

A city-regional strategic food partnership

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This article documents the development of a cross-sectoral food partnership called Good Food Greater Manchester, which aims to act as an umbrella organisation to support and enhance sustainable food activities of the ten metropolitan boroughs of Greater Manchester (UK) while raising the profile of sustainable food across the city-region.

In Greater Manchester, sustainable food has not played a prominent role in political discourse until relatively recently. Its absence is notable in the Greater Manchester Strategy, *Our People Our Place*, which was refreshed in 2017 following the establishment of a new directly elected mayor for the region. The strategy sets out ambitions for the future development of Greater Manchester around ten key themes but makes no mention of sustainable food at all. Food is referenced only twice, both times in relation to the food and drink manufacturing sector and its role in the local industrial strategy. This reflects a tendency to view food through an economic lens, which may inhibit our ability to take a more holistic approach to food policy that considers other areas of our lives such as health, well-being, social justice and community.



Greater Manchester Strategy, "Our People, Our Place". GMCA 2017

Good Food Greater Manchester was established to move sustainable food up the political agenda and to stimulate a strategic and coordinated plan to address food system issues at the city-regional level. The cross-sectoral partnership has been in existence since 2014 following the publication of an essay written by two of the founding members, Debbie Ellen and Lucy Danger, presenting the case for sustainable food as an important and crosscutting issue that requires strategic leadership across Greater Manchester.

The name of the partnership was decided through a consultation event with a local communications agency and a 'soft' launch event was held in 2016.

Membership of Good Food Greater Manchester currently includes representation from academia, the public sector, private consultancies, and the voluntary and community sector; however there are currently no agreed rules surrounding formal membership procedures¹. There are no paid roles – for example, the secretary is a voluntary position held by a PhD researcher at the University of Salford and the interim chair is a research fellow who is based at Manchester Metropolitan University, where the meetings are generally held once every two months. The partnership is not an incorporated entity and governance processes, constitution and funding are presently under review by the board.

Other city regional food boards in UK

The development of Good Food Greater Manchester as a city-regional food board has raised a number of questions surrounding the processes that shape the structure, function and governance of partnerships representing an area wider than city or town. Sustainable Food Cities (1), which provides guidance for a national network of food partnerships from cities and towns across the UK, also supports a small number of partnerships that represent regions, counties and metropolitan areas. Members of the network that cover these larger constituencies include Good Food Leicestershire, Good Food East Midlands, and the London Food Board.

Good Food Leicestershire is housed entirely within Leicestershire County Council, and key support is offered to two particularly active cross-sectoral groups located in two districts within the county (Harborough and Melton). Leicestershire County Council has employed a paid member of staff who is responsible for coordinating and delivering this work and supporting the district groups in the development of their food plans. Good Food East Midlands is led by Public Health England (East Midlands) but has an open network of members and is not housed within a local or regional authority. The network provides opportunities for information exchange and the sharing of best practices across the region through workshops and newsletters. The London Food Board is a high-level strategic board that uses

¹ Specifically, members of the partnership represent Manchester Metropolitan University, Salford University, Sheffield University, the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership, Greater Manchester Food Poverty Alliance, Oldham Council, Tameside Council, Manchester City Council, Sustainable Food Cities, Bolton at Home (GM Housing Providers), the Kindling Trust, Foodsync, Green Futures, EMERGE and FareShare Greater Manchester

its expertise to support the development of the London Food Strategy in an advisory capacity and members are appointed through a competitive recruitment process. Although membership of the London Food Board is not open to the public, there is an associated subgroup called the Boroughs Food Group that is open to any organisation or individual from across the whole of Greater London. The Boroughs Food Group is coordinated by a food policy team based within the Greater London Authority and meetings are held at City Hall. All three food groups have contrasting priorities, resources and structures, suggesting that there is no one-size-fits-all model of governance or membership composition for regional strategic food partnerships.

Official endorsement

Since the establishment of Good Food Greater Manchester, a number of developments have taken place in the city-region's political context that have helped to shape the evolution of the partnership. During the last two years alone, the mayor of Greater Manchester has hosted two Green Summits (2), which summoned a wide range of

expertise to explore pathways towards a carbon neutral city-region. In 2018, the first of the two Mayoral Green Summits brought together recommendations from a large number of themed consultation events and resulted in the official endorsement of Good Food Greater Manchester. The 2018 summit was followed by the publication of Greater Manchester's Springboard to a Green City Region (3), which named Good Food Greater Manchester as the strategic Food Board for Greater Manchester.

Following its official endorsement, Good Food Greater Manchester has been working with the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSCP) to move the sustainable food agenda forward. The two partnerships commissioned a strategic review of the food landscape in Greater Manchester, which was completed in 2019. The review gathered information from 47 interviews with individuals from a variety of sectors about their existing work, their priorities for action, their capacity to act, relationships with other stakeholders, opportunities and barriers to success and perspectives on governance. The key

findings emphasised the importance of collaboration in the food system and the need for senior policy leadership at the regional level. A sustainable food strategy document for the region was recommended as a way to account for the crosscutting nature of food and ensure that policy agendas align. The proposed next steps from the strategic review are based around the need to organise a leadership and governance process, to include food policy at a strategic level of governance and to organise an event, such as a food summit. The review also highlighted the need for paid staff to coordinate the next steps and to support the development of a 5-year action plan. The partnership aims to address these issues over the coming months through continued collaboration with the GMHSCP.

It is clear that setting up food partnerships can be a lengthy, time-consuming and convoluted process that depends on the goodwill and availability of its members and frequently scant resources. Until funding is secured, Good Food Greater Manchester relies on the continued dedication and enthusiasm of visionary activists, like Lucy and Debbie

mentioned earlier. The recognition and support that Good Food Greater Manchester has received reflects the hard work that has been put into its development and it is well placed to build upon this strong foundation to support sustainable food across the city region.

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