



# Monmouthshire County Council Local Food Strategy - May 2024

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## Foreword - Councillor, Mary Ann Brocklesby, Council Leader

**Food matters for us in Monmouthshire: the food we eat, the food we produce, process and sell. Our land depends on it and our identity as a county is bound up with food and farming in our everyday lives, in our economy, tourism and in our hospitality sector. We have so much to celebrate and also to protect so that everyone can benefit from affordable good-quality food produced without compromising nature or degrading our beautiful environment.**

Monmouthshire County Council has a long history of supporting our whole food economy, buying local produce to feed our children and supply our care homes, encouraging community growing and allotments, and working with food producers to promote their projects. Our strategy builds on these strong foundations and sets out the steps we will take towards our long term goal of fairer, greener, healthier food and farming in a flourishing economy that benefits all our residents.

This is not a county-wide food strategy. It concentrates on what we as a local authority can do to make a difference when we stay true to our values of always working in partnership and seeking to empower our local communities to find their own local solutions. Our aim is to have the

the greatest impact on our local food system either through the Council's own interventions or by enabling others to act. I am proud that our strategy has been developed together with so many people – farmers, community growers, food businesses, local communities, and food and farming policy-makers to name a few. I am grateful and thank them for their generosity in contributing their time and expertise to developing our strategy.

Sustainability lies at the very heart of this strategy. The nature and climate crises demand our attention, and our duty to future generations requires that we act now and embed sustainability in all our decision-making. When we talk about food or local food we always mean sustainable food – sustainable environmentally, and also socially and economically. That means good-quality food for everyone, not just a few, and supporting the circular and foundational economies. True sustainability means working in all three areas.

And food itself? The very word conjures up different meanings for us all. For us as a Council our priority is safe, healthy, and nutritious food that meets the UN Human Rights Standards. Food should be available from natural resources (now

and for future generations), accessible both financially and physically, and adequate to nourish the person and sustain body and mind. This is what we strive to provide for the people we feed, in schools, care homes and domiciliary care. But we are not about to dictate to residents and visitors about what to eat. Food should be pleasurable and sociable, from everyday meals to treats and beyond. Many of our local businesses specialise in luxury goods, such as alcohol, chocolate, or ice cream, and they too deserve our support as part of the rich tapestry of Monmouthshire's local food system.

The Delivery Plan that accompanies our Strategy sets out how we will act internally and with partners to achieve our objectives. I look forward to seeing those activities take shape, and to witnessing the difference those activities will make in our precious county and to the talented, dedicated, community-minded people who help make it such a special place to live, work, and visit.



Councillor  
Mary Ann Brocklesby

# 1. OUR PURPOSE: Why a Local Food Strategy?



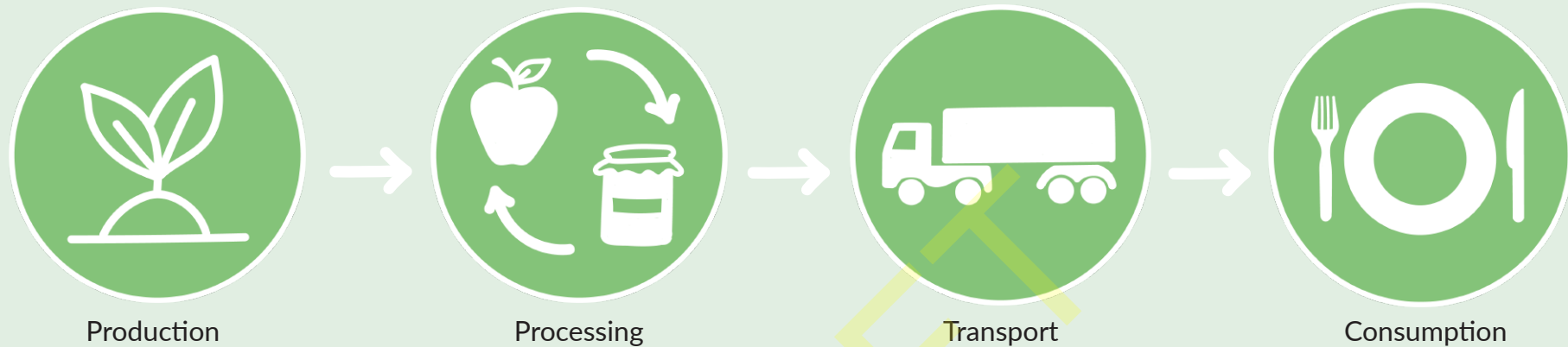
## 1. Our Purpose: Why a Local Food Strategy?

Monmouthshire stands out among UK counties for the commitment its local authority has made to supporting a sustainable, ethical, equitable local food system. This Local Food Strategy is the expression of that commitment, setting out a clear and ambitious goal, a practical approach, and a reasonable assessment of where MCC can have most impact given the limited resources at its disposal and the complexity of the food system itself.

The Strategy sets the trajectory towards our long-term goal of fairer, greener, healthier food and farming in a flourishing economy that benefits all our residents. This goal aligns with our wider commitment to become a prosperous zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health, and dignity for everyone at every stage of life.



