

FSS Strategy 2026 - 31

1 Purpose of the paper

- 1.1 This paper is to advise the Board of the progress to date on producing the 2026 – 31 Food Standards Scotland (FSS) Strategy (the Strategy) and to canvas views on the draft Strategy Framework (**Annex A**).
- 1.2 The Board is asked to:
 - **Discuss and provide a view** on our strategy progress to date.
 - **Discuss and provide input into** the draft Strategy Framework
 - **Discuss and agree** the revised strategy timeline
 - **Discuss and provide a view** on the questions raised in **section 6**.

2 Strategic aims

- 2.1 Due to the strategic nature of the Strategy this covers all 5 FSS Strategic Outcomes.

3 Background

- 3.1 FSS came into being in April 2015 and we developed our first 5-year strategy (2016 – 21). Then on 19 May 2021 we published our [Strategy for 2021-26](#) which set out our vision and described how we would meet our statutory objectives over the five year period, building on the progress we have made since FSS was established in 2015.
- 3.2 We also published our [2021 – 24 Corporate Plan](#) which described how we would turn the ambitions of our strategy into actions. Then in May 2024 we published our new [2024 – 26 Corporate Plan](#) which describes how we are continuing to deliver, and our focus, for the remaining two years of the Strategy.
- 3.3 In 2024 the Senior Leadership Group (SLG) and FSS representatives attended events relating to the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) and the International Heads of Food Agencies Forum (IHFAF). The feedback from these events helped shape thoughts and ideas for the strategy moving forward.

4 Strategy development work to date

- 4.1 In August 2024 the FSS Board Chair and FSS CEO undertook an assessment of where FSS stands against the [WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety 2022-2030](#). The reasoning behind the assessment was to review the World Health Organisation (WHO) model of what a good food nation strategy should look like, then assess where FSS aligns against the WHO's strategic objectives (**Annex B**). This would then result in a reasonable strategic first pass at identifying (and prioritising) areas our next strategy could be focused on.
- 4.2 On the 31 October 2024 the Heads of Division participated in a facilitated workshop to review the above initial assessment. The workshop focused on reviewing and providing feedback on this assessment and populating the document further in terms of evidence and actions.
- 4.3 The above resulted in a Boston Matrix (**Annex C**) which mapped the WHO strategic objectives into the areas below:
- 'high impact / high priority' quadrant would be the areas we would be prioritising / actioning over our next strategy;
 - 'high impact / low priority' quadrant are the areas we are justifying;
 - 'low impact / high priority' quadrant are on our 'good to do if the resources appear pile'; and
 - 'low impact / low priority' quadrant are areas we watch and monitor when the strategy is reviewed.
- 4.4 Also informing our new strategy are 4 significant pieces of 'research to insights' undertaken by our Communications and Marketing (C&M) team. This research helps identify emerging challenges and opportunities. These are noted below, with full outputs included in **Annex D**.
- 4.4.1 Food in Scotland Consumer Tracker (Wave 19, 2025) which provides real-time insights into consumer attitudes and behaviours around food
- 4.4.2 Food and You 2 (Wave 8, Scotland, 2024) which Investigates public attitudes on food safety, diet, and food security.
- 4.4.3 FSS web user research – business and stakeholders (2024) where we engaged with food businesses, local authorities, and stakeholders to assess their needs and challenges.
- 4.4.4 FSS web user research – consumers (2024) which examined consumer interactions with the FSS website, revealing barriers to navigation and accessibility.
- 4.5 The Head of Corporate Services and Head of Corporate Support Branch have also liaised with our Board Champion ahead of drafting our strategy framework. Early

discussions highlighted that Education Scotland, and the National Health Service (NHS) are also running a similar timeline with producing their new strategies. It was agreed establishing a working group with representatives from all parties would be beneficial in sharing lessons learned, approaches and challenges in our strategy development and delivery. This group met February 2025 with a further meeting planned 29 May 2025.

5 The strategy framework

5.1 A strategy framework (**Annex A**) was developed based on outputs from the items in **section 4** and on the 26 February 2025 the Heads of Division and SLG participated in a facilitated workshop to review the draft strategy framework. The workshop focused on confirming the focus of our strategy, defining our guiding principles and reviewing the vision and mission statements. In adopting the agreed principle of 'keeping it simple' the following was recommended, subject to the Board's agreement as noted in **section 6.1.1**:

5.1.1 The flow / framework of the Strategy was fit for purpose.

5.1.2 The focus of our 2026 - 31 strategy will be the delivery of our 3 statutory objectives as defined in the Food (Scotland) Act 2025.

