The development of local food strategies in the UK: Pathways to sustainability

Findings from participatory research and deliberation as part of the Transitions to Agroecological Food Systems project

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This report has been prepared as part of the UK component of the Transitions to Agroecological Food systems project, in partnership between the STEPS Centre at the Institute of Development Studies and the Land Workers' Alliance. For more information, please contact Elise Wach, e.wach@ids.ac.uk

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Introduction

The question, 'What has led some local councils to develop good sustainable local food strategies and what have these entailed?' came out of the "Developing skills, knowledge and attitudes" distilled map and evolved out of a discussion on how a lack of expertise and time for marketing on the part of farmers leads to a lack of awareness among potential consumers. The panel saw harnessing the resources of local councils as one way to break the loop of farmers' lack of marketing options and consumers' lack of awareness and were interested to investigate the circumstances that lead councils to develop effective strategies.

This report summarises the findings from case studies of four local councils which have developed or are developing local food strategies. It provides information about the motivations of local councils to get involved, the mechanisms of action available to the councils, the types of organisations that have been effective in catalysing local food strategies and partnerships, and the challenges that have been faced.

What mechanisms are available to local councils?

As well-established local institutions, local councils have structures in place that provide opportunities to promote local food systems. There are a variety of ways in which council resources can be used to achieve food system goals:

- Estates – councils in some cases own large areas of land, from County Farms to allotments, and including housing estates.

- Procurement – councils are required under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 to consider "how what is to be procured may improve the social, environmental and economic well-being of the area in which the contract will be applied"[1]

. They can use their buying power to influence the food systems in favour of local, organic or healthier food, as they choose.

- Planning – please see our paper on Access to Land for more details on this. Planning is a key way that local councils can support access to land and housing for food producers.

- Infrastructure - councils could maintain or create facilities which support short food supply chains e.g. slaughterhouses, processing facilities, storage facilities, etc.

- Publicity and events – for example sponsoring farm visits[2], organising public pledges to eat more vegetables/more locally[3]

What are the motivations of councils?

- Councils are under pressure to meet a variety of **targets** regarding, for example: health, access to healthy food, reducing food poverty, access to outdoor spaces, mitigating climate change, supporting rural livelihoods, reducing inequalities, reducing food waste (e.g. Oxford are very keen to meet all their waste reduction targets to minimize landfill costs). Food policies which can demonstrably contribute to these targets will be more likely to be well-received by councils.

- Different councils prioritise or weight their targets differently. For example, some councils may prioritise public health goals while others may prioritise job creation through local procurement. Others may be more driven by pressure from their constituents than by their targets. Knowing the priorities and key drivers for local council decisions is essential for developing effective food strategies and partnerships with local councils.

- With central government **funding** to local authorities being cut year on year, local food policies which can either generate income for the council (e.g. through rent or events), save money (i.e. by meeting several targets in one), or keep money circulating in the local economy (for example by committing to local procurement of within council purchasing) are more likely to garner support by councils.

What are the challenges?

A key challenge is to avoid over-reliance on particular individuals within councils and other major partners, and to instead embed policies so that they persist beyond the tenure of their champions. This point was reiterated by several interviewees.

Funding is another challenge – council budgets are stretched thin at the moment, and the main priority is the challenge of meeting statutory responsibilities with much less central government funding to enable them to do so.

There are also limitations to what local councils can effect – national policies are also needed to support local and sustainable food systems.

Which organisations have been effective in developing food policies and partnerships with their local councils?

Local food policies develop momentum through the commitment and actions of a range of actors, often driven by the efforts of key individuals who prioritise the policy goals in their work and in some cases in their own time as well. The support of influential people within the council and/or local business community is critical to the success of attempts at bringing about change. The organisations involved in developing local food strategies and policies can and have included:

- Public sector organisations – local NHS bodies, universities and colleges, housing associations.
- Businesses – farmers and producers, retailers, caterers.
- Local NGOs, e.g. Tamar Grow Local, and local branches of national NGOs, e.g. Transition Town groups.
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are local business led partnerships between local authorities and businesses and play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and the creation of local jobs. They have some funding, and local influence, may be involved in partnerships but are unlikely to lead as their main focus is not food.

The following sections detail case studies from several cities that have developed or are developing food strategies – Plymouth, Bristol, Brighton and Oxford. The first three of these were selected from the list of recipients of the Sustainable Food Cities Awards[4] - Brighton & Hove and Bristol both hold

silver awards, and Plymouth holds a bronze awards (there are as yet no holders of gold awards). Oxford does not as yet have a food strategy but local civil society groups have been quite active and are considering pushing for a strategy. The information presented here is based on a review of publicly available documents and on interviews with people involved in food strategy work in each city.

Case study: Plymouth – Addressing inequalities through supporting both production and consumption

Interviews with people involved in Food Plymouth refer to different origins of the project, but overall the initiative came about when a number of different groups and public-sector organisations were active in the food sector in and around Plymouth and came together to work towards achieving a Sustainable Food Cities award[4]. These groups continue to work together and several sit on the board of Food Plymouth, the network which is now carrying the work forward.

