



FEEDING OUR CITY: WORKING TOGETHER

Policy priorities for a healthier, fairer and more sustainable food system in Southampton

INTRODUCTION

The Southampton Food Partnership

- We are an inclusive cross-sector partnership that brings together public, private, charitable, voluntary, community, and academic partners
- We are working towards a healthier, fairer, more affordable, and sustainable food environment for Southampton (1).
- SFP are functioning during a period of emerging regional governance structures (2), which creates an important opportunity to ensure that food is embedded within local and wider regional priorities.

The Southampton Food Summit

Feeding Our City: Working Together, hosted in May 2026 brought together over 50 stakeholders from across the city and wider region. Southampton's food system was discussed, and how the partnership can improve to benefit all citizens. We aimed to strengthen collaboration across the city's food system, and to collaboratively identify priorities for the partnership's future action.

Evidence for this brief is drawn from six facilitated themed table discussions held during the Summit. The summit demonstrated that the city has both urgent food system challenges as well as significant assets on which to build.

Six cross-cutting themes emerging from the discussions include:

Food education as
a strategy for
long-term food
culture change

Communities as
strong local assets
for long-term food
culture change

Workforce and
employability skills
development

Surplus food
redistribution
system
optimisation

Support for local
food businesses
and social
enterprises

Local policy
integration and
regional
engagement

Policy Recommendations and Priorities

Cross-cutting key theme	Policy recommendations and priority actions	Key issues being addressed
Food education as a strategy for long-term food culture change	• Deliver a food education programme for schools, residents and catering providers to help reduce food waste. • Run positive public campaigns promoting flexitarian and plant-forward diets.	• Confusion around food date labels and food storage. • Food waste driven by overbuying, supermarket practices, poor planning. • Plant-based diet messaging perceived as all-or-nothing and guilt-based.
Communities as strong local assets for food systems change	• Strengthen community food spaces as local hubs by supporting initiatives particularly in deprived areas. • Improve links between schools, growers and volunteers to sustain school growing projects throughout the year. • Pilot inclusive growing projects that engage diaspora communities and young people.	• Cultural food knowledge and expertise within diaspora communities remain underused, due to limited inclusion of diverse communities in food initiatives. • Community growing projects face challenges of continuity, long-term commitment and seasonal maintenance.
Workforce and employability skills development	• Create volunteer-employment pathways within the food sector. • Promote food, agriculture and sustainable food enterprise careers through youth services and apprenticeships.	• Limited volunteer capacity and a lack of structured pathways into employment. • Agriculture and food production are undervalued career options, especially among young people.
Surplus food redistribution system optimisation	• Bring together supermarkets, redistribution partners, and charities to improve surplus food. Begin structured dialogue to improve the timing, quality, and logistics. • Invest in storage and handling infrastructure to make surplus food redistribution safer and more effective.	• Poor timing, quality and logistics of surplus food redistribution. • Redistribution organisations lack adequate storage and handling capacity.

Cross-cutting key theme	Policy recommendations and priority actions	Key issues being addressed
Support for local food businesses and social enterprises	• Create a directory and a recognition scheme for local food producers and suppliers, building on existing networks. • Support reciprocal purchasing, pay-it-forward, and community buying models to strengthen the local food economy. • Back affordable local food delivery initiatives, such as meal-box and subscription schemes. • Develop shared equipment libraries to reduce costs for community growers and small producers.	• Limited visibility and support for local food businesses and social enterprises. • Affordability, accessibility and convenience barriers limit uptake of local food. • High equipment costs constrain community growing and small-scale food production.
Local policy integration and regional engagement	• Establish formal ways for community voices and lived experience to inform food policy. • Support the Southampton Food Partnership's learning and collaboration with established food partnerships. • Fund targeted knowledge-sharing events on topics such as public procurement and local purchasing opportunities.	• Community voices and lived experience, as regards to food, are not consistently embedded in policy-making. • Limited learning and targeted knowledge exchange with regional food partnerships.

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References:

- [1] The Southampton Food Partnership <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/members/southampton/>. Accessed 8 July 2026.
- [2] English Devolution White Paper <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>. Published 16 December 2024. Accessed 15 July 2026.