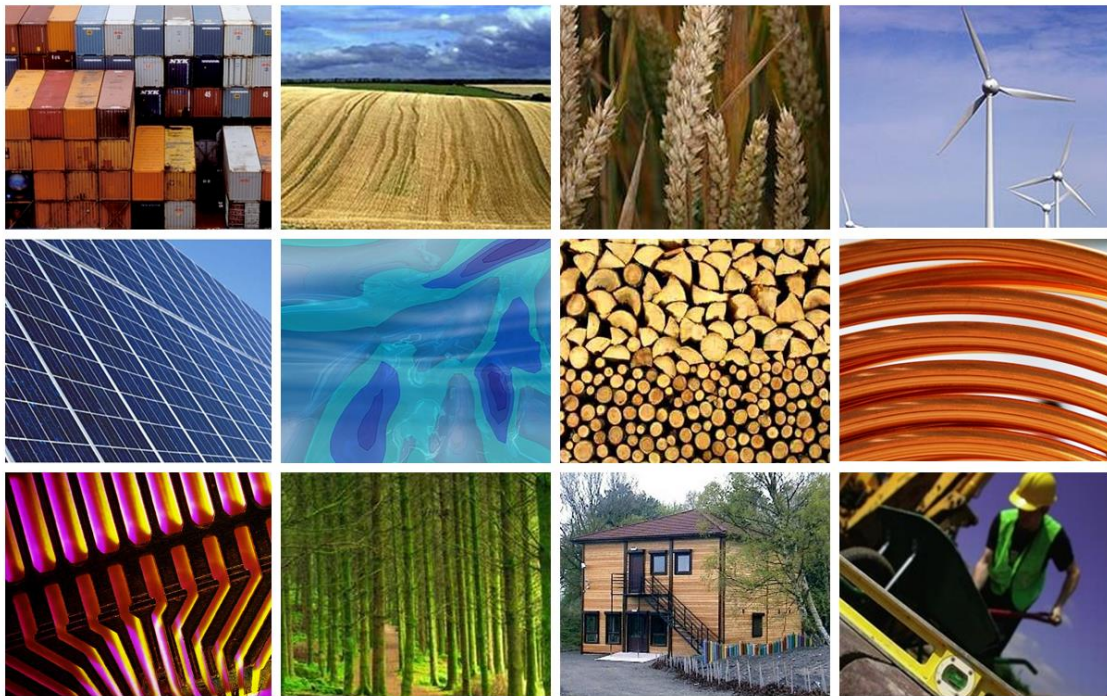


Report to Sciencewise and UKRI

## Evaluation of a public dialogue to inform the National Food Strategy (NFS)

March 2022



## Quality Management

URSUS Consulting Ltd has quality systems which have been assessed and approved to BS EN IS9001:2000 (certificate number GB2002687).

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>BEIS</b>	Business Energy and Industrial Strategy
<b>CAUK</b>	Climate Assembly UK
<b>CLA</b>	Country Landowners and Business Association
<b>DIT</b>	Department of International Trade
<b>DoE</b>	Department of Education
<b>DHSC</b>	Departments of Health and Social Care
<b>ELMS</b>	Environmental Land Management Schemes
<b>FDSC</b>	Food and Drink Sector Council
<b>FSA</b>	Food Standards Agency
<b>FSM</b>	Free School Meals
<b>GFS</b>	Government Food Strategy
<b>HVM</b>	Hopkins Van Mil
<b>NFU</b>	National Farmers Union
<b>NFS</b>	Independent National Food Strategy
<b>OG</b>	Oversight Group
<b>PEP</b>	Pre-Election Preparations
<b>PHE</b>	Public Health England
<b>QALY</b>	Quality Adjusted Life Years
<b>SDIL</b>	Soft Drinks Industry Levy
<b>SEG</b>	Socio economic group
<b>SSEG</b>	Defra Social Science Expert Group
<b>UKRI</b>	UK Research and Innovation

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

This report prepared by URSUS Consulting Ltd presents the findings of an independent evaluation of the National Food Strategy (NFS) public dialogue. The dialogue was commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Agriculture (Defra) and co-funded by Sciencewise<sup>1</sup>, a programme led by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) which helps to ensure that policy is informed by the public. The public dialogue process was designed and delivered by independent public engagement specialists Hopkins Van Mil (HVM).

### 1.2 Background context

In June 2019, the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP, then Secretary of State for Defra, commissioned Henry Dimbleby to conduct an independent review to inform the first new food strategy in England in 75 years. The purpose of the review was to address the environmental and health problems caused by the food system, to ensure the security of food supply and to maximise the benefits of the coming revolution in agricultural technology. The initial plan was that the independent review would publish its results in two parts:

- NFS Part 1 report (Spring 2020) drawing together the evidence and making the case for change; and
- NFS Part 2 report (Spring 2021) presenting the NFS team's recommendations.

Defra undertook to respond with a White Paper within six months of the NFS publication, with Henry Dimbleby reviewing progress a year later. The NFS review was carried out by a small independent temporary task force comprising Defra staff and external experts sitting outside normal departmental structures. The public dialogue was commissioned as one of a number of work streams - including primary research and stakeholder and public engagement – feeding into the NFS process.

### 1.3 Public dialogue objectives

The Defra business case developed with Sciencewise and UKRI was for a public dialogue to provide a bottom up, open exploration of participants' views, hopes, concerns and reflections on the current food system and how they would like to see it change. The dialogue was expected to be short and intensive, running slightly ahead of the NFS reporting, starting in November 2019 and completing in May 2020. This sequencing would have allowed plenty of time for the dialogue findings to feed into further NFS research and the recommendations made in NFS Part 2.

The objectives set out in the business plan, were endorsed with minor clarifications by the dialogue's Oversight Group (OG) as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Sciencewise is funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). The Sciencewise programme aims to improve policy making involving science and technology across Government by increasing the effectiveness with which public dialogue is used and encouraging its wider use to ensure public views are considered as part of the evidence base. It provides a wide range of information, advice, guidance, and support services aimed at policy makers and the different stakeholders involved in science and technology policy making, including the public. Sciencewise also provides co-funding to Government departments and agencies to develop and commission public dialogue activities.

- To engage a diverse and inclusive group of the public in deliberation on the desired outcomes of the proposed National Food Strategy.
- To explore and understand participants' priorities and values in their relationship to the food they eat, how it is grown and produced and the impact it has.
- To explore and understand participants' views on the role of existing and emerging technologies in meeting those priorities.
- To encourage discussion of, and explore the trade-offs and outcomes, and how these might be resolved.
- To use the outputs from the dialogue to inform the next steps in the development of the National Food Strategy.

The overall timing and focus of the NFS were severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020. The NFS team were redeployed to other urgent tasks and did not regroup until late July. At this point they saw an opportunity to use the NFS Part 1 report to make recommendations on how to address immediate issues of hunger and ill health raised by the pandemic, as well as the trade and food standards issues created by EU Exit related trade negotiations. The NFS Part 2 report, delayed to summer 2021, then encompassed both the publication of all the background evidence and the policy recommendations.

When the public dialogue fieldwork re-started in September 2020 the original objectives remained in the background but were restated to reflect emerging NFS priorities as follows:

- To understand the expectations public dialogue participants have of the food system and the people within it.
- To understand participants' thoughts on the transition to more sustainable diets:
  - What people think about the premise of eating less meat and dairy.
  - The reasons for participants' approach to eating less meat and dairy.
- To understand how participants' expectations of the food system and the people within it should change in the future.

#### 1.4 Framing of the dialogue

The initial brief was for a dialogue of up to 200 people meeting face-to-face for two full days drawn from five locations across England. A final reconvened meeting – a National Summit – would then bring about 30 participants back together to hone their reflections and recommendations to the NFS team. The first round of (face-to-face) workshops was designed to help participants grasp the complexity of the food system including environmental, climate, health, food affordability and quality standards issues. The aim was to get individuals thinking not just as consumers but also about their values and priorities as citizens. The second round would then explore potential solutions to challenges identified in Round 1, and the trade-offs participants would be prepared to make and the values that underlay those trade-offs. To build on, rather than duplicate, previous public engagement about the food system<sup>2</sup> and benefit from the evidence being gathered by the NFS team, the dialogue included interviews with external stakeholders and NFS experts. The desire not to

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-system-challenges-public-dialogue> (2015) and the Nuffield Foundation's 'The Crunch' programme (2016).



repeat previous work was also evident in the choice of locations, which were selected to avoid revisiting those included in earlier projects. The OG agreed five locations which would:

- give a good regional coverage;
- provide a demographic mix broadly reflective of the 2011 population census for England; and
- include hill and arable farming, fishing and more urban areas.

The agreed locations were Norwich (East of England), Lewisham (London and Southeast), Bristol (Southwest), Kendal (Northwest) and Grimsby (Northeast).

The first round of face-to-face workshops went ahead, as planned, in February 2020, despite a slight delay for pre-election preparations (PEP) in late 2019. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Defra and Sciencewise agreed to delay Round 2, with the hope that workshops could restart face-to-face in the autumn. Sciencewise and UKRI provided a small additional budget to maintain momentum, allow interested participants to stay engaged over the summer pause, and to explore how digital platforms could be best used for moving online.

After August, the NFS team's evidence collection and analysis reflected a substantially changed policy context shaped by COVID-19, discussions about tackling obesity<sup>3</sup>, the future of agriculture<sup>4</sup> and ongoing EU exit related trade negotiations. The upcoming UK hosting of COP26, reporting from the [Climate Assembly UK](#) (CAUK) and Climate Change Committee work also sharpened interest in how changing diets could contribute to meeting climate goals. Specifically the NFS team was interested in how public participants might react to targets to reduce meat and dairy consumption by 30% by 2030. The team was also keen to explore whether there was support for a new 'social contract' for changing the food system (i.e. how far participants might be prepared to trade-off individual agency vs. state intervention in order to bring about radical changes in the food system). On the advice of the Oversight Group, the term 'social contract' was reframed as a discussion of 'roles and responsibilities of different actors in the food system'.

### 1.5 Challenges for this public dialogue

We all have a relationship with food. However, the food system is complex, and participants in the dialogue were asked to approach the environmental and societal issues it raises from the perspective of citizens, rather than as consumers. This demanded careful design, thoughtful stimulus materials and engaging conversations with specialists and each other.

The COVID pandemic helped to bring food issues into sharp focus in the national debate media: it fundamentally changed participant's experience of and attitudes to food security and poverty, and their understanding of how unsustainable food production and consumption is linked to poor health outcomes. The COVID pandemic brought additional challenges. Whilst there was little prior experience of online dialogue to draw on, this large and complex process moved online successfully, using tools such as Zoom and the online

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-obesity-government-strategy/tackling-obesity-empowering-adults-and-children-to-live-healthier-lives>, July 2020

<sup>4</sup> laid before parliament in January 2020 and adopted as the Agriculture Act in November 2020  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-agriculture-bill-becomes-law>

platform Recollective. The project team worked hard to retain and engage the participants over 15 months rather than the planned four, and re-designed the project process.

### 1.6 Layout of the report

- **Section 2** briefly describes the methods for the dialogue delivery and the evaluation (with detail in *Annex B*).
- **Section 3** assesses the governance and management arrangements for the project and how they affected the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery and the dialogue's impacts.
- **Section 4** assesses how far the dialogue met its objectives.
- **Section 5** describes impacts of the dialogue on the public, policy and research.
- **Section 6** describes lessons learnt about best practice delivery, with a focus on online.
- **Section 7** compares the financial and in-kind costs of the dialogue with its potential to deliver economic benefits; and
- **Section 8** summarises the lessons learnt and recommendations for contractors, UKRI Sciencewise and commissioners.



