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Contents

- Introduction 4
- Step 1: Creating Case Study Families 4
 - Household characteristics: predetermined 4
 - Recruiting community advisors 5
 - Household characteristics: coproduced 6
- Step 2: Developing weekly shopping lists 7
 - Determining portion sizes 9
 - Adjusting for dietary health 12
- Step 3: Pricing the Shopping Lists 13
 - Principles for item selection 14
 - Pricing out of home 15
 - Lifespan and household food waste 17
- Co-production 18
 - Bringing personal experience to public decision-making 18
 - Advisors, not representatives 18
 - Negotiation between rights-holders and decision-makers 19
- Appendix A: Community Advisor Recruitment 21

Introduction

This report accompanies [Our Right to Food: Affording to eat well in a Good Food Nation](#).

Step 1: Creating Case Study Families

We used 'personas' to help the community advisors and project team imagine the priorities, preferences and aspirations of individuals in each household and the family as a whole. Rather than asking about their own personal preferences, this approach positioned community members as *advisors* and allowed us to imagine the needs of the case study family, while still drawing on lived experience. The case study families were invented, but by drawing on the experience and knowledge of community advisors, each household was designed to be recognisable as a family who might reasonably live in Scotland today.

Household characteristics: predetermined

Some characteristics were predetermined or 'fixed' before the community advisors began their work together. This was to ensure there was a degree of consistency between the household characteristics for the groups working on the large case study families (Groups 1 and 3) and the small case study families (Groups 2 and 4).

Number and ages of family members

- With advice from our steering group, we chose to focus on two household types that are at higher risk of food insecurity than average in Scotland.¹
 - Large family with two adults and three children (aged 7, 10 and 15)
 - Small family with single mum and two children (aged 2 and 5)²

Single parent vs single mother

- The project team decided to focus on the experiences of a single mum rather than leave this open for the groups to discuss and agree. This was because the majority of single parent households in Scotland are led by single mothers, and being a female single earner means the household is

¹ In 2021, 12% of large families and 34% of single parents reported that they had worried about running out of food in the previous 12 months, compared with 9% of the population overall: [The Scottish Health Survey 2021 - volume 1: main report](#). Lone parents and larger families (with three or more children) are also considered 'priority families' in the Scottish Government's [Every child, every chance - Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-22](#).

² Four out of 10 children living in poverty in Scotland live in a single parent household: Public Health Scotland (2020) [Child poverty in Scotland: priority groups - lone-parent families](#).

at higher risk of poverty. This relates to the gender pay gap (lower hourly earnings) and limitations on the number of hours they are likely to work due to caring responsibility.³

Dietary requirements and preferences:

- None of the case study family members had specified dietary restrictions (gluten or lactose intolerant, diabetic, halal, etc)
- All of the families were assumed to eat dairy and meat as part of a balanced diet (i.e. no characters or families were vegan or vegetarian).

Kitchen skills

- Each family was assumed to have 'reasonable' cooking skills. Groups made decisions about meal choices and preparation based on what they assumed would be manageable for 'most people in Scotland'.

Location:

- Groups were asked to assume that the families 'could live anywhere in Scotland'. Leaving the urban / rural question open means the geographic accessibility of the items on the list can be assessed separately.

Car ownership:

- Rather than deciding whether the family owned a car, groups were asked to assume that the family had 'reliable access to affordable transport'.⁴

Recruiting community advisors

Once we were clear about the household types that would be the focus of the work, we could begin looking for volunteers who would act as 'community advisors' – people living in Scotland today who had similar experiences to the case study families, the ability to take part in online discussions and a willingness to advise on the content of the meal plans and shopping lists.

The project team specifically sought women advisors for the groups exploring the lives of a single mum with two young children. We did not specify whether the advisors for the larger households with two adults should be men or women, but only women volunteered to take part in the project.

We recruited four groups of community advisors to help us imagine the lives of the families who might live in each household, complete with names, jobs, preferences

³ Public Health Scotland (2020) [Child poverty in Scotland: priority groups – lone-parent families](#).

⁴ Though car ownership can make a significant difference to shopping patterns, the project team decided that owning a car should not be considered a fixed characteristic because affordable access to the foods of your choice should be possible in a country with effective public transport or delivery models.

and interests. The project sought to involve people who identified as someone who 'knows what it's like to shop for, prepare and eat food' as a family in either the small household or large household.⁵

Advisors were not asked to provide information about their age, household size, socio-economic background or ethnicity to take part in the groups. We asked each member to share where they were based throughout Scotland and aimed to have a mix of urban and rural participants with advisors from different local authority areas as much as possible.

Overall, 29 women contributed to the discussions, and 26 members attended more than half of the meetings. On average, each community advisor attended between five and six online sessions.

Household characteristics: coproduced

The remaining characteristics were left open to discussion with the group members, who spent time in the early stages of the project imagining the people who would live in the household and what kinds of jobs, hobbies and resources they would have. The project team provided some information about the relevant context in Scotland to help the groups make decisions, such as statistics on average working hours and wages for different jobs.

Names and gender of children:

- Although the number and ages of the family members were fixed, each group spent some time generating the names and genders of each of the characters living in the household.
- By coincidence, each of the groups working on the small families selected a girl (aged 5) and boy (aged 2) and each of the groups working on the large families selected boys (aged 10 and 15) and a girl (aged 7).
- The gender of the single parent was fixed, but both groups working on the large family chose to have a mother and father in these households.

Employment and hobbies:

- Group members decided the type of employment and number of hours that each of the parents in the case study families worked. This determined the parents' availability and time pressures throughout the week, which affected shopping and meal preparation patterns.
- To help understand more about the weekly eating patterns, community advisors were asked to imagine the types of activities that the children

⁵ See appendix A: "Community Advisor Recruitment".

might be involved with and how the family spent its leisure time.⁶ In some cases, the group would refer to this information to adjust meal preparation, for example if the two boys in a large family had rugby on Sunday, the group might agree that the parents would use the slow cooker that day for an easy soup.

Kitchen equipment:

- For kitchen equipment like knives, chopping boards and saucepans that would be needed to make meals from scratch, the project team used the list of 'key items included in all household budgets' determined by the Minimum Income Standard⁷ as the starting point for a discussion with each group.
- Community advisors reviewed the list and made adjustments as they thought appropriate for the Scottish context and each case study family.⁸

Step 2: Developing weekly shopping lists

Each group of community advisors worked together over a series of 90 minute online discussions to imagine the cooking, eating and shopping patterns for the family across the week and year. The 'healthiest version' of this meal plan that the groups were able to agree was converted into a detailed 'shopping list' of items, including everything the family would need to purchase in the shops or pay for out of home. Additional budget lines were included for occasional experiences like having guests and visitors over and celebrating birthdays and holidays.

Throughout the process, the groups were asked to keep in mind the following criteria for striking a balance of foods that the case study family would find:

- A good fit for their lives
- Enjoyable
- Healthy 'enough'

The shopping list was continuously updated as conversations with community advisors and public health nutritionists progressed from July–December 2021. A

⁶ For some groups, this question created unintended biases and distractions from the core discussion. As a result, it was dropped in the later groups to ensure that the characteristics the groups were co-constructing were relevant to the decisions they would be making about the three principles: a good fit for people's lives, enjoyable and healthy 'enough'.

⁷ Davis et al. (2015) [How much is enough? Reaching social consensus on minimum household needs](#), Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University, p 68.

⁸ See [Our Right to Food: What is available in this family's kitchen?](#) for more detail. Though the groups and project team were aware that not everyone in Scotland currently has the full list of kitchen equipment items, the meal plans and shopping lists were designed as if the family was living in a Good Food Nation where no one is prevented from preparing and storing food at home because of a lack of basic equipment.

select number of products and amounts were brought back to the group to confirm that the assumptions seemed realistic, and these assumptions were applied across the relevant category of items. Finally, the complete shopping list was taken back to the group to review quantities, brand choices and lifespan assumptions.

