



**The Food  
Foundation**

BRIEFING PAPER

# **Making the business case for a city council food policy team or lead**

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## WHAT IS THIS BRIEFING ABOUT?

Food matters for almost every part of our lives. It dictates our health, centres our communities, shapes our environment and is a huge part of our economy. Yet, strong leadership on food within city councils across the UK is relatively rare. This is despite the fact that there are many ways in which council strategy and policy shapes how the food system operates both within the immediate area and surrounding region.

Very few local authorities in the UK have a dedicated food team or officer working across a broad spectrum of food related issues. Food might be addressed by policy teams located in a number of directorates within a council, but a cohesive approach, recognising the interconnectivity of food related issues and appointing a team to work strategically across departments, is difficult to find.

A small number of local authorities in the UK do have a food team or lead in place. Through a series of interviews with a selection of these examples, with additional desk-based research, this report aims to answer:

- Why have a food lead? What are the benefits?
- How did food teams come about and what are the factors which add to their effectiveness and sustainability?
- How does a food team interact and collaborate with the wide range of actors in a city food system?
- What are the impacts and outcomes generated? Is there evidence of a return on investment (ROI)?

Calculating the ROI to the local authority would require a full economic analysis conducted after a team had been in place for some time. We can find no example of this having been undertaken. In the absence of a long-term, system wide analysis, we can draw on examples of individual interventions implemented and accelerated by food teams, leading to outcomes that provide a return on investment to the council and the city. These include improving health outcomes, strengthening the local economy and building resilience to future shocks. We aim to demonstrate the potential value a food team can have by delivering these outcomes.

## Our approach

We identified local authorities that are leading examples of place-based approaches to food system transformation and, in most cases, have or previously had a food team or officer working with a broad remit on food. It is important to note that, due to the organic, non-linear way food work evolves within local authorities, it is not easy to define the structure or function of a food team or the remit or role of a food officer. We looked to identify officers or teams that were working on a broad range of food system issues, including health, environment, equality and economy.

Selection:

We aimed to speak with 10 local authorities, with a geographical spread.

- We selected places primarily through the Sustainable Food Places (SFP) network. A request was made through the network's listserv for cities to identify themselves if they had a lead or team in place working strategically across food in the local authority.
- We asked contacts at the Soil Association, who are one of three organisation that coordinate SFP, to share their knowledge of places with food teams.
- We also had existing knowledge within our team at The Food Foundation of local authorities that are investing in food system work.
- We also selected places that we identified as leaders in food work. Bristol is one of only two cities that has won a Gold award and, although they do not have a dedicated food team, we felt it was important to include them based on this achievement. Sandwell no longer has a food officer with a broad remit on food, but has in the past and has been a national leader in food strategy work.

This resulted in a list of 20 local authorities. Through preliminary conversations via email and phone we established whether their structure met our criteria for inclusion and removed three from our list. We were not able to speak with seven potential places we had identified as we were not able to secure interviews.

Through a semi-structured interview (see Appendix 2 for questions asked), we interviewed people from a total of 10 local authorities. We looked to understand why food policy and strategy was recognised as an important investment in these localities, who drove the work and what conditions enabled the work to flourish. We looked for examples of evidence of a ROI generated by the work of these teams to explore the business case for councils investing in such teams.

### Who we spoke to

We spoke to eight city authorities and two London borough councils with a good geographical spread across the UK (though we did not secure an interview with a city in Scotland or Northern Ireland). Those we spoke to all operated within different structures, sat within different departments and were at different stages of their food work. Though the nuances and complexities of council structure make it difficult to categorise their organisation, they can be roughly categorised as follows:

- Single lead working on broad spectrum of food issues: 3
- Team of two or more working broad spectrum of food issues: 4
- Dispersed officers working on food in different directorates: 1

Previously had a food team, work now dispersed: 2  
All interviewees were asked to review the findings with their seniors and obtain director sign-off.

