

Policy name: 'Food in Prisons' Policy Framework

Re-issue Date: 9th February 2026 **Implementation Date:** 2nd February 2026

Replaces the following documents (e.g. PSIs, PSOs, Custodial Service Specs) which are hereby cancelled: PSI 44/2010: Catering – Meals for Prisoners

Introduces amendments to the following documents: N/A

Action required by:

x	HMPPS HQ	x	Governors
x	Public Sector Prisons	x	Heads of Group
x	Contracted Prisons		The Probation Service
x	Under 18 Young Offender Institutions		Other providers of Probation and Community Services
x	HMPPS Rehabilitation Contract Services Team		

Mandatory Actions: All groups referenced above must adhere to the Requirements section of this Policy Framework, which contains all mandatory actions.

For Information: In this document, the term 'Governor' also applies to the Director of a privately-managed prison.

How will this Policy Framework be audited or monitored:

- The Independent Monitoring Board ("IMB") of each prison establishment also undertakes quality assurance of the standard of food provided in their respective prison establishments as part of their regular inspection routines, which take place 2-3 times per month. The findings form part of an IMB's annual report.
- The Operational and System Assurance Group ("OSAG") conducts periodic inspection visits of prison establishment kitchens and serveries to assess food service, backed up by the conduct of Measuring the Quality of Prison Life ("MQPL") surveys of approximately 100 people at each prison every 3-4 years.
- The HMPPS Food Team conducts operational site visits to each prison establishment each year to assess food provision.
- The National Audit Office ("NAO") also undertakes occasional investigations of the prison food supply and prisoner diet and exercise.

In addition:

- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons ("HMIP") carry out inspections against 'Expectations', the criteria for assessing the treatment and conditions of those in prison, which include consideration of food (primarily as part of HMIP's 'Respect' test).

When will this Policy Framework be reviewed: The HMPPS National Food Team will review this Policy Framework and the accompanying Guidance Manual on an annual basis and re-issue the Policy Framework and Guidance Manual as required, in order to reflect any amendments required or changes to applicable legislation.

Resource Impact: No additional resource is anticipated as being required as a result of the introduction of this policy framework.

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Approved by OPS for publication: Helen Judge, Chair, Operational Policy Sub-board, July 2025.

Revisions:

Date	Nature of Change
09/02/2026	<p>Changes to Policy Framework as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusion of cross-references to current legislation (section 4.1.4) and other existing policy frameworks (sections 3.5.1 and 4.2.2);• Inclusion of requirement for consultation with interested stakeholders of compliance of food with ethical requirements, as well as religious and cultural requirements (section 3.7.1)• Inclusion of requirement for HMPPS National Food Team to undertake compliance checks (section 6.3) <p>Changes to Guidance Manual attached as Annex 'A' as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusion of clarification that Prison Catering Managers should not include an option on food ordering forms for prisoners to opt out of receiving a meal (section 3.3.1(i));• Clarification of equality obligations in relation to specific population groups (section 3.8 and Appendix 10);• Amendment to time windows for providing meals (section 4.1.2);• Inclusion of requirements for supervision of serving practices (section 4.4);• Inclusion of requirements for records to be compiled of supervision of food handlers washing their hands (section 6.3.1(d));• Inclusion of requirement to record advance preparation of hot food in the daily food journal (section 6.5.1(i));• Inclusion of requirement for the HMPPS National Food Team to review the content of the Policy Framework and Guidance Manual on an annual basis (section 8.1.2); and• Addition of further examples of best practice (Appendix 33).

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy framework aims to ensure the timely provision of nutritionally and culturally appropriate food and drink to people in prison and to young persons who are held in the Youth Custody estate, in accordance with legislation and government policy and in a safe and secure manner.
- 1.2 This policy framework aims to contribute to the strategic outcomes of the Ministry of Justice by:
- protecting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of prisoners.
 - lowering internal tension within the prison environment, so as to maintain the levels of overall safety and security for prisoners, staff and visitors; and
 - improving prisoner diet, so as to facilitate prisoners being more receptive to approaches addressing their behavioural challenges, thereby reducing reoffending.
- 1.3 This policy replaces PSI 44/2010: Catering – Meals for Prisoners and the content reflects the wider context of food in prisons, rather than just the catering operation.