Sessions with Community Advisors (2021)

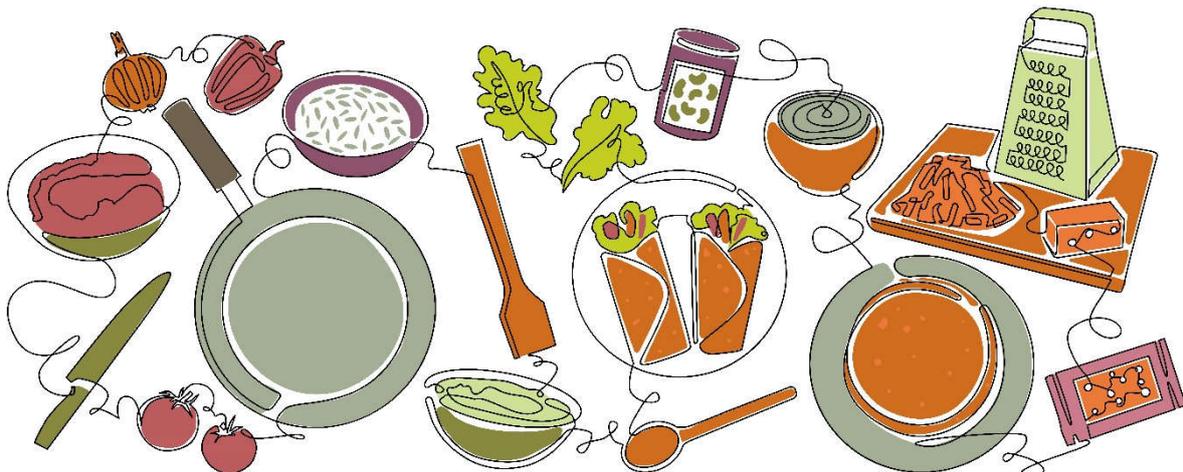
Getting to know each other	Purposes and aims of the project Role of a community advisor
Who lives here?	Getting to know the family What is in their kitchen, their home?
When, where and how does the family eat?	Constructing a typical week Daily / weekly patterns Exceptions (holidays and birthdays)
What food does the family eat?	What do they like and enjoy? What fits their schedules? Adding detail: e.g. school / nursery meals; relative portion size
What would the family eat?	Family's healthy aspirations Eatwell Guide, nutritional analysis reports and suggestions from public health nutritionists Healthy swaps and add-ins
What is included in the shopping list?	Items and amounts Food waste and end of packets Preferences (fresh, frozen, tinned) and brands
Reviewing and finalising	Overall balance Pride and Pleasure Final check for brands, amounts and items that might compromise dignity

Determining portion sizes

Determining portion sizes to allocate each person for each food type proved to be the most difficult part of pricing the food baskets. Several experts in the field of public health nutrition and school food provisioning provided advice on the most appropriate serving recommendations and portion guidelines for children and adults.⁹ These suggestions, along with the priorities of the groups, determined the amounts allocated.

To be as consistent as possible, we based adult portion sizes on Food Standards Scotland's 'Eatwell Everyday' menus (mostly for recipes) and guides from the British Nutrition Foundation (mostly for non-cooked items). The ASSIST FM guide developed for school meal sizes was found to be the most comprehensive for calculating children's portion sizes, though there was no guide available at the time that included all the necessary information. In the smaller family, where the children are in two different brackets for both the ASSIST FM guide and South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust guide, the mid-point was used.

Where no guidance or recommendations existed for either adults or children (e.g. spices, some condiments, and vegetable slices in sandwiches), the project team used a combination of advice from the group members, manufacturers' suggested serving sizes and typical amounts consumed in Britain¹⁰ to calculate the amount needed in the shopping list.



⁹ We are particularly grateful to Dr Lindsey Masson, registered nutritionist at Robert Gordon University, for her support to source relevant assumptions when converting the groups' meal plans and discussions about the family members' eating patterns into specific quantities of each food item.

