

SUBJECT:	LOCAL FOOD STRATEGY
MEETING:	CABINET
DATE:	22 MAY 2024
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	ALL

1. PURPOSE

1.1 To present the Draft Local Food Strategy and associated Delivery Plan for consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 To approve the Local Food Strategy and associated Delivery Plan (Appendix One), which set the Council's direction towards *a long-term goal of fairer, greener, healthier food and farming in a flourishing economy that benefits all our residents.*'

3. KEY ISSUES

3.1 Why a Local Food Strategy?

Firstly, some facts:

- Monmouthshire is known as a food destination and the 'Food capital of Wales'.
- Most of Monmouthshire's land 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.
- Only 20% of Monmouthshire's land is currently being cultivated for crops, which include barley, wheat, maize (for feed and biofuel), stock feed and other cereals.
- The Council owns twenty-four farm holdings and forty 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. Many 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.
- Demand for allotments and growing space is high, with supply and demand often unbalanced across the county.
- 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.).
- One of the 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.
- The roll-out of Welsh Government's Universal Free School Meals policy is complete across all Monmouthshire's Infants and Juniors, though uptake is patchy and often lowest in areas with highest eligibility. School-meal budget and lunchtime food waste are areas of concern.

3.2 In considering the facts above, the Council has been developing an approach to local and community growing, procurement of food and working with local suppliers. Every primary school has a kitchen where freshly cooked, nutrition-rich meals are produced five days a week. Like most other councils in Wales, we also support a countywide Food Partnership. These initiatives are appreciated and do show impact. But the Council can do more to enable a whole-authority approach that is systems-based and focused on sustaining the impacts of our interventions, the long-term sustainability of our land and nature, and the health and well-being of our communities.

3.3 Hence, the Local Food Strategy which:

- a) is driven by evidence which enables 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 the Council’s 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.

The purpose of the Strategy will be achieved through the delivery of actions that enable, influence and advocate for a local food system that:

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

3.4 The Approach

Our approach is founded on *collaborative working; adaptive and opportunistic approaches* - adapting to the changing dynamics in food and farming policy and practice; *taking advantage of opportunities arising* (e.g. for new partners or funding); while always focusing on *impact and outcomes*.

3.5 The Guiding Principles

The 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 guiding principles are *tackling inequality, addressing the nature and climate crises, and supporting sustainable and innovative food and farming practices*.

3.6 Three Core Themes

Three interlinked core themes have been identified which have been scoped to ensure alignment with other Council strategies, are based on evidence, and have the likelihood to drive system change. These are:

- *Improving local and ethical supply chains,*
- *Developing food as an economic sector, and*
- *Community food: access, education, participation.*

Activities have been developed under each of these themes which have been detailed in the associated Delivery Plan, and actions will be taken by the Council and in partnership. The Delivery Plan also details timeframes, responsible Officers and an explanation of

how the team will define success and track benefits through the reporting and monitoring framework.

3.7 The Consultation Process to date

In drafting the Strategy, the following consultation activities have taken place:

- A reference Group of experts and partners has been 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.
- Two stakeholder consultations were held in March - one in Abergavenny and one in Chepstow, where discussions regarding the draft Strategy took place.
- An all-Member's Seminar was held on the 15th of March.
- A Cross Member's working group is being considered to monitor progress of the Strategy and the associated Delivery Plan.

All these activities have shaped the Local Food Strategy appended to this report.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

- 4.1 An integrated impact assessment has been carried out and attached to this report as Appendix Two.

The positive impacts of this draft Strategy are that:

- It enables a whole-authority approach that is systems-based and focused on sustaining the impacts of our interventions, the long-term sustainability of our land and nature, and the health and well-being of our communities.
- It sets our direction of travel, towards our long-term goal of fairer, greener, healthier food and farming in a flourishing economy that benefits all our residents.
- The approach of the Strategy is founded on collaborative working, maximising adaptive and opportunistic approaches, whilst taking advantage of opportunities arising (e.g. for new partners or funding); while always being focused on impact and outcomes.
- The 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 guiding principles are tackling inequality, addressing the nature and climate crises, and supporting sustainable and innovative food and farming practices.
- There are three interlinked core themes which are likely to drive system change. These are improving local and ethical supply chains, developing food as an economic sector, and community food: access, education, participation.
- The actions associated with these three core themes will enable, influence and advocate for a local food system that ensures everyone is well nourished; supports sustainable food and farming businesses to prosper and allows nature and food production to thrive side by side.

