts. It joins together the elements that constitute citizens' experience, or lack of experience, of good food.

Q114 The Earl of Caithness: Once again, England is looking towards Scotland and Wales for advice because you have been in this game longer than we have down here.

You have been working on a non-statutory basis. Can you tell us a bit more about the levers you have used to achieve your food policy goals, both on the demand and the supply side, and whether having an Act of Parliament gives you greater levers and, if so, what are they?

George Burgess: On the supply side, Ambition 2030—our strategy that I outlined earlier—is our main lever or focus of attention. We have seen considerable benefits of that in the growth in turnover in the sector. Through that, and through the collaborative approach between industry and government and the not inconsiderable funding from the Scottish Government to support it, we have seen important developments. There is an export plan and we have about a dozen in-market specialists embedded around the world to help promote Scottish produce. That is one small example.

We have considerably extended our food education programme, trying to reconnect children to the source of their food. There is very considerable expansion on that side. Other legislation will be forthcoming. There is a restricting foods promotion Bill in the offing, led by our health colleagues. That looks at restrictions on high fat, salt and sugar products in the environment.

Your question about the food environment is very important. We have seen other examples, for instance, in relation to alcohol. Changes that we implemented some years ago under our liquor licensing regime to restrict the omnipresence of alcohol in superstores that we had previously is starting to have some effect on behaviours.

David Morris: We have many levers. Some are mandatory, but we have also put a lot of emphasis on working collaboratively with industry. In Wales, we have implemented a triple helix approach, which is government, industry and academia working together. That includes stimulating research and innovation in the sector, primarily in food manufacturing, which is the area where I work. There are related or similar initiatives at primary production level as well.

As part of that approach to stimulating research and innovation, we have developed a network of food business clusters over the past five years. We have approximately 700 food manufacturing businesses in Wales, predominantly SMEs, and indeed predominantly micro businesses. Of the

700, about 450, and probably more now, are members of one or other of seven business clusters. Some of them are sector focused. We have a seafood cluster and a drinks cluster. Some are more thematic, so we have a CEO cluster. We have a nutri-Wales cluster that looks primarily at innovation, research and development. Through that cluster, we have supported companies in reformulating products and thinking about producing healthier products and not just calorie-laden and salt and sugar-laden products. As part of that, we have assisted companies in using initiatives such as SPRI to aid the development of new products.

At the moment, we have some companies working on producing lower-calorie and lower-fat products, such as sausages with 30% fewer calories and yoghurts with less than 5% sugar, by using things such as waste products from other parts of the food chain and food manufacturing, such as apple pomace and potato waste. We have supported food companies. We have a bug farm in west Wales which is producing an edible type of protein that can be used as a meat substitute, VEXo protein. We very much support innovation in that area.

We do lots with schools and with young people. I believe that we pioneered the school holiday enrichment programme in Wales, which offers healthy eating to schoolchildren in the school summer holidays. That is for schoolchildren who are eligible for free school meals, on the basis that their nutrition was suffering over the long summer holiday and when they returned to school in the autumn their learning was suffering as a consequence. That has grown phenomenally; it has been huge.

We are doing a lot to influence the curriculum in schools. We have health and well-being as part of the mainstream curriculum now. That includes food, nutrition, cooking, hydration and education for children. We introduced a food and nutrition GCSE course about three years ago. That deals with a lot of healthy eating advice and hands-on cooking and development.

We have a module under the Welsh baccalaureate for 16 to 18 year-olds looking at food security and food safety. We try to tackle it at every angle. Like Scotland, we support community food growing. I think we are the only one of the home nations that has a strategy to support and enable community growing. That is a snapshot of some of the things we are doing.

The Earl of Caithness: George, is the idea of the good food nation by 2025 now out of the window and we are going for 2030? For all of you, a lot of what you said could be undermined by the trade talks. Are you happy with the UK Government on trade talks?

Dr Donald Macaskill: I will take that while George comes up with a Civil Service response. One of the benefits if Scotland were to incorporate the right to food is that the duty on a nation is to protect, realise and fulfil the right, as some of you are aware. One understands that that is a progressive realisation over time, but one of the things that the right to

food enables you to do is to prevent regressive behaviour or regressive action.

