

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

REPORT FOR INFORMATION

COMMITTEE: Health and Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny

DATE: 13 November 2008

SUBJECT: Food Futures: Overview report

REPORT OF: Colin Cox, Assistant Director, Joint Health Unit
Christine Raiswell, Food Futures Programme Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an overview of the work of the Food Futures partnership.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

- i. note the report;
- ii. identify what topic to consider in more detail at a future meeting.

CONTACT OFFICERS

Colin Cox
Assistant Director, Joint Health Unit
Tel: 0161 234 4190
c.cox@manchester.gov.uk

Christine Raiswell
Food Futures Programme Manager
Tel : 0161 234 4268
c.raiswell@manchester.gov.uk

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Committee requested an overview report on the work being undertaken by the Food Futures Programme to make food in Manchester healthier, more sustainable, more accessible, and more enjoyable for all. This report provides a summary of some of the current activity underway and areas for further development.
- 1.2 Around 70,000 deaths in the UK can be attributed to poor diet each year and in Manchester this equates to approximately 900. While there is some very good food available in the city, in many places fresh, healthy food is hard to find. Manchester's high levels of deprivation translate into a poor diet for many people. Too much of what is eaten in the city is unhealthy and damaging to the environment, and the food supply chain has left many parts of the city devoid of fresh food. The Manchester Food Futures Strategy and Partnership, which is led and managed from the Joint Health Unit, is the city's response to the need to improve the food eaten in Manchester.
- 1.3 The Food Futures strategy has the following broad aims:
- To improve the health of the people of Manchester
 - To protect the local and global environment
 - To strengthen the local economy
 - To build stronger and more sustainable communities
 - To promote culinary diversity and the enjoyment of good food across the city
- 1.4 To achieve these aims, the strategy focuses on the following priority areas for action:

Food security and access: improving access to a wide range of high quality fresh food across the whole city, geographically and by social group

Food production: establishing local food growing as a valuable contributor to health, the environment and the local economy

Children and young people: establishing a pattern of healthy eating from conception, breastfeeding, weaning and early years right through to early adulthood thus having a positive impact on social development, health an education

Vulnerable groups: ensuring that all groups who may find it more difficult to access and consume a healthy diet are given the support they need to do so

Education, awareness and campaigns: ensuring that people in Manchester are adequately informed about food, diet and nutrition

Exerting a broader influence: Using a range of mechanisms including lobbying, purchasing / procurement power of local agencies, recognising good practice and wider promotion to achieve the aims and objectives of the strategy.

- 1.5 In recognition of the work of the Food Futures Partnership to date, Manchester City Council was recently awarded regional Food Champion status by the Food Standards Agency. The award recognises outstanding work done by local authorities in improving community diet and nutrition in their area. Food Champions have demonstrated good practice and shown outstanding commitment to making their local community a better place to live.
- 1.6 To ensure that there is a robust structure for implementing the strategy, the Food Futures Partnership has a Board, steering group and theme groups based on the priorities of the strategy. Their key functions include identifying practical and sustainable solutions and to ensuring that themes and priorities are delivered and co-ordinated to make best use of resources. The Food Futures Board includes two Executive Members – Finance & Human Resources (who chairs the Board), and Employment & Skills.
- 1.7 The Food Futures Board recently agreed to carry out a refresh of the Food Futures strategy to ensure our strategic approach and priorities are right and that we have the appropriate infrastructure and capacity to deliver the strategy in the coming years. This is due to be completed by the end December 2008
- 1.8 Food work in the city is wide ranging and complex and it is important to be clear about the role of Food Futures within it. The Food Futures Partnership does not aim to try to lead or control all work that is supporting the strategy. It provides a strategic direction and support, acts as an enabler for other services and groups where needed, and allows gaps, duplication and opportunities for collaboration to be identified and exploited.
- 1.9 With that caveat, the following offers a brief update on some of the activities currently underway to support the objectives of the strategy. It provides a flavour of actions taking place and is not intended to be comprehensive.

2 Food Security & Access

- 2.1 Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Many factors impact on food security, including poverty, local availability of food, the nutritional value of the food consumed, the structure of the retail market and skill in food preparation.

