



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Public Sector Food and Catering Policy

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Defra's public sector food and catering policy

Includes the **Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services**: a range of mandatory and best practice standards.

Currently mandatory for:

- Central Government Departments
- NHS England Hospitals
- The Armed Forces
- HM Prison and Probation Service

£1.3 billion of spend is covered the GBSF.

Guidance


Government Buying Standard for food and catering services

Updated 18 August 2021

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Central government procurers directly or through their catering contractors are required to apply this Government Buying Standard (GBS). Others are encouraged to follow it. It includes a set of minimum mandatory standards for inclusion in tender specifications and contract performance conditions. It also includes some best practice standards which are recommended but not required.

The balanced scorecard is a supporting tool to use in order to procure food and catering services. It goes beyond production standards, resource efficiency and nutrition helping provide a comprehensive tool for setting technical specifications and evaluating bids. It includes award criteria to reward good practice, and to further stimulate investment and innovation.

Mandatory standards

The following standards are mandatory.

A. Production, processing and distribution

1. Production standards

All food served must be produced in a way that meets UK legislative standards for food production, or equivalent standards. Please refer to Annex for a list of relevant legislation.

If in any particular circumstances, this leads to a significant increase in costs which cannot reasonably be compensated for by savings elsewhere, the procuring authority shall agree with the catering contractor or supplier to depart from this requirement and

We've launched a consultation and would like to hear from you!



Seeking views on possible changes to public sector food and catering policy.

Overview

Government is adopting an ambitious and transformational approach to public sector food and catering. We are determined to use public sector purchasing power to ensure positive change in the food system. Our vision is that public sector food and catering is an exemplar to wider society in delivering positive health, animal welfare, environmental and socio-economic impacts.

We have developed a set of [proposed changes](#) to public sector food and catering policy, including the Government Buying Standards for Food and

Closes 4 Sep 2022

Opened 13 Jun 2022

Contact

Public Sector Food and Catering
Policy Team
[food.proc](#)

Related

[Consultation on possible changes to public sector food and catering policy .pdf](#)
518.3 KB (PDF document)

[Proposed public sector food and catering policy for England.pdf](#)
668.2 KB (PDF document)

[Annex 1 - Summary of proposed changes to public sector food and catering policy.pdf](#)
161.5 KB (PDF document)

Our policy objectives

1. Promote procurement of **local, sustainable, healthier** food and catering.
2. **Open up public sector supply chains** to a wider range of companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to better support local economies, increase resilience, and encourage food producers to innovate.
3. **Increase transparency** of food supply chains to drive continuous improvement and build our understanding of what is bought, served, sold and wasted in the public sector.
4. **Provide guidance and standards** that:
 - are simple and engaging
 - reflect latest scientific evidence and national sustainability priorities
 - clearly align with broader Government policies, such as the Defra waste hierarchy guidance and Government dietary recommendations



What are we proposing?

The vision: Public sector food and catering is an exemplar to wider society in delivering positive health, animal welfare, environmental and socio-economic impacts

1

Setting policy and standards

- Updating the Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services (GBSF)
- Streamlining the Balanced Scorecard into the GBSF
- Considering the scope of the policy and standards

2

Data and transparency

- New mandatory reporting on food and catering to build our understanding of what is bought, served, sold, and wasted in the public sector.

3

Support and implementation

- Developing tailored support for implementing new standards and achieving our policy objectives.

1. Proposed changes to the Government Buying Standards

Structure and appearance:

- Streamlined the Balanced Scorecard into the GBSF
- Moved best practice standards to sit alongside the mandatory requirements
- Split into three sections:
 - Food sourcing
 - Healthier, more sustainable menu choices
 - Sustainable catering services

Mandatory standards

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If in any particular circumstances, this leads to a significant increase in costs which cannot reasonably be compensated for by savings elsewhere, the procuring authority shall agree with the catering contractor or supplier to depart from this requirement and the reasons for doing so shall be noted and recorded. This decision shall be signed off by the Head of Procurement or equivalent senior official of the government department or other public body.

Procurers or catering contractors must ensure that food is verifiable as meeting these standards by either checking that farm inspection systems meet UK standards of inspection or their equivalent, or if not, that they are subject to an independent assurance system.

2. Traceability of fresh, chilled and frozen produce

Catering contractors or food suppliers shall ensure the traceability of fresh, chilled and frozen produce in accordance with current UK legislation or equivalent.

3. Authenticity

The catering contractor or supplier must have systems in place to enable it to check and ensure authenticity of products.

4. Origin of meat and dairy

In line with the industry principles on country of origin information, food and catering service suppliers shall indicate the origin of the meat, meat products and dairy products either on the menu or accompanying literature. If this is not practicable, then at minimum the information must be available and be provided on request to the procuring authority or end consumer.