5.1.3 Our vision statement will be "A safe and healthier food environment that Scotland can trust".

5.1.4 Remove the mission statement.

5.1.5 Our five guiding principles / values to remain as is.

5.1.6 The measurement of success for our strategy to be through monitoring of our annual delivery plans.

6 Questions for the FSS Board consideration

6.1 The Board's views on the items below are appreciated:

6.1.1 Are the Board content with the recommendations noted in **section 5**.

6.1.2 Our previous strategies focused on both what FSS are here to do and how we were going to deliver. Although a reasonable approach, our previous strategies were de-railed by external events such as EU Exit and the pandemic. It is therefore our proposal to focus this strategy on the purpose of FSS i.e. our statutory objectives, our operating environment and utilise separate annual delivery plans to detail the how we are going to deliver.

6.1.3 Aligned to **section 6.1.2**, in our strategy research, the strategies that stood out were those who adopted the 'less is more' approach. Does the Board support this approach, i.e. one that concentrates on reducing the narrative and utilising graphics where appropriate to convey our message.

6.1.4 Our SAFER programme of work is dependent on several factors currently out with our control. Given the uncertainty does the Board recommend that we draw out SAFER specifically in our Strategy (as per page 7 in Appendix A) as an item FSS are committed to delivering.

7 Next steps

7.1 Following the March 2025 Board discussion the strategy framework will be updated to reflect feedback and further work will commence with subject matter experts to develop content throughout the framework.

7.2 Work will also progress with our C&M team to:

7.2.1 Review the practicalities of hosting our Strategy on new FSS website to allow readers to navigate through content. This also allows for up-to-date content to be loaded if needed, and for us to utilise links from the Strategy to relevant areas of the website.

7.2.2 Utilise the new Website Project Writing Guide to ensure consistency in style when developing our strategy.

7.2.3 Plan for the consultation phase of the strategy which will target stakeholders including Local Authorities, Food Business Operators, consumers and other identified stakeholders.

7.2.4 Our revised detailed timeline can be found in **Annex E** and the milestones, including updates to Board, are noted below.

Date	Milestone
31/10/24	Workshop to review outputs of WHO assessment (Heads of Divisions and Senior Leadership Group)
09/01/25 – 11/04/25	Draft strategy framework
26/02/25	Workshop to review strategy framework (Heads of Divisions and Senior Leadership Group)
26/03/25	FSS Board meeting (feedback on strategy framework)
01/04/25 – 30/07/25	Further develop strategy content
18/06/25	FSS Board meeting (development & progress update)
01/08/25 – 12/09/25	Public consultation
17/09/25	FSS Board meeting (development & progress update)
28/10/25	FSS Board Away Day (update including public consultation results)
10/12/25	FSS Board Meeting (Approve strategy & supporting governance docs)
15/01/26	Submission to Minister “To notify the Minister of the launch of FSS’s new Strategy for 2026-31.”
20/01/26	Stakeholder event
TBC/01/26	Formal launch date (to align with FSS Board if possible)

8 Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty

8.1 Equality Impact (EIA) and Fairer Scotland Duty (FSD) assessments are not considered necessary for this paper. The purpose of the paper is to provide an update on our approach to developing the new Strategy. We will complete the EIA and FSD (outlining the socio-economic and inequality factors we need to consider when developing and implementing our new policies and initiatives as part of the Strategy) to support the 2026 to 31 Strategy and they are scheduled for Q4 2025/26.

8.2 Conclusion

8.3 Feedback received by the FSS Board on 26 March 2025 will be considered when continuing to develop the Strategy. The Board Champion will also continue to be consulted at regular intervals.

8.4 A Steering Group has been established and will meet regularly to ensure the development of the Strategy remains on target and actions are being completed. The Steering Group will report progress to the Strategy Forum, for accountability and oversight purposes.

8.5 The strategy development timeline (**Annex D**) details the points at which progress updates / areas for discussion will be presented to the FSS Board. The schedule will be monitored by the Steering Group with escalation to the Strategy Forum as required.

8.6 The Board is asked to:

- **Discuss and provide a view** on our strategy progress to date.
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Please direct queries to:

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Annex B: WHO Strategic Objectives

Strategic Priority 1: Strengthening national food control systems

Strategic Objective	Description
SO 1.1	Establish a modern, harmonized and evidence-based framework of food legislation
SO 1.2	Establish an institutional framework to co-ordinate the work of different competent authorities that manage national food control systems
SO 1.3	Develop and implement fit for purpose standards and guidelines
SO 1.4	Strengthen compliance, verification and enforcement
SO 1.5	Strengthen food monitoring and surveillance programmes
SO 1.6	Establish food safety incident and emergency response

Strategic Priority 2: Identifying and responding to food safety challenges resulting global challenges and food system transformation

Strategic Objective	Description
SO 2.1	Identify and evaluate food safety impacts arising from global changes and food system transformations and movement of food.
SO 2.2	Adapt risk management options to emerging foodborne risks brought about by transformation and changes in global food systems and movement of food.