¹⁰ Food Standards Agency (2002) Food Portion Sizes, third edition.

Final portion sizes were determined by the following factors, in descending order:

Adults and teenager (aged 15)	Children (aged 2-10)
Group decision	Group decision
Find your balance: Get portion wise! An easy guide for finding the right balance for you	ASSIST FM portion size poster Recommended Intake and Portion Sizes for Children
Eatwell Everyday recipes	5332 a-day: Perfect Portions for Little Tums (1-4 years)
Manufacturer’s serving suggestions	Eatwell Everyday recipes
Food Portion Sizes, third edition	Manufacturer’s serving suggestions
Nutritics size suggestions	Nutritics size suggestions
	Discussions with registered nutritionists and school catering experts
	Food Portion Sizes, third edition

Cooked meals and recipes

Community advisors developed ingredients lists and general recipes for most of the cooked meals that appear in the meal plans.¹¹ The remaining three recipes were based on the closest available recipe found online.¹²

For meals prepared and eaten in the home, a standard principle was agreed by all groups to include one adult serving for each adult and teenager and a half serving for the two younger children.¹³ For example, both parents and the oldest child in the Brown and Robinson families would eat a full serving of lentil soup or Spaghetti Bolognese, while the two younger children were allocated a half serving each. Both young children (aged 2 and 5) were allocated half of an adult serving in order to fully account for the food purchased, though it is expected that not all of the food served for these children would be eaten.

¹¹ Groups provided ingredient lists and general guides for 21 of the 24 ‘recipes’ that the case study families prepare.

¹² The Scotch Pancakes recipe (same for two families) is from ‘Tesco’s real food’, and the Porridge recipe was based on Food Standards Scotland’s ‘Eatwell Everyday’ recipe.

¹³ This is roughly in line with the recommendation that a 5-year-old should eat approximately half of an adult: [https://www.safefood.net/start/healthy-eating/serving-kid-sized-portions-\(1\)](https://www.safefood.net/start/healthy-eating/serving-kid-sized-portions-(1)).

School meals

Portion sizes for school meals were based on North Lanarkshire Council school menus for nursery, primary and secondary schools,¹⁴ as these menus had detailed information on what was included in a meal and reflected the selection imagined by the community advisors. The project team selected a balance of hot meals and paninis/sandwiches based on the groups' conversations about habits, taste preferences and social pressures facing each age group (children ages 5, 7, 10, and 15). Each character who ate in the school cafeteria was given one fish dish a week in line with the Eatwell Guide and group aspirations.

Pre-packaged items

When the meal plans included items like a 'small packet of crisps' or 'small yogurt', we based the size of the item on package sizes available at Tesco online.¹⁵ A principle of one small multipack per person was used for individually packaged items. Children aged 2–10 were allocated one each for items like rolls and buns.

Fruits and vegetables

For portions of uncooked fruits and vegetables, such as carrot and cucumber sticks or blueberries added to porridge, children were allocated 50g and adults were allocated 80g.¹⁶ For cooked meals, quantities of vegetables were based on proportions from recipes from 'Eatwell Everyday' or 'BBC Good Food' that the project team thought best reflected the groups' discussion. Some individual vegetable portions, like a side of roast potatoes, were sourced from BNF guidelines.

Pasta

Spaghetti and pasta portion sizes were determined by the groups working on large families to be 500g across the whole family for a meal. This was based on the assumption that a large family would cook a whole 500g packet of spaghetti or box of pasta rather than measure out specific weights.¹⁷

For the smaller families, the adult portion is 100g, based on a compromise between BNF guidelines, average sizes, and the groups' suggestions. The children were given half this portion, as decided by the groups.

¹⁴ <https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/school-meals/meal-menus>

¹⁵ e.g. One Petits Filous Strawberry & Raspberry Fromage Frais is 85g, but a different brand choice could result in a different size pot of yoghurt.

