



Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

8<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Dear Prime Minister

### **UK Public Sector Food Challenges**

I write to you as the Chair of the Public Sector Catering 100 (PSC100 Group). The PSC100 was formed in 2009 and is an alliance of public sector organisations that deliver catering services within schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, care homes, prisons and the armed forces across the UK. Between us we deliver more than 2bn meals a year, serving up to 15m people on a typical weekday.

Each year our professional collective comes together to discuss topics of mutual interest, best practice, and workforce support. This year, at our annual round table event hosted at the Palace of Westminster, we discussed the multiple challenges our organisations face as public food services. As a result of those discussions members felt it was important to write to you with our concerns.

In a world already struggling to recover from the impact of Covid, it is clear that the invasion of Ukraine, among other factors, has negatively affected the supply chain, food prices, and the cost of equipment and labour. We are also deeply concerned about the rise in the cost of living and the impact this is having on the communities we serve. And while the impact on households and other parts of the economy, such as retail, is clearly recognised, the effect on our areas of public service is largely unseen and should be of great concern.

The support that government was able to provide during the pandemic was very welcome, however like the private sector our workforce and services are still affected by Covid. Despite the disruptions, we have continued to keep people safe, fed and connected, including many who are among the most vulnerable in society, such as patients in hospital, the elderly in care homes and our children and young people in schools, colleges and universities.

With food price inflation running at over 9%, nearly 90% of education caterers, for example, citing issues recruiting catering staff and food supply issues challenging all of us to adapt at a moment's notice, we are seeking reassurance from you that public food services will be prioritised in all food policy decisions in the coming year and beyond.

We believe that means investment, not only in terms of daily allowances to provide meals, but also in terms of attracting good people into our industry and retaining them. The public sector is a fantastic place to work, and with more government support to help promote catering careers in it we know our valuable services can do more to support the economy and wellbeing of UK citizens.

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As Defra is currently consulting over Government Food Buying Standards, we would welcome more government support to align farming and the whole public sector food chain more closely. We know UK farmers produce great British food, and we would like to see more of that food being served up by our first-class catering teams right across the public sector.

A step in the right direction would be action to encourage more British produce into our sector rather than allowing the retail market to dominate. Caterers are experts at using crop gluts and adapting to supply demands to create dishes that are seasonal and excite the consumer.

Current initiatives among PSC100 members include the Menus of Change movement, which puts more emphasis on plants in the diet, in the process helping to tackle climate change and reducing the impact catering has on the planet and its resources. With investment in public sector food we can deliver investment in community wealth building, inclusive growth and a circular food economy that benefits people, the climate and animal welfare.

The paybacks of a well-resourced public food service are huge; a nation that is well fed and has better levels of nutrition means less ill health, fewer days of work lost, better educational outcomes and an altogether more productive and content society.

Childhood obesity figures, which were already rising before Covid, have shown a clear spike over lockdown when many schools were closed. It's unlikely that is a coincidence, and a Foresight report from the Government Office for Science suggests that without action more than half of all adults will be obese by 2050. That will have a direct cost to the NHS of £10bn a year, a figure that rises to £50bn when the wider costs to society are factored in.

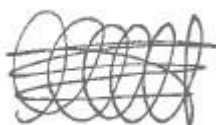
We believe we can help cut the reliance upon the NHS, social care services and other state-funded resources by simply ensuring that the nation is well-fed and therefore healthier.

In the first instance we would welcome a meeting with the chief officers responsible for public sector food and UK food security. We have expertise and insights to offer as well as an understanding of the current frontline challenges and the solutions to them. We meet informally on an almost monthly basis and would very much welcome the chance to consider your response at the next available opportunity.

We will also be meeting formally at the House of Commons in December for the Public Sector Catering Top 20 round table discussion and would be delighted to have a government political representative join us.

We look forward to hearing from you

Kind regards



Matthew White MBE, chair of PSC100

Jacquie Blake, chair, LACA – The School Food people

Molly Shaher, chair, Professional Association for Catering Education

Phil Rees-Jones, chair, The University Caterers Organisation

Jayne Jones, chair, ASSIST FM

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Sue Cawthray, chair, National Association of Care Catering  
Brian Robb, chair, Hospital Caterers Association

CC:

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP

Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP