

Working Towards Better Food for Southampton:

The Southampton Food Partnership's first operational year

October 2025



Introduction

This policy brief has been produced by the Southampton Food Partnership collaboration supported by the University of Southampton, School of Biological Sciences, School of Geography and Environmental Science and Southampton City Council Public Health. The Partnership consists of over 90 members and works collaboratively towards creating a healthier, affordable and sustainable food environment. It follows another programme, Mapping Southampton's Food System¹ (2024) launched in response to the fact that childhood obesity rates are significantly higher in Southampton than the average for England². Our work aligns with priorities outlined in the 2025 Food Strategy for England paper³ and the NHS 10-year Health Plan⁴.

Executive Summary

The Southampton Food Partnership (SFP) is an inclusive partnership of public, private, charitable and community sector members. In September 2024, we obtained strategic support from leaders across the health and care system, and from across political parties, to formally adopt a partnership approach to healthy, sustainable food through Southampton City Council's Health and Wellbeing Board⁵. This endorsement of the Southampton Food Partnership energised us to build a long-term successful collaboration. We meet bi-monthly, providing infrastructure to enable continuity, creating new connections, driving collaboration and regular communication. Our gatherings include agenda setting, project updates, peer learning, and dedicated space for members to connect. In October 2024, we became a member of the Sustainable Food Places scheme⁶ which gave the SFP an official webpage⁷ and access to a network of other food partnerships and a host of resources and expertise.

“I was invited to sit in on a partnership meeting and do a PowerPoint presentation which impressed the partnership a lot and now I am a full member of the partnership. In our most recent partnership meeting we discussed different areas where funding would be available for my project which was very helpful to me and shows the helpful nature of everyone on the partnership.”

Chris, Harvest of Hope

“Southampton Food Partnership has connected me with inspiring local food businesses such as Good Evans Kitchen, Wonky Bowl, and EasyTZmeals, and we’re now exploring ways to collaborate. Attending SFP meetings has also been incredibly useful; a case study from the University of Southampton’s Student Union on their environmental cup levy enabling further environmental improvements offered practical insights I’ve since shared with churches and other community groups running coffee shops.”

Duncan, Southampton City Mission

“The Food Partnership enabled me to share information on the changes to food waste regulations and making the connection between sustainable food and emissions. It has also helped in sharing ideas on how to manage a partnership with a wide-ranging membership base, particularly in learning more about the principles behind co-production.”

Mel, Southampton City Council Sustainability

“I have met lots of people from the food partnership. Here are a few examples: Rebecca Kinge (connections with various groups, connecting to the local library and local connectors.); Sanjay Mall (one of our local connectors and was involved in our City Reflections project and accompanied me on BBC Radio Solent to promote the Big Difference and City Reflections); and Victoria from Feed The Community (another local connector, involved in City Reflections and has been instrumental in the consultation around food-based projects).”

Jasmine, Southampton Forward

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As part of our year-one work, we evaluated the SFP utilising the Sustainable Food Place's 'health check' survey⁸ with eight members in May 2025. This revealed that the SFP is performing strongly for a food partnership in its first year, scoring 23 out of a possible 36 points. These insights also allowed us to tailor our plans for a focus group to dive deeper into opportunities and challenges.

Changes Members want to see in Southampton's food system (June 2025)



Place

We need to better represent Southampton as a place:

- Having anchor institutions (e.g. our NHS trusts) represented and the involvement of businesses would strengthen the partnership by ensuring that a wide range of relevant issues can be raised.
- Greater representation by local organisations, including businesses, could increase the capacity of the partnership, where individuals could assist with tasks that provide joint gains.
- There is a need to involve residents and communities, especially people who do not have professional links, to ensure community voices are represented, recognising that solutions can often be found in the community.



People

We need to support people to lead on areas aligned with the goals of membership:

- The priorities of the SFP should be aligned with people's team's/ professional goals to demonstrate the value of being involved with the food partnership.
- Members should be supported to 'lead' on an area. Influencing policies and strategies is the role of individual members within their organisation, with our SFP providing a sounding board and resource. The capacity of members to lead could be developed through mentoring, support and through using a skills matrix list, as a tool to support development.



Partnership

We need to continue to bring people together, developing a collective understanding of local issues:

- Ongoing co-ordination of the partnership is required to bring people together, make connections and develop a collective understanding of the issues concerning food in the city.
- Clearly defining success measures and impact will increase the credibility of the SFP. Increased communications activity about the partnership, for example through existing newsletters and email signatures, will continue to raise awareness of and broaden the membership of the SFP.
- Activities such as taking part in national initiatives and embedding the agenda in relevant priority topic areas, will increase the visibility of the SFP and its priorities.

Policy recommendations and priorities

Based on our findings above we have made recommendations in the following areas:

Operational:

- Securing partnership and project coordinator funding to support members.
- Develop a skills matrix to highlight gaps and build resilience across the partnership.

Network:

- Take part in national initiatives such as Sustainable Food Places meetings, national food policy networks and parliamentary groups.
- Collaborate with wider Hampshire and Isle of Wight food alliances and partnerships to future-proof and strengthen our ability to deliver activities to develop a healthy, affordable and sustainable food environment and capitalise on efficiencies and economies of scale.
- Advocate for and encourage local uptake of existing food standards or interventions.

More information can be found in our annual report⁹.

Strategy:

- Strengthen the relationships and collaborative activities we do with partners in business and industry as well as anchor institutions in the region (see Table 1 for our call to action for businesses).
- Demonstrate Food Partnership influence incorporating healthy and sustainable food into strategy policies, plans and documentation.

Business type	Big businesses	Small to medium businesses
Any	→ Sponsor or fund Southampton Food Partnership work	→ <u>Pledge your support</u> , share our <u>food charter</u> and <u>get in touch</u> to share positive Southampton food-related stories!
Food-related	→ Reduce access to unhealthy processed food and drinks in canteens, vending machines and on the high street → Redistribute surplus food to food security efforts such as <u>The Big Difference</u> → Become recognised for meeting <u>Food For Life standards</u> → Promote food as a career	→ <u>Take the Planet Pledge Food for the Planet</u> → Buy local produce and contribute to <u>Southampton Pound - Social Value and Community Wealth Building in Southampton</u> → Improve access to free water in public spaces but signing up to <u>Refill</u> and encourage people to choose tap over bottled water
Non-food	→ Encourage people within your business to <u>volunteer/take part in activities that further support the food charter</u>	→ Support your employees to cook, eat and enjoy fresh food → Provide opportunities to grow food at work and within the community

Table 1 – Call to action for businesses.

References

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Authors:

Dr Jenny Baverstock
University of Southampton

Thomas Munday
Public Health, Southampton City Council and Visiting Fellow, University of Southampton

Dr Chloe Webb
University of Southampton

Dr Ravita Taheem
Public Health, Southampton City Council and Visiting Fellow, University of Southampton

Becky Wilkinson
Public Health, Southampton City Council and Visiting Fellow, University of Southampton

Professor Dianna Smith
University of Southampton

And members of the Southampton Food Partnership.