

Developing a Food Strategy for Hull

What is it?

A Food Strategy for Hull to address food related issues at system level, and provide a framework for individuals, organisations and businesses to drive change in our food system with benefits for health, the local economy and the environment. The strategy has six key themes:

- **Strategic and collaborative approach to good food governance and action:** Helping local organisations and people to work together to support sustainable and affordable food in Hull.
- **Building public awareness, active food citizenship and local good food movement:** Local people working together, learning, growing, and cooking and eating in an informed way, using their power to change things for the better.
- **Tackling food poverty and diet related ill-health and increasing access to affordable healthy food:** Affordable and nourishing food – ensuring that everyone can easily get and can afford nutritious, tasty food.
- **Creating a vibrant, prosperous and diverse sustainable food economy:** Organisations and people buy from local food businesses first, where possible.
- **Transforming catering and procurement and revitalising local and sustainable food supply chains:** A thriving and robust local food sector from field to plate, with fairly-paid staff.
- **Tackling the climate and nature emergency through sustainable food and farming and an end to food waste:** All local organisations and people help to tackle climate change and benefit nature by making ethical, informed food choices.

How did it happen?

The strategy is for the city as a whole, not for any single organisation or sector, however, it was recognised that anchor institutions such as local authorities and the NHS have a key role to play in influencing and shaping the local food system. Hull Food Partnership, an initiative partly funded by the council and hosted by Hull CVS, was asked to lead on developing the strategy, with support from Hull City Council from within Public Health and Economic Development and Regeneration. In addition to the strategy being agreed via the governance and decision-making structures of the council, the strategy was then formally endorsed by Hull Health and Wellbeing Board and Hull Health and Care Partnership, demonstrating multi-sector and senior leadership level backing.

The need for a Food Strategy for the city was highlighted by the Health and Wellbeing Board in 2021, and Hull Food Partnership started a programme of stakeholder engagement designed to inform the strategic priorities. Consultation and engagement

took place over almost three years to develop the strategy, which was then endorsed by key stakeholders in 2024.

Who was involved?

As food issues are so wide ranging, extensive consultation and engagement was essential to ensure the strategy was relevant for residents, businesses, public sector bodies and voluntary and community sector organisations, and most importantly, that it reflected the needs and aspirations of Hull.

Building on stakeholder relationships built up throughout the consultation period, the strategy will be regularly revisited with a wide range of stakeholders for review and feedback, via mechanisms such as the multi-sector Task and Finish Groups, relevant partnership boards and committees, and VCSE events such as the regular VCSE Assembly meetings.

How did you involve the community?

Key stakeholder groups were identified, and engagement was designed around their needs from the start. Events, focus groups, surveys, workshops and conversations took place to ask all sectors what was important to them, what changes they wanted to see in our food system, and how they could play their part.

As a city with several disadvantaged areas, food insecurity was a growing concern, and getting to the heart of this issue required true collaboration with community-based emergency food providers, and sensitive, mindful engagement with some of the people accessing their services. In the early days of COVID 19 restrictions in 2020, empty shelves in shops, and the sudden need for emergency food provision, particularly for our most vulnerable residents highlighted just how fragile our food system is. What emerged from this however was a collaborative response from the local VCSE sector and public sector working together to set up a new system for emergency food provision in a matter of days. This relationship led to the formation of the Hull Food Inequality Alliance, a network of community food aid providers, which has been invaluable in developing the strategic priorities for tackling food poverty.

Different population groups were engaged, within their own settings, at times to suit them. These included carers, support groups, young people, community growers, different representatives of Hull's diverse communities, local businesses and the public sector.

By design, this approach to engagement was not quick, but instead was thoughtful and steady, resulting in rich and meaningful findings that reflect the needs and aspirations

of the City on the food agenda. The sheer number of people and organisations we needed to engage with, and the diversity of issues addressed in the strategy required an inclusive and open approach throughout a two-year period of asking, listening, discussing and feedback, culminating in the final food strategy in 2024.

What were the challenges and how were they overcome?

Community engagement to develop and shape the food strategy started in 2021, as people, organisations and businesses were still emerging from the effects of COVID 19, and online engagement was still being utilised more than in person events, focus groups etc. However, as the consultation progressed and in person meetings became more commonplace again, more focus groups and discussions with interest groups were possible, which produced richer insights than can generally be achieved online.

The process of engaging local business was challenging, as many had been affected by COVID 19 restrictions, and understandably had other priorities as they rebuilt their businesses. This was addressed by commissioning a local researcher to focus on business engagement, who conducted short interviews to gain business sector insight into the food system and perceptions of role of local businesses within it.

What have you learnt?

As the six key themes of the Food Strategy demonstrate, food touches on many aspects of life, and the local, national and global food system is extremely complex, yet it has only been in recent years that cities have started to look at food strategically. What was apparent during the consultation and engagement process when developing the strategy was that many of us, either as individuals, families or organisations, do not routinely consider the impact of choices we make about the food we buy, eat, waste or grow, and that choice is limited for some people for reasons of availability, affordability or living situation.

The Food Strategy provides a framework to help people and organisations think differently about food, and to consider tangible actions to improve health, the environment and the local economy. Feedback during the consultation and engagement process was that food and food choices are often taken for granted, as a day to day issue requiring little thought, and that the process of stepping back and thinking about how we can all eat healthier food, waste less food, use food to promote community cohesion, buy local or grow our own was transformative.

What next?

The strategy has a life course of five years from 2024-2029, and will be subject to regular review throughout the action planning and implementation process.

Several multi sector Task and Finish Groups are currently being formed, based around the six key themes of the strategy, to develop an action plan for implementation, with initial meetings due to commence April 2025. The task and finish groups will be the enablers to delivery against the strategy. The operating model that underpins the strategy consists of the task and finish groups feeding into a wider Hull Food Partnership steering group.

The strategy has strong links to Hull City Council's community plan which has committed to taking communities with us in our decision making. This means regular feedback and opportunities to understand how public voice shapes our local plans.