

# **FOOD STRATEGY REVIEW: RECOMMENDATIONS TO SOUTHWARK'S CABINET**

Report of Scrutiny Sub-Committee B

March 2010



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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this review is to make recommendations to the cabinet and senior officers to assist them with the development of a food strategy to improve public health and food security. Southwark must seek to develop the community's responsibility for the health, environmental, economic, social, cultural and the security impacts resulting from the food choices that the population of Southwark make.
- 1.2 It is important that we respect our environment, people, the welfare of animals, businesses and others involved in providing our food.
- 1.3 We took as our starting points the motion passed by full council in 2008 and the Mayor of London's food strategy.
- 1.4 The Mayor's food strategy set out four key aims:  
*"The Mayor and the London Food Board have a vision of a world-class, sustainable food system for London. In 2016, London's residents, employees and visitors, together with public, private and voluntary sector organisations will:*  
*- take **responsibility** for the health, environmental, economic, social, cultural and security impacts resulting from the food choices that they make, and their role in ensuring that food and farming are an integrated part of modern life*  
*- demonstrate **respect** for all the many elements involved in the provision of their food, and respect fairly the environment, the people, the welfare of animals, the businesses and others involved in providing their food*  
*- be more conscious of the **resources** used in growing, processing, distributing, selling, preparing and disposing of their food, and be more engaged in minimising any negative impacts arising from this resource use*  
*- benefit from the **results** of this effort, such that all Londoners have ready access to an adequate, safe, nutritious and affordable diet that meets their health, cultural and other needs, and better protects the environments in which we live and those which we visit."*
- 1.5 In April 2009, Southwark's council assembly passed a motion, with cross party support, which set out the key areas that a Southwark food strategy should seek to address. These were:
- Reducing poverty and deprivation
  - Reducing the negative environmental impacts of Southwark's food system
  - Supporting a vibrant food economy
  - Celebrating and promoting Southwark's food culture
  - Enhancing Southwark's food security
  - Encouraging health eating in schools

- 1.6 We have used this motion as the basis for our recommendations. We have not sought to write a food strategy but to make a series of recommendations that we suggest the cabinet might take note of in developing a comprehensive food strategy.

## **2. Southwark's approach**

- 2.1 Ben Reynolds from *Sustain* came to the sub-committee in July 2009 to provide his experience of food strategy development. He informed the subcommittee that approximately half of London boroughs now had a food strategy and he felt that Camden had a particularly good model to learn from.

Camden had formed strong working alliances with many relevant key stakeholder groups. These groups included partners from the Primary Care Trust (PCT), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the National Trust (NT). They also called upon representatives from local businesses and the community to contribute to the work by taking part in consultations.

Camden Council and Camden PCT formed a steering group which ensured that the strategy was specific to Camden and its communities.

The steering group also helped to bring about consensus from within the partnerships and this acted to engender a sense of ownership across all of the working group participants.

- 2.2 Our members were keen that Southwark also devise a strategy that is going to be specific to the needs of the borough. It might be that Southwark identifies a willing champion to take the work forward, who understands the importance of partnership working. It might be someone who already has an interest in the development of the work, who may or may not be paid but is adept at promoting the strategy, and is able to identify the 'quick wins' to keep things interesting as well as working towards the longer term objectives.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Southwark should seek to create a partnership steering group of interested parties to help develop, monitor and implement the food strategy.
2. Southwark should seek to identify a food champion to promote and drive forward the strategy.
3. The strategy should be accompanied by a clear, realistic and costed action plan that should be regularly reviewed.

### **3. Improving the health and reducing the health inequalities of people living and working in Southwark**

3.1 Dr Ann Marie Connolly, director of public health, came to the sub-committee in July and spoke about how a strategy needed to be embedded within both Southwark Council and Southwark PCT. She also spoke about how important it was that a strategy was specific to Southwark and highlighted some alarming Southwark statistics:

- Southwark has the highest population of child obesity compared to any other part of the country
- 26% of children are obese by year 6
- 14.3% of children are obese by reception year

3.2 Overweight children are more at risk of cancer, diabetes, heart disease and arthritic problems in later life. It is part of Southwark's Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets to reduce levels of obesity and Southwark must do more to address this situation. The PCT has devised an action plan and strategy - the Southwark Healthy Weight Strategy - which covers four strands:

1. Early intervention and prevention.
2. Shifting the curve of overweight.
3. Targeting those at risk of an unhealthy weight.
4. Effective treatments of anorexia, obesity and other weight disorders.

3.3 In the early years, many parents need to help their babies to make the transition from breast feeding to a healthy more solid diet. Moves to lend assistance to parents must take into consideration other determinants such as; play, environment and exercise. It is also important to consider how parents access and cook food, making them aware of the normal weight ranges for children. It was an important factor that parents felt they had support and the Council, PCT and other agencies needed to help families to help each other.

