Medway Food Partnership

The Medway Food Strategy 2024 to 2030

Let food be thy medicine,
and medicine be thy food.

Hippocrates

Our vision is to create an environment that supports sustainable access to affordable healthy food. We want to improve knowledge about nutrition along with cooking and growing skills for all, building healthier communities and better futures for everyone in Medway.

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Every effort has been made to ensure that this document was accurate and up to date at the time of writing in July 2024.

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Foreword From the Leader of the Council

Cllr Vince Maple
Leader of Medway Council

As the leader of Medway Council, I am proud to support the Medway Food Partnership and its ambitious goals. We are committed to tackling poverty, inequality and injustice in our society, and food is a key part of this ambition. We believe that no one should go hungry or struggle to afford healthy food in Medway. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to learn about food, cook nutritious meals and enjoy eating together. Our food system should protect our environment, reduce waste, and support local businesses.

We all need to eat, but food also has the potential to be a positive transformer and to promote social cohesion in the community. Food is not just fuel; it helps us to thrive and improve our lives. Food creates opportunities to bring people together, celebrate cultures and make new connections with people.

The Medway Food Strategy requires the support of a wide range of public, private, community and academic sector partners. No single organisation can deliver the vision of the strategy on its own and Medway Council welcomes all organisations' participation in the Food Partnership. We are grateful to the partners who already make a meaningful difference and welcome the involvement of more stakeholders over the life of the strategy.

I look forward to seeing the success of the strategy and the food partnership over the next six years and look forward to seeing how we use food to support the wider ambitions for the people and place of Medway.

Foreword From the Director of Public Health

Food is essential for life, health, and well-being. It is also a source of pleasure, culture, and community. However, food can also be a cause of ill health, inequality, and environmental damage. That is why we need a Medway Food Strategy that sets out our vision and actions for creating a fairer and more sustainable food system for everyone in Medway. The Medway Food Partnership was launched in November 2021 bringing together local businesses, organisations, and residents. The partnership was formed at the height of the COVID pandemic, mobilising to support tens of thousands of vulnerable residents to access emergency food support.

Since then, the partnership has identified five key areas of focus: food poverty and security; healthy eating; climate change and the environment; business and procurement; and oral health. Each of these areas has a dedicated subgroup that meets regularly to plan and deliver actions that will make a positive difference to Medway's food system.

Some of the achievements of the partnership so far include:

- Creating two new Eatwell Guides tailored for South Asian and African-Caribbean communities to help them eat a healthy and balanced diet.
- Developing an Oral Health Strategy with local partners and groups to improve the oral health of Medway's most vulnerable residents.
- Signing up businesses and organisations to the Water Refill Scheme to reduce plastic waste and encourage people to refill their water bottles.
- Supporting schools to achieve the Food for Life Award, which recognises excellence in food education, school meals and food culture.

These are just some examples of the great work that is happening across Medway to make healthy food the norm for everyone. There is still much more to do, and we need your help to make it happen. Whether you are a resident, a business owner, a community group, or a public sector organisation, you can get involved in the Medway Food Partnership and help shape the future of food in Medway.

Together, we can create a Medway food system that is good for people and the planet.

James Williams (1966-2024)
Director of Public Health

Medway Food Strategy

The Medway Food Partnership is multi-organisation collaboration that aims to create a local food culture that is fair, healthy, sustainable, and supportive of the local economy. The partnership is currently made up of over 140 members, which consists of five subgroups focusing on various aspects of food.

The partnership is open to all private sector, voluntary and charitable sector, academic and public sector partners, who have a part to play in the health and food system in Medway. Following the successful launch in November 2021, the Medway Food Partnership has adopted a collaborative approach using evidence-based methods and best practice to create more opportunities for the people of Medway to learn about food, eat healthily and reduce food poverty, in a way that supports a sustainable food environment.

The strategy's vision is to create an environment that supports sustainable access to affordable healthy food. We want to improve knowledge about nutrition along with cooking and growing skills for all, building healthier communities and better futures for everyone in Medway.

The Medway Food Strategy is aligned and compliments other key strategies including:

- Medway Council Strategy 2023 to 2024
- Medway Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Kent and Medway Integrated Care System Strategy
- Medway Peoples Strategy
- Medway Climate Change Action Plan
- Medway Oral Health Strategy
- Medway Infant Feeding Strategy
- Medway Whole System Obesity Plan
- Medway Council Outdoor Events Policy
- Child Friendly Medway
- Medway Council Advertising Policy