¹⁶ <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/5-a-day-portion-sizes/>

¹⁷ In future work, the groups' perceptions of the amount of pasta needed to prepare the meal could be accommodated through the lifespan calculation rather than in portion sizes. It was not clear whether the groups agreed that this amount of pasta would be consumed or just what someone would expect to prepare for a large family.

Manufacturers' serving sizes

When the meal plans included items like a 'cup of coffee' or 'glass of diluting juice', we relied on a manufacturers' serving sizes.¹⁸ For items such as gravy, diluting juice, and salad dressing, portions specified by the manufacturer were used for both adults and children.

Adjusting for dietary health

At multiple stages, nutrition experts reviewed drafts of the family meal plans and individual 7-day diet logs for each case study character.¹⁹ Feedback and advice about changes that could be made to better meet the nutritional needs of each case study character were brought back to the groups for discussion when they:

1. Considered 'healthier swaps and add ins'
2. Added detail to their own 'recipes'
3. Discussed household food waste²⁰
4. Reviewed and finalised the shopping list

Nutritics software²¹ was used to analyse the nutritional composition of each family member's projected weekly food and drink consumption. Particular attention was paid to allocating a sufficient quantity of food so ensure that the shopping list prices reflected the total amount of food the family would be expecting to purchase.²²

In October 2021, Food Standards Scotland conducted a high-level review of the Nutritics reports for the Robinson and Harris McGregor families and provided feedback on changes that would help each character's diet better align with the Eatwell Guide. For example, some general suggestions were to:

- Introduce more frozen vegetables to dinners

¹⁸ e.g. Nescafe Gold Blend instant coffee 200g contains 111 servings.

¹⁹ We are particularly grateful to Dr Lindsey Masson, registered nutritionist at Robert Gordon University, who assisted with the initial conversion of the family's weekly meal plans into 7-day diet logs for individual members of the case study family.

²⁰ Portions and amounts were initially based on the shopping list requirements and adjusted in some cases to reflect the likelihood that some food and drink would be left on the plate. See below for further detail on household food waste.

²¹ <https://www.nutritics.com>

²² For example, the mum character in most families was initially too low in calories (perhaps due to the groups' perceptions that she would not have much time to sit and eat in the morning or during the day). These characters were sometimes given an additional slice of toast with baked beans throughout the week to increase fibre and calorie intake, while others were given an extra cereal bar.

- Add eggs to toast for breakfast as a change from cereal or cereal bars
- Select low fat, sugar or salt options, e.g. for cheese, crisps, condiments, jam, or diet options for fizzy juice
- Include more non-meat proteins, like beans and pulses
- Reducing the number of discretionary items throughout the week

These comments informed group decisions, and the project team integrated some of the suggestions directly into the meal plan and shopping list when they aligned with previous discussions.²³

In January 2022, updated Nutritics reports based on the groups' final decisions were shared with steering group members for detailed analysis. Dr Lindsey Masson, Robert Gordon University, reviewed each of the 16 characters' 7-day diet logs to compare energy and nutrient intakes with dietary reference values and highlight areas of concern.²⁴ Food Standards Scotland compared the 7-day diets of each of the adult case study characters with both the Scottish Dietary Goals and the Scottish population averages. The project team then made final adjustments in January 2022 to address some of the issues identified during these reviews.

Any changes made after the community advisory groups had stopped meeting were in line with the discussions and decisions that the groups had already had.

In September 2022, Food Standards Scotland carried out a final nutritional analysis of the adult characters in each of the case study families to compare the 7-day diets with both the Scottish Dietary Goals and the Scottish population averages.²⁵

Step 3: Pricing the Shopping Lists

Every food and drink item that appears in the weekly meal plans is included in the shopping list. Most grocery items purchased at shops are listed within Eatwell Guide categories²⁶

- Fruit and vegetables
- Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates
- Dairy and alternatives

²³ For example, some of the portion sizes for home-cooked meals were too high, and these were adjusted to reflect a more reasonable portion size.

²⁴ General concerns were raised at this point about energy, saturated fat and sodium being too high and iron being too low. Dr Masson noted that this was not inconsistent with the average UK diet. *Full comments are available by request.*

²⁵ The menus themselves have not been endorsed by Food Standards Scotland as a healthy diet to follow.