Strategic Priority 3: Improving the use of food chain information, scientific evidence and risk assessment in making risk management decisions

Strategic Objective	Description
SO 3.1	Promote the generation and use of scientific evidence and risk assessment when establishing and reviewing food control measures
SO 3.2	Gather comprehensive information along and beyond food chain and utilise these data when making informed risk management decisions.
SO 3.3	Source food safety information and risk analysis experience from beyond national borders to strengthen risk management decisions and technical capacity.
SO 3.4	Consistent and transparent risk management decisions when establishing food control measures.

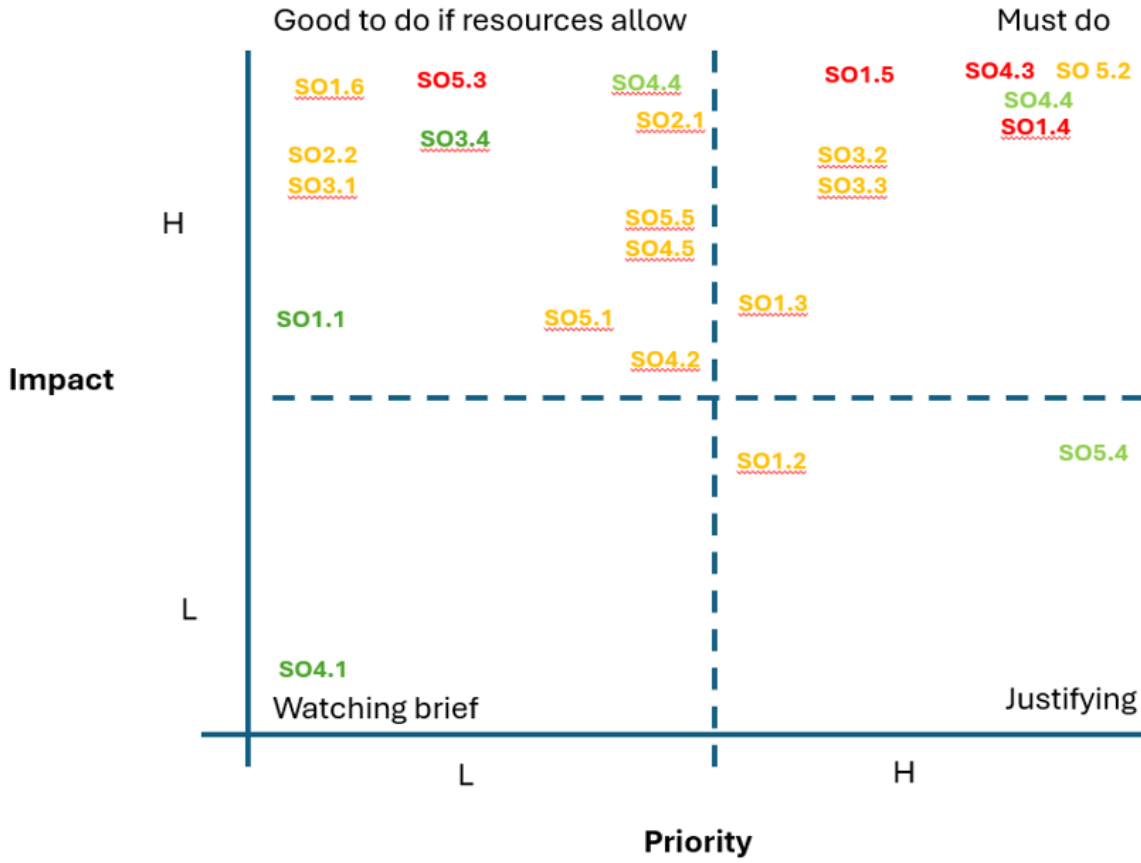
Strategic Priority 4: Strengthening stakeholder engagement and risk communication

Strategic Objective	Description
SO 4.1	Establish platforms for consultation on the national food safety agenda.
SO 4.2	Assess the pertinence of using non-regulatory schemes for enhancing food safety across the food chain.
SO 4.3	Establish frameworks for sharing verification of compliance with food safety regulatory requirements.
SO 4.4	Facilitate communication, capacity building and engagement with FBOs and foster a food safety culture
SO 4.5	Facilitate communications, education and engagement with consumers

Strategic Priority 5: Promoting food safety as an essential component in domestic, regional and international food trade