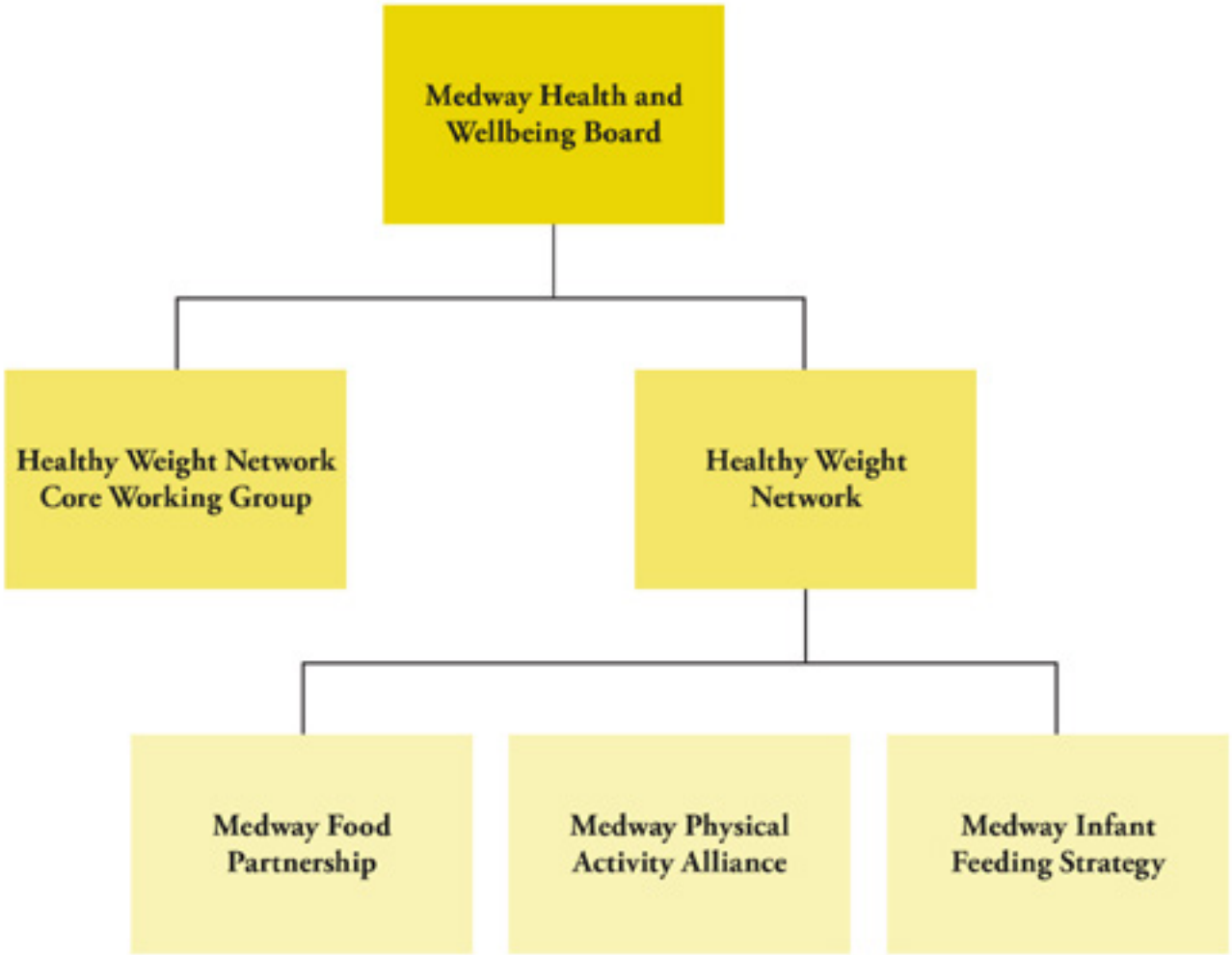
Scope of Medway Food Strategy
We have listed key food terms within Appendices 1 that provide a foundation for the Medway Food Partnership Strategy.
The strategy covers a range of actions and activities, such as:

- ensuring everyone has access to sustainable and healthy food
- building education and skills around healthy food
- collaborating with all key partners to improve the health of Medway residents
- creating healthier communities and better futures for our residents
- supporting a vibrant and sustainable local food economy
- reducing food waste
- reducing plastic pollution caused by food packaging
- improving the oral health of residents and in particular vulnerable groups
- celebrating the diversity and culture of Medway through food
- using the planning system to increase opportunities for growing food and regulate unhealthy eating outlets

The strategy does not cover issues that are outside the remit or influence of the Medway Food Partnership, such as:

- regulating food safety and hygiene standards
- national policies or legislation
- providing clinical or medical advice on nutrition or diet
- funding or delivering individual projects or services.
- industrial food production
- food processing and packaging
- retail and pricing regulations
- broader land use planning
- national advertising and marketing of food and drink

Figure 1 – Structure and accountability of the Medway Healthy Network



Accountability

The Medway Food Partnership is part of the Healthy Weight network. This is a collaborative initiative that aims to tackle obesity and promote healthy weight in Medway. The network is overseen by the Healthy Weight Core Working Group and is accountable to the Medway Health and Wellbeing Board and the Medway Council Cabinet. The network has two other subgroups that focus on physical activity and infant feeding.

National Context

The National Food Strategy
Launched in two parts over 2020-2021, the National Food Strategy was an independent review commissioned by government to set out a vision and a plan for a better food system. The Government responded to the review with its own strategy, published in June 2022.

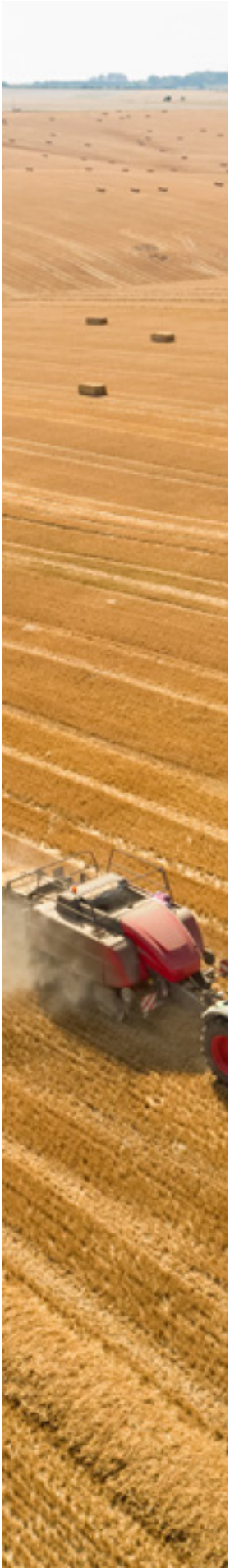
This food strategy concentrates on implementing measures to uphold a resilient, improved, and ecologically viable food system that remains accessible to everyone. The overarching goal is the gradual overhaul of the food system to unlock the advantages of healthier and more sustainable diets.

