

DECISION-MAKER:	HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
SUBJECT:	SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL'S POLICY APPROACH TO FOOD
DATE OF DECISION:	6 APRIL 2023
REPORT OF:	COUNCILLOR FIELKER CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH, ADULTS AND LEISURE

<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY	
None	
BRIEF SUMMARY	
<p>A key recommendation from the Childhood Obesity Scrutiny Inquiry undertaken in 2020 was to improve the local food environment. The National Food Strategy (2021) highlighted the adverse impact that the current food system is having on the environment, food security and health. Whilst it is clear that local government cannot influence the entirety of the local food system, the Council, with partners, could act as enablers for a healthier food environment in the city. Implementation of strategic recommendations, together with project officer capacity, are required to deliver a programme of work which will support stakeholders and partners in initiating a systems change for a sustainable food environment.</p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS:	
(i)	That the Panel note progression of plans to promote a sustainable food environment and considers the next steps to deliver this key recommendation from the Childhood Obesity Scrutiny Inquiry.
REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS	
1.	To enable the Panel to scrutinise current work to improve the local food environment
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED	
2.	None
DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)	
3.	The importance of the food environment as a national priority was underlined in 2021 when the Government published a National Food Strategy. This

	<p>highlighted the adverse impact that our current food system is having on the environment, food security and health. The strategy set out 14 recommendations which included reducing intake of less healthy food and drink (junk food), reducing diet-related inequalities and working towards a long-term change in food culture (see National Food Strategy recommendations Appendix A).ⁱ Whilst it is clear that local governments are not in a position to influence the entirety of what is needed to change the local food system, the Council, with partners, could act as an enabler for healthier, and more sustainable food choices in the city.</p>
4.	<p>A poor diet is recognised as a major risk factor for poor health and early death.ⁱⁱ Research has identified a high intake of salt, low intake of whole grains, and low intake of fruits, were the leading dietary risk factors for deaths and disability.ⁱⁱⁱ A report from Public Health England (now part of the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities [OHID]) on the burden of disease, noted that low intakes of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, in addition to the intake of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, are key behavioural risk factors for long term poor health, including cardiovascular disease and cancer.</p>
5.	<p>The Council continues to support a number of initiatives to improve access to healthy affordable food and to promote healthier diets. The increasing pressures caused by the rise in the costs of living led to the establishment of a Food Insecurity task & finish group (a sub-group of the Cost-of Living Operational group). The task and finish group is working across the organisation, and with partners, to ensure that local residents affected by the cost-of-living crisis can easily find the help they need to access food. In addition, the Council agreed to carry forward a motion to declare Southampton a Right to Food City.</p>
6.	<p>Food insecurity is also a risk factor for obesity and other health problems. Families at risk of food insecurity may be forced to choose between readily available, cheap, high calorie foods and healthy options which are more costly. In 2020/21 the National Child Measurement Programme data highlighted an unprecedented increase in childhood obesity in both Reception year and Year 6. The most recent data for Reception year indicated that the proportion of children with obesity had returned to pre-pandemic levels, whereas for Year 6, levels of obesity and excess weight remained higher. The Scrutiny Inquiry into tackling childhood obesity which took place in 2020 produced a range of recommendations which were adopted. However, some elements including recommendations to improve the local food environment have been more challenging to progress, with the current capacity focussed on food insecurity due to increased pressures on the costs of living.</p>
7.	<p>A recent review led by the Policy & Strategy team to determine how a sustainable food environment featured in the Council's key strategies, showed that the Council is doing little work which directly promotes this agenda. Therefore, there is an opportunity to fill these gaps and support the development of policies which promote a sustainable food environment in Southampton.</p>
Mapping	
8.	<p>The Council's Data, Intelligence and Insights team mapped the local food environment using existing data in 2022. The analysis looked at accessibility to fast-food, accessibility to supermarkets and the e-food desert index. The</p>

mapping showed that fast-food (i.e. energy dense and available quickly) is easily accessible across the city by foot or car (figure 1). Although it should be noted that this analysis does not include fast food outlets located outside of Southampton, which could increase accessibility for those areas on the edge of the city. In addition, with the proliferation of delivery services, accessibility does not solely depend on the proximity of an outlet.

