

Title of Report:	Use of Local Resources – Local Food
Report to be considered by:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Meeting:	2 November 2010
Forward Plan Ref:	N/A

Purpose of Report: For the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to consider the recommendations of the Greener Select Commission review into promoting local food.

Recommended Action: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission recommends the finding of the review into local food be considered by West Berkshire Council's Executive.

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Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Greener Select Committee on 8 December 2009 it was resolved that the Committee would start its review of the use of local resources and that they would initially be concentrating on the use of local food.
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission agreed the terms of reference for this review at its meeting on 1st December 2009. It was proposed that the Committee would examine the work being proposed by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in promoting the use of local food.
- 1.3 The Greener Select Committee agreed to conduct the review initially looking at:
- Identifying the work being undertaken by the LSP;
 - Identifying the LSP performance measures and assess meeting these targets;
 - Understanding the barriers to meeting the LSP targets;
 - To look at ways of overcoming barriers to performance; and
 - Report to the Portfolio Holder and the West Berkshire Partnership with recommendations how West Berkshire Council can encourage the use of local resources.
- 1.4 The review would be undertaken during 2010 with evidence being presented to the Greener Select Committee with draft findings being presented at the Select Committee on 14 December 2010 prior to being considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.

2. West Berkshire Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) Greener Sub-Partnership

- 2.1 The Committee considered a presentation concerning the work of the West Berkshire Partnership's Greener Partnership in relation to their work promoting local food.
- 2.2 Kelvin Hughes, Chief Executive Newbury Community Resource Centre, informed Members that the West Berkshire Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) Greener Sub-Partnership had been tasked within The Sustainable Community Strategy ([A Breath of Fresh Air](#)) with a priority outcome to have five percent of all the food consumed within West Berkshire grown within the district.
- 2.3 In order to reach the five percent target by 2026 the current levels of production and consumption needed to be established. The methodology for establishing this baseline figure needed to be replicated in future years without costly specialist input.
- 2.4 In order to meet the LSP target four actions had been established; secure funding from the National Lottery, establish the baseline figure, enlist the support of three organisations as local 'champions' and deliver a publicity campaign to promote the

purchase of local produce. Funding had been secured for the last two objectives; however this could not be used for establishing the baseline figure.

2.5 Reading University were able to undertake this piece of work at a cost of £10,000. £2,500 towards the cost had been secured; however the remaining £7,500 had not been found.

2.6 Recommend that the Council's Corporate Director for Environment secure funding to enable the LSP's Greener sub-partnership establish current level of local food consumption as long as an affordable methodology is in place to undertake future surveys.

2.7 Following the above recommendation made by the Greener Select Committee further work was undertaken with the LSP Greener Sub-Committee, it was recommended that the cost of the base survey be scaled back to a more affordable option. The funding has since been secured from West Berkshire Council and the Atomic Weapons Establishment.

3. The Organic Research Centre

3.1 The Committee considered evidence from Nic Lampkin, Executive Director Organic Research Centre (Elm Farm) and Lawrence Woodward, Co-Director Organic Research Centre (Elm Farm).

3.2 The Organic Research Centre's, aim was to develop and support sustainable land-use, agriculture and food systems, primarily within local economies, which build on organic principles to ensure the health and well-being of soil, plants, animals, people and the environment.

3.3 The Organic Research Centre was established as a "Centre of Excellence" to address the major issues raised by a global economy based on an intensive agricultural system.

3.4 It was the UK's leading research, development and advisory institution for organic agriculture, having played a pivotal role in the development of organic research, policy and standards since 1980.

3.5 The Committee were informed that the Organic Research Centre supported the views raised by Kelvin Hughes regarding the work being undertaken by the Local Strategic Partnership's Greener Sub-Partnership.

3.6 Members were informed that local production was important to assist local economic development by targeting spend on local communities, to help reduce energy used and greenhouse gas emitted by reducing food miles and improving food quality through improved freshness.

3.7 It was felt that people needed to question what quality standards were guaranteed, how energy or carbon efficient the production and transport of the food was, did buying from a local business ensure local production and was local trade necessarily fair and ethical?

3.8 To make sure local production did make a real contribution to sustainability local food should meet environmental standards, meet food quality standards, meet animal welfare standards and be aware of social standards such as Fair Trade.