The Food Plymouth partnership has been led by the City Council, Plymouth University and NHS Plymouth who under the aegis of the Soil Association, employed a co-ordinator, Traci Lewis.

Tamar Grow Local is a local CIC, which supports local food chains through community support for food growing, education and network building for local commercial food producers. Their activities include an online farmers market, provision of 38 fortnightly vegetable bags as part of the City Council's anti-food poverty measures, supporting a network of local honey producers by offering centralised processing and marketing, and an apple juice business. They have also recently taken on a 12-acre site, which is rented out in small parcels to small-scale and new entrant local fruit and veg producers. In addition to the support of the City Council for the vegetable deliveries (which formed the backbone funding that allowed Tamar Grow Local to establish itself on a firm financial footing), TGL has also received support from the financial inclusion team of a large local housing association.

Simon Platten, director of Tamar Grow Local sees beginnings of the work that led to setting up of Food Plymouth in research carried out in the city in 2008, which highlighted some major disparities in health and inequality across the city. Public health reports in Bristol use a bus route to show how life expectancy changes across the city from bus stop to bus stop (13 years total across the city).[5] This was reported on locally and was a catalyst for change in the city. The Plymouth Fairness Commission was then set up in 2013 as an independent body to help make the city a fairer place to live and work. It is made up of professionals from the police, health, private companies, charities, social enterprises and community groups. Plymouth Fairness Commission[6] made a number of recommendations to city leaders in March 2014, with the aim that they will be implemented across the city.

This and the recommendations of the Fairness Commission prompted the council to start looking for opportunities to act on health and fuel poverty. Food Plymouth brought together stakeholders to facilitate action on this issue. The Grow Share Cook Project is one of the partnerships that evolved from these discussions. The partnership received Nesta funding of £60k, allowing for a co-ordinator at the council for health and diet plus fuel poverty, and what became a separate project on food. This coordinator (Darin Halifax) then managed to double this funding through accessing other council budgets for both health and fuel poverty. According to Simon, "the key was having the right person", able to make connections and bring people and resources on board.

Plymouth has developed an action plan based around economy, environment, learning, health and community. The different aspects of the plan, are being implemented by expert stakeholder groups, and many members of those groups have worked in their own time on the areas that are most important to them as individuals.

According to Traci Lewis of Food Plymouth, an early challenge for the project was getting buy-in at a senior level within Plymouth City Council. “I would have preferred to meet with them straight away. We did have a senior manager on board but he was engaged mostly out of his own interest and wanted to take it slowly to try and get support. This approach however, has paid off and we’ve now been able to get senior management and strategic support from the Council Leader. We are really pleased that they have just recently agreed to provide some match funding for our new two-year supply chain project, to support delivery of the Action Plan.”

Turnover of key decision makers has been a significant challenge in maintaining momentum: “it’s a constantly moving feast, the key people always change…keeping their support and all organisations involved is vital in order to keep a good profile and ensure that everyone feels they are part of the project”. The partnership becoming unbalanced and dominated by one or two organisations while others have little representation was cited by people interviewed as a constant risk.

Tamar Grow Local had already been working with the large local housing association, and their collective ideas were used as a foundation for the council’s work on food poverty.

Simon Platten, commented on the Sustainable Food Cities work in an interview: “The project brought a lot of people together … [and] acted as a network, introducing people and getting them talking, developing a network of relationships between interested people and laying the groundwork for future partnerships. On a practical level, they got involved in encouraging restaurants to purchase from local suppliers. However, many of the local wholesalers create their wide range through importing, whereas Tamar Grow Local only supplies seasonal and local produce. “The easy option for restaurants was to continue buying from these local wholesalers rather than change their menus more drastically to reflect local seasonal availability. The result was therefore largely continuation as normal, i.e. buying from local wholesalers, but not necessarily buying local produce.”

> “Being part of Food Plymouth has enabled us get involved with a wider range of stakeholders. Simply being able to ask a colleague in a different organisation but similar position how they would approach and tackle an issue or source a product has opened doors to different methods and potential suppliers.”
>
> --Brad Pearce, Education Catering Manager at Plymouth City Council.

Food Plymouth has produced a food plan: The Future of Food in Plymouth 2014 – 2031[7], which is an evidence-based document intended to feed Plymouth City Council's Local Plan. It sets out the key issues as: Economy, divided into Enterprise and Public Procurement, Health and Wellbeing, Learning and Skills, Resilient communities, and Environment, and goes into specific details of policy proposals for each. The Local Plan first draft was due to be released in Jan 2017, and it remains to be seen how many of Food Plymouth's ideas have been incorporated. A Food Topic Paper produced by the council itself as part of the same process, while welcome, was criticised for being parochial and unambitious[8]. Objectors also pointed out a lack of reference to the creation of an actual Food Policy, or to the Food Charter (produced by Food Plymouth).