I will leave you to decide whether this is true or not: arguably, the outcomes of any international trade talks could be considered regressive as regards the characteristics of sustainability, good health, good nutrition and potential policy framed in Scotland. The benefit of a right to food at the front of a piece of legislation is that the state, in the Scottish context, would not be able to act in a manner deemed to be regressive from that which is already internationally articulated as what nutrition and what trade is acceptable, particularly around animal husbandry.

George Burgess: On the first question about targets, our good food nation policy is looking to 2025. It is Ambition 2030, our industry programme, that has the 2030 timescale. Is it out of the window? Absolutely not. We have published two progress reports on what has already been achieved under the good food nation banner. Taking up the Chair's introduction, after this session we will send links to those documents so that Committee members can see the range of that activity. We are making quite good progress on that and it will be helped on the way by the good food nation Bill that is coming along.

On the international trade talks, I am reminded of the "Are we happy?" comment by Dr Johnson, and the quote about the difference between a Scotsman and a ray of sunshine. The Scottish Government are not happy with the United Kingdom Government approach on trade. I have further discussions with Defra colleagues over the next couple of days on that. We see considerable dangers, not least in relation to standards.

A number of commitments have been given by the United Kingdom Government to maintain standards in trade negotiations. However, when the Scottish Government and others have proposed amendments to the Agriculture Bill that is currently at the other end of this building, they have not been accepted. We have concerns about just how good the commitment is.

David Morris: On the negotiations, I quote my First Minister, who says that nothing less than "full and unfettered access" to European markets will work for Wales. We have certain sectors that are particularly vulnerable. Welsh lamb is an iconic product. I mentioned earlier that we are trying to raise our profile on the global stage as a food production nation. Welsh lamb would be up there at the top of the list. We export 40% of our production, and 90% of that goes to EU countries.

As to whether it will compromise our ambitions to achieve a healthier diet for the nation, it could in so far as supply chains are very complex webs across Europe. A number of our food producers and food manufacturers rely on ingredients from other European countries. Tariffs and trade barriers would be counterproductive.

Having said that, the Welsh Government are firmly committed to achieving a healthier nation and a healthier diet. We published our

healthy weight, healthy Wales strategy in November last year. It is a 10-year strategy with two-year delivery plans. It is ambitious. It looks not just at achieving healthier people but at everything that impacts on that. It is healthy people, healthy environments and healthy settings and leadership. That will be there irrespective of what happens post EU exit.

Q115 Lord Whitty: You are clearly ambitious in your aims. To some extent, you are ahead of where England appears to be, leaving aside the trade issue, which is clearly complicated. In order to do that, you must have relationships with the industry, and I would like to explore that a bit.

You have discrete farming sectors in Scotland and Wales, but in the processing sector you said they were mainly small businesses. Actually, the big dominant processors are UK, if not international, operators. The same is true of the retailers. How do you get them to move further in Wales or Scotland than perhaps they are prepared to do in England or around the world? You are dealing with very big and powerful companies.

David Morris: In Wales, it is the strength of the relationships that we build with the businesses. To put that in context, it is not a huge sector compared with England. I mentioned that we have maybe 700 food manufacturing businesses, of which probably 5% are large businesses. They know the Welsh Government food division. They know that we have delivery people and business managers who are out there working with businesses and providing support, such as grant support for their development. There is the clustering network that I mentioned to bring them together, including a CEO cluster that meets quarterly and brings together CEOs from the top food manufacturing businesses in Wales. They come to a dinner, sit around and talk about issues they have in common and perhaps opportunities they could progress in common. It is done very much on both a formal and an informal basis.

We have what we call Project Helix, working with academia and universities in Wales to provide assistance to businesses on everything from food safety to new product development. We do a lot of survey work with businesses. It is down to the strength of the relationships with the businesses themselves. That is how we can bring things about, whether it is encouraging them to develop in certain directions, which could be to do with reformulation, or looking at their environmental impact.

We have introduced an economic contract that we call "Something for Something". If a food business is looking for capital grant or revenue support, we expect something in return. It could be commitments on decarbonisation or on ensuring that their workforce is paid fairly and paid the living wage. It could be about ethical working and what they can do for their community. That might be looking to employ local people or supporting initiatives on food poverty. It is a something-for-something relationship.

Lord Whitty: You mentioned reformulation. Reformulation of major products has a world significance, but you seem to have gone further. Can you explain that process? Maybe Scotland has had some success as

well.