²⁶ The Eatwell Guide: Helping you eat a healthy, balanced diet

https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/downloads/Eatwell_Guide_Booklet_-_new.pdf

- Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins
- Oil and spreads
- Sweets, chocolate, crisps, pastries, biscuits and sugary drinks²⁷
- Drinks (coffee, tea, no sugar options)²⁸

Items that could not be easily delineated within the Eatwell Guide categories appear under additional headings:

- Packaged foods (e.g. pizza, soup)
- Cooking ingredients and condiments
- Other (store cupboard), for example diluting juice and gravy granules
- Alcohol
- Weekday lunches
- Takeaways and eating out
- Holidays and birthdays

These categories allowed us to keep an overview of how much was spent on different types of foods and to bring material back to discussions with the community advisors in manageable sections.

Principles for item selection

All items that would be purchased at a shop were priced at Tesco online. This shop was selected because this is the largest online retailer in the UK and is considered to be a mid-range option for price.²⁹

Decisions about brand, package size and form (fresh, frozen or tinned) were guided by the following principles and priorities:

1. Group decision, if known
2. Closest size available to what is needed in a week
3. Second cheapest

The price of the shopping list does not take online promotions or offers into account. This was done for greater consistency in pricing and because we did not want to assume that everyone would be Clubcard members with access to these savings. This could be reviewed and reconsidered in future.

²⁷ Foods high in fat, salt and sugar.

²⁸ Hydration (non-alcoholic drinks).

²⁹ This also reflects the approach taken by the Minimum Income Standard team.

Group decision

The items selected in the shopping lists reflect the groups' decisions about brand, package size and form (e.g. fresh, frozen or tinned) whenever specified. For example, Group 2 selected Heinz Beanz Snap Pots for mum to eat in the Harris McGregor family both because it was the preferred brand and because this package was considered the most convenient and likely for a single mum to want to use in her household.

Decisions about fresh, frozen or tinned items were made with each group through a specific exercise that took into consideration how the item fit into the family's overall cooking and eating patterns, and what the groups thought they would most enjoy. For example, frozen broccoli was selected by each group over fresh because this was considered more convenient and less likely to spoil. Broccoli appears in the meal plans as a side served with the Sunday Roast, on a day when other meal preparation was already taking place.

Closest size

The shopping lists include package sizes and amounts that are closest to what the family would need in one week so that there is not an assumption that the family has the resources or ability to buy in bulk.³⁰ The 'closest package size' principle reflects views about avoiding waste of fresh items and having limited resources and space in the home to purchase and store bulk items. When the groups specifically asked for quantities that would last more than one week, such as multi-packs of crisps, this was reflected in the shopping list.

Second cheapest

When the group members had not specified a brand, and more than one option was available in the same size or amount needed, the project team selected the second cheapest item. This was done to allow room in the budget for the family to choose a mix of branded and unbranded items with dignity.

Pricing out of home

The shopping lists contain three categories of items that would not be purchased as groceries:

- Weekday lunches
- Takeaways and eating out
- Holidays and birthdays

³⁰ This reflects the approach taken by the Minimum Income Standard team.

Weekday lunches

Primary and secondary school meal prices were calculated by averaging the price to parents from 28 local authority area websites for the 2022/23 academic year. ASSIST FM provided the average prices of primary and secondary school meals from 30 local authority areas in 2021.

Three groups included at least one lunch purchased out of the home for the parents during the week. For example, Nora Harris buys a supermarket meal deal on Thursday (one of her workdays), and both parents in the Robinson family buy a meal deal from Subway or Greggs on Fridays. Average prices were used for Subway and Greggs meal deals, and all supermarket meal deals were priced at Tesco.³¹

Takeaways and eating out

Each group discussed how often and where the family might get a takeaway or eat out, and prices were based on group suggestions about where the family might be likely to go. For example, the Brown Family meal plan includes a weekly meal deal takeaway from Domino's, while the price of the Robinson's monthly fish supper was calculated from average prices sourced from multiple fish and chips locations.

