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SUSTAINABLE FOOD places

Remaking Local Food Systems

Progress and prospects for UK local food partnerships

Sustainable Food Places Evaluation Report

NOVEMBER 2023

Mat Jones and Sarah Hills

Contents

Report Summary

Through the 'power of partnerships' the **Sustainable Food Places** programme aims to 'make healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where people live'[1]. Sustainable Food Places (SFP) is led by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain. It is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and The National Lottery Community Fund. SFP was founded to support local action on major challenges ranging from diet-related ill health, obesity, food insecurity, food waste, and environmental degradation. SFP supports **local food partnerships** to harness the diverse energies of their public agencies, voluntary sector organisations, businesses, and citizens for a joined-up approach on food issues.

In a policy context where food problems and opportunities are often siloed or overlooked, SFP champions the need for a system-wide, coordinated, and long-term strategy. With moves in this direction now taking place across the UK[2], SFP and local partnerships intend to show how action on food can support goals for local economic resilience, sustainable development, community cohesion and citizen participation.

Currently, the SFP Network membership is made up of 95 local food partnerships, with over 20 areas seeking to join. In Phase 3 of the programme (2019–24) SFP is offering partnerships a wide spectrum of support. Over 50 places have benefited from a total of £1.5 million to fund the core work of food partnership coordinators. Alongside a £0.5 million specialist grants scheme, SFP provides a framework and toolkits for action, an award scheme, networking and peer-to-peer support, evidence to support the case for funding, and advocacy in policy arenas.

Through an additional £2 million in matched local funding, local food partnerships have become increasingly well established in the UK. However, in a context of stretched resources, many challenges remain to make cross-sector coordinated action on food issues an established feature in all local authority areas.

This report builds on research with 75 local food partnerships. It provides the most extensive picture to date of local food partnerships (LFPs) in terms of their activities, impacts, organisation, additional funding, and priorities.

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1 See Sustainable Food Places https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/about/what-are-sustainable-food-places/

2 Through actions of the Scottish and Welsh governments since 2022.

Key findings

- Local food partnerships are now widespread across the UK, present in all types of local authority areas, and with strongest representation in areas with high multiple deprivation.

- Local food partnerships are relatively new and diverse entities. Nevertheless, the most established partnerships have rapidly consolidated their core membership, strategic priorities, and local membership networks – averaging at over 1000 people per place.

- Local food partnerships reported on the level of support they obtained from 34 different types of stakeholders. Public Health stands out, with 82% of partnerships reporting strong / quite strong support from these teams, alongside quite strong support from community development, voluntary sector, environmental, and higher education agencies. A minority of partnerships report strong / quite support from farming and large food retailer sectors (25% and 13% respectively).

- Local food partnerships leverage a wide range of funding and in-kind support. On top of SFP funding, 75 local food partnerships raised an average of £94,000 per area to support their core work between January 22 and July 2023.

- Of the SFP six key food system change issues, in the last year local food partnerships report the strongest progress on 'Governance and Strategy'. With notable exceptions, action on 'Catering and Procurement' and 'Sustainable Food Economy' represented more challenging areas for progress in 2022–23.

- Alongside the SFP 'Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) for Change' initiative, local food partnerships show an appetite to make EDI principles central to all their work. In the last year, partnerships reported either 'some' (59%) or a great deal (8) on REDI related issues.

- Scottish and Welsh government support is accelerating the formation of new local food partnerships. In these nations established partnerships report a virtuous cycle with increased local stakeholder confidence, a firmer financial footing, and growing scope for action.

- In response to the rise in the cost of living food partnerships have taken concerted action on an urgent and pressing situation. Most led in strategic efforts such as coordinating and developing cross-agency action (72%), developing strategies and action plans (64%), and advising local agencies (53%).

- Food partnerships are driving the transition from mainstream food poverty approaches such as food banks to long-term and empowering models. Signifying the increased standing of local food partnerships, one third of partnerships had advised agencies at regional and national level about the cost of living response.

- With the completion of Phase 3 of the SFP at the end of 2024, financial sustainability is a concern for many local food partnerships. Almost half (44%) are already confident of local funding, but 86% of respondents stated that future viability would also need national / UK funding.

Local food partnerships taking part in this study

This report is based on a survey of the largest number of UK local food partnerships to date. The survey was carried out between June to August 2023 and was conducted as part of the ongoing evaluation of Phase 3 of the Sustainable Food Places programme. A total of 75 out of 95 active SFP local food partnerships completed the survey. Respondents represented partnerships from all phases of the programme including the original members of the Sustainable Food Places (formerly Sustainable Food Cities) network and those who had become members in the sixth months prior to the survey. Survey respondents comprised a representative mix of UK regions, rural and urban locations and local authority types. The 75 local food partnerships represent areas with a total population of over 24 million people.

Organisation and delivery of local food partnerships

"There is a great demand from all sectors to becoming involved in a sustainable food movement."

[67 – Wales Rural Partnership]

"People are desperately wanting change; they want to be involved with the partnership and they want their opinion to be heard."

[52 – London Borough Partnership]

Since 2019 membership of the SFP network has grown from 50 to 95 members[3]. By the summer of 2023, 26 areas were seeking to join the network. To date 50 places have achieved an SFP Award. Growth is fastest in Scotland and Wales, where government policies are conducive to the

creation of local authority level food partnerships. While there is very diverse spread of locations, local food partnerships are more likely to be formed in local authority areas with high multiple deprivation.

For most areas in the UK, local food partnerships represent a new way of working. Diversity in their ways of working make every partnership a unique social experiment for tackling place-based food system challenges. Nevertheless, through peer-to-peer learning and SFP support, many partnerships have rapidly consolidated how they operate as organisations. The survey found that, in a typical format, a full time Coordinator and Chair works with a Steering Group with ten members who represent a range of public, private and third sector agencies and lay membership. This core partnership engages around 25 delivery organisations and, through email lists and social media, operates a network with at least 1000 members in their locality.

Stakeholder support for local food partnerships

"There is a wealth of knowledge in the voluntary and community services in [our Borough] that has been so helpful to tap into and learn from."

[52 – London Borough Partnership]

The survey results profile how local food partnerships are building relationships with and gaining support from 34 different types of stakeholder groups.

For most local food partnerships, support from within local government is a mixed picture. Whilst almost half of respondents reported high levels of support from senior leaders in their local authority, levels of support vary across local authority departments.

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3 Based upon active members in December 2019 and in October 2023.

Public Health – as well as Community Development and Sustainability – feature as the sections of local government that provide the strongest level of support (86% 'quite strong' or 'strong' support). More established partnerships tend to report support across a wider range of departments in their local authority. Those with longer term links also show that support can fluctuate over time.

Support from some key local authority teams such as Planning, Waste and Recycling, Procurement and Environmental Health is relatively low across the sample.

Most local food partnerships are closely linked to the work of a range of third sector organisations. Nearly half receive high levels of support from agencies responsible for local coordination of the third sector, but this relationship is strongest in Wales and urban unitary authorities elsewhere. Local food partnerships are struggling to engage stakeholders from food retail and catering businesses.

Some places are drawing upon a very wide network, particularly from third sector organisations. Many are developing new or diverse connections, for example with cultural and sports institutions such as art galleries and football clubs.

Established partnerships had clear channels for seeking representation and support through their working groups, and other groups relevant to the partnership. This implies that food issues are more likely to feature in wider decision-making situations outside the immediate work of the partnership.

Figure i: Map of Local Food Partnerships currently members of the Sustainable Food Places Network. October 2023.

Some partnerships reported a strong appetite for change among stakeholders. Reflecting the more committed statutory support in Wales, Scotland and London, the examples of positive stakeholder engagement were more abundant from these regions.

Key strategies for engaging stakeholders and influencing local decision-making included seeking out the most influential organisations, joining leading local networks, and bringing stakeholders together around a shared initiative such as the development of a food strategy.

Many partnerships report ongoing challenges in communicating the value and legitimacy of food systems work. The lack of a local statutory framework and long-term under-funding of the public sector were cited as key contributing factors.

Resourcing and additional funding for local food partnerships

"The SFP programme has been extremely effective at developing the skills and knowledge of the coordinator. We would not have been able to do this amazing work without the support, funding and role models heading the SFP programme, and the peer support of other food partnerships."
[86 – Eastern England

"The support material, news, updates, research and kudos of the SFP network and associated partners; it's all has added weight and authority to my ability as a co-ordinator to make the case for change."
[7 – England West Midlands Rural Partnership]

As set out in the introduction, in Phase 3 SFP has provided funding for 50 places to support funding to support the core role of the coordinator.

SFP also provide grant funds for specific packages of work. In most cases this arrangement is met with match funded through local authority sources.

In addition to SFP funding and local match funds, most partnerships have made successful applications to other funding bodies sources. In total, 75 food partnerships (or constituent partners) raised nearly £8.7 million additional income for Jan22–Jul23 from sources external to the programme. Almost half of the total funding secured was for large awards to three partnerships. The levels of funding achieved by the remaining partnerships ranged from £500–£1.7milllon. The average total funding per partnership was over £94,000 for Jan22–Jul23. Almost a quarter of partnerships had received in kind support to help resource core partnership functions.

The public sector was by far the largest source of funding, followed by third sector funders such as the National Lottery. Whilst partnerships report that Public Health departments are one of their strongest stakeholders, this is not directly reflected in the funding mix with Public Health and the NHS combined representing 5% of successful funding applications between January 2022 and August 2023.

Food security and healthy food, farming, growing and food hubs, biodiversity and climate change together with core partnership functions were the most highly funded areas of work since January 2022.

The staff position for work at the heart of partnerships has been broadly stable. The core staffing of partnerships has either stayed the same (46%) or increased (38%) in the last year. For 17% staff levels have decreased.

In total, 44% of survey respondents were either extremely confident or somewhat confident that their partnership would obtain local funding for core work after 2024. However, 29% were somewhat or extremely unconfident that this would be the case.

After 2024 the clear majority (86%) of respondents thought that their partnership was either highly dependent or somewhat dependent on national / UK sources of funding.

Progress and priorities for local food partnerships

"Peer support from other Food Partnerships has enabled us to make strong, informed and inspiring cases with stakeholders on what is possible."

[86 – East of England Rural Partnership]

Partnerships were asked to reflect on their progress over the past year against the six SFP Key Issues. 'Governance and Strategy' stand out as areas where partnerships are moving forward. Progress on 'Good Food Movement' and 'Healthy Food for All' often move forward in tandem – and there clearly exists synergy between these two issues.

Action on 'Catering and Procurement', and 'Sustainable Food Economy' appear to be more challenging than actions on other issues. Nevertheless, wider programme records indicate that many food partnerships are leading work in areas such as dynamic procurement pilots, good food trails and food hubs to connect consumers with local farmers and producers and farmer engagement in rural areas.

The focus on influencing local food governance and strategy was reflected in multiple parts of the survey responses. This was evident in the number of partnerships influencing higher strategic and planning processes, as well as in the range and diversity of examples provided of changes to local policy making in the last year. Partnerships report fresh momentum through SFP's role in the transfer of expertise between partnerships and across stakeholder communities. This included the exchange of solutions on how to influence decision-makers, run campaigns and deliver projects.

Devolved governments in Scotland and Wales have actively supported partnerships to have a more established place in local policy making. While the environment is less supportive in England and Northern Ireland, some partnerships have their work firmly embedded in the long-term strategic plans of their localities.

With respect to priorities for the year ahead, partnerships have set out ambitious and broad-ranging goals in relation to the integration of sustainable food into key areas of local policy, and their visible role on specific issues such as food security, children and schools, farming and growing, community growing, food waste, retail and catering and procurement. This may reflect the result of making a successful case for joined up actions. Alongside these aspirations, partnerships also emphasise work to strengthen their representativeness and financial sustainability.

Action on race, equity, diversity and inclusion (REDI) issues

"[Getting an Award] has given us more significant inclusion in local food and climate related discussion, strategies, and initiatives... It has enabled funding to ensure the survival of the network for 3 years."

[SFP 2022 Member Consultation]

"[One of our key successes has been] increasing the dynamic mix of individuals at any one time in the room to ensure lived experience is sharing the floor with subject matter experts."

[17 – West Midlands England Urban Partnership]

"We have found that the topic of food has a lot of scope for bringing in different voices."

[58 – North West London Urban Partnership]

Building upon the Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) for Change work of SFP, there continue to be questions of how partnerships better reflect the diversity of the communities they work with. While progress on REDI across the SFP network has been mixed, partnerships report either some (59%) or a great deal (8%) of progress.

Partnership responses tended to mirror the SFP programme and toolkit's focus on addressing racialisation and racism. Some of the Welsh partnerships and those in rural areas gave a wider interpretation that reflected related aspects of cultural and linguistic diversity.

In Phase 3, the SFP programme awarded a REDI pilot grant to three partnerships with an aim to test out the SFP REDI toolkit and to embed REDI principles into food partnerships. These partnerships, and several other areas, adopted a range of approaches and fed their learning back to the wider UK network.

Time and resources were the most frequently mentioned barriers to making meaningful and sustained progress on REDI. Those in rural areas cited geographic dispersal as a barrier to accessing and forging strong links with strong links with different communities. A minority perceived REDI to be a low priority.

There are opportunities to develop more work on representation and recognition as local food partnerships expand their engagement on Good Food Movement issues. Some partnerships recommend that SFP should make EDI a higher priority and integral subject within the six SFP issues.

Addressing the rising cost of living

"The partnership has amplified access to the food support grants administered by the Local Authority. With the partnership's expertise, the grants were given out quickly and effectively seeing over £80,000 go to groups providing food support. This equates to 20 groups receiving money, the vast majority in the partnership network and the new entrants were linked in with the SFC meaning there was a coordinated and joined up approach."

[69 – Wales Rural Partnership]

"The level of general need in society keeps rising, food is on nobody's list of responsibilities, and it takes time to build the narrative about how the right approach to food can prevent a whole range of problems."

[113 – East of England Urban Partnership]

"We are also working on measures to transition the network to more of an alliance model – with an accent on moving away from 'aid' towards 'agency'."

[9 – South West England Urban Partnership]

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, SFP food partnerships were often able to take coordinated action around a range of food issues. Many partnerships were able to mobilise their pre-existing multi-sector food poverty action plan and delivery group. This preparation enabled prompt strategic action on emergency food aid. More widely the SFP national team and wider network used their convening power to broker links between leading policy actors to engender a more effective and forward-looking response to the pandemic.

Such resilience has also been in place during the rise in the cost-of-living where food partnerships have taken a concerted response in an urgent and pressing situation. The survey findings show that the majority of partnerships have led in strategic efforts such as coordinating and developing cross-agency action (72%), developing strategies and action plans (64%), and advised local agencies (53%).

A key area of focus has been to help drive the transition from conventional food poverty approaches such as food banks to more long-term and empowering models. Signifying the increased standing of local food partnerships, one third of partnerships had advised agencies at regional and national level about the cost-of-living response.

Many partnerships had led practical initiatives such as such as offering training programmes, the development of best practice and improving take-up of schemes to improve nutrition in pregnancy and the early years.

They have also instigated and delivered initiatives such as the setting up of community fridge networks, food pantries and community supermarkets.

Food partnerships have on a broad scale supported the work of other agencies through contributions to the development of new approaches to food security, improving access to healthy food, tackling school holiday hunger and the take up of pregnancy and early years food payment schemes and free school meals.

The pressures created in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the sharp increase in poverty levels are also forcing attention away from taking a more systemic and sustainability-focussed approach.

Nevertheless, local decision-makers appear to have greater awareness of food as a system and of the interconnected nature of issues such as food poverty and climate change. Since the pandemic, 75% of partnerships report a greater level awareness among local leaders on the need to work across sector to address key challenges.

"We have this incredible network of food partnership across the 4 nations – nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world and yet I worry about its future."

[19 – North East England Urban Partnership]

"Please ensure the valuable work of the SFP continues. It really makes such a huge difference in being able to bring about change. As a coordinator it takes all my allotted time to try and bring about change with the folks I work with and the wider community. I don't have time to also research and find all the relevant research and up to date info I need to be able to do this change work. Having it sent or being able to find the links is fabulous. Beyond fabulous really."

[– CPartnership]

1

Introduction

Through the 'power of partnerships' the Sustainable Food Places programme aims to 'make healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where people live'[4]. Sustainable Food Places (SFP) is led by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain. It is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and The National Lottery Community Fund. SFP was founded to support local action on major challenges ranging from diet-related ill health, obesity, food insecurity, food waste, and environmental degradation. SFP supports local food partnerships to harness the diverse energies of their public agencies, voluntary sector organisations, businesses, and citizens for a joined-up approach on food issues. In a policy context where food problems and opportunities are often siloed or overlooked, SFP champions the need for a system-wide, coordinated, and long-term strategy. With moves in this direction now taking place across the UK[5], SFP and local partnerships intend to show how action of food can support positive goals for local economic resilience, sustainable development, community cohesion and citizen participation.

