

Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: N/A

Decision Date - 05/04/23

LOCAL PRODUCTION OF FOOD IN THE SOUTH WEST – PUBLIC SECTOR DECLARATION OF INTENT

Executive Member(s): Cllr Sarah Dyke - Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change and Cllr Ros Wyke – Lead Member for Prosperity, Assets and Development
Local Member(s) and Division: NA

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1. Summary / Background

1.1 In 2021 a partnership of the Heart of the South West LEP, the NFU SW regional team, Cornwall, Devon and Somerset County Councils and the University of Exeter jointly initiated research into food and drink procurement in the region. As a result the University of Exeter's research report "Public Procurement of Food in the South West" was published in March 2022. The report showed a growing interest among all stakeholders regarding the opportunities and benefits of shortened supply chains, including increasing competitiveness and productivity. Building on this research a declaration of intent has been prepared for South West public sector organisations to demonstrate the commitment to localising food procurement in the future.

1.2 Somerset Council, along with other South West local authorities, has been invited to be a signatory to this declaration of intent.

2. Recommendations

2.1. That the Executive Lead Members Prosperity, Assets and Development and Environment and Climate Change:

- endorse the proposed declaration of intent about local production of food in the South West; and
- agree to Somerset Council being a signatory to the declaration, recognising the responsibility for the Council to take reasonable endeavours to advance the commitments within this

3. Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1** SC has been invited by the Heart of the South West LEP to be a party to the proposed declaration of intent about local food produced in the South West. The recommendations outlined in this report are designed to enable SC to respond formally to this.

4. Other options considered

- 4.1.** It is at the discretion of SC whether or not the authority decides to be a partner to this declaration of intent. It is proposed that, as part of its community leadership role and for a range of policy reasons spanning economic prosperity, health and well being, food security and climate emergency, SC should respond positively to the invitation to be a partner to the declaration.

5. Links to County Vision, Business Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

- 5.1.** The purposes of the declaration of intent are consistent with the ambitions and priorities set out in the draft Somerset Council Plan endorsed by the Somerset County Council executive in December 2022. In particular by creating additional opportunities for local and regional food procurement by public sector organisations in the southwest the declaration will advance the priority of “a Greener, More Sustainable Somerset” by reducing food miles and by creating additional opportunities for local food businesses the declaration will advance the priority of “a Flourishing and Resilient Somerset”.

6. Consultations and co-production

- 6.1.** The proposed declaration of intent for local food production in the South West has been developed following a research project undertaken by the University of Exeter which engaged with a range of stakeholders including local producers, business organisations and procurement specialists from local authorities and other public bodies. The evidence and conclusions from this research project have informed the development of the proposed declaration. Following this the Heart of the South West LEP has worked with range of stakeholders including through its food, farming and natural capital programme board to develop the principles contained in the proposed declaration and to consult individual local authorities in the South West about its emerging proposals and commitments. SC has been engaged at relevant points in these discussions.

7. Financial and Risk Implications

- 7.1.** Finance have been consulted and noted there are no direct financial implications arising from taking this decision.

8. Legal and HR Implications

- 8.1.** Legal has been consulted and there are no legal implications arising from taking this decision.
- 8.2.** There are no HR implications associated with this decision.

9. Other Implications

9.1. Equalities Implications

There are no equalities implications associated with this decision.

9.2. Community Safety Implications

There are no community safety implications associated with this decision.

9.3. Sustainability Implications

This declaration of intent potentially has positive sustainability implications. Localising supply of food products by public sector organisations in the South West will reduce food miles with positive impacts resulting in both reduction of energy use and pollution to air, land and water. In addition the promotion and development of local food supply chains will help to sustain and strengthen the local economy by increasing opportunities for SMEs in the food production sector and retaining local employment in this sector.

9.4. Health and Safety Implications

There are no implications associated with this decision.

9.5. Health and Wellbeing Implications

The focus on locally and regionally produced food in the declaration aligns to a degree with the healthy eating agenda which has positive or negative implications for the health and wellbeing of the population. While there are no direct commitments proposed in the declaration relating to this, shared awareness and collaborative working between the partners can potentially extend to actions relating to this in the future.

9.6. Social Value

There are no direct social value implications from the recommendations in this report.

10. Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

- 10.1.** The proposed decision has not been considered by a Scrutiny Committee.

11. Background

11.1. Domestic food production is important to national food security and to the UK meeting its carbon and environmental targets. The food and drink sector is the UK's largest manufacturing industry and its continued success is therefore key to economic prosperity, including the health of small businesses. While big players dominate some parts of the sector, a large proportion of food and drink producers are smaller businesses. Nationally 96% of businesses are SMEs and account for 25% of sector employment and turnover. Nationally, it is estimated that public sector organisations spent £2.4 billion annually on food products in 2014. The Government's Food Strategy (2002) aims for farmers to at least maintain the current level of food produced domestically and for at least 50% of public sector spend on food to be on food produced locally or certified to higher environmental production standards. The Government has committed to support the food and drink sector by requiring public organisations to report on the food they buy, serve and waste.