Holidays and birthdays

Each group discussed how much additional money they thought the case study family would need over the Christmas holiday period and for each family member's birthday. Groups discussed the priorities and preferences of different characters within the family for these special occasions and determined what they thought would be reasonable for families living in Scotland today.

In general, the groups thought that it was difficult to predict what a family would want or need over the holiday period. It was easiest for the groups to agree on the additional food and drink spending that would be used for adult birthdays, while children's birthdays revealed considerable variation due to social pressures parents are under to make the day special for their children. Discussions were informed by figures from the 2020 Minimum Income Standard rebase,³² and the final amounts represent the compromises that each group made.

³¹ Tesco increased the price of its meal deal to £3.40 with a Clubcard in October 2022 after remaining at £3 for almost 10 years <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2022/feb/07/meal-deals-best-value-lunch-s-boots-co-op-waitrose>.

³² Meal out as a family (£25 per parent, £25 for secondary, £15 for primary, £10 for preschool); child's birthday party food (£50 for a birthday tea at home for up to 10 children including birthday cake and sausage rolls etc.). MIS focus groups had multiple answers for Christmas food and drink budgets but settled on £80 extra for 2 week festive period). See closest [comparison for large family](#) and [small family](#).

Lifespan and household food waste

The lifespan of each item was calculated by dividing the amount required by the family in the week's meal plan from the size and amount of the item available at Tesco online. For example, if the meal plan included 10 apples each week, the lifespan of a 5-pack of apples would be 0.5 weeks. On the other hand, if the total cereal needed each week was 300g, a 500g pack would last 1.66 weeks.

Further adjustments were made for items that might spoil or otherwise be unused before they are consumed. Some of this was calculated by the project team, and some was informed by the group members' perceptions of what would be reasonable to assume for the case study families.

Accounting for household food waste is a significant challenge, but it is an important part of ensuring the shopping lists reflect the true cost to the family's budget. Future work could explore ways of using standard estimates for household food waste in addition to lifespan calculations and group members' advice.

Accounting for food waste

The shopping list has some exceptions built in for food and drink that will be purchased but not consumed. For example, for store cupboard items with a long shelf life (e.g. salt), we applied a 'six months principle', where the cost of the product would be split over six months, even if the item would theoretically last longer. This was to reflect items getting lost in cupboards and extra used that had not been accounted for in the meal plans.

Groups members were asked to discuss and advise on food waste to help the shopping lists account for the amount the family would need each week. We used activities to explore patterns and practices around 'end of packet decisions' and what they believed the family would be likely to 'eat, save or toss' once something was opened at home.

In general, groups typically assumed fruit, vegetables and dairy would spoil rather than be eaten (excess was therefore factored into lifespan calculations.), while most other items were factored into the portions allocated to each family member (i.e. groups typically assumed 'someone would eat a remaining croissant, bacon rasher or final biscuit in a packet rather than throw these away').

Although in general, the groups did not feel that it was likely for the families to freeze items to reduce household waste, exceptions were made for fresh meat, such as half a pack of chicken breast that they knew the family would be planning to use in a similar recipe the following week.

Co-production

The final shopping lists are grounded in lived experience, informed by expert guidance and a reasonable example of what families would be proud to eat in Scotland.

Bringing personal experience to public decision-making

While the advisors were already politically *aware*, many found it difficult to be political *engaged* on the issues related to accessing and affording food that keeps us healthy and well. Conversations between advisors offered an opportunity to bring their experiences from a personal to a political level. For example, a discussion that began with an advisor blaming herself for not eating enough vegetables would soon spark reflections from others about vegetables prices and supermarket profits.