3.4 From recent studies it was believed that a quarter of 14 to 17 year olds miss breakfast completely. This is despite findings suggesting that there is a strong link between nutrition, attention and attainment.

3.5 It was suggested that the Southwark food strategy should link up with the healthy weight strategy developed by the PCT, providing a shared message to the community with leadership being shown at the highest level. The messages should endeavour to help lay down better patterns of eating and attitudes towards food. The modelling of good practice and willingness to change is essential across the PCT and the council if we are to be at the forefront of change, setting an example to our communities.

**Recommendations:**

4. It is essential that any food strategy should be jointly prepared by the PCT and the council as a factor in reducing health inequalities in the borough.
5. In order to give the required level of strategic leadership, the joint Council/PCT board should consider this report and agree a timetable for developing a strategy, we suggest within the next six months.

**4. Reducing poverty and deprivation**

- 4.1 For families that are on a very tight budget, finding and affording healthy food can be very difficult. The culture of our society seems to be tied in to extensive marketing; product placements push forward the more unhealthy options. Often, foods with low nutritional value are cheaper, more filling and comforting, making them more desirable to young people and adults alike. In addition, there are high numbers of adults who do not understand enough about cooking and nutrition to know how to prepare easy, healthy and economical meal from fresh ingredients.
- 4.2 Food poverty is the lack of a balanced diet, often found among low income families, and can be deadly, cutting the life expectancy of Britain's poor and causing them to suffer more diet-related ill health. Compared to the rich, those on low incomes eat less well, often paying more for food. In London this is an increasing problem, and sometimes derives from education, but often from lack of access to healthy food. In low income areas, small local shops may not sell unprocessed, fresh food, and the supermarkets stay out of such areas where profits are low. London has to ensure there is good local access to fresh food, to avoid the later problems of obesity and early death.

**Recommendation:**

6. Southwark should consider a programme of promotional materials and cookery demonstrations that can help address the lack of knowledge about cooking and nutrition. This could seek to make links with supermarkets, high street shopping centres and street markets across the borough.

**5. Reducing the negative environmental impacts of Southwark's food system**

- 5.1 The sub-committee took evidence from Annie Baker, Southwark's sustainable services manager, who explained the initiatives the council is following to reduce domestic food waste. The council encourages people to use other forms of waste processing such as wormeries. Wormeries will compost food waste very effectively. The council has offered wormeries to households for six years at a cost of £10 each. The uptake is high with around 300 in use to date. The council also needs to continue in its efforts to encourage composting wherever possible. Composting reduces landfill as well as enriching the soil.

- 5.2 There is currently also an initiative which illustrates the quantity of food purchased and how much we throw away (Reduce the Waste Campaign). More campaigns such as this are needed to raise awareness of and to encourage people to steer away from excessive packaging.
- 5.3 The council does not yet collect domestic food waste for recycling although this service is due to be introduced by 2015 at the latest. Officers are working with Veolia to see if this can be introduced earlier.
- 5.4 Dulwich community council are piloting a commercial collection scheme in Lordship Lane, encouraging commercial outlets to think about recycling by offering them free collections for three months. It was felt that Southwark might undertake some best practice work to help speed up improvements in the commercial sector.

**Recommendations:**

7. Southwark should seek to work with 'Veolia' (the council's waste subcontractors) to introduce food waste collection as early as possible and before the current target date of 2015.
8. There should be more promotion of home composting to increase the numbers of bins distributed and used.
9. Southwark should continue to make strides to widen the types of food packaging collected making particular efforts to provide facilities for tetrapaks/liquid board packaging.
10. Southwark should consider how it can positively encourage the collection of food waste from commercial premises.

**6. Supporting a vibrant food economy**

- 6.1 Our members were keen to support local markets and expand the hours of operation of existing markets and introduce new food markets where possible. Recent examples of such expansion are the Peckham Farmer's Market and Bermondsey Market. This should form a core part of the council's Markets Strategy.
- 6.2 There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that access to healthy food can be difficult to obtain in certain areas of the borough, with fresh fruit and vegetable shops located some way away from housing estates. Cheaper more unhealthy foods seem to be more readily available in those areas. Planning officers explained the action taken to promote retail shopping parades in planning policies and that these policies were being strengthened through the new Core Strategy.

**Recommendations:**

11. Southwark should promote and encourage street markets, seeking to expand the hours of operation of existing markets and introduce new food markets where possible.
12. Southwark should continue to use its planning policies to promote and enhance local shopping parades.