- 3.9 The sustainable benefit of organic food was recognised across Europe and by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The benefits included reduced energy consumption, increased biodiversity, reduced pollution, high animal welfare standards, increased evidence of food quality benefits and positive social impacts such as increased employment.
- 3.10 Recommended that Council via its Corporate Director for Environment voice its support to national initiatives for clear food labelling and standards.
- 3.11 With regards to organic food the committee were informed that organic farms aimed to improve the quality and sustainability of food production that operated to standards that addressed environmental and animal welfare issues. As the term 'organic food' was legally defined and regulated its standards should be more reliable than food labelled as local without any quality assurance.
- 3.12 The committee were also informed that organic food need not be significantly more expensive and the additional costs were usually associated with supermarkets artificially increasing the cost. It was important to challenge the myth that healthy eating has to cost more.
- 3.13 Recommended that the Council via its Corporate Director for Environment works with the Local Strategic Partnership in the promotion of the benefits of locally produced food and promote healthy eating on low incomes.
- 3.14 Members were informed that the Organic Research Centre could help by providing advice on local food issues, advice on standards and regulations, support school education activities and be an active partner with the Local Strategic Partnership. The research centre had also recently opened its conference centre and was keen to work on joint initiatives with the Nature Discovery Centre.
- 3.15 Recommended that the Council via its Corporate Director for Environment works with the Local Strategic Partnership's Greener Sub-Committee, the Nature Discovery Centre and the Organic Research Centre to ascertain what joint initiatives could be undertaken to promote, educate and encourage a greater use of local food and healthy eating.

4. Local Food Groups and Farmers Markets

- 4.1 Tamara Schiopu attended the meeting to inform the work of the Local Food Group and to answer any questions pertinent to the committees review.
- 4.2 The committee were informed that the term 'local' could be very wide or narrow in its definition. As the Local Food Group covered three counties they classed local food as food produced in these counties, they did not wish to introduce barriers to collective working.
- 4.3 Members were informed that there used to be three separate food groups, in 2004 they were merged with the aid of funding from the South East England Development Agency.
- 4.4 This funding ceased on 31 March 2010 and the group were looking for additional support. Since the group were created they had become a support network for local producers and worked at introducing local suppliers to local businesses.

- 4.5 'Meet the buyer' events were held and they also published Local Flavours that promoted locally produced food and drink. If funding could be found they would like to introduce local food walks and a food and drink trade show in West Berkshire.
- 4.6 Recommended that the Council's Economic Development Officer liaise with the Berkshire Food Group to ascertain what funding streams may be available to support the food group and how the Council may be able to promote the organisations work.
- 4.7 Alexander Farrow, Thames Valley Market Co-Operative, informed the committee that the co-operative were a 'not-for-profit' organisation that promoted fresh, seasonal, local food.
- 4.8 Most produce for the Newbury Farmers Market were produced within 30 miles, however they had to be flexible, for example the fish came from Southsea. The idea was to be more local rather than totally local. Farmers markets could be useful as local food hubs and local restaurants have been asked to cook at local markets.
- 4.9 As markets were not always weekly it was difficult to get people to visit them as part of their shopping routine. The Council could help farmers markets by improving signage to make people aware when they were in town.
- 4.10 Recommended that the Council's Head of Highways and Transport and Head of Cultural Services consult with Newbury's Chartered Market and the Farmers Market to discuss possible improvements to road signage advertising the markets and promoting local markets via 'Visit Newbury'.

5. Procurement of Local Food

- 5.1 Leigh Hogan, Team Leader, Legal and Electoral Services and Mike Sullivan, Contracts and Procurement Officer, gave evidence on the Council's procurement process.
- 5.2 Members were informed that under the Council's Contract Rules of Procedure and The Public Contracts Regulations 2006, the authority was not allowed to discriminate when awarding contracts. This meant that they could not offer a contract to a supplier on the grounds of their locality.
- 5.3 The Council did not procure food directly; however there were contracts to supply meals to schools and Council owned care homes. When setting these contracts the authority was able to insert a clause that the contractor would explore the use of local businesses. This was not always possible as consideration to the producers' ability to produce the right quality and quantity was more important than locality.
- 5.4 The Committee felt that although the Council did not procure food directly it was important to encourage contractors to look at using local produce as sustainable food helped:
- Promote good health.
 - Improve access to healthy food.
 - Helps support the local economy.
 - Promotes eating food in season.

- Encourage sustainable farming, involving high environmental standards and reduced energy consumption (food miles).

5.5 Recommended that the Council via the Head of Legal and Electoral Services support sustainable food production provide nutritionally balanced meals in schools, workplace and community facilities by introducing a Sustainable Procurement Impact Assessment integrated within the procurement process, that considered locality as part of this process.

6. Allotments

6.1 Representatives from Newbury Town Council attended the Greener Select Committee to provide information on Newbury Town Council's work in supporting local allotments.

6.2 The Select Committee were informed that Newbury Town Council were undertaking a project called Sustainable Newbury that contained projects looking at local food production. The Town Council was also responsible for managing a number of allotments.

6.3 The Town Council had produced an allotment strategy and were committed to promoting healthy living through the development and management of six allotment sites in Newbury.

6.4 The Greener Select Committee were informed that not all surrounding parish councils provided allotments and they felt it would be helpful if West Berkshire District Council could provide guidance on how parish / town councils could establish allotments.

6.5 Recommended that the Council's Corporate Director for Environment publish, on its website, information to help parish / town councils establish allotments.

6.6 Recommended that a 'Meet the Expert' event be organised by the Head of Policy and Communication to provide information for parish / town councillors on establishing and running allotments.

Appendices

There are no Appendices to this report.