[4] See Sustainable Food Places https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/about/what-are-sustainable-food-places/

[5] In particular through actions of the Scottish and Welsh governments since 2022.

Currently, the SFP Network membership is made up of 95 local food partnerships, with over 20 areas seeking to join. SFP offers partnerships a wide spectrum of support including a framework and toolkits for action, an award scheme, a grants programme, networking and peer-to-peer support, evidence to support the case for funding, and advocacy in policy arenas. While local food partnerships have become increasingly widespread, many challenges remain to make cross-sector coordinated action on food issues an established feature in all local authority areas.

This report builds on research with 75 local food partnerships. It provides the most extensive picture to date of local food partnerships (LFPs) in terms of their activities, impacts, organisation, funding and priorities.

Figure 1: SFP Six Key Issues

Local Food Partnerships

Local food partnerships are cross-sector bodies that coordinate and drive actions to create a better local food system. In the UK, local food partnerships come together as members of **Sustainable Food Places** (SFP), the UK programme led by three national sustainable food organisations the Soil Association, Sustain and Food Matters. The aim of SFP is to bring about a fundamental change in the food system. SFP seeks to catalyse, inspire, and support multi-sector, local partnerships to take a strategic and holistic approach to transforming local food systems. SFP[6] was established as a network in 2011 and a funded programme in 2012. It is currently in its third phase of funding, from 2019 to 2023, through the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund.

About this report

Through the largest survey to date of UK local food partnerships, this report provides an insight into the governance, impacts on policy and practice and financial standing of local food partnerships. Whilst the focus is on status and activities in the period covered by the survey (January 2022–August 2023) the report also gives insight into the way in which the network and partnerships have evolved since the start of Phase 3 of the programme and considers the implications for food partnerships and the network in terms of direction of travel and long-term sustainability.

Overview of the UK SFP programme, research and the international context

Currently (Autumn 2023) 95 Local Food Partnerships are active members of the Sustainable Food Places Programme. Alongside funding, specialist resources, networking, campaigns, advocacy and tailored support, SFP

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6 Initially Sustainable Food Cities, in 2017 the programme title changed to Sustainable Food Places to reflect its expanded work with all local authority areas.

provide an awards-based framework of six issues for member local food partnerships to help shape and benchmark their work (Figure 1). The six issues framework and award system has been adapted and refined to reflect the insights of member places as they feed practical learning through the SFP member network.

The first two phases of the UK programme were funded between 2012–2016 and 2016–2019 by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. In late 2019, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) and the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) provided funding for a five-year phase 3 of the programme. This was accompanied with a reframing from 'Sustainable Food Cities' to 'Sustainable Food Places' to reflect work with both cities and a broader range of localities, such as town and rural county authorities.

Central themes from research and evaluation on SFP local food partnerships (e.g. Jones and Hills, 2021, 2019) indicate they bringing together disconnected issues across the food system; provide an innovative model for local governance and trans-local governance; are a promising format for convening formerly disconnected actors; act as an exemplar of community food action at scale; and are needed as a local component in the delivery of national policy on food. Evaluation on work during the pandemic in our 'Covid and Beyond' report (Jones, Hills and Beardmore, 2022) concluded that:

"Food Partnerships have been uniquely placed to provide systems leadership and practical solutions through the strategic direction and support of the UK-wide Sustainable Food Places programme, established a decade prior to the pandemic. Food Partnerships have been able to pivot to respond with agility to an extended period of national crisis and have moved forward to offer a coherent framework for the transition of local food system. The four dimensions of 'effectiveness', 'efficiency', 'engagement', and 'equity' highlight the value of Food Partnerships to fill the leadership gap on local food issues."

Whilst at an international level there has been a growth in work relating to local food partnership models and their coordinating networks, SFP is marked out through the combined duration of financial support, strategic framing, practical tools and resources, facilitated peer support and advocacy. A range of place-based food systems programmes run in other parts of the world. Notably, in North America, the **Food Policy Networks project** was launched two years after the establishment of the Sustainable Food Cities network. The project is run by the Center for a Livable Future at John Hopkins University and shares with SFP the aim to build the capacity of local 'food policy councils' through sharing knowledge and best practice. Based in an academic institution, Food Policy Networks was founded to catalogue, better understand, and disseminate learning about the collective impact of food policy councils across North America. In contrast to SFP it does not share the same grant-giving, co-delivery and advocacy capacities.

In recent years there have also been international and pan-European projects aimed at building knowledge and driving action on local food systems. These have had a particular focus on urban locations. For example, the **Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)** is a global initiative that through a declaration, framework for action and growing toolkit of resources aims to build an international alliance around and drive action on urban food system issues. Other initiatives include the **Food Cities 2022 Learning Platform**. This is a project initiated by the Food Foundation and is designed to provide a knowledge sharing platform for cities in low and middle income countries. The local food networks approach has also received increased research attention. As discussed in Section 6 and Section 7 of this report several SFP food partnerships are working with universities on projects that have been funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI funding councils). The EU Horizon programme has also recently funded a five-year project called **FoodClic**. This is a collaboration (in which SFP has an advisory role) between academic institutions and stakeholders in eight European city-regions to support 'the development of integrated urban food policies'.

Methods

Alongside wider information about the programme, this report draws upon a survey of SFP local food partnership members in mid-2023. The research sought to understand the current characteristics of local food partnerships in terms of their structure and delivery. This included a focus of the support and financial investments that partnerships have secured, along with their future funding prospects. The survey also sought to pull together evidence on the areas of progress and the types of impacts that partnerships are creating at the local level.

The SFP Membership Survey 2023 was designed to collect the insights from all current members of the UK SFP Network. The survey covers both the work of local food partnerships and the role of the SFP programme. It complements previous broadscale consultations with members that were administered by the programme team. The most recent of these took place in 2022 and gave emphasis to what members wanted from SFP. The results have been used to help shape the strategic priorities of the programme in the latter part of Phase 3. The development of the 2023 survey was informed by input from the programme team, SFP membership data, information in the SFP Grant Reports, Award applications and insights from earlier phases of the evaluation.

Using the Qualtrics survey platform, UWE and SFP ran the survey between 22nd June and 23rd August 2023. This was sent out to all members recorded as active on the SFP database at that time. In addition, we contacted prospective SFP network members to take part in a specific survey. Those members that had recently become non-active or 'dormant' were also contacted. Their feedback was recorded along with programme team records on members that had been dormant for over one year.

The results were imported into SPSS and Excel for quantitative and qualitative analysis, alongside other evidence collected through programme records, such as grant and award documents.

For the survey with SFP Network members, 75 out of 88 places provided a response, representing an 85% response rate. In addition to the 88 places, a further three places were contacted but were either temporarily non-active or had merged as a partnership.

The survey was mainly completed by the partnership coordinator or a member of staff with similar role (n=62, 82%). Others included the Chair, Director, General Manager or representative from the Public Health team. A total of six responses were completed by both a Coordinator and another person such as Chair, Manager or Director.

In this report, we have sought to anonymise responses[7], although for written feedback some specific references may make partnerships identifiable. As well as member responses to open text survey questions, some quotations include material compiled by the SFP programme from grant reports and award applications. Ethical approval for the study was provided by the UWE Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences Research Ethics Committee Reference HAS.17.10.031.

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7 Except where an example had also been reported elsewhere in the public domain.

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SFP and the Geographical Profile Local Food Partnerships

This section summarises the profile of partnerships in terms of their geography and SFP membership. Survey respondents represented partnerships from all phases of the programme including the original members of the Sustainable Food Cities network and those who had become members in the sixth months prior to the survey. The survey was completed by partnerships representing a wide range of geographies. Aside from Northern Ireland, there was good representation from the devolved nations. Respondents also represented a mix of urban and rural locations and the new SFP local authority geographies.

SFP Network membership of partnerships

Figures 02 and 03 give a broad indication of the respondent profile in relation to the growth of the SFP network in the three programme phases. Almost a third (29%) of survey respondents had joined the SFP programme in Phase 1. Twelve (16%) respondents had joined in Phase 2. Reflecting the rapid growth of the network in Phase 3, just over half (55%) of the respondents had joined the programme in this most recent Phase.
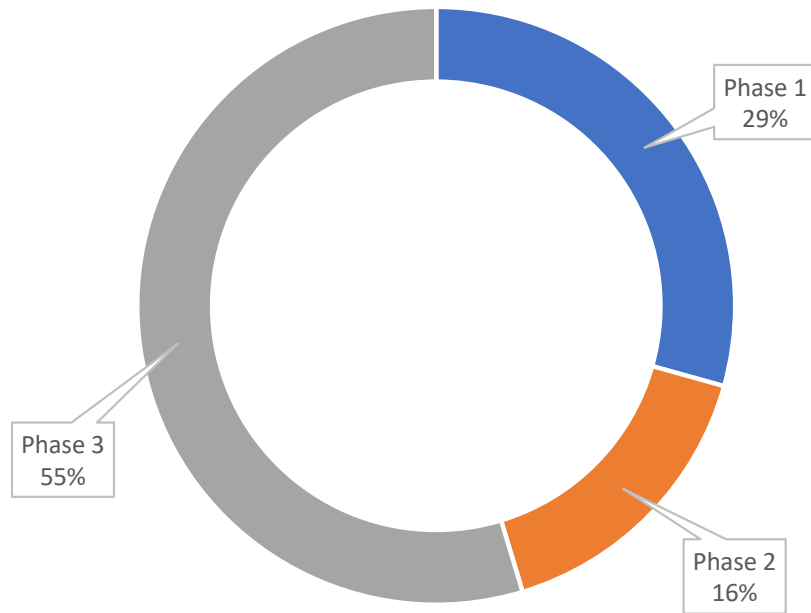

Figure 02: Survey respondents: SFP Network year of membership. n=75.
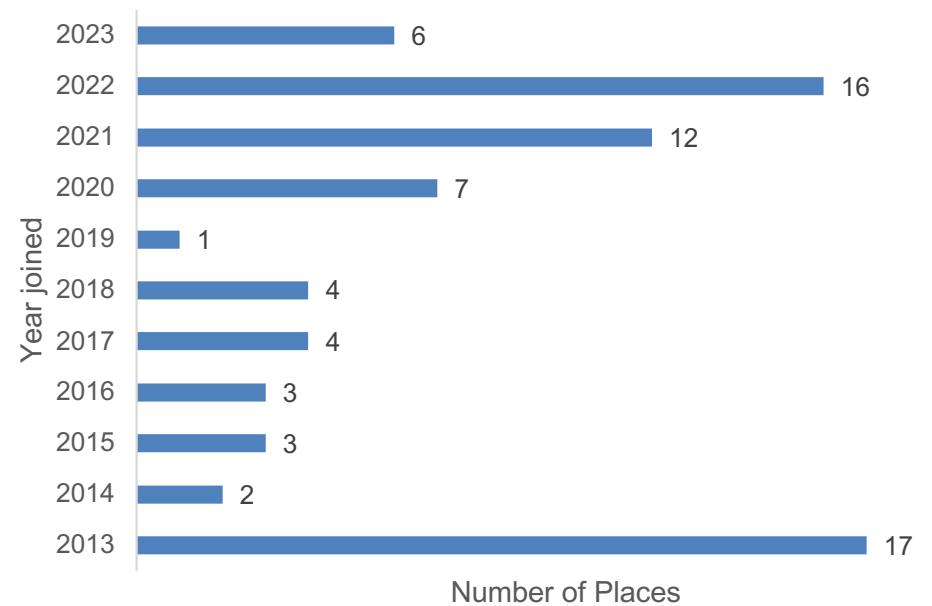

Figure 03: Year that respondents joined SFP Network. n=75.
*Note that some partnerships have transitioned into a new area (such as a district authority to a county). Where membership has been continuous the first year of membership is used.

Figure 04: Map of Local Food Partnerships currently members of the Sustainable Food Places Network. October 2023.

Highland

Aberdeenshire
Aberdeen

Perth & Kinross
Dundee
Fife
Stirling
Clackmannanshire
Falkirk
East Lothian
Glasgow
Edinburgh
North Ayrshire
South Lanarkshire
East Ayrshire

Derry & Strabane
Dumfries & Galloway
Newcastle upon Tyne
Mid & East Antrim
Cumberland
Sunderland
County Durham
Hartlepool
Belfast
Ards & North Down
Middlesbrough

Newry, Mourne & Down

North Lancashire
York
Bradford
Leeds
Blackburn with Darwen
Calderdale
Kingston upon Hull
Bury
Oldham
Manchester
Tameside
Doncaster
Liverpool
Greater
Rotherham
Manchester
Sheffield
Cheshire West
Greater Lincolnshire
& Chester

Derby
Nottinghamshire
Leicestershire
Shropshire
Leicester
Powys
Birmingham
Peterborough
Norwich
Coventry
North Northamptonshire
West Northamptonshire
Cambridge
Herefordshire
Blaenau
Gwent
Camarthenshire
Rhondda
Gloucestershire
Luton
Cynon Taf
Monmouthshire
Swansea
Torfaen
Oxfordshire
Cardiff
Bristol
Vale of Glamorgan
Medway
Somerset
Kent
Andover
Winchester
Devon
Arun & Chichester
Lewes
Exeter
Eastbourne
Brighton & Hove
Plymouth
Cornwall

Waltham Forest
Islington
Barking & Dagenham
Greater London
Tower Hamlets
Southwark
Greenwich
Lambeth
Lewisham
Wandsworth
Merton

Local authority geographies of partnerships

Local food partnerships are present across a range of types of local authority geographies in the UK, particularly reflecting the different types of local authority in England (Figure 05).
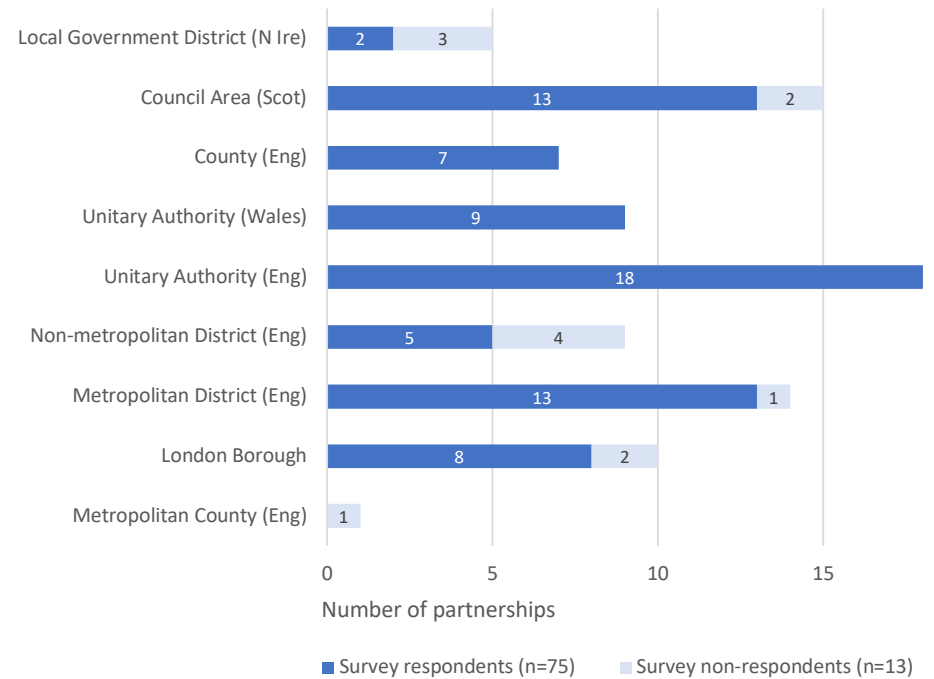

Figure 05: Local authority types of local food partnerships.
Respondents and non-respondents to 23 SFP Network members survey.

Of the survey respondents, 51 (68%) were from England; 13 (17%) were from Scotland; 9 (12%) were from Wales; and 2 (3%) from Northern Ireland[8].

The 75 SFP partnerships responding to the membership survey cover over 24 million people, representing 36% of the population of the UK[9].
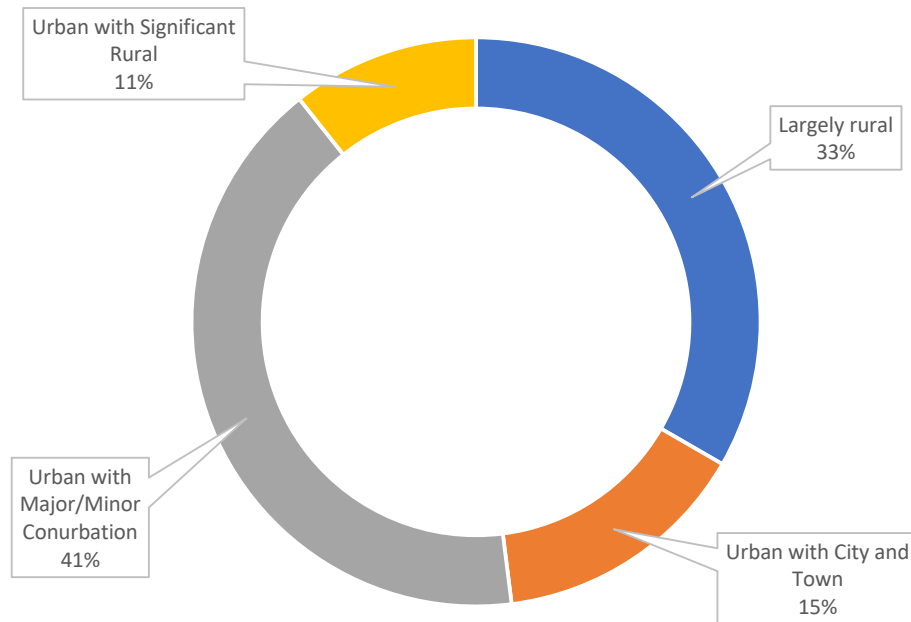

Figure 06: Urban and rural geographies of food partnerships. n=75.