No negative impacts have been identified.

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 5.1 Once approved the success of the Strategy will be monitored and quarterly progress reported against the Delivery Plan and the associated monitoring and evaluation framework including those set by funders including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and WLGA. Updates will be provided to Place Scrutiny Committee as requested.

6. REASONS

- 6.1 Whilst the Council does not have a statutory responsibility to produce a Local Food Strategy, this Strategy demonstrates the Council's recognition of Monmouthshire as the 'Food Capital of Wales'. This Strategy will enable a whole-authority approach focussed on the long-term sustainability of the County's land and nature, and the health and well-being of our communities.
- 6.2 The Strategy aligns with the Council's Community and Corporate Plan and its associated enabling strategies including the Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy, the Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy, the Asset Management Strategy, the Climate and Nature Recovery Plan and the Replacement Local Development Plan. It has also been authored to reflect key regional, national and UK Strategies such as 'Dyfodol Y Bannau The Future' (Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Management Plan, 2023–28), Gwent Public Services Board Wellbeing Assessment and Plan, Food and Drink Wales Vision and Strategy, 'National Food Strategy' (Dimbleby Report) and the Sustainable Food Places Framework.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council's Sustainable Food Team is currently funded via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the WLGA Direct Food Support Fund and Food Partnership Development Fund.
- 7.2 As many activities will involve our partners, support will also be provided by, among others, Natural Resources Wales, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Gwent Public Health Team, Food Partnerships, Trussel Trust, local Community Fridges, Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations, Social Farms and Gardens, Farming Connect, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Wye and Usk Foundation, Land Workers Alliance, farming unions, farmers and food businesses, our community groups and voices.

8. CONSULTEES

- Council Leader
- Chief Officer for Communities and Place
- Informal Cabinet (9 January 2024 and 26 March 2024)
- Place Scrutiny Committee – 10 April 2024
- Strategic Leadership Team
- All Members
- The Marches Forward Partnership
- Stakeholder Consultation Events (11 and 12 March) with local food businesses and sector representatives.
- Head of Rural Development, Housing and Partnerships
- Communities and Place DMT
- MCC Estates Team

- MCC Economy, Employment and Skills Team

9.1 AMENDMENTS MADE AS A RESULT OF THE CONSULTATION

9.1.1 Place Scrutiny Committee made the following observations at their meeting on the 10 April 2024, as detailed in the Chair's comments below:

Members wanted to understand what we are doing to support and teach our communities and projects of upskilling residents to eat nutritious meals and how we can support and facilitate local residents to get access to Council land to grow their own produce. There is concern about the uptake of free school meals and what the Council is doing to ensure that people are aware of what is available to them.

It was asked if there is any way we can improve supply chains locally to our nursing homes, schools, etc. in relation to processing that produce. There is a very real concern from recent events that have caused members to discuss the procurement of food and milk. Council and residents will of course support a local food strategy, but we'd like a strategy to be more specific to Monmouthshire and maybe neighbouring borders. Local produce is key when considering climate change and we need our local food strategy to align.

There was praise from members for the hydrogen vehicles that are serving 'Meals on Wheels' to our residents. There was a question asking if the local food strategy played any part in the recent procurement selection of Totally Welsh and we're looking for some support to lobby Welsh Government with regards to the business rate relief for RSMES in the county. There was a valid question as to how the Council will encourage sustainable farming going forward and the importance of aligning all our policies, whether that's the local food strategy, the climate change strategy, the RLDP, tackling inequalities, the list is endless.

9.1.2 Following Scrutiny and wider stakeholder consultation the following amendments have been made:

- Clarification that delivery must take account of local geographies (sub-county level);
- Clarification of the kind of food supported by the strategy, aligned to United Nations definition of availability, accessibility, and adequacy;
- Further contextual information, including recognition of existing grassroots activity in schools and community settings and commitment to ongoing support for these where possible;
- Closer alignment with Nature & Climate Strategy and Replacement Local Development Plan;
- Increased focus on the need to understand supply-chain gaps and maximise opportunities to use MCC assets (land and commercial) to assist in achieving strategic objectives, reflected in Delivery Plan;
- Recognition of universal free school meals as a key mechanism for realising strategic objectives, and focus on maximising uptake and benefits, reflected in Delivery Plan.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix One: Local Food Strategy and Delivery Plan

Appendix Two: EQIA

11. AUTHOR

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12. CONTACT DETAILS

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