

Policy Brief

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Policies for transforming the UK's food system: insights from Brighton and Hove's local community



POLICIES FOR TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEMS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE FOODSEQUAL PROJECT

With a growing part of UK population experiencing food inequalities, transforming the UK food system constitutes a key imperative demanding urgent policy action. However, how can we make sure that policies speak to local community lives and needs?

As part of the UKRI-funded FoodSEqual project, the University of Sussex and the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership have joined forces in organizing community policy workshops in two high-deprivation areas of Brighton and Hove, asking local people's views on their ideal food futures and changes that need to happen to get there.

Drawing on local community input from our workshops held in October 2023, this policy briefing outlines key policy recommendations for transforming the UK food system. It points to policy areas and changes – both at national and local levels – that people identified as important for a meaningful food system change. By doing so, it also underlines the significance of attending to local people's voices in order to achieve more impactful as well as more inclusive policy making, and the need for developing appropriate methods for supporting that.

Key findings

- People care about their food and the environment, and want a better food future for themselves and their children.
- People want to be included in discussions about the food system and policy changes: they want to see more focus groups like those we had!
- School food and education (whole school approach) is very important to people, in terms of immediate change needed and a hope for reducing food inequalities.
- Changes in food advertising, labelling and processed foods formulation are also important for people for a more transparent food system.

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THE FUTURE PEOPLE WANT TO SEE

Our workshops affirmed people's vision for a future where "healthy food should be the norm, not a luxury" (Workshop 1, 2023). People wanted to see a future where there is less junk food, packaged food and food waste. They care about farmers and the amount of pesticide and chemicals in their food and the soil. They want to see a food culture that provides good food education and enough time for people to be able to shop, cook, sit down and eat at home, at work and in schools. They want to see more support towards low-income households and less manipulation in current food manufacturing, food labelling and advertising practices.

CHANGES PEOPLE WANT TO SEE AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

- Help local farmers grow food for local communities
 - Re-orient farming subsidies
- Support food education in and out of schools
 - Curriculum changes; cooking classes with more relevant content
- Extend criteria for free school meals and Healthy Start Vouchers to include low income working families and students.
- Honour mealtimes – in workplaces, schools, and the built environment
 - e.g. help companies have a canteen
 - e.g. longer lunch breaks
- Change the formulation of food so that it is not addictive
 - especially salt and sugar
- Make supermarket offers healthy
- Ban misleading advertising
 - Support advertising focusing on positive public health outcomes
- Maximise opportunities for schools/supermarkets/companies to redistribute surplus food – e.g. through tax incentives
- Orientate income to reflect cost of living

CHANGES PEOPLE WANT TO SEE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

- Learn from and further support local food campaigns
 - Sugar Smart campaign
 - Bus stop advertising (B&H)
- Include local citizens in discussions about the food system and changes needed
 - Do more focus groups like that!
- Enhance food education in school curriculum
 - Embed cookery lessons
 - make food tech more realistic and applicable – e.g. batch cooking with staples
- Availability of food, including surplus, in all areas in the city
- Enable community food culture
 - e.g. support community kitchens for distributing healthy cooked meals to be eaten at home

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Including local communities in policy making is key for transforming the food system in ways that would meet real world needs.
 - Policy makers need to work more closely with local people and local community organisations for the identification and formulation of future policies.
 - People in our workshops recommended the organization of more focus groups like that!
- Supporting both local and national policy change is pivotal for achieving effective food system change.
 - Policy Makers should learn from and further support successful local food policy actions.
 - Brighton and Hove's successful 'Sugar Smart' and 'Bus Stop Advertising' Campaigns provide good examples of local policies that other places can learn from and implement.
- People's recommendations point to specific policy areas and specific interventions needed.
 - Environmental Land Management Scheme
 - Increase local small-scale farmer subsidies to support them growing more local food, particularly horticulture.
 - Enable local community organisations to create new shared food growing spaces in public and private urban land.
 - Advertising
 - Ban misleading advertising.
 - Support marketing & advertising focusing on positive public health outcomes
 - Whole School Food Approach
 - Make sufficient time and space for children in schools to eat their lunch
 - Free School Meals for All
 - Change the school curriculum to include food technology with more relevant content e.g. batch cooking, cooking with staples, leftovers etc
 - Funding
 - Fund community organisations to deliver community cooking events, create new shared spaces for growing food, distribution of local food, batch cooking and food clubs
 - Social Welfare Policies
 - Extend Healthy Start Vouchers
 - Income in line with cost of living