The National Food Strategy plays a pivotal role in ensuring the realisation of the government's aspiration for a flourishing agri-food sector and the attainability of healthier and more sustainable dietary patterns for all.

Context
The food system is both vast and complex. It can be defined as the complete set of people, institutions, activities, processes, and infrastructure involved in producing and consuming food for a given population. It encompasses all food related activities including growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, selling, cooking, consumption, and disposal of food and any food-related items (Gladek and Roemers, 2020). Instigated partly by the growing global population, global food production has increased dramatically in recent decades, driven primarily by the amount of land used for agriculture and a rapid rise in crop yields. However, the global food system needs a dramatic transformation as current food production methods are not only damaging our personal health, but also the health of the planet.

Simply ensuring a sufficient level of food production does not address the distribution inequalities in the current food system as one in three people in the world did not have access to adequate food in 2020 (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2021). On the other end of the spectrum, worldwide obesity has nearly tripled since 1975, with 1.9 billion overweight and over 650 million obese people around the world in 2016 (World Health Organization, 2021). This epidemic of dietary ill health has developed slowly over decades, but the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a painful reality check, with our obesity problem being a major factor in the UK's tragically high death rate.

Rising Food Prices
Rising food prices and the concentration of unhealthy food outlets in disadvantaged areas contribute to food insecurity. Food insecurity refers to limited or uncertain access to nutritious and culturally appropriate foods. This can lead to poor dietary choices, malnutrition, and a higher prevalence of diet-related diseases like obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions. The cost of living directly influences food choices, as individuals facing financial constraints often resort to cheaper, energy-dense, and nutritionally poor food. This has a direct impact on health and wellbeing in the short and long term. All commodities have shown price increases over the last decade; however, fresh fruit prices have seen the greatest



increase and potatoes have shown the greatest seasonal volatility.

Rising food prices particularly affect low-income households because they spend a larger proportion of their income on groceries than average. In the Consumer price inflation, UK: October 2022 bulletin, food, and non-alcoholic beverage Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) was estimated to be at their highest annual rate since September 1977 at 16.4% (ONS, 2022a). While food price rises have been broad based since the beginning of 2022, with all the prices of food product categories rising, higher prices for bread, cereals, milk, cheese, eggs, and meat have contributed more to inflation for low-income households.

While these moves are like the broader move in food prices as measured by the CPIH, households who already buy the lowest cost grocery items do not have the opportunity to substitute to cheaper options and are affected more by these increasing costs. According to Office for National Statistics data (2022b), around half of adults reported spending less on food and essentials (45%) due to increases in the cost of living. Around 3% said they were using support from charities, such as food banks, because of the increases in the cost of living.

Adults who were more likely to report spending less on food and essentials include those:

- Experiencing moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms (63%)
- Paying energy bills by prepayment ("top-up") (59%)
- Renters (57%)
- Living in the most deprived areas in England (54%)
- Have one or more dependent children (52%).

Disability and Food

Disabled people are more prone to the effects of the rising cost of living due to their lower employment rate (54%), compared to 82% for non-disabled people (ONS, 2022c). The financial challenges faced by disabled households due to the rise in the cost of living are particularly acute as two of the key commodities which have been driving the increase in inflation—energy and food—make up a disproportionate share of the disabled household consumption. Office for National Statistics data suggests that spending on food and non-alcoholic beverages averages 14% of costs for disabled households, compared to 11% for non-disabled households (ONS, 2020). The challenge of food affordability is further reflected in disabled people's disproportionate reliance on food banks. The Trussell Trust network claims that disabled people are "over-represented" in food poverty demographics, accounting for over half of food bank users (House of Lords Library, 2023).

Global Conflict and International Trade

Global conflict has added to the worldwide food supply chain pressures, particularly in relation to rising costs of fertilisers, animal feed and energy (House of Commons Library, 2023).

Exiting the European Union has also had consequences on food for the UK, particularly the cost of food products and manufacturing inputs (Office for National Statistics, 2022a). Post COVID-19 pandemic there has also been a shortage of workers in the labour market which in turn has pushed up wages and increased prices in specific sectors, including agriculture and hospitality.

Food Poverty

Food poverty is on the rise in the UK. The Department of Health defines food poverty as the inability to afford, or to have access to food that constitutes a healthy diet. Poverty is an underlying cause of food insecurity; however, not everyone living in poverty will experience food insecurity (Department for Work and Pensions, 2021).

Food insecurity is a term used to describe people that easily fall into food poverty due to life incidents such as sudden reduction of working hours or delays in benefit payments as they may have been only 'just' getting by, to start with.

Food poverty can arise from financial crises or personal challenges. These circumstances can be events like job loss, housing changes, delayed receipt of Universal Credit, unexpected expenses, or family loss. It can also result from persistent difficulties in accessing or affording nutritious meals. This might include scenarios like insufficient wages that do not meet living costs or a disability hindering access to nutritious food. Data from the Trussell Trust shows that they have seen an increase in food bank use of 123% over the past five years nationally (Trussell Trust, 2022), whilst the Independent Food Aid Network (2023) report shows a rise of 110% between 2019 and 2020. According to local Medway Trussell Trust data, 4,138 vouchers were issued in 2023, which has increased by 72% from 2,404 in 2019. Similarly, a total of 12,266 people were fed in 2023, which has increased by 109% from 5,855 in 2019 (see Table 1).