**Table 1: Details of interviewees**

Place	Name	Role	Directorate	Time in post *	Structure
Birmingham City Council	Sarah Pullen	Food System Team lead	Public Health	August 2021 – present	Team of two or more working broad spectrum of food issues
Brighton and Hove City Council	Angela Blair	Food Policy Coordinator	Environment, Economy and Culture	April 2021 – present	Single lead working on broad spectrum on food issues
Bristol City Council	Kathy Derrick	Sustainable City Team Manager	Sustainability		Dispersed officers working on food in different directorates

Cardiff City Council	Sam Chettleburgh and Elizabeth Lambert	Principal Sustainability Officer (Food) and Sustainable Development Group Leader	Planning, Transport and Environment	February 2022 – present and 2007 – present	Team of two or more working broad spectrum of food issues
Greenwich Borough Council	Claire Bennett and Catherine Hannafin	Senior Public Health Manager (Food and Health) and Senior Public Health Manager (Healthy Weight)	Public Health	2013 – present and 2012 - present	Team of two or more working broad spectrum of food issues
Hull City Council	Jo Arro	Commissioning and Service Development Manager	Public Health		Single lead working on broad spectrum on food
Leicester City Council	Susan Holden	Project Manager (Food Plan)	Public Health and Health Improvement		Single lead working on broad spectrum on food
Newham Borough Council	Andy Gold	Head of Food Strategy	Public Health	July 2019 - Present	Team of two or more working broad spectrum of food
Sandwell City Council	Tom Richards	Public Health Specialist (Food and Nutrition)	Public Health	May 2021 - present	Previously had a food team, work now dispersed

## Why have a food lead?

Through our interview process, we gathered information on what value a food team added and identified the main elements that made them effective.

### An expert brings knowledge and vision to the work

In a number of the examples we looked at, the lead food officer was recruited from outside of the local authority and brought food system expertise from their earlier career to the role. This expertise is hugely valuable in effective delivery of food strategies. Experts are able to see strengths, gaps, opportunities and inefficiencies across the board. They are able to apply this knowledge to their work with officers in different directorates, whilst maintaining strategic oversight and vision.

#### CASE STUDY:

In Newham, food work began in a focused way in 2015. Officers within the council had been flagging issues such as obesity problems and the prevalence of unhealthy food outlets in public areas. Andy Gold, who has a background in hospitality, business and food system consultation, was initially engaged for small commissions, which grew into long list of issues to tackle as a council. The newly appointed Director of Public Health noted the promise in Andy's plan and he was brought in to lead the strategy development in a newly created role.

In other cases, the lead officer had developed into their role, broadening the remit of their work from within a specific directorate or team, often within Public Health or Sustainability. In these cases, the individual may have had an existing passion for, or interest in, food and recognised opportunities that were being missed, and drove the development of this work, seeking out new projects and funding in different areas.

### Dedicated resource and focus builds capacity and catalyses work

Having strategic oversight on the interconnected elements of food system transformation, and creating and delivering an effective plan for that, requires a considerable amount of focused resource. We were unable to find an example of a local authority creating a food strategy without either a food team or officer leading this work or having commissioned an external consultant to lead. We found that, when sufficiently resourced, food teams deliver more comprehensive strategies, informed by thorough stakeholder consultation, and more impactful and robust policies and interventions.

#### CASE STUDY:

Development of a city food strategy began in 2018 in Birmingham. The Birmingham Food Conversations, a public consultation initiative, was launched to inform the strategy. Other audits and consultations were undertaken.

The strategy work was paused while Public Health responded to the outbreak of COVID-19. Once the worst of the pandemic had passed, the team under Public Health who were previously driving the food strategy development were focused on COVID recovery. The Director of Public Health, Dr Justin Varney, recognised that something as complex as a city food strategy, which required the input of so many stakeholders, needed dedicated capacity.

A Food System Team of four were put in place in August 2021. Their primary focus was the development of the strategy. In early 2022, the strategy went through cabinet approval and in May was published for a four-month period of public consultation.

The passion and dedication that many of those we spoke to bring to the role plays out in their ability to catalyse action in the council. With this inbuilt capacity to focus on food, hand in hand with expertise and knowledge, food officers are able to demonstrate the impact and value of their work. This in turn leads to greater visibility of food-related policy as a vehicle for change across a range of council priorities, increasing its recognition as a priority area, and even in turn influencing national policy.

#### CASE STUDY:

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is a national programme for children eligible for free school meals. Food provision is an essential component however it didn't look at food safety. The Greenwich team who work in a cross-directorate way with Environmental Health, were able to influence local policy changes but also the HAF guidance produced by the Department for Education.