Strategic Objective	Description
SO 5.1	Strengthen food control systems and capacity development in regulatory systems for the domestic market.
SO 5.2	Strengthen interaction between national agencies responsible for domestic food safety and those facilitating international fair-trading practices.
SO 5.3	Ensure that national food safety systems are aligned with the standards of Codex to protect public health and facilitate trade.
SO 5.4	Strengthen engagements of national competent authorities with international agencies and networks that establish standards and guidelines for food.
SO 5.5	Facilitate communications, education and engagement with consumers

Annex C: Boston Matrix



Annex D: Research to Insights

Using existing research to inform our organisational strategy (2026-2030)

To help inform the strategy, we can draw on existing research to identify emerging challenges and opportunities. Insights from consumer behaviour, business needs, and public health trends can help shape our approach. Additionally, as with the previous strategy, stakeholder consultation and testing will be important post-development - perhaps to a lesser extent given we can draw on previous findings - to validate our direction and refine implementation plans.

This section aims to support the strategy development work and stimulate discussion/ debate by EMT/ Strategy forum:

Key research insights

K Smith has identified four key research sources, but there are undoubtedly others:

1. Food in Scotland Consumer Tracker (Wave 19, 2025)

Summary: Provides real-time insights into consumer attitudes and behaviours around food. Insights:

- Highlights that affordability, food safety, and healthy eating remain top concerns for consumers.
- Increasing concerns about ultra-processed foods (81%) and food poverty (80%) suggest a need for targeted consumer education and intervention.
- Consumers continue to trust Food Standards Scotland (FSS) but awareness of our broader role beyond food safety is limited and engagement with our services, including the website, also remains low.
- Research indicates that consumers struggle to maintain a balanced diet due to affordability, availability of unhealthy foods, and personal habits.
- Over two-fifths (43%) of consumers have some form of eating constraint, making accurate labelling information critical. This includes 24% who said they have food allergies, intolerances or avoid certain foods for medical reasons
- Public concern over the nutritional content of food, particularly sugar, salt, and fat levels, remains high.

Relevance: Supports our work in consumer protection by highlighting areas for focus and improved public engagement.

2. Food and You 2 (Wave 8, Scotland, 2024)

Summary: Investigates public attitudes on food safety, diet, and food security.

Insights: Reinforces concerns over affordability, nutrition, and foodborne risks – as per the tracker. While confidence in food safety remains high, economic pressures impact healthy eating choices.

Relevance: Contributes to our public health and consumer protection goals by reinforcing the need for targeted interventions to improve food security and nutrition.

3. FSS web user research – Business and stakeholders (2024)

Summary: Engaged with food businesses, local authorities, and stakeholders to assess their needs and challenges.

Insights:

- Found that businesses often rely on local authorities rather than FSS (specifically the website) for guidance highlighting a gap in direct engagement.
- Compliance with food safety regulations is perceived as complex and resource-intensive.
- Businesses and regulators seek clearer, streamlined guidance on regulations, particularly on food crime, allergens, and industry-specific compliance.

Relevance: Informs our food safety and consumer protection priorities by identifying areas where regulatory guidance can be simplified. Essentially this relates to SAFER. It also highlights the need to develop direct engagement strategies with businesses, offering clearer, more accessible regulatory guidance and practical support.

4. FSS web user research – Consumers (2024)

Summary: Examines consumer interactions with the FSS website, revealing barriers to navigation and accessibility.

Insights: Consumers value food safety guidance but often struggle to locate relevant information efficiently.

Relevance: Perhaps less relevant to the strategy development but informs our work by ensuring consumers can easily access the information they need.

Summary of key points

- Enhancing consumer trust and engagement through digital improvements and targeted communication.
- Strengthening food safety education and affordability initiatives.

- Improving business and stakeholder support by simplifying regulatory guidance and strengthening partnerships.
- Enhancing allergen awareness and ensuring compliance with food safety standards.
- Promoting/ supporting policies that contribute to healthier dietary habits.

Limitations

- Reports such as Food and You 2 and the Consumer Tracker are useful for gauging attitudes, but they primarily rely on self-reported behaviours rather than observed actions.
- The research acknowledges concerns around food affordability and nutrition but does not deeply explore the barriers (e.g., supply chain constraints, retail practices, policy interventions) that impact food security.
- Research insights focus on current consumer and business needs, but do not fully explore future trends, such as climate-related food safety risks, technological changes in food production, or evolving dietary patterns.

Consultation and testing

To ensure the strategy is effective and aligns with stakeholder and consumer needs, we should engage in a structured consultation and testing phase. This should include stakeholder engagement with businesses, local authorities, and public health partners to refine priorities and implementation plans.