## 1.1 What is the Food System?



The food system is extensive and complex. It covers a wide range of activities, affects every one of us every day, and connects with some of society's most pressing and difficult issues. According to Oxford University's Future of Food Programme:

*The food system is a complex web of activities involving production, processing, transport, and consumption. Issues concerning the food system include the governance and economics of food production, its sustainability, the degree to which we waste food, how food production affects the natural environment and the impact of food on individual and population health.*

*(Oxford Martin Programme, no date)*

Although a local authority cannot influence all aspects of the food system as described above, we do touch on many of them. By doing so in a strategic manner we can deliver environmental, social, economic, and cultural benefits for our county and the wider world in line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

## 1.2 Why a Local Food Strategy?

Increasingly, politicians, campaigners, and communities across Wales are recognising that the food system is a powerful driver for change: by thinking strategically and joining up with partners, we can make this vast and complex system a force for good. The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales recognised this in his 2023 strategy document, *Cymru Can*, which makes food a key 'area of focus' and sets out the responsibilities of other public service bodies in this area:

*From farm to fork, food is critical to achieving Wales's well-being goals for the health of our people and our planet ... Public services must use their levers for change, for example, doing more to facilitate community growing and sustainable land use, considering the wider implications of planning decisions on communities and nature, providing the framework of farming subsidies and grants and understanding the local and global impact of food spending.*

*(Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2023)*

Historically, Monmouthshire County Council has been ahead of the curve: in 2013 we passed a motion to support the Incredible Edible community growing movement on Council land; in 2015 we adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance on Green Infrastructure, which includes provision for food growing; and in 2020 the Council made a commitment to the delivery of a Food Development Action Plan. More recently the Council has explored new approaches to procurement and working with local suppliers, and embraced the roll-out of Universal Free School Meals to all Infants and Juniors, cooking meals from scratch in the purpose-built kitchens that are a feature of every one of our primary schools.

This Strategy now draws on that long track record and sets a vision for the future, providing an evidence-based, whole-Authority approach that will ensure we use our resources wisely and to maximum effect for Monmouthshire's communities, businesses, and natural environment.

### 1.3 What is Local?

'Local food' is difficult to define geographically, particularly as Monmouthshire is a border county with neighbours in both Wales and England. This Strategy aligns with the Council's Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy (2023) in recognising the economic, social, environmental and cultural value that can be generated by spending public money with local businesses (in particular small and micro enterprises), and acknowledging that 'dependent on the particular requirement, local can be Monmouthshire, Gwent, English Border Counties, Cardiff Capital Region or Wales'.

#### What sort of food are we talking about?

For us as a Council, our priority is **safe, healthy, and nutritious food** that meets the UN Human Rights Standards:

**Availability:** Food should be obtainable from natural resources, and on sale in markets and shops.

**Availability:** Food should be obtainable from natural resources, and on sale in markets and shops.  
**Accessibility:** Food must be affordable. Individuals should be able to have an adequate diet without compromising on other basic needs [...] Food should be accessible to the physically vulnerable, including children, sick people, people with disabilities and the elderly. Food must also be available to people in remote areas, to victims of armed conflicts or natural disasters, and to prisoners.

**Adequacy:** Food must satisfy dietary needs, taking into account a person's age, living conditions, health, occupation, sex, etc. Food should be safe for human consumption and free from adverse substances.

*(UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2024)*

But we also believe that food should be pleasurable and sociable, and that our local businesses producing luxury goods and treats are also a vital part of our local food system and economy.





## 2. THE CONTEXT



## 2. The Context

The food system impacts many areas of county life, from how land is managed, to how our economy functions, to the health of our residents and how communities come together.

### 2.1 Current Land Use

- 80% of Monmouthshire's land is farmed. The great majority is laid over to grassland for livestock, which is predominantly beef, lamb and dairy with some growth over the last 10 years in poultry, pigs and goats. Livestock is and probably always will be the mainstay of our agricultural land use and farming communities.
- 16% of Monmouthshire's land is currently being cultivated for crops, which include barley, wheat, maize (for feed and biofuel), stock feed and other cereals.
- There are currently at least fifteen primary vegetable and fruit producing businesses across Monmouthshire; those selling direct to the public are small, the largest being 6 hectares (15 acres).
- Monmouthshire County Council owns 24 farm holdings and 40 areas of bare land amounting to 1,122 hectares (2,773 acres) in total, primarily located in the south of the county and in the Severnside area. Most of this land is tenanted or leased to graziers. The majority of the holdings are mixed livestock farms, with few remaining dairy units. There are three market gardens. The Council also owns the Monmouthshire Livestock Market at Raglan.
- The county's rivers are in an unfavourable condition, partly due to agricultural pollution from within and outside the county. Steps are being taken to address the issues, but the problems remain.
- In future, food production will probably need to be balanced with a greater emphasis on other ecosystem services (such as atmospheric regulation, water quality regulation, water storage, and cultural services).
- The agricultural industry is experiencing challenging times as Government subsidy, trade deals and immigration policy change post-Brexit, and pressure to reduce the environmental impact of farming grows through Government policy, the supply chain, media, and public opinion.

## 2.2 Enterprise and Economy

- From primary production through manufacturing, retail, and hospitality, the food sector accounts for approximately 5,000 jobs in Monmouthshire – with many more jobs in secondary industries connected to food (vets, machinery, logistics, etc.). Monmouthshire is known as a food destination and the ‘food capital of Wales’.
- Broadly, the sector’s significance in GVA is forecast to increase between 2024 and 2042, though more granular data reveals nuances within the macro-forecasting in terms of job gains or losses in different parts of the supply chain, and GVA per job.
- Monmouthshire has around 700 food-related businesses. Over 90% are micro-businesses (0–9 employees), though there are also successful SMEs and larger businesses operating in the county’s food industry. These businesses contribute significantly to Monmouthshire’s sense of place for residents and visitors and are central to our local food economy.
- Food and drink businesses sometimes struggle to find suitable premises (and/or secure planning permission) to allow them to move into the county or scale-up within it, potentially limiting growth. Housing costs and availability present another pinch-point, limiting entrepreneurs’ ability to start up in the county.
- Supply-chain gaps and precarities limit the viability and/or long-term resilience of local supply chains (e.g. slaughtering facilities for livestock; processing and logistics for grains and horticultural crops).
- Staffing and skills are concerns in many areas of the food industry locally, from primary production through manufacture and retail. These concerns are often linked to the availability and cost of housing and transport.
- One of Monmouthshire County Council’s main interventions in the food economy is in purchasing food for school meals and the county’s meals-on-wheels service (‘public-sector procurement’). Traditional procurement models have excluded small and local suppliers but there has been recent progress towards a more socially responsible procurement strategy that focuses on local wealth creation, taking a more enabling approach to engage with small suppliers.