David Morris: We believe it is about providing the right support at the right time. To go back to our SME cohort, the largest part of the food manufacturing sector, a number of them—particularly the smaller SMEs and the micro businesses—do not have in-house resources for things such as reformulation. In our food centre network, under our Project Helix umbrella, we have a food centre in north Wales at Coleg Menai, in west Wales at Horeb and in south-east Wales at Cardiff Metropolitan. It is an outreach programme for all food manufacturers. It is heavily supported and costs them very little, if anything, and they have access to all the food technologists they need. They have the production facilities they need. They have tasting suites and access to virtual reality grocery retail experiences. There is a suite of support and programmes to aid their development. That makes concepts such as reformulation much easier for businesses.

When they understand that the priority for Welsh Ministers and the nation as a whole is healthier eating, and that we are going to look more favourably at businesses that bring forward plans and proposals for development that include something that will address our overall ambition for healthier eating, they see that those proposals are probably more likely to gain support over time than proposals that just look at development across the board for whatever reason.

The Chair: We are going to have to be a bit briefer.

George Burgess: A lot of what David said would apply equally in Scotland. Like Wales, we have the benefit of scale, so the personal relationships between businesses, government and other stakeholders play an important part. A lot of the relationship is through Scotland Food and Drink. It is an industry-led body but it works closely with government.

To pick up on reformulation, we have had some success there. The Scottish Government fund a project, again working in partnership. It is delivered through Food and Drink Federation Scotland, working predominantly with the SME sector that does not have access to its own resources. There are some good examples through the craft butchers association. The project has helped local butchers to reduce quite dramatically the salt levels in burgers and sausages, and increase fibre. There are some good examples of change on the ground.

I do not want to suggest, however, that it is all about the small guys. The big players are active. The Scotch Whisky Association is obviously very important for us. There are a lot of large players, but the association and its members have for a long time recognised the need for responsibility, particularly on environmental matters, and they have a well-developed programme of work on environmental aspects.

The Chair: We need to move on, but perhaps you could write to us with a bit of detail about the reformulation of salt in hamburgers and

sausages, to decrease salt and increase fibre.

George Burgess: Certainly.

The Chair: I guess it is hard to reformulate whisky to make it a healthier option. It may be delicious, so I guess your focus there is on the environment. Again, could you write with a bit more detail?

George Burgess: Certainly. We cannot improve on perfection. Their efforts are principally around environmental aspects, both in production and packaging.

Baroness Boycott: I read somewhere that all whisky is sent out of Scotland in bottles, which is obviously terribly heavy, rather than being sent out in barrels and bottled at the destination, because people want it bottled in Scotland. Is that right?

George Burgess: For malt whisky, that is certainly the case. Some blended whisky can be dispatched in bulk. There are issues around the potential for fraud. There are other reasons behind that.

Q116 **Lord Empey:** How much progress has been made towards your stated goals? Presumably, you do interim reports; I think you referred to them. What have been the major challenges you faced in implementing those policies?

George Burgess: We have had success in some areas. I mentioned earlier that our food and drink industry turnover reached record levels in 2017, which is a 36% increase over the previous decade. There was real success in some of those areas. Food and drink is our largest exporting sector. In other areas, issues such as obesity, particularly childhood obesity, remain a persistent challenge, which Donald touched on.

Lord Empey: Did you encounter pitfalls or non-starters that it would be helpful that we are aware of?

George Burgess: There is nothing that we would say is a non-starter. It is worth exploring different projects and trying things out. Some will work better than others. We simply learn from experience. As part of writing to the Committee, we can draw attention to some of the evaluation that has been done of particular projects.

Lord Empey: Do you have rural proofing in Scotland and Wales on your legislation?

George Burgess: Yes.

The Chair: Donald mentioned at the beginning the statistic that 65% of children up to the age of 16 were overweight or obese. With all the initiatives you have in Scotland, is there any evidence that nationwide there is a trend to decreasing obesity, or is the trend still rising?

Dr Donald Macaskill: It is too early. The data is not sufficiently robust. We can send you illustrations from many of the initiatives that George

and I have referred to; for instance, the Best Start Foods programme gives individuals a card, and that removes stigma, say, for somebody who has given birth and wants to access appropriate provision and support, such as nappies, food, fresh vegetables and other things. Anecdotally, that already has evidence of benefits, as have many of the community allotment programmes and the programmes to educate children about vegetables, both in the early years and in the first four years of primary school, and to build confidence by including them in growing them.