11.2. In autumn 2021 a partnership of the Heart of the South West LEP, the NFU SW regional team, Cornwall, Devon and Somerset County Councils and the University of Exeter jointly initiated research into food and drink procurement in the region. As a result the University of Exeter's research report "Public Procurement of Food in the South West" was published in March 2022. The report showed a growing interest among all stakeholders regarding the opportunities and benefits of shortened supply chains, including increasing competitiveness and productivity. Building on this research the Heart of the South West LEP has championed the development of a declaration of intent by South West public sector organisations about the commitment to localising food procurement in the future. A copy of the proposed declaration of intent is contained in appendix A of this report. The declaration contains five key commitments from the signatories:

- *To source, and guide their local providers to source more seasonally and domestically available locally produced food,;*
- *To recognise that more local sourcing will contribute positively to the climate change emergency, and net zero objectives. Moreover, improving food security and resilience in supply chains supports SMEs and local economy, contributes towards rural levelling up and underpins healthy eating in our communities.*
- *To review their procurement policies to streamline it to enable local food producers and processors to supply into their organisations – and to encourage others in their food sourcing supply chain to do the same.*

- *To work with partners and funders to seek opportunities to champion and cascade best practice, supporting new ideas, training, knowledge and innovation.*
- *To publicly report on progress each year to enable the impact of this declaration to be monitored.*

11.3. As part of this process the LEP has engaged with a range of stakeholders including through its food, farming and natural capital programme board and has consulted directly with individual local authorities, including Somerset Council, to secure their input into the contents of the proposed declaration. SC is now being invited formally to endorse this declaration. Given the links to SC's climate declaration and climate emergency strategy and also to the commitments in the draft Council Plan for Somerset to supporting a flourishing economy it is recommended that SC responds positively to this invitation.

12. Background Papers

12.1 None

APPENDIX A LOCAL PRODUCTION OF FOOD IN THE SOUTH WEST – PUBLIC SECTOR DECLARATION OF INTENT

1. This Declaration has been prepared by partners in [Heart of the South West/Great South West] in response to the UK Government’s Food Strategy published by Defra (June 2022) and research published by the University of Exeter into Public Procurement of Food in the South West (March 2022).
2. We will endeavour to source, and guide our local providers to source, more seasonally and domestically available locally produced food, aiming for at least 50% of all food spend to be procured from growers/ producers/ manufacturers within the South West local region* by 2028 and 75% from the UK].
3. We recognise that by more local sourcing we will contribute positively to the climate change emergency, and net zero objectives. Moreover, improving food security and resilience in supply chains supports our SMEs and local economy, contributes towards rural levelling up and underpins healthy eating in our communities.
4. We will seek to review our procurement policies and build pre-market engagement into our process to streamline it to enable local food producers and processors to supply into our organisation. We will encourage others related to our food sourcing supply chain, both direct and indirect, to do the same.
5. Wherever possible we will work with partners and funders to seek opportunity to champion and cascade best practice, supporting new ideas, training, knowledge and innovation.
6. We will publicly report on our progress each year through existing corporate reporting arrangements to enable the impact of this Declaration to be monitored.

We encourage every public sector organisation, and those who supply them, to call on the Government to work with us to deliver this Declaration. Through collective action, innovation and influence we will be able to create a mutually supportive regional food supply chain economy that maintains high standards of people and animal welfare, delivering local, sustainable food in the public sector across the South West region.

* Locally produced food is defined as ingredients produced/grown/caught within the same region as it is consumed, or a neighbouring county (for counties at regional boundaries), as set out in Defra’s consultation on the Public Sector Food and Catering Policy. Multi-ingredient foods may qualify as ‘locally produced’ if at least 50% quantity (Kg or L) of their ingredients are produced/grown/caught in the local region.

Context

Domestic food production is a vital contributor to national resilience and food security, it plays a critical role in meeting our carbon and environmental targets, and it reduces the offshoring of food production to countries that do not meet our high environmental and animal welfare standards. The food and drink industry also has an important role to play in levelling up as it is the UK's largest manufacturing industry (bigger than the aerospace and automotive industries combined), creates over £120 billion of value for the economy every year and employs over 4 million people.

Nationally, it has been estimated that public sector organisations spent £2.4 billion annually on food products in 2014. While big players dominate some sectors, a large proportion are smaller businesses. In the food and drink manufacturing sector (excluding beverages) for instance, 96% of business are SMEs and account for 25% of employment and total turnover of the sector. In the South West, many agricultural enterprises are small family farms that contribute to the rural economy, local communities and to landscape quality.

The UK Food Security report published by the government (December 2021) concluded there is a high degree of food security in the UK, with 60% of the value of all food we need being domestically produced, rising to 74% of food which we can grow or rear in the UK. Of the 9.2 million hectares of farmland in England, we have some of the best performing farms in the world such that 57% of agricultural output comes from just 33% of the farmed land area. We produce more lamb and liquid milk than we consume and, in recent years, our production in sectors like poultry and soft fruit has increased with further sustainable growth opportunities such as horticulture and seafood.

The government's Food Strategy (June 2022) aims for farmers to broadly maintain the current level of food we produce domestically whilst also aspiring for at least 50% of public sector spend on food to be on food produced locally or certified to higher environmental production standards. They have committed to support the sector to work with more small and local suppliers and to improve accountability by requiring public organisations to report on the food they buy, serve and waste. The government believes this could be an exemplar for wider society, delivering positive health, animal welfare, environmental and socio-economic impacts.

The University of Exeter's research into Public Procurement of Food in the South West (March 2022) showed a growing interest among all stakeholders regarding the opportunities and benefits of shortened supply chains, including increasing competitiveness and productivity. Building on this research and the government's consultation during the summer on the Public Sector Food and Catering Policy, South West public sector organisations have made this declaration.