Yorkshire & Humber Association of Directors of Public Health

Position Statement

'*Civil Food Resilience – a public health protection issue*'

November 2026

Executive summary

The Yorkshire and Humber Association of Directors of Public Health recognises civil food resilience as a critical public health, health inequalities, community resilience and climate adaptation issue. We call for food resilience to be embedded within local authority planning (particularly emergency planning), Local Resilience Forum arrangements, public health strategies and national resilience policy to ensure all communities can access affordable, healthy and sustainable food during periods of disruption.

The scale of the problem

- Since the Second World War, the UK has become increasingly reliant on complex and centralised food supply chains. While this has improved year-round access to food, it has also created vulnerabilities that could disproportionately affect low-income households, underserved communities and those already experiencing health inequalities.

- The increasing frequency of severe weather events such as droughts and floods, and the subsequent pressure on UK farming, combined with the rising impact of climate change in overseas food production, and our over reliance on importing food from heat-stressed countries, through increasingly stretched systems (42% imported from overseas[1]) presents a substantial risk to our food supply chains and subsequently to our local communities.

- The 2026 UK Government nature security assessment[2] highlighted the potential impact of global biodiversity loss on UK security, specifically summarising that

  "critical ecosystems that support major global food production areas and impact global climate, water and weather cycles are the most important for UK national security and without significant increases in UK food system and supply chain resilience, it is unlikely the UK would be able to maintain food security if ecosystem collapse drives geopolitical competition for food".

- ‘Sustainable Food Places’ (SFP) states that the UK remains unprepared for climate, geopolitical, and cyber shocks to the food chain, requiring local authorities and Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) to formally log and plan for household and supply-chain food vulnerabilities[3]

- Yorkshire and Humber is both a major food-producing region and home to communities experiencing significant deprivation and health inequalities. Disruptions to food supply, affordability or access have the potential to disproportionately affect vulnerable populations whilst impacting critical local infrastructure, health services and community wellbeing.

- Increasingly, food systems are recognised not only as being vulnerable to climate change but also as providing an important means of adaptation. Diversified local and regional food systems can reduce exposure to climate-related disruptions elsewhere, enhance system flexibility and increase community capacity to respond to environmental change.

Inequalities

- Food insecurity, and the lack of access to an adequate supply of nutritious food, is associated with poorer physical health, increased risk of diet-related disease, poorer mental wellbeing, social isolation and reduced educational attainment in children. Food system shocks therefore have the potential to widen existing health inequalities through increasing prices and reducing access across Yorkshire and Humber.

- Food security also contributes to climate resilience through its role in supporting mental wellbeing and adaptive capacity during periods of environmental and economic disruptions, reducing vulnerability among at-risk populations, strengthening social networks and supporting local adaptive capacity.

- The most deprived fifth of the population would need to spend 50% of their disposable income on food to meet the cost of the Government recommended healthy diet. This compares to just 11% for the least deprived fifth[4]. Food system shocks therefore have the potential to widen existing health inequalities through increasing prices and reducing access across Yorkshire and Humber.

- The 2024 UK food security report highlighted that the proportion of food secure households in the UK declined from 92% to 90% (And has a downward trend), with lower levels of food security in households with

disabled adults and ethnic minority communities (Black, African, Caribbean or Black British households with the lowest)[1].

- Significant inequalities around access to affordable nutritious food already exist across the Yorkshire and Humber region, and any chronic or acute disruptions to food supply will exacerbate this.

- The current systems in farming rewards farming at large scale over sustainability and equity. The power of the resulting very large organisations reduces the agency and the flexibility within the system.

Food System Resilience

- A functioning, accessible and resilient food system is a fundamental tool in improving the wellbeing of our populations. The access to healthy and sustainable food is one of the most powerful ways we can improve public health, reduce inequalities, help protect our environment, and contribute to climate adaptation.

- This position statement highlights the fundamental importance of civil food resilience to the Yorkshire and Humber region, from two positions;

1. **Short-term resilience (Emergency Response)** Preparing for and responding to food supply shocks, caused by e.g. cyber-attacks, extreme weather, disruptions to logistics, or other emergencies.

2. **Long-term resilience (System Transformation)** Building stronger local food systems through local production, procurement, distribution, growing spaces, food partnerships and community infrastructure, to benefit the local economy, social cohesion, access to nutritious food and enhance local biodiversity.

Supporting evidence

- The UK Food Security Report 2024[1] provides useful evidence on household food insecurity, affordability pressures, supply chain vulnerabilities and consumer confidence.

- The 2025 ‘Just in Case’ report[5] highlights civil food resilience as an emerging public health and local authority priority, recognising that food system shocks are likely to disproportionately affect underserved communities and exacerbate

existing health inequalities unless resilience is strengthened at community, local and national levels.