The Plymouth Food Charter

Good food is vital to the quality of peoples' lives in Plymouth. By promoting healthy and sustainable food as part of a thriving food economy, the Plymouth Food Charter aims to improve health and wellbeing for all and to create a more connected, resilient and sustainable City. Signatories to the Charter – which include public, private and community partners – are committed to promoting the pleasure and importance of good food to help create a vibrant and diverse food culture. We will work together to increase both the demand and supply of delicious and affordable, fresh, seasonal, local and organic food throughout Plymouth in order to achieve:

A thriving local economy

- Encouraging a greater number and diversity of food enterprises and jobs, making the most of Plymouth's rich land and sea resources.
- Sourcing healthy and sustainable food from local producers and suppliers, keeping value within the local economy.

Health and wellbeing for all

- Raising awareness of the importance of a nutritious, balanced diet and improving the availability of affordable healthy food.
- Providing a wide range of community growing and other food-related activities to improve physical and mental health for people of all ages.

Resilient, close-knit communities

- Promoting and celebrating the food and culinary traditions of all cultures through a variety of public events, such as Plymouth's Flavourfest.
- Supporting local and city-wide food initiatives that bring communities together and help them to improve their neighbourhoods.

Lifelong learning & skills

- Giving everyone the opportunity to learn about good food – how to grow it, how to cook it, how to eat it and how to enjoy it.
- Inspiring and enabling organisations such as schools, hospitals, businesses and other caterers to transform their food culture.

A reduced eco-footprint

- Supporting food production that protects wildlife and nature; reducing food miles, packaging and waste; and increasing composting and recycling.
- Maximising the use of greenspace and brownfield sites in and around Plymouth to produce food for local people.

Case study: Bristol – building on commitments to being a Green City

Bristol is the largest city in the South West of England and has a strong regional food culture. "This flourishing food culture is both a cause and a consequence of a very green urban civil society, which also helps explain why Bristol claims to be the first city in the UK to create a Food Policy Council (FPC)"[9] which was launched in 2011.

Food Policy Councils act as both forums for food issues and platforms for coordinated action. They originated in the USA with the first Food Policy Council started in 1982 in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since then Food Policy Councils have been established at state, local and regional levels across the USA.[10] The central aim of most Food Policy Councils is to identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local or state food systems, spurring local economic development and making food systems more environmentally sustainable and socially just. FPCs often engage in research and make policy recommendations, and may even be charged with writing food policy. FPCs can improve coordination between council departments whose policies influence the food system. By working across sectors, they can provide a platform for co-ordinated action by the public and private sector and NGOs. They often play an active role in educating policy makers and the public about the food system.

A Food Policy Council consists of representatives and stakeholders from many sectors of the food system and ideally include representatives from all five sectors of the food system: production, consumption, processing, distribution and waste recycling. They often include anti-hunger and food justice advocates, educators, non-profit organizations, concerned citizens, government officials, farmers, grocers, chefs, workers, food processors and food distributors. Food Policy Councils create an opportunity for discussion and strategy development among these various interests, and create an arena for studying the food system as a whole. Because they are often initiated by government actors, through executive orders, public acts or joint resolutions, Food Policy Councils tend to enjoy a formal relationship with local, city or state officials.

Food Policy Councils (FPCs)

Food Policy Councils consist of representatives and stakeholders from different sectors of food systems, ideally across the five main sectors: production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste aspects. Food Policy Councils create an opportunity for discussion and strategy development among these various interests, and create an arena for studying the food system as a whole. Because they are often initiated by government actors, through executive orders, public acts or joint resolutions, Food Policy Councils tend to enjoy a formal relationship with local, city or state officials.

"Food Policy Councils (FPCs) bring together stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating and to develop recommendations on how to improve it. FPCs may take many forms, but are typically either commissioned by state or local government, or predominately a grassroots effort. Food policy councils have been successful at educating officials and the public, shaping public policy, improving coordination between existing programs, and starting new programs. Examples include mapping and publicizing local food resources; creating new transit routes to connect underserved areas with full-service grocery stores; persuading government agencies to purchase from local farmers; and organizing community gardens and farmers' markets."[11]

"The central aim of most Food Policy Councils is to identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local or state food systems, spurring local economic development and making food systems more environmentally sustainable and socially just." – Food First, 2009

https://foodfirst.org/publication/food-policy-councils-lessons-learned/

Bristol's political history leading up to the forming of its Food Policy Council is a long and convoluted one. Its commitment in 2007 to becoming a European Green Capital led it to form the Bristol Green Capital Partnership (BGCP), which commissioned the Who Feeds Bristol report. Also in 2007, Transition Bristol formed, beginning an extensive series of events, some of which were attended by local politicians and senior council officers.

In 2008, BGCP commissioned a report "Building a Positive Future for Bristol after Peak Oil" (Osborne 2009[12]) which included a chapter on food.

In 2009, the **Bristol Food Network (BFN)** was set up, and the BFN later played a key role in Bristol's year as 'European Green Capital 2015'[13] ensuring that food was an explicit theme and coordinating the development and oversight of Green Capital funding for food projects. BFN is now a Community Interest Company.