Costs to the System

During the financial year 2020 to 2021, it is estimated that about £6.5 billion (Bell et al, 2022), approximately 4.7% of the NHS budget, was spent on health issues related to overweight and obesity. Therefore, it is crucial to reduce obesity rates and improve dietary habits to increase the UK population's healthy life expectancy.

The costs to the wider economy include higher levels of sickness and absence from work and have been predicted to reach £49.9 billion per year by 2050 (Government Office for Science, 2007). Doing nothing is not an option. Without action, the health of individuals will continue to suffer, health inequalities associated with obesity will remain and the economic and social costs will increase to unsustainable levels. Improving healthy eating not only must target individual dietary habits but also consider larger societal and environmental factors that impact food choices.

Table 1 – Trussell Trust food bank support levels

Year	Vouchers Issued	% increase from previous year	Adults Fed	Children Fed	Total Fed	% increase from previous year
2018/19	2,404	-	3,438	2,417	5,855	-
2019/20	3,293	37.0	4,647	3,564	8,211	40.2
2020/21	4,245	28.9	6,489	6,138	12,627	53.8
2021/22	3,921	-7.6	5,773	5,446	11,219	-11.2
2022/23	4,138	5.5	6,640	5,626	12,266	9.3

Obesity

For decades we have known that obesity is one of the biggest public health challenges of the 21st century, impacting on an individual's quality of life, risk of developing certain chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, as well as being associated with common mental health disorders. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic starkly highlighted the human cost of health inequalities, with associated mortality rates being more than double in the most deprived areas compared to in the least deprived areas and death rates being highest among people of Black and Asian ethnic groups (Public Health England, 2020c). This has partly been attributed to obesity, which is more common amongst people living in deprived areas (NHS Digital, 2018), with children aged 5 growing up in low-income households being more than twice as likely to be obese than those in higher income households (ONS National Child Measurement Programme, England, 2021/22 school year (NHS Digital, 2022a). We also know that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic populations are more likely to be overweight or obese and are more susceptible to obesity-related diseases at a lower weight status compared to their White counterparts (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2013). We want to address these disparities to ensure that all children, regardless of background, have the best start in life.

Healthy Eating

Maintaining good health and reducing the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and several types of cancer, including bowel, breast, and pancreatic cancer, is influenced by a nutritious, balanced diet. According to the World Health Organization (2020), a healthy diet across all life stages can prevent malnutrition in its various forms, as well as many non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and other conditions.

The introduction of a variety of healthy, nutrient dense foods in infancy can set a trajectory for healthy eating through the life course – reducing the risk of obesity and tooth decay (Public Health England, 2016). During childhood, children need sufficient nutrition to support their growth and development, which will set them up for life. Achieving the dietary recommendations in this age ensure they reach optimal health and wellbeing. If children are not meeting their nutritional needs or exceeding their recommended amounts of unhealthy foods, they increase their risk of poor health and inequalities in unhealthy weight and diet often continue throughout the life course. While dietary recommendations for fat, fibre and carbohydrate are similar for most adults, older people often eat less due to reduced physical activity, mobility issues or difficulty in preparing or purchasing food. However, given their increased requirement of high levels of calcium and vitamin D to preserve bone health and prevent fractures, it is important that older adults continue to consume a balanced diet.

Cooking and Food Literacy

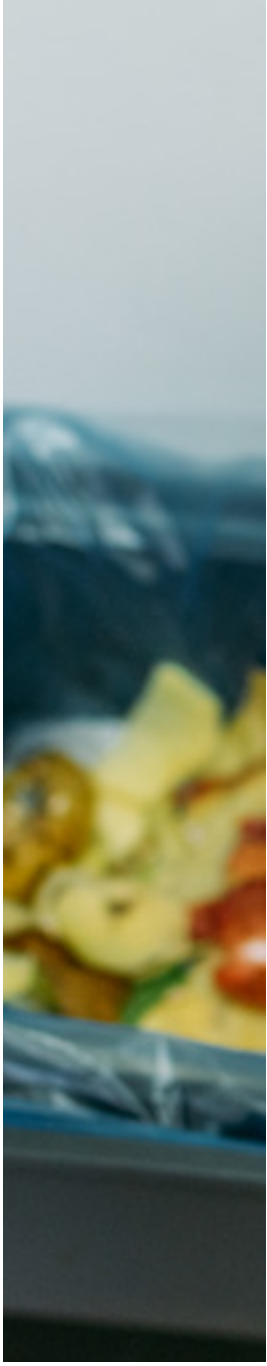
There are vast amounts of challenges and opportunities within the areas of cookery and food literacy in our society. These challenges and opportunities require a strategic approach to address them and to ensure we have a more knowledgeable and health-conscious society. Food literacy refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and use information relating to food and nutrition. This can be from the basic idea of interpreting a recipe. In a time when the public is bombarded with mixed messages about food due to heavy marketing particularly on high fat, salt, and sugar foods (HFSS), it has never been more vital to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about what we eat.

The increase in digital access offers a unique opportunity to reach people in their homes. Through the development of engaging and informative online resources and apps, people can have immediate access to trusted, user-friendly information on food, nutrition, and cooking.

Education

From schools to workplaces, it is vital to create and publish clear, consistent messaging about the importance of a balanced diet and the benefits of consuming a variety of foods, particularly fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. We must also make sure the healthy foods are 'seen' and help to market healthy foods to our communities. This information should be presented in a manner that is easy to understand and apply to people's lives, ensuring everyone, regardless of age or background, can make healthier choices.