2. Evidence

- 2.1 This policy framework and the associated guidance is informed by legislative requirements, scientific evidence, management information, and practical inspection reports by industry experts, including but not limited to:
- The Prison Rules 1999;
 - HM Inspectorate of Prisons Thematic Report entitled '*Life in Prison: Food*' (2016);
 - Eves, A. and Gesch, B. (2003) 'Food provision and the nutritional implications of food choices made by young adult males, in a young offenders' institution', *Journal of Human Nutrition and Diet*, 16(3);
 - Poulter, M., Coe, S., Graham, C., Leach, B. and Tammam, J. (2024) 'A systematic review of the effect of dietary and nutritional interventions on the behaviours and mental health of prisoners', *British Journal of Nutrition*, 132;
 - Ramsbotham, Lord and Gesch, B. (2009) 'Crime and Nourishment', *Prison Service Journal*, 182;
 - Zaalberg, A., Nijman, H., Bulten, E., Stroosma, L., Van der Staak, C. (2010) 'Effects of nutritional supplements on aggression, rule-breaking, & psychopathology among young adult prisoners', *Aggressive Behaviour*, 36(2); and
 - The UK Government's Eatwell Guide and dietary recommendations.
- 2.2 These and other academic studies have consistently demonstrated that food is more than fuel: it is fundamental for health, decency, security, and rehabilitation. The provision of nutritious meals that meet the diverse needs of our population supports wellbeing, safety, and stability. Shared meals build community, connection and celebrating culture fosters togetherness and mutual respect. Food-related training equips individuals with valuable life and employability skills, and combining nutritious food with education promotes recovery, reduces reoffending, and supports reintegration into the community.

3. Outcomes

Governors are accountable for delivering and monitoring the following outcomes:

3.1 Governance and accountability

- 3.1.1 Suitable, appropriately-qualified persons are appointed and empowered to ensure the delivery of the outcomes specified in this Section 3 (Outcomes) and, in particular, prison officers are shown the process by staff who have prior and regular experience of supervising the provision of the meal service.
- 3.1.2 Sufficient funding is provided from the prison budget to enable the delivery of the outcomes specified in this Section 3 (Outcomes).

3.2 Compliance with legislation

- 3.2.1 All meals and the food service provided for prisoners shall be undertaken in accordance with all current legislation relating to food handling, storage, and cooking/service.

3.3 Food safety management

- 3.3.1 All locations where food is stored, prepared, and/or served (including staff messes, visitors' centres and self-cook areas) shall be inspected regularly, by a member of the prison management team independent of the prison kitchen, and are maintained in a clean, pest-free and safe condition.
- 3.3.2 All equipment used in the provision of food for or by prisoners shall be maintained in safe working order.
- 3.3.3 A fully documented Food Safety Management System (FSMS) shall be in place, which incorporates full Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point (HACCP) procedures and daily monitoring activities.

3.4 Meal planning

- 3.4.1 The menu of food made available to prisoners (whether devised centrally by HMPPS Headquarters or locally by the prison) over the course of each week shall have been nutritionally analysed, by an appropriately skilled person, in order to ensure that it meets the nutrient standards necessary to meet the needs of the prison's population. Proof of such analysis shall be retained for audit purposes.
- 3.4.2 The menu of food made available to prisoners shall reflect the diverse needs of the prison's population, taking into account the religious and belief-based dietary needs, cultural norms and any specific medical requirements of the prisoners.
- 3.4.3 The menu of food made available to prisoners for both lunch and evening meal shall include as a minimum five options: one meat option, one vegan option, one vegetarian option, one halal option and one other option.
- 3.4.4 The menu of food made available to prisoners shall be different each day over a minimum of a four-week period.

3.4.5 The menu of food made available to prisoners shall contain sufficient information to enable such persons to make an informed choice from the menu and shall include details of any of the 14 regulated allergens which are present in the food.

3.4.6 The menu of food made available to prisoners shall, where reasonably practicable, be provided:

- in both the English and Welsh languages:
 - as standard by prisons in Wales;
 - on request by prisons in England;
- with appropriate symbols to identify the nature of the food (i.e. a cow for beef, a crescent moon for halal, etc.) to prisoners who are not fluent in English or Welsh; and
- in braille or read verbally, where necessary, to prisoners who are blind.

