



OFFICER REPORT TO COUNCIL

FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITIES, ENVIRONMENT AND HIGHWAYS SELECT COMMITTEE ON A REFERRED MOTION: 'PLANT BASED MEALS'

KEY ISSUE / DECISION:

1. Under Standing Order 12.6 for Council to note the feedback from the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee on the referred Council motion title 'Plant based meals'
2. This report sets out the conclusions of the Select Committee and invites Council to note the work underway to address the issues raised in the motion through finalisation and implementation of A Surrey Whole System Food Strategy and the [Surrey Healthy Schools](#) approach which this strategy supports.

BACKGROUND:

3. Cllr Lance Spencer submitted a motion to a meeting of the County Council held on 11 July 2023 on the topic of plant based meals, *food choices and their impact on the environment, health and animal welfare*. It was resolved that this Motion be referred to the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee for the purpose of consideration and making recommendations to the Cabinet or the Council for decision.

4. The motion asked the Council to:

- *Ensure that food provided at all council catered events and meetings is predominantly plant-based, preferably using ingredients sourced from local food surplus organisations.*
- *Ensure that school meals service have a totally plant based menu one day per week, ideally Mondays.*
- *Continue to outreach to schools and young people to actively influence and inform on climate change and in particular on food choices and their impact on the environment, health and animal welfare.*
- *To further encourage and empower students to make informed decisions about the food available in their school.*
- *Inspire, promote and support initiatives surrounding climate change and in particular food growing, preparation and waste avoidance, especially as part of school and community projects.*

Full text of the motion presented to the Council meeting is at Annex 1.

THE PROCESS:

5. According to the Surrey County Council constitution, Part 1 of the Standing Orders states that:

- When an original motion is referred to the Cabinet or appropriate committee under Standing Order 12.3, the Member of the Council who has moved the original motion and his/her seconder shall be notified of the meeting at which the Cabinet or committee will consider it. They shall have the right to attend the meeting and speak to the motion.
- Where an original motion is referred to the Cabinet or a committee, it will report upon the motion to the following ordinary meeting of the Council and Standing Order 8.8(b) shall not apply to such report.

6. The motion was referred to the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee at the Council meeting on 11 July 2023 and considered formally by the Select Committee at its meeting on 29 April 2024.

KEY ACTIVITIES AND ANALYSIS:

7. Following the referral, the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee scheduled the item for scrutiny at a public session to hear the views of key stakeholders and requested a service briefing report on the Motion. Officers were invited to attend the April Committee session to speak to their report. The Cabinet Member for Environment and the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, and Public Health were also present.

8. In considering the Motion the Select Committee noted the following key points:

- I. The terminology 'plant-based' should not be used as this could imply processed food which may not be healthy. The aim should be reduction of meat consumption and consumption of more fruit and vegetables in a healthy manner.
- II. The importance of an inclusive approach which supported *meat free Mondays* but allowed flexibility for special dietary needs or medical conditions to be accommodated. It was important not to restrict choice. The focus should be on embedding principles of healthy and sustainable eating and empowering choice.

RESOLVED

9. After detailed discussion and noting the responses to its key lines of enquiry, the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee:

- Noted the comprehensive work to develop the Surrey's Whole System Food Strategy and the Surrey County Council Climate Change Strategy

and the key ambition they set to make our local food system more sustainable, empower local people to make healthier food choices and reduce the impact of food system on climate change, and that these ambitions align closely with those set out in the Motion.

10. The Select Committee endorsed the majority of the Service responses to the Motion and the approach described to addressing its aims as set out in the table below:

Motion Resolution	Service recommendation
Ensure that food provided at all council catered events and meetings is predominantly plant-based, preferably using ingredients sourced from local food surplus organisations	Create guidelines for local authority procurement of food to be sustainable by default based on Government Buying Standard for food and catering services - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) and to encourage using ingredients sourced from local food surplus organisations
Ensure that school meals service have a totally plant based menu one day per week, ideally Mondays.	<p>Eating a balanced diet is essential for children’s growth and development. Increasing access to nutritious and affordable food is one of the key ambitions of the Surrey whole system food strategy. Additionally, the strategy aims to mitigate the climate impacts of the food system by fostering education, community empowerment, and engagement. Currently, some schools in Surrey, predominantly primary with a few secondary schools, observe Meat-Free Mondays as part of the 12-15 contract for school meals. Some schools in Surrey observe Meat-Free Mondays. Further promotion of Meat-Free Mondays could be achieved by the implementation of the Surrey whole system food strategy and engaging schools. While existing initiatives like Surrey Healthy Schools could help embed a culture of healthy and sustainable eating among Surrey families, implementing a Meat-Free Mondays in select schools may require careful consideration and expert guidance. This is especially important for children with special dietary needs or medical conditions that restrict them from eating certain types of foods.</p> <p>To address this, we suggest that schools define Meat-Free Mondays through discussions and collaboration with families and students, focusing on principles of healthy and sustainable eating. This approach ensures inclusivity and fairness in the Meat-Free Monday initiative, while providing an opportunity for children, particularly those with limited access at home, to consume more fruits and vegetables.</p>
Continue to outreach to schools and young people to actively influence and inform on climate change and in particular on food choices and their impact on the environment, health and	Provide schools with support in order to increase the number of schools engaging with the development of a Surrey Healthy Schools approach, in particular re Theme 3 – Healthy Eating. Increase the emphasis on food choices and their impact on the environment, health and animal welfare in the exiting initiatives such Eco Schools