Animal welfare

2. Healthier, more sustainable menu choices

| Impact area | Mandatory standards | Best practice standards | Verification of compliance |
|--|---|---|--|
| 2.1 Menu cycle and seasonality | Menus must vary throughout the year to reflect the natural growing or production period for the UK, such as cauliflower, butternut squash and venison in the winter, and new potatoes, berries and lamb in the summer. There must be at least one menu cycle change every 3 months. | Menu cycles are analysed to meet nutrient-based standards relevant for the majority of customers using the catering provision. Menus are flexible to take advantage of seasonal gluts. | Menus reflect UK seasonality and the menu cycle changes every 3 months? (Yes or No) |
| 2.2 Local and cultural engagement | Menus must support UK food traditions. For example, Lancashire hotpot, Bakewell tart, Sunday roast. Local produce, UK seasonal produce, and traditional dishes must be indicated to the consumer on menus or through other means, such as posters or websites. Menus must take account of cultural, religious, and special dietary needs of consumers. | Foods with local or regional significance are incorporated within menus to give them cultural value. For example, those with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> protected designation of origin (PDO) protected geographical indication (PGI) traditional specialties guaranteed (TSG) status | Local produce, UK seasonal produce, and traditional dishes are indicated to the consumer? (Yes or No) |
| 2.3 Animal source food origin labelling | Country or place of origin of meat, meat products, seafood, shell eggs and dairy products must be made available and provided on request to the contracting authority and end consumer. Wherever practical, this information must be indicated on either the menu or food packaging. This must be in line with the current food labelling and packaging rules , including the rule on primary ingredients and country of origin labelling. For example, a pork pie labelled 'British' that's produced in the UK with pork from Denmark, must state 'with pork from Denmark' or 'made with pork from outside the UK'. | Country or place of origin of meat, meat products, seafood, shell eggs and dairy products procured is always indicated on either the menu or food packaging. | Country or place of origin of meat, meat products, seafood, shell eggs and dairy products is made available to the contracting authority and end consumer? (Yes or No) |
| 2.4 Calorie and allergen labelling | Menus and pre-packaged food must include allergen labelling, following the allergen labelling rules . | Menus include calorie and allergen labelling where not stated in law. | Allergen labelling rules followed? (Yes or No) |



1. Proposed changes to the Government Buying Standards

Content:

- An aspirational 50% target (local and higher environmental food sourcing)
- New standards (e.g. soy)
- Updated standards (e.g. seafood)
- The nutrition standards were updated in July 2021 following consultation by DHSC and are not within scope of this consultation.

Consulting on a proposed 1 year lead time for compliance.

Impacts



Environment



Economic



Social



Animal welfare



Health

Food sourcing

All food must meet UK food and farming legislation including animal welfare standards, or equivalent.

At least 20% food spend must be on food certified to higher environmental production standards. Wherever possible, food sourcing should prioritise locally produced food and food produced to higher environmental production standards.

All seafood must be sustainably caught or responsibly farmed.

All in-shell and liquid eggs must be sourced from cage-free systems.

All palm oil, soy, cocoa, tea, coffee, and bananas must be demonstrably legal and sustainable.

Food and drink must meet energy, salt, sugar, fibre, saturated fat and pack size specifications.

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Healthier, more sustainable menu choices

Menus must vary throughout the year to reflect the natural growing or production period for the UK. There must be at least one menu cycle change every 3 months.

Menus must support UK food traditions and take account of cultural, religious, and special dietary needs of consumers.

Menus and pre-packaged food must be labelled in line with current rules on allergens and origins of animal source foods.

Menu choices must include healthier options to encourage and support people to achieve a healthy balanced diet, in line with the Eatwell Guide.

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Healthier, more sustainable menu choices

Sustainable catering services

Non-recyclable waste must be prevented by removing single use plastics wherever possible.

Customer satisfaction should be monitored and feedback addressed.

Catering services must have an energy management policy.

Opportunities for employment and routes for development within the catering service must be accessible and promoted.

Catering equipment must meet criteria in the Energy Technology List and be re-used, repaired or refurbished at end of use, where possible.

Caterers must have an equality and diversity policy in place

Catering services must use WRAP's Target Measure Act approach, or equivalent, to preventing and managing food waste.

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3

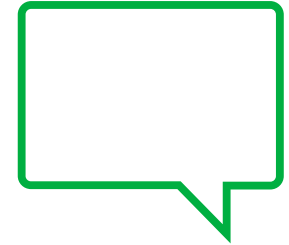
Support and implementation

- Developing tailored support for implementing new standards and achieving our policy objectives.

Give your feedback and get in touch

The consultation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/public-sector-food-and-catering-policy> (closes 4 September)



- Ellen Fletcher (ellen.fletcher@defra.gov.uk)
- Public sector food and catering policy team (food.procurement@defra.gov.uk)