## 2. Public dialogue and evaluation approach

### 2.1 Public dialogue key elements

The structure of the dialogue and information shared at each stage is summarised in *Annex B*. The four key elements of the design included:

- **Round 1: a full day face-to-face workshop in five locations attended by 180 participants (February and March 2020).** Participants heard a mix of information which had been fully piloted in advance, including a talking heads film, carousels and ‘community voices’ (short interviews recorded with those with everyday lived experience of working in the food system) recorded by [Postcode films](#). Participants discussed the issues that arose in small, facilitated groups throughout the day.
- **Online activities over the summer pause (May to August 2020).** Interested participants received training in basic online meeting skills and were able to access new materials including discussion threads, a 7-day food diary, updated community voice clips and a webinar. Some 116 individuals took the chance to share their thoughts on food during the pandemic.
- **Round 2: Online workshops for each location attended by 129 participants (October 2020).** Seven and a half hours of meetings delivered over four sessions (a 1-hour webinar and three 2- or 2.5-hour workshops) on weekday evenings and one weekend session over the course of a month. Materials were piloted with the core project management team. Materials included a short film and a PowerPoint presentation per session mixed with opportunities for participants to question specialists in plenary and to discuss issues in small, facilitated group (‘synchronous’). Participants were also asked to share independent (‘asynchronous’) reflections on the Recollective platform.
- **The National Summit: an online 2-hour workshop attended by 43 participants and 20 stakeholders (April 2021).** Following presentations by the NFS team, HVM and three public participants, small groups shared their reflections on taking part and what they had taken from the process. Three stakeholders responded with their reactions. Due to a combination of factors (see *Section 3*) the summit came too late to contribute to the dialogue findings.

### Recruitment of participants and specialists

- **Participants.** A professional recruitment agency used on-street recruitment (95%) and lists and networks to fill any gaps to deliver a stratified sample broadly reflective of local demographics (gender, age and ethnicity) and socio-economic groups (SEG) for each location, and for England as a whole. Several attitudinal questions ensured that the cohort included a mix of starting perceptions of how food impacts on health and environment. Round 1 events were held in central community venues and locally sourced sustainable food and drink was offered to help set the scene. All participants received a welcome pack in advance and were offered a £250 ‘thank you’ payment to ensure that no one was excluded from taking part on economic grounds. Payments were staggered across Rounds 1 and 2, with the balance paid after all Round 2 sessions and homework tasks were completed.
- **Food system specialists** Participants heard from 38 food sector specialists covering a broad spectrum of views (see *Annex A*). During Round 1 at least one specialist in each location covered the food system, climate and environment, health and trade issues

respectively. A number of specialists – including members of the Oversight Group - took part in more than one location. As the dialogue moved online specialists contributed via pre-filmed videos and by answering participant questions in online sessions.

### Data collection, analysis and outputs

- All small group audio recordings were transcribed and supplemented with facilitators' simultaneous notes (using flip charts in the room and shared PowerPoint screens on Zoom). Individual deliberations on the Recollective research space also generated a great deal of open text data and images uploaded by participants. All the data was coded using NVivo software and analysed by HVM to inform the dialogue report.

### Published dialogue outputs included:

- The [dialogue report](#) and the standalone executive summary published on Sciencewise and Defra websites, including an annexed 'quotes book' of hundreds of individual quotes coded by theme.
- A mini documentary [vox pop film](#) of the process and findings made by Postcode films including interviews with five participants and three core team members shown at the NFS Part 2 launch (15th July 2021) and since viewed 140 times on YouTube.
- [A set of stimulus materials](#) – available as links in Appendix 3 of the dialogue report including talking heads films, slide decks, carousel materials and community voice films (see *Annex B2*).

## 2.3 Evaluation methods

The evaluation took place between November 2019 and January 2022. The objectives were:

- To gather and present objective and robust evidence of the nature and quality of the impacts, achievements, and activities of the project in order to come to conclusions; and
- To identify lessons from the project to support the design and delivery of future public dialogue projects (particularly focusing on those from moving online).

The evaluation included three key stages:

- **Phase 1: Baseline Assessment.** Working alongside the core management team, evaluators provided formative feedback on the framing, design and piloting during February 2020 and again as online design and materials took shape during August 2020.
- **Phase 2: Interim assessment of design and delivery** based on observing all Round 1 workshops (5) and Round 2 online sessions (18), the National Summit and NFS Part 2 launch. We held informal discussions with participants, specialists and observers at face-to-face meetings and collected written feedback and via Recollective surveys. We also sampled the discussion threads and deliberation on the online research space. Findings from our observations were shared at wash-up sessions, regular team and Oversight Group meetings.
- **Phase 3: Final assessment of the overall dialogue** also reflected evidence collected via desk research and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders who had been part of the process (as members of the Oversight Group, specialists, observers) and as part of the Defra NFS, HVM, UKRI and Sciencewise teams.

Quotes from individual participants and stakeholders are included in *blue italics* to illustrate evaluation points.

### 3. Governance and project management

#### 3.1 Overview

The commissioning context for this dialogue was unusual for a Sciencewise-supported project: the commissioning body was a temporary task force (including both Defra staff and external experts) within a government department. A Defra project director and project manager reported directly to the independent NFS director, Henry Dimbleby, who held overall responsibility for all decisions, while sitting outside the decision-making hierarchy of the host department. This structure was designed to ensure the process was politically independent and that the team could engage with wider stakeholders with the minimum of bureaucracy.

- **Oversight Group.** Defra convened and coordinated a large, senior group chaired by Professor Peter Jackson and with a fairly fluid membership of about 18 individuals representing a broad range of government, academic, non-governmental and food sector interests (see *Annex A*). The OG met twice in person, once online and then reviewed stimulus materials and the final report via email (see *Annex A*). The expectation was that meetings would be held over a six-month period; in the event this was extended to 10 months due to COVID.
- **Core project management team.** The core project management team comprised a two person Defra team, a four person HVM team (project director, project manager, technical support/coordinator, and an independent agricultural sustainability adviser), the Sciencewise dialogue and engagement specialist (DES), a representative of UKRI and the independent evaluator. The HVM team was responsible for design and delivery (see Section 2). All of the core project management team met regularly, initially face-to-face and by telephone, and from March 2020 to September 2021 online.
- **The Defra NFS team took a very hands-on role in the dialogue.** In addition to standard roles such as the overall framing of the dialogue, managing the Oversight Group (OG), proposing stakeholders for interview or as specialists, and in signing off materials and the final report the NFS team's also took a role in developing stimulus materials and presenting them as specialists. Senior NFS team leaders contributed as talking heads in videos, setting the scene for Rounds 1 and 2 and sharing the NFS Part 1 findings and progress on Part 2. A large number of Defra staff also participated as observers in both rounds of workshops and in the National Summit. This level of visibility and commitment was a major contributing factor in participants feeling that they were being listened to and that their views would be reflected in the NFS (see *section 5.2*). The team also took the lead in designing and co-facilitating the National Summit. In contrast, the team took only a limited role in the publication and dissemination of the final public dialogue report – usually a key commissioner role – since the independent NFS team had largely dispersed by this point.
- **Sciencewise and UKRI representatives were closely involved in project management from the early business planning stages, through procurement and delivery.** During the summer pause UKRI provided additional resources (see *section 6*) to maintain the momentum.

### 3.2 Challenges which affected project delivery

The project management and governance arrangements were challenged by several factors: the unusual set up within commissioning body, disruption and delays cause by COVID; the temporary dispersal of the NFS team; a late decision to go ahead with Round 2 online; and a change in framing in Round 2. The combination of these factors had some impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of dialogue as described in the following paragraphs.

**The status of the NFS task force as an insider/outside team in Defra created some challenges for the process, not least a lack of clarity about decision-making and sign-off.** The initial Defra core team (a deputy director, analysis lead, project manager and analysis team) had prior experience of using public dialogue: they shared Sciencewise expectations that the dialogue would be a normative, bottom-up, independent process generating evidence on how the public participants felt about different aspects of the food system which could enrich the NFS process at every step. The initial team worked closely with Sciencewise and UKRI on the business plan to agree the objectives, methodological approach and in running a transparent, competitive procurement process to appoint delivery contractors. However, a combination of the scale of the NFS undertaking and the demanding leadership style in the NFS team created stress and burnout leading to significant staff turnover: by early 2020 a Defra Grade 5 (Deputy Director), two Grade 6's and several Grade 7's had moved on before the dialogue had really hit its stride.

**Confusion over the expectations of a UKRI Sciencewise public dialogue.** When the independent NFS director engaged towards the end of the procurement process it became clear that his preference would have been for a Citizen's Assembly<sup>5</sup> delivered by a preferred contractor. This approach would not have met UKRI Sciencewise or government procurement standards: and since the contractors had already been appointed to deliver a public dialogue it was too late to re-design the methodology or re-tender the contract and still produce timely findings. The misalignment of expectations between the NFS leadership and the rest of the core project managed team contributed to a lack of ownership of the dialogue process and a misunderstanding about the format that the public dialogue report would take (i.e. an independent analysis of citizen voices, rather than evidence written up in the service of the policy message).

Reassurances from the initial NFS core team provided comfort to Sciencewise, UKRI and the delivery contractors that a workable compromise could be achieved: this was agreed as a public dialogue process culminating in a National Summit, which would feed recommendations into the NFS process which could then be tested by a top-down Citizen's Assembly (funded separately). This compromise did not, however, address a certain disregard for public dialogue as a methodology. A lack of clarity about how the dialogue and NFS processes would fit together was still evident to some Oversight Group members well into the process (see *section 3.3*).

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<sup>5</sup> Citizen's Assemblies are more often designed as a top-down public engagement process to test and endorse specific policy recommendations.

**Management style and core team relationships.** The incoming Defra NFS project management team had no direct experience of public dialogue and in stepping into the demanding roles they adopted a forceful management style. The environment created was more transactional than the collaborative co-management style generally achieved in Sciencewise-supported dialogues.

**Late decisions and lack of clarity on sign-off procedures contributed to unrealistically tight timetables.** During Round 1, delays in other parts of the NFS process led to some last-minute decisions and unnecessary stress in developing stimulus materials. A late decision to move the Round 2 workshops online also led to a challenging timetable to re-engage participants, recruit specialists, sign-off workshop plans, prepare materials and have them reviewed by the OG (see *section 3.3*). This put the delivery contractors under unnecessary stress and limited the role that the OG members could play during Round 2.

**Capacity constraints in the NFS team delayed the public dialogue report publications and limited the overall impact of the dialogue findings.** As the NFS team's focus moved to drafting the NFS Part 2 report from late 2020 limited capacity delayed the review and sign-off process. A lengthy delay in agreeing the objectives and format of the National Summit meant it came too late in the dialogue process to inform the dialogue findings or the NFS Part 2 report.

Finalising the public dialogue report was a lengthy stop-go process. HVM analysed and incorporated a huge volume of evidence in a first version of the report just a month after the final Round 2 workshops. A long gap then followed before the NFS team was able to provide feedback, requesting radical changes in structure, content, style and branding design. This process was repeated three times, with the NFS project manager at one point "*taking the pen*" to draft an executive summary which framed the findings to fit with the emerging NFS Part 2 messages and style. The inconsistencies in style and message were noted by several OG members (see *section 3.3*).