Figure 06 illustrates how the current make-up of local food partnerships has a significant representation from local authority areas that are largely rural. This represents a substantial shift in the composition of the membership since the reframing of the programme from a 'city' to 'place' focus in 2019.

Drawing upon government data, Figure 07 shows that local food partnerships tend to be in local authority areas with high multiple deprivation in England and Scotland.
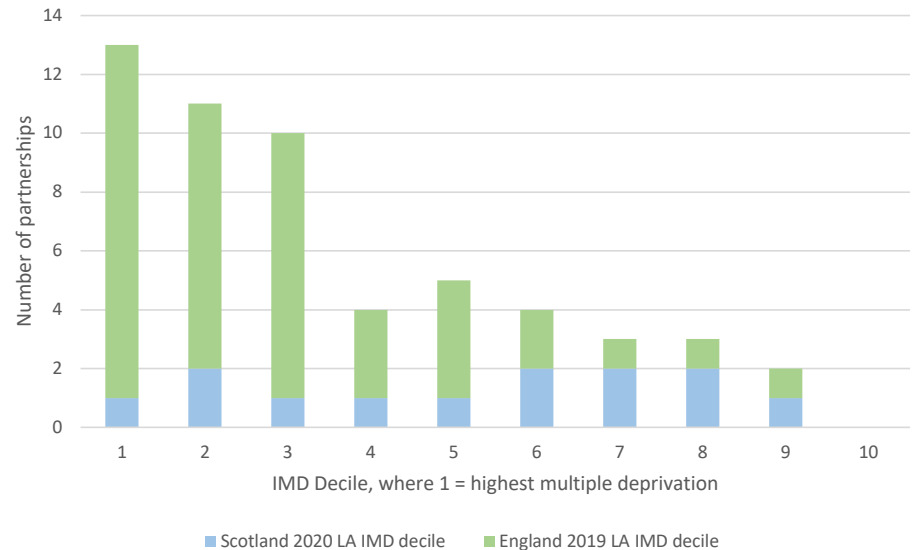

Figure 07: Deprivation of local authority areas of local food partnerships. n=55. England and Scotland partnerships only[10].

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8 Percentages rounded.

9 ONS mid 2021 data. Population of the 88 SFP Member active areas is 29,875,606.

10 Based upon England Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 and Scotland Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020. Local authority IMD ranks for Wales and Northern Ireland are not available on government websites.

3

Organising and Delivering Local Food Partnerships

A key component of the SFP programme is the establishment of a cross sector body which owns and drives forward a shared direction on local food issues. These partnerships aim to include representation from the public, private, and third sectors. In some places these are newly formed partnerships coming together specifically to meet the criteria to become a SFP Network member. In other areas these partnerships have been in existence for a decade or more. Given that partnerships are adapting their work to local circumstances, this section presents evidence on commonalities and differences across the SFP Network.

"

We've developed good working relations with the Strategy and Partnerships team in the Council, who have been instrumental in signposting us to other teams within the LA.

[66 – Wales Rural Partnership]

Integrated food strategy work has been one of our key successes…maintaining engagement from key stakeholders this year. Key to this was highlighting commonalities in goals between organisations.

[77 – Scotland Rural Partnership]

"

Understanding the structure of local food partnerships

Figure 08 indicates that local food partnerships often – but not always – share similar features in terms of their structure and operations. A steering group and associated roles and documentation are commonplace across the SFP Network[11]. While most partnerships have a Coordinator, 10 places (13%) currently operate without a designated Coordinator position. These were mainly newly formed partnerships, where coordination is one part a work role.

Further feedback from survey respondents (n=67) showed that the steering groups for local food partnerships typically consist of eleven members (including the Coordinator) but range from three to 29 members. Alongside representation from public, private and third sectors, lay contributors often feature in the make up of these groups.
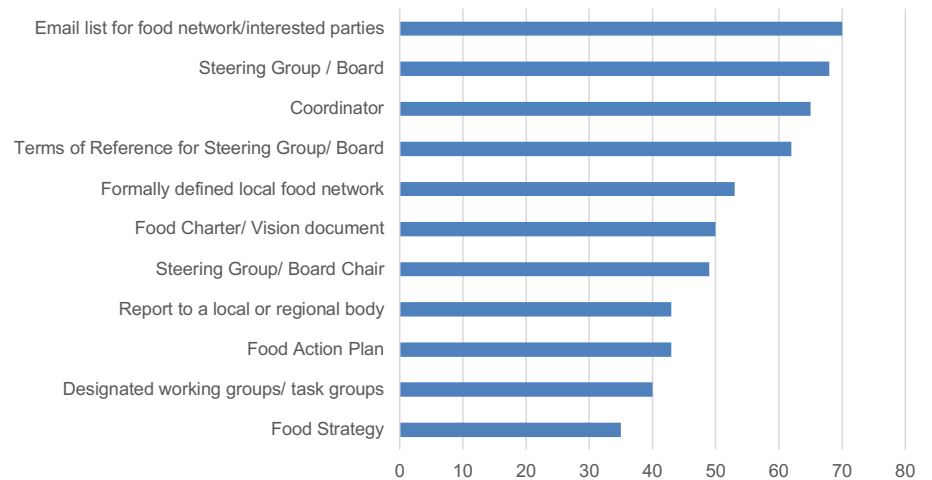

Figure 08: Elements of local food partnerships. n=75.

Notes: Those without a steering group/board, stated that this was because their partnership was in the early stages of formation. Local food network defined in terms of a network with a title, circulation list, and periodic communications.

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11 SFP Network members are encouraged to adopt partnership organisation structures set out in guidance: https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/files/SFP_Toolkit/Food_Partnership_Structures.pdf

The host organisations for local food partnerships

Partnerships differ in terms of the organisations employing or hosting the Coordinator. As Figure 09 indicates over 60% (n=46) of host organisations are third sector agencies. Within this group there is variation. In total 19 of host third sector agencies have a specific focus on local food systems change. As legal entities these organisations are enabled to act as accountable bodies for the decisions and responsibilities of local food partnerships. These bodies take a variety of legal forms including Community Interest Company, Company Limited by Guarantee, Charitable Incorporated Organisation – or they may be an Unincorporated Association.

A further group of host third sector agencies include those where food is one area of work under, for example, an environmental, sustainability or transitions umbrella.
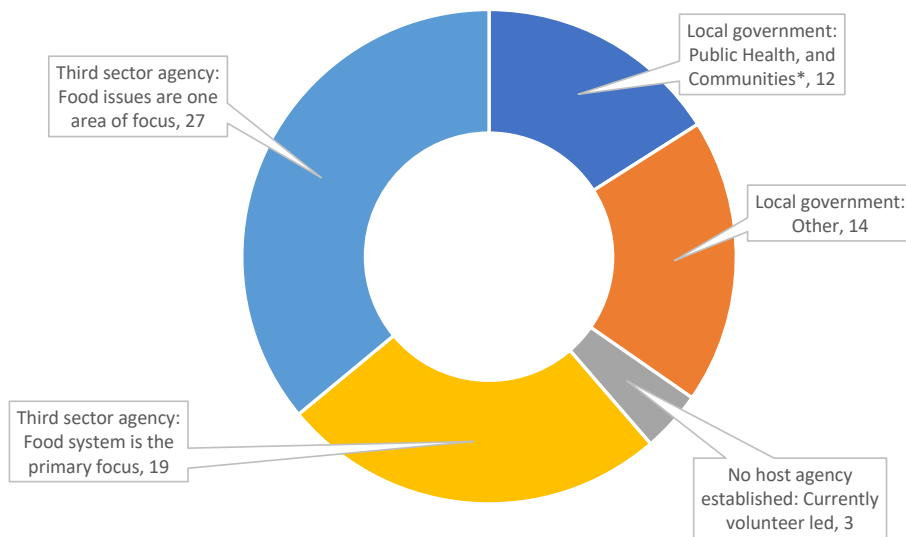

Figure 09: Host organisation employing or hosting the partnership coordinator/manager. n=75. *for Wales this includes the NHS Public Health Board

Other Coordinators are employed within local government, with Public Health (and Community Development) as the most common host department. For those in the 'Local government: Other' group, four out of 14 Coordinators were located in environment focused sections of the council.

This diversity indicates that places have adopted different pathways to run their partnership. As 'natural experiments' each format illustrates options on how to support the work of a partnership and specifically the role of a Coordinator.

Partnerships hosted within local authorities tend to show greater formality in their structure than those under third sector agencies.

Local Food Partnership connections with strategic bodies

LFPs vary in the degree to which they formally coordinate and obtain support for their action plans with other decision-making groups. An indicator of this is whether an LFP reports on its work to a governing structure in their local area. In total, 58% (n=43) stated that they reported into a local (or occasionally regional) governing body. Eight were 'not sure' and 23 (31%) did not. The latter figure signifies that LFPs are not clearly part of the integrated strategic and service landscape in many areas.

The lines of reporting vary, particularly in different nations. For England the main reporting route is into the local Health and Wellbeing Board. The Community Planning Partnership[12] is a significant reporting line in Scotland. Whereas in Wales the similar structure is the Public Services Board[13]. However, local reporting and governance processes clearly vary and are evolving for local food partnerships, albeit these are more consistent within both Scotland and Wales.

12 https://www.gov.scot/policies/improving-public-services/community-planning/

13 https://www.gov.wales/public-services-boards

With considerable diversity within local authority areas in terms of geography, population size and configuration of public bodies, it was not surprising that LFPs in England report to a wider range of reporting bodies. Of these the Health and Wellbeing Board was the reporting committee most frequently cited. Other bodies listed, from respondents in all UK nations were:

● Poverty / Food Poverty / Financial Inclusion and Cost of Living partnership
● Environmental / Green Strategy / Nature partnership
● Local authority scrutiny committee
● Public Health (no committee specified)
● Local authority (no committee specified)
● VCSE Consortium / Assembly / Partnership

Some partnerships areas have formal procedures, whereby plans are reviewed and signed off, for instance through a Health and Wellbeing Board committee, before adoption in cross-sector planning documents. This position on the local governance landscape was reflected the survey responses where, for instance, one partnership reports to five high level committees within the local authority area.

Other LFPs emphasised more informal channels such as sending un-invited reports and requests to raise agenda items. Comments from respondents show that less formal written communications and verbal updates, particularly through public health colleagues, were an effective ingredient in decision-making processes.

Local governance formalities are not necessarily a feature of all local food partnerships, including those with strong links to the SFP programme. Eight places holding an SFP Award did not, or were not sure, whether they reported into a higher governing body within their locality. This might reflect the emphasis of some partnerships on developing their grass-roots engagement and local networks.

Local food networks: contacts and reach

Social media and email contacts give an indication of the reach of local food partnerships with their wider local networks. All but two of 75 partnerships have some form of email or social media communications, and those without stated that they were planning to start soon.

Food partnerships reported the use of seven social media platforms, of which Twitter, Instagram and Facebook had on average the largest number of followers. Focusing on places with established communication networks, Figure 10 shows that a typical local food partnership probably has a combined reach of over a thousand individuals[14]. Across all social media platforms and email contacts for 47 partnerships there was a total of 134,263 user accounts.

The survey evidence indicates that SFP Gold and Silver Award holding partnerships have developed the largest food networks, for example two Gold Award partnerships currently have 2000+ and 5000+ email contacts.
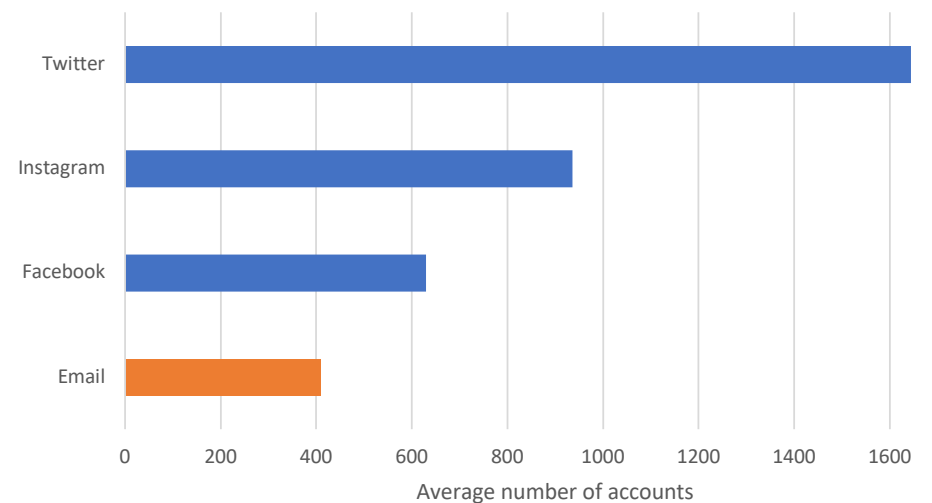

Figure 10: Network contacts of local food partnerships. Average number of users for three leading social media platforms, plus average email contacts list size. n=47.

14 This is a cautious estimate, assuming duplicated, corporate, and dormant accounts.

4

Stakeholder Support for Local Food Partnerships

Local food partnerships rely upon assembling a coalition of the willing to address the complexity of local food systems. In this section we set out the findings on the support that local food partnerships are obtaining from a range of stakeholders. Recognising that this is a shifting landscape, we focused on recent support in the last year to provide a snapshot for 2023. With both champions and absentees, the results show a mixed picture of the sources of support for local food partnerships.

"

People are desperately wanting change; they want to be involved with the partnership and they want their opinion to be heard.

[52 – London Borough Partnership]

[One of our key successes has been] increasing the dynamic mix of individuals at any one time in the room to ensure lived experience is sharing the floor with subject matter experts.

[17 – West Midlands England Urban Partnership]

We're a nice to have, but not viewed as integral to the operations of the city.

[5 – North East England Urban Partnership]

Articulating what a food partnership is and what it is for is a universal challenge, as is overcoming scepticism as a council-hosted initiative.

