

FSS Strategy – A safe, authentic and healthier food environment that Scotland can trust

Food Standards Scotland Strategy for 2026
– 2031 (DRAFT)

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At Food Standards Scotland we have a unique role, working independently of Ministers and industry to provide advice which is impartial, and based on robust science and data.

Our remit covers all aspects of the food chain which can impact on public health – aiming to protect consumers from food safety risks and promote healthy eating.

Foreword from Chair and CEO of Food Standards Scotland

We are pleased to introduce Food Standards Scotland's Strategy for 2026–2031, which sets out our vision for a food system that is safe, authentic and healthier - and above all, one that Scotland can trust.

This strategy is rooted in our unwavering commitment to the people of Scotland. Consumers are at the heart of everything we do. Whether it's protecting public health from foodborne illness, improving dietary outcomes, or ensuring food is labelled accurately and produced responsibly, our work is driven by the need to serve and safeguard the public. We are here to ensure that everyone in Scotland - regardless of background or circumstance - can have confidence in the food they eat.

The past five years have brought profound change to the food landscape. The UK's exit from the European Union, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the growing impacts of climate change have reshaped the way food is produced, regulated and consumed. At the same time, new technologies, shifting consumer behaviours and evolving trade relationships have introduced fresh challenges and opportunities. In this context, our role as Scotland's independent food body has never been more vital.

This strategy builds on the strong foundations laid since our establishment in 2015. It reflects our continued independence from government and industry, our direct accountability to the Scottish Parliament, and our commitment to transparency, fairness and evidence-based decision making. Our work is grounded in robust science and data and shaped by the lived experiences and concerns of consumers across Scotland.

Over the next five years, we will strengthen our leadership in public health nutrition, recognising that Scotland continues to face significant challenges in diet-related health. Too many of Scotland's adults remain overweight or obese, and conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers continue to place a heavy burden on individuals, families and the NHS. We will publish clear, accessible advice and transparent data on Scotland's diet, and work with partners to create a healthier food environment that supports positive change.

We will also reform and modernise the way food law is delivered in Scotland. Our intention is to build a regulatory system that is efficient, proportionate and trusted - one that supports responsible businesses to thrive, while ensuring robust enforcement where standards are not met. This includes developing a more targeted approach to compliance, improving consistency across food law delivery, and supporting the transition to a model that is more sustainable and better aligned with the needs of consumers.

Digital transformation will be central to our strategy. Wherever possible, we will continue to invest in data science and digital technologies that allow us to collect, analyse and share information more effectively. This will help us to identify emerging risks, measure impact, and respond quickly to changes in the food system. It will also enable us to communicate more clearly with the public, tailoring our messages to different audiences and ensuring that our advice is inclusive, accessible and trusted.

We recognise that the food system is not just about safety and standards — it is also about sustainability, equity and resilience. Our strategy takes full account of the Scottish Government's ambitions for a Good Food Nation and the transition to Net Zero. We will work to ensure that our policies and actions support a food system that is environmentally responsible, socially just, and capable of adapting to future challenges.

Above all, we will continue to put consumers first. We will listen to the public, engage with communities across Scotland, and ensure that our work reflects the issues that matter most to Scottish consumers. We will expand our reach to marginalised and low-income groups and use social research to better understand how the food environment affects people's choices, behaviours and health outcomes.

Food Standards Scotland exists to help protect the people of Scotland. This strategy sets out how we will continue to do that - by safeguarding public health, promoting healthier diets, and ensuring that the food system works for everyone. We look forward to working with our partners, stakeholders and the public to deliver this vision over the next five years.

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Abbreviations

EU	European Union
FSA	Food Standards Agency
FSS	Food Standards Scotland
LA	Local Authority
NHS	National Health Service
PHS	Public Health Scotland

About us

Our role

Food Standards Scotland was established on 1st April 2015 as Scotland's public sector food body, to protect the health and wellbeing of consumers through three statutory objectives set under the [Food \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#):

- **To protect the public from risks to health which may arise in connection with the consumption of food**
- **To improve the extent to which members of the public have diets which are conducive to good health**
- **To protect the other interests of consumers in relation to food**

Through these three objectives, we:

- protect the people of Scotland from the risks of foodborne disease, poor diet and food crime
- support the nation's economy by reducing the burden of these public health harms
- provide assurance that enable the food industry to sustain the confidence of consumers and export markets in the high levels of safety and quality of the food they produce.