#### Strategic oversight identifies new opportunities and helps drive policy cohesion across the council

Delivering a strategy across numerous departments is extremely challenging. Many of the people we spoke to described how important good relationships with other departments are. Working with other directorates allows a food officer to offer support and knowledge on how to best integrate food and tackle food-related challenges within their strategies, acting as a "convenor, enabler and catalyst." One interviewee spoke about their role in seeing opportunities as they relate to food. Often two or more directorates have challenges that can be solved through a joined up approach, and to a person with a food background this can present an opportunity.

#### CASE STUDY:

At Newham Borough Council, Adult and Social Care were looking to generate placements and routes into work, whilst a school caterers were looking at options for setting up a production kitchen. Andy Gold was able to see the opportunity and is creating connections and providing support to the mutual benefit of both.

#### CASE STUDY:

During the pandemic, a cross-directorate working group was set up between Food and Health, Healthy Weight, Corporate Comms, Children's Services and Welfare Rights in Greenwich. This group was responsible for the Covid Winter Grant. Thanks to the expertise and influence of the food team, food was prioritised and the grant was spent in an innovative way. 11,000 breakfast bags were delivered to primary aged children and under 5's, and 8,000 Take and Make food boxes were distributed. They also ran a £10,000 small grants programme for community food charities to deliver programmes. They were able to integrate the principles of Good Food in Greenwich, helping to maintain the quality of food being distributed, and policies, such as their Advertising Policy, into these grant programmes, thus increasing the impact, cohesion and visibility of food work across the council.

A couple of interviewees described how their role included pitching ideas and convincing other departments of their value, as well as providing them with the practical information they need to effectively execute these ideas.

#### CASE STUDY:

The Cardiff food team developed the Healthy and Sustainable Food Standards, with input from Public Health and other organisations, for Cardiff Council catering and external events. They will be trialling the standards internally, but first, again with the input from Public Health and NHS dieticians, they will run a workshop for catering staff in which they will discuss the drivers for the standards, provide further information about the standards and create a space for them to ask questions.

Developing trusting and collaborative relationships with existing officers and new appointments in other departments is clearly a hugely important part of the role.

#### How did food teams come about and what are the factors which add to their effectiveness and sustainability?

##### How did these teams come into being?

The evolution of food work within a city follows no set path. Each local authority we spoke to had their own story, with commonalities across the board. Each came from a combination of the following:

- A local leader who recognised the importance of focusing on food and drove the agenda, expanding the remit of current roles focused on food and/or the growth of the team

- An officer or small team within the council working on food, with expertise, passion and comprehension of the potential breadth of the work, made a compelling case to senior leadership and other departments to focus more on food
- External experts working on food systems, often commissioned by council, have produced work that has highlighted the importance and opportunities on focusing on food issues
- A local food partnership of civil society organisations has driven work within the city in the first instance, increasing the recognition of food as a city priority and engaging with the council
- The city had a strong culture of food and sustainability that helped catalyse Council action
- Food was already a city priority from a health and equality perspective due to high level of deprivation, food insecurity and/or obesity
- COVID-19 highlighted the importance of resilient food systems and established new structures which continue work on food issues

#### Cardiff:

In Cardiff, work on food historically was owned by the food and health steering group. This focused mainly on obesity and food safety, was managed by the Council with input from Public Health (which sits within the NHS in Wales). There had been discussion around broadening this group to include all aspects of sustainable food and when funding from sustainable food cities became available, officers from Public Health Wales and Cardiff Council agreed to submit a joint application. The application was successful and enabled the food agenda in the city to grow in breadth and depth, and Food Cardiff, the local food partnership, to be created, as this citywide partnership working progressed, it became clear that there was significant Council-specific action that could be coordinated across the Council's operations. Following senior officer support this resulted in the Council developing its own Council Food Strategy and appointing a full-time Food Officer to deliver this. The Council still actively participates in the Food Cardiff partnership and the Sustainable Food Places Coordinator and Council Food Officer work closely together when work intersects.

#### Greater London:

In the Greater London Authority the Food Team ran the formal mayoral programme on food. At various points the team has been located within the Environment Team, Economic Development and in Social integration, social mobility, and community engagement. The team was supported by the advisory group: The London Food Board which was first established in 2004. The central team and the London Boroughs are connected by the

Boroughs Food Sub-Group. The food team worked very closely with external partners, including with significant support from Sustain: The Alliance for Better Food & Farming (Parsons et al, 2021).