## 2.3 Community and Health

- Just under 20% of pupils aged 5–15 are eligible for free school meals or transitionally protected (2021–22 data), and just over 25% of children are living in poverty, after housing costs (2020/21 data).
- The roll-out of Welsh Government’s Universal Free School Meals policy is complete across all Monmouthshire’s Infants and Juniors. Uptake is generally high, but areas of lowest uptake are often those with highest eligibility. School-meal budget and lunchtime food waste are areas of concern.
- Healthy Start uptake varies month by month, usually between 60% and 80%.
- Out of 40 pre-school settings, 32 have completed the nutrition and oral health element of the Healthy and Sustainable Pre-School Scheme, and 30 have achieved the Gold Standard Healthy Snack Award.
- Five schools in Monmouthshire have achieved National Quality Award including focus on food and nutrition.
- Yet, approximately 20% of 4–5-year-olds and over 50% of adults aged 16+ are obese.



- Trussel Trust food banks gave out approximately 4,000 food parcels in 2021/22. Additional free or low-cost food parcels or meals are provided by other community initiatives across the county, including independent food banks, community fridges, food clubs, lunch clubs, soup kitchens, etc., all of whom report rising demand. These initiatives are a vital and vibrant part of our local food system providing invaluable direct and wrap-around support to our residents.
- Demand for allotments and growing space is high, with supply and demand often unbalanced across the county. Many communities and schools have communal growing initiatives, providing a source of fresh fruit and vegetables and opportunities for outdoor learning, exercise, and social interaction.
- Public health practitioners and campaigners are increasingly reporting that traditional health messaging, which seeks to influence individual decisions, is inadequate; they are turning instead to different approaches that attempt to shift the wider context in which individuals make their choices. These approaches often involve working in partnership through cross-sector networks.

\* \* \*

Awareness of the context in which we work has shaped our Strategy and the broader Council strategies it supports. Within the county-wide context, delivery against this Strategy will consider more granular local data when selecting priority areas and interventions.



# 3. DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY



### 3. Developing the Strategy: Process and Evidence

This Strategy has developed out of conversations and discussions within the Council, with colleagues across many organisations, and with individuals who work in our food system and/or have an interest in making that system fairer, more ethical and more locally based. We have also drawn on a wealth of evidence and stakeholder engagement about our local food and farming context and what works in contributing to a healthier, more sustainable system. Many of our partners have shared data with us, and we have a library of commissioned studies and active research undertaken through the Rural Development Programme, Community Renewal Fund and others.

We also ran an internal influence mapping exercise to help shape our delivery plan. The outcomes of this exercise are described in Section 9. In drafting the Strategy, the following consultation activities took place:

- A reference group of experts and partners was established in the capacity of 'critical friends' who work in our food system and/or have an interest in making the system fairer, more ethical and more locally based.
- The outline strategy proposal was presented and discussed at the regular Monmouthshire Food Partnership Steering Group meeting on 28 February 2024.
- Two stakeholder consultations were held in March 2024, one in Abergavenny and one in Chepstow, where discussions regarding the draft Strategy took place.
- Eight written responses were received from external stakeholders.
- An all-Member's Seminar was held on the 15 March 2024.
- A cross-party Member's working group has also been established to monitor progress of the Strategy and the associated Delivery Plan.
- The draft Strategy was scrutinised at Place Scrutiny Committee on 10 April 2024.

All these activities have shaped the Local Food Strategy and Delivery Plan.

# 4. STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND SCOPE





## 4. Strategic Context and Scope

### 4.1 Strategic Context

In addition to the Council's Community and Corporate Plan, there are legislative and policy requirements that inform and influence the Council's activity within the local food system. Crucially, the context we work in is framed by law and policy on agriculture, trade, immigration, commerce and procurement as set by the Welsh and/or UK Governments. Though these do not always align comfortably with our local objectives, in many cases there are synergies. Some of the most relevant adopted and emerging strategies are set out in below. In particular this Strategy should be read alongside the strategies listed in the Local column, and provide more detailed data and contextual information, and set the wider organisational aspirations.

Local	Regional	National
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy</li> <li>• Asset Management Strategy</li> <li>• Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy</li> <li>• Climate &amp; Nature Emergency Strategy and Action Plans*</li> <li>• Green Infrastructure Strategy</li> <li>• Replacement Local Development Plan</li> <li>• Food Partnership Charter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Resources Wales South -East Area Statement</li> <li>• Gwent Wildlife Trust Landscape Profiles</li> <li>• Gwent Public Services Board Wellbeing Assessment &amp; Plan</li> <li>• 'Dyfodol Y Bannau The Future' (Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Management Plan, 2023–28)</li> <li>• South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee Strategic Development Plan</li> <li>• Food Strategies from neighbouring counties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wellbeing of Future Generations Act</li> <li>• Social Partnerships and Procurement Act</li> <li>• Food and Drink Wales Vision and Strategy</li> <li>• Welsh Government Sustainable Farming Scheme</li> <li>• Welsh Government Community Food Strategy</li> <li>• Welsh Government Healthy Weight Healthy Wales Strategy</li> <li>• Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 'Cymru Can'</li> <li>• 'National Food Strategy' (Dimpleby Report)</li> <li>• Sustainable Food Places framework</li> <li>• Future Wales: The National Plan 2040</li> </ul>

\* The action plans (APs) that sit under the Climate and Nature Strategy are: (1) Internal 2030 Decarbonisation AP; (2) Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Section 6 Forward Plan & Nature Recovery AP; (3) Rivers and Oceans AP; (4) Community Climate AP.