Also, in 2009, "Bristol City Council adopted a new Waste Strategy … including a commitment to "tackle climate change by reducing food miles, maximizing recycling and reducing waste". A Sustainable Procurement Policy was also adopted although it contained limited detail on food procurement (Bristol Food Policy Council 2016). Within the City Council the separation between healthy food policy, and sustainable food policy, began to lessen, with an internal officer Food Interests Group established that brought all departments to one table."[14]

In 2010, the report 'Who Feeds Bristol; towards a resilient food system' was commissioned by NHS Bristol and Bristol City Council, supported by BGCP and launched at a Food Conference attended by nearly 200 people. The conference included presentations and workshops on a range of themes, and the adoption by Bristol City Council of a Sustainable Food Charter. This led to the recognition of the need for a high-level group of stakeholders to put food policy on the agenda in Bristol and keep it there, and the **Bristol Food Policy Council** was formed as a direct result.

Membership of the Food Policy Council (FPC) includes individuals from different elements of the food system and from key sectors, including health, business, grassroots, non-government organizations, education and local government. Full meetings take place four times a year. Working groups have delivered events, communications, input to procurement and to land use planning, preparation of a Good Food Plan for Bristol, compilation and submission of the evidence for achieving the Sustainable Food Cities Silver Award in 2016.

An early effort of the Bristol FPC was to make explicit the desired aim for a food system. "The Food Policy Council has articulated this aim, restated it at every opportunity, and embedded it in as many policies, and in as many institutions and organizations as possible."[15] The aim of the food system is framed as follows;

"We want our food system to produce food that is tasty, healthy, affordable, good for nature, good for workers, good for local businesses and good for animal welfare. This is what we mean by Good Food".

Setting out the goal like this, and working to publicise it whenever possible has meant that actors with divergent aims have increasingly been brought together under a single banner of good food.

For example, in 2011 Bristol City Council Planning Team came to an agreement with the Bristol Public Health Team, whereby comments from the health team would be sought on relevant planning policies and planning applications. This joint working continued until 2014, by which time food systems planning was explicitly acknowledged within Bristol City Council's Development Management policies. This helped familiarize planners with the good food agenda, although the system and mindset barriers to achieving major change remain substantial.

The work of the BFPC has three overarching themes: partnerships, planning and policy, and six key issues, which are:

1. Promoting healthy and sustainable food to the public.
2. Tackling food poverty, diet-related ill health and access to affordable healthy food.
3. Building community food knowledge, skills, resources and projects.
4. Promoting a vibrant and diverse food economy.
5. Transforming catering and food procurement.
6. Reducing waste and the ecological footprint of the food system.

These have been translated into 8 goals for Bristol's Good Food Plan[16]:

- Transform Bristol's food culture.
- Safeguard the diversity of food retail.
- Safeguard land for food production.
- Redistribute, recycle and compost food waste.
- Support community food enterprises.
- Increase the market opportunities for local and regional suppliers.
- Protect key infrastructure for local food supplies.
- Increase urban food production.

In a 2015 interview,[17] Joy Carey identified key areas of the food system that still need to change in Bristol:

- Maximise and make more visible Bristol's supply of staple foods (meat, dairy, fruit & veg, cereals) produced in the surrounding region.
- Ensure that everyone has access to affordable fresh, seasonal, 'cook from scratch' ingredients with which to prepare a healthy meal.
- Safeguard the diversity of food markets and food retail outlets.
- Ensure 'closed loop' systems – that means to redistribute food that is fit to eat, but otherwise would go to landfill, and to recycle nutrient and energy resources by composting food waste.
- Increase the opportunities for all of us to get involved in food activities, – like food growing, or reducing our food waste, or learning to cook, or even setting up a food business – in a fun engaging way.

A Bristol based delegate at the Oxford Real Farming Conference (who wishes to remain anonymous) commented that the loss of the council's smallholdings and allotments officer (due to redundancy) has been a big blow to the work of facilitating land acquisition by local projects. Without this 'right person in the right place' there is no one within the council to champion these projects, nor a specific policy framework adopted by the council. The commenter felt that everything looks rosy in the garden but in fact for would be food producers Bristol isn't such a great example of a city with a strong local food environment.

Golden Rules for establishing successful food initiatives –

"People are always telling you what they have achieved, but seldom do they tell you how they did it." Joy Carey and Angela Raffle's golden rules based on their experiences in Bristol are:

- "Articulate the desired purpose of the food system and keep on saying it; get it written into the aims of all sustainability and health institutions."
- "Show people rather than tell them; enable people to see for themselves why localized nature-friendly food production is important"
- "Be open to working with anyone who shares your aims and values"
- "Keep Going"
- Be aware of advocacy techniques used by agribusiness and multinational retailers. Stand your ground, use evidence, and stick to the deep purpose."

Thus, while there is widespread recognition of significant progress being made, others feel that more is still needed to create a stronger and more inclusive local food environment in the city.

Case study: Brighton – Food Policy and Action Plan - A partnership approach

In Brighton & Hove city 2017 saw the third and final year of the second iteration of the Food Strategy and Action Plan – Spade to Spoon: Digging Deeper. The plan was developed by the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (BHFP) in collaboration with the Brighton & Hove council and many other stakeholders across the city following the successful delivery of the ground breaking Spade to Spoon Food Strategy (2006), one of the first strategies of its kind in the country.