Our primary focus is protecting the interests of consumers in relation to food and animal feed. We work independently of industry and the Scottish Government, being fully accountable to the people of Scotland through the Scottish Parliament.

Our remit covers all aspects of the food chain, including responsibilities for verifying the safety and standards of animal feed, egg hygiene, animal slaughter operations, wine and shellfish in Scotland. We develop policy and provide advice to Scottish Ministers, food businesses, other government departments and regulators and the public on food and feed safety, standards and public health nutrition.

Collaboration is key to our work, delivering our objectives in partnership with Scottish Government departments and agencies across Scotland, the UK and globally, whilst supporting local authorities to enforce food and feed law at businesses across Scotland. As our policy responsibilities are devolved, we work closely with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and other UK government departments and regulators to ensure a consistent approach to food regulation and public health protection across the four nations (Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland) of the UK. We also work to ensure that assurance over the safety and standards of the food exported and imported takes full account of Scotland's interests.

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Our decisions are based on evidence, with recommendations and advice based on the best available science and data. This includes data relating to:

- what we eat
- the food environment
- risks to our food chain
- social, ethical and environmental factors that influence the way food is produced, supplied and consumed.

It is critical to ensure we remain trusted by consumers, and that we drive action by government and the food industry to ensure the food we eat is safe and supports the health and wellbeing of everyone in Scotland.

The difference we make

FSS makes a meaningful difference to the people of Scotland by promoting a healthier food environment and developing and implementing policies which ensure that the food they eat is safe and authentic.



We aim to protect everyone in Scotland from the impacts of poor diet and foodborne illnesses and ensure that food is authentic and labelled accurately with the information for consumers to make safe, healthy and sustainable choices.

Foodborne illness continues to place a significant burden on our National Health Service (NHS). We work closely with Public Health Scotland (PHS) and the FSA to investigate incidents and identify ways to reduce risks. We monitor trends in the incidence of infectious intestinal disease caused by pathogens which are associated with food. We use this data alongside the results of our food surveillance and research programmes to focus our efforts where they will have the greatest impact.

We support the Scottish Government in tackling the significant challenges Scotland is facing from diet-related conditions like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. Central to our work is monitoring dietary habits and commissioning research to better understand the food environment and its impact on health. This

enables us to provide recommendations and evidence that underpins dietary health policy in Scotland. We provide support for food manufacturers to reduce salt, sugar and fat in their products, and we provide clear, practical advice to support everyone in eating well. This will help to create a healthier food environment accessible to everyone in Scotland, reducing pressure on the NHS, and contribute to a healthier, more resilient population and workforce.

Helping to build a food system that benefits everyone in Scotland

Since the publication of our previous strategy in 2021, our work has evolved significantly. The impacts on the UK's food and public health environment as a result of European Union (EU) Exit, COVID-19 pandemic, and a rapidly evolving social, technological and geopolitical landscape have required us to shift the focus of our policy, science and regulatory functions. FSS must stay flexible and ready to respond quickly to change, now more than ever.

In line with developments in international trade, including the UK's new relationship with the EU, the way we deliver our risk analysis functions, and regulatory frameworks needs to adapt. This means taking account of mechanisms for four country working with the FSA and other government partners. Added to this, a changing climate and the advent of new technologies and business models are transforming the way our food is produced and sold, and therefore how it needs to be regulated.

Alongside these changes, we will be delivering this strategy in a new policy context, as wider government plans for building a more sustainable and healthy food system are implemented. This includes:

- the UK Government's National Food Strategy which has committed to considering the wider UK food system,
- the 'Fit for the Future' 10-year health plan for England, which contains elements that impact reserved issues
- the Good Food Nation Act in Scotland
- Scottish Government's new 10-year Population Health Framework which sets the direction for a healthier food environment.

We remain committed to meeting these challenges through robust science and evidence to ensure a safe, authentic and healthier food environment that benefits everyone.

Our values

Consumer and health focussed: We keep public health and consumer protection at the heart of what we do. We ensure our actions are targeted, recognising the diversity of people in Scotland and striving to reduce health inequalities.

Evidence based: We ensure our work is underpinned by robust science and data and an up to date understanding of the issues that matter most to consumers in Scotland.