## 4.2 Scope

We recognise that it is neither possible nor appropriate for a local authority to influence all aspects of the food system. Our direct influence is limited to our own asset portfolio and our statutory and voluntary functions; though we can work collaboratively to widen our influence, there are still many areas that come down to personal choice – be that the commercial choice of a business or land owner, or the personal choice of individual shoppers. The scope of this Strategy is therefore restricted to those areas where MCC has direct or significant indirect influence (see further Section 9); it does not attempt a comprehensive picture of all food-system work undertaken in the county across the private, public, and third sectors.

Nor does the Strategy reflect all the ways the Council touches on the local food system. Much relevant activity is already being reported elsewhere. The primary purpose of this Strategy is to highlight areas of maximum impact, where the Council can most effectively deploy its voluntary functions (and the funding associated with them) to assist in meeting wider organisational objectives delivered through statutory operational teams.



# 5. OUR GOAL AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES



## 5.1 Our Goal

This Strategy sets the trajectory towards our long-term goal of fairer, greener, healthier food and farming in a flourishing economy that benefits all our residents. It also recognises the changes we want to see in our local food system will: a) take longer than one Council term; b) cannot happen unless we work collaboratively with farmers, producers, wholesalers, retailers, consumers and communities; and c) depend on Welsh and UK farming, food and procurement investments and policies.

We will achieve our purpose through actions that enable, influence, and advocate for a local food system that:

- ensures everyone is well nourished,
- brings prosperity to sustainable food and farming businesses, and
- allows nature and food production to thrive side by side.

This purpose springs from the over-arching objective of MCC's Community and Corporate Plan: to see Monmouthshire become 'a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life'.



## 5.2 Our Guiding Principles

Our Local Food Strategy is based on three interlinked principles fundamental to how we will work and the decisions we will make about where to seek investment and/or focus our own resources.

These principles, which are shared with the Council's Community and Corporate Plan, are:

**Tackling  
inequality**



**Addressing the nature  
and climate crises**



**Supporting sustainable  
and innovative  
economic activity**



The principles are all directly relevant to the local food system and the Council's place within it. Table 1 shows how elements of the food system connect with each principle.

Table 1: MCC's Guiding Principles Applied to the Food System

<b>Tackling inequality</b>	<b>Addressing the nature and climate crises</b>	<b>Supporting sustainable and innovative economic activity</b>
Access: to appropriate and affordable food; to land	Agricultural and land management practices	Alternative enterprise models and social enterprise
The socio-economic distribution of dietary ill health and obesity	Food waste, packaging and recycling	Collaboration and clustering
The ethics of global and local supply chains	Diversity and resilience in the local food economy	Infrastructure and investment
Links between food and the root causes of inequality	Visibility and public understanding of food production	Higher education, technology, R&D

# 6. OUR APPROACH



## 6. Our Approach

Our approach is founded on three principles:

- **collaborative working** – we will always work in partnership where appropriate;
- **adaptive and opportunistic responses** – we will adapt to the changing dynamics in food and farming policy and practice, taking advantage of opportunities arising (e.g. for new partners or funding);
- **focus on impact and outcomes** – we will take time to learn from past experience and new research (our own and others'), and to understand 'what good looks like' and how to measure progress towards it.

This approach will deliver a strategy that:

- a) **is evidence-based**, enabling us to target areas and populations of need;
- b) **positions us to maximise resources and inward investments**, identifying potential areas of development and pathways to capitalise on development opportunities through attracting more strategic funding and investments;
- c) **aligns our work on the local food system with our Community and Corporate Plan objectives and sector policies**, optimising the impact of food- and farming-based interventions through how we procure, manage our assets, support our local economy, encourage learning and skills acquisition and protect our environment;
- d) **is focused on long-term change**, helping us achieve short-term impacts that set the foundation for achieving long-term goals.

### Sustainability

Sustainability lies at the very heart of this strategy. When we talk about food or local food we always mean sustainable food – sustainable environmentally, and also socially and economically. That means good-quality food for everyone, not just a few, and supporting the circular and foundational economies. True sustainability means working in all three areas, for present and future generations.





## Talk Farm Regen Monmouthshire

**Talk Farm Regen (TFR) Monmouthshire** is an example of using our approach to put our guiding principles into action. TFR Monmouthshire is a farmer-led discussion group supported by the Council through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. It is open to anyone who is farming in the Usk and Wye catchments and interested in regenerative farming. Regenerative farming has five core principles:

- minimise soil disturbance
- keep living roots in the soil
- keep the soil covered
- grow a wide variety of crops
- practise mixed farming (crops and livestock)

The approach is well established and backed by evidence of the benefits for soil health, water quality and flood risk, biodiversity, yields, and business performance. It therefore aligns with our guiding principles of addressing the nature and climate crises and supporting sustainable economic activity and the objectives of the Community and Corporate Plan. The group provides an informal setting where farmers can give and get advice from others trying similar things in the same locality.

By raising awareness and spreading knowledge locally through talks, workshops and farm visits, the group positions farmers to enter future agricultural subsidy schemes and emerging private markets that look to balance food production with broader ecosystem services – allowing farm businesses to maximise resources and inward investment.

Equally important is the group's social aspect: farming can be an isolating profession, involving hard labour, low returns, and long hours worked alone. The group's in-person events provide an opportunity for our farming community to come together and socialise in a way often taken for granted by those in other occupations, contributing to our objective of tackling inequality in all its forms.

Alongside the discussion group the Council has supported a mentoring scheme to give three farms a year's more focussed support to plan a transition to regenerative practices. Since we recognise that farming systems cannot be changed overnight, this scheme is focused on long-term change rather than short-term targets: the year of mentoring will provide farms with a tailored route map for change over years to come. This project is also a shining example of partnership working between the Council, Food Partnership, Wye Valley National Landscape, private consultancy, the farming community, and Size of Wales and ACE Monmouth – the third-sector and community organisations who conceived the project and lead delivery.



# 7. PARTNERS AND PARTNERSHIPS



## 7. Partners and Partnerships

Partnership working is at the heart of our approach, in line with the collaboration, integration and involvement 'ways of working' under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. We have partners at national, regional and local levels, and this Strategy is nested in the wider framework set by those partnerships as outlined in Section 4.1 above.