The final report was not published in tandem with the NFS Part 2 report and other supporting evidence, but in September 2021, 10 months after the end of the dialogue. In the view of the evaluator and OG interviewees, this was no reflection on the quality of HVM's analysis or drafting but rather a lingering misconception about what a public dialogue report should look like. The public dialogue launch came several months after the NFS Part 2 report: it was a low-key affair, led by UKRI Sciencewise, and not reflective of the scale of resources invested or the quality of the process.

### **3.3 Sciencewise and UKRI advisers**

Both Sciencewise and UKRI considered withdrawing financial support at various sticking points in the process. However, recognising the once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring citizens' voices to the centre of a rethink the food system and the scale of the resources committed this was never really an option. Instead, advisers took a more hands-on role than usual in supporting the commissioners and delivery contractors and keeping the process on track.

- **The Sciencewise Dialogue and Engagement Specialist (DES) argued for the integrity of the process, encouraged respect for the professionalism of delivery contractors, and advised on best practice delivery.** Support provided during commissioning, procurement and in making the case for public dialogue and transparent and competitive procurement was greatly appreciated by the initial Defra team.
- **During Rounds 1 and 2, UKRI and Sciencewise advisers made numerous interventions to help keep the process on track.** The team referred issues up to the Defra Director (e.g. clarifying the decision-making process and negotiating deadlines and amendments). Although these interventions temporarily defused problems, they never quite resulted in the hoped-for collaborative and trusting working relationships in the core management team. The NFS team setup outside normal departmental structures meant that the usual options for referring complaints to higher echelons in the department were limited.
- **The team stood firm on their expectations of an independently authored, analytical, final dialogue report and took the lead in publishing and launching the final report at the Sciencewise website.** The final public dialogue report was beautifully written, accessible, well designed and put the citizen voice front and centre, fully reflecting the time and passion that the public participants had committed to the process.

### 3.4 Oversight Group

The size of the OG enabled most interests to be included and for the team to benefit from helpful advice in the early part of the process when framing, accuracy and balance were really important. However, the shift to online, the drawn-out final stages and fall-off in communication led to members gradually disengaging and limited the opportunity to disseminate the dialogue findings through OG members and maximise the dialogue policy and research impact.

- **A large, experienced group was able to bring a wide range of perspectives.** The high-profile nature of the NFS meant that many organisations were keen to have a seat at the table and the size of the group brought together non-governmental and academic interests representing health, environmental and consumer perspectives (including those facing extreme food poverty) with industry, farming and government departmental views. There was very little duplication with other groups supporting the NFS process (the 30-strong NFS advisory panel and a cross-Whitehall group). Several members, including the Chair, brought prior experience of public dialogue. The mix of individuals resulted in a good gender balance but, even with UKRI Sciencewise representatives pushing for more diverse representation, still included only a few individuals from Black or minority ethnic community backgrounds.
- **Effectively chaired with a clear focus on delivering its roles and responsibilities.** Evaluation interviewees described the face-to-face meetings as well organised, well chaired and highly productive, with opportunities for all around the table to contribute. Members were clear on their responsibilities and brought their combined expertise to bear to make the dialogue as accessible and far reaching as possible and ensure the findings would be considered robust and credible.
- **The group made its mark on the framing and delivery of Round 1 through:**
  - **Refining its objectives** (e.g. adding in 'production' to Objective 2 and underlying the importance of the objective on innovation and science as potential solutions).



- **Endorsing the choice of locations**, recruitment methods and outline designs for Rounds 1 and 2.
- **Reviewing Round 1 stimulus materials** before they were piloted: members were generally happy with the accuracy and breadth of views in the information shared.
- **Contributing as specialists to dialogue events**: six appeared as specialists in person or via pre-filmed talking head videos (see *Annex A*).
- **Raising questions over the framing**. Several members raised concerns about how the National Summit would fit with the NFS team's aspiration for a Citizens' Assembly and how both would inform the NFS. As one interviewee told us: "*When the dialogue was pitched it was expected to be a substantive part of the evidence, but increasingly it felt like an add on.*"
- **Most members remained engaged in helping to frame Round 2 by:**
  - **Raising questions over the framing**. At the second OG meeting - only 10 days before national lockdown, but still with the full expectation that face-to-face workshops would go ahead at the end of March – a few OG members challenged the NFS team's proposed focus on meat and dairy. This concern was again raised at the third OG meeting: several interviewees were disappointed by the limited available time and space to resolve this issue. As one interviewee stated: "We believe that by only focusing on these two food groups, the debate becomes quite narrow and risks participants, and therefore the wider strategy, of being unsighted on other wider challenges in shifting towards a more sustainable diet." Most participants felt that they had been able to amend this narrow framing to a wider discussion on 'shifting to more sustainable diets'. The group also suggested avoiding using jargon (a 'social contract') and to instead talk about 'roles and responsibilities' of different actors in the system.
  - **Reviewing Round 2 materials**. Although many individuals expressed an interest in reviewing materials for Round 2, the tight timetable left only a two-day window for review. This timescale was unfeasibly tight for most individuals and only a few submitted detailed comments. Those made by the NFU representatives were substantive and highlighted their concerns about accuracy and balance. The NFS team did not fully accept these comments and the materials for the second workshop were amended, but remained focused on reducing meat and dairy consumption.
- **After the field work finished and the reporting timetable continued slipping most OG members gradually disengaged from the process**. As the NFS team's focus shifted to drafting the NFS Part 2 report correspondence with the OG tailed off. Only a small core group remained actively engaged:
  - **Elapsed time and a tight review deadline for the draft public dialogue report meant very few individuals reviewed it**. Several that did noted a disconnect between the main report findings - which they felt accurately reflected feedback from the public dialogue workshops - and the executive summary, which "*appeared to be saying what the NFS wanted to hear rather than what people had said.*" The final version of the executive summary, drafted by the delivery contractors, was considered much more in line with the findings and tone of the overall report.
  - **Attending the National Summit (April 2021)**- five signed up and three attended on the day.
  - **Attending the NFS Part 2 launch (July 2021)**. A few attended and shared links to the report at their websites. A typical view amongst those interviewed was that the



NFS Part 2 report was: "*an insightful read reinforcing our understanding of what matters to the public – we have shared the key themes that emerged with our members.*"

- **Disseminating the public dialogue findings.** The final public dialogue report was shared with all OG members in September 2021, but by this time most had moved on and few appear to have posted links at their websites, although the chair has shared findings through academic networks (see *Section 5*).

In retrospect, the evaluator and Sciencewise should have pressed for an additional (fourth) meeting and more frequent communication during the final stages to move on the final report process and the OG's role in disseminating the findings.

## 4 Objectives

### 4.1 Overall achievement of objectives

The objectives summarised in *Table 4.1* were typical of a Sciencewise public dialogue and included a normative exploration of the underlying values, principles and expectations of a diverse group of participants in their role of citizens, and understanding how these evolved as they explored the complexities of the food system and were able to discuss this with specialists and each other. As summarised in *Table 4.1*, most of the objectives were met despite the impacts of COVID, and a refocus of objectives part way through.

**Table 4.1: Objectives and how different public dialogue elements delivered them**

Combined Round 1 and 2 objectives	Met or not	Round 1 (face-to-face (Feb 2020))	Interim (online May-Aug 2020)	Round 2 (online, Oct 2020)	National summit (online, April 2021)
<b>Engage a diverse and inclusive group of the public in deliberation on the desired outcomes of the proposed NFS</b>	✓	A good mix (180 participants from five locations) agreed that the food system needs to change and that they could help inform how the NFS could do this.	A diverse group (116 - 65% of original participants) took the chance to take part in voluntary online activities during the first lockdown.	A diverse group (129, >70% of R1 participants) re-engaged for R2. Tech support before and during sessions helped ensure everyone had acquired the necessary digital skills.	A good mix (43 from 5 locations) took part and enjoyed hearing the dialogue findings: 3 shared reflections on being part of the process.
<b>Understand participants' priorities and values in their relationship to the food they eat, how it is grown and produced, and the impact it has (R2 focus on meat and dairy)</b>	✓	The design built through a self-exploratory warm up exercises, presentations, community voice pen portraits, and carousels to small group discussions which surfaced their priorities & value pre-pandemic.	Engaging materials (exercises, discussion threads, community voices and a webinar) provided rich detail on how priorities & values had been affected by the pandemic.	A re-focus of materials and discussion topics dug deeper into understanding the impacts of unsustainable diets and revealed differences in views about the implications of reducing meat and dairy consumption.	Analysis of the findings highlighted similarities and differences across the five locations while citizen testimony (3 participants) highlighted how individuals were acting on the values and priorities they had identified.
<b>Understand participants' views on the role of existing and emerging technologies in meeting priorities</b>	✗	This objective was of interest to UKRI Sciencewise and some OG members but was not a priority for the NFS team and did not become a central focus of discussing solutions to challenges. Some views on how existing technologies contributed to challenges emerged in discussions with carousel specialists.	Community voice clips illustrated how arable farmers were applying emerging technology.	Emerging technologies (e.g. alternative proteins and lab-grow meat) were discussed, but less so than other policy solutions.	
<b>Understand the expectations of the food system and the people within it (R2)</b>	✓	The complexity of the food system and actors was introduced via an infographic (revisited in Round 2) and community voices.	Participants got more understanding of roles of different actors during the pandemic (community voice clips, webinars and NFS team roles).	The design carefully built from R1 to reinforce understanding of participants' expectations of the food system and who should take responsibility to deliver solutions.	Small group discussions focused on individual behaviour change and how stakeholders could support it but did not feed into the dialogue report findings.
<b>Encourage discussion of and explore the trade-offs and outcomes, and how these might be resolved (R2 focus on meat and dairy)</b>	✓	Discussions of trade-offs were wide ranging (health, affordability, climate, environment and quality standards) and how they fit with personal and cultural factors affecting food choices.	Online discussion threads helped participants to start thinking about the outcomes they wanted (availability of healthy, local, affordable food for all).	During workshop 3 participants explored their preferences against a 'ladder of interventions' and clear criteria emerged for which would be acceptable in terms of level of government intervention.	Food system and elected officials responded to participants' points on what was needed with offers of what they could deliver.
<b>Use the outputs to inform the next steps in the development of the National Food Strategy.</b>	✓	Findings were shared with the NFS team but, due to COVID/context related changes were not used to inform the NFS Part 1 report.	Rich data on COVID-related changes to attitudes and individual behaviour was generated on the Recollective platform, but was not really able to feed into the NFS process.	Findings from all groups and a 'quote book' fed into the NFS Part 2 main report but less so into the recommendations, although the criteria for acceptable interventions are loosely reflected in several recommendations.	The sequencing was too late to inform NFS Part 2 evidence or recommendations.

## 4.2 How the dialogue met specific objectives

### 1. To engage a diverse and inclusive group of the public in deliberation on the desired outcomes of the proposed National Food Strategy

This objective was very well met, despite the huge challenges in moving online part way through the process at a time when participants were facing many other challenges.