Fair, proportionate and trusted: We promote compliance with food law by regulating fairly, firmly and proportionately; establishing trust by ensuring regulatory objectives are transparent and our actions are consistent and timely.

Independent: We preserve our independence, working at arm's length from government and industry. We influence UK policy development through robust risk analysis, recommending decisions which are in the best interests of consumers in Scotland.

Inclusive, collaborative and open: We respect the rights of every individual, organisation and business to have a say in the matters that affect them and work collaboratively to achieve the greatest benefit for the people of Scotland. We ensure transparency in our decision making, advice and recommendations, by publishing our evidence base and enabling those impacted to understand the issues.

Our strategy 2026 – 31

This strategy sets out our vision over the next five years and describes the priority work areas for the organisation. It takes account of the significant political, environmental, technological and societal changes that are affecting our food system. In this strategy we'll ensure our work keeps pace with consumer interests and that food safety, standards and dietary health remain at the forefront of government policy.

Our vision and how we aim to achieve it

A safe, authentic and healthier food environment that Scotland can trust.

We are committed to protecting public health and ensuring the integrity of the nation's food system. We aim to achieve our vision through the delivery of a rigorous system of food and feed safety and standards regulations that ensure policy development, operational delivery, guidance and public communications are transparent and evidence based.

Our vision for a healthier food environment recognises the critical role of diet in public health and the wider food system. By placing a stronger emphasis on monitoring the Scottish diet, and working more closely with government, food businesses, local authorities, and consumers, we will promote an environment where food safe to eat and supports the health and well-being of our population.

Our science-led approach builds confidence and trust in the food supply chain while addressing long-term health challenges linked to poor diet. We will continue to gather data and evidence on the food we eat and emerging risks. This will ensure that we remain a trusted voice which plays a vital role in shaping a food system in Scotland that supports wellbeing, fairness, and sustainability.

Over the next five years, we will continue to strengthen our role as Scotland's public sector food body by:

- protecting consumers from potential risks associated with food and feed by taking the necessary action to prevent, and investigate, all food crime and related incidents.
- working with partners to implement a proportionate and effective delivery approach that supports the food and drink industry by applying evidence based and targeted controls, recognising good practice, applying robust sanctions where appropriate and providing guidance which promotes compliance
- maintaining a robust and effective regulatory assurance regime in Scotland, working across the UK and internationally to strengthen consumer confidence and support trade
- working with the FSA to provide an effective risk analysis process for the UK and ensuring our decisions and advice are underpinned by robust science and evidence relating to public health risks and the interests of consumers in Scotland
- strengthening our leadership role in public health nutrition; enabling accountability through the publication of a transparent evidence base on Scotland's diet
- providing the authoritative source of nutrition advice and promoting partnerships which will support a healthier food environment
- ensuring consumers have the necessary information about the nutritional content and provenance of their food and can trust the food they buy
- undertaking research, surveillance, monitoring and analysis to generate a robust evidence base which enables us to understand trends in foodborne illness,

dietary behaviours assess risks, and target actions to where they are most likely to have an impact

- playing our part in supporting efforts to create a more sustainable and resilient food system for Scotland
- developing the skills of our staff and enhancing the capacity within our workforce to strengthen our use of data and digital technologies
- supporting our partners across government in ensuring policies on climate change adaptation and sustainability take full account of food and feed safety and public health nutrition.

Our strategic priorities that will make a difference to Scotland

- Public health and consumer protection
- Evolving and reforming the regulatory landscape
- Providing an effective public service for the people of Scotland

Public health and consumer protection

We will use robust science and clear evidence, risk assessments and investigations to guide our decisions and recommendations. This will help us take the right actions to keep food safe and support healthier diets, protecting people in Scotland from foodborne illness and the impacts of poor diet.

Risk analysis remains at the heart of everything we do. Maintaining and developing expertise in food safety science and policy to identify, assess, and manage risks in our food chain is a key priority. Ensuring we can deliver a robust risk analysis function is increasingly important in:

- understanding the potential risks that may be associated with emerging food technologies
- the impacts of climate change
- an evolving trading environment
- government food strategies.

Another important aspect of our risk analysis work will be to strengthen our engagement with consumers and businesses in Scotland. This is so that we can take consider their views and challenges in the recommendations we provide to Ministers on future regulatory decisions and the advice we provide to the public.