Food Mapping

- 2.2 There is a clear need to understand the issues of availability of healthy and sustainable food within neighbourhoods and communities across the city, to enable resources to be targeted most effectively. Some food mapping work has already been carried out in parts of North Manchester and it is recognised that this needs to be further expanded. A project group will be established to take this work forward. This will be used to inform future work on tackling food deserts.

Miles Platting

- 2.3 Miles Platting is an area of significant long-term regeneration, under the Housing Market Renewal programme. Food mapping has identified that currently the local retail offer is poor, especially in relation to access to fresh/healthy food. Food Futures, Zest and Manchester Markets are therefore working with the local independent convenience stores to improve the range, quality and marketing of their fresh food offer.

Herbie

- 2.4 Food Futures continues to support Herbie, the mobile greengrocer run by MERCi, an independent charity based in East Manchester. Two Herbie vans bring good quality affordable fruit and vegetables sourced from New Smithfield wholesale market to areas in North and East Manchester where access to these foods is poor.

Local research study recommendations

- 2.5 Food Futures, Manchester Markets and Regeneration commissioned the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) to examine the role that Local Authorities can play in improving access to food in neighbourhood centres and also the wider role local food access plays in supporting the local economy and sustainable communities.
- 2.6 The final report put forward wide-ranging recommendations needing the involvement of a number of services / departments to deliver. These recommendations need to be prioritised to develop a deliverable programme that complements wider regeneration and food access activity in local areas. The Food Access Group, chaired by the Food Futures Regeneration lead is tasked with co-ordinating the development and implementation of this work.

3 Growing Food

Allotments

- 3.1 Further developing the infra-structure of the City's allotments and supporting people and groups to be involved in growing food has been identified as a Food Futures priority. To support this, Groundwork have secured funding through the Big Lottery Wellbeing Programme to carry out a three year project with two allotment sites – Gorton Reservoirs and Woodhouse Park. A project officer has been employed to work with the community and allotment societies with the aim of encouraging individuals and groups from disadvantaged areas to get involved in maintaining allotments in order to improve physical and mental well-being. The project encourages sustainable allotment use, physical exercise, social interaction, healthy eating and mental stimulation.

Growing Food from seed campaign

- 3.2 Food Futures has funded and supported the Groundwork allotments project to develop a 'Growing Food from Seed' campaign, focused on encouraging people to grow food at home. Stalls and roadshows have taken place in various settings where people can plant seeds in a pot to take away and are given basic instructions and support to care for this and grow other simple crops, dependent on the space people have available. Contact details of people who are interested enough to take up the kit are taken, so we can stay in touch and build on this initial campaign later in the year. The Growing Food from Seed 'kit' has been provided to other food workers to help them to promote growing in their localities.

4 Children and Young People

Packed lunches

- 4.1 In response to requests for help from schools in Manchester, the Food Futures subgroup for children and young people, led by the Healthy Schools Partnership, has set up a pilot project to look at packed lunches.
- 4.2 Work is currently underway in 2 schools to promote healthier packed lunches. To date sessions have been run for parents to look at what constitutes a healthy packed lunch, and funding has been secured for all primary schools in Manchester to access a national website to produce their own school specific 'Healthier Packed Lunch' leaflet. Access to the website also gives schools the option to translate the leaflets they produce, as needed. Future plans for the pilot include the development of a Packed Lunch Policy in consultation with the school community. Findings from the pilot will be used to produce a guide to be distributed to all primary and special schools to support them in the establishment of their own packed lunch policy.

School Meals

- 4.3 Manchester Fayre has had a focus for many years on promoting healthy food in schools. More recently additional national resources have supported even more improvements in menus and healthy options. This is important to promoting health and wellbeing in children, particularly those from more deprived groups; for some children, the school meal is the main meal of the day.
- 4.4 Recently the government has announced that it plans to run a pilot scheme to make school meals free to all primary school pupils. Only three local authorities will be selected to be part of this pilot, and they will have to provide matched funding to go alongside extra national investment. The City Council is currently considering whether to apply to be part of this national pilot project.

5 Vulnerable groups

- 5.1 Many groups can find it particularly difficult to access a healthy, enjoyable diet and need additional support to do so. These include learning disabled people, physically disabled people, people with mental health problems, older people - particularly those who are isolated or in care, looked after children, BME groups

and recent immigrant communities, people with drug and alcohol problems and homeless people.