The role of the food and beverage industry play a vital part in supporting the healthy eating agenda. The government has begun this journey with the introduction of the sugar tax. The sugar reduction programme was launched in 2016 and was a voluntary scheme for all sectors of the food industry to reduce sugar by 20% by 2020 in certain food categories. These categories targeted food that children aged 18 and over consume a large amount of e.g. confectionary, cereals etc. (GOV.UK, 2022b). This type of



programme is used to encourage and drive producers to limit the amount of sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats in processed foods. Transparent food labelling is essential for consumers to make clear and informed choices when purchasing food and drink.

Food Waste

Food waste is the unconsumed or discarded food that could have been eaten but is instead thrown away at various stages in the food supply chain or by consumers. This issue encompasses a wide range of food items, from perishable fruits and vegetables to packaged goods and prepared meals. Food waste contributes significantly to environmental problems we face today, as it not only wastes valuable resources like water, energy, and land but also releases harmful greenhouse gases when it decomposes in landfills. In addition to its environmental impact, food waste also represents a missed opportunity to alleviate hunger and reduce food insecurity, as many people in the UK struggle to access adequate nutrition, yet the equivalent of billions of meals are thrown away every year.

Food waste from households and businesses in the UK is still around 9.5 million tonnes (Mt) (WRAP). The food that could have been eaten (6.4 Mt) would make the equivalent of over 15 billion meals – enough to feed the entire UK population 3 meals a day for 11 weeks (WRAP). According to WRAP, it is estimated that 25% of all black sacks contain food waste and 1 in every 5 shopping bags of food bought are wasted.

Food Miles

Food miles refers to the distance food is transported before being consumed – from the moment it is produced to the second it hits our plates. Calculations are based on the weight of food distributed in tonnes by the distance travelled. Food transportation is responsible for 25% of all miles covered by heavy goods traffic in the UK. A recent study also found that global food miles are generating 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2e) each year – with "high-income nations" responsible for 52% of international food miles, despite only representing about 12.5% of the world's population (Howell, 2022).

Of the food groups, fruit and vegetables have the highest emissions

from food miles. One of the reasons is because consumers demand out of season foods meaning they are transported over longer distances. Keeping food in a temperature-controlled environment throughout transit also contributes to food supply chain emissions. By promoting local and seasonal food production and consumption in Medway, we can help to reduce food miles and carbon emissions. Additionally, local food production can help to support local economies and communities, giving jobs to local people and supporting local businesses.

Growing Food

The positive effects of gardening and food growing have a profound impact on overall wellbeing, and social connections are becoming increasingly well-documented according to Sustain (Sustain, Growing). Numerous initiatives throughout the UK focus on supporting communities and offer chances for people to be physically active, addressing both physical and mental health issues, fostering social engagement, skill development, and providing access to locally grown, nutritious produce. This is also reflected in schools and early years settings where growing and gardening can benefit pupils through better levels of attention in class, higher achievement, and stronger links to their local communities (Food For life).

Growing food in the local community is important for several reasons. Growing food supports people to connect with nature and appreciate the importance of agriculture. Eating locally grown produce can improve people's health whilst supporting the economy by spending on locally grown food. Locally grown fruit and vegetables are fresher as they can be consumed quite soon after being picked. Fruit and vegetables begin to lose their nutrients within 24 hours of picking, meaning the quicker consumers can access them the better it is for their health.

It also supports the environment as growing plants help to absorb carbon dioxide and other pollutants from the air. Gardening is also a great way to get some exercise and fresh air whilst reducing stress and improving mental health.

Water

To support the growing of food and consumption of water, there is a need to ensure that adequate water resources are available. The government has produced a framework for water resources that sets out England's long term water needs, the scale of action needed to ensure resilient supplies and an improved water environment (GOV.UK, 2020a)

Planning

The natural and built environment has a substantial influence over the food that people eat, such as the availability of kitchen facilities in dwellings, existence of spaces for food growing at home and in the community, and extent of access to unhealthy food for purchase. Planning therefore has a key role to play in supporting healthy diets and food provision as part of a whole system approach to healthy weight (PHE, 2020).

Medway Context

Childhood Obesity in Medway
Childhood obesity in Medway is a significant challenge and mirrors trends seen nationally. The above England average trend is consistent for year R and year 6 children. However, a return to pre-pandemic levels can be seen in reception age children in Table 2, and a major reduction in year 6 in the last 12 months.

Adult Overweight and Obesity Prevalence in Medway
Over the past four decades, there has been a substantial rise in the percentage of adults in England living with obesity. According to the latest annual data released in May 2023 (Table 3 on the next page), there appears to be a decrease in the number of overweight or obese adults in Medway, dropping from 69.4% to 67.2%. Nevertheless, Medway continues to exceed the England average, which has marginally increased over the past year from 63.3% to 63.8%.

Food Poverty in Medway
In Medway, 11,866 (September 2023) children are currently registered for benefit related free school meals. This has increased by 86% from 6,388 in 2019.

Several charity and faith groups operate food bank support in Medway throughout the year, engaging with the Medway Food Partnership via the food poverty subgroup. These organisations report supporting more than 20,000 vulnerable residents with accessing food in a typical month in 2023.

Food Mapping
Food mapping is the systematic process of gathering and analysing data about where people can obtain, grow, and consume food within a specific geographic area. This involves identifying and categorising various food outlets, such as supermarkets, markets, restaurants, cafes, farm shops, take-aways and community gardens, and understanding the availability of diverse types of food products. Food mapping helps inform strategies to improve food security, sustainability, and equitable access to nutritious food options by helping to paint a picture of the current food landscape and identifying areas of need or, opportunities for interventions.