[68 – Wales Rural Partnership]

"

Partnerships were asked to rate the support they had received from a wide range of stakeholder groups in the last year. When selecting for ratings of strong and quite strong support Figure 11 summarises a varied picture that depends upon stakeholder.
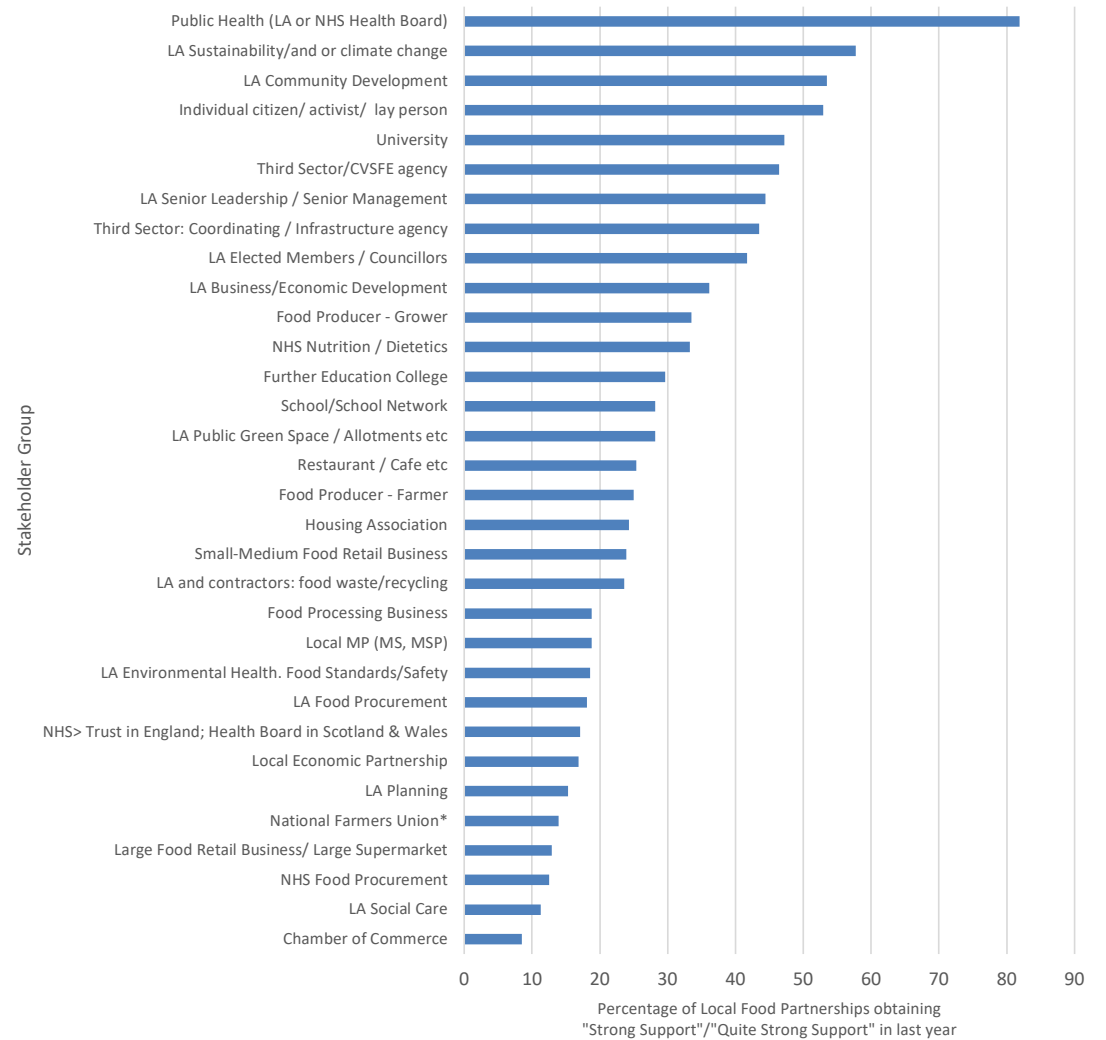

Figure 11: Local food partnerships and the support of stakeholder groups in the last year. n=74.
*Plus Ulster Farmers Union and Farmers' Union of Wales

Public sector stakeholder support

For most local food partnerships gave a mixed picture in terms of support from across different sections of local government. In the last year, 44% of respondents reported high levels of support from senior leaders their local authority. Levels of support vary across local authority departments. This might be expected where parts of the council take on the role of hosting or engaging with partnerships.

Figure 11 shows that Public Health[15] teams, who often work in combination with their colleagues in Community Development, are clearly the foremost stakeholders to support the work of local food partnerships. Only a minority of places (n=5) reported weak or no support from their local Public Heath teams. One place reported a recent decision to not renew funding, but it was not clear why other places reported a lack of engagement. From within the public sector, local authority-based teams working on sustainability and climate change represent the second leading field of support for local food partnerships.

The relative weakness of connections with local authority planning departments is noteworthy given the emphasis of SFP and local partnerships on the spatial planning questions of access to productive land, retail provision and restrictions, and similar issues.

It is also interesting to note that two stakeholder groups that reflect local authority food system responsibilities – relating to food waste/recycling and environmental health obtain quite strong or strong support from under 24% of partnerships. High levels of support from local authority food procurement teams are similarly quite low (18%). However, this may reflect the absence of specialist food procurement staff in some local authorities.

While local authority social care issues have not figured prominently in SFP's national campaign work, as the largest area of local government expenditure and arguably responsibility, there are clearly many connections to make between social care and food. Only a few food partnerships report quite strong or strong support from Social Care stakeholders, the experience of these partnerships may be valuable for the wider network.

Support from NHS sources is not straightforward to compile. NHS structures differ for each UK nation, and there are multiple service areas with an interest in health-related food issues. Public Health teams, with functions across multiple sectors, appear as to act as bridge makers into the NHS particularly where action on the integration of health and social care is more advanced[16]. Without such support, partnerships coordinators may find it difficult to identify the most fruitful points of contact.

More established partnerships tend to report more across different departments of their local authority. Those with longer term links also show that support can fluctuate over time. So, it is useful to note that the results here represent only the most recent summary of the circumstances for partnerships.

Third sector and civil society stakeholder support

Most local food partnerships are closely linked to the work of a range of third sector organisations. Over 43% of partnerships receive high levels of support from agencies responsible for providing infrastructure and coordination for the third sector. This pattern was clearest for partnerships across Wales and urban unitary authorities elsewhere, where such organisations are an established part of the service landscape. Five respondents noted that their area did not have an umbrella agency with this role.

The majority of partnerships (53%) report a high level of support from people who act in a personal capacity. As previous evaluation on the SFP programme has found, these are often highly motivated individuals who volunteer their time and bring expertise on local food issues and activism.

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15 Note that Public Health teams are located in the NHS in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

16 Barnes A, Baxter S, Beynon C, et al. Four nations study: a comparative systems review and thematic policy analysis of public health across the four constituent countries of the UK. Sheffield: University of Sheffield; 2018.

Alongside those from community and voluntary organisations, the presence of these representatives highlights the investment of civic and unpaid commitments in the operations of local food partnerships.

Food business stakeholder support

In total, 13% of partnerships reported strong or quite strong support from large food retail businesses such as the mainstream supermarket chains, while 61% report no or only weak support from this group. Given their central place in the food system, newcomers to the SFP programme might be surprised that this figure is so low. The survey feedback and previous programme evaluation indicates that this reflects differing priorities. A focus of local food partnerships has been on the interests of small and medium enterprises.

Other food businesses – restaurants, cafes, and small-medium food businesses – feature somewhat as supporters of local food partnerships. However, with low levels of engagement through Chambers of Commerce, Local Economic Partnerships and other representing bodies, there is a question about how local food partnerships best engage with a large and diverse sector.

Fourteen percent of local food partnerships report strong or quite strong support from the National Farmers Union (NFU). With the recent establishment of local food partnerships into rural areas since 2019, these are recent connections in most instances. Partnerships reporting engagement from the NFU are also likely to report similar levels of support from specific farming representatives. While there are clear exceptions, overall farming interests are not strongly represented as stakeholder group with local food partnerships. This current position is likely to shift, especially in Wales and Scotland where local food policy developments are driving greater dialogue with farming interests.

Growing Apart and Growing Together. How local food partnerships are changing in nations and regions

Local food partnerships are developing in increasingly diverse situations across the UK. Some of this variation is rooted in the policy contexts of the UK nations. Notably, in 2022 the Scottish Parliament voted for the Scotland Good Food Nation Act which includes a statutory requirement for all areas-based local public bodies (councils and health boards) to develop a local Food Action Plan. While the specific requirements are under development, an effect of the Act has been to stimulate widespread interest in local food partnerships as the delivery agents for such strategies, and to build upon the work of Nourish Scotland and the SFP Network. Meanwhile, in 2022 the Welsh government committed one year of funding for all local authority areas to develop a local food partnership. Evaluation found that SFP member areas, with established partnerships and a working relationship with Food Sense Wales, have been able to utilise the funding more rapidly than those without local food partnership experience. In both Scotland and Wales, innovations in local food partnership working are providing useful exemplars of how to achieve policy influence for the rest of the UK.

Other stakeholder support

Involvement from universities, further education and schools indicates that the education sector has grown to become a significant area of support for the work of partnerships. Comments from respondents elsewhere in the survey show that universities in particular are bringing research, evaluation, training, networking, advocacy and volunteering. Some partnerships have also partnered with universities to make successful funding application to UK Research and Innovation funding streams.

In total, 19% of local food partnerships reported high levels of support from elected political representatives (MP, MSP, and/or MS) in their area. Those reporting that this was not applicable, or unknown, were largely partnerships hosted under a public sector agency, where direct political lobbying is not permitted.

Engaging stakeholders – successes and challenges

Seventy out of seventy-five partnerships provided examples of their successes and challenges in engaging stakeholders. The comments provide a rich insight into the many and varied ways in which partnerships are developing and consolidating these relationships. At the same time many partnerships are experiencing ongoing and frustrating experiences in establishing their legitimacy, communicating the value of food partnerships and food system work and in engaging key stakeholders.

Successes in obtaining the support of stakeholders

Some places stated that they sought to draw upon a very wide network – particularly from third sector organisations and many partnerships are developing new or diverse connections, for example with cultural and sports institutions such as art galleries and football clubs. Established partnerships

had clear channels for seeking representation and support on their working groups, and other groups relevant to the partnership. Some partnerships reported a strong appetite for change among stakeholders.

> **"People are desperately wanting change; they want to be involved with the partnership and they want their opinion to be heard."**
>
> [52 – London Borough Partnership]

> **"Outside of the farming sector, there is a great demand from all sectors to becoming involved in a sustainable food movement. Our SFP partners clearly recognise the need and imperative for healthy, affordable, and accessible food."**
>
> [67 – Wales Rural Partnership]

> **"One challenge is on how we can ensure that stakeholders can feel a sense of alignment with this work, but we have found that the topic of food has a lot of scope for bringing in different voices."**
>
> [58 – North West London Urban Partnership]

Reflecting the more committed statutory support in Wales, Scotland and London, the examples of positive stakeholder engagement were more abundant from these regions. The examples given by many areas indicated that taking a highly strategic approach to the development and management of the partnership was a key to gaining influence with and getting meaningful input from key organisations, influencing policy, obtaining access to project and funding opportunities. A key message overall was that getting the right people in the partnership was vital.

> **"Our key partners are positive, passionate, pro active people, who say yes and get it done!"**
>
> [92 – East England Rural Partnership]

Strategies for success included:

- Working with larger institutions such as universities or public health teams to secure large and long-term sources of funding. This was also an effective way to change policy.
- Ensuring that the most influential local organisations are on the board.
- Being part of influential networks.
- Coalescing stakeholders around a common objective such as the development of a food strategy, plan, charter, right to food motion or around an initiative that will lead to a tangible outcome.
- Recruiting an independent chair to remove the perception that a local authority-based food partnership is politically biased.

"The structure of the partnership as a board means that we have access to influential organisations. This has assisted in building a relationship with these organisations, understanding the work they are undertaking and any gaps."

[14 North West England Urban Partnership]

"There is a wealth of knowledge in the voluntary and community services in [our Borough] that has been so helpful to tap into and learn from."

[52 – London Borough Partnership]

"[Our Steering Group members] are extremely supportive and give time and expertise to…project development (eg action plans, funding applications), subgroups, events engaging wider membership, as well as the monthly Steering Group meetings."

[105 – Wales Urban Partnership]

"[The partnership's] long-standing positive relationship with the University…has manifested itself in collaborations around: Fairtrade; sustainability; the UKRI funded five year £6.2M project and a potentially emerging three year £1M ESRC funded Food Sharing project."

[9 – South East England Urban Partnership]

Some respondents pointed to the importance of developing strong foundations and credibility through building initiatives and relationships over the longer-term. Some of this momentum gathered pace during the Covid pandemic and was reinforced through a track record of achievements.

The development of important relationships and momentum through joint working around during Covid was a factor in strong stakeholder engagement for some partnerships. Not surprisingly some respondents referred to the fact that they were able to gain more traction around issues that have statutory attention and resources such as food poverty, child health and healthy weight.

Other successes in reaching and working with stakeholders included:

- Outreach through attending existing community events.
- Outreach at local food events and food outlets.
- Acting as a multiplier to catalyse beneficial relationships between stakeholders and promoting the work of stakeholders.
- Working hard on representation.
- Regular and engaging communications, for example, via a newsletter or blog.
- Using resources from SFP or other partnerships to make the case for LFPs'
- Hosting Food Summits.
- Using small grants to stimulate engagement.

"Increasing the dynamic mix of individuals at any one time in the room to ensure lived experience is sharing the floor with subject matter experts."

[17 – England Midlands Urban Partnership]

"Our blog and mailing list (the regularity and clarity of it) has been noted as useful and has led to people contacting about the sort of things that they know they can help with or learn from."

[7 – England West Midlands Rural Partnership]

"In-person events seem to work really well."

[66 – Wales Rural Partnership]

"The support material, news, updates, research and kudos of the SFP network and associated partners. Its all has added weight and authority to my ability as a co-ordinator to make the case for change."

[7 – England West Midlands Rural Partnership]

"Peer support from other Food Partnerships has enabled us to make strong, informed and inspiring cases with stakeholders on what is possible."

[86 – East of England Rural Partnership]

"Finding the right hook for each of them. Takes ages!"

[78 – Scotland Rural Partnership]

Many respondents referred to the importance of nurturing relationships with stakeholder by, for example:

- working to understand the perspectives and drivers of other stakeholders
- identifying common ground whilst building awareness of the connection to the bigger picture
- being appreciative
- hosting regular social events
- providing good food.

"Taking time to get to know individuals within key agencies to build rapport. Thinking about their problems/their pain and how what we do can take this away. Holding events and activities that are well run (organised/good chairing/agendas etc). Giving people nice food. Taking people to see things when they work. Remembering to say thank you and praise when something has happened."

[11 – South East England Urban Partnership]

"Engagement – all stakeholders are valued equally and there is a spirit of collaboration and collectivity. Establishing support for a 'more than food' approach across the partnership."

[63 – East Midlands England County Partnership]

"Being community focused and working to build communities of practice. I think it helps that we are a fairly small unitary authority so organisations tend to know of each other and have worked together on a range of project – pros and cons with this though."

[104 – North West England Urban Partnership]

Whilst many respondents reported difficulties in engaging retail and catering businesses a few partnerships are clearly gaining traction in this area. It was not always clear how this was being achieved, but one respondent referred to the value of conducting a business audit and another to the value of developing a Food Charter.

Challenges in obtaining the support of stakeholders

Many respondents reported ongoing struggles to communicate the value and legitimacy of food systems work and that the work of the food partnership was not perceived as core to other areas of statutory work. It is, therefore, being de-prioritised in a context where stakeholder resources (personnel and funding) have been constantly eroded over an almost 15-year period. One of the results of this can be that the work of the partnership isn't as representative as it could/should be. Linked to this, partnerships reported that they don't have the resources to be able to make the case – communicate the value for/connection between food work and the goals of other stakeholders.

Specific issues reported by respondents included:

- Lack of a physical location adds to the perception that partnership is not an important or legitimate entity.
- Lack of engagement from senior decision-makers.
- Difficulty getting consistent buy-in from across the whole organisation of more complex stakeholders.
- The relative informality of some food partnerships means that stakeholders are not clear about their roles and responsibilities.
- Public sector institutions can be complex and inflexible, which makes them hard to influence.
- Local authorities may not have a strong cross-sector track record.
- Difficulty of engaging public health when working in a two-tiered authority.
- Political division within a locality resulting in a lack of consensus about the value of local food system work or tensions with other policy priorities.
- Political tensions created for partnerships that have a local authority base.
- Translating support into financial commitment.

"We're a nice to have, but not viewed as integral to the operations of the city. We are attempting to shift this perception, but it's been slow progress."

[5 – North East England Urban Partnership]

"Articulating what a food partnership is and what it is for is a universal challenge, as is overcoming scepticism at a council-hosted initiative. There can be resistance to the concept of an umbrella organisation. There is a tension between the value of bringing people together and the dislike of 'meetings for the sake of meetings'."

[68 – Wales Rural Partnership]

"The level of general need in society keeps rising, food is on nobody's list of responsibilities, and it takes time to build the narrative about how the right approach to food can prevent a whole range of problems."

[113 – East of England Urban Partnership]

"Being hosted by a political organisation presents challenges to engagement and outreach (e.g. in stimulating social media discussion while remaining politically neutral on hotly contested topics)."

[68 – Wales Rural Partnership]

"MP support is challenging due to the network being embedded within the LA."

[17 – West Midlands England Urban Partnership].

"Some LA stakeholders see lots of the food debate as outside their job description or don't buy into the partnership goals. For example, the lead for the planning department doesn't agree with the idea of creating restrictions on new Hot Food Takeaway."

[69 – Wales Rural Partnership]

Several of the respondents referred to the challenging and time-consuming nature of identifying and engaging the most appropriate stakeholders. This was for various reasons, simply including the difficulty of working out who to contact in large bureaucratic organisations, maintaining continuity and momentum when there are frequent changes in personal, the difficulty of building relationships since the post Covid shift to online working. One person mentioned the difficulty in managing a clash of ideologies between deep green food activists and those working in more conventional parts of the food system. Several of the rural-based partnerships referred to the challenge of building a broad coalition when working a geographically dispersed area.

5
Funding and Resourcing Local Food Partnerships

The origin story for many local food partnerships starts with committed and well networked individuals. While personal energies are a fundamental ingredient to successful partnerships, funding and resource soon become increasingly important to maintain momentum and address the formidable challenges of food system change. The combination of partnership growth in scale and responsibilities and the imminent end of Phase 3 means that the subject of resources has become more pressing. In this section we report on evidence of the staffing levels and financial resources obtained by partnerships, with a focus on the last three years.

"

We have this incredible network of food partnership across the 4 nations – nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world and yet I worry about its future.

