

London Food Link's response to the Mayors Health Inequalities Strategy Consultation



About London Food Link

This response is from London Food Link, part of the charity Sustain. London Food Link is *the voice for good food in London* and has worked in the capital for over 12 years on strengthening the understanding of the role that good food can play in strengthening communities and economy as well as ensuring people understand the impact of the food system on the environment. Amongst our influential projects and campaigns are:

- **Good Food for London:** Our annual report in its sixth year compares local authority commitments to good food measures, including Fairtrade status and Living Wage and ranks them in a league table.
- **Beyond the Food Bank:** Our annual report in its third year compares local authority commitments to tackling food poverty.
- **Capital Growth:** London's food growing network, with over 2000 community gardens, engaging over 200,000 people.
- **Children's Food Campaign:** Has spearheaded the work on a Sugary Drinks Levy, Junk Food Marketing restrictions and getting junk food off the checkouts of 50% of supermarket outlets
- **Food Power:** working to alleviate food poverty by calling on Governments across the four nations to tackle the root causes such as low pay, as well as to improve and protect publicly-funded nutrition programmes. We are launching a related programme to support local food poverty alliances across the UK including in London.
- **SUGAR SMART:** A campaign of Sustain and the Jamie Oliver Food Foundation encouraging local authorities, organisations, workplaces and individuals to reduce the amount of sugar we all consume.

Our response

Sustain is pleased that the Mayor has created a "Health Inequalities Strategy" and is taking active steps to address the main issues that lead to inequalities in the health of different groups of Londoners. We support the inclusion of certain key factors that influence access to healthy, affordable food such as early years, breastfeeding and the availability of healthy food choices low in fat and sugar. However we believe the strategy needs to contain more detailed action on the following:

1. *Tackle holiday hunger* as part of securing children's access to food 365 days a year. The Mayor has a real opportunity to improve people's lives with a coordinated plan for weaving good food into holiday food provision.
2. *Focus on secondary schools* Whilst much has been done to improve school food, it has focused largely on primary, and a new approach targeting teenagers, championed by the Mayor could really improve childhood obesity.
3. *Improve Meals on Wheels and food for older people* The Mayor's leadership could rally this neglected sector to make more efficient use of local council budgets and relieve the burden of malnutrition and social isolation on the NHS, with better coordination and collaboration between London boroughs.

4. *Promote levies on the price of junk food/junk food marketing.* The proceeds of this could be redistributed to promote alternative healthy choices. This could build on the City Hall café being the first Government building to sign up to the voluntary Sugary Drinks Tax (raising money for the Children’s Health Fund). This could be more widely promoted, with similar levies explored on junk food advertising on GLA family/TFL property.
5. *Ensure the planning system is prioritising good food* London could lead the world in restricting junk food outlets/promotion, and ensuring that new developments embed the alternatives e.g. community food growing, water refill/fountains, healthy food retail.
6. *Ensure widespread access to tap water in public places* Through community crowdfunding, corporate partnerships, and levies above, a new wave of water fountains/refill points could sweep the capital, providing an environmentally friendly alternative to sugary drinks – the largest contributor of sugar in children’s diets.
7. *Join/promote the SUGAR SMART campaign* to reduce sugar in organisations and businesses with a London-wide presence and reach out to more Londoners about the dangers of too much sugar.

Below we highlight the key areas where food can play a vital part in reducing health inequalities.

Contents

Healthy Children	2
Healthy Places.....	4
Healthy Communities	5
Healthy Habits.....	6

Healthy Children

Is there more that the Mayor should do to reduce health inequalities for children and young people?

London Food Link is pleased that the Mayor has included some very important factors that can reduce health inequalities amongst children such as free school meals, breastfeeding, and early years. However we believe the section on healthy children needs more mention of food poverty.

Food poverty has many interlinked causes and cuts across a number of policy areas including health inequalities. Low pay, inadequate welfare support or long term illness, combined with high housing and travel costs can condemn families to chronic hunger, poor nutrition and anxiety. To combat this we recommend that the Mayor include these specific food poverty reduction measures in his strategy.

- 1) Encourage councils to engage with existing food and nutrition programmes that focus on reducing food poverty such as:
 - a) *Holiday hunger and securing children’s access to food 365 days a year:* School meals are a critical safety net for low-income children. Free school meals help tackle child hunger and boost attainment, especially for the poorest children. This is especially so for children who go hungry during the holidays because they are unable to get a balanced diet due to squeezes on their families budget. To tackle this, the Mayor

should not only champion efforts to give children 365 days a year access to food but tackle the stigmatisation and social exclusion that discourages parents from registering their eligible children for free school meals.