In the Summer of 2021, the MFP (Medway Food Partnership) worked with the Medway Public Health Intelligence team to explore food mapping in Medway. The E-food Desert Index was used to explore the extent to which areas exhibit

Table 2 – Medway and England 4–5-year-old overweight and obesity prevalence

Year	% Medway Year R overweight and obesity	% England Average Year R overweight and obesity	% Medway Year R obesity	% England Average Year R obesity
2019	24.0	22.6	9.8	9.7
2020	25.5	23.0	11.6	9.9
2021	31.5	27.7	16.9	14.4
2022	23.7	22.3	11.1	10.1
2023	22.4	21.3	10.0	9.2

Table 3 – Medway and England 10–11-year-old overweight and obesity prevalence

Year	% Medway Year 6 overweight and obesity	% England Average Year 6 overweight and obesity	% Medway Year 6 obesity	% England Average Year 6 obesity
2019	36.1	34.3	21.7	20.2
2020	36.9	35.2	22.2	21.0
2021	44.2	40.9	28.6	25.5
2022	41.3	37.8	26.2	23.4
2023	37.3	36.6	23.1	22.7

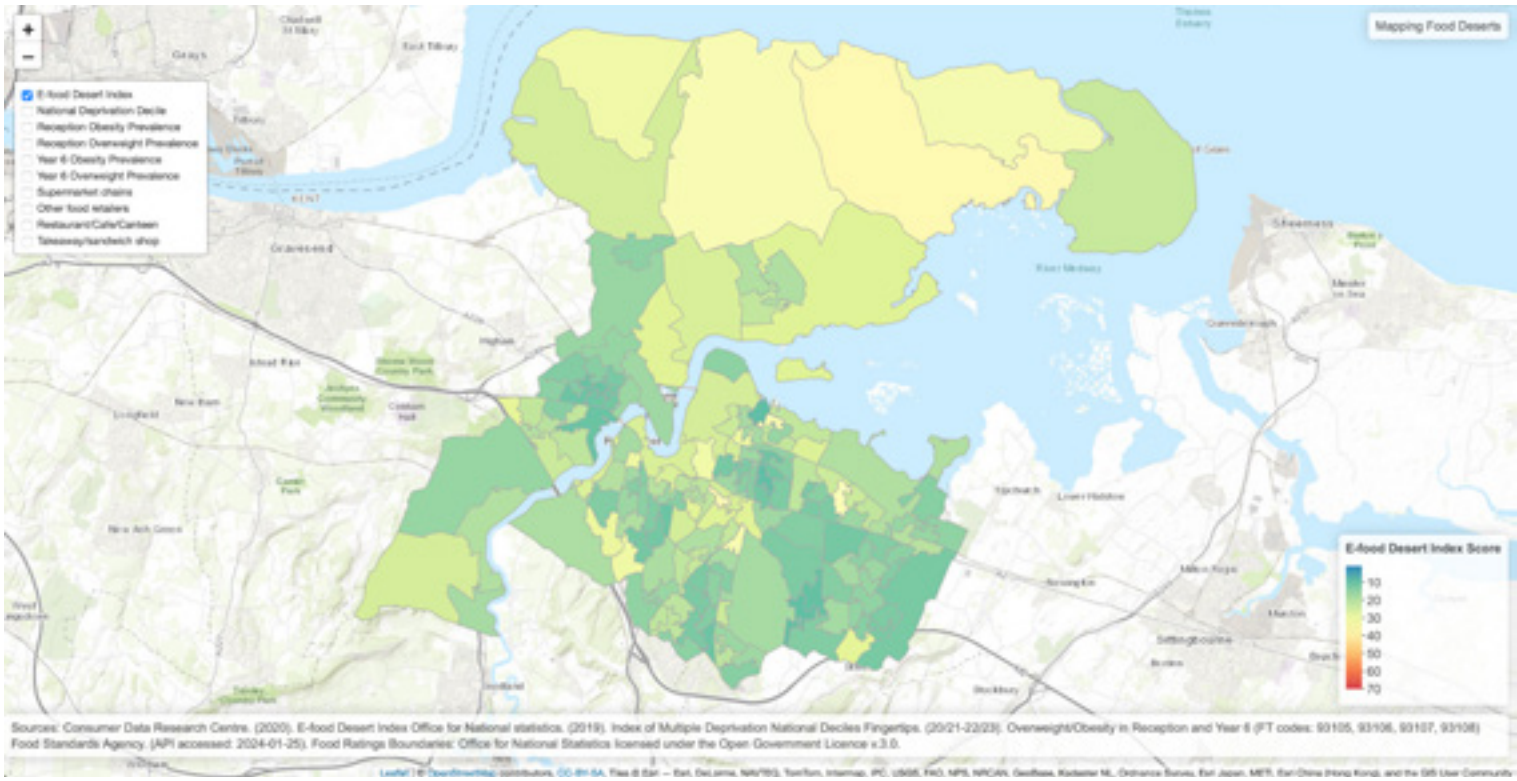


Figure 2: E-Food Desert score by LSOA in Medway (2019). Note that each area represents around the same number of residents and so more densely populated places look smaller.

characteristics of a food desert (a higher value suggests reduced access to food). It is based on four key drivers of grocery accessibility:

- Proximity and density of grocery retail facilities
- Transport and accessibility
- Neighbourhood socio-economic demographic characteristics
- E-commerce availability and propensity

The term 'food desert' describes areas/communities that have poor access to healthy, affordable food. The interactive map identifies availability of healthy food in Medway, as well as risk indicators of unhealthy eating. Medway is broken down into lower layer super output areas (LSOAs) which are areas where a similar number of people live, usually between 1500-3000 people.