#### Greenwich:

In the Royal Borough of Greenwich, the food work has naturally grown from more typical council roles. For example, one of the roles has expanded from a public health nutritionist role that had been in place for 20 years. The Portfolio of the team working on food has developed in response to the increasing recognition of value of this work. High health inequalities in Greenwich put action around food insecurity high on the agenda initially, which led to wider food work being recognised. The officers created a positive track record which allowed them to keep the momentum of their work going.

#### The importance of Senior Leadership

Without exception, every local authority that we spoke to highlighted how essential support of senior leadership is in driving the agenda and many identified one particular, visionary person who was instrumental to this. Without senior political backing, the resources are not made available and food policy work does not become a priority. Not only are these leaders crucial in commissioning and funding work, they also help to raise the profile of the food agenda, stimulate action in other departments and set an expectation within council for the agenda to be prioritised. A leader also has the power to be able to take risks to achieve their vision. Those mentioned were:

- Directors and Assistant Directors of Public Health, Economy, Environment and Culture, and City Development and Regeneration
- Mayors and Deputy Mayors
- Council Leaders
- Councilors
- Chief Executives
- Corporate Director of Finance

#### Birmingham:

In Birmingham, the Director of Public Health recognised the importance of investing in food, in particular diet and nutrition to address the obesity crisis. Significant work began to address childhood obesity. He also signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact for Birmingham, committing the city to strategic, systemic change. His successor, who is still currently in post, also holds the food agenda as a priority. Whilst in post he has established the Food System Team in the city and overseen the development and publication of the city's food strategy. Prior to establishment of Food System team in 2021 the capacity on food was being delivered since 2016 by part-time

support from other teams within Public Health and external consultants. Birmingham also sat on the Steering Committee for the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP). Concurrently, Paulette Hamilton, in her previous role as Councillor of Holyhead Ward and Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, was a huge advocate for and driving force behind food strategy for Birmingham. Her successor Councillor Mariam Khan has continued to champion food transformation agenda in the city and internationally, with Birmingham re-applying to be on the MUFPP Steering Committee for the second time.

#### **Sandwell:**

In the mid-90s, a visionary Director of Public Health employed a food policy advisor. This advisor wrote, implemented and monitored food and health policies for various sectors and settings in the population. Their successor continued with this work, building on national food work and putting in major bids for pilot projects which contributed to national research. Sandwell was among the first places to create food policy in the UK, and this was in large part thanks to the vision and understanding of the Director of Public Health.

#### **Complementary governance structures**

Many of the places we spoke to have other boards and panels in place. These bodies existed for various reasons. Some focused on a specific area of food system work, such as food insecurity, and many functioned as expert and strategic advisory panels. In a number of places these bodies came into being in response to COVID-19 and are now working on recovery and renewal.

There are clear benefits to having more than one body with strategic leadership work. For one, it helps create resilience over time to personnel changes. If there is a change leadership at a council and the new lead chooses not to invest in food work, the other body may be able to protect the strategy and continue to promote and deliver food system work in the city. Also, it helps protect the collective knowledge that builds up over time in a place, such as who key organisations are, what has worked effectively in the city, what the city assets and needs are and so on.

#### **Brighton and Hove:**

In Brighton and Hove there is a Food Strategy Expert Panel who act as an advisory body to Brighton and Hove Food Partnership. The panel also act as champions of the Brighton and Hove Food Strategy Action Plan within their own and partner organisations. Angela Blair sits on this group meetings take place twice yearly. The panel includes members and other officers from the council, the partnership, local universities, the local NHS Trust, Fareshare and community/third sector groups, such as Possibility People and The Living Coast UNESCO Biosphere.

There is also the Food Cell, which meets regularly and is made up of representatives from the Council, the partnership and other community organisations. This group was originally set up in response to COVID-19 and they plan to keep this 'food cell approach' going to maintain their focus on long term resilience.

#### **Greater London:**

The London Food Board is an advisory panel that was established in 2004. It brings together a wide group of highly qualified expert advisors. It is made up of 17 leaders from sectors spanning the breadth of the food system who "reflect the diversity and dynamism of London." Sectors represented include nutrition and health, policy, hospitality, community food action, farming and agriculture, sustainability and communications. They meet at least four times a year and report to the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority.

#### **Leicester:**

The Food Board meets quarterly and is made up of a diverse group of food system stakeholders, including community representatives, food banks, other third sector groups, growing projects, the local LEP, the Economic Development department and other representatives from across the City Council. It is chaired by a Public Health consultant.

