

## Food Standards Scotland (FSS): Food Fund Guidance for Local Authorities

### Introduction

On 18 March, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government announced a £70 million Food Fund to help organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors address issues of food insecurity, including older people, and families who may not be able to rely on free school meals. This funding covers support to both the shielded and non-shielded groups.

Food items provided to households that require support should include a range of foods which aim to meet requirements of a healthy balanced diet.<sup>i,ii</sup> Equally, we recognise that when people are in a difficult situation, the services provided must do as much as possible to maximise dignity, which encompasses feeling involved, supported and valued. This FSS guidance is designed to ensure a varied, healthy balanced diet, for all age groups, whilst meeting a number of the other food-related requirements of individuals and families, such as allergens, vegetarianism and veganism and religious or ethical beliefs.

During the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, many households may find themselves with limited access to food due to financial or health reasons. Some will have been experiencing food insecurity prior to the pandemic. Food is a vital part of our daily lives, not only for the energy and nutrients to survive but as something to enjoy and celebrate. Eating well and staying active is really important for both our physical and mental wellbeing.

We recognise that food provided by Local Authorities is being delivered under incredibly challenging circumstances. However, if possible, Local Authorities (LAs) should aim to value individuals' lived experience, encourage participation and promote choice.<sup>iii</sup>

On request of support, Local Authorities could consider a brief questionnaire for recipients, to determine matters such as allergies, religious or ethical requirements, preferences, and availability of kitchen equipment (such as tin opener and fridge/freezer). If possible, individuals can be invited to return items unused, especially unopened canned or dried goods, to ensure less waste.

This document includes:

- The main aspects of providing a healthy balanced diet<sup>iv</sup> and which foods to prioritise for inclusion
  - Information covering the 5 main food groups, plus supplementary items such as fluids
  - Advice is given on providing appropriate quantities and where possible, advice is given on providing a variety of foods, by varying the offering where possible
  - Ideally, the Food Fund provision should, where possible aim to provide a mix of fresh, chilled, frozen and ambient items, to ensure provision is palatable. However, to be most widely applicable, advice is provided in the first instance for ambient items only, with supplementary advice if refrigerated and frozen items can be provided
  - For the purposes of this guidance, a 'child' refers to a child aged from 2-12 years. Children aged 1-2 years should be moving towards eating the same foods as the rest of the family. It is not likely that a child under 2 would require a full food fund package.
- Related issues such as food safety, allergens and food waste.

## **Food Fund box query handling – FSS timelines**

Food Standards Scotland Nutrition Branch can be contacted for further advice of guidance if required.

- All enquiries to come to [dietpolicy@fss.scot](mailto:dietpolicy@fss.scot) mailbox
- Three working day turnaround for enquiries
- Mobile telephone numbers provide for urgent queries
  - Calls will be answered during office hours only
- Mailbox enquiries will answered by the FSS Nutrition Science and Policy team
- FSS will be unable to respond to specific enquiries about medical conditions, as this is beyond the remit of the organisation
  - In this event, individuals should contact their local dietetic team
- Enquirer will be informed if response time will be longer than 3 working days, for example if other FSS expertise is required
- Response will be cross-checked by another team member, before replying.

### Please note:

A log of enquiries received via phone and email will be maintained by FSS to ensure consistency across our responses.

## ***Main aspects of providing a healthy balanced diet***

The following suggestions are based on a food package supply for 7 days.

### **1. Provide starchy foods such as bread, rice, potatoes, pasta, noodles**

For one adult, for one week, consider including

- One 800g loaf of bread  
OR
- One 400g loaf of bread AND one packet of 4 rolls
  
- One 300-500g box of breakfast cereal (10-16 portions) OR one bag of plain porridge oats
- One 500g bag of pasta (6-7 portions)
- One 500g bag of potatoes (~5 portions)
- Consider including supplementary 500g bag of rice each fortnight

For one child, for one week, consider including

- One 400g loaf of bread
- One 300-500g box of breakfast cereal (10-16 portions)
- One 500g bag of pasta (7-10 portions)
- Consider including one packet of 4 rolls

White bread/rice/pasta are acceptable. Wholemeal/wholegrain items are preferable; many people will be familiar with wholegrain or brown bread. Consider including additional breads such as naan, wraps or pitta, as meal accompaniments or as an alternative for lunch and snacks. A packet of oatcakes or crackers /breadsticks could also be included to supplement the above.

### **2. Aim for at least five portions of fruit & vegetables each day**

Ensure a variety and a balance between fresh fruit & vegetables, which may go off if unused, and tinned or frozen items which keep for longer.