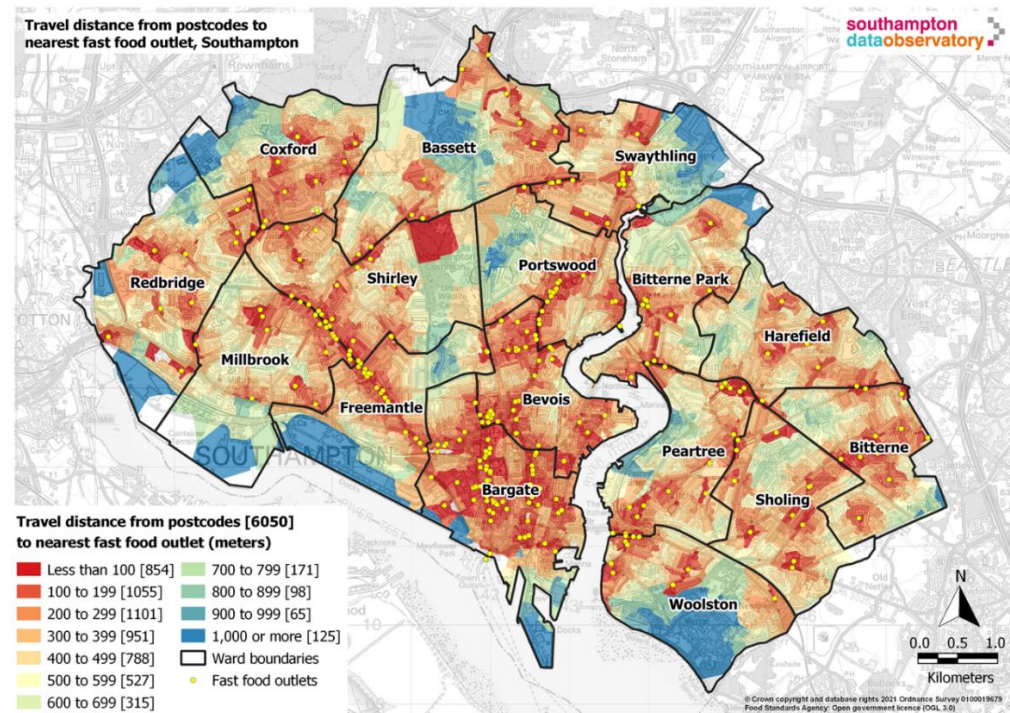


Figure 1. Travel distance to fast-food outlets

9. A further analysis of fast-food outlets near to schools, showed that schools around the city centre and deprived wards are generally in closer proximity to fast-food outlets. Across the whole city 72.4% of schools are within 400m of a fast-food outlet. Although most fast-food outlets near to secondary schools are closed around 3-4pm, there are some notable exceptions including around St. Anne's (Bevois/Bargate area) and around the two Oasis Academies in Sholing.

10. Local supermarkets were also mapped, and the analysis showed that supermarkets are fairly accessible by car across the city, however walking to supermarkets is less feasible to residents in certain areas. For instance, there are longer travel distances to the largest supermarkets (2800m²) in the east of the city, especially Woolston, even taking into account supermarkets located outside of the city boundary. This may be problematic, as larger supermarkets are likely to have a greater selection of affordable, healthy food.

11. Food deserts are areas where residents might experience physical and economic barriers in accessing healthy and affordable food. The E-food deserts index measures the extent to which neighbourhoods exhibit characteristics associated with food deserts, taking into account online shopping behaviours. A local analysis showed that some of the city's more deprived neighbourhoods, including Weston and Redbridge, are e-food deserts.

Cost of living and food insecurity

12. A Food Insecurity task and finish group was set up in December 2022, to sit under the Cost-of-Living Operational group and align with the work of Southampton's Food Aid forum. The Food Insecurity task & finish group has

representatives from the Food Aid forum, Southampton Citizens Advice Bureau, Southampton Voluntary Services and the University of Southampton, as well as representation from across the Council. The focus of the group is on prevention, to support the cohort of people who are at risk of food insecurity from moving into crisis and requiring emergency food aid. In addition to providing an opportunity for agencies to share information and data, the work has focussed on:

- Increasing visibility of information/advice including where people can get help with food (food membership clubs, food banks and free hot meals) and raising awareness through schools and GP practices.
- Updating the 'Help with Food' Council webpages, based on data analytics and feedback, to increase accessibility.
- Increased promotion of the Healthy Start scheme, including securing £9k funding from Health Education England to train the wider early years workforce to help families to access the NHS benefit.
- Raising awareness of Healthy Start among members of the Food Aid Forum, so that families can redeem Healthy Start Vouchers in local food pantries to help their budgets stretch.
- Supporting promotion and participation in the Cost-of-Living survey
- Addition of food insecurity data to the cost-of-living indices, available through the Southampton Data Observatory.

