

BACKGROUND NOTE FOR S6O-00911

CONFIRMED SUPPLEMENTARY

Q. As the Cabinet Secretary will be aware, Ayrshire Food an' a That in my constituency aims to identify and promote new opportunities for food and drink in Ayrshire including in areas of activity such as local procurement, education and skills, and training. Does the Cabinet Secretary share my view that organisations such as this are vital to continuing the good work that Scotland has accomplished in our cultural approach to food, as we strive towards our ambition of being a Good Food Nation?

A. Yes I do, it is clear to me that the Regional Food Groups have a pivotal role to play in telling Scotland's fantastic Food and Drink stories and will also be fundamental to the delivery of the next phase of Ambition 2030 at local and national level. I also envisage the groups playing a key role as we look to develop national and local good food nation plans as part of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. The groups will also be important partners as we develop our Local Food Strategy based on our recent consultation.

POSSIBLE SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Q: Why do we support these Groups?

MAIRI GOUGEON: All regions of Scotland have their own food and drink story to tell. This partnership model allows groups, local authorities, Scotland Food & Drink and other partners to work hand-in-hand to develop and strengthen their regional food and drink and there are many examples of successful projects and initiatives countywide with a full evaluation report of first year nearing completion.

Q: There are two RFGs within Ayrshire, and this support has crucial to their development, can the Scottish Government confirm that funding will continue to be provided towards the groups?

MAIRI GOUGEON: The Scottish Government, through the Scotland Food and Drink Recovery partnership have provided £250k in both 2020/21 and 2021/22 and intend to fund at the same level next year. I have written only last week to Local Authorities to thank them for their continued support and encouraging ongoing funding for next year.

Q: The two Groups in Ayrshire – Ayrshire Food and A That and Arrans Food Journey - have delivered some real successes since their establishment and funding, such as creation of online directories and even the establishment of the first ever Farmers Market in Arran, does the Cabinet Secretary agree that regional groups are fundamental to the ongoing success of the sector as move out of the pandemic?

MAIRI GOUGEON: Yes, it's not just about the flagship events and initiatives that everyone sees, I know that a lot of work goes on behind the scenes. These groups, have, for the first time allowed local producers and networks to have a foot in the camp of local authorities, which is helping with all matters of business, from planning queries, to regular meetings on increasing local sourcing and more. It is an extension of the collaboration, at a much more local level, and what has served the sector so well.

Siobhian Brown is the SNP constituency MSP for Ayr and is the convener of the Covid-19 Recovery Committee.

There are two Regional Food Groups operating within Ayrshire, both funded jointly by all three Ayrshire Local Authorities. The Groups and some key achievements/workstreams are detailed below:-

Ayrshire Food And A' That

- Creation of Ayrshire Connect online directory in collaboration with Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce
- Helping to develop the visitor economy workstream within the Ayrshire Economic partnership including linkages between the workstream and businesses.
- Currently developing the food and drink Economic Plan in collaboration with Arran RFG
- Leading on local procurement in local schools across the three authorities in Ayrshire including regular monthly meetings with the three local authorities to continue progress

Arran's Food Journey

- Setting up of the regional food group Arran's Food Journey, getting 49 supporters and many stakeholders involved with it.
- Creating Arran's Food Journey's website, social media channels and high-quality promotional videos
- Integral part of team that successfully delivered Arran's first farmer's market.
- Growing the relationships and cooperation of the Ayrshire Economic Partnership food and drink team:-
 - A partnership has been developed with Arran's Food Journey being part the Ayrshire Economic Partnership Food and Drink team. An 18-month plan has been developed
 - A joint marketing programme between Arran and Ayrshire's Regional Food Groups and the Ayrshire Economic Partnership has been awarded funding from the VS Destination Fund
 - Relationships with North Ayrshire Councils business support team have been developed and has resulted in grant being received towards the 'Arran Food To Market' Project

REGIONAL FOOD GROUP WORK (RFGs)

Background

The importance of Scotland's regional food groups has long been recognised by Scotland Food & Drink (SF&D) and through Ambition 2030, but the UK Market Development (UKMD) Home Advantage strategy, with its ambition to grow domestic sales, placed a new focus on the regional agenda and, specifically, the role of the groups in growing and developing their local food and drink businesses. The Food and Drink Recovery plan put in place to support the Industry through Covid and Brexit strengthened this further with a commitment to supporting regional growth; and the national food tourism plan, Food Tourism Scotland, also placed a strong call of action to the regions to align their plans that would contribute to Scotland becoming a renowned destination for unique and memorable food tourism experiences.

