
Scottish Food Commission

Head of Policy and Research

Job Description and Person Specification

Location: Home working, with regular in-person meetings and travel. Office base requirements may be considered.

Hours: 30 hours per week, flexible and part-time working can be considered

Contract: Permanent

Reports to: Chief Executive

Context

The Scottish Food Commission was established within the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022, and has the following core functions:

- To keep under review progress in achieving the outcomes in the national good food plan and the good food nation plans of relevant authorities, and the effectiveness of those plans in addressing food-related issues.
- To advise, inform and assist the Scottish Ministers and relevant authorities with a view to promoting and supporting progress in achieving the outcomes in the national good food nation plan and the good food nation plans of relevant authorities, and improving the effectiveness of those plans in addressing food-related issues.
- The Commission may make formal recommendations
 - to the Scottish Ministers as to action which it considers should be taken in relation to the national good food nation plan,
 - to a relevant authority as to action which it considers should be taken in relation to the authority's good food nation plan.
- The Commission may, in particular, for the purpose of its functions
 - carry out, commission or support any research it considers appropriate,
 - seek any independent and expert advice it considers appropriate,
 - acquire, compile and keep under review information about food-related issues,
 - keep under review implementation of any international obligation of the United Kingdom relating to a food-related issue,
 - have regard to developments in, and information on the effectiveness of, legislation on food-related issues elsewhere in the world.

The Commission is now establishing its initial staff resource to enable it to deliver these core functions.

The first National Good Food Nation Plan was published by the Scottish Government in December 2025, and work is commencing across the 32 Local Authorities and 14 territorial Health Boards to deliver their plans, with an anticipated publication date of Spring 2028.

The post-holder can expect to be closely involved in monitoring delivery of the National Plan and in supporting scrutiny of relevant authority plans over the next 24 months. The Commission will need to develop a strong evidence base, robust analysis and clear advice to support effective scrutiny and constructive challenge.

The Vision and Purpose of the Scottish Food Commission

The Vision of the Commission is

Making food work for all.

The defined purpose of the Commission is

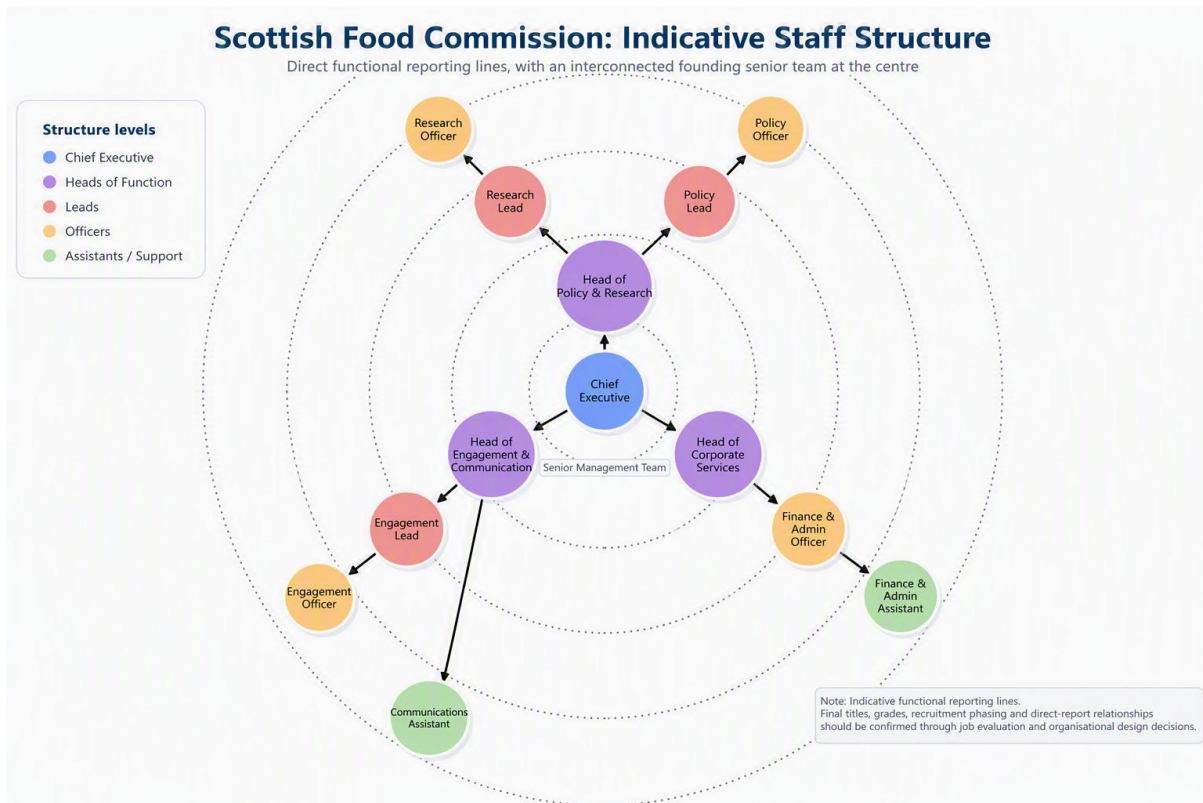
We lead stewardship and oversight of the Good Food Nation Act by engaging diverse perspectives, scrutinising and applying constructive challenge, building mutual understanding and common ground, learning from best practice at home and abroad, to drive transformational change of Scotland's food system into a fairer, healthier and more sustainable system for all.