#### **Birmingham:**

In Birmingham, the Creating a Healthy Food City Forum was established in 2019 by the Public Health Division of the City Council. Set up as a partnership sub-committee, the Forum is monitored and accountable to Health and Wellbeing Board. It meets every 2 months and has a core membership of organisations that are focused on improving the food environment in the city, increasing healthy eating, reducing obesity and tackling food inequality. Since 2019, the Forum has played a key role in building the Council's capacity on food and ensuring that a whole system approach has been applied to understanding the food landscape of the city. Its members were actively involved in steering and consultation processes during development of the Birmingham Food System Strategy.

## **How does a food team interact and collaborate with the wide range of actors in a city food system?**

Local food partnerships are formalised groups of diverse stakeholders and organisations taking a holistic, place based and systemic approach to promoting and enabling healthy and sustainable diets and a strong local food economy. There are 95 local food partnerships registered with the Sustainable Food Places network. In most cases, the Local Authority is involved in the partnership, with at

least one representative from the council participating in meetings and/or sitting on the board. We asked interviewees how the local food partnership and the council interacted and explored the value of the two bodies working in synergy.

All of the places we spoke to have a local food partnership. They varied in the scope of their work, with some being primarily focused on food insecurity. They also varied in how established they were, with some being relatively new and others more than two decades old.

In every case, the partnership was recognised as being essential to the development and delivery of strategic food work across the city. The reasons mentioned were:

- The breadth and depth of work required to shift a city food system is beyond the capacity of a council food team/lead
- Citizens and civil society groups may be resistant to working with the council and may feel 'less threatened by a non-council lead initiative'
- Council processes and procedures can delay or prevent certain actions that a partnership can move faster
- Partnerships will be able to access funding the council cannot
- Partnerships bring a wealth of expertise and experience and can scrutinise the actions of the council

#### **Bristol:**

Bristol City Council does not have a food team. Food work is integrated and embedded with the council, but dispersed, with a number of policy teams in different departments crossing into food. Food work in Bristol has a long legacy of being delivered as a tripartite between the council's Environment and Public Health Teams and Bristol Food Network. This group leads the coordination of the work of the wider partnership, which is made up of representatives from businesses, charitable bodies, community groups and public sector bodies.

#### **Brighton and Hove:**

In Brighton and Hove, the food work has historically been managed and driven by the partnership, who have created a foundation for this work over nearly two decades. The partnership has raised awareness, pride and visibility of food system action in the city. It inspired Brighton City Council to take seriously the responsibility it had to play in food system transformation. The volume and breadth of the work of the partnership gained national and international recognition, but a point is reached where the next level of work requires action at council level and work cannot move forward without this contribution. There is a mature and trusting relationship

between the partnership and the council. The proven track record of the partnership has earned the respect of the council and they are open to being held to account and challenged by the partnership.

Angela described how the two bodies complement one another. The partnership has the local knowledge of what needs to change on the ground and often can action this more effectively, whilst internal processes that need to go through the council can be actioned and accelerated by a food officer. Angela also explained that many people would rather interact and work with the partnership than with the council. She described the partnership as essential.

#### **Hull:**

The Hull Food Partnership works on the wider elements of food across the city. Jo Arro sits on the board, as does her colleague in "Economic Development and Regeneration". Here, they are able to help contribute to the work of the partnership. Jo explained that people respond differently to a non-council led initiative, feeling less threatened by interacting with such bodies and were more likely to get involved. Other benefits Jo mentioned included the ability to access certain streams of funding and the additional capacity that was added to the work.

The council partly funds the coordinator of the partnership and the rest is match funded. Jo described that, whilst action ownership is fairly self-determining, tensions and conflicts could arise where there are political tensions or conflicting agendas. To resolve tensions effectively it is important to have good working relationships, trust, a clear vision for the partnership, an understanding of diverse governance systems in place across the work in the city, with clear Terms of Reference and democratic procedures.

## **What are the impacts and outcomes generated? Is there evidence of a return on investment (ROI)?**

#### **What is the investment?**

The investment that a council has made will depend on the size of the food team and the wage band at which its people are employed.

We can take an example from Birmingham, who have a team of five substantive posts across three different pay grades.