Five portions each day, for one adult, for one week would equate to:

- 35 portions of a variety of fruit & vegetables (~400g/day on average)
- Try to include a mixture of different types of fruit and vegetables – for example:  
20 portions of vegetables and 15 portions of fruit or vice versa

*What counts as a portion?*

- A portion of fruit or vegetables is usually counted as 80g or one whole fruit.
- A smaller amount counts as a portion for a child (from 40g up to 80g).
- Fresh, frozen and tinned can all be included, including tinned baked beans (1 portion/day).
- Dried fruit (30g) and 150ml of fruit juice can also count up to 1 portion each per day; if provided, fruit juice, should be included as a fruit portion rather than as a source of hydration.
- Tinned vegetable soup or a ready meal may count as up to 1 portion per day; it may say so on the label.

### **3. Include some meat and other non-dairy sources of protein**

FSS recommends adults consume no more than 70g red and processed meat/day (490g/week). A healthy, balanced diet also includes at least one portion of white fish and one portion of oil-rich fish per week. Where possible, Food Fund provision should consider the recipients' cultural or ethical preference for certain protein sources.

For one adult, please try to include protein sources, which could comprise of a mixture of:

- Tinned baked beans
- Tinned meats or fish including tuna, mackerel, salmon, corned beef, ham
- Tinned meat in sauce such curry or chill
- Other beans and pulses e.g. chickpeas, lentils, butter beans, haricot beans, cannellini beans, tofu, bean curd, Quorn or similar
- At least half a dozen British Lion marked (or similar assurance scheme) eggs (unless egg allergy)

### **4. Include a small amount of dairy foods or substitutes**

For one adult or one child, for one week, please include

- A minimum of 3 pints of milk (~1.5 litres) (or substitute if milk allergy)
- Consider including additional milk where families have children aged 1-2 years

Including items such as tinned custard or rice pudding will help contribute additional sources of calcium.

### **5. A need to limit the amount of food and drinks high in fat, sugar or salt**

By following the guidance here, which will help ensure that broadly speaking healthier choices are selected, it is possible to include a small amount of foods high in fat, sugar or salt, such as crisps, cakes or biscuits. Any discretionary foods that are included should be lower in fat, sugar and salt. This could include plain biscuits – e.g. digestives or rich tea, cakes without icing – e.g. madeira or fruit cake, or baked savoury snacks.

### **6. Packaged foods such as breakfast cereal, ready meals or tinned soup**

For these foods, it would be helpful to consider food labels and choose options that are lower in fat, sugar and salt where possible e.g. lower salt bread, breakfast cereal, ready meals and jars or tins. Processed and packaged foods should be chosen with as many green traffic lights for salt, fats and sugar as possible.

For tinned foods, try to choose items not tinned in salt water (brine), fruits tinned in juice, not syrup and lower sugar versions of items like custard and rice pudding. If LAs consider including ready meals in the box, please try to ensure these include a starchy food component (potatoes, rice or pasta) and at least one portion of fruit or vegetables. If including savoury pies, please do not provide more than two per week, as these items can be higher in saturated fat and salt.

## 7. Store cupboard/refrigerator items

It may be helpful to include common store cupboard items such as flour, cooking oils, spreads, table sauces and sugar, as part of the Food Fund provision, perhaps on a monthly basis. Consider including a spread such as jam, particularly if you are unable to offer a refrigerated spread.

If refrigerated delivery is possible:

- Fresh milk could be provided
- Refrigerated spread, such as a sunflower or olive oil spread
- Fresh meat, such as mince, chicken breast or thigh, diced beef, pork or lamb or chilled vegetarian alternatives such as Quorn. Choose leaner options where possible.
- Consider including a four pack or 500g tub of yogurt (low fat, low sugar if possible)
- Consider including a small block of cheese (around 200g)

If frozen food delivery is possible:

- Frozen, roast potatoes, oven chips (reduced fat where possible) or other frozen reduced fat potato items may be included
- Bags of frozen vegetables can be included; these items do not need to be included weekly for a single person, as we might expect a bag to last longer than one week
- Bags of frozen meat such as mince, vegetarian mince, chicken may be provided
- Frozen fried foods for example breaded fish or chicken should ideally be limited to one bag per week for families and one bag or box per fortnight for individual
- If possible, choose items in breadcrumbs over batter.

## 8. Fluids

It is important people are able to consume around 8 glasses of fluid each day. In addition to tea and coffee, LAs may wish to include low or no-added sugar squash to boxes on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Please try to avoid including sugary drinks in the food box offering.

### General guidance

- To meet requirements of those who have higher energy needs e.g. men with a physical occupation, it may be useful to provide additional ambient or long life food, such as pasta, bread or breakfast cereal.
- Providing onions, tinned tomatoes, tomato puree, passata, pulses and other beans will help recipients meet fruit & vegetables recommendations and are useful in making many different meals
- Eggs are generally an easy to prepare option; individuals can safely eat more than one egg a day, including pregnant woman and children over 6 months old. You may wish to provide specific food safety guidance if providing eggs: [link](#).
- You may receive requests for specific items, due to cultural or ethnic preference. Where possible, we recommend discussing these needs with recipients, to ensure requirements are understood.

### ***Cooking skills/equipment***

It may be useful to consider both cooking skills and access to kitchen equipment, such as tin openers or fridges and freezers. Local Authorities may consider provision of microwavable or over-ready meals or 'just add water' meals for those with limited cooking skills or equipment.

