

Cabinet

14 January 2025

Medway Food Strategy

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Teresa Murray, Deputy Leader of the Council

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Summary

The vision of the Medway Food Partnership (MFP) is to create an environment that supports sustainable access to affordable healthy food. This is to improve knowledge about nutrition along with cooking and growing skills for all, building healthier communities and better futures for everyone in Medway.

The Medway Food Strategy supports the food partnership by providing a structured framework that align with the goals and objectives.

The report was previously considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board on 21 November 2024 and by the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 December 2024, the minutes of which are set out in sections 8 and 9 of the report.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Cabinet is requested to note the comments of the Health and Wellbeing Board and of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out at sections 8 and 9 of the report.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is requested to approve the Medway Food Strategy, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

2. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 2.1. Approval of the Food Strategy will help to create an environment that supports sustainable access to affordable healthy food.

3. Budget and policy framework

3.1. The UK government outlines the need for a comprehensive food strategy to address food system challenges, such as:

- Poor diets and public health issues (e.g., obesity, malnutrition)
- Environmental sustainability in agriculture
- Food insecurity and inequality
- Food supply chain resilience in the face of climate change

3.2. The Medway Public Health team have worked with a range of partners to co-produce a local food strategy. Ensuring access to nutritious and affordable food is essential for improving community health, reducing diet-related diseases, and addressing health inequalities, which aligns with the overall public health objectives.

4. Background

4.1. In the UK, 7.2 million adults (13.6% of households) experienced food insecurity and of those 2.5 million adults (4.8% of households) reported not eating for an entire day because they could not afford or get access to food. This equates to 18% of children experiencing food insecurity compared with 11.7% of households with children. [Food Foundation 2024](#)

4.2. Single adult households with children were (nearly) twice as likely to be food insecure than multi adult households with children and non-white ethnic groups are at a higher risk than other white ethnic groups. [Food Foundation 2024](#)

4.3. The approach taken to developing Medway's Food partnership was to:

- establish an appropriate and representative partnership structure
- to engage with the community and partners
- create a vision
- design a structure
- lead the development and delivery of the food strategy

4.4. The steps taken to develop the strategy included:

Assessment: Analysing current food systems, surveys, engagement events, log frame approaches, research and identifying gaps.

Collaboration: Engagement and inclusion of stakeholders across the whole food system and forming partnerships.

Planning: setting goals, objectives, priorities, and actions.

4.5. This strategy supports the development of other policies, such as:

- The Sustainable Food (Procurement) Policy

- Outdoor Events Policy
- Advertising and Promotion of High Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS),
- Climate change action plan
- Waste policy
- Sustainable food places award

5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1. The food strategy supports sustainability by promoting local food production, reducing food waste, encouraging sustainable farming practices, and ensuring equitable access to healthy, environmentally friendly food options, all of which contribute to long-term environmental and community well-being.
- 5.2. To support diversity, this strategy will support the inclusion of culturally diverse foods, promotes equitable access to a wide range of nutritious options, and encourages the participation of diverse voices in the planning and decision-making processes, ensuring that the food system meets the needs and preferences of all communities.
- 5.3. The implementation of the strategy bolsters Medway's recognition as a Bronze Sustainable Food award recipient, making it one of only ten local authorities in the UK to achieve this award in 2024.
- 5.4. A tailored strategy helps the local partnership to respond to specific challenges, such as rising food insecurity, diet-related health issues, environmental impacts, and economic disparities.

6. Risk management

By not having a food strategy, this poses several risks to the community:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Increased health related issues	Increased rates of diet related disease, such as obesity, diabetes due to poor dietary choices, lack of nutrition and education	Implementation of a Food Strategy	All
Lack of engagement from partners	System partners fail to engage and support the Food Strategy, with the outcomes dependent on more than just one council department	Wide promotion of the Medway Food Partnership and the subgroups	BII
Food prices	The cost-of-living crisis and other economic factors mean that food becomes even more unaffordable for residents	Local food growers, food retailers and food charities work collaboratively to create a more sustainable local	BII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		food system that minimises waste	

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

7. Consultation

7.1. To ensure that a comprehensive approach was taken, consultation was held with the following:

- community members via the health and wellbeing survey
- surveys and a community engagement event held in collaboration with the University of Greenwich
- local businesses via a survey
- consultation with Medway Foundation Trust
- a healthy weight residents feedback survey

7.2. Further work will be carried out with growers and educational institutions to ensure that a comprehensive approach to the food strategy has been carried out.

8. Health and Wellbeing Board

8.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board considered the report on 21 November 2024 and the minutes of the discussion were as follows:

8.2. The Board received a report on the Medway Food Strategy which aspired to create an environment that supports sustainable access to healthy food

8.3. Members then raised the following comments and questions:

8.4. The community garden was an innovative idea that provided residents with the opportunities to grow and share food.

8.5. There was concern that data showed that there was a decline in healthy weight of 4/5 year olds.

8.6. Alongside the development of the Local Plan, it would be beneficial for consideration to be given to making more community spaces available to enable people to have access to fresh produce.

