Brighton and Hove Food Strategy Refresh (2024) Research and Evidence Review

Thursday March 7th, 9.00-14.00
Atenborough Centre for Creative Arts, University of Sussex

Executive Summary

The Brighton & Hove Food Partnership are refreshing the city food strategy in 2024 and identified a need to build on existing evidence in order to adapt and improve the current approach. On March 7th, 2024, the University of Sussex Business School hosted a "research and evidence review" involving 36 researchers from different departments at Sussex, Brighton, Birkbeck, and Kingston Universities and the Institute for Development Studies, as well as representatives of Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, Brighton & Hove City Council, Food ş c ª Ŗ ┌

Each of these was discussed at separate tables, with participants free to move between them and contribute their thoughts. Volunteers from the University of Sussex and the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership took responsibility for making notes on discussions at each table, and participants were asked to make recommendations on the basis of the "stop/ start/ continue" format:

- Stop (identify which activities from the 2018-2023 strategy are no longer a priority)
- Start (which new activities and priorities need to be included in this refresh)
- Continue (which activities in the current food strategy should carry on, and how can they be adjusted so they are more effective?)

The reports from each of the eight tables are presented below. More general points emerging from the plenary discussion are included afterwards.

Aim 1: Champion healthy and sustainable food
(11 of 43 participants who registered said their project related to this aim)

1.10 (access to free tap water): Ramp up beyond Brighton and Hove – was part of national scheme, but the National Refill campaign were trying to charge for using their brand.
The Health and well-being survey should be used and expanded
Preventative approach malnutrition – expand urban farms
More capacity – care homes – dedicated capacity

More general points

students. Periodic community events can be used to draw attention to specific cuisines and/or promote diverse as well as local foods, and communal eating.

Continue:

Efforts around advancing cooking skills through schools and for adults through community venues (3.1 “be the city that cooks”) is a key intervention. It could include trainings for batch cooking meals; cooking nourishing/ healthy meals with limited/

Second, in relation to 4.5 ("establish Stanmer Park as a beacon of good practice, inspiration and education on sustainable food production"), participants proposed start embedding high-traffic areas in Brighton and Hove in the allotments planning. They gave Old Steine as an example.

Third, accountability of new developers for growing space has also been mentioned as a key parameter that could be added to the strategy, also in line with the national Right to Grow movement. Thus, in relation to 4.3 ("encourage urban food production"), participants suggested to enquire the ways commitment to food growing is associated with new developments – for example housing developments. As part of this, they also proposed to consider and build on synergies with the Right to Grow movement.

In relation to the strategy's 4.8 clause ("encourage good connections between urban residents and businesses and Sussex-wide farmers and producers"), participants underlined the need for more support for the promotion of benefits of local food – e.g. for restaurants.

Linking this to the strategy's 4.6 "include food security in the citywide resilience planning, in planning for climate change and in crisis planning e.g. for a flu epidemic, flooding, drought and other extreme weather"), the participants proposed including food processing in the strategy's climate changing planning.

Funding training to support the uptake of agro-ecological practices (e.g. by schools, farmers as well as citizens) and connecting those to existing initatives has also been identified as key.

Finally, in relation to 4.6 ("include food security in the citywide resilience planning, in planning for climate change and in crisis planning e.g. for a flu epidemic, flooding, drought and other extreme weather"), climate proofing for food production was another recommended area for further development. Participants recommended the need of a tool that would help balance nutrient/production productivity per square meter – in other words, a tool that would help identify the best drought resistant crops with the highest nutritional value.

Continue

Participants have found that a lot of existing work needs to carry on being done! Specific areas that were highlighted included:

4.2 ("develop a whole estate plan"): Improve communication of the outcomes of the consultation process

Carry on working on sub-aims 4.3 ("encourage urban food production") & 4.4 ("deliver enjoyable, inclusive, sustainable and affordable allotments", also by considering existing communities' access and inequality in access (please also points above on 'equity').

Aim 6: Transform catering and food procurement
(8 of 43 participants who registered said their project related to this aim)

We firstly acknowledged that more effort needs to be put in to pushing the large caterers / anchor institutions (e.g. hospitals, schools, universities) as they have significant buying power and can help to transform food systems for the better. We know, for example, that a lot of what ends up on the school plate ends up in the bin and the nutritional content of secondary school meals, hospital food is poor.

We acknowledged that barriers to change include privatisation/outsourcing of catering to large profit-driven companies where supply chains are long and lack transparency. Breaking into the public sector supply chain to improve the quality and sustainability of ingredients, therefore, can be very difficult.

Continue

- Learning from what works elsewhere (national and international). Elaine Swan (University of Sussex Business School), for example, has looked at school food in lots of countries. What can that research tell us?
- Healthy Choice Awards (Council runs this)
- Showcasing good/best practice to show what's possible and inspire / influence others
- Promoting activism among consumers to change catering practices, e.g. BiteBack, Sugar Smart (national), School Food Waste Audits (local)

Aim 7: Become a 'food use' not a 'food waste' city
(8 of 43 participants who registered said their project related to this aim)

Summary
The discussion moved between systematic/preventive measures, and business/individual

Restaurants/takeaways – as there are some many in Brighton and Hove. ‘How much are they wast ng’? plate waste could be tackled by o fering di ferent por t on sizes. Could there be a zero waste restaurant treaty?

Con t nue:

Voice ongoing concerns to council (e.g. lack of food waste collec t on). Bring residents’ voices to the table.

Very localised excess food sharing between residents - working towards changing a t tudes around small food sharing to ‘make it less weird’. It also needs to be simple, as people are busy. How about a ‘veg bench’ where can drop o f unwanted bits?

Champion home compos t ng and other solu t ons (e.g. wormeries where space is limited)

Encourage food growing (increases value and more thought about use). Using front and back gardens so that people can harvest as needed.

Suppor t ng/promo t ng organisa t ons like the gleaning network and Real Junk Food Project Brighton

Aim 8: Ensure healthy, sustainable, fair food is embedded in policy and planning, and has a high pro f le right across the city
(16 of 43 par t cipants who registered said their project related to this aim)

Much of the discussion related to the interac t on between research/ intelligence and policy. Most of those present worked in the public health domain, although some points were made about food growing.

The group found it di f cult to iden t fy ac t ons that should be de-priori t sed in the 2024-28 Food Strategy Refresh.

Start:

Overall, the food strategy should priori t se opportuni t es for greater informa t on exchange and policy learning, both between research and policy organisa t ons but also across local authori t es in the G Ma D t n Ò 6 2 .