- **A diverse and inclusive mix reflective of population took part in Round 1.** Through the choice of locations and with some targeted methods to fill gaps (due to the impact of floods and storms in Bristol, Kendall and Grimsby) the dialogue successfully engaged 177 participants for Round 1. The mix fully reflected the expected demographics of the five locations and of the English population. Specialists, observers and participants themselves agreed that almost everyone was fully engaged and were able to make their voices heard in the warm and lively atmosphere created by the delivery team.
- **Participants brought lived experience as food consumers and a breadth of starting positions on the importance of environment and health issues.** Screening questions worked effectively to bring a range of perspectives across the cohort, except in Kendal, where participants appeared more than averagely interested in the food system. The community voices stimulus materials (see *Section 2 and Annex B*) brought in the perspectives of individuals working within the food system (including farmers, fishermen, shop owners and market stallholder holders and a foodbank working) and helped participants to start thinking more as citizens. By the end of Round 1 almost all specialists agreed that the participants had grasped the complexities of the food system well enough to make a useful contribution to the NFS process.
- **During the summer pause many participants (116, 65%) chose to stay engaged and developed the skills they needed to move online for Round 2.** UKRI Sciencewise and HVM's efforts to create a satisfying bridge between the rounds helped the majority anyone who wanted to keep the conversation going. Many individuals shared their heartfelt appreciation of the chance to stay connected and discuss the challenges around food supply chains, economic insecurity and health at a very difficult time. The time spent and enthusiasm with which participants contributed their reflections, food diaries and to forum discussion threads was evidence of how much they valued this opportunity.
- **About 75% of the Round 1 participants chose to re-engage for Round 2.** Despite the time lapse (7 months after originally planned), change in format (numerous short sessions) and competing demands on their time (caring, home-schooling and working from home) many were keen to complete the process. The care and patience invested by the HVM team in supporting people to move online ensured that no one was excluded due to lack of access to a computer, Wi-Fi or online meeting skills.
- **The engaging design and staggered thank you payment structure contributed to high retention rates during Round 2.** Many participants reflected in evaluation feedback on their enjoyment of and commitment to the process. Most were very pleased to reconnect with their facilitators and others from their location. *"This has been very informative, and I've enjoyed discussing these issues with people I wouldn't normally encounter as it's given me a better picture of the views people have in our society!"* I participant Round 2.

## 2. To explore and understand participants' priorities and values in their relationship to the food they eat, how it is grown and produced and the impact it has; and to understand what people think about the premise of eating less meat and dairy

This objective was fully met both in Round 1 and in Round 2, when the focus shifted to meat and dairy consumption.

- **A rich understanding of participants' priorities and values in their relationship to food quickly emerged during Round 1.** The design successfully led participants on a journey towards a more nuanced understanding of the food system as citizens. The contributions by specialists and from community voices helped reveal differences in views from across the five locations that resonated with previous research.
- **Activities and discussions on the Recollective research space during the summer pause highlighted changing views about food and its relationship to health and poverty which had come to the fore due to the COVID pandemic.** Discussion threads and food diaries underlined the central place that food was taking in many people's lives during lockdown and echoed research by others such as the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in summer 2020. The data was not reflected directly in the NFS process but certainly heightened interest in the subject for Round 2, with one participant describing the impact of COVID as: "*a very badly wrapped gift for the National Food Strategy.*"
- **During Round 2 most participants embraced the shift in focus towards exploring their views on eating less meat and dairy.** Despite worries about the narrow focus from some OG members (see *Section 3.3*), the reframing gave participants a tighter frame to explore trade-offs between their own preferences and societal impacts (health, climate and environmental) of meat and dairy consumption patterns. Clear differences emerged between urban and rural areas. Participants also still managed to discuss issues which had seemed important to them during Round 1 (such as animal welfare standards, waste and local purchasing). A consensus emerged across all five locations that a fundamental change was needed to what they described as '*an upside-down food system*' for the benefit of people and planet, with a strong caveat that healthy food should be affordable by all. The NFS team's foreword to the public dialogue report notes that: "*The overriding message we heard was that citizens felt there is something fundamentally wrong in how food works.*"

## 3. To understand the expectations public dialogue participants have of the food system and the people within it

This objective was added for Round 1, but the design during Round 1 had set the scene for it to be successfully addressed during Round 2.

The thoughtful design during Round 1 (a food systems map introducing the role of different actors, community voice pen portraits (see *Annex B*) and the Defra team's descriptions of roles during the pandemic made it relatively easy for participants to articulate their expectations of the food system and who was responsible for delivering them in Round 2. The makeup of the small groups – bringing together individuals with experience across the food system – also helped participants to think about different roles for delivering policies. The NFS Part 2 report notes greater support than had been expected for state intervention where this might help individuals to make healthier food choices.

#### 4.To explore and understand participants' views on the role of existing and emerging technologies in meeting those priorities

Although this was a UKRI Sciencewise area of interest and a clear objective in the business case, this objective was not really met. The UKRI Sciencewise representatives and some OG members pushed for this to be more explicitly covered in the design of both Rounds 1 and 2: as a result existing intensive farming practices were discussed at carousels during Round 1 and in relation to meat and dairy production during Round 2. However, the Defra NFS team was more interested in exploring what would influence behaviour change during Round 2 and discussion of emerging technologies was limited. Small group discussions touched lightly on alternative proteins and lab-grown meat as alternatives to consuming animal proteins: a few participants also brought their own research of innovative technologies they felt could be part of the solution because they were being used elsewhere in Europe. However, the Round 2 discussions on a 'ladder of interventions' focused on potential information, labelling, taxes and regulatory instruments rather than technological solutions. The NFS Part 2 report includes recommendations for encouraging greater use of technology<sup>6</sup> but not based on evidence from the dialogue.

#### 5.To encourage discussion of and explore the trade-offs and outcomes, and how these might be resolved

This objective was well met during the Round 2 workshop sessions.

- **Presentations and deliberations around potential policy interventions successfully generated an understanding of how participants would trade-off policies in the context of meat and dairy consumption choices.** Clear differences emerged on issues such as bans and taxes: these emerged strongly in individual deliberations, and slightly less so in small groups as participants seemed to challenge each other less robustly than they might have done in the room (see *Section 6*).
- **Some generalisable 'principles' or 'criteria' emerged for policy solutions that would be more or less acceptable.** Support was greatest where the issue to be addressed was urgent, the benefits and costs widely spread, individuals would not be stigmatised (e.g. in relation to their dietary choices), and there would still be some individual agency in making choices. The degree of consensus about these criteria may partly have reflected the paradigm shift nationally in the perceived importance of food and diet as a result of the pandemic.
- **The delay and format of the National Summit meant it was not able to play the intended role of further developing these criteria or refining messages for the NFS Part report.** One stakeholder interviewee concluded: "*A disappointment that it was so curtailed – in the end it was just two hours and felt a bit stage-managed ... hope they [participants] didn't feel short-changed when they had been offered more.*"

#### 6.To use the outputs from the dialogue to inform the next steps in the development of the National Food Strategy

This objective was met but, the nature of the NFS independent review (time-limited, not part of a government department process, and covering the interests of a number of departments), and the disruption caused by COVID limited the extent that the dialogue was

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. use of AI and IT in farming (robots, drones, improved genetics) and developing meat alternatives sector (precision fermentation of proteins, plant-based meat substitutes (wheat, soy, pea and algae) and lab-based meat)

able to inform the NFS, relative to what had initially been expected. This was partly due to the delayed publication of the dialogue report which means it is referenced less than other sources of NFS evidence. The foreword, signed by Henry Dimbleby, does emphasise the dialogue's importance in bringing understanding of the complex linkages between food, values, health and sustainability and in helping improve the NFS Part 2 recommendations and the workshops are described as "*Inspirational events. No written report could ever hope to capture the full depth and richness of a discussion involving 180 people across the country over 18 months.*" The dialogue did inform the NFS process in a number of ways as summarised in *Table 4.2*, but the absence of any explicit reference to the dialogue findings in the Part 2 Recommendations means there is no golden thread directly tracing from the dialogue findings to potential policy impacts (see *Section 5*).

**Table 4.2: Summary of how the public dialogue helped inform the NFS process**

Element of NFS	How the public dialogue process and findings informed it
<b>NFS Part 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Due to a change in purpose (to make recommendations on addressing food poverty and trade standards, rather than as a synthesis of the evidence) the public dialogue was not reflected.</li> <li>• OG members and participants accepted this expediency and endorsed the recommendations: "<i>I have read Part 1 and am aware of how the pandemic moved focus to deal with the most important issues of the moment. I congratulate you on the wonderful presentation of Part 1, which was magnificent.</i>" Participant, Round 2.</li> </ul>
<b>National Summit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The online session provided closure for the 43 participants who took part, and shared the public dialogue findings with a small audience of 20 stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>NFS Part 2 launch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The launch webinar (15<sup>th</sup> July 2021) featured the <a href="#">Public dialogue mini documentary</a> ensuring that the public dialogue was acknowledged and participants' voices were heard.</li> <li>• Filmed in their own environments (a considerable feat during local lockdowns), one participant from each location showed and told how their thinking about food had evolved.</li> <li>• They also explained how they felt they had been able to influence the NFS process and in turn had been influenced by being part of the process.</li> </ul>
<b><a href="#">The NFS Part 2 main report (the Plan)</a></b>	<p><b>Dialogue findings are reflected in several ways:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The role of the public dialogue is acknowledged in the foreword.</b></li> <li>• <b>The overall message</b> for radical change to achieved in a balanced, proportionate and fair way resonates throughout.</li> <li>• <b>Chapter 13: the Protein Transition-</b> Describes the dialogue process and cites public participants' attitudes to reducing meat intake. The text refers to mixed and some strongly negative reactions to a proposed meat tax. Although we certainly heard differences in opinion in small groups we observed, this evidence may also have come from other NFS evidence<sup>7</sup> sources: the description of '<i>panellists</i>' (rather than public participants) being "<i>vehemently opposed</i>" and that "<i>arguments between instantaneous tribes were fierce</i>" with discussions "<i>crackling with hostility</i>" does not particularly chime with the tone of public dialogue discussions we heard.</li> <li>• <b>A dozen quotes from the dialogue 'quotes book' are used in support of arguments about the impacts of the food system on health, climate and the environment.</b> Most quotes are used verbatim and drawn from across all five locations: a few are not quoted in full (e.g. on pages 49 and 117) or with subtle changes in wording (e.g. on page 66 referring to climate change rather than environment more generally). Several quotes underline how individuals have changed their own behaviour as a result of learning more through the dialogue</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> [Food Foundation's Youth Assembly](#) or Town Hall meetings.

(for instance on pages 84, 117 and 122) particularly in relation to reducing meat consumption.

**The NFS Part 2 Recommendations in Full**

**Draws loosely on the dialogue findings:**

- **The public dialogue foreword notes** *"the findings from this process have shaped and directed our recommendations ... The recommendations we will make are far the better for it."*
- **However, none of the 14 policies directly reference the public dialogue** among the many other sources quoted. Neither are the findings cited in the preamble to the policy recommendations.
- **The handful of recommendations to help break the junk food cycle and protect the NHS are in line** with the suggested dialogue 'criteria' for the most acceptable policy interventions.
- **The recommendation for a sugar and salt reformulation tax reflects the dialogue findings that taxes on unhealthy food may be generally acceptable.** Partly based on the dialogue finding of mixed support for a meat tax, the NFS team went on to commission further research (a large public opinion survey<sup>8</sup> and an impact assessment<sup>9</sup>) before proposing its centrepiece sugar and salt reformulation tax.