[19 – North East England Urban Partnership]

The main thing to flag…is that our current core funding coming to an end by early next year is a significant risk to the partnership coordination and comms work.

[8 – South West England Urban Partnership]

We have been told not to expect any further funding from [the] City Council as there's nothing in the budget.

[5 – North East England Urban Partnership]

"

Core staffing of partnerships

Figure 12 shows that core staffing levels in local food partnership varies substantially. While the modal and mean number of staff is about 1fte, 47% (n=33/70) of local food partnerships run with a core team equivalent to less than one full time member of staff.
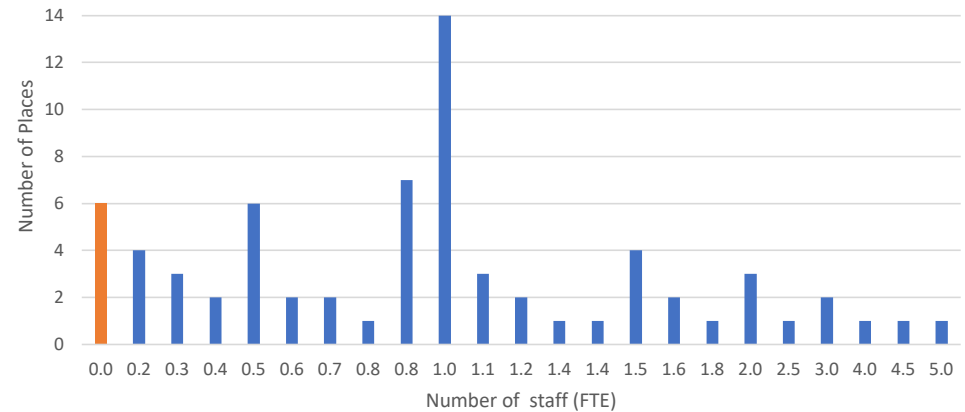

Figure 12: Number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff funded to work on core partnership activities (coordination, development, communications etc) in 2022–23. n=70.
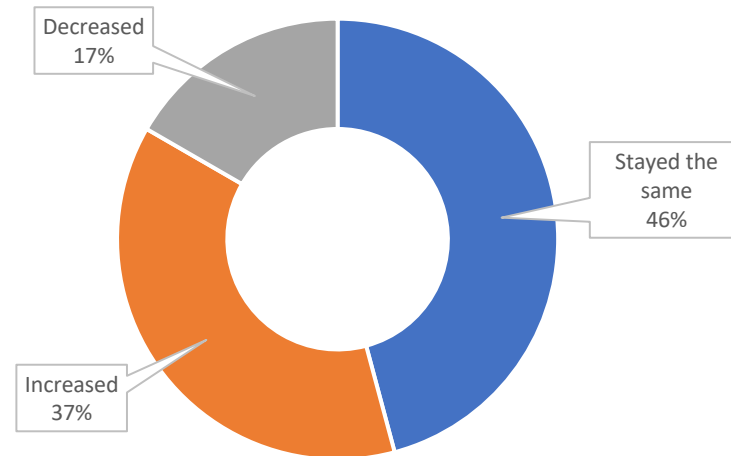

Figure 13: Change in staff levels compared to the previous financial year of 2021–22. n=72.

Survey respondents gave a mixed picture of how these staff levels had changed, with 17% reporting a decrease in staffing compared to the financial year of 2021–22 (Figure 13).

Twenty-eight respondents commented on why there staffing levels had changed. An increase in staffing levels was made possible by the following:

- Increased local government funding (although some noted this was marginal and temporary)
- Receipt of an SFP grant in combination with match funding from another source such as the NHS or an NGO
- Receipt of Welsh Government food partnership grant
- Successful project funding applications
- Negotiating admin support with new partnership host organisation

For the partnerships whose staffing levels had reduced, several simply referred to a reduction in their funding. For a couple the reduction was the result of a personal decision by the coordinator and in one case volunteers had left their role and not been replaced.

Funding for partnerships

The survey collected data on the funding mix for core partnership activities (coordination, development, communications) since 2019 and on funding secured by the partnership (or food network) from external sources for SFP-related work between January 2022–August 2023.

Figure 14 shows that since 2019 partnerships have drawn on a wide range of sources to fund their core partnership activities (coordination, development, communications). The public sector was by far the largest funder of SFP core activities in this period with 85% of partnerships receiving funding from this source. Third sector/charitable funding was the next largest funder type with 51% of partnerships receiving funding from this source. Just under one third of partnerships were using in kind sources of support to help resource

core partnership activities. Just under a quarter were receiving funding for providing consultancy services. A much smaller number (between 1%–8%) were receiving money for membership subscriptions, fee paying events and training courses, donations, public sector funding and food enterprises to fund core partnership functions. Seven percent of partnerships were either wholly reliant on voluntary staff time or SFP programme funding.
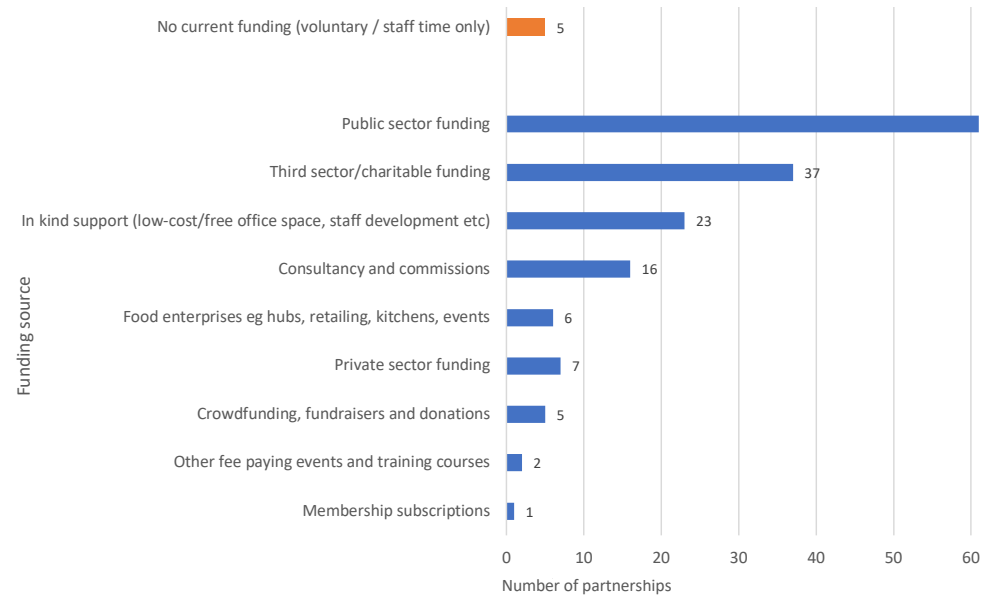

Figure 14: Local food partnership sources of funding since 2019, not including SFP. n=72.
Note: Consultancy and commissions include research and fees for the management of services.

Successful bids since January 2022

Overall, 57 of 75 (68%) partnerships/or partnership network members had received funding from non-SFP programme sources for SFP-related issues. Details of the funding amounts were stated by 51 of 57 respondents. In total SFP partnerships/partners received £8,761,817 in the period January 2022–August 2023.

Five partnerships explicitly stated that they had not received any funding from non-SFP programme sources in this period and 13 partnerships did not respond to the question. Total funding allocations per partnership ranged from £200–£1,700,000. The relative scale of funding across the network is shown in Figure 15.

Three partnerships secured total funding of between £1–2 million. These are outliers and represent almost half of the total funding received by SFP partnerships/partners. In these cases the partnerships' total funding was either exclusively or primarily from a UK Government one-off payment (from either the Household Support[17] or Round 2 of the Levelling Up fund[18]) or a National Lottery Community Fund[19].
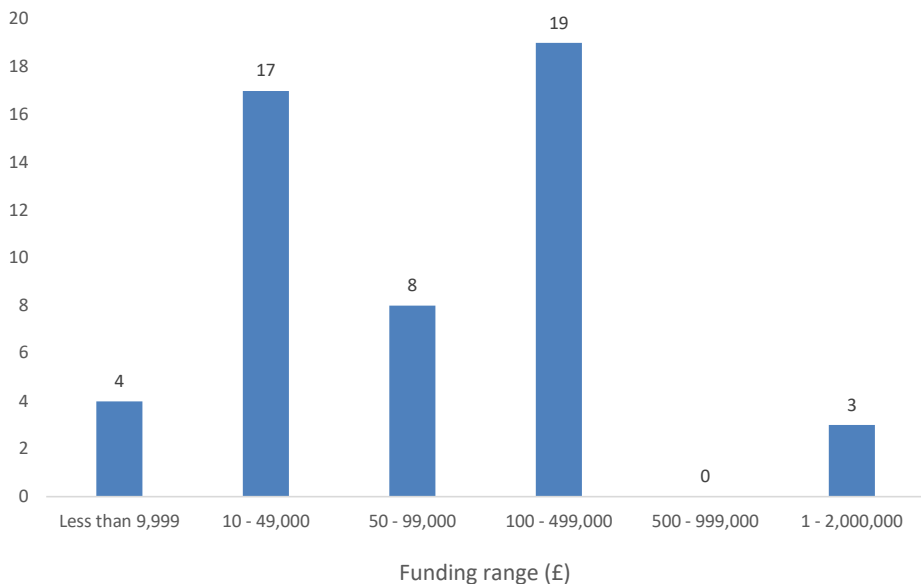
If these outliers are removed, the total amount of funding secured by SFP partnerships was £4,512,513. The average total funding per partnership was £94,000 with just over a third of partnerships receiving total funding in the range of £10,000–49,000 (17 partnerships) and 37% of partnerships receiving funding in the range of £100,000–499,000 (19 partnerships).

National and local government and third sector funders (for example National Lottery) were the three main sources of partnership funding (Figure 16) with each contributing approximately one third. It is likely that the majority of funding that is reported as coming from the UK Government actually came via local government, but this isn't explicit in the way that partnerships reported on their funding sources.

Figure 15: The scale of funding secured by SFP Partnerships/partners January 2022–August 2023. n = 51
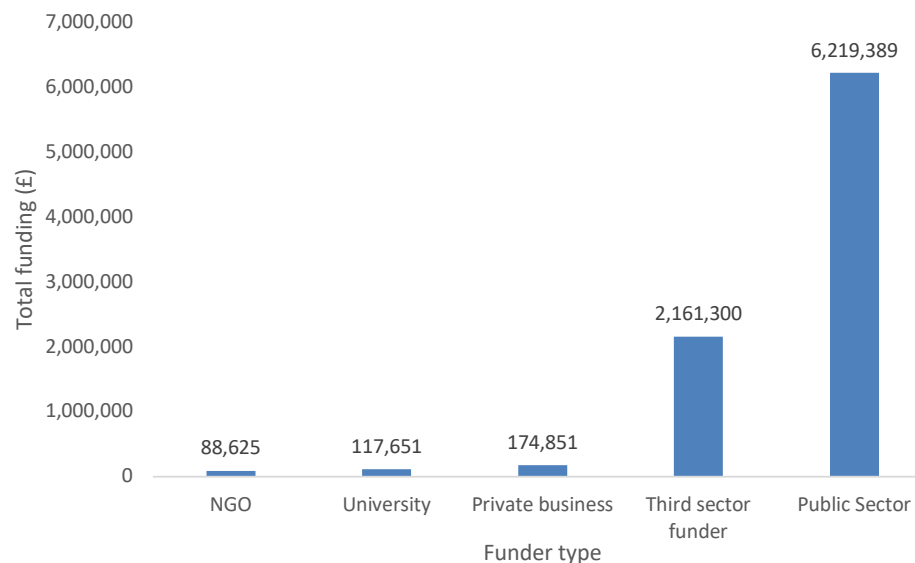
Figure 16: Sources of funding received by SFP partnerships/networks. n = 57. Third sector funders are those whose sole purpose is to provide grants for the third sector. NGOs are other charities with a substantive focus.

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17 £842 million allocated to local government to provide cash and vouchers for families struggling with rising cost of living expenses.

18 £2.1 billion distributed to local government in January 2023 for infrastructure investment.

19 £600 million distributed annually to communities across UK. https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/

Ninety percent (£1,931,300) of the £2,161,300 contributed by third sector funders came from the National Lottery. The grant type was not always clear, but the majority of funding appears to have come from the Lottery Community Fund and a smaller portion from the Climate Action Fund. Twelve partnerships in total received a grant from the National Lottery with amounts ranging from between £2000–£1.5 million. Seven other third sector funders contributed to SFP partnerships. These were a mix of national and local/regionally based entities and allocations ranged from £5,000–£97,000.

It is interesting to note that whilst the vast majority (80+%) of SFP partnerships report that they receive strong/very strong support from their public health team, this is not directly reflected in funding secured since January 2022. Funding specified as coming from public health and NHS sources represents just 5% (£444,445) of the overall funding mix for SFP partnerships in this period. Moreover, only twelve partnerships reported that they received funding from public health or NHS sources with allocations ranging from £2,370–£96,000. However, it is likely that some non-specified local government/NHS funding was derived from public health budgets.

Private businesses, universities and NGOs are relatively minor players, with each contributing approximately 1–2% of funding allocations to SFP partnerships overall.

Funding for different areas of work

Approximately one third (£2,613,019) of funding secured by SFP partnerships funding was initiatives and projects addressing food security and access to healthy food.

Almost half of the survey respondents 35/75 (47%) of partnerships reported that they had received funding for this area of work. The purpose wasn't always clearly stated, but the responses indicate that partnerships have been successful in attracting funding to deliver projects that seek to deliver

holistic and long-term solutions to food security and healthy food access. School and community growing and cooking projects as well as community fridges and supermarkets and school holiday food projects were amongst the most frequently mentioned project types.

Almost a quarter of funding was to support projects related to regenerative farming, commercial growing and food hubs and included a range of project types including vertical farming, Farmstart and halal farm-to-form feasibility studies, projects supporting agroecology and nature friendly farming, a large-scale urban farm development and the set-up of two farm hubs.

The majority of the £1,842,098 allocated to the support of core food partnership functions was intended for partnership/coordinator management posts. There was also funding to support the development of food strategies and communications. This total figure is largely made up of the funding that the Welsh Government awarded to all local authorities (£97,000 per authority) to establish and further develop local food partnerships.
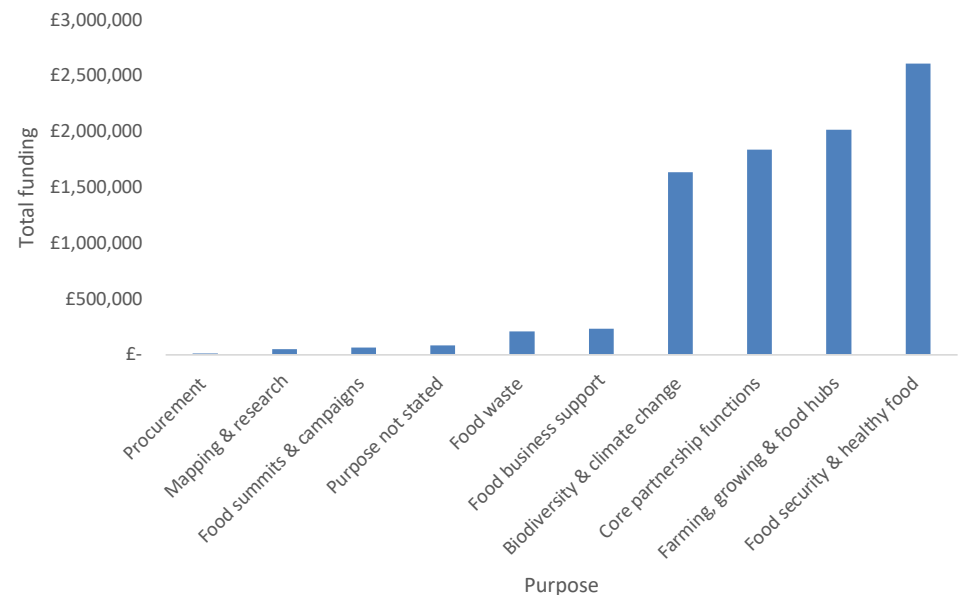

Figure 17: Funding financial value by type of project. n=50

This allocation to the nine Welsh SFP food partnerships represents 47% of the overall funding for work within this theme. Including the Welsh partnerships a total of 26 (35%) of partnerships who responded to the survey had received funding for core partnership activities since January 2022.

Almost 20% (£1,637,500) of funding received was for projects relating to climate change and biodiversity. Four partnerships had received funding for this area of work, but awards to two of these partnerships comprised the bulk of the funding.

