



BRIEFING NOTE - Climate Change - Food and Health, Health Scrutiny Committee, July 2022

This briefing note has been produced by Climate Emergency Manchester and supporters, for the benefit of councillors and citizens.

Introduction

Our food system is broken, with serious consequences for people and planet. We can't wait for national government to make good food accessible to all.

Last month the government's national food strategy was dismissed as 'shambolic' 'watered down' and 'half-baked' by the very advisors who commissioned it. Sir Henry Dimbleby estimated that the strategy adopted less than half of his recommendations, while Graham MacGregor, Professor of Cardiovascular medicine at Queen Mary University London, declared that the government rowback on key health measured made it 'abundantly clear that our Government is in the pocket of the food industry and has no desire to bite the hand that feeds it'.

Cities can and must be bolder. Manchester Food Board (MFB) last presented to councillors at the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee in January 2022. The evidence supplied then was a newsletter. Six months later, Health Scrutiny Committee has received a [strategy refresh](#) and a short [report](#). This is an improvement, but the documents still suggest that training and resource packs fill bellies. Faced with health challenges (from diabetes to obesity), rising food prices and environmental breakdown, Manchester City Council must pull every policy lever at its disposal. It's time to step up to the plate.

Recommendations

1. Provide more ambitious food waste collection services and free compost bins for residents
2. Investigate the possibility of bringing school meals back in house
3. Ensure the new Local Plan contains a firm commitment to growing spaces
4. Offer business rate reliefs for those selling healthy and sustainable food
5. Make healthy, sustainable food a requirement for market traders and events
6. Increase the number of public water fountains, to save on packing and help keep residents safe during heatwaves
7. Maintain an accessible Manchester food map
8. Provide community food and growing groups with a clear point of contact at the Manchester Food Board.

Reduce food waste

Measures to reduce food waste are largely listed as ‘future actions’. The MFB strategy states that public sector bodies have food waste reduction plans in place and that food waste reduction plans are part of procurement processes for catering.

- Do these processes have any teeth? Will suppliers lose a contract for not meeting food waste reduction targets?
- Tackling food waste needs transparency, and there is a history of cover ups by certain firms. But there is little information in the MFB documents on the **reporting** of food waste.
 - **Mandatory reporting** on food waste by large businesses is likely to come into legislation following a current [DEFRA consultation](#). Manchester could get ahead of the national curve by making reporting on food waste mandatory and more transparent for food suppliers in its influence
- Food waste collection is provided in offices, but Manchester City Council could also provide a **doorstep food waste collection service** for homes, restaurants and other catering, retail and manufacturing businesses. Such a service has been in place in Bristol since 2014 and [Plymouth City Council](#) runs a food waste recycling service that takes food waste from the local authority, food processors, pubs, schools, hotels, restaurants and colleges to an anaerobic digester at a farm outside the city.
- Manchester City Council could encourage more community and home composting, for example by providing **free compost bins** for residents (at present, a discount is provided but the payment will deter many).

Consume more sustainable diets

The MFB strategy relies on ‘training’ as a solution to unsustainable diets. This overlooks the root causes of the problem. If people can’t afford to eat ‘better meat’, training is not the answer.

The Council should use areas within its direct influence - schools, hospitals, care homes, leisure centres, housing associations - to lead the way in good food. These sites should go beyond the minimum and set an example, providing affordable healthy options and limiting access to low quality food.

Since the [closure of Manchester City Council’s school catering service](#), Manchester Fayre, in December 2020 it is not clear how the Council can oversee school food provision and thus how MFB will meet its targets. Privatised services will be inconsistent; the quality of school meals may have improved in some schools, worsened in others. Speaking to ten student leaders at the ‘Bee Green Education Summit’ (4.1) is only scratching the surface in a city with over 200 schools.

Rapid food price increases and the cost-of-living crisis means that [food poverty and the number of children experiencing food poverty are increasing rapidly](#). Have MFB considered a more urgent food security action plan, particularly as we approach the winter months?

Increase number and improve quality of food-growing spaces

Plans to increase the number of food growing spaces lack urgency. There is an upcoming window of opportunity via the new local plan, with a draft due in autumn 2022.

The local plan will determine land use in the city for the next decade, it is crucial that firm commitments to food growing spaces are included in the Plan. [Lambeth City Council](#) has a series of policies dedicated to food growing and production in its local plan (p.102). Some councils, such as Aberdeen, even have a dedicated [food growing strategy](#).

Other aspects of the planning and development process could be deployed. For example, Brighton and Hove City Council have called on Section 62 (3) of the Planning Act to make it compulsory for developers of residential buildings (new and conversions) to complete a Sustainability Checklist for Planning which includes a section on food growing. There is no information in the report or MFB strategy about whether Manchester City Council will encourage 'meanwhile' leases and use of derelict space.

Work to increase the diversity and sustainability of food and drink operations

This diversity and sustainability must be city-wide. The report's key example is the Oxford Road Corridor, with loose plans for 'replicating' what happens there in other parts of the city. MadelnHackney is a MFB partner. This overlooks excellent initiatives right across Manchester (see our Appendix) and seems to propose a model of good practice radiating outwards from the 'innovative' centre.

There is no mention of key policy levers (such as **business rate reliefs**). These could be offered for small or healthy / sustainable food businesses, zero waste shops etc and demonstrate that the Council and Food board can go beyond creating toolkits and facilitating events.

Develop shorter food supply chains

The focus on last mile deliveries is welcome but should not overlook existing good practice and knowledge in the city, such as the use of [cargo bikes](#).

Manchester City Council has one of the largest markets and events teams within a local authority and could use this to require all food traders at events to use produce with the shortest possible supply chains. The existing [sustainable events guide](#) provided by Manchester City Council does not go far enough with its self-assessment checklist format.