**Box 4.1: References to the public dialogue by the Defra NFS team**

- *"The public dialogue process and engaging with citizens was incredibly important for the independent review ... what they think is incredibly important for how we shape our recommendations and take things forward."* | NFS team member contribution to public dialogue mini documentary.
- *"It involves difficult questions about values and what sort of society we want to be. What is the role of the state in helping people to change their diet? How much do we value choice and freedom over health and sustainability? What do we want our land and countryside to look like? There are no right answers to these questions. So we set out to engage deeply with a group of citizens from across the country."* | public dialogue report foreword.
- *"We held deliberative dialogues" with citizens across the country to establish what changes the public is willing to embrace. The recommendations we have put together are intended to create the kind of food system the people of this country say they want – and need.*" | NFS Part 2, The plan, foreword
- *"In February of 2019, shortly before COVID-19 reached these shores, our team gathered in a small tearoom overlooking a graveyard in Bristol to discuss food policy with 36 strangers. This was the first of five "deliberative dialogues" that we staged around the country to get a better understanding of how the citizens of England feel about our food system, and how far they would be prepared to go to improve it."* | NFS Part 2, The plan, Chapter 13
- *"Across the board, there was a higher tolerance for state intervention than we had anticipated...overwhelming support for much stronger restrictions on advertising...and tougher regulations for retailers selling junk foods."* | NFS Part 2, The plan, Chapter 13

<sup>8</sup> A follow-on quantitative poll (cited in *Figure 13.1*, NFS Report Part 2 the Plan) found that about half of respondents believed the Government should set a target for meat reduction, but nearly 50% opposed a meat tax and only a quarter liked the idea.

<sup>9</sup> [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) The impact of a tax on added sugar and salt, Rachel Griffith, Victoria Jenneson, Joseph James and Anna Taylor, IFS Working Paper W21/21.



## 5. Actual and potential impacts of the dialogue

### 5.1 Overview

This section assesses the impacts of the dialogue process on the participants, policy and academic research. The decoupling of the dialogue report from other NFS products and published evidence has meant it has had a lower profile than might be expected from a Sciencewise-supported dialogue of this size.

### 5.2 Dissemination of the public dialogue report

The dialogue report was published just before the UN Food Systems Summit in September 2021 with press releases by Sciencewise and UKRI but no physical launch event. The report was shared with the Oversight Group members and all participants by HVM. Our evaluation interviews and desk research suggest that most stakeholders were by this time more focused on responding to the NFS Part 2 recommendations: links to the dialogue report do not appear to have been widely shared amongst OG members networks, nor do they appear to have been picked up in wider press coverage. Likewise, despite its high quality, the dialogue mini documentary has not been seen by wider audiences and has only attracted modest viewing figures on YouTube since it was shown at the NFS launch in July 2021.

### 5.3 Impact of the process on public participants

The public participants enjoyed both the face-to-face and online elements of the dialogues and by the end of Round 1 were almost unanimous in feeling positive about having been involved. Many commented on how much they had enjoying taking part in the process and learning about the national food system. By the end of Round 2, many took the trouble to share their appreciation of what a privilege it had been to take part in the important work of rethinking the food system. Typical views were: *"Great to be involved. If nothing else it has made me realise how complex some issues are and that there are few easy solutions, but it is a vital strategy for the future of the country and the world."* And *"It has been an extremely interesting journey and a privilege to take part. Thank you."* A number of participants also reported feeling more aware of and optimistic about the possibilities for changing the food system: *"I found it all very inspiring and feel hopeful for a healthier, happier planet."*

Many participants found being a part of the process very stimulating and valued the chance to have their voices heard, particularly during the difficult circumstances of the pandemic: *"It's been fantastic to be involved in the public dialogue. I was given a platform to have my voice heard."* The opportunity to interact with others was also appreciated: *"so many people from different backgrounds who I wouldn't normally meet"* (vox pop video).

By the end of Round 2, almost all participants felt well enough informed to have shared opinions that the NFS team would find useful: almost everyone felt that this is the type of policy process that the public should be involved with. The NFS team leadership played a highly visible role – introducing Rounds 1 and 2, presenting stimulus materials during Round 2 and responding to participants' recommendations - and for participants this underlined the importance of the dialogue and contributed to the trust and confidence they felt in the process and that they had been heard. A sole participant questioned whether the public's opinions were as valid as non-specialists.

By the end of Round 2 over 90% of participants felt that the NFS team would take account of their contribution and felt optimistic that, in turn, the Government would take on many of the NFS recommendations. A few individuals were more sceptical: *"My major concern is the Government not taking these ideas seriously or [not] taking drastic action to put them into policy and action. This is an important endeavour and I hope it is treated as such."*

Participants at the National Summit appreciated being able to talk to wider stakeholders: *"It was nice to talk to those who really could make a difference."*

#### **Box 5.1: Selected quotes from public participants on the impact of the dialogue**

- *"A great experience overall and I'm glad to know our views will be going to good use."*
- *"I am impressed with the way it was conducted, it felt inclusive and meaningful. I hope that some, if not all of the recommendations that are made to Government by the National Food Strategy are successful."*
- *"I expect Part 2 to be as effective as the first and hope there is a positive response by the Government to it"*
- *"Overall, I am very pleased to have learnt from the NFS and to have taken part. I do hope that our voices will be heard more widely and help make a difference."*
- *"I just hope that there is the political will to take the ideas we all had into meaningful and constructive action."*
- *"You're listening, if you think my views count that means so much to me"* | Mini documentary film participant

Individual behaviour change as a result of what they learn through the process is never an explicit objective of a public dialogue. However, in this case the combination of the powerful messages that participants took from what they heard from specialists and each other, and the impacts of COVID in bringing food system issues to the fore appear to have influenced many participants. Through evaluation feedback, homework tasks, small group discussions, testimony at the National Summit and contributions to the mini documentary film many individuals shared how anecdotes of how they had, or intended to, change their thinking, behaviour and eating habits. One participant expressed some scepticism that people in small groups might be saying what they felt others wanted to hear rather than what they actually thought. However, individual comments on Recollective suggest that changes were more profound. One participant reported that *"It has definitely affected my buying and eating habits. 100% made me stop and think about things that I wouldn't necessarily be considering before."* while another featured at the summit and in the mini documentary film, reported how he had stopped eating meat as a result of taking part. Others also reported how they were trying to influence behaviours of those close to them: one felt *"compelled to share the knowledge I've learnt about food, animals, environment etc."* and another was *"determined to carry on with my food choices and I will talk to my friends and family about the subjects covered."*

An indicator of the level of interest and commitment that participants felt even after a six-month gap from the Round 2 workshops was the number of participants who expressed an interest in attending the National Summit (63, of whom 43 attended on the day) with a number of them still keen to be involved in further dialogue activities at this stage.

### **5.3 Potential impact on policy**

As noted in Section 4, the dialogue findings on criteria and principles were loosely reflected in a number of the NFS recommendations designed to help escape the junk food cycle,

protect the NHS and reduce diet-related inequality.<sup>10</sup> These recommendations broadly fit with the criteria developed during the dialogue, but also draw on many other sources and parallel policy processes.<sup>11</sup> It is not yet possible to trace a direct link from the dialogue findings to potential policy impacts.

A team within Defra is now preparing a Government Food Strategy (GFS) responding to the NFS Part 2 report and wider evidence<sup>12</sup> (including the public dialogue report) expected in spring 2022. By February 2022 there was no indication which recommendations the Government will take forward but a Defra interviewee told us that “*generally the NFS report went down pretty well and most recommendations are under consideration.*” The recommendations with closest links to the dialogue appear quite likely to be adopted as they have wide stakeholder support amongst organisations on the Oversight Group, NFS advisory group, within the food industry<sup>13</sup> and amongst parliamentarians (based on debates in the House of Lords (July) and House of Commons (December)).<sup>14</sup> They also fit with proposals in other bills.<sup>15</sup> The sugar and salt reformulation tax – even more loosely linked to public dialogue findings – seems less likely to be adopted as it is strongly contested by the food industry<sup>16</sup> and in the popular press.

### 5.5 Impact on academic research

The findings of the dialogue have been actively shared by a few OG members with wider academic and international audiences. As shown in *Box 5.2* the dialogue process has been used as an example in several recent presentations and forthcoming papers.

#### **Box 5.2: Examples of public dialogue citations in academic research**

- The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) online Festival of Social Science (November 2020) presentation on [Food in a digital age](#) by Prof. Peter Jackson used the public dialogue as an example of the challenges and opportunities for public engagement in food policy online.
- A presentation by Prof. Jackson at a Science and [Policy conference](#) at Wageningen University, Netherlands, (2020) described the NFS dialogue process, challenges and emerging findings and linked them to a [European report by SAPEA](#) on how the transition to sustainable food systems can happen in an inclusive, just, and timely way.
- The new international journal [Consumption and Society journal](#), will publish an article in 2022 referencing the NFS public dialogue and the challenges of treating the public as consumers vs. citizens.
- A Defra report on Public Engagement (forthcoming) led by Susan Owens of the Social Science Expert Group (SSEG), will include a case study on the NFS and Living Landscapes citing the public dialogue.

<sup>10</sup> Free School Meals (FSMs), Healthy Start programmes, ‘Eat and Learn’ initiatives in schools, mandatory reporting for large food companies and ensuring that public sector procurement delivers healthy and sustainable food.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. the Agriculture Act (put before parliament in January 2020 and approved in November),<sup>11</sup> the Climate Assembly UK (which reported in September 2020) and the Tackling Obesity Strategy (published by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in July 2020).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Departments of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Education (DoE), International Trade (DIT), Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and other independent sources such as food sector academics and the Food and Drink Sector Council (FDSC)

<sup>13</sup> <http://fdsc.org.uk/fdsc/documents/feeding-the-future-working-together-to-build-the-national-food-strategy-report-2021.pdf>, October 2021 which supports an ‘Eat & Learn’ initiative

<sup>14</sup> A debate requested by Jo Gideon, the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on NFS who also attended the public dialogue National Summit.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. the Health and Care Bill <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3022> currently at the committee stage in the House of Lords

<sup>16</sup> FDSC response to NFS strongly rejected the sugar and salt reformulation tax stating that the case for a tax leading to reformulation, rather than higher prices, has not been made.

## 6 How delivery met Sciencewise best practice principles

### 6.1 Overview

This was one of the first large public dialogues to move online. UKRI Sciencewise funding over the summer pause allowed the delivery team to develop a set of interim activities to maintain momentum over the summer pause. This not only kept participants engaged but enabled the delivery contractors, Sciencewise and the evaluator to research and test out the most effective ways for moving online in terms of effective digital platforms, logistics and addressing the less tangible (epistemological) factors affecting how knowledge is shared in shorter more intensive sessions mediated through screens. As shown in *Table 6.1* the thoughtful approach to adapting Round 2 designs reflected many elements of emerging best practice. The dialogue has therefore generated a number of lessons on what works online which will be applicable to future online or blended processes.