### **Further information and advice**

#### ***Vitamin D***

During the coronavirus crisis, the advice of FSS and the Scottish Government is that everyone (including pregnant and breastfeeding women, and children) should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D supplement to mitigate the effects of spending more time than usual indoors.<sup>v</sup> We would not expect individuals taking a prescribed vitamin D supplement to require additional supplementation.

#### ***Babies and young children***

- breastfed babies from birth to 1 year of age should be given a daily supplement containing 8.5 to 10 mcg of vitamin D to make sure they get enough
- formula-fed babies shouldn't be given a vitamin D supplement until they're having less than 500ml (about a pint) of infant formula a day, as infant formula is fortified with vitamin D
- children aged 1-4 years should be given a daily supplement containing 10 mcg vitamin D.

Too much vitamin D may be harmful. Unless your doctor has advised you differently, daily supplements at the recommended amounts will be enough for requirements. ***In particular, avoid daily high dose vitamin D supplement containing more than 100 micrograms for adults and children from age 11, more than 50 micrograms for children age 1-10 years, and more than 25 micrograms for infants under 12 months.***

#### ***Safety and enforcement***

Following good food safety practices is an integral part of managing food distribution. To be suitable for distribution, all food must be fit for human consumption and compliant with relevant food hygiene, labelling and safety legislation.

Use-by labels indicate the date by which the food must be eaten. These dates are used on perishable foods that go off quickly and refer to food safety. After this date, food should not be used even if it looks and smells fine as it may contain harmful bacteria. A best-before date is about food quality rather than food safety, so after this date has passed, the food will be safe to eat, but its flavour, colour or texture might begin to deteriorate.

Foods cannot be redistributed if they pose a food safety risk to the consumer and/or do not meet legal labelling requirements e.g. food:

- with an expired use-by date
- that has not been kept at the appropriate temperature.
- that has damaged packaging with a possibility of contamination.
- that lacks information on allergens (see below)
- that has been served to a customer
- that has been in direct contact with consumers (e.g. buffet-type service)

Make sure all storage containers have been cleaned and, where necessary, disinfected. Always follow temperature directions on the label. If the food is chilled, store at the correct temperature at all times; chilled products should be refrigerated at the specified temperature. Food Standards Scotland recommends no more than 5°C. When transporting food, make sure it is kept at an appropriate temperature at all times.

Only donate food before it reaches the use-by date, unless it has gone through a safe cooking or freezing process before the use-by date expired. Chilled food that is past its use-by date should never be presented to any person or organisation for consumption. Further guidance on redistributing pre-cooked food should be adhered to. For more information, please see FSS and Zero Waste Scotland guidance on Food redistribution, as well as Food Standards Scotland and Zero Waste Scotland food safety and infection control advice pages.<sup>vi</sup>

### *Food Business registration*

When choosing suppliers for the Food Fund boxes, please ensure that the food business is carrying out the function for which they are registered with their LA. If food businesses change business model, there may be additional food safety and food information risks to be aware of. Businesses should always speak with their Local Authority Environmental Health Department.

### ***Allergens and intolerances***

The symptoms of a food allergy differ from person to person and may include gastrointestinal complaints, skin reactions or potentially life-threatening anaphylaxis. Food intolerances are different from allergies, but can still make someone feel very ill and affect their long-term health.

There are **fourteen food allergens**<sup>1</sup> which must be highlighted on food labels, or through information such as menus, when they are used as ingredients in a food product or meal. When used in foods that aren't pre-packed, information on their presence must be available to consumers. Please be aware there are other allergens (and foods which cause intolerances) beyond the 14 that must be labelled, that should also be considered if noted by package recipients.

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<sup>1</sup> Cereals containing gluten, eggs, mustard, sesame seeds, tree nuts, crustaceans, sulphur dioxide and sulphites, celery, milk, soybeans, peanuts, fish, molluscs, lupin

## References

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/publications-and-research/publications/scottish-dietary-goals>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumers/healthy-eating/eatwell>

<sup>iii</sup> Adapted from the Report of the Independent Working Group on Food Poverty, June 2016  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/dignity-ending-hunger-together-scotland-report-independent-working-group-food/>

<sup>iv</sup> Guidance on what to include is based on eatwell everyday resource, week one. This meets macro and micronutrient requirements for an average person, over the course of one week:  
<https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumers/healthy-eating/eatwell/eatwell-everyday>

<sup>v</sup> Information from:  
<https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumers/healthy-eating/nutrition/vitamins-minerals/vitamin-d-during-isolation>

<sup>vi</sup> Surplus food redistribution guide  
[https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/RES\\_Food%20Redistribution%20Guide\\_final.pdf](https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/RES_Food%20Redistribution%20Guide_final.pdf)

Food safety information  
<https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumers/food-safety/at-home>  
<https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/food-waste/food-redistribution-covid19>