Availability of healthy food is measured using the E-Food Desert score. This was co-published by the Consumer Data Research Centre in conjunction with Dr Andy Newing at the University of Leeds (CDRC Data, 2022). An LSOA's score is higher if people are not close to shops selling healthy food at affordable prices, are less able to use cars and public transport to access shops, lack the money to buy healthy food, and are not able to shop for food online (Figure 2). The higher the E-Food Desert score is, the harder it is for residents to access healthy food. The scores are also arranged into national deciles. LSOAs in

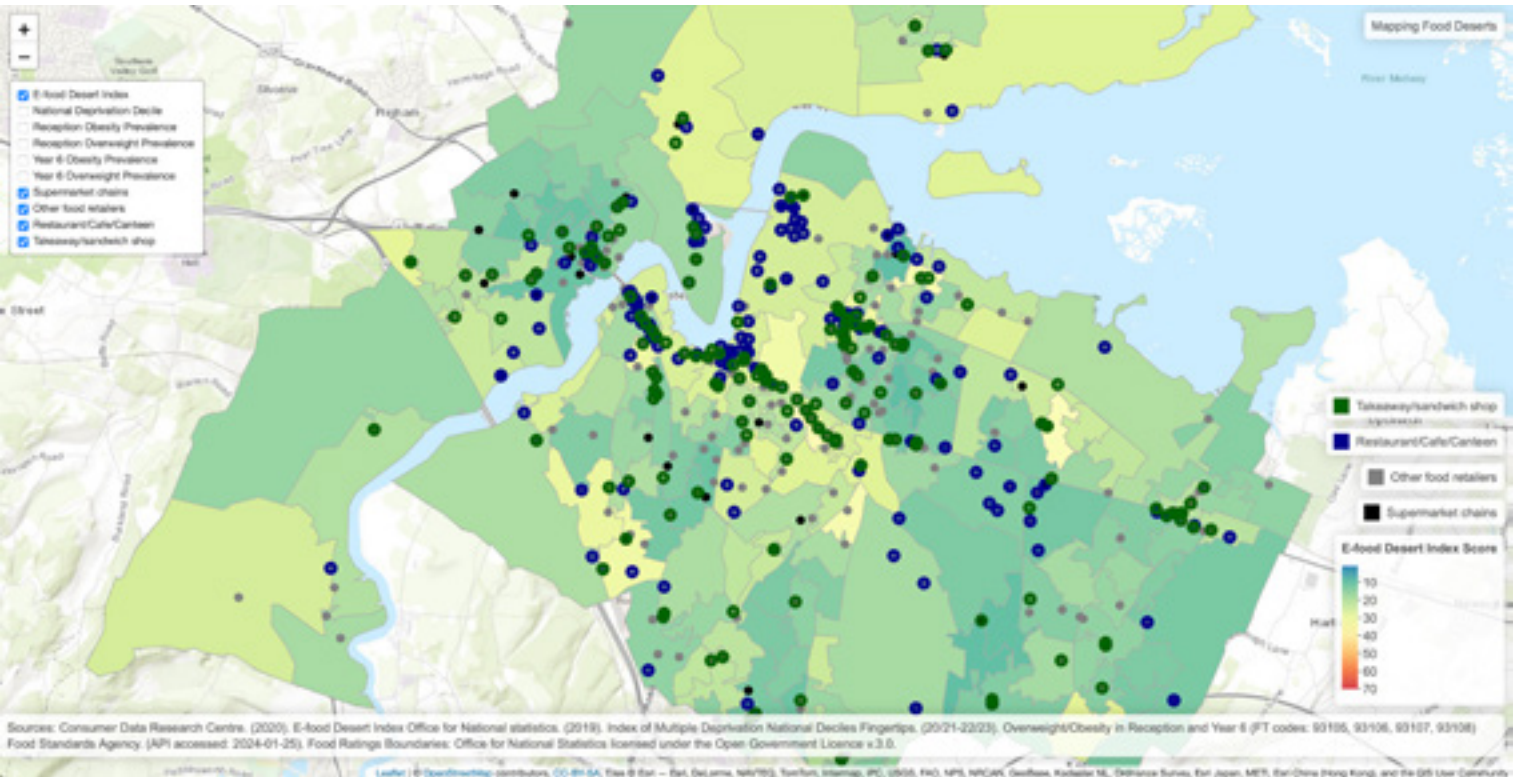


Figure 3: E-Food Desert score by LSOA in Medway (2019) with locations of supermarket chains, restaurants and cafes, takeaways, and other food retailers visible (2023).

decile one are amongst the top 10% of LSOAs in England and Wales with low healthy food availability. In Medway, this includes LSOAs in the wards All Saints and Luton.

The map also shows locations of supermarket chains, restaurants and cafes, takeaways, and other food retailers (Food Standards Agency, 2020) (Figure 3).

Limited accessibility to healthy food can result in individuals being overweight or obese (National Health Service, 2023). This is indicated on the map by neighbourhood using childhood obesity with data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) (Office for health improvement and disparities (2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). The darker the colour, the higher the proportion of overweight or obese children are in that neighbourhood (Figure 4, page 24).