### 7.1 Regional Strategic Economic Partnerships

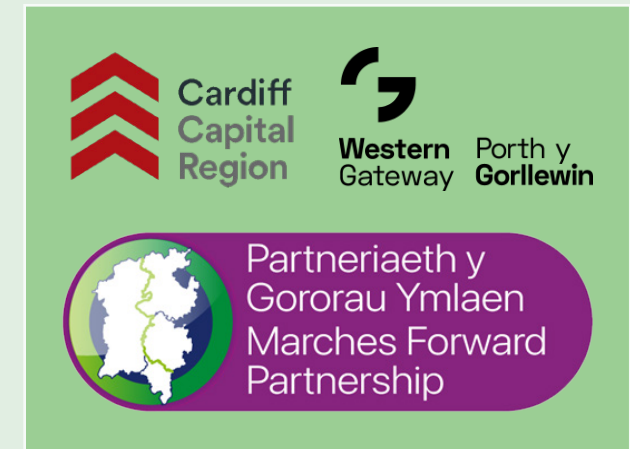
Monmouthshire is a border county in a strategic location. Our county benefits from membership of regional economic partnerships including the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCR), the Western Gateway and Marches Forward. Through the CCR, Monmouthshire assists in delivering the Sustainable Food Challenge Fund. Monmouthshire also leads the Food, Rural Development and Economy subgroup of the Marches Forward Partnership. These regional strategic economic partnerships also set a context of local-authority collaboration and joint working in many other fields too.

### 7.2 Multi-Agency Working

More locally we work closely with a wide range of partners to address specific issues and/or push for long-term change. Among our valued partners are: Gwent Public Services Board, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Gwent Public Health Team, Natural Resources Wales, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Registered Social Landlords, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations, Food Sense Wales and Food Partnerships, Social Farms and Gardens, Trussell Trust, Food Farming and Countryside Commission, Farming Connect, Nature Friendly Farming Network, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Monmouthshire Local Nature Partnership, Wye and Usk Foundation, river catchment partnerships, Wye Valley National Landscape, Land Workers Alliance, Transition Towns, education providers, farming unions, farmers and food businesses, and our community voices.

### 7.3 Local Insights

We rely on direct connections with Monmouthshire residents, community groups and businesses to understand our County's needs and aspirations. Elected Members represent their constituents and ensure these vital voices are heard. In addition, the Council convenes specific food-system networks and groups, including Monmouthshire Food & Drink Business Network, Talk Farm Regen Monmouthshire, and Monmouthshire Food Partnership.





# Monmouthshire Food Partnership

**Monmouthshire Food Partnership is a county-wide collaboration of people and organisations from all walks of life who think food is worth taking seriously. The Partnership is hosted by Monmouthshire County Council and coordinated by the Sustainable Food Team. It is part of a UK-wide network of Food Partnerships who are all working together to champion good food and create sustainable local food systems that everyone can access and enjoy.**

**Monmouthshire Food Partnership's bilingual website is at [foodmonmouthshire.co.uk](http://foodmonmouthshire.co.uk)**



Or use the QR code to access

The Partnership works to the nationally acclaimed Sustainable Food Places framework, which covers six key issues:

- Governance and Strategy
- Healthy Food for All
- Food for the Planet
- Good Food Movement
- Sustainable Food Economy
- Catering and Procurement

This framework has been endorsed by Welsh Government, which has so far funded food partnerships across Wales in 2022–24.

Through its cross-sector Steering Group and wide network of over 500 members and supporters, Monmouthshire Food Partnership aims to:

- connect people, projects and partners trying to create a sustainable local food system,
- take collective action to shape the local food system, and
- be a collective voice for food that positively shapes policy and shares best practice.

Since convening in its current form in 2022 the Partnership has issued over £14,000 in grants to support community food projects and growing spaces. It has supported FOOD Clubs, community fridges, and secondary-school breakfast clubs, and run training sessions in cookery and food growing. There have been two community 'Cook and Share' days, and 70 people were introduced to pumpkin soup in a waste-busting campaign ahead of Hallowe'en 2023. Businesses have benefited from a Meet the Buyer event, peer-to-peer networking, and support to trade at the world-famous Abergavenny Food Festival. Three farm businesses have received a year of 1:1 mentoring in transitioning to regenerative farming practices from a leading expert in the field. The Partnership is also crucial to the Welsh Veg for Schools supply chain investment pilot, showcased in the next case study.

## 8. OUR CORE THEMES



## Our Core Themes

We have a clear purpose for this Strategy, which is:

to set the trajectory towards fairer, greener, healthier food and farming in a flourishing economy that benefits all our residents.

To reach our goal we have set three interlinked core themes, which we will address by working collaboratively across Council Directorates, with elected Members, our partners and trusted experts.

These core themes are:

- improving local and ethical supply chains
- developing food as an economic sector
- community food: access, education, participation

Broad objectives have been identified for each theme, and alignment with other key strategies identified (Table 2). Many of these objectives and their related actions are captured and monitored in the strategies cross-referenced.



