



CMS Scotland - Kernel

Evolving health regulation for the food and drink industry – What lies ahead?

Introduction

The UK's regulatory landscape is undergoing significant transformation, with a clear shift towards policies that prioritise public health, diet and wellbeing, and which rely on consumer awareness to achieve their goals. Rising interest in the potential short and long term impacts on health relating to consumption has driven demand for greater transparency and stricter regulation.

Long term Governmental health strategies

Both England and Scotland have recently set out ambitious 10-year plans to improve the health of the population and reform the food system.

England's 'Fit for the Future' plan, published in July 2025, highlights key reforms to look out for in line with Labour's food and health manifesto commitments, including:

- Restrictions on 'junk food' advertising targeted at children
- Prohibition of high-caffeine energy drink sales to under-16s
- Stronger planning powers for councils to block fast food outlets near schools
- Mandatory healthy food sales reporting for large companies
- An update to the outdated 2004 Nutrient Profile Model

In parallel, Scotland has published its 'Population Health Framework 2025–2035' and its first national food strategy, the 'National Good Food Nation Plan'. These set out prevention focused goals, including:

- Improving access to healthy school meals
- Promoting community food growing
- Supporting a whole-system approach to healthy weight
- Enacting legislation requiring food reformulation to reduce fat, sugar and salt
- Working with retailers to improve the healthiness of the typical consumer shopping basket

Restricting the promotion and advertising of less healthy foods

Both England and Scotland are pushing forward with measures to reduce the promotion of "less healthy foods", particularly HFSS products.

The Food (Promotion and Placement) (England) Regulations 2021 in England target the visibility and accessibility of HFSS products, banning volume promotions (e.g. "buy one get one free") and restricting the placement of specified products in prominent locations. From 5 January 2026, the new Advertising (Less Healthy Food Definitions and Exemptions) Regulations 2024 will also introduce:

- A 9pm TV watershed for less healthy foods advertisements
- Bans on paid-for online advertisements targeting children

After a 2024 consultation, Scotland has proposed regulations aiming for consistency with England. Local authorities will be tasked with enforcement, utilising powers under the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Food (Scotland) Act 2015. These actions are seen as key to reducing obesity and related health issues such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease¹.

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Calorie labelling initiatives

In England, mandatory calorie labelling policies require certain food businesses with over 250 employees, to display calorie information on menus and packaging.

Scotland is debating similar legislation, weighing public health benefits against concerns about potential harm to vulnerable groups, such as those with eating disorders. The ongoing debate highlights the complexity of implementing effective but equitable health policies.

Regulation of colourings and ultra-processed foods

As the regulatory landscape evolves, attention is turning to new and emerging risks, and there is currently a lot of focus on UPFs and food colourings.

UPFs (foods formulated with industrial ingredients and processes) are reported to account for nearly 57% of the UK diet². Evidence increasingly links UPFs to various adverse health outcomes,³ however, there is still uncertainty and further research is likely needed before any regulation is enacted.

Food dyes are also under scrutiny. In January 2025, the US FDA introduced a blanket ban on Red Dye No.3 after studies revealed a potential link to cancer. Whilst prohibited in some items, the use of Red Dye No.3 is not fully banned in the UK. Many manufacturers have already transitioned to natural food colourings but it remains to be seen whether the UK will follow suit by banning the substance entirely.

Baby food nutritional values

Following recent news reports of baby food products lacking key nutrients, in August 2025, the Government published voluntary industry guidelines for products aimed at children up to 36 months, which include sugar and salt reduction targets (without the use of sweeteners), and labelling and marketing guidance.

Businesses have been given 18 months to implement these targets and actions, with the Government indicating it will remain under review until the end of February 2027.

¹ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. 'Risk Factors Driving the Global Burden of Disease' 2024. www.healthdata.org/research-analysis/library/risk-factors-driving-globalburden-disease

² Rauber F, Louzada MLDC, Martinez Steele E, et al Ultra-processed foods and excessive free sugar intake in the UK: a nationally representative cross-sectional study *BMJ Open* 2019;9:e027546. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2018-027546

³ [Processed foods and health: SACN's rapid evidence update](#)

What this means for stakeholders

Taken together, these developments point to a particular trajectory: the UK is moving towards a more health-focused food system. For businesses in the food and drink sector, this means a period of significant change, with increased regulatory scrutiny and a need to adapt to evolving consumer expectations.

Businesses should:

- monitor regulatory trends and anticipate future legislation
- align their practices accordingly
- embrace the opportunity to enhance public health and build consumer trust

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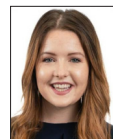


Esme Saynor

Partner

T +44 114 279 4245

E esme.saynor@cms-cmno.com



Cara McGlynn

Senior Associate

T +44 131 200 7506

E cara.mcglynn@cms-cmno.com



Megan Loxley

Associate

T +44 114 279 4060

E megan.loxley@cms-cmno.com

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