**7. Celebrating and promoting Southwark's food culture**

- 7.1 It is important that the council, in devising a food strategy, shows leadership in its implementation. Using sustainable, ethically sourced and healthy food should become part of the culture of the council, making it standard practice in the working environment across all its sites. For example, catering for meetings should naturally default to vegetarian options. Vegetarian food tends to be healthier as well as having the benefit of generating less carbon emissions. The council should not use 'red' list fish (fish that is in danger of extinction) and should provide detailed, accurate and up to date information about the food on offer and how it is produced. This information should be widely available across the borough, encouraging local businesses and the community to make informed choices about what to buy and what to eat. It was thought that providing good information about the food available in the borough would be a relatively low cost initiative and could act as a firm initial step on which to start building the momentum for the implementation of other aspects of the strategy.

**Recommendations:**

13. The council should undertake a campaign of sustainable food awareness.
14. The council should seek to use its own purchasing power, particularly in the new Tooley Street contract to ensure:
- The provision of Fair trade food
  - The use of sustainable food supplies, minimisation of packaging and recycling
  - The use of local providers and supply chain
  - The provision of healthy food choices
  - The provision and promotion of vegetarian and vegan options
  - That food supplies reflect the diversity of Southwark

**8. Enhancing Southwark's food security**

- 8.1 Independent food shops could play a more significant role in promoting healthy choices by increasing stocks of organic and fair trade produce and it was felt that Southwark must start to look at local food production possibilities, putting local food first, seeking to understand more fully the implications of food brought in from overseas; for instance the economic and ethical considerations to the country of origin and the impact the imports might be having on local food supply. It is important to understand the quality and quantity of both local and overseas production and what kinds of supplies



might be needed for Southwark. It was felt that a Southwark strategy should detail ways in which to promote organic produce; linking it with seasonal production; the planting of fruit trees and the possibilities of utilising public space for these initiatives.

- 8.2 To increase the amount of allotments in the borough would mean taking over other public open spaces, and whilst this would not constitute a 'change of use' under the current planning rules, the viability of putting allotments on to publicly owned space was questionable. Public land means that everyone has access to it and the only way to ensure the safety of the allotments would be to invest in fences, gates and gate locks which would then require planning permission.
- 8.3 The evidence taken from Southwark's planning department pointed to the fact that there was little that could be done to enhance local food production. Recently there have been large developments of new homes being built on high density brown field sites, without a great deal of open space to use for anything but the provision of sustainable homes.
- 8.4 Members felt, however, that under the sustainable communities act, planners and developers should start to think more seriously about integrating open spaces within new developments which might be suitable for growing vegetables as well as other recreational uses.

**Recommendations:**

15. Members felt very strongly that the council must continue to use its planning policies to ensure adequate provision of outdoor space in both private and public areas.
16. Developments should seek to design outdoor space to be used flexibly, maximising the ability of the community and individuals to use outdoor space for growing food.
17. Council-owned land, housing and parks land in particular, presents ample opportunity for more creative use of open space to provide allotments and orchards. A comprehensive programme of identifying and encouraging the conversion of such land for active food use should be developed.

**9. Encouraging healthy eating in schools**

- 9.1 There are positive initiatives being taken to encourage young people to eat better by encouraging them to join breakfast clubs. However, the subcommittee heard reports that breakfast clubs were not widely available in Southwark schools. There was also significant concern that vending machines in schools were selling fizzy, high sugar drinks and according to PCT reports, children were getting through on average 3 – 4 fizzy drinks per day.

- 9.2 The representations from the PCT stated that providing free school meals would ensure that all children get at least one nutritious meal per day. However, it was realised that the expense of providing such a service for all schools would be extremely high.

**Recommendations:**

18. The curriculum should be used to understand food and encourage gardening and growing food, particularly in primary schools.

19. Southwark needs to get a better picture of precisely what is going on in its schools with a view to adopting an aspiration of achieving the provision of universal free school meals.

## **Summary of recommendations:**

### **Southwark's approach**

1. Southwark should seek to create a partnership steering group of interested parties to help develop, monitor and implement the food strategy.
2. Southwark should seek to identify a food champion to promote and drive forward the strategy.
3. The strategy should be accompanied by a clear, realistic and costed action plan that should be regularly reviewed.

### **Improving the health and reducing the health inequalities of people living and working in Southwark**

4. It is essential that any food strategy should be jointly prepared by the PCT and the council as a factor in reducing health inequalities in the borough.
5. In order to give the required level of strategic leadership, the joint Council/PCT board should consider this report and agree a timetable for developing a strategy, we suggest within the next six months.

### **Reducing poverty and deprivation**

6. Southwark should consider a programme of promotional materials and cookery demonstrations that can help address the lack of knowledge about cooking and nutrition. This could seek to make links with supermarkets, high street shopping centres and street markets across the borough.

### **Reducing the negative environmental impacts of Southwark's food system**

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  - The provision of healthy food choices
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**Scrutiny Sub-Committee B**

Councillor Richard Thomas (Chair)

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