Table 2 Core Themes and Linked Objectives\*

Improving local and ethical supply chains	Developing food as an economic sector	Community food: access, education, participation
<p>Increasing the use of local and seasonal produce in schools (primary and where possible secondary) and care homes.</p> <p><i>EESS</i></p>	<p>Showcasing local food and drink producers and promoting Monmouthshire as a food and drink destination.</p> <p><i>DMP, EESS</i></p>	<p>Providing and promoting access to land through allotments and community gardens for growing food.</p> <p><i>NRAP</i></p>
<p>Working across the supply chain (incl. suppliers, processors and logistics) to support the development of the local food economy in private and public sectors and reduce our reliance on imported food.</p> <p><i>EESS</i></p>	<p>Supporting entrepreneurs, start-ups, and established food and drink businesses to be environmentally, socially, and financially sustainable – encourage innovation and clustering.</p> <p><i>EESS</i></p>	<p>Working in schools to increase ‘food literacy’ from soil to plate and encourage a positive food culture.</p> <p><i>NRAP</i></p>
<p>Working with procurement colleagues to maximise the social value and minimise the environmental impact of public-sector food contracts (e.g. using Fairtrade and Deforestation Free options where possible, minimising packaging and waste).</p> <p><i>EESS</i></p>	<p>Promoting learning pathways to develop skills and career opportunities in food, farming, and associated industries.</p> <p><i>EESS, NRAP</i></p>	<p>Supporting accessible food projects in community settings (e.g. community fridges, lunch clubs), with a focus on environmental sustainability and nutritional quality</p> <p><i>CCAP, NRAP</i></p>
<p>Promoting regenerative agriculture, nature-friendly farming and horticulture on the MCC farm estate and beyond.</p> <p><i>EESS, NRAP</i></p>	<p>Exploring options for investment in infrastructure and taking a long view on supply-chain resilience.</p> <p><i>EESS</i></p>	<p>Facilitating Monmouthshire Food Partnership as a driver of food citizenship and cross-sector insight.</p> <p><i>NRAP</i></p>

\* Letters in italic indicate strategic alignment: CCAP = Community Climate Change Action Plan; DMP = Destination Management Plan; EESS = Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy; NRAP = Nature Recovery Action Plan



## Welsh Veg in Schools

Since 2023 Monmouthshire has been participating in a pilot to develop new local agroecological supply chains into schools – specifically focusing on vegetables. The Welsh Veg in Schools pilot is a collaboration between Local Authorities and Health Boards covering Cardiff, Carmarthenshire and Monmouthshire, the counties' Food Partnerships, the wholesaler Castell Howell Foods, a number of vegetable growers, and Farming Connect Horticulture. It is led by Food Sense Wales and supported by Welsh Government Foundational Economy funding. This 'action research' pilot brings together all this Strategy's core themes into one multi-pronged project.

In essence the project is about improving local and ethical supply chains: the partners worked together to open conventional wholesale supply chains to Welsh vegetable growers focused on producing high-quality food with minimal environmental impacts. Through the Autumn Term of 2023, ten Monmouthshire primary schools received fresh agroecological Welsh vegetables through the project to use in school lunches. More broadly, the collaboration is an example of developing food as an economic sector: the growers have invested and adapted their practices to meet the requirements of public-sector supply chains, and new quality assurance standards have been developed to suit such small-scale mixed enterprises.

Nutritional analyses of the produce have been undertaken, and options trialled to extend the harvest's shelf life and preserve summer gluts for future use (e.g. by converting fresh tomatoes into a jarred base sauce fortified with spinach and/or kale).

Finally, the project addressed wider issues around access, education and participation. By investing in the supply chain through school meals, high-quality local vegetables were made available to all children regardless of their socio-economic status, going some way to 'bridging the gap' between the sustainability and food access movements. Children from participating schools were also taken on farm visits to meet the people who grew their vegetables and get hands on planting onions and harvesting carrots. There was also a series of classroom activities for children to explore less familiar vegetables through touch, smell, and taste, increasing 'food literacy' from soil to plate and encouraging a positive and enquiring food culture.



The project is ongoing in 2024 and at the time of writing the growing season is already in progress and looking ahead to the next harvest.



# 9. INFLUENCE MAPPING



## 9. Influence Mapping

The core themes and objectives identified above are broad and cross-cutting. Given our evidence-based approach and the strict scope of this Strategy, a further influence mapping exercise was carried out to identify areas of maximum impact, where the Council can most effectively concentrate its limited resources. This exercise identified three areas of focus that draw multiple workstreams together and unite them to drive change against our Core Themes and in line with our Guiding Principles.

These are:

**The food  
we buy**



**The land  
we own**



**The conversations we  
convene**



## 9.1 The Food We Buy

In the 2023/24 financial year, the Council spent approximately £1.3 million on food for school meals, care homes and domiciliary support ('meals on wheels'). School meals are one of our most powerful levers for addressing inequality and the nature and climate crises. We feed 4,200 children every day, providing a nourishing hot lunch to sustain them as they grow and learn. Increasing uptake of universal free school meals (UFSM) is one way in which we can strike at the root causes of inequality, in particular child hunger, dietary ill-health and the socio-economic attainment gap. By procuring wisely, choosing British seasonal ingredients that are ethically and sustainably produced, we can support our domestic economy in confidence that the ingredients have been produced to UK standards without unacceptable exploitation of human and natural resources. Where budgets allow and the evidence is robust, we can potentially go further by committing to certifications such as Fairtrade for chocolate, coffee, sugar, bananas and more, RSPO for palm oil, MSC for fish, higher-welfare meat, or organic fruit and vegetables.

However, the school catering team faces barriers. A return to seasonal eating means embracing ingredients that are unfamiliar in many households, such as kale, beetroot, and spinach. Raising standards in some areas may mean economising in others, for instance by using beans and lentils sometimes to free up budget for sustainable meat and fish on other days. Above all, children's palates are increasingly accustomed to the flavours and textures of ultra-processed foods. Before committing to menu change, our menu planners therefore need assurance that the changes will be accepted by children and their families; otherwise the food will be wasted and the learners go hungry. To overcome these barriers we need to work in concert with our communities, using our direct and indirect influence through community food projects and school outreach to further our ambitions for healthy children with a positive food culture that spreads from school to home and back again, and will serve them for life.



For our more elderly residents, our Monmouthshire Meals domiciliary service and care-home staff grapple with the increasingly complex dietary needs. Again, service innovation is required if we are to meet those needs and ensure the older generation is likewise provided with the appropriate, accessible, and affordable food we all deserve by right. Here the challenge is less to do with changing tastes, and more to do with recruiting and training staff with the right skill set for care catering, and exploiting new technology to provide economies of scale and a mobile service that is fit for purpose in the modern era.