In line with our commitment to science-led risk analysis, we will keep track of emerging evidence on the role of ultra-processed foods (UPF) in Scotland's diet and their potential impact on public health. This approach will build on the existing

evidence base working with the UK Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) and academic partners to ensure our advice to consumers, stakeholders and Ministers reflects the most up-to-date scientific developments.

Reducing the impacts of foodborne illness will continue to be a priority. Working with partners we will promote a One Health approach for controlling the transmission of pathogens in the food chain. Our work in this area will remain focussed on research to understand the sources and risk factors. We will work to ensure Scottish food businesses are aware of what they need to do to produce food safely, and we will provide evidence-based advice to people in Scotland who are most vulnerable to infection.

By strengthening our leadership role on diet and nutrition in Scotland we will strive to influence positive change to Scotland's food environment and dietary health outcomes. We will do this by providing robust, evidence-based advice, shaping policy, and coordinating research. We will hold government and industry to account by publishing transparent data and reports on dietary intakes and purchasing behaviours - driving action and accountability to improve public health.

We will continue to develop our food and health research programme by commissioning research, food surveillance and dietary monitoring to strengthen our evidence base. As part of this, we will promote collaborations which enable us to influence government and the wider scientific community to build capacity and capability in food science. Collaboration will ensure research is targeted, impactful, and generates the insights needed to support our strategic aims, alongside wider food and environmental policy objectives.

We will lead, co-ordinate and support the response to food and feed safety incidents and food crime impacting on Scotland to mitigate the risks to consumers.

We will keep providing accessible and evidence-based communications that help consumers make informed choices and support businesses to understand and meet their obligations. Our guidance, tools and advice are developed to reflect regulatory requirements, public health priorities and the needs of different audiences — from industry to vulnerable consumers. This includes improving digital access to our materials, working with partners to amplify key messages, and ensuring that our communications help build confidence in Scotland's food system.

Evolving and reforming the regulatory landscape

We will work towards creating, influencing, developing, and implementing a regulatory and enforcement framework which is efficient and effective in strengthening compliance and public trust in Scotland's food system.

FSS's intention during this strategy period is to reform and modernise Scotland's food law delivery system. This will mean:

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- developing an enhanced data analysis capability to ensure resources are targeted more effectively and in ways that maximise public health outcomes
- improving the delivery of public services by ensuring that there are enough competent officials to deliver a system that is efficient and appropriately targeted to provide domestic and international assurance
- improved compliance to help mitigate costs associated with foodborne disease, estimated at approximately £729 million per year in Scotland
- reducing the cost associated with regulating the food sector through realising efficiencies, enhanced targeting, reducing demand on the public sector through greater self-service and the move from a model funded by the taxpayer to one based on business registration and cost recovery.
- meeting statutory, regulatory and organisational requirements by ensuring that there are adequate financial resources available to competent authorities to deliver an effective, efficient and sustainable system of the food controls that are required by regulations

Working towards a common Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) area

Further to announcements made at the [UK-EU Summit on 19 May 2025](#), FSS will work alongside the Scottish Government, the FSA, and other UK Government departments to plan for, implement and subsequently operate an EU/UK SPS Agreement. This work will ensure Scottish interests in relation to food safety and other general consumer protection rules within scope of FSS' policy responsibility are considered as part of any SPS Agreement negotiated with the EU.

Providing an effective public service for the people of Scotland

We will ensure the services we deliver are effective, efficient, inclusive and sustainable.

Building our digital and data capabilities

Over the past five years, FSS has made significant progress in developing a data-led and digitally enabled approach to our work, and this will continue to be a key priority throughout the delivery of this strategy.

Through this strategy, we are committed to delivering our work in a more data driven way. We will:

- continue to strengthen and enhance our digital and data science capabilities
- explore the benefits of Artificial Intelligence and cloud technologies
- optimise the quality and accessibility of the data we collect to inform decisions, measure impacts, and share insights with stakeholders

Strengthening public engagement

Public engagement is central to supporting our vision of a food system that is safe, trusted and healthier for all. We will build on our existing communications strategy to ensure our messages are clear, evidence-based and accessible to all audiences, particularly those most affected by food safety risks and poor diet.