Band 4: Public Health Officer - 2  
£26,999 – £33,799



Band 5: Senior Public Health Officer - 2  
£34,788 - £42,683

Band 6: Public Health Service Lead - 1  
£43,662 - £54,574

If we make the assumption that each employee is being paid an average of their pay band, the total investment amounts to £187,388 per year. This example represents an average investment, as some places, such as Brighton and Hove, have just one person dedicated to food, whereas others, such as Newham who employ a team of around 10, have bigger teams and therefore a higher investment.

While a team would typically have project funding allocated to them, in this paper we have focused on the additional budgetary costs of personnel.

### What is the return?

Calculating the economic return on investment to a council for funding a food team or officer is extremely difficult and we are unable to find any examples where this has been done. In addition, work to change systems is notoriously hard to evaluate. Food systems are incredibly complex and with many different actors operating within and around an urban food environment not only is it difficult to measure effects, but it is also difficult to prove causality from intervention. A robust evaluation would require a rigorous approach from the outset, beginning with an extensive auditing of baseline data, a wide set of criteria being measured and a timeline of decades.

It is also important to recognise the difference between a financial ROI to a council and the financial and social ROI to the city or borough at large and the citizens that live there. Of course, there will be a significant amount of overlap between these two.

Finally, the impact of many interventions implemented by a food team will deliver benefits over long periods of time. For example, the full impact interventions that improve childhood nutrition will not be seen until adulthood.

Whilst a number of our interviewees have gathered some data or have plans to begin implementing a monitoring and evaluation process, we did not find a great amount of quantitative data. What we are able to do, is gather data from discrete projects which have been or could be delivered by a dedicated food team or officer.

The following case studies demonstrate the potential for a visionary food team or officer to deliver significant value.

### The Junk Food Ad Ban

In February 2019, then Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, launched a junk food advertisement ban on all Transport for London services. This radical and internationally

recognised policy was delivered by the Greater London Authority food team as part of their work to refresh London's world-renowned food strategy.

Researchers from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) found that this resulted in a decrease in unhealthy food purchases equating to a reduction of about 385 calories a person a week.

Using data from 'The impact of a tax on added sugar and salt: an Institute for Fiscal Studies working paper in collaboration with the National Food Strategy', which calculated the economic benefits from calorie reductions resulting from a sugar tax for England for a 25-year period, we can extrapolate the economic benefits the policy had for the city of London. See Appendix One for calculations.

Economic Output (£m)	1,089
NHS costs (£m)	742.5
QALY (£m)	9,300.4
Social care costs (£m)	891
Total (£m)	12,023

This one simple policy has potentially resulted in economic benefits of over £12 billion over the next 25 years for Greater London. This policy would not have been put in place if it were not for the food team.

### Food redistribution during the pandemic

During the pandemic, the expertise within the food team in Newham Borough Council led to £7.5m worth of food being rescued and redistributed to residents rather than having to be purchased from council budgets to meet need. This was possible due to the expertise within the team regarding surplus food within the local supply chain and relationships the food team had developed with local charities and support services, as well as redistribution charities such as Fareshare.

### Eat For Free

The Eat For Free scheme from Newham Borough Council entitles all children at Key Stage 2 to free school meals in all primary schools in the borough. Since the scheme began there has been a 90% uptake of school meals at KS2 compared with 45% before the scheme was introduced.

The borough council invests £5.889 million into the scheme (£3m from Public Health Fund and £2.889m from General Fund). This is combined with the £8.5 million from Central Government towards FSM at KS2 and UFISM at KS1. Through the scheme, the money that primary schools spend on food is kept anchored in the local area through wages and local activity.

To receive the EFF grant, the schools must adhere to grant conditions set by the food team through this

scheme. This includes paying all workers the London Living Wage. 86% of people who work in school meals are Newham residents. Without the stipulation of the London Living Wage there would be £2 million less in the local economy from these local wages. There is also £1 million more in wages generated through the increased uptake of school meals. The schools must also participate in a whole school accredited programme on food and health and meet bronze standards for the Food For Life Programme (see below).

Attainment at the school is higher than in neighbouring boroughs and the societal impact of improved nutrition and education will play out for the borough for the decades to come.

### Food For Life

The [Food for Life programme](#) is an initiative from the Soil Association that aims to transform food culture through a whole-school approach to food. They also operate in care homes, hospitals and other educational settings. The programme and award system sets out standards relating to health, sustainability and welfare in procurement, provides resources and guidelines for integrating food education into the curriculum and training and support for providers.