The Cost-of-Living survey included questions on food insecurity, and results are currently being analysed.

Healthy Start and Free school meals

13. Healthy Start uptake fell slightly between January 2019 and February 2020 and again during the pandemic period to January 2021. Uptake had started to increase again by August 2021. The latest data for Southampton in February 2023 indicates that 2796 people were eligible and 1827 (65.0%) took up the support. This is higher than the national comparator 62.7% (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). Table 1 provides a breakdown by Southampton postcodes for the number of people eligible for the benefit and the number who have applied and are entitled to take-up the scheme.

Table 1. Healthy Start uptake figures in Southampton

Month	Postal District	Beneficiaries Entitled (signed-up) (by Postal District)	Beneficiaries Eligible (by Postal District)	Uptake %
Feb-23	SO14	216	375	57.6
Feb-23	SO15	219	340	64.4
Feb-23	SO16	559	842	66.4
Feb-23	SO17	81	128	63.3
Feb-23	SO18	242	339	71.4
Feb-23	SO19	566	815	69.5

14. Free school meal (FSM) data from January 2023 indicates 34.5% of pupils in Southampton are taking up free school meals. The Council HAF (Holiday Activity Fund) team are leading on work to understand the proportion of pupils that are eligible for FSM and are not taking up the offer. This work will inform plans for increasing FSM uptake in the city.

Local programmes

15.	<p>There are a range of activities supported by the Council which all contribute to creating a healthy food environment, these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and Nutrition Education network led by Abri Housing and City Catering. This network is working to improve the consistency and quality of cook and eat programmes across the city, through the provision of training on food hygiene and the sharing of resources and good practice. • Healthy Cook and Eat programmes delivered through local Family Hubs • Food Aid Forum led by Southampton City Mission • The Council has secured funding to roll out training for the wider workforce to help families to access the Healthy Start scheme. • Project to review the guidance on the advertising of food and drink that is high in fat, sugar and salt on council owned advertising spaces. • Planning policy work to improve the local food environment is being undertaken by the Council's Spatial Planning for Health officer, working within the Planning Policy team. <p>These activities are important, however, the absence of a local strategic direction may be limiting the reach of these initiatives, both in terms of individuals and communities, as well as influencing organisations and the local system.</p>
Next steps	
16.	<p>To build momentum across the Council towards developing a sustainable food environment, a local action plan with high-level recommendations is required. The recommendations, co-produced with stakeholders across the city, would set out the current ambitions and provides the strategic direction needed to support a system change. Local recommendations which can be widely shared, will also drive actions and initiatives led by external partners, and will contribute to supporting the overall aim of creating a sustainable local food environment. Project officer capacity is required to lead this work, increase engagement from stakeholders and external partners, and deliver the local action plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategic recommendations to be developed and shared widely ○ Project officer capacity, to lead the programme of work.
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Capital/Revenue</u>	
17.	<p>We do not currently have funding identified to commence these plans. Business cases will be developed to deliver the recommendations. Any additional funding will be looked to be sourced from the Public Health grant, subject to prioritisation of the Public Health strategy and programme.</p>
<u>Property/Other</u>	
18.	N/A
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u>	
19.	<p>The Health and Social Care Act 2012 requires Local authorities to improve the health of their local population</p>
<u>Other Legal Implications:</u>	

20.	N/A
RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS	
21.	The risks associated with food policy not being delivered effectively are: increased levels of obesity, diet related ill- health and inequality; reduced opportunities to identify best practice approaches for affordability and accessibility to healthy food and reduced opportunities for collaboration to support a sustainable food environment in the city. These risks will be monitored by oversight from the Director of Public Health and escalated to EMT as part of delivering the Scrutiny Inquiry recommendations to tackle childhood obesity.
POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS	
22.	The proposals are in line with policies outlined in Southampton's Corporate Plan 2022-2030

KEY DECISION?	No
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	All
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>	
Appendices	
1.	None

Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None
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Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) to be carried out?	No
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Data Protection Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out?	No
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Other Background Documents

Other Background documents available for inspection at:

Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
1.	None

ⁱ The National Food Strategy- an independent review for Government. Available from [The National Food Strategy - The Plan](#). [Accessed 16 March 2022].

ⁱⁱ Diet-related health inequalities [POST-PN-0686.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990-2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017
Afshin, Ashkan et al.
The Lancet, Volume 393, Issue 10184, 1958 - 1972