animal welfare.	
To further encourage and empower students to make informed decisions about the food available in their school	Support schools to develop school nutrition action group (SNAG) as part of a Surrey Healthy Schools approach and widen student participation in through initiatives such as “peer champions” based in schools to make informed decisions about the food available in their school.
Inspire, promote and support initiatives surrounding climate change and in particular food growing, preparation and waste avoidance, especially as part of school and community projects.	Facilitate a robust public involvement to raise the importance of food choices on the climate change and animal welfare and enable the community to make an informed decision about food choices

11. The Committee also encouraged development of KPIs to measure change on the ground including around sourcing of local food, and the quality of food supplied.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

12. Based on its consideration of the issues as set out in this report, the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee recommends that Council:

- I. Note the key points from their discussion of the Motion as described in this report and the work underway to address the issues raised in the motion through finalisation and implementation of A Surrey Whole System Food Strategy.
- II. Note that the strategy supports the [Surrey Healthy Schools](#) approach and has a focus on three key strands: addressing food insecurity, reducing climate impact of the local food system and supporting the local population to keep a healthy weight by enhancing the accessibility and affordability of nutritious food.

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Sources/background papers:

Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee Agenda – 29 April 2024 ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee, 29/04/2024 10:00 \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

Council Agenda – 11 July 2023:

[\(Public Pack\) Agenda Document for Council, 11/07/2023 10:00 \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

Lance Spencer (Goldsworth East and Horsell Village) to move under standing order 11 as follows:

This Council notes that:

- *At the Council meeting on 9 July 2019 an original motion resolved that the Council:*
 - 4. *declares a ‘Climate Emergency’, and commits actions to support businesses and all local authorities in their work to tackle climate change by providing a strong unified voice for councils in lobbying for support to address this emergency, and sharing best practice across all councils.*
- *At the Council meeting on 21 March 2023 an original motion resolved that the Council noted that:*
 - *Food production has a high impact on climate and the environment. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on climate change and land estimates that 21-27% of total greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) are attributable to the food system ([Special Report on Climate Change and Land, IPCC, 2019](#)). Local, organic and animal friendly food production systems reduce these emissions.*
 - *What we eat has a significant impact on our climate impact in the UK. This is explored by the Centre for Alternative Technology ([Zero Carbon: Rethinking the Future - Centre for Alternative Technology](#))*
 - *What we eat has a strong role to play in our public health, including through Surrey’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy.*
- *At the Council meeting on 21 March 2023 the aforementioned original motion resolved that the Council believed that:*
 - *Surrey County Council has a significant role to play in leadership in this area - including through our procurement of food, addressing food waste and through our farm ownership.*
 - *Implementing Surrey’s Climate Change Strategy will have a positive impact on our land-use in Surrey.*
 - *Surrey County Councillors can play an active role in advocating for what is needed in this area.*

This Council further notes that:

- *The Government’s independent Climate Change Committee advises that meat consumption should be reduced by a fifth, and that public bodies should lead the way by promoting plant-based food options. Leading by example on this, and food waste, should be fundamental components of our commitment to cutting carbon emissions.*

- *Furthermore, in the UK, only 18% of children consume the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables per day, and most young people's diets lack fibre. Providing appealing plant-based school meals along with education on healthy, climate-positive food choices are excellent ways to address these problems.*
- *Currently school meals services have plant-based menus available as part of their regular offer.*

This Council calls on the Cabinet to:

- I. Ensure that food provided at all council catered events and meetings is predominantly plant-based, preferably using ingredients sourced from local food surplus organisations.*
- II. Ensure that school meals service have a totally plant based menu one day per week, ideally Mondays.*
- III. Continue to outreach to schools and young people to actively influence and inform on climate change and in particular on food choices and their impact on the environment, health and animal welfare.*
- IV. To further encourage and empower students to make informed decisions about the food available in their school.*
- V. Inspire, promote and support initiatives surrounding climate change and in particular food growing, preparation and waste avoidance, especially as part of school and community projects.*