We will continue to communicate in ways that inform, build trust and support behaviour change, while also listening more actively to the views of consumers. By strengthening our use of social research and digital tools, we aim to better understand public concerns and adapt our messages accordingly.

In addition to direct engagement with the public, we will work closely with industry and food business operators to amplify key messages and improve understanding of the role FSS plays in protecting consumers. These partnerships will be key to ensuring our messages reach as wide an audience as possible, build advocacy for our work, and support businesses to deliver safe, authentic and healthier food in ways that benefit everyone.

We will expand our engagement and communications to better reach marginalised and low-income groups, ensuring our messages are inclusive, accessible and informed by public interest and experience', supported by our new website and Accessibility & Inclusive Communications Plan.

Through this approach, we will strengthen awareness of our role, promote informed choices, and support a more transparent and collaborative food system for Scotland.

Public service reform - delivering more efficiently

We recognise that the medium to long-term projections of demand and cost for all Scotland's public services are extremely challenging. The immediacy of this means we must continue to deliver efficiencies and make more effective use of resources to deliver services while reducing demand and cost and improving outcomes for the people of Scotland.

The Scottish Government launched the [Public Service Reform \(PSR\) Strategy](#) in summer 2025 to overhaul the way public services are delivered, with a focus on early intervention, prevention, and citizen-centred outcomes. PSR is core to achieving a fiscally sustainable Scotland, focusing on aligning spending with strategic priorities through a new [fiscal sustainability delivery plan](#).

We are fully committed to working with and progressing PSR principles of whole system working with national bodies LAs, the third sector, and communities. FSS was allocated a proportion of monies from the Scottish Government's £30 million "invest to save funds" (2025-26) to support efficiency and productivity improvements tied to reform. The FSS programme to reform and modernise the delivery of food law in Scotland is considered groundbreaking and early testament to our public service reform ambitions.

Supporting sustainability

We will continue to take account of the increasing focus on wider government policy for tackling the impacts of climate change and making our food system more sustainable and resilient. This means ensuring FSS delivers sustainably at organisational level and that we consider environmental and societal impacts in all policy, operational and corporate aspects of our work.

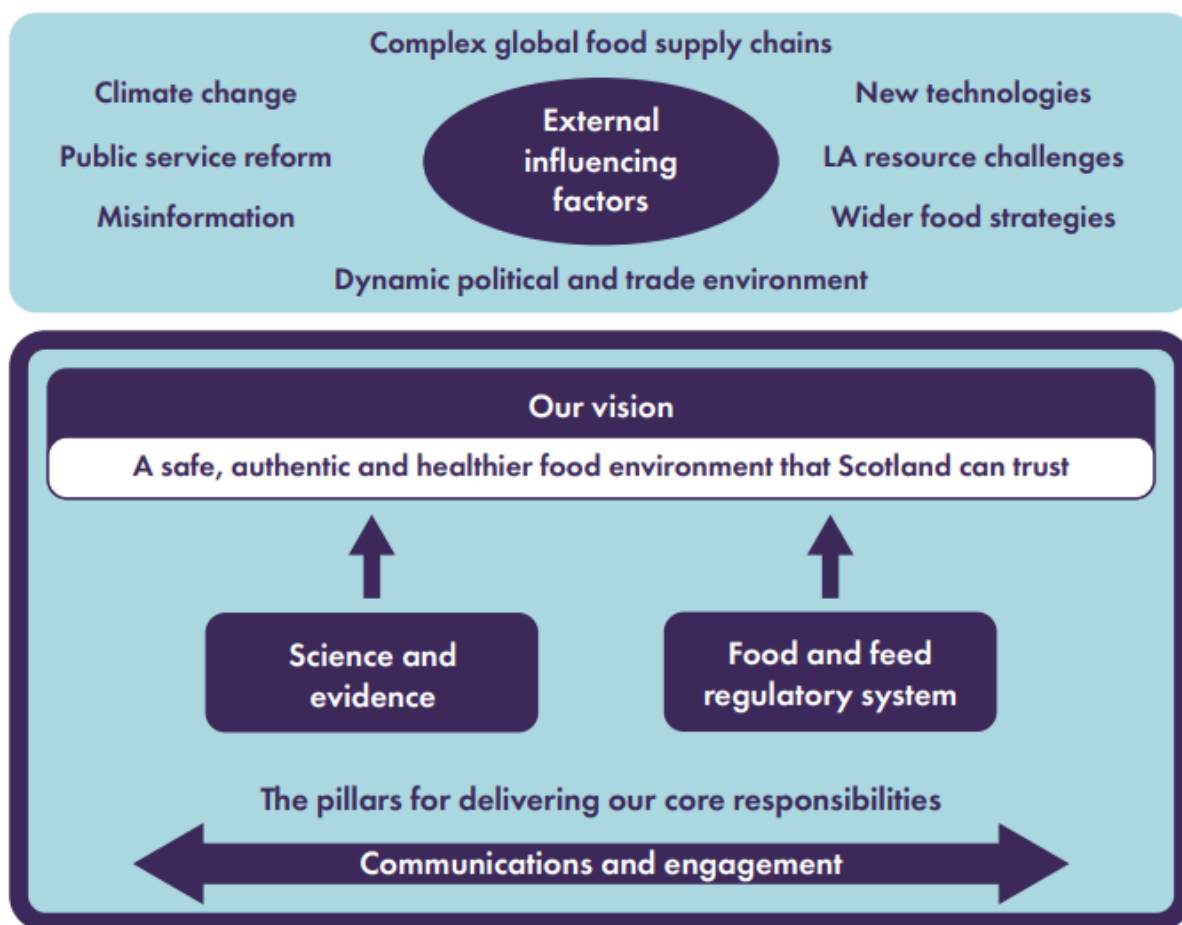
We understand the important role we must play in supporting the Scottish Government to deliver their ambitions for Scotland as a Good Food Nation, and its transition to Net Zero. This will help create a healthy, sustainable and equitable food environment for everyone in Scotland.