The Brighton and Hove Food Partnership was established in 2003 with support from Food Matters, a national food policy and advocacy organisation, when Food Matters undertook a mapping of the local food system in Brighton & Hove. The mapping highlighted the need and desire to bring together the existing food work in the city under one umbrella. Food Matters, the City Council and what was then known as Health Promotion organised a conference to bring together representatives from food projects, community groups, food businesses, individuals and statutory agencies to explore how to develop a partnership approach to sustainable food policy and action. This led directly to the formation of the BHFP and subsequent to that the development of the first Food Strategy and Action Plan- Spade to Spoon: Making the Connections in 2006.

In an interview with Food Matters' Director and BHFP Chair, Victoria Williams, she emphasized that while the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership oversees the implementation of the food strategy and delivers on a number of actions it is at its heart a partnership endeavour, with a whole host of organisations and stakeholders delivering actions across the city including the City Council, Health agencies and the third and commercial sectors.

The BHFP was set up and is run as an independent organisation. Its role is to facilitate the implementation of the food strategy and this includes bringing together stakeholders who would not necessarily see themselves as usual collaborators. This facilitation role is crucial to the success of the action plan and it's delivery through partnership working.

In terms of the strategy itself, Victoria notes that the first strategy (in 2006) sought to achieve a balance between aspiration and pragmatism. 'We wanted to ensure we had actions that were visible and achievable, to show real progress but with enough policy ambition to keep pushing the agenda forward'. She reflects that the consultation process to develop the strategy and action plan was time-consuming but essential to engage with partners and to ensure the strategy aims and actions dovetailed with the local authorities' existing strategies. This approach was essential to the ensuing success of the strategy.

Procurement requirements for public institutions – one approach that can make a significant difference for local production

The Brighton & Hove Food Strategy and Action Plan of 2012 established minimum buying standards for statutory organisations (e.g. NHS and university bodies) providing catering on contracts of more than £75,000 per year. The minimum standards are based on the Soil Association's Bronze Food for Life Award and includes standards for Fairtrade sourcing, health, waste and animal welfare.

For the second iteration of the strategy, developed in 2012, Victoria states that they wanted to be even more ambitious. The strategy includes nine aims[18] of relevance to food production and linkages between food producers and consumers, Aim 5 includes an objective to lobby; to produce a map of land in the city and on the urban fringe that would be suitable food growing; to work with owners of underused land on growing projects including through the use of 'meanwhile leases'; and to develop demand side interventions for local food and fish through marketing and infrastructure investment.

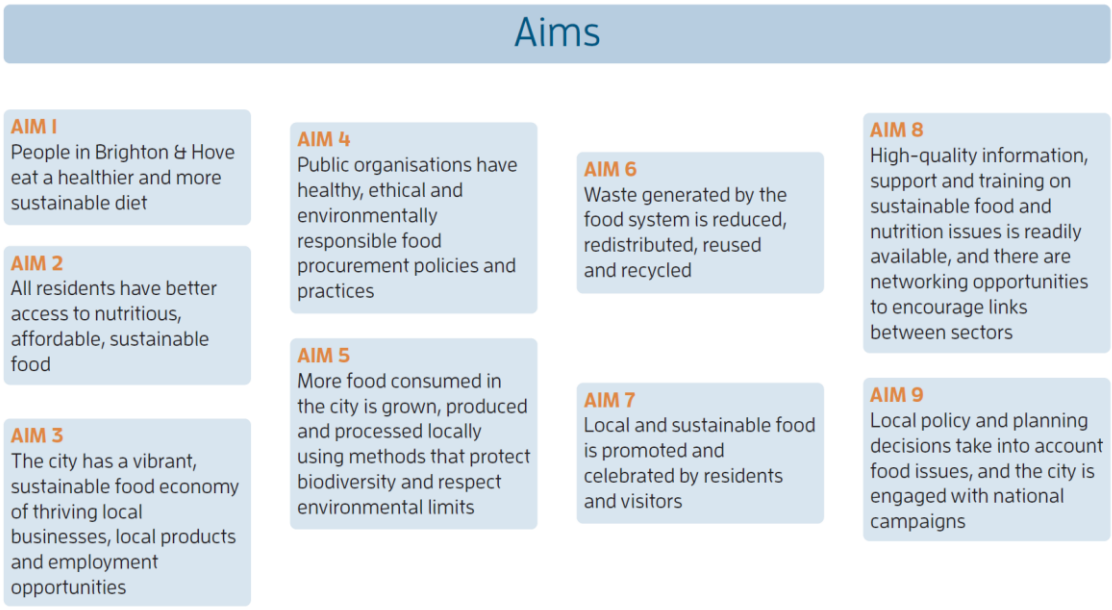

Figure 1: Aims of the 2012 Brighton and Hove Food Strategy and Action Plan

The 2012, strategy notably included a focus on changing procurement policies and practices of public organisations. The BHFP has been able to establish minimum buying standards for statutory organisations providing catering (e.g. NHS, prisons and universities) at contracts of more than £75,000. Brighton and Hove was the first city to specify this. The minimum standards are based on the Soil Association's Bronze Food for Life award, which includes criteria for Fairtrade, Health, Waste and Sustainability. Arguably the focus is primarily on the health and animal welfare aspects. While there is a focus on seasonality and local sourcing, there is no specific guidance on ecological production.

|In 2018 with funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Action Plan will be refreshed. The nine aims in the Digging Deeper Food Strategy were developed for the long term: they focus on what needs to be achieved over a 20 year period, so they will remain. The refresh will concentrate on focussed actions for the next five years. The refresh will be guided by an expert group and developed through a series of consultation events, research, conversations and listening events.

