



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET SUB COMMITTEE

7TH MARCH 2024

**SUSTAINABLE FOOD PLACES:
UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE RCT FOOD PARTNERSHIP IN
RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH COUNCILLOR BOB
HARRIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with information on the work undertaken since 2020 in relation to Sustainable Food Places and the planned programme of work for 2024-25.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members consider the progress reported, the planned expenditure, and how this contributes to the broader objectives of the Councils Tackling Climate Change Strategy 2022-2025: [‘Think Climate RCT’](#)

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To inform and update the Climate Change Cabinet Sub Committee in relation to the significant body of work that has been undertaken to achieve recognition for Rhondda Cynon Taf as a Sustainable Food Place.
- 3.2 To highlight the contribution being made by the Council’s Community Development Team and its designated Sustainable Food Co-ordinator; community partners across Rhondda Cynon Taf; and the impact of this work on the Council’s climate change ambitions.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 *Storm Dennis*

4.1.1 The Council's first initial involvement in relation to providing direct food support to residents took place in 2020 in response to Storm Dennis, when the Council issued a press release requesting public donations, volunteer time and food (see Appendix A).

4.1.2 The press release received an unexpected response, with all major supermarkets making significant donations and residents keen to help.

4.1.3 The Community Development Team implemented a plan for the collection and re-distribution of food, and other items, to individuals and families affected by Storm Dennis. In total, 461 food parcels were delivered.

4.2 *Coronavirus Pandemic*

4.2.1 As a direct response to the unprecedented development of Covid 19, the Community Development Team co-ordinated the Council's second major foray into food support.

4.2.2 When the National Lockdown arrangements were announced on 23rd March 2020, food was an immediate issue of concern for residents and food providers, with panic buying resulting in significant shortages of key items.

4.2.3 The Council established a Food Distribution Centre and co-ordinated a distribution network utilising the [Community Resilience Hubs](#).

4.2.4 The Food Distribution Centre delivered a total of 2535 food parcels; an additional 810 frozen meals were delivered to residents on the Shielded Patient list who were unable to prepare food for themselves; and co-ordinated the distribution of 2512 food parcels on behalf of Welsh Government.

4.3 Storm Dennis, the Coronavirus Pandemic, the uncertainties of Brexit, and the subsequent cost of living impacts have highlighted the importance of developing a medium to long-term solution to food sustainability across Rhondda Cynon Taf; particularly as many of the initiatives implemented were short term solutions to unprecedented situations.

4.4 On 13th July 2020, the then Service Director for Community Services met with key partners involved in local food networks and collaborations that had emerged since Storm Dennis, and recognised that there was a clear intent, commitment, and agreement to develop a strategic response to food poverty (including the establishment of a Food Prosperity Network and a Food Response Pathway that had been

successful in some other areas) that would provide a sustainable way forward.

- 4.5 In October 2020, the Leader of the Council announced £10,000 of funding for foodbanks; however, local intelligence and discussions indicated that several micro/community groups, that had established local responses to needs during Covid-19 and were providing food support across RCT, were in more immediate need of support to make a significant contribution to the effort of ensuring RCT residents had sufficient food.
- 4.6 It was agreed that the £10,000 be utilised to establish a small grant scheme to support these smaller ventures, and in November 2020 the Council's Community Development Team launched the RCTCBC Food Support Fund, available to community groups, with Trivallis also contributing £10,000 increasing the grant available to £20,000.
- 4.7 In November 2020, the Senior Leadership Team of the Council agreed to work collaboratively with relevant partners to develop a more strategic approach to food poverty and establish an RCT Food Prosperity Network and a Food Response Pathway, which would seek to secure a more sustainable way ahead
- 4.8 The [Sustainable Food Places UK](#) approach was identified by officers as the exemplar model for creating a 'Food Prosperity Network'.

5. Sustainable Food Places

- 5.1 Sustainable Food Places focuses on six key issues:

Key Issue 1: Taking a strategic and collaborative approach to good food governance and action.

Key Issue 2: Building public awareness, active food citizenship and a local good food movement.

Key Issue 3: Tackling food poverty and diet related ill-health and increasing access to affordable healthy food.

Key Issue 4: Creating a vibrant, prosperous, and diverse sustainable food economy.

Key Issue 5: Transforming catering and procurement and revitalising local and sustainable food supply chains.

Key Issue 6: Tackling the climate and nature emergency through sustainable food & farming and an end to food waste.

5.2 In December 2020, the Council applied to Sustainable Food Places for a £5,000 Development Grant to initiate the strategic approach to food and in January 2021 the Council was chosen as one of just four successful applicants from Wales.

5.3 Following on from the work undertaken with the Development Grant, successful Sustainable Food Places applications were submitted and awarded in October 2021 for Sustainable Food Places Membership and a contribution towards the salary of a Sustainable Food Coordinator.