5.2 It is worth noting that none of these groups is homogenous. Many people who fall into one or more category can and do have a healthy diet, whether by their own volition or because of the support they receive. So it is important not to oversimplify the issue and assume, for example, that all older people have the same needs. Strategies for addressing the needs of vulnerable groups therefore need to be sensitive to these differences and able to provide the right support to the right people – or no support where none is needed.

5.3 A number of activities are underway or have recently been carried out to support some of the groups above including:

- Providing cooking sessions for residents of homeless hostels to support them to move successfully into independent living
- Work with cooks in Children's Homes to improve the food served to looked after children and cooking sessions with the children resulting in improved skills and self esteem
- Work with South Asian and Caribbean communities to support them to reduce salt in their diets – a major risk factor for high blood pressure and heart disease

6 Communications and campaigns

6.1 Food Futures uses a variety of tools to communicate messages from the strategy to different audiences, including:

- A dedicated website
- A quarterly newsletter to share local and national stories of interest
- A salt reduction campaign using appropriate resources targeted to different communities
- Growing from seed campaign (discussed elsewhere in report)
- Attendance at various events including Manchester Conference and the recent Valuing Older People Big Event attended by around 500 older people and 200 officers and volunteers

6.2 The partnership has identified the need to up our campaigning and communications considerably in the coming year and work is underway to agree key messages and a programme of communication both with organisations and residents.

7 Exerting a broader influence

Food Futures Certificate

7.1 Food Futures runs a certificate scheme that rewards and promotes eating establishments that are helping to make Manchester healthier by serving healthy and sustainable food. The aim of the scheme is to influence and

improve the choices people have when eating out. The scheme has had a modest take up so far and it is intended to promote the scheme more widely and give consideration to extending it to shops as well as catering establishments.

Workforce

- 7.2 The Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee has previously discussed actions that could be taken by the City Council and PCT to tackle obesity through action in their own workplaces. A 'Fruit on Desks' scheme will be piloted in selected departments before the end 2008. This will involve selling fruit at cost in selected workplace sites to draw attention to important health messages and improve access to fruit as snacks.

Manchester Food and Drink Festival

- 7.3 In order to encourage the local food and drink industry to think more about healthy eating, Food Futures works with Festival organisers and sponsors the Healthy and Sustainable Eating Award. Over recent years this partnership has seen the festival increasing its focus on healthy eating and growing food, with events focused on these themes now a regular part of the festival calendar.

8 Areas for further development

- 8.1 Whilst the above report demonstrates considerable activity taking place to deliver the Food Futures Strategy there is still a need to increase interventions to make a serious impact on the diets and health of residents. The Food Futures refresh has already highlighted a need to:

- Significantly increase our communications and campaigning
- Engage more with the private sector to influence food available
- Continue to support the community and voluntary sector to help to deliver the strategy at local level
- Work across Council Services to ensure they are all working towards the strategy
- Ensure that the contribution of food to the delivery of local area agreement targets is fully realised

- 8.2 To carry out all of the above, increased capacity within the system will be required.

9 Possible areas for future scrutiny

- 9.1 This report provides a very brief overview of the major current and planned activity for the Food Futures Programme. The Committee may wish to consider some of this work in more detail at future meetings. Potentially fruitful areas for further investigation might include:

- The national free school meals in Primary Schools pilot work: should Manchester apply to take part in this pilot, given the resources that would

need to be committed to it? This option would lend itself to a joint scrutiny panel with the Children and Young People OSC.

- Food in the Local Area Agreement: how could it contribute, and could we be doing more across the Council to build this in to existing activity?
- Food mapping: what do we know about accessibility to fresh food in the city, and what is being done to improve this?

10 Conclusion and recommendations

10.1 Over recent years Food Futures has been developing some very high quality work to improve the food eaten in Manchester; the recognition of the city as the regional Food Champion by the Food Standards Agency reflects the amount that has been achieved. However, it is clear that there is still a lot to do to transform the city's food and make it healthier, more sustainable, more accessible, and more enjoyable for all.

10.2 The Committee is asked to:

- iii. note the report;
- iv. identify what topic to consider in more detail at a future meeting.