There are dozens of programmes. Many of them were formed under the Dignity title; Nourish Scotland and other players have been attempting to join the experience of children living in poverty who do not know what a vegetable is and help them to understand the ecological issues attached to growing food, and what healthy and nutritional mean. As George highlighted, and as anybody working in food and care—my sector—realises, some things are in our control and other things are not in our control. In its submission, the Scottish Human Rights Commission told the story of a young woman on universal credit who had a young child. In order for her to access the nearest shop that sold fresh fruit and vegetables, either she had to pay £5 of that universal credit to take the bus to get there, or she had a six-mile round trip with a six week-old baby. Transport, particularly for rural communities, remains a real challenge.

In the care sector, the provision of good, locally sourced food is one mechanism, or means, to address some of the transport costs attached to using larger national or international companies, but it comes with a cost. As anybody working in the delivery of health and care knows, we do not have a lot of resources for something that is extremely important. More than 50% of people over the age of 70 who are admitted to hospital in Scotland are malnourished. That is a fundamental challenge, particularly to a community where in the last 18 months to two years we have virtually removed meals on wheels. That is why a holistic view within a good food nation Bill that ties up all the communities of interest and policy areas strikes us as extremely important.

David Morris: I shall choose two areas. I mentioned our current action plan, which we will complete in 2020. A difficult area for us to deliver has been skills, both upskilling the food manufacturing workforce and, more specifically, attracting enough people into the industry. We are heavily reliant on migrant labour, which is up to about 30% of our food manufacturing workforce. Because the UK economy at the moment is supposedly nearer full employment than it has been for a very long time, food manufacturing is not an attractive career choice for young people and not so young people. That is a real challenge for us and we still have not cracked it.

With food, health, diet and nutrition, we are a bit like Scotland. We have tried things over the years but the obesity problem has worsened. It is

not as bad as in Scotland; in fact, in our nought to five population, about 25% are obese. I am not sure about the six to 16s.

We need a holistic approach, including better education in schools and families, and it is now part of the curriculum. It includes reformulation. It includes making it easier for people; for example, we have a refill scheme in Wales that offers fresh clean drinking water across all our towns and cities so that people are less inclined to buy energy drinks. The approach will include legislation where necessary, if we need it, to reduce calorie content, salt, sugar and the rest, and perhaps even access to energy drinks by children. It also includes research and innovation. Monitoring is important. With all our policies in Wales, we evaluate everything on an ongoing basis and change them where necessary.

Q117 Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick: A key point raised at a round-table discussion organised by Sustain last week on the right to food was that strong governance, monitoring and accountability were essential in food policies. In view of that, what governance arrangements do you have in place for monitoring and accountability of your food policies?

David Morris: We have a Food and Drink Wales Industry Board, which we established in 2015, after we published our action plan. That was a clear demand in consultation responses prior to publishing that plan. The voice of industry was important in influencing the policy direction. That has proved beneficial. We have people from food and drink manufacturing and from the business community. Some of them represent sectors such as dairying and red meat. Others are more thematic; we have academics on the board. There are 14 people maximum. We have had a bit of natural wastage and at the moment we are in the process of reinvigorating the board. We have just advertised for some new members.

The board holds us to account. It meets approximately quarterly. As officials, we report what we have been doing in the industry. The board is very hands on in delivery. The chairman is Andy Richardson from Volac, and he commits a huge amount of time to building networks here in Westminster and elsewhere, working with the food council. That has all been very beneficial in understanding what others are doing, helping to shape our policies and challenging us on whether we are delivering the ambitions we set ourselves and the ambitions the board has for the food industry in Wales.

The Chair: That re-emphasises that your main focus in Wales is the industry.

David Morris: It is industry. I have not mentioned pre-farm gate. We are very integrated with the supply chain. There is a whole separate policy development—Brexit and our land—to replace the common agricultural policy. Obviously, we work closely with those sectors, but the focus for our food strategy is very much food manufacturing.

George Burgess: On monitoring and accountability, I mentioned earlier our national performance framework, which operates across government. There is a separate website, and we will send links, where you can see at a glance how Scotland is doing across a whole range of government activity. That would show figures on childhood obesity perhaps little different from the ones Donald gave earlier but nevertheless stubbornly unchanging. That is reported, and as soon as new data is available it is added to the national performance framework website. We have a framework for monitoring and accountability across government.