The co-production model was seen as a way get their voices heard - translating their everyday experiences into something that could be used to make a change:

I feel like chatting through all of this stuff feels like it is quite sort of translating it back into real life and thinking about “what does it mean, practically, for people?” and “how do we contribute to this conversation in a way that might actually help us to change things for people that are in a tight spot?” (Group 1)

The same advisor spoke of the process as ‘cathartic’ rather than overwhelming, as she found other political participation. Other advisors echoed this, finding the co-production method accessible as they were heard without being expected to be an expert. This was important to many of the advisors when they reflected on their participation: “It’s just I really appreciate that, it’s nice to feel heard. It’s nice to be able to give your opinion and feel heard, so thank you” (Group 2).

Advisors, not representatives

Although group members drew on their own experiences in the discussions, the project team regularly focused the questions and activities on what would be helpful, needed, appropriate, etc, *for the case study family members* rather than any particular member of the group. The aim was not to reflect the lived experiences of these women as individuals but to work together as an informed group of people to explore, discuss and negotiate what ‘should’ be included in a

shopping list for a 'recognisable' family living in a specific household type in Scotland today.

Negotiation between rights-holders and decision-makers

Community advisors were involved in extensive discussions and negotiations with each other and the project team over a series of online meetings in 2021. Information, data and advice from external sources and experts were brought into discussions at multiple stages. In turn, the project team brought material and questions from the groups' discussions to quarterly steering group meetings to involve wider stakeholders' views in the strategic direction of the project.

Online discussions and activities were led by the project team, but decisions were made by group members through a process of 'negotiated consensus'³³ within the group and with advice from external experts. The project team shared group findings and questions with members of the steering group – public health nutritionists at Robert Gordon University and Food Standards Scotland – as part of the co-development process. This iterative process between the project team, external experts and community advisors helped the groups review and negotiate contradictions between portion size information, nutritional needs of the case study characters and perceptions of what was reasonable.

Some advisors were involved in other co-production processes and thought the structure of the group discussions was the best way to engage with people who would be affected by policy decisions:

It has to be about more of that, more about community involvement, and not just people sitting behind closed doors deciding how I get to live my life and how much money I need to live on. It has to be about community involvement and people like you leading groups like this and not just the high heidyins³⁴ telling me what to do because I don't be liking that. I like to be part of the conversation. And that's difficult to do. (Group 1)

The research team made every effort to reflect the groups' decisions and best available evidence in the final meal plans and shopping lists. It was not always possible or practical to confirm each decision, but changes made by the

³³ The project drew on the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) approach of arriving at a consensus within the group, based on what the advisors' believed the case study family's priorities and preferences, rather than theirs as individuals. See for example: Davis et al. (2015) [How much is enough? Reaching social consensus on minimum household needs](#), Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University, p 3.

³⁴ The 'people making the decisions'.

researchers (e.g. to overcome contradictions in guidance or suggested serving size) were grounded in group discussions about reasonable cooking time, convenience for and taste preferences of the family.

Appendix A: Community Advisor Recruitment

We used various methods to recruit community advisors, and group membership reflected these approaches. Group 1 was recruited through engagement with the Corra Foundation's place team in late 2020 to identify people who would have an interest in contributing their views and experiences to a project about the affordability of healthy food. Early online meetings were held in December 2020 and January 2021 to introduce potential members to the project and establish relationships with the project team. This group met monthly for a year and were particularly helpful in trialling discussion strategies and activities as the project team developed ways of working together online to co-create the shopping lists for the Robinson Family. Group 1 members were based primarily in East Renfrewshire and Fife.

Groups 2 and 3 were recruited through an open call through Nourish Scotland's networks in April / May 2021. Potential participants were invited to information sessions to learn more about the project and decide whether their experiences were better suited to contributing to the discussions about a large or small family. Group members were invited to self-select into the group that they felt was the best for them. These two groups met online every 3-4 weeks between May and December 2021 and had participants from Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, Moray and Perth and Kinross.

Group 4 was also recruited through an open call, with specific targeting of partner organisations that work with and alongside single parents. We specified that community advisors should be single mums, as this was relevant to the case study example and the higher risk of food insecurity for single mothers. The group met online every 2-3 weeks between September and December 2021 and had participants from Dundee, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire / Glasgow and Edinburgh.