



HOUSE OF LORDS

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The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

As you will be aware, the House of Lords Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment produced its report, *Hungry for change: fixing the failures in food*, on 6 July 2020 (Session 2019–20, House of Lords Paper 85). The Government response was published on 4 September 2020 and the report was subsequently debated in the House of Lords on 10 June 2021.

The Select Committee was a special inquiry committee and as a result ceased to exist on the agreement of its report in 2020. The House of Lords Liaison Committee, which is responsible for committee resources, carries out follow-up work on the recommendations of such special inquiry committee reports.

I am therefore writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Liaison Committee to request that you provide a written update on the status of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment. Lord Krebs, former Chair of the Committee, has been consulted on the terms of this letter.

The Committee made 70 conclusions and recommendations to the Government, focused on solutions to evident problems in the food system from production to consumption. I would be grateful if you could provide an update on the status of each of the Committee's recommendations outlined in the report. In particular, I would be grateful if the update could address the points raised below.

Governance, accountability and food policy

- The Government Food Strategy was announced two years after the Committee's report was published and one year after the publication of the final part of the National Food Strategy Independent Review (the Review). Does the Government

have in place the necessary governance infrastructure to ensure the Food Strategy is implemented quickly and effectively? Which commitments in the Government Food Strategy have been progressed since its publication?

- It has recently been announced that the Government is reviewing the current obesity strategy, why has this review been undertaken? How long is the review intended to take and what are the anticipated next steps?

Poverty and food insecurity

- The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) published in September 2021, *Diet, nutrition and physical activity in 2020: A follow up study during COVID-19*, included questions on food security for the first time and was able to comment on how diet is impacted by food and financial security. Does the Government intend to continue to include food security questions in the NDNS rolling programme moving forward? If food security questions will not continue to be included in the NDNS, how does the Government intend to monitor the relationship between food insecurity and dietary intake?
- The current cost of living increases will exacerbate food insecurity and make it harder for people to eat a healthier diet. In September 2022, a YouGov poll found that of those who have annual incomes below £20,000, 29% have cut spending on essential food items. What progress has the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities made in exploring the options on assessing the cost of a healthy, balanced diet? If no progress has been made, can the Government commit to a time scale within which to carry out this assessment and provide details of what they believe to be a reasonably costed healthy and sustainable diet?

The Food Environment

Since the publication of the Committee's report a number of commitments have been made to maintain or extend food initiatives for children.¹ These are welcome developments; however, there are a number of areas where progress has not been made:

- Both the Committee and the Review made recommendations regarding free school meals eligibility requirements. Part Two of the Review revised its original recommendation, to increase the eligible earnings threshold to £20,000 per year before benefits. The Review stated this would “ensure 82% of children in households with very low food security would be eligible for free school meals and 70% of those facing low food security.” The Government Food Strategy committed to “continue to keep free school meal eligibility under review to ensure that these meals are supporting those who most need them” but made no changes to the free school meals system. In October 2022, Impact on Urban Health published a cost benefit analysis of expanding the provision of free school meals in England which found that both an expansion to all pupils receiving Universal Credit and an expansion to all pupils in state-funded schools gave a positive return on investment. As of January 2022, 22.5% of pupils (1.9 million pupils) are eligible for free school meals. This figure is up from 15.4% at the time of the Committee's report. Can the Government detail

¹ Including increased funding for Universal Infant Free School Meals, a permanent extension of free school meals to 'No Recourse to Public Funds' families, an uprate in the value of Healthy Start vouchers and an extension of the Holiday Activities and Food programme across England for a three-year period with continued investment.

how it intends to review eligibility requirements for free school meals and what the deciding factors would be to adapt the eligibility requirements?

- Again, both the Committee and the Review recommended amended eligibility requirements for the Holiday Activities and Food programme and recognised the need for changes to the Healthy Start vouchers scheme, which were not taken onboard. Can the Government detail how it intends to review eligibility requirements for both programmes and what key factors will be considered in any change to the eligibility requirements?
- The Committee also recommended changes to the eligibility requirements for the National Schools Breakfast Programme, which were not adopted in the Food Strategy. Can the Government detail how this programme will be reviewed and what deciding factors will be considered when assessing eligibility requirements?
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Government paused work on updating the School Food Standards and instead focused on enforcing the current standard. Does the Government intend to recommence its work into reviewing and updating School Food Standards? If so, can the Government provide details of how this review will be conducted and the time frame for this review to be completed, reviewed and the findings implemented?
- Pilot schemes were due to take place from September 2022 to support and assure compliance with School Food Standards. Can the Government provide details of the mechanisms being trialled and the timescale for completing, reviewing and implementing the outcome of the pilot?
- Following the Committee's recommendation for the Government to strengthen and develop the Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services (GBSF), in 2019 the Government consulted on and updated the nutrition standards for the GBSF. The Government subsequently issued a further consultation on proposed changes to the GBSF including broadening the scope of the GBSF mandatory organisations, the introduction of targets for locally produced food and new data reporting requirements. What is the time frame for providing a response to the consultation and to implement further revisions to the GBSF? Does the Government intend to set a review date to determine the success of the changes made the GBSF?
- Evidence to the Committee supported the implementation of restrictions on advertising, prominent product placement in supermarkets and price promotions on foods high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS). The Committee recommended that by the end of 2020 these initiatives should be rolled out. Despite the Government introducing legislation to affect these restrictions, in May 2022 the Government announced that both the advertising and price promotion legislation would now be significantly delayed with only the limits on product placement locations proceeding in October 2022. The justification is the "unprecedented global economic situation" and a desire to give the industry enough time to prepare for the restrictions on advertising. This is an extensive delay given these reforms were already in train in 2020 and the Government has already acknowledged the positive impact these reforms would have. Would the Government consider reviewing the extent of the delays and commit to an earlier date of implementation? The Government recently conducted a further consultation on online advertising. Does the Government anticipate this consultation will result in any further changes to restrictions on advertising HFSS food?
- The Committee welcomed the Government consultation on the current traffic light labelling system which closed in November 2020. However, the Government has not yet provided a response to this consultation nearly two years on. The Government

Food Strategy states it will consider how the current regime can be strengthened but delays any further detail until the publication of the Health Disparities White Paper. Could the Government provide a revised timetable for the publication of the White Paper and if possible, any further information on the plans for food and drink labelling and any other food related aspects of the White Paper?

Reformulation and regulation

- The Committee recommended that the Government should explore the application of fiscal measures when Government guidance or targets for reformulation are not being met. Part Two of the Review recommended the introduction of a Sugar and Salt Reformulation Tax, but this was not taken forward in the Government Food Strategy. Why did the Government decide not to pursue a sugar and salt reformulation tax, and how will this decision be reviewed in the future? What is the Government actively doing to review the need for fiscal measures to ensure reformulation targets are met?
- The final report on the sugar and reformulation programme was due in 2021, but it was then announced it would be published in early 2022; however, the report remains unpublished. Can the Government provide an update on when this report will be published?
- The Committee recommended the Government review the Soft Drinks Levy, including giving consideration to an extension of the Levy to include sugary milk-based drinks. In 2020 the Government stated good progress had been made in sugar reduction in milk-based drinks and that this would next be reviewed in 2022. Does the Government intend to conduct a review of the Soft Drinks Levy? When will the Government next consider the exemption of sugary milk and milk substitute drinks from the Soft Drinks Levy?

Food and the environment

- Can the Government provide further information on the Environment Land Management Scheme (ELMs) National Pilot including details of how the ELMs is being piloted, an update on progress and how the pilot is being assessed? Does the Government anticipate the original timeline for the pilot will be met? DEFRA has confirmed there is a review being undertaken on the ELMs, can the Government confirm what impact this will have on the pilot, and if there will be any anticipated delay? What is the scope of the review and is it expected that ELMs will be replaced or fundamentally changed?
- The Food Strategy did not set out what is considered a sustainable diet to be, but committed to undertake a programme of randomised control trials of interventions in the food system over the next three years to “encourage and enable healthier and more sustainable diets for all”. Can the Government provide more detail on the intended control trial interventions and how it anticipates these will inform a sustainable diet? What is the time frame for the Government to produce a revised sustainable diet guide and communicate this to the public after the completion of the trials? Does the Government intend to continue to use the Eatwell Guide until the trials are completed, despite the unrealistic cost of the Eatwell Guide for low-income groups highlighted by the Committee, or will revised guidance and information be provided prior to the trials being completed?

- The Food Strategy acknowledges that many people in the most deprived groups are not eating enough fruit and vegetables but does not include details on how to improve this. The Government committed to reviewing the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme; could the Government provide an update on when this review will take place and the resultant actions implemented? This Scheme is solely for children, so could the Government explain how it intends to tackle deficiencies in fruit and vegetable consumption in older children and adults? The Government has committed to pilot mechanisms to improve diets through the Community Eatwell programme, can the Government provide more information on the detail of this pilot and the time frames for completion?
- Both the Committee's report and the Review highlighted the importance of maintaining our health, environmental and animal welfare standards in any future trade deals. The Government Food Strategy committed to publishing a statement on the animal health and production regime that will inform negotiations. This statement is yet to be published; when does the Government intend to publish this statement? Will the statement detail standards below which any food imports cannot fall?
- Can the Government provide more information on the progress of the Farming Innovation Programme across its three funds (the 'industry led R&D partnerships fund', the 'farming futures R&D fund' and the 'projects to accelerate adoption fund')? What is the breakdown of how the funding will be distributed across the years of the Programme? What assessment has been made of the progress of the Programme? Has the uptake of the funding available been as expected and what outcomes have so far been produced?
- Further to recommendations from both the Committee and the Review the Government has committed to launch a Food Data Transparency Partnership to consider mandatory reporting requirements against health, sustainability and animal welfare metrics. When does the Government anticipate the Partnership will be established and what progress has been made to date? What organisations will be involved in the Partnership? What is the anticipated time frame for a decision to be reached on mandatory reporting?

I would be grateful if you could provide an update on all these points as well as any additional information relevant to the Committee's report.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble
Senior Deputy Speaker
House of Lords