In our heritage and leisure outlets the opportunities are different. Here (within legislative boundaries), we have the opportunity to support and showcase small artisan businesses selling added-value products. These businesses contribute greatly to Monmouthshire's local economy and appeal as visitor destination, and their produce could, in turn, enhance our visitor attractions and so drive revenue opportunities for the Council and the businesses themselves.



## 9.2 The Land We Own

Land management and its associations with water and air quality, soil health, biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation, and flood risk are key issues for any rural Council. Through our various partnerships and outreach work MCC seeks to influence land management practices in our County and catchments and promote sustainable, nature-friendly, regenerative farming practices. More immediately, the Council is also a land-owner in its own right, in possession of tenanted county farms, bare land let to graziers, statutory allotment sites, parks and play areas, and other small parcels in urban and rural settings that may be suitable for community food-growing. Here we can intervene more directly to achieve our ambitions. For example, when farms are relet Landlord Services can and do consider factors such as environmental sustainability, food production, and community engagement when selecting successful bidders. If a community expresses interest in managing a site for a shared garden, the Council will in principle support their ambition provided the site is suitable and legal obligations met on both sides.

However, there is more we can do. Many farms are on historical tenancies that leave the landlord with little influence over how the land is managed. But we can seek to build closer relationships with our tenants to understand more fully what is happening on our estate, what is needed from us as landlords, and how we and our tenants can work together to ensure our collective land management is the best it can be on each farm and sets a model of good practice when we advocate change to others. There is no universal model, and our approaches will need to reflect the particular needs of the different businesses involved. At the community level, we can improve our processes to provide a smoother pathway to community growing along with robust and transparent decision-making and clear guidelines on how we wish to see the land managed (e.g. no dig approaches to minimise soil disturbance, and holistic pest management that uses chemicals only as a last resort).

We know that many allotment sites have long waiting lists. The issue is complex as new sites are not easily found and resources for their management are very limited. We can however continue to work with Allotment Associations to revive disused plots and create new ones through the Allotment Support Grants provided by Welsh Government, and consider ways of managing waiting lists more effectively to ensure plots are allocated in line with our core ambition to tackle inequality. We will also continue to promote communal community gardening as a more sustainable and equitable alternative to single-occupancy allotments, as communal growing makes better use of the limited space available and facilitates more even distribution of harvest gluts.

### 9.3 The Conversations We Convene

As a local authority Monmouthshire County Council is privileged to be able to take a long view. Many of the systemic imbalances upon which this Strategy touches are global and will take decades, perhaps generations, to redress. The ubiquity of ultra-processed foods, excessive consolidation of supply chains, exploitation of primary producers, and over-emphasis on agricultural yields at the expense of other ecosystem services are examples. Looking ahead, we can map other risks that are approaching and bring stakeholders together to identify mitigations, assess options, make the case for investment, and begin long-term change. The local food economy is a case in point, where supply-chain gaps and precarities limit the viability and long-term resilience of our supply chains. If we lose our small abattoirs, for example, the local meat supply chain will collapse. If we wish to increase horticultural production in line with national ambitions, we need the infrastructure, the expertise to enable farmers to diversify and the contracts to purchase the vegetables that are grown. If we wish to keep our rural communities together, we need young people to be aware of the career opportunities available in food, farming and their supporting rural industries. We may not know the answers, and we will not be able to afford the solutions, but we can bring together the people who might, to develop locally appropriate interventions and investment proposals and galvanise both public and private enterprise, innovation, and collaboration.

These are specific examples of where MCC can bring stakeholders together to address particular issues. The Council also has a more general convening role, providing a forum for knowledge exchange within and between sectors to share best practice, spark new ideas, or simply provide opportunities for social interaction to individuals working in a challenging and often isolating industry. Moreover, by acting strategically in our areas of strongest influence we can demonstrate good food citizenship and inspire it in others – both organisations and individuals – to make our local food system and the part we play within it truly a force for good.

\* \* \*

These three areas are where Monmouthshire County Council has most influence in the local food system, and where we will therefore target our efforts to meet the objectives set out in Table 3 above. The Delivery Plan that follows identifies the activities we will undertake.

# 10. OUR DELIVERY PLAN



# Delivery Plan



The food we buy

Target	Relevant themes	Actions we will take	Who will do it?	How will we measure progress?	Timeframe (short, medium or long term)
Increase uptake of UFSM in target areas (i.e. areas with below-average uptake)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gather data to understand barriers to uptake</li> <li>Deliver awareness and familiarisation sessions in schools and community settings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catering</li> <li>Sustainable Food</li> <li>with</li> <li>Community Focused Schools</li> <li>Healthy Schools</li> <li>Education</li> <li>Community Development</li> <li>Healthy Schools</li> </ul>	Uptake of UFSM in target areas	Medium
Increase use of seasonal and/or local produce in schools, care homes, and domiciliary care; reduce use of UPFs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>Developing food as an economic sector</li> <li>Community food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver awareness and familiarisation sessions in schools and community settings</li> <li>Gather data to support adoption of more seasonal ingredients</li> <li>Pursue supply-chain and service innovation and (where appropriate) investment to facilitate local and/or seasonal sourcing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catering</li> <li>Sustainable Food</li> <li>with</li> <li>Procurement</li> <li>Community Focused Schools</li> <li>Healthy Schools</li> <li>Education</li> <li>Social Care</li> <li>Mon Life</li> <li>Community Development</li> <li>Healthy Schools</li> </ul>	Amount of local and/or seasonal produce used in schools, care homes, and domiciliary care Amount of UPFs used in schools, care homes, and domiciliary care Lessons learnt from supply-chain and service innovation activity	Medium-long