Figure 2. This diagram indicates what the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership did to get the City council to adopt the Soil Association's minimum buying standards for public procurement

Many of the structural issues faced by a city like Brighton and Hove endure. For example there is a big challenge around land, with a growing population, hemmed in by the South Downs and the sea any available land is prioritised for housing and other developments rather than food growing activities for example. While the city council owns much of the farmland surrounding the city it currently does not stipulate agro-ecological production

or local supply. It is unclear how the BHFP will seek to address this or other challenging issues in the next action plan. However the facilitated consultation process will allow difficult and thorny issues to be discussed, ideas to flourish and solutions sought.

Victoria stresses another note of pragmatism in terms of recognising the boundaries of authority and remit limitations between local authorities and national government. She states that trying to influence your local authority is a waste of time and effort if what you are trying to effect is not within the local authority's jurisdiction. Where the policy implications of a locally felt issue goes beyond the remit of the local authority, she believes it is important to work with national campaigns and networks such as Sustainable Food Cities, Friends of the Earth, Sustain, Soil Association, etc. to push for policy change. The Sugar Smart and Food Poverty campaigns for example can influence at the parliamentary level, which is needed to effect national policy change. This in turn potentially enables local authorities to make local policy change. 'When 44 cities speak with one voice it is powerful and being part of a wider national network is empowering for local campaigners and local authorities alike.'

'When 44 cities speak with one voice it is powerful and being part of a wider national network is empowering for local campaigners and local authorities alike.'

–Victoria Williams, Food Matters

Case study: Oxford – Relationship building towards a local food policy

Oxford has yet to produce its own local food policy, but does have a thriving local organisation, Good Food Oxford (GFO), which has been steadily manoeuvring itself into a position to begin developing a policy in partnership with its network members. Good Food Oxford was launched in December 2013 in order to help support the existing work of many organisations in and around the city "to improve our food system, to catalyse new initiatives and collaborations and to encourage more joined-up thinking and policy around food issues". After a public meeting, a steering group was formed to take GFO forward. Members include local food activists, farmers, and retailers, plus representatives of the University and the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare. This group, after various consultation meetings, drafted the **Oxford Good Food Charter**, a statement of values for a better food system in Oxford which was launched in June 2014. Since then over 130 organisations have signed the Charter.

GFO manager Hannah Fenton has spent the last 18 months building relationships with councillors and staff, local businesses from farmers to restaurants, and the Local Enterprise Partnership. All of these people have their own responsibilities and agendas and plying these different strands together into one yarn is the basis of setting the stage for the creation of a local food policy with widespread local engagement and ownership.

According to Mairi Brookes, Sustainable City Team Manager at Oxford City Council, Good Food Oxford originally developed out of the buzz surround the Foodprinting Oxford Report, commissioned by the City Council several years ago from local environmental consultant Tom Curtis. The work was commissioned on behalf of Low Carbon Oxford, a partnership of approximately 45 local organisations committed to reducing their carbon footprints as part of the Council's commitment to reducing the city's emissions by 40% by 2020 (against 2005 emissions).

GFO's work so far has been focused on reducing food waste (a well-established waste reduction goal for Oxford City Council), meat reduction and food poverty (both of which are now local health targets, having joined obesity prevention, which was previously the only food-related health goal) and promoting the use of local produce in restaurants (through an awards scheme) and shops. The council also has an interest in resilience and its Low Carbon Oxford week events have provided many opportunities to promote healthier local food. The Local Enterprise Partnership on the other hand is more interested in supporting local business and profit-making enterprises.

Throughout this establishment phase GFO has focused on relationship building and working with the council and others to meet mutual goals. Having laid the groundwork and secured the support of various actors with the council, Hannah believes that it's now time to begin the work of developing the actual policy.

Key points for laying the groundwork for a policy:

- Building alliances with council staff and councillors is essential
- You need the councillors to be on board to carry staff along
- Presenting the food poverty plan gave exposure to lots of stakeholders who then support the work
- Money is the hard part! If you bring funding that helps
- Rather than the proposal to develop a policy or put in for an award coming as a challenge, better if it ties into what the council are already doing.

Additional insights from our expert witnesses and farmers' panel

Three expert witnesses were invited to discuss the question: What has led some local councils to develop good sustainable local food strategies and what have these entailed?