- 8.7. It was asked whether there were any developments on a proposal for a social supermarket model and the Board was informed that there was a small community supermarket called Second Chance Medway.
- 8.8. The Voluntary Sector worked with very disadvantaged people in the community and highlighted that stigma was attached to some communities in attending food banks and more work needed to be undertaken in supporting these communities and breaking the stigma.
- 8.9. Healthy weight training continued to be delivered by the Voluntary Sector, with sessions running for a twelve week period. Feedback from participants was that they would like to have the opportunity during sessions to practice what they had learned at the centre where the training took place.
- 8.10. It was highlighted that many people that attended food banks or were provided with food vouchers were very educated on food and their issues were with the cost and lack affordability of nutritional food which affected the food choices they made.
- 8.11. The message of healthy eating being targeted at young children from Early Years stage was welcomed and it was encouraging that we were concentrating on educating young children, however it was just as important to educate the older generation, in particular grandparents who may be stuck in their ways or view poor food choices as just a harmless treat.
- 8.12. It was vital to note that residents in some parts of Medway were not able to access supermarkets or local markets due to lack of good transportation infrastructure which made them reliant on buying food from their local convenience stores.
- 8.13. Consideration to be given to whether schools and teachers were adequately equipped with the knowledge and confidence to engage in difficult conversations with parents.
- 8.14. Schools and establishments such as hospitals to actively explore whether the food provided was healthy and of good nutritional value.
- 8.15. **Decision:**
 - a) The Board noted the report.
 - b) Partners and Board Members to encourage schools, food businesses and any stakeholders involved in food to sign up to the Medway Food Partnership.
 - c) Consideration to be given to building in provision for community spaces to enable residents to have more access to fresh produce by being able to grow it themselves.

9. Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 9.1. The Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the report on 5 December 2024 and the minutes of the discussion are as follows:
- 9.2. The Public Health Consultant and Strategic Head of Service introduced the report which presented the draft Medway Food Strategy. The strategy's purpose was to support the Medway Food Partnership (MFP) by providing a structured framework that aligned with the MFP's goals and objectives to create an environment that supported sustainable access to affordable healthy food by improving knowledge about nutrition, along with cooking and growing skills for all, building healthier communities and better futures for everyone in Medway.
- 9.3. Members then raised a number of questions and comments, which included:
- 9.4. Engagement – in response to a question about consultation, officers explained that a great deal of purposeful engagement had been undertaken including targeted surveys and focus groups undertaken with the support of the University of Greenwich.
- 9.5. Fast food outlets near schools – reference was made to the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) which restricted the hours of operation of hot food outlets within 400m from schools, and it was asked whether this was something that could be explored in relation to applying the same restrictions to street trading within the Council's Licensing Policy (any changes made to Licensing Policy would be a matter for Cabinet). This suggestion was welcomed and officers undertook to explore the possibility with colleagues, adding that the SPG was being reviewed in the context of the emerging Local Plan to explore if there were opportunities to strengthen this further.
- 9.6. Cookery courses – in response to a question about take up and feedback of the cookery courses, officers explained there was a whole suite of activity around cooking that happened in addition to those run by Public Health, particularly in schools but take up of the Public Health Team's cookery sessions had included involvement of 405 families within the last year.
- 9.7. Community Garden Projects – in response to a question about how organisations could become involved in the project, officers explained that they welcomed participation from many organisations and Ward Councillor intel was a great resource in making those connections. More information would be provided to the Member on how to get involved.
- 9.8. Ethnic minority groups – in response to a question as to why non-white British groups were at a higher risk of food insecurity than other white ethnic groups and what mitigations were being put in place, officers explained that there were a number of health inequalities that were linked with those with a protected characteristic and ethnicity was a key determinant. Equally there was an overlap as those from ethnic minority groups were more likely to be

within a lower income bracket and therefore food poverty was more likely. The MFP was therefore heavily engaged with a number of community groups to combat the unfair health outcomes for such demographics. Reference was also made to a recent Jollof Rice competition event, hosted by the Mayor, which had been an opportunity for community engagement and collaboration, in sharing cuisine to support health outcomes and community cohesion.

- 9.9. Locally grown food – concern was raised about possible loss in farm land due to the impact of housing targets and other factors affecting the farming community. In response officers reported that a similar discussion had recently taken place at the Medway Health and Wellbeing Board, with planning colleagues present therefore discussion had been within the context of the emerging Local Plan. There was a real keenness to continue to grow food locally for food production sustainability and the Local Plan was a key asset in how Medway used its space in smart, sustainable ways.
- 9.10. Involvement of food businesses – it was confirmed that growing the participation from food businesses was a priority for the MFP as it was believed that health and wealth could co-exist for such companies and small changes to menus could make big changes for the community's health outcomes.
- 9.11. Work with the universities – providing addition information in relation to the work being done by the universities in relation to the MFP, officers referred to the nearby Pilkington Building within the local university campus, which was managing to provide healthy food, using locally sourced produce and was achieving almost zero food waste. The universities were actively supporting the partnership and it was hoped more schools would engage too.
- 9.12. Food banks – in response to a question about what was being done to tackle dependency on food banks, officers explained there were good learning examples in other areas where they were creating a shift from dependency to alternative models with better choice for people and opportunities for people to access other support while accessing food banks, and this was a focus for Medway.
- 9.13. **Decision:**

The Committee recommended the strategy to Cabinet for approval.

10. Climate change implications

- 10.1. [The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019](#) - item 1038D refers and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.
- 10.2. The Strategy supports the climate change emergency by addressing the environmental impacts of food production, distribution and consumption.
- 10.3. By reducing food waste, food miles and promoting sustainable agricultural practices, the strategy aims to reduce the carbon emissions.

- 10.4. Enhance the resilience of local food systems to climate-related disruptions, ensuring food security while increasing awareness about the role of food choices supports the mitigating impact it has on climate change.
- 10.5. An integrated approach helps to create a more sustainable and climate-friendly food environment for the community.

11. Financial implications

- 11.1. There are no direct financial implications as result of the recommendations in this report. The activity within the food strategy that is delivered by Medway Council is funded through existing revenue budgets and are not currently projected to represent a budget pressure in 2024/25 or 2025/26.

12. Legal implications

- 12.1. There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Draft Medway Food Strategy

Appendix 2 – Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

None