- The 2026 UK Government nature security assessment[2] highlights how global biodiversity loss is increasingly recognised as a national security risk, with the potential to undermine food security, public health, economic stability and community resilience through cascading impacts on food systems, water supplies and global supply chains.

- The 2026 Global Nutrition[6] report highlights that climate change, conflict and economic shocks are increasingly disrupting food systems, reducing access to affordable and nutritious food, and increasing the risk of malnutrition, demonstrating the critical importance of strengthening food resilience and transforming food systems to support healthier, more sustainable communities

Public perceptions

- Public understanding of sustainable diets is an important component of food system resilience, helping to support informed food choices and long-term sustainability goals. The 2024 UK Food Security report[1] found;

    1) Only 48% of respondents believed they knew what a sustainable diet consisted of, and just 51% understood the impact their diet had on the environment.
    2) That there is a rising concern about affordability, which is an indicator of community resilience.

- The 2024 ‘Food, Farming and Countryside Commission’ (FFCC) public attitudes survey[7] showed strong support for decisive action on food with fewer than 1 in 10 (7%) people believing the food system works well and should be left as it is. Only 28% of people think food is currently a top priority for the government, and nearly half (45%) say food should be the top priority above other pressing issues like transport, water and housing.

- The FFFCC report also highted strong support for farmers and local food production, and 88% agreed that it is important that our food production is resilient to global conflict or extreme weather.

Proposals to improve civil food resilience

- The 'Just in Case' report[6] highlights seven steps to civil food resilience and argues that strengthening civil food resilience requires action at household, community, local authority and national levels.

- The report recommends learning from international best practice, understanding community vulnerability, mapping local food assets, giving local authorities a stronger leadership role, establishing local Food Resilience Committees, developing a coherent national food policy, and embedding food security within the UK Resilience Framework.

At a local authority level;

Short-term resilience *(Emergency Response)*	**Long-term resilience** *(System Transformation)*
1) **Emergency Planning**– there is a lack of food-specific planning within Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) and emergency planning structures at local authority level. Local authorities should explicitly list household and supply-chain food vulnerabilities within corporate risk registers. 2) **Local Planning Duty**: Local authorities should move from informal good practice to formal statutory duties, integrating food asset mapping into corporate risk registers. 3) **Asset Mapping**: Local authorities may wish to consider cataloguing local emergency infrastructure, food storage hubs, and productive land assets to support preparedness and resilience planning. 4) **Supply chain diversification**: De-risk of low/emergency food supply chains to prevent over-reliance on single points of failure or surplus food,	1) Creation of a strategic '**whole systems approach'** to transforming the local food system. 2) Inclusion of a **local strategic approaches to community growing,** and land access within planning departments. 3) The **review of procurement practices** as a strategic lever to support resilience. 4) **Engagement with the 'Yorkshire and Humber Food Systems Network'** to share and learn from existing good practice across the region.

particularly relevant for the support of underserved communities. 5) **Shadow Committees**: Support the development of community resilience partnerships that incorporate food resilience within a broader approach to preparing for and responding to local shocks and stresses.	

Ensuring civil food resilience is a cross system, cross sector challenge. However, local authority public health teams can play a key influencing role in supporting this agenda through;

- Population health needs assessment
- Identification of underserved groups
- Integration with health inequalities work
- Facilitate asset-based community engagement
- Evidence generation and evaluation
- Systems leadership across local authority and the wider food system
- Co-ordination with emergency planning, NHS partners and the voluntary sector
- Regional collaboration and utilising food related policy levers

The Yorkshire and Humber ADPH network calls for:

National Government

1. Recognition of food as a resilience priority within the UK Resilience Framework and co-ordinated down to Local Resilience Forums
2. Clear national guidance on civil food resilience.
3. Food system risks to be routinely considered through the National Risk Register.

4. Dedicated funding for local resilience planning and food systems/food partnerships coordination and leadership.

Local Authorities and Combined Authorities

1. Inclusion of civil food resilience within corporate and community risk registers.
2. Civil food resilience to be included within Health and Wellbeing Strategies.
3. Integration with climate adaptation planning.
4. Development of local civil food resilience partnerships.

Local Resilience Forums

1. Food resilience to become a standing agenda item integrated into planning frameworks.
2. Food disruption scenarios included within emergency exercises.

Summary

The Yorkshire and Humber Association of Directors of Public Health believes access to safe, affordable, healthy and sustainable food is fundamental to population health. This Position Statement builds on the Government Resilience Framework and its three principles 1. Prevention being better than a cure 2. To take a whole of society approach. 3. To build a shared understanding of risks/threats.

Strengthening civil food resilience is not solely an emergency planning function, but a core component of preventing ill-health, reducing inequalities, protecting underserved communities and improving regional resilience. It also allows for enhanced community collaboration around food and growing as a tool for asset-based community development.

The ADHP sees this issue of civil food resilience as one on which its members could provide leadership at the local level.

Acknowledgement

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References

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