Our Values

The Senior Team members will work with the members of the Commission to develop the values for the organisation before recruiting their direct report(s).

Team Structure

The structure of the organisation is proposed as follows:



Purpose of Role

This is a senior leadership role with responsibility for the Commission's policy scrutiny, research, evidence, data, analysis, expert advice and formal recommendations in relation to Scotland's Good Food Nation.

You will lead the Commission's policy and research approach to scrutinising the national Good Food Nation Plan and relevant authority plans, ensuring that advice and recommendations are credible, independent, evidence-informed and practical.

You will develop and maintain the Commission's evidence and analytical frameworks, commission or support research where appropriate, and translate evidence into constructive policy advice for Scottish Ministers and relevant authorities.

You will work closely with the Head of Engagement and Communications to ensure policy and research are informed by diverse perspectives and communicated clearly, accessibly and impactfully, and with Corporate Services to ensure programmes are planned, governed and resourced effectively.

The role requires strategic judgement, political awareness, strong analytical capability, an understanding of public policy, legislation and research methods, and the ability to translate complexity into practical, actionable advice.

As a member of the Senior Management Team, you will also have an organisational leadership role, working closely with the Chief Executive and other

Heads of Function to ensure the Commission is effective, independent, collaborative and influential.

Statutory functions led by this post

The Head of Policy and Research will have lead responsibility for the following functions:

- Keeping under review progress in achieving the outcomes in the national Good Food Nation Plan and relevant authority plans, and the effectiveness of those plans in addressing food-related issues.
- Advising, informing and assisting Scottish Ministers and relevant authorities with a view to promoting progress and improving plan effectiveness.
- Developing formal recommendations to Scottish Ministers or relevant authorities where the Commission considers action should be taken.
- Carrying out, commissioning or supporting research considered appropriate for the Commission's functions.
- Seeking independent and expert advice.
- Acquiring, compiling and keeping under review information about food-related issues.
- Keeping under review the implementation of relevant international obligations of the United Kingdom relating to food-related issues.
- Having regard to developments in, and information on the effectiveness of, food-related legislation elsewhere in the world.
- Leading the Commission's policy contribution to any future legislative or regulatory change relating to food-related issues.

The post will support, but not lead, the Commission's engagement, communications, publication, finance, governance and corporate reporting functions.

Key duties of the role

Delivery

- Lead the Commission's policy and research scrutiny of the National Good Food Nation Plan and relevant authority Good Food Nation plans.
- Develop and maintain clear policy, evidence and analytical frameworks for assessing whether plans are likely to support progress towards a fairer, healthier and more sustainable food system.
- Lead the development of the Commission's policy advice, research synthesis, briefings, reports and formal recommendations to Scottish Ministers and relevant authorities.
- Identify emerging policy and evidence risks, gaps and opportunities across food-related issues, including links to health, climate, biodiversity, poverty, education, economic development, animal welfare and wider public service reform.
- Establish robust systems for acquiring, compiling and keeping under review information about food-related issues.