3.5 Meal provision

3.5.1 Drinking water shall be made available to all prisoners at all times, as required by the [Certified Prisoner Accommodation Policy Framework](#).

3.5.2 Prisoners shall be provided with a minimum of three meals a day (or more where a medical condition requires), which shall include breakfast, lunch and an evening meal.

3.5.3 Prisoners shall be provided with a substantial hot meal, chosen by the prisoner from a multi-option pre-select menu, as either lunch or the evening meal.

3.6 Serving of food

3.6.1 Meals shall be served at appropriate times of the day. Mealtimes shall be agreed with the relevant PGDs and/or EDs and/or AEDs, depending on the nature of the prison.

3.6.2 Staff and prisoners shall be made aware in advance of when meals are to be served.

3.6.3 Any persons received into the prison after the serving of the last meal of the day shall receive a hot meal which meets their cultural, dietary, religious and medical needs.

3.7 Consultation

3.7.1 Interested stakeholders (including prisoners) shall be consulted about the food process (including how the food is prepared and its compliance with religious, ethical and cultural requirements) and shall have clearly identifiable input into menu selection and food quality.

3.7.2 A designated member of the prison management team, independent of the catering operation, shall sample the food served in the prison each day (alternating between the points of preparation in the prison kitchen and the points of service) and shall provide a record of their comments to both the prison management team and the prison kitchen, on a daily basis, on whether the food is of an appropriate nature for the prison population and of sufficient quality. The records shall be reviewed on a monthly basis by the prison management team and appropriate corrective action taken to address any shortcomings identified and a record maintained of the action taken.

3.8 Security

- 3.8.1 Where prisoners are engaged in the preparation or provision of food, such persons shall be appropriately supervised and searched, in accordance with nationally and locally agreed security arrangements, including activity allocation risk assessments, area risk assessments, and levels of searching.

4. Mandatory Requirements

4.1 Legal requirements

- 4.1.1 Governors are required, pursuant to the Section 24 of the [Prison Rules 1999](#), to ensure that:

- (1) Subject to any directions of the Secretary of State, no prisoner shall be allowed, except as authorised by a health care professional, to have any food other than that ordinarily provided.*
- (2) The food provided shall be wholesome, nutritious, well prepared and served, reasonably varied and sufficient in quantity.*
- (3) Any person deemed by the Governor to be competent, shall from time to time inspect the food both before and after it is cooked and shall report any deficiency or defect to the Governor.*
- (4) In this rule "food" includes drink.*

- 4.1.2 Governors are required, under section 149(1) of the [Equality Act 2010](#), in determining the nature, portion size and nutritional content of the food served in prison, to have due regard for equality considerations from the outset, with a view to meeting the principle of equality of treatment of all persons with protected characteristics (defined in the Equality Act 2010 as being: Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage or Civil Partnership, Pregnancy & Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, and Sexual Orientation). Specifically, under section 149(1) Equality Act 2010, both HMPPS and prison establishments in exercising their functions must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010.
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and,
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

- 4.1.3 Governors are required to comply with national legislation, and European legislation incorporated into national legislation following Brexit, which relates to food, including:

- [The Food Safety Act 1990](#), which regulates food standards;
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 178/2002](#), also known as the General Food Law Regulation, which sets out the main obligations of 'food business operators' (which includes the Governor of a prison) and 'food businesses';

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 852/2004](#), which lays down procedure in matters of food safety;
- [The Food Safety and Hygiene \(England\) Regulations 2013](#) and their Welsh equivalent [The Food Hygiene Rating \(Wales\) Regulations 2013](#), which covers food hygiene practices; and
- [The Food Information Regulations 2014](#), which covers the provision of allergen information in relation to food served.

4.1.4 The requirements set out in the applicable legislation are covered in more detail in the guidance accompanying this Policy Framework but include obligations that food business operators (and thus Governors) shall:

- establish and maintain a food safety management system (FSMS).
- implement and maintain a preventative approach to food safety management designed to control significant food safety hazards that are likely to cause an adverse health effect when products are consumed. This involves identifying the stages which are critical to food safety (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP)) and ensuring that adequate controls for each such point (including the prison kitchen, serveries, self-catering facilities, etc.) are implemented, maintained and reviewed.
- ensure that those responsible for the development and maintenance of the HACCP system or operation of relevant guidelines have received adequate training in the application of the HACCP principles.
- ensure that food operators/handlers, being persons who handle or prepare food (whether open/unwrapped or packaged), are supervised and instructed and/or trained in food hygiene matters to a level commensurate with their work activities.
- ensure that food premises are clean and maintained in good repair and the condition and the design and layout of the rooms permit good food hygiene practices, including protection against physical contamination between and during operations with particular reference to fabric, structure, walls, floors, ceilings and equipment.
- provide adequate facilities for cleaning, disinfection and storage of working utensils and equipment and for the washing of food.
- keep their premises (including the prison kitchen, serveries, self-catering facilities, staff facilities and visitors' centres) free from any risk of contamination by pests. Local authorities can apply to a Magistrates' Court to close food premises which are infested by rodents or insect pests and/or there are serious contraventions of food law, if there is an imminent risk to health. Penalties for breaches of the regulations are punishable in the Crown Court by unlimited fines and up to two years in prison. Penalties in the Magistrates Court are punishable by fines of up to £5,000 for each charge on conviction.
- attach a full ingredients list to any prepacked and prepacked-for-direct-sale food products (such as breakfast packs or sandwiches made and wrapped in the prison) which are made available to prisoners, unless the food was pre-ordered, and the relevant information is made available to the prisoner at the point of ordering.

- provide mandatory food allergen information (covering the 14 substances that are required to be declared by law) relating to any food product in a form which is accurate, available, and easily accessible by the consumer, regardless of whether such food is prepacked, prepacked-for-direct-sale (PPDS) or non-prepacked.
- ensure that all food is kept at the correct temperature:
 - food which supports the growth of pathogens or the formation of toxins must not be kept above 8°C, unless:
 - it is hot food on display;
 - there is no health risk;
 - it is canned or dehydrated (until opened); or
 - it is raw food intended for cooking or further processing.
 - hot food on display must not be kept below 63°C.
- ensure that food waste, non-edible by-products and other refuse is removed from rooms where food is present as quickly as possible.
- ensure that suitable provision is made for the storage and disposal of food waste, non-edible by-products and other refuse and all such waste is kept away from food preparation and storage areas. Waste must not be returned to food production areas.

4.1.5 Governors are also required to ensure compliance with the [Separation of Waste \(England\) Regulations 2024](#), which requires non-domestic premises to:

- separate waste streams, using different bins for different types of material, including food waste;
- arrange collections of waste by a licensed waste carrier; and
- recycle specific waste materials, including food waste.

4.2 Government policy requirements

4.2.1 Governors are also required, as a matter of policy, to comply with Rule 22 of the [United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners \(2015\)](#) and ensure that:

Every prisoner shall be provided by the prison administration at the usual hours with food of nutritional value adequate for health and strength, of wholesome quality and well prepared and served.

Drinking water shall be available to every prisoner whenever he or she needs it.

4.2.2 Governors are also required, as a matter of policy, to comply with:

- [PSI-05-2016 \(Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners\)](#), which acknowledges that the ethical and religious beliefs of the persons held in an establishment will have a material impact on the diverse needs of a prison's population in dietary terms.
- [Pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units \(MBUs\), and Maternal Separation from Children up to the Age of Two in Women's Prisons Policy Framework](#), which acknowledges that pregnant women, mothers and babies should be provided with food that meets the standards issued by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).
- [Certified Prisoner Accommodation Policy Framework](#), which acknowledges that prisoners should have 24-hour access to water.

5. Constraints

- 5.1 Any derogation from this Policy Framework should be considered on a case-by-case basis and will need to be justified and discussed with and authorised in advance (where possible) by the HMPPS National Food Team, which forms part of the Rehabilitation and Change Directorate of HMPPS.

6. Guidance on compliance

- 6.1 Guidance is set out in Annex 'A' on how to deliver the outcomes set out in Section 4 of this Policy Framework and how to implement the mandatory requirements set out in Section 5 of this Policy Framework. The guidance includes recommended practice, toolkits, operating guidance, and templates for relevant documents.
- 6.2 Whilst it is not mandatory to follow what is set out in the guidance, failure to do so could be challenged and so clear reasons to depart from the guidance should be documented locally in each and every case.
- 6.3 The HMPPS National Food Team shall provide policy assurance in connection with prison catering and shall undertake, as a minimum, two assurance visits per annum to each prison in order to support Governors.