**Table 6.1: Meeting best practice standards (three ticks best practice)**

Best practice principles	Performance
Focus on addressing agreed dialogue objectives	✓ ✓ ✓
Learning from practice throughout	✓ ✓ ✓
Respect for public participants	✓ ✓ ✓
A mix of stimulus materials representing a range of perspectives	✓ ✓ ✓
Sufficient, accurate information to enable informed deliberation without overwhelming participants	✓ ✓ ✓
Sufficient time for deliberative discussions in small groups (synchronous) or individually in their own time (asynchronous)	✓ ✓ ✓
Professional, independent and probing facilitation	✓ ✓ ✓
Recording the findings to capture agreement and disagreement	✓ ✓
Analysis of dialogue results reflected in clear and coherent reporting with clear links between the data and conclusions	✓ ✓ ✓
Participant involvement in reporting the dialogue results	✓ ✓ ✓
Sharing the dialogue results and final reports with those involved	✓ ✓ ✓

### 6.2 Lessons about the design and delivery of effective online processes

The transfer of Round 2 to online proved very effective. The specific factors which contributed to the successful pivot online included the following:

#### The investment in creating an interim research space

- **An impressive 65% of Round 1 participants (116) chose to engage with the curated materials and discussion topics over the summer.** Many really welcomed this diversion from the loneliness and anxiety of lockdown and participants created rich evidence of their own experience in the form of food diaries (uploading photos and recipes) and starting their own discussion strands. All those who chose to take part were highly appreciative of the team's efforts to keep them updated and involved, with many praising the contractors: *"Well done to the HVM team for reorganising the workshops online."*
- **The contractors gained experience on training and support needs for digital inclusion and how attitudes had shifted as a result of COVID-19 experiences which**

**really helped in rethinking Round 2.** The Recollective platform continued to be a major element of the design and added real value as a platform for sharing materials and information, collecting views and evaluation feedback. Some participants really appreciated the chance to review materials in their own time: with a less rushed timetable for producing materials more could have been made of the chance to share materials on Recollective in advance.

#### **A commitment to meeting a duty of care to participants**

- **Many participants appreciated the care that HVM had taken in setting the tone for Round 1 (choice of venues and sustainable food)** and felt this had continued through the efforts to keep them connected and the conversation going over the summer.
- **Technical training provided before launching the online space and again as participants regrouped for Round 2, helped all those unused to using Zoom or Recollective platforms to master the basics.** Participants praised the care and patience shown by the tech team in helping them get the most out of their equipment and the platforms. This support helped ensure no one was excluded due to lack of digital skills: indeed older participants proved just as keen and were often the most active contributors to the online space. Several older people shared their appreciation of having been able to acquire new online skills that they could apply in their everyday lives.
- **The positive experience over the summer pause encouraged almost all those who took part to re-engage for Round 2.** Participants also felt better prepared for the shift in focus to health, climate and environment and the role and responsibilities of actors in the food system. While participants identified both downsides and upsides to the move online (see *Box 6.1*), almost all were really pleased that the process had been able to continue rather than finishing after Round 1. As one commented: *"I was concerned that the research would be another casualty of COVID-19 following the lockdown, but the team managed the pivot to online workshops very well and did their best to keep people involved."*
- **Participants felt comfortable working online and the vast majority kept their cameras turned on during small group discussions.** This was a good indicator that they were fully engaged. Almost all participants were zealous in completing their 'homework' individual deliberation tasks between sessions, generally putting in far greater effort than required simply to guarantee their incentive payment. Based on our review of their comments, this level of effort was a genuine reflection of how much people valued the chance to share their in-depth reflections.

#### **6.3 Rethinking the design and stimulus materials for online**

The HVM team worked hard to adapt the design and create new content which would work effectively online:

- **The length of online sessions (2-2.5 hours) and timing on weekday evenings or weekends was designed to work for participants.** The timing on weekday evenings or a longer weekend session worked equally well in terms of participant attendance, but with weekday evenings probably slightly preferred by specialists and observers. The design tested sessions of different lengths (1, 2 and 2.5 hours) and participants seemed happy with the longer sessions which allowed more time for small group discussions. Outside of a pandemic situation, fewer longer sessions might make for easier to recruit participants, and make logistics and staffing more efficient for delivery contractors.

- **Simplified formats should allow plenty of opportunities for both small group (synchronous) and individual (asynchronous) deliberation.** Although the online sessions did not feel quite as pacy and energetic as the face-to-face sessions the 2- or 2.5-hour sessions allowed ample time for small group deliberations: all topics got covered, everyone was able to contribute and they generated a richness of evidence to compare and contrast views between individuals and across locations.
- **Simpler stimulus materials – films and PowerPoints - work best online.** Participants found the mix, amount and balance of views presented in Round 1 stimulating, often eye-opening and felt they had learnt a great deal about the food system by the end of the day. For Round 2 the team had to go back to the drawing board to reflect what had been proven to work online: pre-filmed talking heads videos, slide presentations and clearly structured small group discussions. Despite extremely tight timetables to design them, Round 2 materials were equally clear, informative and effective.
- **PowerPoints used plenty of images and were in fonts and colours that worked well even on smaller devices.** Almost all participants agreed – as they had during Round 1 – that the materials provided them with the information they needed to have meaningful discussions on the issues.
- **Pre-filmed contributions had many advantages** ensuring that everyone was able to hear the same broad range of views while allowing the facilitation team to control the timing and quality of specialist contributions.
- **Participants welcomed a choice of ways to share their views.** Beyond small group discussions, participants shared their views via chat box, regular eVoting (MentiMeter) and through contributions (written and photos) on Recollective. Participants used all methods but reported that small group discussions as their overall preference for making their views heard.
- **Many participants felt some nostalgia for the face-to-face experience and noted the differences or limitations of the online medium for reading body language and having 'natural' conversations** (see *Annex C*). However, all those that participated in Round 2 accepted the necessity of moving online: many commented that it had worked far better, and was more enjoyable, than they had expected.

#### 6.4 Investing additional staff time to get the most out of the online format

Based on learning during the summer pause and from other processes which had moved online the team reallocated resources to ensure:

- **Continuous technical back up before and during sessions.** Dedicated tech support was crucial in ensuring that the Recollective space and Zoom sessions ran smoothly. A coordinator was on hand to anticipate connectivity issues and address problems (such as checking cameras and microphones were working as participants and specialists joined online, sharing stimulus materials and moving specialists around small groups). This allowed facilitators to focus on their key roles.
- **Continuity amongst facilitators across sessions and locations allowed them to focus on creating a convivial atmosphere and asking probing questions.** This was a considerable timetabling feat but was rewarded by groups quickly gelling and feeling cohesive again in Round 2, despite the long break. Several participants found this helpful: *"I appreciated being put into the same group of people as in the previous workshop - I felt that helped."*



- **Smaller online groups.** Smaller groups with six participants to one facilitator (compared to eight: one in face-to-face sessions) appeared to be an ideal size: all members could see each other on the screen and had time to contribute.
- **Keeping groups separate online events was resource intensive but had benefits in maintaining the strong sense of geographic identity which had been established during Round 1.** It made data analysis by location (in plenary, via eVoting and on Recollective) easier allowing the Lead Facilitator to playback key findings from each location to set the scene for each workshop. It also eased analysis of the similarities and differences in priorities, trade-offs and underlying values in different settings. This analysis helped to make the dialogue findings more robust.
- **The mix of platform and length of the process generated more material than could be fully used in the reporting.** The volume of material from multiple platforms, smaller groups and more sessions required additional time and staff resources for analysis and to be fully reflect the data in reporting. For future online dialogues this will need to be factored into contractor budgets.

### 6.5 Adjusting the facilitation role and how evidence is collected online

The unique blend of face-to-face and online sessions during this dialogue provided enabled comparison of how facilitation styles and the nature of evidence generated between lively face-to-face discussions versus the quieter, more measured discussions vary. As one specialist who contributed to both Rounds 1 and 2 noted: "*You can have rich conversations online, just not necessarily the same.*"

- **The facilitation team paid attention to creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere in order to put participants at ease and to ensure that all participants were treated with respect in a context where visual cues, turn-taking, body language and eye contact are subtly different.** We noted that participants tended to moderate their tone and language in small online groups and were less likely to directly challenge each other – even when the topics were contentious such as eating less meat and dairy. The one participant who robustly challenged others was perceived as being more aggressive than his remarks may have felt face-to-face: after a discussion with the lead facilitator he moderated his tone and apologised to others in the group. All participants felt respected and in turn respected each other's views, however, there may be a tendency towards greater consensus in small online groups than we had observed in face-to-face meetings.
- **Methods for capturing participant's comments online were less diverse.** In the room facilitators took visible notes but also collected participants' thoughts on post-it notes and from discussion in pairs: online views were mostly captured via simultaneous, visible PowerPoint notetaking by facilitators in shared screen mode. This approach worked well in terms of transparency and allowing participants to build on each other's points but also had downsides: it limited how well facilitators could see the group making it more difficult to encourage natural conversation. The notetaking approach may also have reinforced the appearance of consensus by prioritising areas of agreement to feedback to plenary (although the breadth of what participants said was also recorded and transcribed). Varying the mix of visible and offscreen notetaking and finding ways for participants to feedback directly (e.g. via an interactive whiteboard) would have been helpful at different points in the process.



- **Recollective proved a really useful additional mode of sharing knowledge, and capturing participants in-depth deliberations and evaluation feedback.** Although resource intensive (designing, moderating and collating the evidence), the Recollective space allowed participants to express their views of issues discussed in small groups in greater depth or more strongly than on Zoom. By the end of Round 2, almost all participants reported they had been able to make their voices heard via the mix of platforms. Individual contributions helped to paint a more nuanced picture of the breadth of individual views on food system dilemmas. The final public dialogue report included six 'capsule' pen portraits using long quotes from participants to describe the full breadth of views expressed, not just the areas of consensus.

### 6.5 Ensuring key dialogue elements do not get lost

The slippage in timing and compromises in structure of the National Summit meant that the summative event felt more like a public relations event than the intended opportunity to refine the findings.

The event was well attended,<sup>17</sup> the presentations of high quality (on the dialogue findings and on progress with the NFS Part 2) and the three participants spoke with passion and confidence about their experiences. Stakeholders found the event inspiring: "*the three participant contributors came across very well and with real commitment to the opinions they presented.*" and post-event online feedback via SurveyMonkey found that participants had unanimously enjoyed taking part. However, it felt more like a showcase of how the public's opinions change as they understand a topic, than a purposive element of the dialogue. Even if new insights had emerged they would have come too late to have an impact (*see section 4*). Furthermore, in trying to balance public and stakeholder participant numbers, the opportunity to involve many more participants online than would have been logistically feasible face-to-face was missed.

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<sup>17</sup> Of the 83 participants, half were public dialogue participants from across the five locations (43 of the 58 participants invited), 21 were stakeholders with an interest in the NFS including two MPs (Ian Byrne, Jo Gideon) and food and farming industry representatives and academics. The remaining 19 consisted of the Defra/HVM facilitation team and Defra observers.

## 6 Costs and benefits

### 7.1 Overview

This section compares the financial and in-kind costs of running the public dialogue with the potential economic benefits which could result. A key question was whether online processes could be cheaper to run than face-to-face dialogue. The following paragraphs suggest that a hybrid or good online dialogue is likely to be at least as costly to deliver as a face-to-face process: any savings in the costs of running physical meetings are likely to be more than offset by additional staff time, materials production and platform subscription costs.

However, savings in time and travel costs for commissioning body staff, Oversight Group members and specialist contributors can be a significant benefit of online dialogues allowing individuals to attend sessions in different locations and allowing more observers from the commissioning body to learn about public dialogue and hear directly from participants.

### 7.2 Financial costs

This was a large contract, nearly double the average for a Sciencewise co-funded dialogue: the initial budget for both the dialogue delivery and evaluation elements was £381.2K excluding VAT. The costs were shared equally between UKRI and Defra. The initial budget was to bring together 180 individuals across five locations for two full days of face-to-face dialogue and then reconvene 30 participants for a full day National Summit. The budget included participant 'thankyou' payments, venue hire and refreshments in the five locations and travel and overnight stays for the delivery and evaluation teams. The core delivery team also included sub-contracts for a food system specialist and for a professional documentary film maker to prepare high quality stimulus materials.

