

Food Strategy Advisory Board Meeting – 12 March 2026

Attendees

- Angela Eagle MP (Chair)
- Tessa Jones, Agri Food Chain Director, Defra (Co-Secretariat)
- Mike Rowe, Farming Director, Defra
- Amy Ferguson, Deputy Director - Food Strategy, Defra
- Adnan Obaidullah, Deputy Director – FFPB, Defra
- Sir Chris Whitty, DHSC, Chief Medical Officer
- Catherine Frances, Director General at DHSC
- Natasha Burgon, Director Health Improvement, DHSC
- Rupert Daniels, Director Services, DBT
- Sarah Bradbury, Chief Executive Officer, IGD (Co-Secretariat)
- Ash Amirahmadi OBE, Chief Executive Officer, Sofina Foods
- Peter Kendall, Farmer
- Julian Marks, Group Chief Executive Officer, Barfoots
- Simon Roberts, Chief Executive Officer, Sainsburys and President of IGD
- Andrew Selley, CEO BidCorp UK
- Tim Smith CBE, Non-Executive Chairman, Cranswick plc
- Anna Taylor OBE, Food Foundation
- Susan Jebb OBE, Professor of Diet and Population Health, Oxford University
- Ravi Gurumurthy, Chief Executive Officer, NESTA
- Dalton Phillips, Chief Executive Officer, Greencore
- Roisin Currie, Chief Executive Officer, Greggs
- Tanya Steele, Chief Executive Officer, WWF
- Andrew Forsey, Chief Executive Officer, Feeding Britain

Item 1: Introduction

- Minister Eagle welcomed new members and the group confirmed there were no conflicts of interest.
- Tessa Jones provided an update on the situation in the Middle East and potential effects on the food strategy, including rising energy costs, longer trade routes, and impacts on essential inputs. She highlighted the need for price transparency on inputs such as fertiliser, and reliance on industry insight for supply-chain visibility.
- The Minister reiterated long-term priorities including tackling food poverty and developing the existing food strategy.

Item 2: Farming Profitability Review (FPR) and Farming and Food Partnership Board (FFPB)

A paper on the new Farming and Food Partnership Board and its interactions with the FSAB was tabled. Defra's Farming Director spoke to priorities for the Board, emphasising the partnership theme and the aim of starting with a small, focused membership, with horticulture and poultry as first priorities.

- Members welcomed the breadth of engagement and emphasised the need for clear success measures and a strong communication plan, and a focus on health and diet, and trade. There were suggestions of semi-regular milestones and reporting and potentially utilising task-and-finish groups.
- There was some discussion about alternative terminology to 'profitability', suggesting terms such as 'competitive' or 'productive'.
- The importance of demand – and visibility of demand – for British raw ingredients was critical, particularly where that would unlock investment. Confidence would be an early win.
- The group underlined the importance of full supply-chain representation, including feed, logistics and manufacturing. Members also suggested the use of sub-groups or task-and-finish groups to capture the breadth of the sector.
- The board concluded that clear achievable scope, with regular reporting against delivery, would set the board up for success.

Item 3: Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) and health regulations

The Chief Medical Officer and DHSC officials thanked industry for engagement and noted obesity was a major public health call to action. Sir Chris set out the data underpinning the 10 Year Health Plan and the case for intervention, including that free sugars correlate much better with bad health outcomes than total sugars. The update to the Nutrient Profile Model (NPM) tries to address this gap.

- Public health is improving, but obesity is getting worse, particularly in areas of deprivation.
- The public want government – and industry – to do more.
- People who go shopping want to buy healthily, but aren't.
- The update to the NPM does not ban products.
- Members discussed challenges around free-sugar calculation, implementation timelines, and sequencing, and reflected on early sector engagement. The Minister had chaired a roundtable, and IGD had held a technical workshop.
- The group raised concerns about SME readiness particularly and emphasised support while maintaining consistent standards. DHSC committed to pick this up through the consultation process.
- There was consensus that industry must maintain momentum to deliver meaningful change on health outcomes in this Parliament. It was important to explain clearly and simply the link between free sugars and poor health outcomes.

Item 4: Cost-of-living and food prices

The Minister set out her ambition to seize opportunities for 'hyper-local' interventions in Pride in Place areas. Tessa Jones introduced a paper on potential funding for place based approaches to support greater access to nutritious food given cost-of-living pressures. This geographical targeting reflects the overlap between areas of highest deprivation and child obesity.

- Members underlined the need to direct funding to the most impactful channels. Action should shift the system, not act as a sticking plaster. The group suggested opportunities and best practice including community food clubs, digital tools and supply-chain innovation.
- There was a significant retail footprint in the areas in question; there were offers or practical support to create impact quickly. Members highlighted the value of non-surplus models for resilience and local economic benefit.
- There was discussion about the most effective roles of National and Local Government and suggested there was value convening local partners to develop scalable solutions such as schools or charities on the ground. Trusted partners were even more important than funding, and solutions should be scalable.
- Members discussed opportunities around the Healthy Start scheme

Next steps

- Food Strategy team to produce a summary of delivery since July launch of the Good Food Cycle.
- Government to convene subgroups between FSAB meetings on Healthy Start and hyper-local interventions on increasing access to affordable food.