Within government, we have established a ministerial working group on food, to help to ensure that we have join-up across government. A good number of our senior Ministers are directly engaged in that. Under the good food nation proposals we referred to earlier, the Bill, as well as setting out the policy on food, will require regular reporting by the Scottish Government and other authorities on their progress against their policies.

The Chair: There is no single Minister responsible; it is a ministerial committee.

George Burgess: A number of Ministers are responsible for food in their portfolio. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism, Fergus Ewing MSP, is the Minister principally responsible for the food industry and for primary production, both agriculture and fisheries. Our Cabinet Secretary for Health is principally responsible for diet and obesity.

The whole approach under the national performance framework is that we do not see them as sitting in silos and that there is engagement between the different parts of government and between Ministers. Scale is on our side.

Dr Donald Macaskill: We have already heard about the risks of siloed working across departments and across policy areas. The Scottish Food Coalition's counter to that would be that we need to embed the right to food, with progressive realisation of the safeguards that come with that. At the coalition we have recommended the creation of an independent food commission. We do not believe that the aims of the good food nation Bill will be properly achieved without an independent commission that would bring all stakeholders, from all sectors, together, and would hold government in its various departments and policy areas to account. Without that, there would be great risk.

I want to clarify my obesity statistics, lest they run away with themselves. I have checked my notes. The 65% was for the whole population; 29% is the under-16 population, of whom another 31% are at additional risk of obesity. It is still horrendous; it is still an area where we need to improve, and, unfortunately, we are still worse than Wales, but it illustrates that obesity is the concern of multiple departments in the Scottish Government. The creation of an independent food commissioner would address some of the lack of joined-up-ness at times.

The Chair: Who would the commission and the commissioner report to?

Dr Donald Macaskill: The Scottish Parliament.

The Chair: What powers would they have?

Dr Donald Macaskill: Ideally, that would be up to the Scottish Parliament. We have a good system of commissioners who hold the Parliament to account. We have an information commissioner, a human rights commissioner and commissioners who are responsible for distinct policy delivery areas. The coalition believes that we are inevitably going to move into territory where consensus, collaboration and relationships will be stretched and strained. To have one point, one source of oversight and governance, would be to the benefit of achieving the aims of the Bill.

Q118 **Baroness Janke:** My question is about the successful policy levers you would like to draw to our attention. Some of you said that you need more time, yet both programmes seem to have been there since 2009-10. You have drawn attention to barriers already, although to us there seems to be a strong legislative framework, yet clearly you still struggle. You aspire to high standards but you still have major challenges. Do you have some words of advice for us, both on success and the barriers to achieving it?

The Chair: Could you give us a sentence or two each?

Dr Donald Macaskill: I refer to my previous answer. Food is fundamental to our well-being and our health as a nation and as individuals. It deserves a holistic, overarching prioritisation that counters sectoral interests wherever they may be. It is not sufficient to have good legislation. It necessitates the force that an independent food commission would deliver in Scotland and, I suggest, elsewhere.

George Burgess: We have already talked about a number of the successes and challenges in our sector. Another that I draw to your attention, and will send information about, is the Fair Food Fund which has supported a large number of projects in Scotland. It is based on food but it addresses other social issues, such as loneliness and isolation. It is a real example of holistic projects that make a benefit, particularly for deprived communities.

David Morris: It is about a holistic approach. Legislation has a role. That is for certain. The industry responded before the legislation reducing sugar in drinks came into being, because it knew that was going to happen. There is always a place for that approach.

Joining up is important. For example, in Wales, and I think it is the same in England and Scotland, there is a much higher density of fast food-type outlets in poor communities. We can do lots through education and everything else, but, unless we can control the licensing of such things, people will still be inclined to buy what is on their doorstep. Join-up across central government policy, local authority policy and wider is very important as part of a holistic approach.

The Chair: What are you actually doing about the high density of fast-food outlets in poor areas?

David Morris: We are going to look at that as part of our healthy weight, healthy Wales strategy.

The Chair: What you are doing is looking at it.

David Morris: We are looking at it, and we will be working with local authorities persuading them to think again before they license anyone and everyone who turns up with a fast-food opportunity for the high street.

The Chair: Thank you. In drawing this session to a close, I thank our witnesses very much indeed. You have been very helpful to us.

As I said at the beginning, there will be a transcript that you will be able to comment on in draft before it is published on our website. There are a number of points on which you have agreed to write to us with further information. We very much look forward to that. Thank you very much indeed.