- b) *Increasing the uptake of Healthy Start:* Healthy Start aims to provide a nutritional safety net and to encourage healthy food choices. Yet in 2017 its take up rate ranged between 56% to 75% across 30 of London's boroughs, meaning that over 22,000 households were missing out on Healthy Start Vouchers. The Mayor should ensure that local authorities, who are best placed to increase uptake, have the resources to recruit a designated Healthy Start Coordinator and create an integrated programme of activities to reach a minimum local uptake of 80%.
 - c) *Improving the quality of school food.* Whilst much has been done to improve the healthiness and quality of school food nationally, with initiatives such as the school food plan, there is still much room for improvement. More can be done to educate children about good food and a healthy diet at primary school – through growing and cooking as well as weaving it into other elements of the curriculum. The challenge is greater for secondary schools, where many academies do not have to meet the school food standards, and many other schools have made little attempt to ensure their children have a healthy diet – either through the food served on or off-site.
- 2) The Mayor should ensure every borough has a food poverty action plan. This plan will bring together statutory and non-statutory partners to develop a coordinated and sustainable response to food poverty and its underlying drivers

How can you help to reduce health inequalities among children and young people?

Sustain, through our London Food Poverty Campaign, works with local councils to build their capacity to address food poverty. We can help local councils and the organisations that GLA has awarded contracts to engage with existing policies aimed at tackling food inequalities and improve their performance on them.

We champion local policies and initiatives and measure these through the annual Good Food for London and Beyond the Food Bank (see below) reports that track London Borough progress on key actions to improve health and sustainability through food, and household food insecurity, through mechanisms under local authority control.

What should be our measures of success and level of ambition for giving London's children a healthy start to life?

The ability to obtain healthy affordable food is one of the most crucial ways to ensure that children have a healthy start. Due to lack of physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life children often have to skip or skimp on meals, often choosing less healthy options because they contain more calories. This can result in episodes of hunger, chronic poor nutrition and low educational attainment. Therefore ensuring sufficient or secure access to food should form a part central part of the Mayor's overall ambition to give London's children a healthy start to life.

The GLA can measure success by monitoring how well councils are doing to improve food poverty across all of the existing national policies and initiatives that have been put in place to address food poverty. For example, since 2015, Sustain has released a yearly report called Beyond the Food Bank which tracks what London councils are doing to improve household food insecurity. It does so

by looking at 10 key areas within the influence and responsibility of local authorities to help those in food poverty. The measures most relevant to children include:

1. Have a comprehensive plan to reduce food poverty
2. Have a designated Healthy Start coordinator and an integrated programme of activities to reach a minimum local uptake for 80%.
3. Boost breastfeeding by working towards full Unicef UK Baby Friendly accreditation.
4. Harness the value of children's centres, using them to deliver concrete actions to tackle food poverty.
5. Work with partners to tackle holiday hunger among children by ensuring children have access to food 365 days a year.
6. Lead on activities to improve physical access to good food by working with planners, retailers and caterers.

Please see our [Beyond the Food Bank](#) reports for more information on what this measurement could look like.

Healthy Places

Is there more that the Mayor should do to make London's society, environment and economy better for health and reduce health inequalities?

Purchasing and eating behaviour is influenced by the food around us. Large portions of foods high in calories, salt, fat and sugar are cheap and too widely available, leading to Londoners developing unhealthy habits. The Great Weight Debate and GLA YouGov polls show Londoners want the Mayor and partners to act.

We believe the following actions should be considered as ways to achieve this:

- Create stronger and coordinated measures to control proximity of unhealthy hot food takeaways close to premises used by young people. Work with local businesses to improve their food offer.
- Ensure that procurement and purchasing across the GLA family support healthy and sustainable food and farming
- Help communities by ensuring access to diverse food retail within walking distance
- Support current and future initiatives such as the Healthier Catering Commitment to help fast food outlets wanting to make their food healthier and the Local Authority Declaration on Sugar Reduction and Healthier Food need London-wide leadership to ensure implementation.

Other ideas include:

- Improve access to community food growing as referenced in Environment Strategy
- Improve access to quality green spaces including flagship scheme e.g. food growing in every park
- Use the London plan to help communities that are trying to tackle the above
- Improve access to affordable healthier food in all neighbourhoods especially focus for schemes that operate in areas of poor health/ deprivation and restrict access to unhealthy/junk food

- Improve collaboration with social enterprises that are mission driven to provide access to healthy and sustainable food

How can you help to reduce inequalities in the environmental, social and economic causes of ill health?

We champion local policies and initiatives and measure these through the annual Good Food for London and Beyond the Foodbank reports that track London Borough progress on key actions to improve health and sustainability through food, and household food insecurity, through mechanisms under local authority control.

What should be our measures of success and level of ambition for creating a healthy environment, society and economy?

Improved access to healthy food outlets and green spaces. Every household should be within 500m of healthy affordable food (the opposite of which is considered to be a food desert).

Healthy Communities

Is there more that the Mayor should do to help London's diverse communities become healthy and thriving?