UKRI Sciencewise provided an additional £30K for interim activities over the summer pause. This covered the costs of subscribing to the Recollective platform and additional staff time to moderate the platform, develop stimulus materials, run an online webinar and additional small 'thankyou' payments to participants. The evaluation contract was also extended by 10% to cover additional time inputs over the extended timeframe.

With the move online the contractors were able to make some savings in venue hire and catering and travel and subsistence costs for Round 2 workshops and the National Summit. Together with a reduced number of participants re-engaging for Round 2 (129 instead of 180) these savings covered additional staff time for providing dedicated tech support, moderating the online space and reducing average group sizes. The budget did not allow for additional time for transcribing and analysis of greater volumes of data generated over a longer process using multiple platforms. The final total cost of delivery was £414 K excluding VAT: a modest 8.5% increase overall, despite a tripling in the length of the project. As a result of the long delays in finalising and publishing the report, the delivery contractors, Sciencewise, UKRI and the evaluator all put in considerably more project management time than budgeted for.

### 7.3 In-kind contributions to costs

Based on conservative values of an average opportunity cost of £500/day across all levels of seniority, we estimate that in-kind contributions of time amounted to a further £150K, equivalent to about a third on top of the financial budget.

- **Defra NFS project management team.** The team invested time over a 23-month period, but it is difficult to separate out time spent specifically on the public dialogue as opposed to other NFS evidence gathering, analysis and drafting tasks. Initially a two-person team was intensively involved at the business case and procurement stages; thereafter a project manager and assistant spent about two days a week during scoping and design stages and during Round 1 activities to mid-March 2020. Once the team regrouped in late July members worked intensively on developing stimulus materials and attending Round 2 events. After November 2020, inputs were mainly focused on the design and delivery of the National Summit, with the team's major focus on the wider NFS process. We estimate that in total the NFS core team spent about 200 equivalent to about £100K of in-kind contribution. The extended time frame for the project and the team's hands-on role in materials design and delivery, suggest the time inputs were greater than anticipated during the planning stages.
- **Oversight Group.** Almost all of the OG members attended the first two face-to-face meetings and reviewed materials for Round 1. About half a dozen individuals contributed as specialists in Round 1, devoting a full weekend day plus travel time. During Round 2, time inputs for online participation (online meetings and workshops) was less intense and fewer individuals spent time reviewing materials, report drafts or attending events. A conservative estimate of 45 days of time invested across the group would suggest a £22.5K in-kind contribution. A distinct benefit of the move online for OG members was in travel time and expense savings. Those interviewed for the evaluation suggested that the time they spent "*was in line with expectations and not onerous*" and a typical view was that the time invested was "*worth it to have a seat at the table.*"
- **Specialists.** The dialogue quality really benefitted from the time and expertise contributed by 38 specialists in attending events or being filmed for talking heads or community voice interviews. Across Rounds 1 and 2 we estimate a total of 60 days, equivalent to a contribution in-kind of about £30K. Again the move online substantially reduced time commitments (from a long day or overnight stay for face-to-face sessions outside London to just 3 hours/session including pre-briefing for online).
- **Defra observers.** The scale of the dialogue (the number of groups and online sessions), low costs of participating (in terms of time and travel) and convenience of evening sessions meant that many more Defra observers were able to benefit from hearing what participants had to say and understanding the benefits of public dialogue online than would have been feasible face-to-face.

### 7.4 Potential economic benefits of the dialogue

As described in *Section 6*, it is not yet possible to directly trace policy impacts from the public dialogue process and it has not therefore been possible to quantify the potential economic benefits of the public dialogue. However, several of the recommendations loosely connected to the dialogue (such as reducing health impacts from junk food and encouraging access to healthy food) could, if picked up by government departments, have long term economic benefits measurable in terms of reduced costs for the NHS in treating obesity and improved quality of life for individuals.

## 8. Lessons learnt and recommendations

### 8.2 Lessons for contractors on delivering a high-quality online process

The process benefitted from the decision to develop an online research space and from the thought and care invested in adapting the process based on emerging experience. The positive experience over the summer pause encouraged 70% of participants to re-engage for Round 2 online. The effective move online has generated a number of useful lessons for how contractors can make online processes work effectively:

- **To appear seamless, online delivery requires even more careful pre-planning, with implications for staffing levels and facilitator skills.** This includes ensuring technical back up before the first session and during all workshops, staffing for smaller group sizes (6-7 per facilitator) and timetabling for continuity in each location.
- **The scheduling of 2- or 2.5-hour sessions on weeknights and weekend evenings over the course of 3-4 weeks worked well for most participants.** There were very high attendance rates amongst those able to sign up for Round 2 and a significant number of participants found they actually preferred the convenience of participating from their own homes. Outside the unusual context of COVID lockdowns, fewer longer sessions (2.5 or 3 hours) might be a more reasonable 'ask' for participants and make timetabling and logistics easier for delivery contractors, specialists, and observers.
- **Online delivery works well with fairly simple workshop designs and information sharing via pre-filmed talking heads videos and carefully designed PowerPoints.** Pre-filmed or recorded materials enable the delivery contractors to control timings, the quality of specialist contributions and to ensure that everyone in each location gets to hear the same, broad range of perspectives.
- **Getting specialists to answer frequently asked questions identified in small groups in plenary sessions can work equally well face-to-face or online.** This can help ensure all participants at a location hear the same answers while allowing specialists to get a feel for the wider group.
- **The Recollective platform proved a really useful additional mode of sharing knowledge and capturing participants in-depth deliberations.** Setting up, moderating and collating the evidence from an online space requires additional staff time but can add a rich layer of additional evidence. This can help strengthen analysis of what is similar and what is different in views between locations and by participant characteristics. Individual (asynchronous) deliberation opportunities can also provide a useful counterbalance to any tendency for participants to be less challenging or to express their views less strongly than they might in the room.
- **Timetables for producing online materials need to build in sufficient time for Oversight Group review and design for accessibility (text, graphics and colours).** A potential advantage of online delivery is being able to share materials on an online platform in advance so that participants can review information at their own pace.
- **Visible simultaneous notetaking by facilitators (e.g. in share screen mode) can work well to capture participant inputs and help them build on each other's points.** Ideally this should be mixed with less formal notetaking and participant-led methods.
- **Short films, audio clips and pen portraits of 'community voices' were effective in bringing in lived experience from those working in the food system.** These stimulus materials added diversity and helped make the 'actors' within the food system more

visible and helped participants to think about the roles and responsibilities from the point of view of citizens, not just consumers.

- **Well-designed online reconvened/ summative events can offer opportunities to bring together more participants from all locations** because of the logistical ease and financial savings relative to face-to-face events, which typically only bring together a subset of participants.
- **An early decision to invest resources in a high-quality mini documentary film paid off in giving the dialogue some visibility and ensuring participant's voices were heard.** A greater commitment to disseminate the video and the final report by the commissioners or via the Oversight Group might have helped it reach wider audiences.
- **Good online or blended public dialogues are likely to cost at least as much as face-to-face processes.** Dialogues involving comparable numbers of public participants and engagement time are likely to be similar in cost when delivered online, and require more time and resource allocated to analysing and reporting on the greater volume of findings.

## 8.2 Recommendations for Sciencewise and UKRI

- **In order to have a significant impact on a policy process a dialogue needs to be timed to deliver its outputs and findings well ahead of the policy drafting process.** The sequencing of this dialogue in relation to the many moving parts of the NFS programme was not within Sciencewise's control and meant that any slippage risked reducing the value of the dialogue findings to the NFS process. The hiatus caused by the COVID pandemic could not have been predicted: but UKRI Sciencewise's decision to maintain momentum by investing a little extra resource over the summer pause proved really helpful in keeping the dialogue process on track.
- **Sciencewise and UKRI should ensure that the commissioning body decision-making procedures and ways of working are clear.** The expectation of a collegiate, co-production style of working and communication should be made clear from the outset and should be restated if there is any turnover in the core team.
- **Sciencewise's expectations of an independent public dialogue report which puts the citizen voice front and centre,** with an agreed timeframe for analysis, sharing comments and sign-off to ensure timely publication should be agreed from the earliest stages.
- **The independent evaluator and/or the Sciencewise Dialogue and Engagement Specialist (DES) should check-in regularly with both the commissioners and delivery contractor team leaders** to ensure that the division of responsibilities and communications are working well and to address any issues that might affect the efficiency or quality of the dialogue or its impacts.
- **Where projects are commissioned outside normal government lines of accountability Sciencewise should ensure that they and their contractors have access to grievance mechanisms** at higher levels in the commissioning body, if needed. Where there are early signs that a commissioning body is not prepared to meet Sciencewise standards or there are dangers of reputational damage to Sciencewise/UKRI, its contractors, the commissioners or to the status of public dialogue as a methodology, then Sciencewise/UKRI should be prepared to withdraw its financial support.

### 8.3 Recommendations for Commissioners

- **Think about the sequencing of the policy making process and when public dialogue findings can most usefully feed in.** Get in touch with Sciencewise as early as possible to ensure the dialogue findings can help shape the vision and substance of the policy process and inform any additional research or engagement needed.
- **Ensure that timeframes for public dialogue deliverables are realistic and the sign-off process is clear.** Ensure sufficient time is factored in to recruit specialists, for Oversight Group review, analysis of findings (longer for mixed platform online processes) and dialogue report drafting.
- **Maintain regular communication with the Oversight Group members,** even if the reporting schedule slips, so that they can help to disseminate findings and maximise the dialogue impact.
- **Provide clarity on the expected structure, format and design style of the final dialogue report and outputs** and agree procedures and timescales for review, sharing comments and sign-off to help avoid delays in report publication.
- **Where projects are commissioned outside normal government lines of accountability ensure access to appropriate grievance mechanisms** for all core project management teams (commissioner staff, contractors and Sciencewise).