The Fund

In August 2020 and as part of wider support in recognition of food and drink's economic importance, growth potential, and a pandemic inspired increased interest in regional and locally-led activity across tourism and food and drink, the Scottish Government through the Food and Drink Sector Recovery Plan, and re-purposed food tourism monies (announced by Cab Sec REC in March 2020) developed a Regional Food Group National Fund. The national fund saw Scotland Food and Drink provide grants of £10-£15k per year to fund a co-ordinator post in regional food groups across Scotland for one year initially with a stipulation that grants be match-funded to bring the total to a minimum of £20-£30k to fund each post. The initiative was, and continues to be fully supported by the Scottish Tourism Alliance and Scotland's Food Tourism Board who saw this as a vital link up and intervention in the light of the Covid-19 crisis. The fund was replicated in 2021 with further support from the recovery plan and a further repurposing of the previously allocated funding to the Food Tourism Board to support the groups, the co-ordinators and their activity.

The fund aligns closely with the 2020 PfG commitment - *Work with local government to develop new regional action plans to support delivery of Ambition 2030* - with match funding being sought as pre-requisite of funding, and many regional groups have sourced that funding from their Local Authority. This work of the fund has resulted in 19 Regional Food Groups now being in operation across Scotland.

Model

The model - a network of regional groups supported by a central organisation and working collaboratively with local authorities and other stakeholders – is the first of its kind in Scotland and aims to demonstrate that this way of working delivers for both the regional and national food and drink and tourism economies.

Evaluation

An evaluation report of the first year has been produced and shows a high level of success, this report has yet to be published:

- 100% group satisfaction with the scheme
- Widespread acknowledgment that the support has made a real, tangible difference to the groups and their members & businesses
- All groups benefited from, and highly valued, the collaboration and mutual learning/knowledge-sharing
- More than 80% groups felt that the relationship with their local authority had improved as a result of the scheme, and most said that they were able to deliver activities that wouldn't have happened otherwise
- All groups performed very well against their agreed objectives

Current Position & Funding

Current funding under the model described is confirmed until end March 2022. A similar funding model is now being sought for the financial year 22/23, with £125k being committed from the 22/23 Recovery Plan allocation (provided by SG Food and Drink) and a request for the further £125k made to Tourism colleagues. ~~(Redacted text)~~ **[Redacted – 30(b)(ii) (the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation) FOISA]**

This £250k funding, taken together with match funding from local authorities or other partners would provide for up to £500k available to provide continued support for the co-ordinator posts during 2022/23 and we understand that the majority of local authorities with RFGs have now committed to match-funding so far, with all Groups being supported by Scotland Food and Drink to secure support.

You wrote to all LA sponsored Regional Food Groups on Tuesday 15 March thanking them for support and encouraging support in the future.

The Groups and Co-Funders

Regional Food Group	Co Funder(s)
Appetite for Angus	Angus Council
Arrans Food Journey	East Ayrshire Council, North Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council

Ayrshire Food an A'That	East Ayrshire Council, North Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council
Bute Kitchen	Mount Stuart Trust
Discover Inverclyde's Food and Drink	Inverclyde Council
East Lothian Food & Drink	East Lothian Council
Eat Drink Dundee	Dundee City Council
Eat Drink Hebrides	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Eat South West Scotland	Dumfries and Galloway Council
Experience Glasgow Food and Drink	Scottish Enterprise
Food from Argyll	Argyll & Bute Council
Food from Fife	Fife Council
Forth Valley Food and Drink	Stirling Council
Highland Good Food Partnership	Sustainable Food Places
Great Perthshire	Perth & Kinross Council
Lanarkshire Larder	North Lanarkshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council
North East Food and Drink Network	Opportunity North East
Orkney Food and Drink	Orkney Islands Council
Shetland Food and Drink	Shetland Islands Council

Testimonials/Quotes

Food From Argyll

“Having been involved with Food From Argyll since 2007 I have long been campaigning for greater collaboration across Scotland's food groups. Working at events around the country I have met inspirational people working in the sector across the country so I knew they were out there! It has therefore been a real pleasure to be able to meet up regularly with the other groups leaders (albeit virtually) and begin to build relationships with them and knowledge of their areas. To see the official appreciation for these groups and their leaders by SF&D and the Scottish Government, has been very encouraging and has definitely inspired an ambition to grow and provide continuity for the group and the network. Thank you”

Lanarkshire Larder

“The vision of Lanarkshire Larder is to enable Lanarkshire to be recognised as one of the leading regions in Scotland for quality and sustainable food and drink produce. This [support from fund) has allowed us to build a brand, website and social media strategy which has helped

create a community, increase collaboration amongst members, raise awareness of our produce and have a centralised voice for small and independent producers in Lanarkshire”

North East Food and Drink Network

“We were delighted to secure the RFG funding which helped us to build on a previous food tourism project to support producers with the development and promotion of their tourism experiences to a higher level. We really appreciated the organised training sessions and the lively discussions during our RFG leader sessions. The opportunity to learn from each other and to share ideas was such a valuable part of this project”

Contact Name: ~~(Redacted text)~~ [Redacted - 38(1)(b) (personal information)]
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