- Lead the development of indicators, evidence frameworks and analytical approaches to support assessment of progress against Good Food Nation outcomes.
- Where appropriate, commission, manage and quality assure external research, expert advice, evidence reviews and analytical input.
- Build relationships with academic institutions, research bodies, public agencies, civil society, community organisations, business and expert networks, and maximise research already underway across the food system.
- Lead the Commission's approach to international evidence, relevant obligations, comparative legislation, best practice and food systems developments elsewhere.
- Lead the Commission's response to relevant policy consultations, parliamentary scrutiny and legislative developments.
- Work closely with the Head of Engagement and Communications to ensure research, policy advice and recommendations are informed by lived experience, interested parties' insight and diverse perspectives, and presented in accessible and plain English formats where appropriate.
- Work closely with Corporate Services to ensure policy and research programmes are planned, procured, budgeted, monitored and reported effectively.
- Provide high-quality advice to the Commission Board and Chief Executive on policy priorities, evidence gaps, research findings, emerging risks and opportunities for influence.
- Represent the Commission at senior level with Scottish Government, Parliament, relevant authorities and external interested parties in Scotland and beyond.
- Propose, develop, prioritise and lead agreed programmes of work within the Commission's business plan.

Management Team and Organisation

- Contribute to the strategic leadership of the Scottish Food Commission as a member of the Senior Management Team.
- Work collaboratively with the Chief Executive, Head of Engagement and Communications, and Corporate Services to ensure integrated delivery across policy, research, engagement, communications, governance and corporate support.
- Motivate, empower and support direct reports, creating a culture of learning, accountability and wellbeing.
- Hold delegated budget responsibility for relevant policy and research programmes and ensure expenditure is planned in accordance with the Commission's budget and procurement requirements.
- Support organisational planning, risk management, performance monitoring and reporting.
- Promote high standards of research ethics, data handling, inclusion, accessibility, transparency and constructive challenge.
- Be proactive in professional development, maintaining an active interest in relevant policy, legislative, research methods and food systems developments.

Person Specification

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Qualifications & professional experience	A relevant degree or equivalent professional experience. Experience of working in a public policy, legislative, scrutiny, regulatory, research, evidence, data or analytical environment. Strong awareness of food systems policy context.	Postgraduate qualification or equivalent experience in research, evaluation, public policy, social science, public health, food systems, environment or related field. Experience working with or within Scottish Government, Parliament, local government, health boards or another public body.
Policy, research and analysis	Proven ability to lead policy review, research synthesis and analysis leading to practical recommendations. Strong understanding of how policy, evidence, legislation, delivery and accountability interact. Ability to assess complex policy and evidence issues and identify risks, gaps and opportunities. Strong understanding of qualitative and quantitative evidence and how it can inform scrutiny. Experience of influencing and informing public policy. Exemplary written and verbal communication skills.	Experience of food, health, poverty, climate, environment, agriculture, procurement or public service policy. Experience of indicators, monitoring frameworks, evaluation or outcomes-based reporting. Experience preparing advice for boards, Ministers, elected members or senior public leaders.
Research commissioning	Proven ability to design, lead or commission robust	Experience of international evidence review or comparative policy analysis.

and evidence quality	research and evidence programmes. Ability to assess evidence quality and communicate findings clearly. Experience of managing research projects, external suppliers or expert input.	
Influencing and relationships	Proven ability to manage sensitive relationships and communicate complex messages clearly to a range of audiences. Ability to exercise sound judgement in a politically aware but independent manner.	Established networks across public, private, academic and voluntary sector interests.
Corporate management	Strong management skills and the ability to lead and empower staff. Ability to work as part of a senior management team providing organisational leadership and direction. Experience of business planning and budget management.	Experience of working in a new, developing or small organisation.
Professional development	Willingness to learn and take on new areas of responsibility.	Evidence of ongoing commitment to continuous professional development.
Other	Willingness to travel across Scotland and the UK to fulfil requirements of the post.	