Making progress towards the Scottish Dietary Goals will improve health outcomes but also support climate objectives by reducing emissions associated with our current food system. Diets aligned with the Eatwell Guide can significantly reduce environmental impact while improving population health. It will therefore be essential to explore synergies between dietary health and climate goals, working closely with government, industry, and public sector partners to identify opportunities for action that benefit both health and sustainability.

Navigating a complex operating environment

Understanding a complex operating environment is vital for FSS to deliver on behalf of the people of Scotland. We will monitor and review external factors that may influence the delivery of this strategy.

Annual delivery plans will give us the flexibility required to move with changing times and external influencing factors as they emerge.



Science and Evidence

Our food and health research programme provides the framework for commissioning research and surveillance. This:

- underpins policy on food safety and public health nutrition
- supports the effective delivery of our regulatory functions,
- develops the evidence base needed to keep pace with a dynamic food system and emerging technologies

We collaborate and engage across sectors to:

- optimise the impact of research and data
- ensure the evidence base aligns with public health priorities
- drives accountability
- support wider food policies and climate goals

Food and feed regulatory system

A robust food and feed regulatory system in Scotland protects public health, and consumer interests. It also ensures both domestic and international markets have the assurance of a broad regulatory framework to support trade. We will:

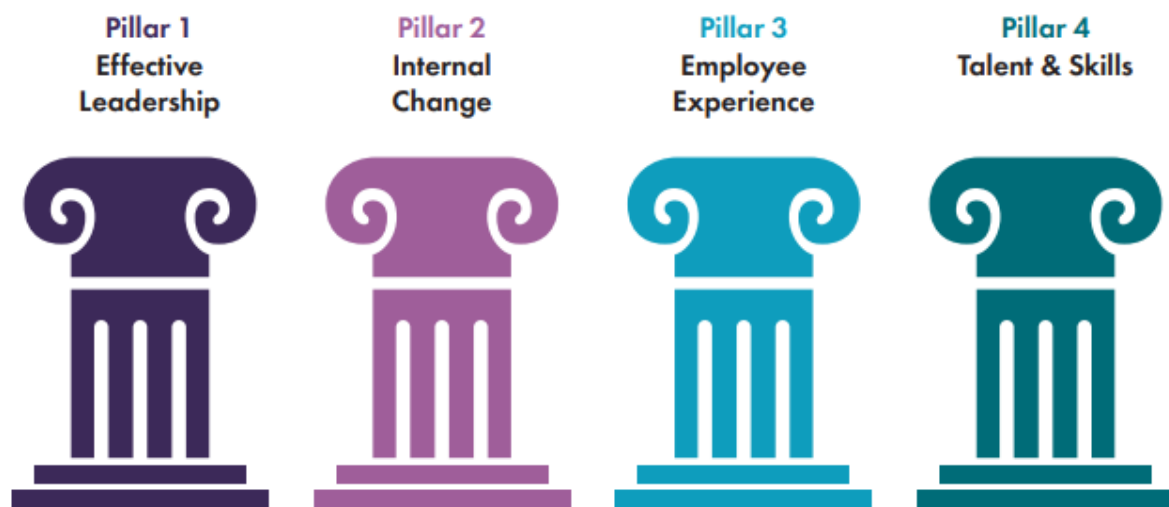
- identify and develop Scottish policy and programme priorities in relation to food and animal feed, advising Scottish Ministers on relevant legislative and non-legislative mechanisms for enacting that change to ensure the continued protection of public health in Scotland
- review and redefine performance standards for LA food law delivery in Scotland where required
- carry out systematic and independent internal and external audits which seek to verify and validate the effectiveness and suitability of the food and feed regulatory framework in Scotland
- continue to support inward and outward missions to support exporting businesses and provide robust evidence of an effective regulatory assurance system