## Annex A: Stakeholders involved in the public dialogue

Oversight Group members	
Name	Organisation
Ben Reynolds	Sustain
Christine McDowell, Ruth Edge, Jack Watts	National Farmers Union
Justin Varney	Birmingham City Council
Laura Wellesley	Chatham House
Luke Halsey	Royal Agricultural College
Matthew van Duyvenbode	Trussel Trust
Modi Mwatsama	Wellcome Foundation
Paul Smith	Botanical Gardens Conservation International
Peter Jackson	Sheffield University
Rachel Ward	Institute of Food Science and Technology
Sanjan Sabherwal	Policy Lab, Cabinet Office
Sarah Bradbury	Tesco
Teresa Marteau	Cambridge University Medical School
Theo Bass	UKRI
Toby Park	The Behavioural Insights Team
Ian Mace	Associated British Foods
Sue Davies	Which?
Philippa Lang, Theo Bass	UKRI

Name	Organisation
Henry Dimbleby	National Food Strategy
Dr. Tamsin Cooper	National Food Strategy
Anna Taylor	National Food Strategy
Dustin Benton	National Food Strategy
Professor Tom MacMillan	National Food Strategy
Dan Crossley	Food Ethics Council
Professor Peter Jackson	Institute for Sustainable Food, University of Sheffield
Professor Bob Doherty	University of York
Dr. Modi Motswana	Wellcome Trust
Professor Bhavani Shankar	University of Sheffield (previously SOAS)
Professor Steve Cummins	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Rachel Ward	Institute of Food Science & Technology
Laura Wellesley	Chatham House



Justin Varney	Birmingham City Council
Professor Susan Jebb	University of Oxford
Lindsay Boswell	FareShare
Dr. Christian Reynolds	Centre for Food Policy, University of London
Professor Tim Benton	Chatham House
Sue Davies	Which? the Consumer Association
Sarah Mukherjee	The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA)
Professor Dame Theresa Marteau	Behaviour and Health Research Unit at the University of Cambridge
Denise Bentley	First Love Foundation
Helen Browning	Soil Association
Tara Garnett	Oxford Martin School, University of Oxford
Simon Billing	Eating Better Alliance
Judith Buttriss	British Nutrition Foundation
Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones	Black Farmer products
Andrew Kuyk	Provision Trade Federation
Professor Michael Lee	Rothamsted Research
Professor Mark Post	Maastricht University
Catherine Tubb	RethinkX
Jonathan Beecham	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
Robin Ireland	Health Equalities Group, University of Glasgow
Caroline Drummond	LEAF
Professor Jennie Macdairmid	University of Aberdeen
Professor Michael Winter	University of Exeter
Emma Garnett	University of Cambridge
Duncan Williamson	Compassion in World Farming

#### Stakeholders who attended the National Summit

Rt Hon. Ian Byrne	MP, Liverpool West Derby
Rt Hon. Jo Gideon	MP, Stoke-on-Trent Central
Craig Livingstone	Lockerley Estate
Rebecca Laughton	Landworkers Alliance
Andrew Selley	Bidfood
Caroline Drummond	Leaf
Peter Jackson (OG and specialist)	University of Sheffield
Christian Reynolds (specialist)	University of Sheffield
Jenny Macdiamid	University of Aberdeen

Emma Garnett	Cambridge University
Susan Jebb	University of Oxford
Ian Mace	Association British Foods
Donna Ward	DWP
Emily Miles	FSA
Paul Clarke	Former Ocado
Sarah Bradbury	Tesco
Helen Browning	Soil Association
Denise Bentley	First Love Foundation
Alison Tedstone	PHE
Richard Benwell	Wildlife and Countryside Link

#### **Box A1: Oversight Group meetings**

- **The first meeting** (December 9<sup>th</sup>, 18 participants) focused on the framing, objectives and exploring the dialogue methodology and fit with other aspects of the NFS.
- **The second meeting** (March 11<sup>th</sup>, 12 participants) provided an update on the NFS progress and the first round of dialogue meetings, with discussions about the format and content of the second round and how these would inform the National Summit and fit with the Citizens' Assembly.
- **The third meeting** (7<sup>th</sup> September, online) was expected to review the overall findings and help shape the dialogue report but was rescheduled to order to update the group on activities during lockdown, the rationale and process for moving workshops online, and discuss the reworded objectives and refocus on reducing meat and dairy consumption.

## Annex B: Dialogue elements and materials

**Table B1: Dialogue elements and topics covered**

<p><b>Round 1 Face -to-face workshops</b></p> <p><b>R1: Morning (3 hours)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Film introduction to NFS - purpose of the dialogue and hints for working together.</li> <li>● Small group (SG) exercise - where our food comes – journey of food from farm to plate</li> <li>● SG discussions – ‘food challenges’ faced by individuals, families and society.</li> <li>● Community voice films (environment, healthy eating, veganism, affordability, buying local, trade, time &amp; convenience)</li> <li>● PowerPoint - introduction to the food system (complexities of actors and environmental, health and equity issues).</li> <li>● Specialist panel - curated Q+A on the issues raised by presentations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Round 2 Online workshops</b></p> <p><b>Webinar (1 hour, average two locations per session)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● PowerPoint (HVM) - Reminder of the aims &amp; findings of R1</li> <li>● PowerPoint (NFS) - what they did during lockdown and the recommendations in the NFS Part 1 report</li> </ul>
<p><b>R1: Afternoon (2.5 hours)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Carousel presentations with 4 specialists on hand to present key facts and issues and answer small groups questions as they revolved around four workstations viewing the food system through different lenses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Health</li> <li>○ Environment and climate</li> <li>○ Affordability</li> <li>○ Food standards and trade</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Small group reflections on the trade-offs required to achieve what matters to participants.</li> <li>● Closing remarks, briefing on homework and evaluation feedback</li> </ul>	<p><b>Workshop 1: Expectations of the food system now (2 hours, weeknight one location per session)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● MentiMeter – first thoughts on food</li> <li>● Filmed talking heads (8 mins) – 6 specialists reflect on expectations of the food system.</li> <li>● SG discussions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Food system expectations (health, climate, nature)</li> <li>○ Responsibilities of different food system actors to deliver expectations (why &amp; implications for others)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Interim activities before Round 2 (for those that were interested)</b></p> <p>HVM ran voluntary activities online:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Vox pop videos/audio recordings with community voices (CVs) incl a fishing family, dairy farmer, fruit and veg market stall holder and foodbank volunteer</li> <li>● Participant’s 7-day food journals - photos and written reflections on their eating habits during lockdown.</li> <li>● Presentation (Zoom) and Q+A with the Food Ethics Council on COVID-19 impacts on the food system and emerging issues.</li> <li>● Shared links to NFS Part 1 report &amp; video</li> <li>● Discussion forums – suggested by HVM and participants</li> </ul>	<p><b>Workshop 2: Transition to sustainable diets (2 hours, weekend am or pm, one location per session)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● MentiMeter – first thoughts on meat and dairy</li> <li>● SG discussions – what would it mean to reduce consumption?</li> <li>● Filmed talking heads (7 mins) – 8 specialists reflect on a range of perspectives on reducing meat and dairy.</li> <li>● SG discussions – questions with specialists</li> <li>● Filmed presentation (NFS) on sustainable diets and implications for health, climate, nature (and aesthetics, culture, animal welfare, flavour etc).</li> <li>● Questions in plenary to specialist panel</li> <li>● SG discussions - Overall reactions to eating less meat and dairy, the rationale for doing so and how it might be acceptable</li> </ul>
<p><b>Workshop 3: Future expectations of the food system (2.5 hours, weeknight, one location per session)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Presentation (HVM) on expectations and transition to a sustainable diet outcomes so far</li> <li>● Presentation (NFS team) - ladder of potential policy interventions to help reduce meat and dairy impacts</li> <li>● Small group discussions:</li> <li>● Future of the food system based on expectations of the system itself and those who deliver it.</li> <li>● Main messages on the future of food – feed back to plenary</li> <li>● Mentimeter – final messages to the NFS team</li> </ul>	
<p><b>National Summit (Sat 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2 hours online, 43 public participants from 5 locations)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Presentation (NFS team) – update on NFS reporting and role of public dialogue</li> <li>● Presentation (HVM) on outcomes from rounds 1 and 2 of the public dialogue</li> <li>● Participant testimony – five-minute reflections each by three participants on what they took from the dialogue process</li> <li>● Small group discussions – reflections participating, insights they took and what has changed for them as a result</li> <li>● Reflections from three stakeholders on what they had heard</li> <li>● Closing remarks (NFS team) on call to action and next steps</li> </ul>	

**Table B2: Dialogue stimulus materials at each stage**

Key element	Stimulus materials shared with participants
<b>Round 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short films (<a href="#">An introduction to the National Food Strategy</a> and <a href="#">An introduction to the food system</a>)</li> <li>• Carousels, with an attendant specialist informally presenting the issues and answering rapid fire questions on <a href="#">health</a>, <a href="#">affordability</a>, <a href="#">environment</a> and <a href="#">trade</a>.</li> <li>• Community voices: <a href="#">the environment and healthy eating</a>, <a href="#">Vegan food</a>, <a href="#">Food affordability</a>, <a href="#">Local food and trade</a>, <a href="#">Post Brexit trade in food</a>, <a href="#">Home cooked food</a>, <a href="#">Healthy eating</a> and <a href="#">Time poor eating</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Round 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PowerPoints to help frame the discussion: <a href="#">the expectations of the food system</a>; <a href="#">a shift to more sustainable diets</a>; and <a href="#">expectations of people within the food system</a>),</li> </ul>
<b>Summer activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow on community voice vox pop films (or audio clips where local lockdowns made filming difficult) explored how individuals were being effected by the pandemic and covered <a href="#">Small-scale fishing off the North Norfolk coast</a>, <a href="#">A pre-pandemic food bank</a>, <a href="#">A food bank during lockdown</a>, <a href="#">A market stall in lockdown</a> and <a href="#">Milk production in a pandemic</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>National Summit</b>	<p>Presentations by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NFS team on progress in producing the NFS Part 2 report,</li> <li>• HVM on the findings of Rounds 1 and 2 of the public dialogues.</li> <li>• Three public participants (two women and one man from Norwich, Lewisham and Bristol respectively) supported to make a 5-minute presentation on their own experiences and what they had taken away from the dialogue.</li> <li>• Three stakeholders who responded with reflections on what they had heard</li> </ul>

## Annex C: Participation reflections on moving online

A few, mostly older, participants across all locations found the initial 'listen and learn' webinar a bit frustrating since it required multi-tasking to listen, take notes and follow the chat stream simultaneously on Zoom. They variously described this as "*too much*," "*distracting*" or "*annoying*" but quickly became comfortable working online when the longer workshops required less multi-tasking and limited use of the chat function outside small groups.

Over two thirds of participants reported that online sessions worked just as well as face-to-face with many praising the HVM team and their individual facilitators for making the transition work so well. A number of participants highlighted the benefits of having had the opportunity to practise using online tools during the summer pause as contributing factors to making online sessions work as well as they did. Almost a third of all participants actually preferred meeting online, finding the shorter sessions and lack of travel more convenient and time efficient. Several noted that having already met in person probably helped the process, making it easier for groups and their facilitators to gel when they moved online. One participant reflected that "*Zoom sessions are more productive than the face-to-face meetings, no travel time and people still able to offer opinions and ideas to the group. I think it helped that we had all met previously so knew of each other and our group leader.*" This view was also shared by some specialists, one noting that: "*The groups bonded [during Round 1], and this put them in a good place to have challenging discussions.*"

Some participants also commented that the smaller groups and more structured approach were more efficient: "*I think better: more controlled smaller groups, more structure*" and "*I feel as though I was able to focus and provide better and more valid points due to having to be on for a shorter amount of time, rather than over a long day.*" Others felt that although they worked well, they were not quite so enjoyable as meeting in person: "*I think swings and roundabouts. It is probably easier to document the information through doing it online and by recording on Zoom. But it was a more pleasant experience going to the face-to-face [event] and it encouraged a more free-flowing conversation.*"

A sizeable minority would have preferred to meet face-to-face if it were possible, but accepted online as a necessary compromise: "*Zoom sessions are a poor substitute for the real thing but, of course, there is no alternative at present.*" A few really missed face-to-face meetings including the energy, the creative elements and the food they had experienced in Round 1, but only a few older participants found the online experience an ordeal. One told us that "*I treat the online sessions as a task that has to be completed rather than enjoyed.*" while another felt that "*Computer workshops were very isolating and the Saturday workshops far more preferable, inclusive and interactive experience for all.*" In contrast, several other older participants appreciated having had the chance to acquire Zoom skills.

Regardless of whether or not they preferred online meetings, many participants did point out limitations of online technology in enabling natural deeper conversations involving the whole group. Several pointed out that it was more difficult to read body language, establish eye contact or take turns to talk.