6. **Sustainable Food Places: Progress and Milestones**

6.1 The secured Development Grant was utilised to:

- Gain a better understanding of the current Food System and current projects across the county;
- Instigate a Sustainable Food Network, including gaining buy-in, ownership and support from the public, private and voluntary sectors;
- Develop an action plan to take the Good Food Movement forward.

6.2 The six-month Development Grant period culminated in an event on 18th May 2021, facilitated by Interlink RCT, attended by 82 individuals from organisations involved and interested in being part of Sustainable Food Places in RCT.

6.4 In moving forward, successful applications were submitted to Sustainable Food Places in October 2021 for Sustainable Food Places Membership and a contribution towards the salary costs for a Sustainable Food Coordinator, providing RCT access to a framework, peer support, funding and networks to develop Sustainable Food Places in RCT.

6.4 In November 2021, a Sustainable Food Coordinator was appointed, funded by Sustainable Food Places and the WLGA EU Transitional Fund; and thereafter, the UKG Shared Prosperity Fund.

6.5 The work is guided by an **RCT Food Steering Group**, which has a Terms of Reference and meets bimonthly.

6.6 The Steering Group includes seven core members representing RCTCBC, Interlink RCT, Bryncynon Strategy, FareShare Cymru, Cwm

Taf Morgannwg University Health Board Public Health Team, Grow Rhondda and Welcome to Our Woods.

- 6.7 Focus has been on increasing membership of the Sustainable Food Partnership, which currently includes 111 individuals across 98 organisations, and following input and suggestions from partners, the Sustainable Food Partnership in RCT has been named '**RCT Food**'.
- 6.8 RCT Food has two active sub-groups which meet quarterly to facilitate connections and collaborations between a broad range of food factors: the **Community Growers Sub-group** and the **Food Pantry Sub-group**.

7. **Sustainable Food Places: Impact and Outcomes**

- 7.1 The Sustainable Food Coordinator has been instrumental in ensuring that food-related projects have accessed grants support and advice, including grants secured from Trivallis, WLGA Direct Food Support, WLGA Sustainable Food Partnerships, Sustainable Food Places Coordinator Grant, and Sustainable Food Places Food for Planet (see Appendix B).
- 7.2 Of the projects funded by the Food Support Fund, a conservative minimum report of 3,215 individuals and 274 volunteers benefited from the 35 projects funded in 2022/23.
- 7.3 The 2022/23 Winter Hardship Fund's returned monitoring and evaluation forms from 50 organisations reported 2,824 adults supported and 617 children supported during the 1,309 sessions provided, with 2,980 individuals receiving a warm drink/snack; 1,816 receiving warm pack items; and 315 volunteers involved in delivery.
- 7.5 For the eight food-related projects funded by the UKG Shared Prosperity Fund during 2022/23, 1,322 improved engagement numbers were reported.
- 7.6 Across all the food related grants distributed in 2023/24 (UKG Shared Prosperity Fund Community Grant, UKG Shared Prosperity Fund Community Micro Food Grant, Food Support Fund, Winter Hardship Fund and direct support to foodbanks) it is expected that there will be a significant increase in beneficiaries once monitoring is received and verified.

- 7.7 Direct monetary support is also available for residents in need to purchase food through a £35 Blackhawk vouchers which can be redeemed as a gift card to be used at any major supermarket, and 198 vouchers have been supplied to residents in RCT during 2022-23 to access emergency food.
- 7.8 In RCT, the uptake of Healthy Start vouchers to provide support with nutritional intake amongst children and families on low incomes has increased from 56% in June 2022 to 78% as at December 2023 (the Wales average is 71%), and information provided to all community food support projects, with awareness campaigns run in low take-up areas such as Taf Ely.
- 7.9 Since May 2022, nine Community Growers and Pantry sub-group events have been held to inspire and engage the public about good food at various locations across the borough, including Meadow Street Community Garden, Cynon Valley Organic Adventures and Welcome to Our Woods.
- 7.10 A successful Community Asset Transfer was achieved with Welcome to Our Woods, who now have a lease agreement with the Council for land in Treherbert at which they plan to explore a community agroforestry project; a food hub was also launched in 2022 with funding the organisation secured from the Open Food Network.
- 7.11 With the Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB area recording the highest level of obesity in Wales, and RCT being the second highest, the RCT Food members have delivered events in partnership with the Public Health Team, such as Get Cooking and Nutrition Skills for Life Courses across RCT.
- 7.12 The Council has committed in its [Climate Change Strategy](#) to work “with local businesses to help them source more sustainable products locally and sell to local markets”, including agricultural businesses, and RCT Food, in conjunction with Cywain, has hosted three business breakfast events at Mallow Beverages with 9 businesses present during 2023.
- 7.13 The majority of our food suppliers used in the production of School and Community Meals for the Council are based in south Wales and RCT are working in collaboration with neighbouring local authorities, and is a member of the WLGA Food Group, to centrally look at procurement

routes to market that will benefit local Welsh supply chains and the foundational economy of Wales.