The remaining seven percent of funding was for projects in the areas of:

- Food business support (£236,000)
- Food Waste (£208,200)
- Food summits and campaigns (£63,500)
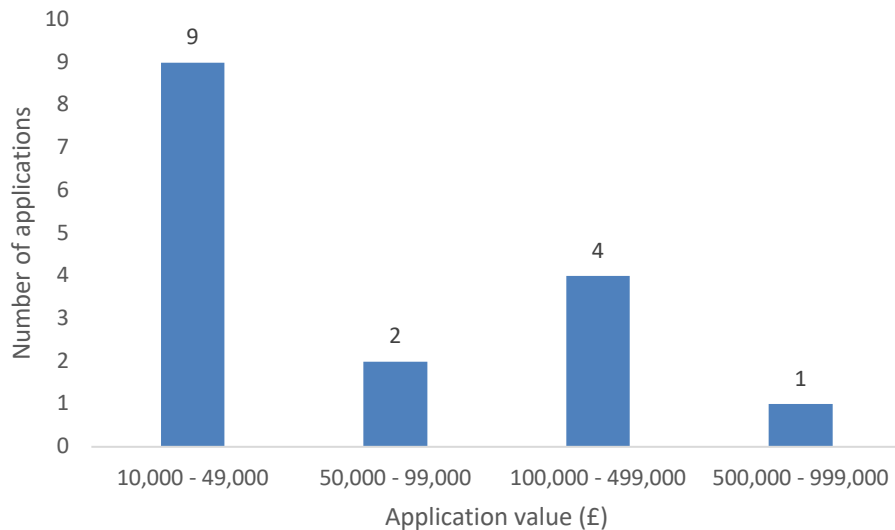- Mapping and research (£50,000)
- Procurement (£10,000)

Current applications for funding

Fifteen partnerships (20%) were awaiting the outcome of a funding application as of August 2023. All partnerships in this group had received funding from non-SFP programme sources in the period January 2022– August 2023. In some cases, the bid value was not stated or not known. The total value of the 16 bids, where funding amount was reported, was just over £2 million.

The majority of these live bids were in the £10,000–49,000 range (Figure 18). Four partnerships were awaiting a decision on applications worth between £100,000–499,000 and one was awaiting the outcome of a funding application worth £650,000.

The majority (12) of the 21 live bids (Figure 19) were made to public sector bodies. Almost a third were to third sector funders whilst two partnerships had made applications to the Hubbub / Starbucks 'Eat it Up' fund and one was for was a collaborative bid with a local university to the Economic and Social Research Council.
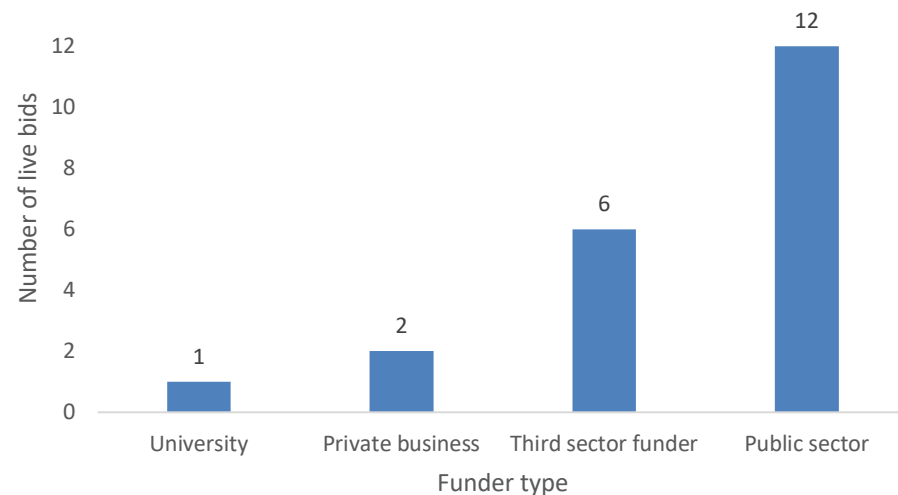

Figure 18: The scale of live funding applications in August 2023. n = 16.

Figure 19: Funding sources for live bids. n = 14.

The purpose of the funding application was stated for 16 out of 21 of the live bids (Figure 20). Although three of the bids were to support core partnership functions, it is notable that this represents a tiny fraction of the partnerships who responded to the survey. Given the fact post-2024 future of food partnerships is likely to be heavily dependent on external sources of funding this is clearly an area that the programme needs to give strategic attention to over the next six months.

A quarter of the bids supporting projects related to farming, growing and supply chains. As with the pattern of funding that has recently been secured, it is interesting to note the increased focus on this strategic area of work in Phase 3.

Other bids in development were for projects on food waste/food sharing, innovative approaches to food security (to the London Roots 2 fund) and two (from the same partnership) were for work on race, equity, diversity and inclusion (REDI).
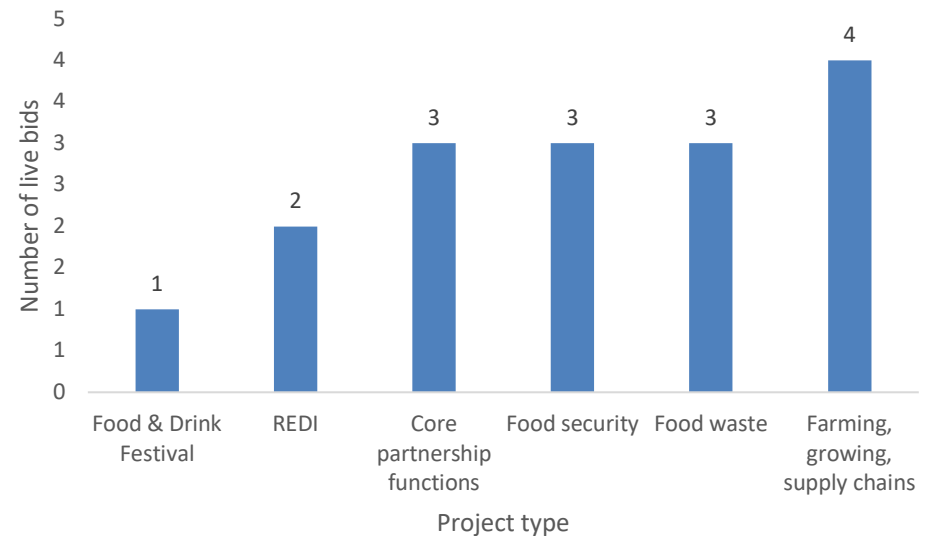

Figure 20: Project themes for live bids. n = 14.

Funding beyond 2024

Just over one third (36.1%, n=32) felt extremely or somewhat confident that their partnership would obtain local funding for its core work after the end of Phase 3 of the programme (Figure 21).

Most partnerships rely on funding above the local level, with 85.7% (n=48) reporting that they anticipated being highly or somewhat dependent upon national / UK sources of funding after the end of 2024 (Figure 22).

Extremely unconfident 4%

Extremely confident 8%

Somewhat unconfident 25%

Somewhat confident 36%

Neither confident nor unconfident 27%
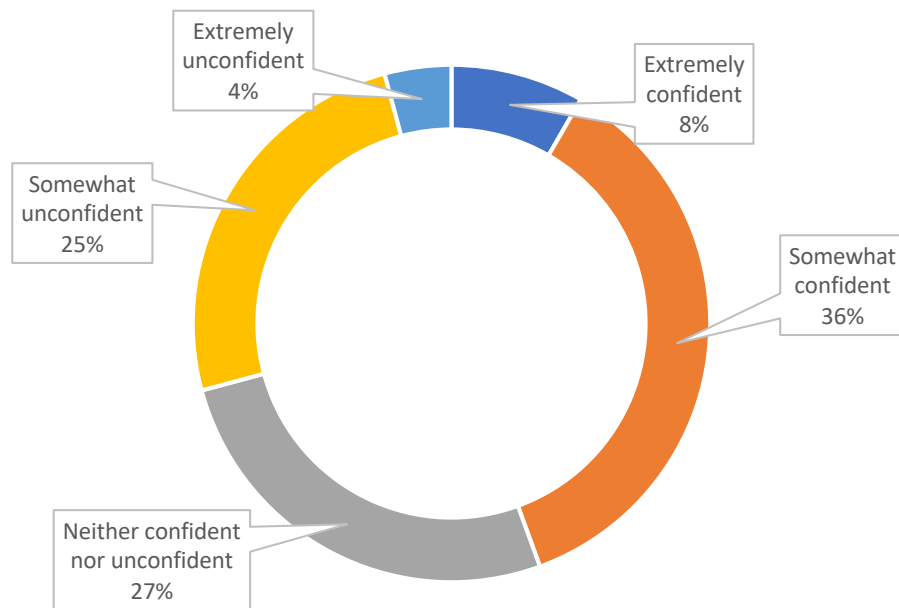
Figure 21: Confidence that the partnership will obtain funding for its core work after 2024. n = 72.

Not dependent (eg local funders are unlikely to require match funding from national sources) 14%

Highly dependent (eg national funding is essential to obtain buy in from local funders) 52%

Somewhat dependent 34%
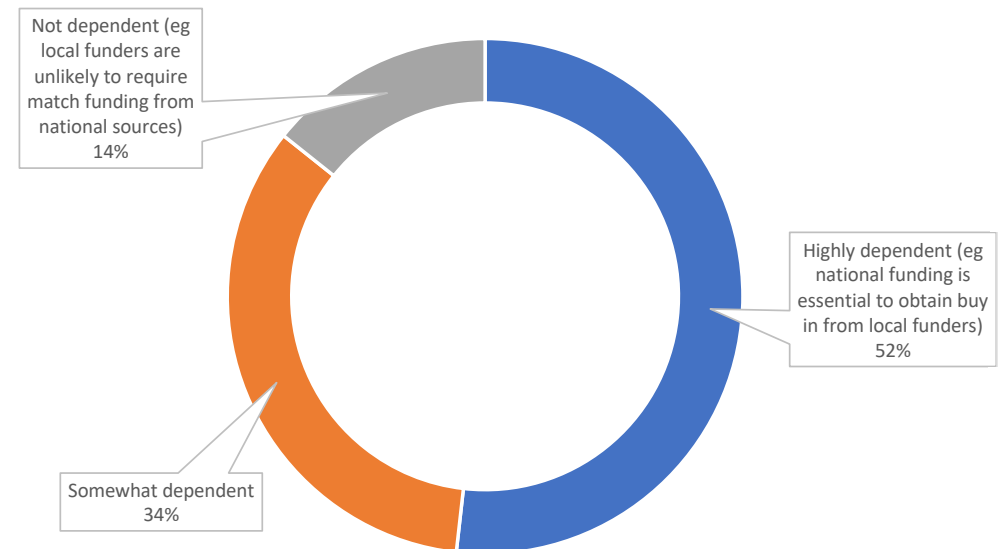
Figure 22: Dependence of partnership on national/UK sources of funding. Mainly national/UK government and/or major charities. This includes SFP funding. n = 56.

6

Local Food Partnership Priorities and Progress on Key Issues

For members of the SFP Network, the Six Key Issues provide a framework for action across a diverse range of local food issues. In any given year, attention on the different issues will vary according to the priorities of each partnership. Understanding progress against priorities gives a picture of the points of leverage and resistance for change within local food systems in the UK. It also gives an indication of where the SFP network might coordinate its efforts in future.

"

[The partnership] developed the concept of "Food at the Frontier", delivering food trail and associated events celebrating sustainable food and farming [in our county]... Events so far have reached over 800 people, with three more in the pipeline.

[13 North West England County Partnership]

The partnership worked with the city council to update their Good Food Buying Standards which mandates food businesses to adhere to the food waste hierarchy, to have an annually reviewed clear plan for reducing and minimising food waste, disposables and packaging and to communicate this to the public. This includes any food or catering procured through the council and operating from Council premises, but also provides a checklist and benchmark for licensing street food traders and citywide events.

[11 – South East England Urban Partnership]

We successfully secured funding from the Dixon Foundation to explore the opportunities of a Dynamic Food Procurement Hub in the north east region.

[12 – North East England County Partnership]

[Our partnership] brought 15 producers together to hold [the area's] first Farmers' Market in September. It was the result of monthly calls and online get-togethers to bring this network together. Attended by 900+ people, the market was more than a venue at which to buy food but also a dynamic space to engage with local, seasonal produce through discussions with producers, recipe sharing and tastings.

[93 – Scotland Rural Partnership]

"

Progress against SFP Key Issues

Reflecting on progress over the past year, Figure 23 shows the summary position where partnerships have made either a great deal, or a moderate amount of progress. Broadly, three patterns are evident. Firstly, governance and strategy stand out as the primary area where partnerships are moving forward. Secondly, as with other findings, progress on Good Food and Healthy Food for All are going forward in tandem – and there clearly exists synergy between these two issues. Finally, action on Catering and Procurement, and Sustainable Food Economy issues appear to be comparably more challenging overall.
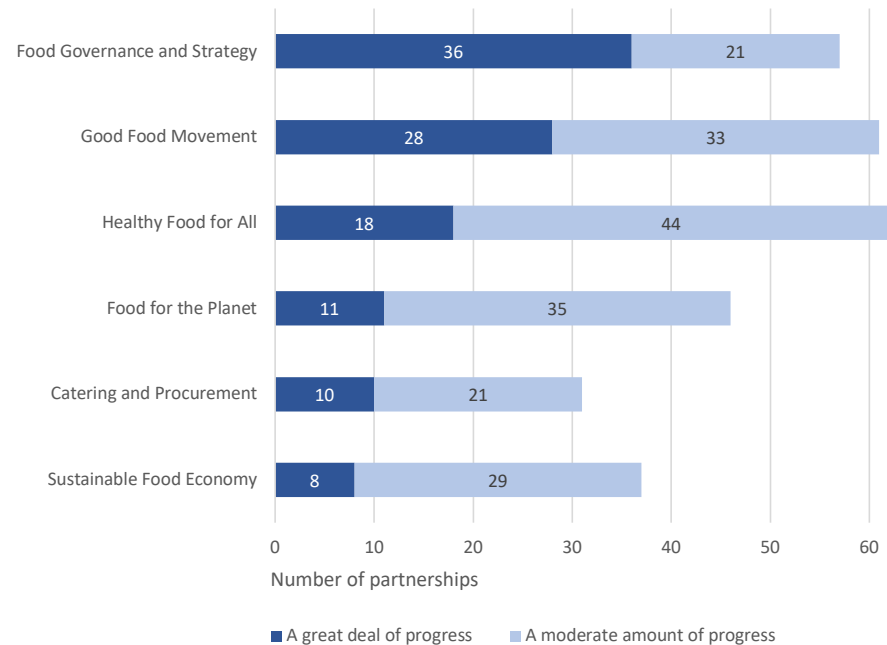

Figure 23: In the last year, how do you rate your partnership's progress against SFP's Six Key Issues? n=72.

Figure 24 reinforces this pattern shown for the overall progress made by partnerships but provides a more detailed profile of the types of activities. The evidence indicates that work around Catering and Procurement and Sustainable Food Economy is less commonplace among partnerships in the less year. However, while starting projects feature less frequently in these areas, the level of activity around lobbying and political engagement is similar for all issues[20]

Partnership impacts on local policy

Twenty-nine partnerships provided examples of their work to change local policy. Of the total of 53 interventions, 39 (74%) had been achieved, 2 (4%) were in consultation and a further 12 (23%) were in development (Figure 25).
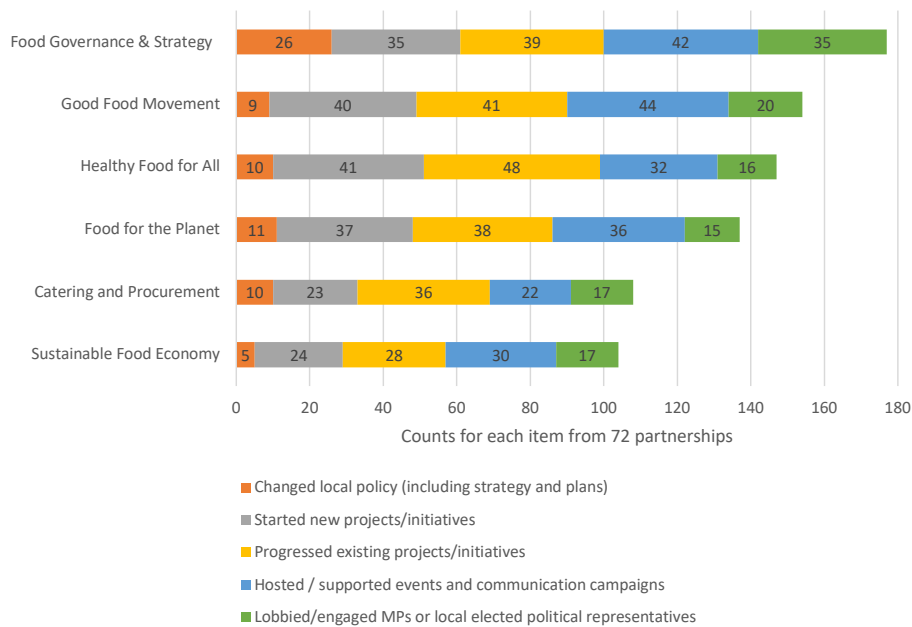
The examples referred to in the survey indicate that food partnerships are influencing a wide range of policy areas (Figure 26). They have also initiated new policies where there is no satisfactory provision within existing statutory frameworks. This includes advocacy and the development of new policies around commercial growing and supply chains, food hubs and food justice.