Sustain supports the mayor's vision for a city in which the places that people live and the social networks they build do not unfairly reduce life expectancy or quality of life. However we believe that a city where everyone has access to healthy affordable food regardless of where they live plays an important part of increasing life expectancy. Specific recommendations include:

- Ensuring all residents have physical access to good food. One of the objectives listed on page 87 should focus on measures to protect and encourage provision and diversity of food retail outlets ensuring that all have access to affordable healthy food as part of healthy street approach and limiting access to junk food. Many Londoners struggle to find affordable, healthy food near where they live. Reasonable physical access to healthy food outlets is a distance of 500 metres or less -a walking time of approximately ten minutes for the average person. Councils will need to engage staff in planning, regeneration, environmental health and public health to ensure that all Londoners have access to healthy, affordable food. Local authorities can also encourage and support outlets and stalls that provide the low-cost provision of fruit and vegetables and other healthy foods, helping low-income citizens have access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables within easy walking distance of where they live.
- This could include supporting and promoting community food initiatives that provide opportunities for people – especially those on lower incomes - to participate in their community, celebrate the capital's food cultures, access healthy food and support empowerment.

- 1) More should also be done to address poor nutrition in older people who live in boroughs where pressure on budgets has led to cuts in valuable services such as meals on wheels.

How can you help to support thriving communities?

We run the Capital Growth network of food growing gardens and support communities to start and grow their food growing initiatives.

We also champion local policies and initiatives and measure these through the annual Good Food for London and Beyond the Foodbank reports that track London Borough progress on key actions to improve health and sustainability through food, and household food insecurity, through mechanisms under local authority control.

What should be our measures of success and level of ambition for creating healthy and thriving communities?

Healthy Habits

Is there more that the Mayor should do to help to reduce health inequalities as well as improve overall health in work to support Londoners' healthy lives and habits?

The Local Government Declaration on Sugar Reduction and Healthier Food, launched in 2016 with the involvement and support of the GLA, food groups and public health experts, provides a useful framework of action that can contribute to support Londoner's healthier lives and habits. The aim of the declaration is to achieve a public commitment to improve the availability of healthier food and to reduce the availability and promotion of unhealthier alternatives. It should be endorsed by the elected leaders and relevant senior officers such as directors of public health. At the moment 6 local authorities in London have signed the declaration and 10 more are making progress towards signing it.

The Mayor should use this framework to make an inventory of all measures under the direct control or influence of the GLA team to address the following 6 areas:

1 – Tackle advertising and sponsorship, for example:

- Restrict advertising of sugary drinks and food high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) in the tube network and other spaces controlled by the GLA. This could be done by linking it to nutrient profiling modelling which is already used to restrict junk food advertising to children. Alternatively rather than restrict the advertising, a levy could be put in place on these adverts, with money raised going to support initiatives that promote alternatives.
- Restrict sponsorship to GLA programmes and projects from sugary drinks companies, manufacturers of foods HFSS and fast food companies.

2 – Improve the food controlled or influenced by the GLA, for example:

The GLA has humane and sustainable food at the heart of its catering standards for London's City Hall, police, fire brigade and transport services. More could be done to reduce the carbon footprint (less, better meat and more veg) and reduce sugar in food and drinks.

3 – Reduce prominence of sugary drinks and promote free drinking water, for example:

- Get water refill stations on tube stations and other major transport hubs.
- Put in place voluntary sugary drinks levy and raise funds for children's health promotion e.g. City Hall café has already signed up to the Children's Health Fund, but other caterers in the GLA family could come on board.

4 – Support businesses and organisations to improve their food offer:

- Planning policies in the new London Plan should limit the development of new hot food takeaways not just around schools but also in town centers and near other places where young people congregate.

5 – Public events, for example:

- Ensure that the majority of food and drink provided at public events organised by the GLA are healthy
- Ensure that the majority of food and drink provided at public events on GLA premises and property are healthy choices.

6 – Raise public awareness and encourage action in other settings, for example:

- Support nationally recognized campaigns to achieve impact in organisations and businesses with a London-wide presence and reach out to more Londoners encouraging them to make healthier choices.

SUGAR SMART

SUGAR SMART is a campaign supported by Sustain and the Jamie Oliver Food Foundation encouraging local authorities, organisations such as sports clubs, workplaces and individuals to reduce the amount of sugar we all consume. There are nearly 40 cities registered to run campaigns and over 400 organisations involved in reducing sugar, from schools to sports clubs, restaurants, hospitals and workplaces. In London, the boroughs of Lewisham, Greenwich and Bexley started Sugar Smart campaigns and many more are interested.

SUGAR SMART provides a fantastic framework and resources to involve 10 sectors that can have a huge impact in helping Londoners to develop healthy food and drink habits. A Sugar Smart London campaign would facilitate the involvement of organisations that have a London-wide presence, for example Thames Water, leisure centers, sports clubs, restaurant chains, etc. with a strong presence in London.

Veg Cities

Cities are being invited to consider becoming Veg Cities as part of the Peas Please initiative. Peas Please brings together retailers, farmers, fast food and restaurant chains, caterers, processors and government departments with a common goal of making it easier for everyone to eat veg.

Veg cities are those where the city or local authority, in partnership with the private sector and community organisations use their powers to drive up vegetable consumption.

Veg Cities will become the feature campaign of the Sustainable Food Cities network from mid-2018.

What can you do to help all Londoners to develop healthy habits? What is preventing you from doing more and what would help you?

What should be our measures of success and level of ambition for helping more Londoners to develop healthy habits?