

Food Price Controls

Member briefing and discussion

Jayne Swanson
Head of Public Affairs, Scottish Wholesale Association

SWA Member Briefing | 15 October 2026

This presentation reflects the proposals and information available at the time of the webinar. The proposals are currently subject to consultation, with many aspects yet to be decided. Indicative timelines and potential outcomes represent SWA's assessment and should not be taken as confirmed Scottish Government plans.

Today's session

A short factual briefing, then discussion and evidence gathering.

- ☐ Why this has come forward
- ☐ What Government is proposing
- ☐ How the proposed model could work
- ☐ Questions Government should answer
- ☐ What happens next: legislation, regulations and timing
- ☐ Why this matters to wholesale
- ☐ Discussion points
- ☐ Next steps for SWA

Context: Why this has come forward

Government's rationale is affordability, food insecurity and a legislative commitment.

Evidence cited by Government

- Food prices up 38.1% since 2020 to July 2026.
- General inflation up 32.1%; average incomes up 35.3% to June 2026.
- Poorest fifth spend 15.2% of income on food and non-alcoholic drinks, compared with 10.9% average.
- 8% of adults worried about running out of food in 2023/24; 36% in single-parent households.
- Trussell estimates 1m people in Scotland, including 210,000 children, lived in food-insecure households in 2024.

Policy route

- SNP manifesto commitment to introduce legal price ceilings on some essential foods.
- Food Prices (Scotland) Bill included in the Year One legislative programme.
- Stated objective is to improve affordability of selected essential food items, particularly for lower-income households.
- Consultation also seeks views on alternatives.

Status now

- Consultation published 1 September 2026.
- Consultation closes 24 November 2026.
- Framework Bill with details captured in Regulations.
- Illustrative model only at this stage.
- No final product list or maximum price.
- Protection of primary producers is identified as an objective.

Source: Scottish Government consultation paper and partial BRIA, September 2026.

What is being proposed?

An illustrative model, not a finished scheme. The Bill would set the framework, with much of the detail left to regulations.

Who?

- Large qualifying grocery retailers
- More than 250 employees
- Turnover over £250m
- Majority grocery sales
- Smaller stores operated by qualifying businesses also covered

What?

- Selected essential food products
- Bread, milk and eggs are examples
- No final product list or cap

How?

- At least one qualifying option for each specified food sold
- At or below the relevant maximum price
- In-store and online sales

Current boundaries

- Wholesalers, hospitality and foodservice are not currently proposed to be directly price controlled.
- There is no proposed duty to stock specific capped products.
- The retailer would choose which qualifying product meets the duty.

How the model could work

The consultation asks about practical operation, not just the principle.

Price setting model

The preferred approach is an item-level cap, but Government is also considering basket-based, category-based and other models.

Stocking

Retailers would not be required to stock products subject to a cap. The duty would only apply where qualifying products are offered for sale.

Replacement products

If the selected capped product sells out, another qualifying product must be offered at or below the cap, but only if an alternative is available and on sale.

Presentation and signage

No additional signage or labelling requirements are currently proposed, but Government is seeking views on whether capped products should be identified or grouped.

Uprating and volatility

Maximum prices would be set through regulations. How they are calculated and adjusted for inflation, seasonality and changing costs remains undecided.

Online and in-person sales

The duty would apply to relevant sales in Scotland, including websites, apps, click and collect and delivery.

Primary producers

Government recognises potential impacts on producers and the wider supply chain, but no specific statutory protections for primary producers (or others) are currently proposed.

Three questions Government still needs to answer

Beyond the model, the tests are affordability, consequences and delivery.

Will it improve affordability?

Would the savings make a meaningful difference for lower-income households?
How would success be measured?

Where could the consequences fall?

Could costs, competition, sourcing or product choice change elsewhere in the market?

Could it work in practice?

How would caps respond to changing costs, and how would problems be identified and addressed?

These are questions of effectiveness and workability, not simply details for future regulations.

What could happen next?

The Bill would establish powers; regulations could carry much of the operating detail.

1 Consultation

Evidence on principle, design, costs, safeguards and alternatives.

2 Policy decision

Government considers responses and decides whether, and how, to proceed.

3 Bill

Core legal framework, powers and competence statements.

4 Parliament

Stage 1 scrutiny, amendments, Stage 2 and Stage 3 vote.

5 Regulations

Products, maximum prices, scope, operation, enforcement and review.

What this could mean for future influence

- Product lists and maximum prices are not settled now.
- The paper expects further consultation on products, price levels, and how the scheme operates.
- Draft wording refers to consulting “such persons as Ministers consider appropriate”.

UK market point

- Buying, sourcing and distribution operates across UK markets, so intra-UK impacts need evidence.

Hypothetical timeline

The Government has committed to introducing a Bill, but there is no confirmed timetable for implementation.

November 2026	Consultation closes
Q1 2027	Consultation analysis, policy decisions and anticipated Bill introduction
Q2 2027 onwards	Parliamentary scrutiny and consideration of the Bill
Q1 2028	Even a relatively straightforward Bill could take six to nine months to pass through Parliament and receive Royal Assent.
2029 onwards	Becoming an Act is not the same as implementation. The proposed framework legislation would still require regulations setting out the products, actual prices and operating arrangements.

For planning purposes, implementation of a working Price Control could be several years away. Any timetable assumes progress through consultation, parliamentary scrutiny and subsequent regulations. No implementation date been confirmed.

Why this matters to wholesale

The cap would sit at retail, but the market does not operate in separate channels.

Where pressure may move

- Cost and margin
- Volumes and stock allocation
- Sourcing, specification and product origin
- Supplier terms
- Delivery density and route viability

What the consultation is testing

- Behaviour change and basket shift
- Local sourcing, imports and seasonality
- Impact on primary producers and smaller businesses
- Implementation and enforcement costs
- Monitoring, review and safeguards
- Unintended consequences

If the price is controlled at one point, what needs to be tested elsewhere?

Discussion Points

Each question below links to an area the consultation is testing.

Consultation focus	What should be considered
1 Principle and alternatives	Is statutory price control appropriate and proportionate? What else could improve affordability?
2 Model and operation	What would an item-level cap mean for the wholesale channel.
3 Scope	What happens if the duty applies to large grocery businesses only? What about franchise and symbol models?
4 Price setting	What evidence matters for calculating and uprating caps: input costs, inflation, volatility and seasonality?
5 Supply chain / producers	What could change in supplier terms, wholesale volumes, Scottish sourcing, imports and specifications?
6 Safeguards / review	What should be monitored, when should it be reviewed and what would trigger change, suspension or a sunset?

We are not looking for commercially sensitive information. Practical examples are particularly useful.

Next steps

How today's discussion feeds into SWA's response.

- SWA will reflect on the views and practical examples raised during the webinar.
- We will circulate a short member survey to gather evidence consistently across the membership.
- Members are encouraged to complete the survey, including those who attended today.
- Members can also respond directly to the Scottish Government consultation and are encouraged to share their response with SWA.
- SWA will use the webinar discussion, survey evidence and further member feedback to shape our formal response.
- We will continue to engage with Ministers and officials as the policy and legislation develop.

Scottish Government consultation closes: 24 November 2026