Many of the actions to influence local policy involved the creation of new food strategies, plans and charters. Other actions to integrate food into local strategy include aligning the food strategy with key local strategic policies or plans, a local policy food gap analysis, securing whole-council commitment to the SFP partnership and the launch of a food policy council to see through the implementation of a community food resilience strategy.

Figure 24: Area of activity and impact for partnerships in the last year. Count per partnership. n = 72.
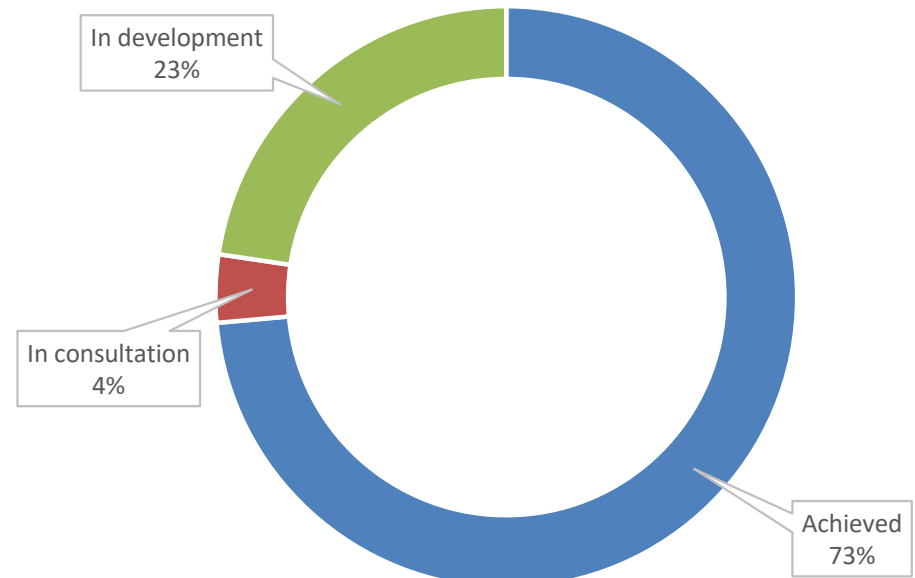
Figure 25: Status of partnership interventions to influence local policies and plans. n = 53.

20 Particularly given that 'Food Governance and Strategy' features thematically in the other five key issues.

"The council funded research to support and create a participatory Good Food Plan….This lays out a comprehensive vision for the borough for systems change, which includes resident participation, food security, growing and all the usual range of important work we see from partnerships."

[125 – London Borough]

Food partnerships have also successfully influenced (or are in the process of influencing) a wide range of local policies and plans including local outcome improvement plans, procurement strategies and policies, spatial plans, cost of living responses, and environment and climate change plans. There were other examples of innovative approaches to influencing policy and pushing the boundaries on sustainable food measures in traditionally inflexible or conservative areas of policy. For example, one partnership was seeking a culture change within the council through providing permaculture courses to the council and its partners. This partnership was also providing consultancy services to the economic development department to support the transition from a food aid to a food resilience approach. Another partnership was pushing to get the widest possible representation of sustainable food issues in the new Local Development Plan. This included targeting policy changes on disposable packaging for food businesses, protection of land for growing, new criteria for allocating land to different stakeholders for growing, requirements on land tenants to agree to nature-friendly food production techniques and planning policy to support food waste infrastructure in block housing.

Likewise, many food partnerships were explicitly referencing key local policies and plans in their food strategy. In addition to key local strategic documents (for example, council corporate strategies, Local Outcomes Improvement Plans – Scotland, Public Services Board and Health Board Plans – Wales), the policy areas most frequently mentioned were:

- ● Public health, health and well-being and healthy weight
- ● Environment, climate change
- ● Economic development and circular economy

Some partnerships are influencing a wide range of policy areas. From food strategies to commercial and community growing they are also creating new local policies and plans where the existing statutory framework is lacking. At the same time, aside from food strategies/plans and to some extent procurement and food security the number of interventions associated with specific areas of policy is relatively small. As with funding, this points to the potential for the programme to give more strategic direction to the network's policy advocacy along the lines of the Phase 2 campaigns approach.

Several leading partnerships have succeeded in integrating food system priorities across a wide range of strategic plans, for example:

"Our Food System Strategy has three key pillars – Economy, Environment, and Community. This then delves deeper to 4 cross cutting themes of Food Skills and Knowledge, Food Behavior Change, Food Security and Resilience, Food Innovation Data and Research; plus 6 strategic work streams of Food Production, Food Sourcing, Food Transformation, Food Waste & Recycling, Food Economy & Employment, Food Safety and Standards. All of these areas directly effect and inform key policies such as the Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy, Inclusive Growth Strategy, FIP Action Plan, City of Nature Plan, and many more."

[17 – West Midlands England Urban Partnership]

Many councils are strategically referring to other key areas of policy in their food strategies. This practice could be adopted more widely as a way to reinforce the message that action on sustainable food is a route to delivery on other local policies and objectives.
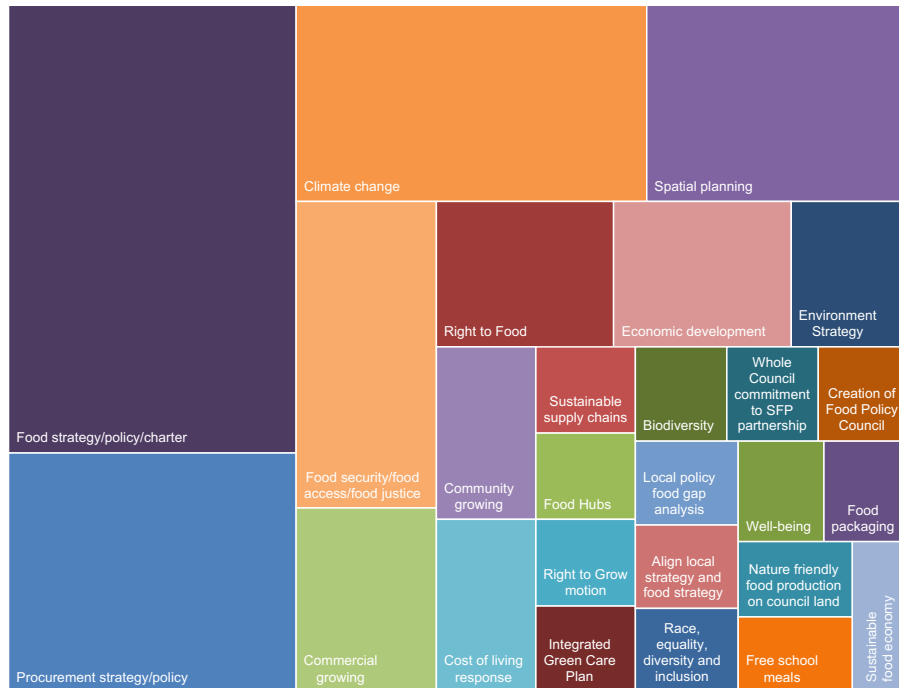
Figure 26: Treemap of local policy interventions.
n=29 partnerships responding to an optional question.

Partnership goals for the next 12 months

Responses indicated that Local Food Partnerships had broad-ranging and ambitious goals for the coming year. These fell under twelve categories and involved a wide range of planned initiatives (see Table 1). Overall, the responses provide evidence that partnerships are focussing their efforts increasingly strategically to effect local food system change. Many responses also emphasised planned work to strengthen the representativeness and financial sustainability of the partnership.

Go, Stop and Go Again:
How fortunes fluctuate for some local food partnerships

In most cases to date, local food partnerships have grown over time to bring on board new stakeholders and to take on an increasing range of roles and responsibilities. However, not all partnerships experience this upward trajectory. Since the start of the programme in 2011, records show that 21 areas have suspended their activities for at least six months. Several reasons account for these halts including the loss of a leading advocate, changes to the host organisation, the loss of local funding, or a shift in policy priorities. Sixteen areas have left the programme where the challenges are not resolved. In five areas, these changes represent a pause before re-grouping and picking up partnership activities once again. In some cases, re-kindled partnerships can move forward with fresh representation and ideas. This illustrates how local 'stop and go' factors direct the speed at which local food partnerships make progress on their objectives.

Table 1: Going into 2024: partnership priorities over the next 12 months.

Area of work	Examples
Strengthening partnership	● Improve communications. ● Developing a post Phase 3 finance strategy. ● Achieve financial sustainability for partnership coordinator and associated core roles. ● Aligning food projects with major government funding such as the Shared Prosperity fund. ● Increase range of public and private sector representatives. ● Increase partnership management capacity. ● Progressing towards Bronze or Silver SFP Award. ● Securing buy-in from council CEO, senior management and elected members.
Strengthening local food policy	● Developing and implementing local and regional food, strategies, action plans and charters. ● Influencing local policy to reflect SFP priorities / Good Food Nation policy. ● Signing up businesses to Sustainable Business Code and Digital Food Hub projects. ● Achieve steering group membership of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. ● Collecting area-wide data to understand gaps and opportunities.

Area of work	Examples
Children and schools	● Changing catering, curriculum, and culture. ● Bringing the voices of children and young people in programmes of work. ● Increasing uptake of free school meals. ● Working with public health on children's health food initiatives. ● Piloting new supply chains for school food. ● Improving access to healthy food in early years settings. ● Working with planning team to develop local policy on takeaway restriction zones near schools.
Good food movement	● Running food summits and public facing events. ● Public consultations. ● Developing strategic communications to aid a more joined up approach publicly and regionally.

Area of work	Examples
Resilience approaches to food security	● Bring people with lived experience of food insecurity into partnership decision making. ● Develop an alternative to Healthy Start for those with No Recourse to Public Funds status. ● Supporting the community food network. ● Securing supply chains for affordable food projects. ● Moving away from reliance on surplus food donations in food hubs and co-ops. ● Setting up a cash first programme. ● Employing Right to Food to shape work of the council. ● Working with community food providers to build in more nutrition and seasonal cooking skills. ● Empowering citizens with the Culturally Diverse Healthy Eating Guides. ● Linking public sector food procurement to community wealth building. ● Evolving food banks into more holistic and empowering approaches to food security. ● Bridging the gap on affordability of climate-friendly food for low-income communities. ● Transition of community food retail projects to sustainable supply chains. ● Managing implications of end of Household Support Fund. ● Integration of wrap around services and food security services.

Area of work	Examples
Catering and retail	● Completing research and survey on permanent indoor market. ● Engaging food businesses. ● Increasing number of sustainable food retail outlets.
Procurement	● Developing growing plans with local farmers to meet public sector procurement demand. ● Increasing public procurement of agro-ecologically produced seasonable fruit and vegetables. ● Linking public sector food procurement to community wealth building.
Farming and growing	● Projects to showcase local food. ● Implementing actions in City Downland Estate Plan. ● Developing regenerative food systems.
Community growing	● Working with urban farm project to deliver community growing projects. ● Developing stronger more visible community growing spaces. ● Launching map of county food growing projects.
Food waste	● Driving forward a food waste and circular economy action.

7

Local Food Partnership Actions on Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The active engagement of diverse groups of people is essential if local food partnerships are to represent the population they work with. In Phase 2 of the programme, SFP initiated Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) for Change as a strand of work. In Phase 3, the programme developed a REDI Review Tool 'designed to help SFP food partnerships and other food sector organisations review their culture, practices and the people involved, through the lens of Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. The tool gives a particular focus to Race rather than EDI in general. The programme awarded a REDI pilot grant to three partnerships with the aim of enabling the recipients and programme to explore how the REDI tool could be used and how REDI for change principles could be embedded in food partnerships.

"

Expansion and diversification of [the partnership] governance structure is underway via new working partnerships with Diversity Business Incubator (DBI), notably through our SFP Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) for Change pilot. [Name withheld] and DBI colleagues are representing [the partnership] at events, becoming 'faces' of the partnership and network.

[9 – South West England Urban Partnership]

Work has begun to increase our board with individuals that have the best local links to a diverse community and groups to assure good access to information.

[65 – Scotland Urban Partnership]

During the food strategy consultation process, [our partnership] held 14 in-person focus groups to ensure seldom listened to voices were included.

[19 – North East England Urban Partnership]

[This area] is not, on the face of it, a conventionally diverse county so diversity and inclusion takes different forms here.

[68 – Wales Rural Partnership]

"

The SFP Survey sought to explore action against REDI goals across the SFP Network. While the responses were mixed, Figure 27 shows that most partnerships reported some progress in this area. This mixed picture was reflected in other areas of the survey. For example, just under one third of partnerships reported that they were either leading or supporting actions to involve diverse or disadvantaged groups in relation to cost of living decision making.

Figure 27: Perception of partnership's progress on tackling issues around race, equity, diversity and inclusion in last year. SFP REDI initiative toolkit information provided. n=71.

Approaches to REDI

In total, 71 respondents provided further written feedback on this area. Partnerships were working both strategically and tactically to progress race, equity, diversity and inclusion in their work. Participant responses on challenges and approaches to equity, diversity and inclusion reflect the REDI tools emphasis on race with very few partnerships referring to other aspects of the EDI agenda such as disability or sexuality and gender.

The three recipients of the REDI pilot grant were taking different approaches to embedding REDI principles in the work of the partnership. This included:

- Embedding REDI principles in strategy, policy and membership criteria
- Collaborative research around BAME communities and food
- Ensuring the accessibility of partnership events and workshops (for example through paying travel expenses)
- Anti-racism training for the core partnership team
- Building BAME representation in the partnership

Other partnerships mentioned that they were seeking to progress EDI through strategic actions such as:

- Embedding REDI criteria in small grant opportunities
- Development of a more diverse partnership steering group
- Meaningful involvement of diverse groups of people in the development and implementation of the food strategy
- Deprivation mapping to more effectively target efforts
- Extending EDI beyond food poverty work

"We have a working group of people with lived experience known as 'Beans on Toast' who co- developed the local food strategy and are leading on the development of key workstreams. We feel that this is really enhancing the inclusion of the food partnership."

[101 – North West England County Partnership]

"We are working to promote the Welsh language through community gardening initiatives that focus on learning Welsh through growing. We are aiming to target our next year's work towards support for the wards on the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation with the highest level of socio-economic disadvantage. This includes areas with the highest level of racial and ethnic diversity in the county including refugees and homelessness/housing insecurity."

[71 – Wales Rural Partnership]

On a more tactical level partnerships referred to approaches such as:

- Ensuring that information was available in different languages
- Ensuring the availability of culturally appropriate food
- Targeted approaches (for example, Queer Gardening Group and podcasts showcasing the work of third sector organisations working with diverse groups) to engaging with people from marginalised groups as part of a Good Food Movement campaign
- Engaging with a group of refugees and asylum seekers via their support worker.

Drawing upon specific examples, the Cheshire West and Chester food partnership have established a workstream to increase the voices of the BAME community, including refugees and asylum seekers to ensure that the partnership's work appropriately reflects the food needs of these groups. The partnership has a working group of people with lived experience known as 'Beans on Toast' who co-developed the local food strategy and leading on the development of key workstreams.

Carmarthenshire are working to promote the Welsh language through community gardening initiatives that focus on learning Welsh through growing. They are also aiming to target next year's work towards support for the wards on the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation with the highest level of socio-economic disadvantage. This includes areas with the highest level of racial and ethnic diversity in the county including refugees and homelessness / housing insecurity.

In Stirling work has begun to increase the number of food partnership board members who have strong local links to diverse groups to ensure information and support is accessible to all people and groups in the local community. They are also linking in with council Community Learning and Development officers to share their networking events and food charters to create conversations within areas with the highest levels of deprivation.

Barriers to progressing REDI

The main themes emerged in the responses about barriers and challenges to making progress on EDI.

The most frequently mentioned issue was time and resource. Partnerships from geographically dispersed regions mentioned that it could be challenging to locate meetings in such a way as to make them accessible for different community stakeholders. Several respondents stated that they lacked the time to be able to approach REDI in a meaningful way or to sustain the work that was already underway.

"[Name withheld] is a very big city with many social problems. We do our best to work with various organisations in order to connect with different communities experiencing disadvantage, but without continuous funding/increased capacity for our work/ the work of our partners, equity will be hard to achieve."

[44 – Scotland Urban Partnership]

"Rural inclusion is very challenging at county scale."

[68 – Wales Rural Partnership]

"Time & capacity challenges – Lots of groups & organisations contact us, which is great. But it does mean our capacity to do outreach work with new groups is very challenging."

[67 – Wales Rural Partnership]

Several respondents mentioned the structural challenge of many key decision-making bodies including the partnership steering group lacking people with lived experience of being from a minoritized background.