- Angela Raffle, a director of Transition Bristol and who was involved in setting up the Bristol Food Policy Council;
- Simon Platten of Tamar Grow Local, which works with Plymouth City Council on the implementation of food policies there;
- Daphne Page of City University, a researcher on local food strategies and urban food production.

Following their presentations and a question and answer session, the farmer panel deliberated the implications of their contributions and of this research report. The contributions of these three witnesses are summarised below, followed by a summary of the farmer deliberation.

Angela Raffle

When she first started working on food issues in Bristol, Angela found that these issues had no traction in there, and were seen by people within the council as something "out there", nothing to do with "us". She and Joy Carey worked hard to gain the council's agreement to put their logo on the Who Feeds Bristol report. Despite appearances, momentum for producing the report did not come from the council.

> Angela sees gaining control of the discourse as a major part of the struggle for change. She draws a comparison with the battle in the anti-smoking campaign to get the word Free on our side – "smoke free lives", rather than "anti-smoking".

The food scene in Bristol was very fragmented before the work of Transition Bristol and the Food Policy Council began with permaculture groups, wildlife organisations, local business supporters, city farms, etc, all operating in their own separate worlds. The Food Policy Council spent a year refining its mantra in order to include all of these groups and talking to each group to bring them on board.

The way the Food Policy Council works is to always try to have an influence on council officials and other actors at a deeper level, on deep values, rather than to necessarily bring about policy changes.

"If a factory is torn down but the thoughts which produced it are left standing then these thoughts will simply produce another factory. There is so much talk about the system. And so little understanding" – adapted (by Angela) from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. For example, Angela believes food should never be a commodity, and that even a CSA with all the right principles, will always tend to be co-opted by the system as long as the deeper thought patterns of society remain unchanged.

The importance of key individuals in changing local cultures was discussed. Angela also stressed that there can be significant setbacks when key posts are lost to redundancy. From her experience, she felt that "money runs everything" and that in attempting to put in place successful local sustainable food strategies within the context of our current socioeconomic system, 'we are working against this tide.'

Simon Platten

Simon reported a different experience of working with the local authority to Angela's.

Simon suggested that the key difference between Bristol and Plymouth is that Plymouth is a lot poorer. It doesn't have a large middle class, and 30% of its population experiences multiple deprivations. Therefore, many of Plymouth's councillors represent wards with a significant proportion of voters who fall into this category. From Simon's perspective, this was key in the development of a food policy and strategies for Plymouth. Plymouth Community Homes (a housing association) house 1 in 5 of the Plymouth population and have been involved Grow Share Cook project alongside TGL and the council.

The city received Nesta funding to rollout the American Cities of Service model of high-impact volunteering. By offering a high salary for a co-ordinator, they were able to appoint a well-connected individual who has been able to make connections between people and projects, and also to unlock other pots of funding within the council budget.

A panel member expressed concern about unfair competition between different operators in the food system, and particularly grant-funded producers. Simon answered with examples of how their project has been able to push up prices to producers locally, particularly by setting up local producers' co-ops which can aggregate produce to meet market demand. For example, a co-op of 40 honey producers, co-ordinated by TGL has been able to increase the price received by its producers from £2.30 per pound to £4.40 per pound, taking into account packaging costs,[19] a 91% increase in price received by the producer. The honey is retailed by the cooperative at £5.86 per pound which is in the middle of the average retail price (which ranges from £5 to £7.50 per pound). Thus the cooperative is able to purchase honey at the top of the wholesale price range but sell it at the lower or middle end of the retail price range. As well as selling wholesale, individual producers are able to 'buy back' their own honey and sell it themselves. TGL have bought equipment for the co-op in order to reduce barriers to entry and to improve quality control – honey is a low risk product and one that is relatively straightforward to work with under this model.

TGL cooperatives also use price floors to help protect farmers and ensure they receive farmgate prices that relate to the cost of production. In the case of apples for juicing, the cooperative pays a minimum of £150 per tonne to farmers. "That's what we pay because that's what it costs to produce and earn some income from a small orchard." In 2016, market prices were at £40 per tonne, meaning that producers selling to TGL received 275% higher prices than average wholesale. In 2017, however, market prices were £160-225 per tonne given it was a 'bad year for apples.' TGL therefore paid market price this year. This model enables producers of all sizes to market their goods – not just the very small and very large.

One of the panel members recognised the key role of TGL as the trader connecting the producer and consumer, replacing the intermediaries in the supply chain which normally take a large percentage of cost of food paid by the consumer. It was asked why TGL was not taking more money out of the system for themselves. Simon responded that because the group is legally a community interest company, it is guided by social (or community) aims and collectively decides to place a limit on its profit. **The scale of benefits for primary producers in terms of increased returns could not be made if TGL increased its profit margin from the supply chain.** In addition to limiting its own profit, Tamar Grow Local is able to pay producers more without raising the cost for consumers by cross subsidising from other activities including consultancy, and products, for example, charging a higher overhead on household goods (e.g. ecological washing up liquid) on the food hub. Grant funding enables them to test out these models with producers rather than subsidise the prices that they pay to them. In the longer term the group aims to cover their costs without external funding.

Simon noted that the benefits of the scheme were quantified for the Plymouth City Council in order to demonstrate that the model was economically beneficial. Overall, it was found that the Grow Share Cook scheme generated a £15.79 social return on investment. In other words, for every £1 invested, the equivalent of £15.79 in social benefits was generated. The calculations included volunteer time, cooking lessons delivered, and vegetables provided. It was noted that the calculations at this time did not take into account the economic benefits in the surrounding areas given the bias of the Plymouth City Council to capture the city-wide effects. Simon noted that although the effect on the surrounding rural areas is not captured by the figures, it has been significant and may be captured in future studies.

TGL are also working on simplifying their arrangements with the horticulturalists growing on their 12-acre site – e.g. by aggregation of salad growing and also trying to influence growing methods towards organic production. Panel members wondered whether new independent businesses in the area were by now effectively obliged to become part of TGL, but Simon responded that although this had also been a concern locally, it was not the case. The Open Food Network software the group use enables people to sell both independently and through TGL. He also stated that TGL would rather replicate than grow bigger and bigger as logistics become unsustainable when companies become too large (a clear link with the discussion on dinosaur businesses such as Pizza Hut and the difficulties in turning them around, with Patrick Holden as part of the True Cost Accounting deliberation).

It was noted that there are many different definitions of local – producers, processors, retailers. Tamar Grow Local work within the geographical boundary of the Tamar valley catchment and are prioritising livelihoods from primary production or processing. This may be a blurring of the local issue but is something that allows work to move forward.

Daphne Page

Daphne Page presented her research on the processes involved in developing food policies, based on her research through the City University, London.

Daphne pointed out that because not all ideas discussed make it into food policies, the actual process of developing the policy is very important, in terms of changing local cultures.

She indicated that in light of cuts, councils are less likely to be able to sustain commitments if they have financial implications. However, working with the council has many benefits due to its social legitimacy. The Sustainable Food Cities network adds to this at a national level.

Figure 3, shows how internal and external factors interact in the development of local council strategies:

Figure 3: Drivers of change, from Hatfield 2012,[20] p15

Health is a major entry point for council interest in food strategies at the moment, and others are economic development, sustainability, social development – any group seeking to develop a

successful local food strategy needs to identify a hook to pull their council in. As noted by others interviewed for this report, each council has its own set of priorities and it is recommended that people attempting to establish effective food partnerships and policies get to know what those are for their council and ensure that food strategies are seen as contributing towards these priorities.

Daphne has studied several councils' work on this area, and gave some pointers regarding issues that have arisen in her research. For example, Exeter City Council are developing their own bespoke urban food strategy. The council held a civil society driven consultation as part of their efforts. However, this process was quite limited and came down to the work of a few key people, placing a big burden on volunteers.

Likewise, Belfast had good intentions but their rollout was not hugely successful. Daphne suggested consultation had been neglected, for example when building unwanted community gardens which are now not well managed.

Daphne has also looked at Bath and North East Somerset as well as Exeter and Belfast, and has found that people in all three locations feel that civil society is taking on the upkeep of projects and programs rather than the councils themselves. The impression generated is that council action can be tokenistic and aimed at meeting targets or generating outputs for the annual reports, without properly addressing local needs and aspirations.

Daphne has also talked with people in Oxford who questioned whether the city really needs a food policy if they're making the changes anyway. This is interesting as interviewees for this project have indicated in interviews that they are building relationships and are ready to start developing a local food strategy for Oxford.

Deliberation on council strategies

The panel discussed ideas around values – the different values of different groups, the need in our society to monetise value, the difference between value and price. The lack of a truly free market was also discussed, and the factors which draw consumers into the orbit of the supermarkets.

In terms of action the group focused on the importance of promoting viable secure livelihoods including the support of improved routes to market, how best to engage with local councils and make use of existing local momentum by working with other groups. The importance of defining our objectives and making a clear case for the benefits of agro-ecological local food was also discussed.

Overall it became clear from the research report and from the witness presentations that food strategies and policies do not tend to originate from local councils but rather from civil society actors. Key to ensuring their success was integrating the council's priorities from the beginning and bringing on board a range of stakeholders from across the food sector and also in other sectors that might be complementary (e.g. related to climate change, poverty and inequality, etc.).

Conclusions

The discussions which led to this research question assumed that local councils have played a proactive role in developing sustainable food policies and strategies. However, the case studies analysed for this research and the presentations given by expert witnesses suggest that in fact the drive for local food policies tends to come from outside local councils, typically from local food

related NGOs and their networks. These groups often come together to work with the council to develop strategies and partnerships for food production and sourcing that meets local authority objectives.

The key messages that emerged from the research and deliberation were that it is important to work with the specific targets and priorities of each council. It was also noted that bringing in a wide range of stakeholders, including those with complementary interests is important for success. Most local food strategies have come from a few key individuals being committed to driving the agenda forward, and yet long term sustainability of any change necessitates that changes are embedded beyond those individuals. The panel determined that they as farmers need to be proactive in their own councils.

Resources

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