The committee papers refer to a study on how to shorten supply chains of food used by culturally diverse communities in Manchester. We are pleased to hear that initial work is being done, and look forward to it coming to fruition.

Reduce unnecessary product packaging and single-use plastics

The MFB strategy puts the onus on the individual not to buy food with packaging and to use water bottles. It does in passing mention that providing drinking fountains is within the scope of public sector action. However, a recent Freedom of Information Act Request revealed that **Manchester City Council owns and maintains seven decorative water features but no public water fountains**. As ever, systemic change enables behaviour change.

The lack of any pledge to totally ban or phase out single use plastics throughout the strategy may be positive, as it may point to an awareness that some disabled people rely on single use plastics. This is not directly referenced in either committee papers or the strategy. We hope to see the actual reduction targets published once this draft strategy is finalised.

Support agroecological food production and management practices

This pillar of the strategy must be integrated into other work around work and skills. **The report and strategy do not convey a good baseline understanding of what practices are underway in the city at present**. There are some promising existing food maps (e.g. hosted by [Sow the City](#)) but to be useful these need to be kept up to date and easy to use - which may fall outside the scope of a single project or community organisation.

Community organisations might need tangible support - beyond training - to adopt these practices, such as assistance with funding applications or equipment. Too much weight cannot be placed on the VCSE sector to fix the food system and the Council might need to think about wider and more creative types of support to offer charity and community food services. For example, Cracking Good Food have previously sent out urgent requests for equipment storage space and help with legal fees after being let down by a major supermarket chain. As an established organisation, they are not asking for a toolkit.

Promote responsible advertising and the promotion of healthy, sustainable food

The Manchester Food Board website may not be the ideal vehicle to launch a wide reaching campaign. It is not well resourced and does not have a strong social media profile. The membership page is still awaiting a biography from the Exec Member for the Environment, Tracey Rawlins, among others. It is also not clear how a community group might work with the food board. Who do they contact, and how would they collaborate? The choice of name ('Board') may not be as welcoming as some other city structures like Liverpool, which has a food alliance. There is a risk that focussing on responsible advertising can become the main public health intervention, when lack of access often decides what food people eat.

The Manchester Climate Assembly mandate recommended a focus on positive messaging on the importance of seasonal and local diets, to coincide with other schemes such as

prominent seasonal aisles in supermarkets. Communications that provide practical information to consumers on what food is seasonal and locally available would fulfil this mandate and promote sustainable food in the area.

Conclusions

The report and the food board strategy place too much focus on individual behaviour change via training, toolkits and events and shies away from some of the key levers at Manchester City Council's disposal. Good food for all needs encouragement *and* regulation. Long-term thinking about what we eat and drink, and how that works a system, is welcome. But the 'future' status of several actions and lack of urgency beg the question: how many will go hungry this winter? Initiatives like the proposed Food Hub mentioned sound positive, but must be accelerated and connected to other services. After a lost decade in which Manchester lagged behind other cities on sustainable food action, we have a 'starter' of a strategy. Go further, and this could be a main course.

About Us

[Climate Emergency Manchester](#) is a voluntary, non-partisan organisation connecting citizens and holding Manchester City Council to account. If you'd like to talk or to help, email contact@climateemergencymanchester.net or find us on Twitter [@ClimateEmergMcr](#)

Appendix - Local food initiatives

The below provides a list of sustainable food initiatives beyond the parts of the city mentioned in the report. It is not exhaustive - and we look forward to adding to it when we hear about new schemes.

[Wythenshawe Community Farm & Shop](#) - community project in Wythenshawe Park, shop stocks Fresh pastries, locally sourced vegetables, chicken and duck eggs, home reared lamb, beef and pork and locally produced cheese and jams, and of course, Wythenshawe Bee Club honey

[M20 Refills](#) - home delivery service of eco-friendly products, supplied in re-usable glass bottles

[Real Food Wythenshawe](#) - a programme to engage and excite the people of Wythenshawe in growing and cooking fresh, sustainable food.]

[Community Grocery](#) - run by The Message Trust and local churches, based in Sharston in Wythenshawe. People can buy food cheaper than supermarkets, lots of food items donated by local supermarkets and food suppliers to reduce wast^t]

[Cracking Good Food](#) "We enthuse, encourage, and teach individuals and groups how to source and cook affordable, healthy, and tasty food from scratch, whilst minimising both food waste and our environmental impact." Variety of locations including South Manchester

[Food Cycle](#), free hot meal made from surplus ingredients Brooklands Church of the Nazarene Wendover Road, Manchester, M23 9FN

[Pay what you can cafe](#) - "Working with local businesses to eliminate food waste means we are able to have free produce (bread, veg and fruit etc) to give away daily." Based in Ashton

[Holland Street Community Garden](#) (M40 7DE) - a community garden in Miles Platting, see also their Facebook page [here](#)

[Miles Platting Savers](#) - serves as a community grocer on Thursday mornings, see also [here](#)

[Ridgeway Street Community Garden](#) in Miles Platting - "There are environmental arts projects, gardening workshops, events and outings organised via the community garden. MERCI(the centre for sustainable development) is two minutes away"

[Green Fingers Moston](#) - Community garden/allotment for local residents, allotment members and children of St Dunstan's primary school

[The Bread and Butter Thing](#) at Higher Blackley Community [Centre](#), groceries at a reduced cost, supplies from supermarkets, factories and farms to reduce waste

[Mirfield Community Gardens](#) (M9 6NN) - run by volunteers, transformed a former garage site around 12 years ago. Includes fruit trees and vegetable plots