# Delivery Plan

Target	Relevant themes	Actions we will take	Who will do it?	How will we measure progress?	Timeframe (short, medium or long term)
Integrate community food projects in the good food movement to enable and extend local and/or seasonal procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community food: access, education, participation</li> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver awareness and familiarisation sessions in community settings</li> <li>Include seasonality and support for local businesses in grant requirements</li> <li>Link local businesses with community settings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable Food</li> <li>Community Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of joined up approach between schools and community work</li> <li>Evidence of local spend from community settings</li> </ul>	Short-medium
Identify ways to use heritage and cultural attractions to showcase local food & drink businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>Developing food as an economic sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore cooperative models and procurement options to facilitate purchasing from local suppliers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable Food <i>with</i></li> <li>Mon Life</li> <li>Procurement</li> </ul>	Number of heritage and cultural attractions showcasing local food & drink businesses	Short-medium
Understand potential for additional certifications on specific ingredients (e.g. Fairtrade, RSPO, MSC, pasture-fed, organic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partners to explore the evidence for and practical feasibility of such commitments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Catering</li> <li>Sustainable Food <i>with</i></li> <li>Procurement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevant options analysis undertaken</li> <li>Commitments made where recommended by options analysis</li> </ul>	Medium-long

# Delivery Plan



Target	Relevant themes	Actions we will take	Who will do it?	How will we measure progress?	Timeframe (short, medium or long term)
Embed food production, environmental land management (ELM) and community engagement in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>Developing food as an economic sector</li> <li>Community food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include food production, ELM as community engagement criteria when re-letting county farms and assessing bids</li> <li>Seek out examples of innovation and best practice elsewhere and apply learning to Monmouthshire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landlord Services <i>with</i></li> <li>Sustainable Food</li> </ul>	Scoring criteria and weightings in tender assessments	Short (in progress)
Further ELM best practice across county farm estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>Developing food as an economic sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen relationships with existing tenants</li> <li>Gather data to build understanding of current practices</li> <li>Convene knowledge transfer and discussions to further</li> <li>ELM best practice among tenants</li> <li>Promote Farming Connect services to tenants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landlord Services <i>with</i></li> <li>Sustainable Food</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Green Infrastructure</li> <li>Natural Flood Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tenant testimonies</li> <li>Proportion of tenants registered with Farming Connect</li> <li>No. of knowledge transfer events</li> </ul>	Medium-long

# Delivery Plan

Target	Relevant themes	Actions we will take	Who will do it?	How will we measure progress?	Timeframe (short, medium or long term)
Facilitate access to Council land for community food growing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish and communicate clear process for establishing new community gardens</li> <li>Revise and re-affirm commitment to Incredible Edible movement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable Food <i>with</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landlord Services</li> <li>Legal</li> <li>Community Development</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Green Infrastructure</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment, communication and utilisation of clear process map</li> <li>New community garden(s) supported</li> </ul>	Short-medium
Maximise benefits from existing allotment space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate Welsh Government Allotment Support Grant to bring more plots into use</li> <li>Consider new ways of managing waiting lists to tackle inequality</li> <li>Promote communal community gardening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landlord Services <i>with</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable Food</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of sites benefiting from Allotment Support Grant</li> <li>New approaches to waiting lists considered and, if appropriate, acted upon</li> </ul>	Short-medium

# Delivery Plan



The  
conversations  
we convene

Target	Relevant themes	Actions we will take	Who will do it?	How will we measure progress?	Timeframe (short, medium or long term)
Secure the long-term viability of the local meat supply chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>Developing food as an economic sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convene key stakeholders to map current situation, vulnerabilities, and opportunities</li> <li>Options analysis and recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable Food <i>with</i></li> <li>Economy, Employment &amp; Skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existence of options analysis and recommendations</li> <li>Evidence that preferred option is being pursued</li> <li>Ongoing viability of local meat supply chain</li> </ul>	Long
Increase commercial horticultural production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>Developing food as an economic sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with partners to promote diversification into horticulture</li> <li>Identify existing and new routes to market for horticultural enterprises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable Food <i>with</i></li> <li>Economy, Employment and Skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of increased horticultural production</li> <li>New routes to market established</li> </ul>	Long

# Delivery Plan

Target	Relevant themes	Actions we will take	Who will do it?	How will we measure progress?	Timeframe (short, medium or long term)
Ensure young people are aware of career pathways in food, farming, and related rural industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing food as an economic sector</li> <li>• Community food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with partners to develop a consistent message and resources across careers advice services in schools and colleges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable Food</li> <li>• Economy, Employment and Skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources and insight disseminated to and adopted by careers advisors</li> </ul>	Medium-long
Facilitate knowledge exchange within and between sectors to share best practice, spark new ideas, and support mental wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>• Developing food as an economic sector</li> <li>• Community food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate Monmouthshire Food Partnership as a driver of food citizenship and cross-sector insight</li> <li>• Facilitate Monmouthshire Food &amp; Drink Business Network</li> <li>• Facilitate Talk Farm Regen Monmouthshire discussion group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable Food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of meetings and/or events held</li> <li>• Number of businesses engaged</li> <li>• Persistence of business engagement</li> </ul>	Short (in progress)

# Delivery Plan

Monitoring and Review					
Target	Relevant themes	Actions we will take	Who will do it?	How will we measure progress?	Timeframe (short, medium or long term)
Quarterly internal monitoring via Service Business Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>Developing food as an economic sector</li> <li>Community food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update SBP quarterly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable Food Projects Manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above</li> </ul>	Short
Establish cross-party Members Group to oversee progress against the Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>Developing food as an economic sector</li> <li>Community food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold 6-monthly meetings of cross-party Members Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable Food Projects Manager</li> <li>Cross-party Members Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above</li> </ul>	Short
Assess need to review Strategy in 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving local and ethical supply chains</li> <li>Developing food as an economic sector</li> <li>Community food: access, education, participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider progress against the plan and wider changes in context and assess need to review the Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cross-party Members Group</li> <li>SLT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As above</li> </ul>	Medium-long