It was shown to have a [SROI \(Social ROI\) of £3 to every £1 invested by the New Economics Foundation](#) (for a definition of SROI, see page 10 of the report). A number of the council teams we spoke to support and drive the work of Food For Life in their cities. There are various levels a local authority can commission the work at: Full Programme delivery from the Soil Association, Expansive, Light Touch or None, where the provider undertakes the delivery. With a 3:1 SROI, promoting and/or commissioning uptake of this programme is another effective way for a food officer to generate a ROI for their time.

### Local food programmes

In 2007, as part of the Big Lottery Fund's 'Changing Spaces' programme, the Local Food funding programme distributed £59.8 million from the Big Lottery fund (BIG) to a variety of food-related projects to help make locally grown food accessible and affordable to communities. In 2013, the University of Gloucestershire's Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) were commissioned to assess the Social Return on Investment (SROI) of the programme with [three case studies](#). They found that every £1 invested in Local Food generates a return of between £6 and £8 to society in the form of social and economic outcomes including health and well-being, training and skills.

The types of projects funded and outcomes achieved through this programme are within the remit of the strategic work of a food team. These returns could be achieved by food teams that invest time, expertise and

budget into local food.

## Conclusion

Local authorities are currently having to respond to a health crisis, an environmental crisis and an economic crisis. Food is increasingly being recognised as a hugely important factor in addressing all three of these crises. The investment made by local authorities in strategic food system work can have significant positive impact for urban areas in both the short and long term.

Action on food systems to address short-term crises and create long-term transformation requires a multifaceted approach, both horizontally across issues and vertically through levels of influence. It is imperative that a place has a groundswell of grassroots, citizen-led activities and engaged, committed business leaders. It is equally imperative that there is senior leadership within the local political structures to invest in and drive food system transformation, whilst helping to increase visibility of and commitment to food work in the area. We have also found the existence of local food partnerships to be essential in place-based food system transformation. A healthy working relationship between such partnerships and the local authority is a key factor in successful delivery.

Whilst some places demonstrate that it is possible to progress this work without a dedicated food team, our research finds that investing in a food team:

- Accelerates delivery of this crucial work
- Increases cohesion both horizontally (across the council) and vertically (between community lead organisations, businesses, and policymakers)
- Increases breadth and depth of work through the addition of expertise, strategic oversight and ability to identify and catalyse opportunities

Whilst it is hard to gather quantitative data, the gathered evidence suggests there are multiple examples of interventions actioned by a food team which provide economic return for the local authority, both in the short term and through the long-term implications of improved health and economic outcomes.

However, it should be recognised that establishing a food team requires long-term development and commitment to fund capacity building on food policy across the Council. This is necessary to ensure longevity of the work that can withstand internal organisational change and which continuously adapts to directly reflect Council priorities. Food teams are uniquely positioned to work with cross-cutting themes that fit into broader Council's objectives, like climate change, sustainability etc. and can ensure that food policy is fully embedded on the Council's agenda even in times of economic downturn.

## Appendix One:

Calculating the economic benefit of the TfL junk food ad ban:

We took the average calorie saving per day across age groups from scenario C (44.1 calories) and the estimated economic benefits from this scenario. [Link](#).

These savings were divided by the population of England in 2021 (56.2m) and the 44.1 average calorie reduction to give an estimated saving per person, per calorie.

Economic Output (£)	2.2
NHS costs (£)	1.5
QALY (£)	18.5
Social care costs (£)	1.8
Total (£)	24

We then multiplied this by a 55 calorie reduction (385 week reduction divided by seven for daily reduction) estimated by LSHTM researchers as a result of the ban. This was then multiplied by the population of London in 2021 (9m) to achieve our figures. All numbers were rounded to one decimal place.

## Appendix two:

Interview questions for semi-structured interviews:

- Do you have a dedicated food team or lead working on food policy across a range of issues? What is the scope/remit of their work?
- When was the food team established?
- What was the decision-making process for this?
- Can you describe how the food team sits within the council and/or how the food portfolio is managed?
- Who have the key backers for the work been?
- Why do you think it is important here?
- How was the food team budgeted for and over what period of time?
- What have been the outcomes since the food team was established?
- What has been your proudest achievement in your role?
- Has any quantitative data been captured that demonstrates ROI?
- What are your evaluation processes?