"System change from central points is often led by those without lived experience and minimal lived experience support/input."

[17 – West Midlands England Urban Partnership]

Other partnerships mentioned the fact that they were part of a racially homogeneous region or lack of response to outreach efforts/initiatives as perceived barriers to progressing REDI work. One partnership drew attention to the fact that REDI was not integrated into the SFP six key themes.

8

Local Food Partnership Responses to the Cost of Living

Since early 2021, households have experienced the biggest drop in living standards since records began 60 years ago[21]. The UK Government has framed the issue as a short term 'crisis' related to increases in food and energy prices driven by global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Many commentators, however, challenge the idea of a crisis, pointing out that poverty and social inequity is an entrenched issue driven by political decisions on austerity and deregulation in previous years. The increasing disparity between incomes and prices has significantly increased the number of households living in poverty and had a particularly devastating effect on diets for those living in the poorest households. In 2022, a survey published by the Food Foundation[22] survey found that 14% of households had missed or restricted meals as a result of affordability and access issues, whilst 2.6 million children were 'living in households that did not have access to a healthy and affordable diet'.

21 https://www.newstatesman.com/chart-of-the-day/2022/08/uk-households-fall-living-standards

22 https://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/millions-adults-missing-meals-cost-living-crisis-bites

"

The partnership has amplified access to the food support grants administered by the Local Authority. With the partnership's expertise, the grants were given out quickly and effectively seeing over £80,000 go to groups providing food support. This equates to 20 groups receiving money, the vast majority in the partnership network and the new entrants were linked in with the SFC meaning there was a coordinated and joined up approach.

[69 – Wales Rural Partnership]

We are also working on measures to transition the network to more of an alliance model – with an accent on moving away from 'aid' towards 'agency'

[9 – South West England Urban Partnership]

We have also been working to add local voice to national campaigns as most of the solutions to poverty require national government intervention.

[11 – South East England Urban Partnership]

We have recruited twice to the role of Food Inequality Officer, and both incumbents have left the role within 18 months due to the enormous stress of the role.

[5 – North East England Urban Partnership]

[Our partnership] helped to facilitate meetings and liaise with key food providers in the city to ensure that this response was appropriately targeted geographically.

[34 – North East England Urban Partnership]

"

The survey captures a summary of the role of local food partnerships in shaping cost of living responses and addressing related local priorities. The analysis below should be considered in conjunction with the findings on partnership funding. This shows how partnerships are creatively deploying cost of living and levelling up allocations from central government to deliver holistic, long-term and empowering approaches to food security.

Leading responses at the local level

As during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, partnerships are playing a significant role in shaping the strategic response to cost of living. Seventy two percent (Figure 28) of partnerships had coordinated and developed cross-agency responses and 64% had led the development of area strategies and action plans. Just over half had advised or informed local agencies on their cost of living response. Between 13%–40% of partnerships had also led on a range of other critical areas including supporting existing food poverty models (such as food banks) to transition to more sustainable approaches and improving access to healthy food as well as campaigning and lobbying (all 40% respectively). Signifying the increased standing of local food partnerships, a third had advised agencies at regional and national level.

Many had also led on practical initiatives such as offering training programmes, the development of best practice and improving take-up of schemes to improve nutrition in pregnancy and the early years.

Many partnerships had also played a role in the work that other agencies were doing on cost of living. Approximately 40%–70% had supported the development of new approaches to food security, improving access to healthy food, tackling school holiday hunger, improving the take-up of pregnancy and early years food payment schemes and free school meals.
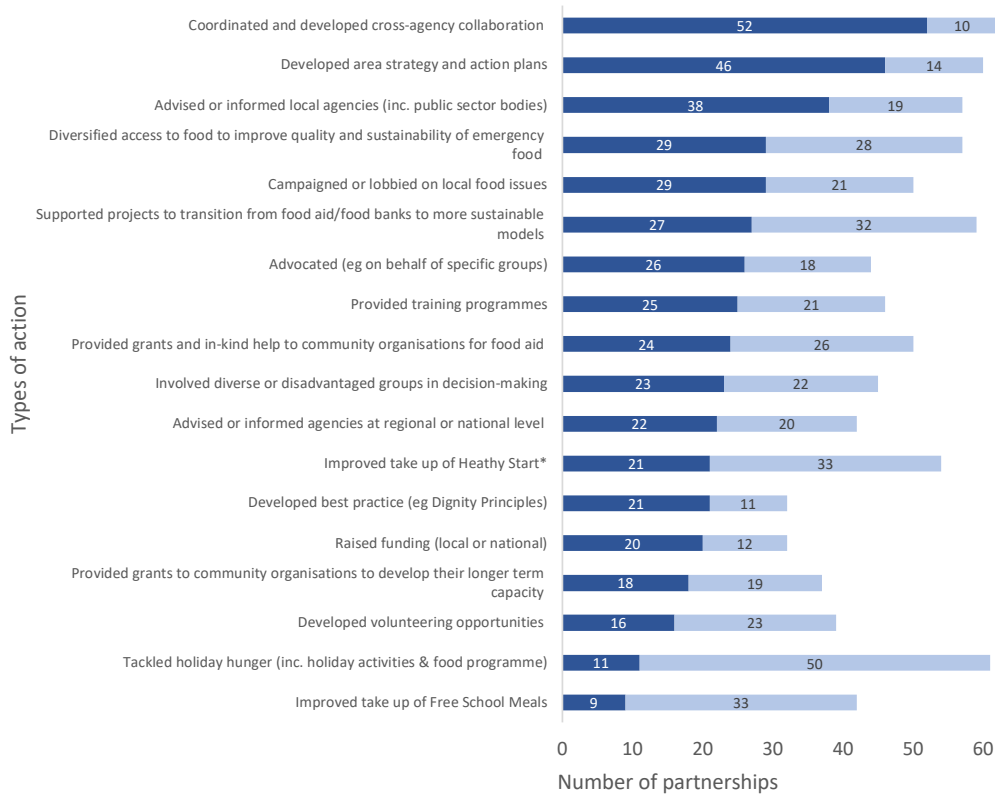
Types of action

Coordinated and developed cross-agency collaboration	52	10
Developed area strategy and action plans	46	14
Advised or informed local agencies (inc. public sector bodies)	38	19
Diversified access to food to improve quality and sustainability of emergency food	29	28
Campaigned or lobbied on local food issues	29	21
Supported projects to transition from food aid/food banks to more sustainable models	27	32
Advocated (eg on behalf of specific groups)	26	18
Provided training programmes	25	21
Provided grants and in-kind help to community organisations for food aid	24	26
Involved diverse or disadvantaged groups in decision-making	23	22
Advised or informed agencies at regional or national level	22	20
Improved take up of Heathy Start*	21	33
Developed best practice (eg Dignity Principles)	21	11
Raised funding (local or national)	20	12
Provided grants to community organisations to develop their longer term capacity	18	19
Developed volunteering opportunities	16	23
Tackled holiday hunger (inc. holiday activities & food programme)	11	50
Improved take up of Free School Meals	9	33

Number of partnerships

Figure 28: Food partnership leadership and support for actions to address the cost of living.
n=72. *Best Start Foods in Scotland

Leads who gave further explanation of their partnership's response on cost of living indicated that local food partnerships are mainly concerned with governance and shaping the strategic agenda. However, a distinct theme from the feedback also emphasised the role of partnerships in direct interventions.

"[We have] facilitated conversations between the local authority, Health Board and foodbank to join-up on strategies to provide energy top up, energy efficient cooking equipment, and nutrition advice."

[79 – Scotland County Partnership]

"Community grants have enabled food banks and School to start to develop small scale food growing model with cafes."

[116 – Wales Rural Partnership]

"[We are delivering a] programme of community based information sessions focused on mitigating the impact of the cost of living crisis were held across a range of public spaces in the borough."

[104 – North West England Urban Partnership]

"We are…moving away from 'aid' towards 'agency' including affordable food clubs, social supermarkets, street level food buying co-operatives and potentially a large-scale bulk food buying and distribution initiative."

[9 – South West England Urban Partnership]

"We have also been working to add local voice to national campaigns as most of the solutions to poverty require national government intervention."

[11 – South East England Urban Partnership]

A shift in awareness of food system issues

Reflecting on the outlook of local decision-makers, the majority of survey respondents (75%) thought that awareness of food system issues has continued to grow since the end of the pandemic. A minority (8%) thought that key decision makers are less focused on food issues now (Figure 29).

Many of the qualitative responses indicated that the combined effects of recent events have supported a greater focus on food system issues. Respondents indicated that local decision-makers appeared to have greater awareness of food as a system and of the interconnected nature of issues such as food poverty and climate change. There also appears to be more awareness of the need to work across sectors to address key challenges.
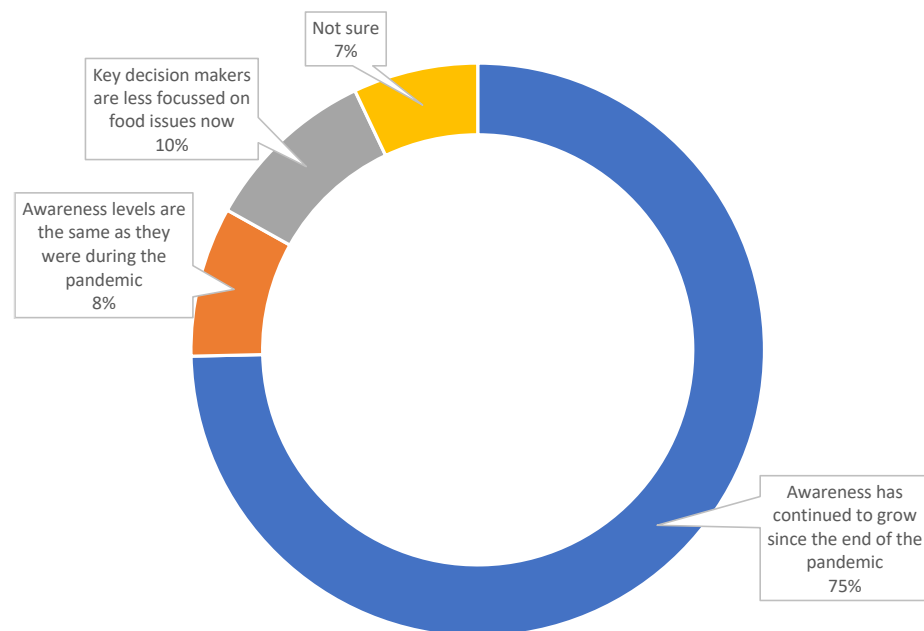

Figure 29: Local decision-maker awareness of food system issues. Perceptions of partnership leads. n=71.

"I get the sense that the agenda has shifted significantly [with] the impact of the cost of living crisis, coping with the massive cuts in public sector funding, and delivering on climate action."

[104 – North West England Urban Partnership]

"Local decisions on addressing healthy weight management... have naturally now extended to discussing the influence of the food system on public health outcomes when applying a whole systems approach."

[58 – East England Urban Partnership]

"There is a much greater awareness to collaborate, make connections and enable all sectors to work to improve the whole food system. Prior to the pandemic it was a difficult door to open..."

[63 – East Midlands England County Partnership]

However, the pressures created in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the sharp increase in poverty levels are also forcing attention away from taking a more systemic and sustainability-focussed approach.

"The after-effects of the covid pandemic have meant that food issues are not highest on the priority for sectors such as public health."

[16 – North East England Urban Partnership]

"Awareness has increased...but public funds and resources are limited so council action and policies are weak. Most action is coming from the third sector and community-based organisations."

[100 – West Midlands England County Partnership]

"The cost of living crisis has refocused the need for food support, but wider food system issues e.g. procurement, sustainability, social responsibility to provide good nutrition remain challenging."

[69 – Wales Urban Partnership]

9
Conclusions

"We have this incredible network of food partnership across the 4 nations – nothing quite like anywhere else in the world and yet I worry about its future. We have really benefited from the SFP funding – we need this to continue... We need the infrastructure to keep it all going in the same direction with all its wonderful local variations. We need policy change at the top to help support this infrastructure and inspire us all to keep going. It's tough out there and sadly, it's only going to get tougher."

[19 – North East England Urban Partnership]

1. Since 2019 membership of the SFP network has grown from 50 to 95 active members[23]. By the summer of 2023, 26 areas were seeking to join the network. Growth is fastest in Scotland and Wales, where government policies are conducive to the creation of local authority level food partnerships.

2. The pattern of membership shows partnerships located in all forms of local authority geography and a mixture of urban and rural locations. While there is very diverse spread of locations, local food partnerships are more likely to be formed in local authority areas with high multiple deprivation.

3. Many established local food partnerships are consolidating how they operate as organisations. In a typical format, a full time Coordinator and Chair works with a Steering Group with ten members who represent a range of public, private and third sector agencies and lay membership. This core partnership engages around 25 delivery organisations and, through email lists and social media, networks with at least a thousand interested individuals in their locality.

4. This typical pattern hides much variation depending, for instance, on the maturity of the partnership, the local geography, and the host organisation. The latter are mainly differentiated by whether they are public sector or third sector agencies. Within the public sector, public health – as well as community development and sustainability – feature strongly. Third sector hosts vary considerably notably in terms of whether they are specifically constituted as local food systems change agencies – or if this is one area of work among other roles. Some of these variations may account for differences in styles of working, particularly depending on where the balance lies between working within and without local bureaucracies.

5. Food partnerships are often very successful in bringing together diverse stakeholders, including those who would not meet otherwise. Nevertheless, there are some clear patterns in terms where support is forthcoming. From within departments of local government and the NHS, engagement is often mixed and, without support from senior sources, obtaining coordinated action is challenging. While some partnerships have formed close relationships, overall engagement across the food business community is less strong than public and third sector links.

6. One theme from across the members survey was around the focus on influencing local food governance and strategy. This was reflected in the number of partnerships reporting in to higher strategic and planning processes as well as in the range and diversity of examples provided of changes to local policy making in the last year. Two processes at work appear to be, firstly, the momentum that partnerships are gaining through the transfer of expertise between partnerships and across stakeholder communities. As many survey respondents reported, the SFP Network is helping to exchange ideas and solutions to influence decision-making. Secondly, devolved government in Scotland and Wales has given active support for partnerships to have a more established place in local policy making. While the environment is less supportive in England and Northern Ireland, some partnerships have consolidated their role as contributors in local landscape of decision-making.

7. Partnership working in the context of local food systems change involves significant leadership skills to transcends single organisation and harnesses collective efforts. LFPs act with limited formal authority – bringing people together across and beyond organisational boundaries – seeking to shared understanding and collective action. While no one organisation has exclusive control over the local food system, some have more influence than others. Much of the success and struggle of local food partnerships involves discovering and working with the interests and skills of actors who rarely work together and mobilising marginalised interests.

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23 Based upon active members in Dec 2019 and in October 2023.

8. Some more established LFPs are acting with greater authority in the local governance landscape: revising cross sector strategies; shaping and giving oversight to a range of food-related programmes and leading on specific initiatives.

9. More attention is needed to their legal and governance status of cross sector food partnerships in the local policy landscape. There are opportunities to further refine practices around representation, roles and responsibilities of key players. This also links to the subject of the professional training and support, and workforce development more widely, for people who work on local food systems issues.

10. Overall, local food partnerships are thinly resourced, particularly in given the scale and complexity of local food system issues. Funding sources are often based upon local underspends or specific short-terms grants. Many partnerships struggle to operate as more than a pilot or a task-and-finish project, as opposed to a long-term feature of the organisation landscape.

11. A range of funders are interested in supporting SFP-related activity in local areas. SFP partnerships have been successful at attracting money from the national (via local government) cost of living and levelling up funds. The data potentially points to some sources of funding that have not as yet been exploited on a broadscale by SFP partnerships. This points to the benefit of the SFP programme developing a more strategic approach to support partnerships to raise funds, for example through help to identify sources of funding and advice about engaging funders and making successful applications.

12. Building upon the REDI work of SFP, there continues to be questions of how partnerships better reflect the diversity of the communities they work with. There are opportunities to develop more work on representation and recognition as local food partnerships expand their engagement on Good Food Movement issues. Some partnerships recommend that SFP should make EDI a higher priority and integral subject within the six SFP issues.

13. As during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, partnerships are playing a significant role in shaping the strategic response to cost of living. The vast majority have led strategic efforts such as coordinating and developing cross-agency action, developing strategies and action plans, lobbied for change at national and local level and advised local agencies. A key area of focus has been to help drive the transition from traditional food poverty approaches such as food banks to more long-term, sustainable, and empowering models. One third of partnerships had advised agencies at regional and national level about the cost-of-living response. These contributions in the last eighteen months signify the increased standing of local food partnerships as expert organisations on place-based food system issues.

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Authors

Mat Jones, Professor of Public Health and Community
    Development, Bristol Centre for Public Health and Wellbeing

Sarah Hills, Senior Lecturer in Sustainability,
    School of Architecture and Environment

University of the West of England