- 7.14 In Rhondda Cynon Taf food pantries and zero waste shops represent a bold step towards placing good food enterprise at the core of local economic development, offering sustainable shopping options and fostering a vibrant economic ecosystem that revolves around community needs and values, for example Down to Zeros vegetable boxes and Cynon Valley's Food Pantries Consortium's exploring their buying power to maximise the benefit to the local economy.

8. Achievement of Sustainable Food Places Bronze Award

- 8.1 The RCT Food partnership was awarded the Sustainable Food Places Bronze Award on 8th November 2023, the joint-third (alongside Carmarthenshire County Council) Welsh Local Authority to receive this award since the framework was initiated in 2015 (Cardiff 2014, Vale of Glamorgan 2021).
- 8.2 Cabinet office released a [statement](#) celebrating this success on 21st November 2023, and the RCT Food Partnership held a celebration event on 16th February 2024 at Bryncynon Community Revival Strategy.
- 8.3 Constructive feedback following achievement of the Sustainable Food Places Bronze Award included the need to continue and build upon success to date, with developing work with procurement, healthy eating initiatives, and proactively promoting and supporting local producers identified as areas for improvement.

9. Working towards Sustainable Food Places Silver Award

- 9.1 RCT Food Partnership's next development phase will concentrate effort towards achieving the Silver Award (Cardiff City Council is the only Silver award holder in Wales), with the intention to devise a strategy to support future developments longer term.
- 9.2 To achieve the Silver Award, a 3-year RCT strategy for Sustainable Food Places is required, which will be co-produced with RCT Food partners supported by the Council's Community Development Team.
- 9.3 In its development, the following will be actioned:
- A series of public participation events will also be delivered, such as Food Waste Action Week linked activities planned across the county hosted by network members;

- Engagement with Public Health Wales and Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB to create and deliver activities around a healthy sustainable diet and diet-related ill health across the county, including devising appropriate analysis to demonstrate positive social impact;
- Local sustainable food enterprises and private food businesses will be engaged in food sustainability discussions;
- Work with the Council's Procurement department to understand the current procurement policies regarding sustainability and short supply chains, and seek to inform and develop relevant new policies;
- Raise awareness of the detrimental effect of food waste and food supply chains on the environment and engage with key climate action stakeholders to ensure that food plays a central role in environmental conversations.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

10.1 There are no implications as a direct result of this report.

11. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

12. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

12.1 There are no consultation implications as a direct result of this report; however, it should be noted that developments to date and those in future, rely upon significant involvement from all key partners and agencies.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

13.1 The costs associated with this work can be met from the allocated grant funding from WLGA Direct Food Support and the UK Governments Shared Prosperity Fund. The funding for the Sustainable Food Co-ordinator post ceases in March 2025 placing developments at risk.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

14.1 There are no legal implications aligned to the recommendations in this report.

15. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

- 15.1 Sustainable Food Places has been included in the [RCT Climate Change Strategy: Think Climate](#), outlining a commitment to work to “foster a diverse and vibrant food economy”. The Council has also committed to work “with local businesses to help them source more sustainable products locally and sell to local markets.”
- 15.2 Sustainable Food Places specifically contributes to three of the four well-being objectives within the Council’s new Corporate Plan ‘Working With Our Communities’:

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES - *Supporting and empowering RCT residents and communities to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.*

- Sustainable Food Places increases access to healthy, affordable and sustainable food, and empowers residents with education and training, such as cooking skills and nutrition.

WORK AND BUSINESS - *Helping to strengthen and grow RCT’s economy.*

- Sustainable Food Places celebrates and advocates for local producers and sustainable food enterprises.

NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT - *A green and clean RCT that improves and protects RCT’s environment and nature.*

- Sustainable Food Places supports residents and communities to grow their own food and raises awareness of the current food system’s impact upon the climate.

- 15.3 Sustainable Food Places reflects the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, with sustainable management based on long-term considerations and focus on preventative and precautionary action, contributing specifically to the Resilience and Global Responsibility Goals of the Act.

16. CONCLUSION

- 16.1 As Sustainable Food Places continues to develop in RCT and moves towards Sustainable Food Places Silver and Gold awards, the Community Development Team will continue to work in meaningful partnership with support from the Council.
- 16.2 The partnership work to date has received the recognition of other local authorities across Wales, and those from further afield in the UK, as some partnerships fail to thrive due to a lack of understanding and support from Councils.

16.3 The Sustainable Food Places programme is funded until 31st March 2025, with considerations being discussed to secure its future beyond this date.