Supporting high performance

Our people and skills

We operate within a dynamic and evolving landscape, where we need to actively address challenges through effective workforce planning, organisational review and other forward-looking initiatives. This enables us to become more agile with a skilled, fulfilled and motivated workforce, that is treated fairly, able to work in flexible ways and maintain our position as an employer of choice in a challenging marketplace.

Our strategic people-related outcomes, objectives and priorities are framed around four core 'pillars' with equality, diversity and inclusion flowing through each. They are at the heart of what we do.



1. **Effective leadership** - Our leaders inspire a positive culture which inspires diversity, where staff feel challenged and motivated to succeed.
2. **Internal change** - FSS is committed to pursuing change to grow and perform at our best and ensure our leadership and employees are well supported to make change happen.
3. **Employee experience** - Strive to ensure that we have a healthy and energised workforce where the employee experience remains at the heart of all we do, every interaction is checked against how it contributes to making people feel safe and valued, that they belong and have safe connections.
4. **Talent and skills** - People are our best asset, we will manage talent strategically to build a high performing workforce, foster a learning climate, add value to our employer brand and improve diversity management.

Finance

Our financial strategy for the next five years will be developed to support FSS's strategic ambitions. It will ensure that resources are aligned with strategic priorities, risks are managed effectively, and value for money is achieved across all activities. The finance function will play a critical role in ensuring the organisation remains financially resilient, transparent, and responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Sustainable funding and resource allocation

- ensure that FSS is adequately funded to deliver core statutory functions and strategic initiatives
- advocate for multi-year budget settlements to enhance financial certainty
- Embed outcome-based budgeting to align resources with strategic goals and performance indicators
- Optimise use of public funds through effective cost controls and prioritisation processes

Financial governance, assurance and risk management

- maintain robust governance frameworks that support accountability and compliance with the Scottish Public Finance Manual (SPFM)
- strengthen internal controls, audit readiness and risk management to safeguard public assets
- Implement dynamic forecasting models to proactively manage financial risk across programmes and projects

Strategic finance partnership and value creation

- collaborate cross-functionally to ensure financial insights shape strategy, policy and operations
- foster innovation in procurement and commercial arrangements to maximise value for money
- support digital transformation and sustainability through financially viable investment appraisals
- enhance financial reporting to promote transparency and support stakeholder engagement

Delivering our strategy

This strategy articulates our vision:

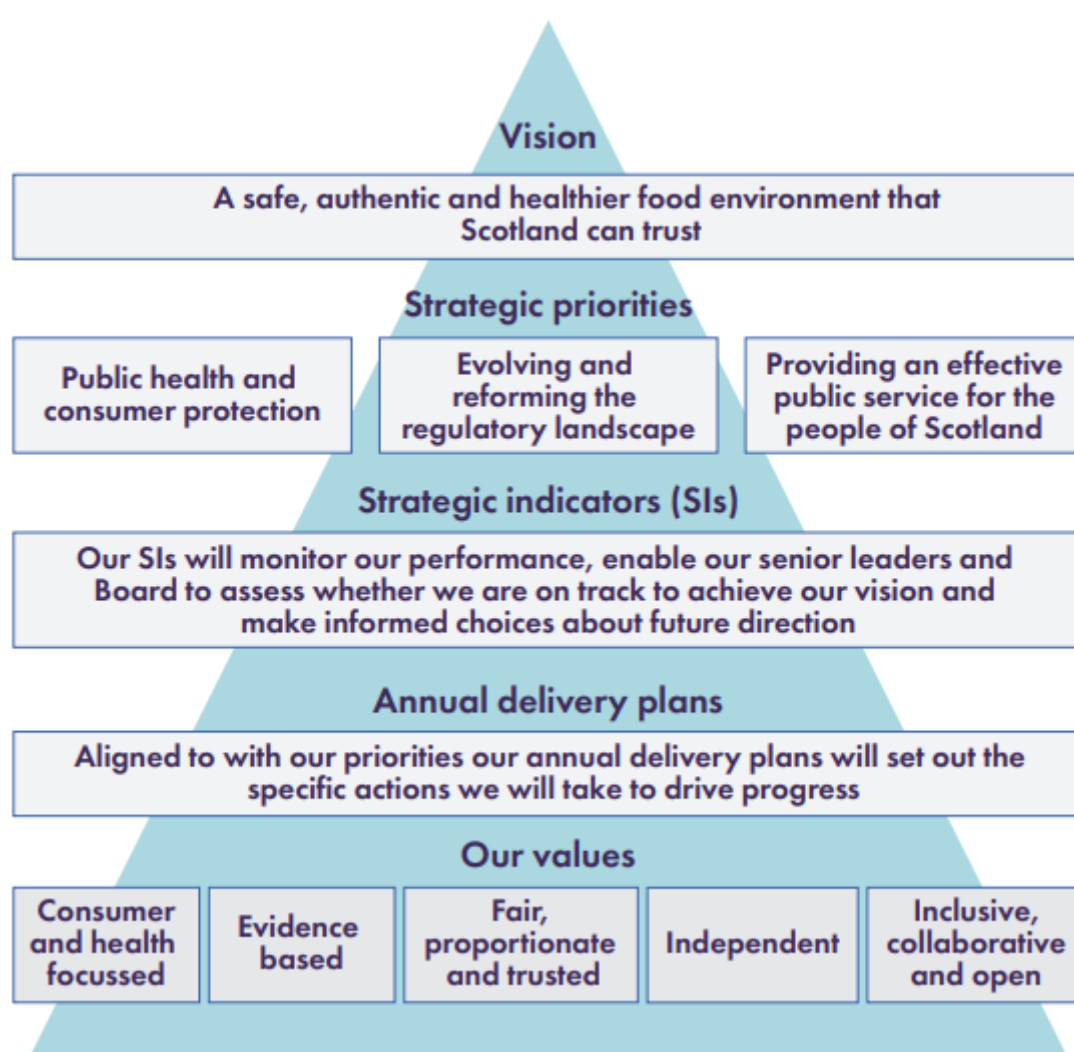
“A safe, authentic, and healthier food environment that Scotland can trust.”

Our vision is underpinned by statutory objectives and strategic priorities, which guide our direction and decision-making. To deliver on this ambition, we will develop annual delivery plans aligned with our priorities. These plans will set out the specific actions we will take to drive progress.

To ensure accountability and transparency, we will monitor our performance using strategic indicators. These indicators will enable our senior leadership and Board to assess whether we are on track to achieve our vision and make informed decisions about future direction.

At the heart of everything we do are the values that shape how we operate — across all levels of the organisation. These values inform our behaviours, our culture, and our approach to delivering our vision.

The relationship between our vision, strategic priorities, SPIs, delivery plans, and organisational values is illustrated in the diagram below.



Our Board will ensure that appropriate governance arrangements are in place to facilitate the delivery of our vision and strategic priorities.

When requested, or when appropriate, the Board will provide strategic advice and guidance to the Scottish Government, Ministers and other public bodies on all areas within our remit. In line with the overarching framework of the Food (Scotland) Act

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2015, the Board approves our strategic direction as set out in this this five-year strategy.

We will continue to apply appropriate levels of governance, accountability and independence from industry and the Scottish Government. Ultimately, FSS is accountable to the people of Scotland through the Scottish Parliament, ensuring transparency and public trust in our performance.