



1.0 Introduction

This note outlines discussions had at the fifth West Midlands Greener Together Forum on the 6th June 2023, where the topic discussed focused what the region can do to tackle food injustices and access to healthy, sustainable food. The Forum brought together speakers who are involved in food justice and access;

Dr Rosemary Jenkins, Food Systems Team, Public Health Division, Birmingham City Council
Jamie Upton-Speed, Senior Horticulturalist, Ideal for All

Please see the presentations from the meeting [here](#) and the Forum Terms of Reference [here](#).

2.0 Greener Together Forum Advisory Board

2.1 An Advisory Board has been created to help shape the direction and logistics of the Forum. We thank David Evans (Birmingham City Council), Danielle Parker (Birmingham Climate Justice Network and West Midlands Climate Coalition) and Kamran Shezad (BAHU Trust), Perminder Balu (City of Wolverhampton Council) and Tahir Parvaz (Canals & River Trust) for joining the board.

Advisory board to help with;

- To help bring new voices to the Forum.
- Ensure the Forum remains action focused.
- Support with improving the Forum for all.
- To contribute to the agenda setting for each meeting.

2.2 Receive the monthly West Midlands Combined Authority Energy and Environment newsletter by registering [via this link](#).

3.0 What can the region do to tackle food injustices and access to healthy, sustainable food?

3.1 Birmingham Food System Strategy & Food Insecurity Work

Vision – Create a fair, sustainable and prosperous food system and economy, where food options are nutritious, affordable and desirable so everyone can thrive.

To create a regenerative food system, there are three pillars the strategy address: the environment, communities and the economy.

The four cross-cutting themes are:

Food Skills & Knowledge	Empowering citizens with knowledge and skills in relation to the food system.
Food Behaviour Change	Developing the capability, opportunity and motivation for key behaviours that will enable long term change.
Food Security & Resilience	Increasing access to sufficient affordable, nutritious and safe food for all citizens, all the time, in every community, and at every age.
Food Innovation, Data & Research	Gathering insights and data and facilitating innovation, collaboration, learning and research across the food system.

Birmingham is calling on cities across the world to come together to tackle Food Justice. They are asking cities to commit by signing the Food Justice Pledge to create a united global movement that has a local and national impact. Signatory cities commit to put their political weight into the collective voice of cities emphasising the need for policies which create and support an affordable, safe, nutritious and sustainable food system for all citizens, irrespective of social or economic grouping. This demonstrates our commitment to food justice.

Get your city to sign the pledge by sharing the link; <https://forms.office.com/r/WQkAzYLT5G>

Get in involved with the Birmingham Food System Strategy by emailing foodsystemPH@birmingham.gov.uk

3.2 Ideal for All – Integrated Health, Wellbeing and Employment Support

Ideal for All are a user led charity for people with disabilities which formed in 1996 and have helped over 23,000 people so far.

Deliver a range of person-centred services including:

- Integrated health, wellbeing & specialist employment support
- Condition management & peer support
- Direct Payments
- Growing Opportunities - Social enterprise with 3 market & community gardens. Sites in Oldbury, Wednesbury and Smethwick (exact locations can be found in the presentation here)

Between 2020-2021 the charity distributed 1.6 tonnes of produce to the local community. The charity also supports children through their “welly to belly” groups over Easter and Summer holidays.

To join or make a referral please call 0121 558 5555 Option 2 or email contactifa@idealforall.co.uk

For more information, please contact one of our team today or find out more about our work at www.idealforall.co.uk

3.3 What is the approach for including faith communities and ethnic minorities with the Birmingham Food System Strategy?

Committed through the Food System Strategy to engage with as many people as possible, as you cannot do meaningful engagement without engaging with people from minority communities. The first draft of the strategy was informed through the "Seldom Heard Communities" work to help write the strategy. Empowering and equalising is important for the strategy - one example on the food donations to help during lockdowns, decided it should be a cash grant to foodbanks as they are the experts in the local communities and what these communities would want in terms of food. Allotments are important stakeholder in the strategy and the council funded 3 allotments in growing projects with people from minority ethnic communities.

3.4 How are we supporting the Henry Dimbleby [National Food Strategy](#), Part One?

The Government used the recommendations within this strategy to inform the [Governments Food Strategy](#). There has been criticism that many of the recommendations have not been included. Birmingham City Council only have the power to effect change within Birmingham. However, the “Creating a Health City Food Forum” has lobbied the government on this issue.

3.5 Should we be encouraging people to eat more vegan and vegetarian diets?

Food choices are important and there should be options available for people to make the right choices for themselves, rather than being too prescriptive on what people can eat. Behaviour change is important to ensure people make the right decisions in terms of the environment, economy, and community as there can

be cultural and religious needs. A lot of vegetarian diets in the UK are ultra processed and not good for health or sustainability. There needs to be a focus on how we help people to eat a consistently good diet.

3.6 What are the barriers and opportunities in your area to provide healthy, sustainable food for everyone?

The Trussell Trust support 34 food banks within the WMCA area and have recorded the highest level ever of people using the foodbanks – 270,000 food parcels within the last year. Providing food is not solving the route issue of people accessing food banks. There needs to be more support to alleviate people from poverty. A role the WMCA could play is supporting people to access services available and provide education and employment support. The Trust worked with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to look into Universal Credit payments, there is a £35 shortfall in these payments which is needed for people to live on these payments.

The cost-of-living crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have put pressure on local growing projects and there needs to be better financial support, that are not focused on 1–2-year funding cycles. As well as providing sustainable food, we need to be focusing on sustainable funding as well.

What are the opportunities for growing within the built environment? Can we support vertical and rooftop gardens as well as allotments? In terms of food production, average community gardens (based on London) production is about 1.7kilos per square meter- in an allotment it is 3 kilos per square meter- in a farm it is 7/8 kilos per square meter. Urban areas have lower outputs but the trade-off is that urban food growing has a lower carbon footprint compared to the farm. Difficulties with legislation and access to land.

Birmingham has more allotments than any other city within the UK with approximately 150 community growing spaces however community growing cannot feed the population alone. What support and education is needed for people to grow their own, prevent food waste and gain cooking skills?

Through the Birmingham Food System Strategy is there the opportunity for the WMCA to support other Local Authorities to tap into local food systems work? However there was also the point that creating a regional food network in the West Midlands could replicate already established forums and instead of adding another layer of bureaucracy, the WMCA should be supporting these groups and councils.

This briefing note will be shared with the WMCA’s Energy and Environment board at the next board meeting.