People who live in deprived LSOAs may struggle to afford healthy choices. National deprivation deciles are indicated on the map, with decile one (purple) referring to the most deprived areas (Ministry of Housing, Communities & LG, 2019) (Figure 5).

Wards that contain neighbourhoods with low E-Food Desert scores, high levels of overweight and obese children and elevated levels of deprivation include Luton, All Saints, Strood West and Princes Park.

Food Waste in Medway

Medway Council collects domestic co-mingled food and garden waste collection from households every

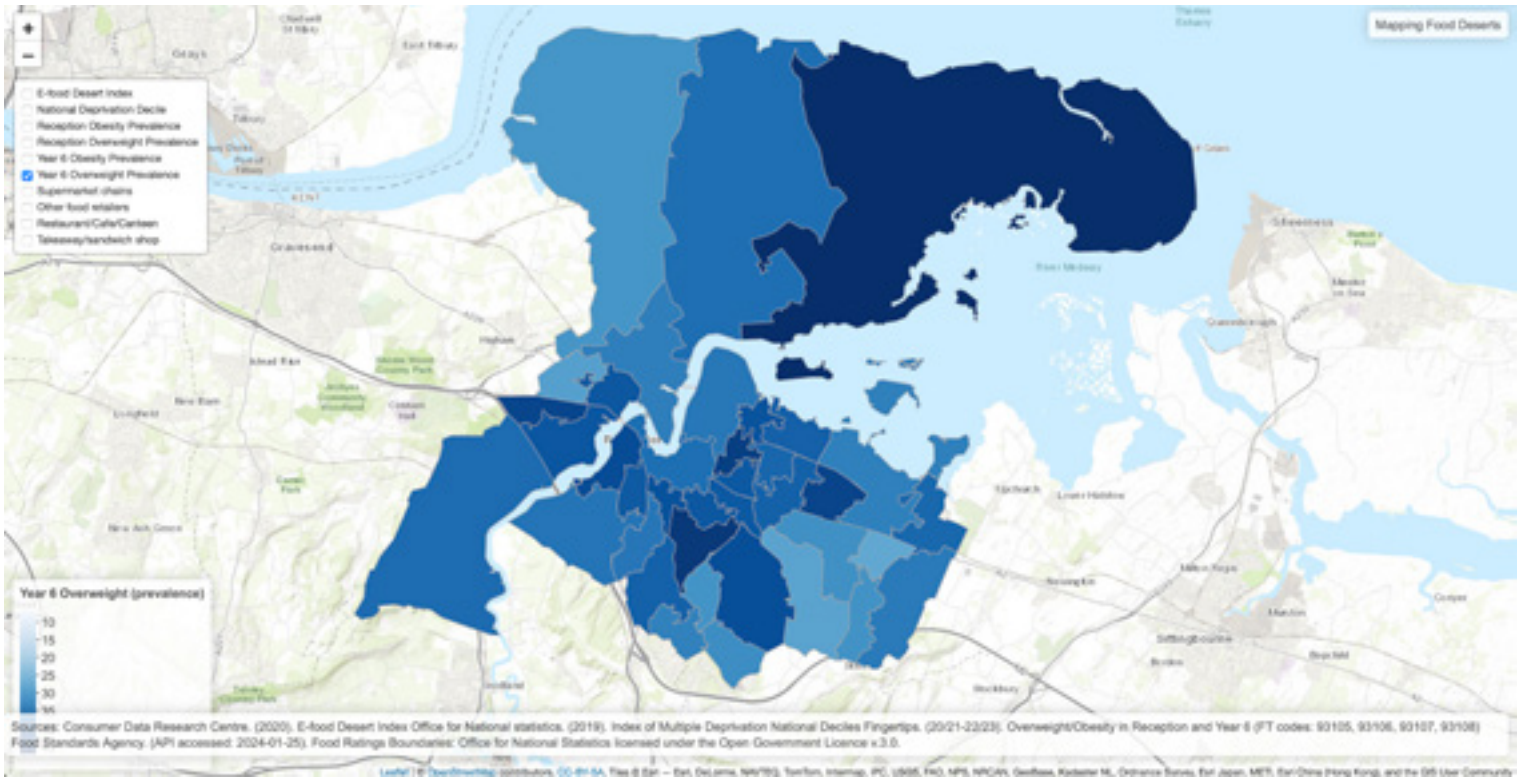


Figure 4: Prevalence of overweight (including obese) Year 6 children in Medway. The darker colours indicate a higher prevalence (2022/23).

week in either a brown bin or the 23-litre food bin. Communal food recycling collections will be introduced to flats by April 2026 to meet Simpler Recycling requirements. The mixed garden and food waste from Medway is transported to an in-vessel composting facility in Cambridgeshire, East Anglia, where it is made into soil conditioner for use on agricultural land in the South of England. This completes the 'circular economy.' Locally, Medway Councils Behaviour Change team deliver campaigns to encourage households to reduce, reuse or recycle their food waste, rather than putting in the general waste stream.

A waste strategy will be commissioned by September 2025 to first, identify and appraise options for domestic waste collection and disposal in Medway and second, develop a plan to influence residents' behaviour and support Medway's wider climate change ambitions.

In 2022/23, 19% of waste collected throughout Medway was food and garden waste which was composted. A recent waste composition analysis of residents' waste in Medway estimates that 35% of black sacks still contained food waste. This is a higher percentage than the national average, and the waste strategy must address this gap in resident behaviour.

Businesses, hospitals, schools, and universities are required to recycle all waste streams including food waste by 31 March 2025. Businesses with fewer than ten full time employees have until 31st March 2027. The council does not provide any business waste or recycling collections. Organisations should make

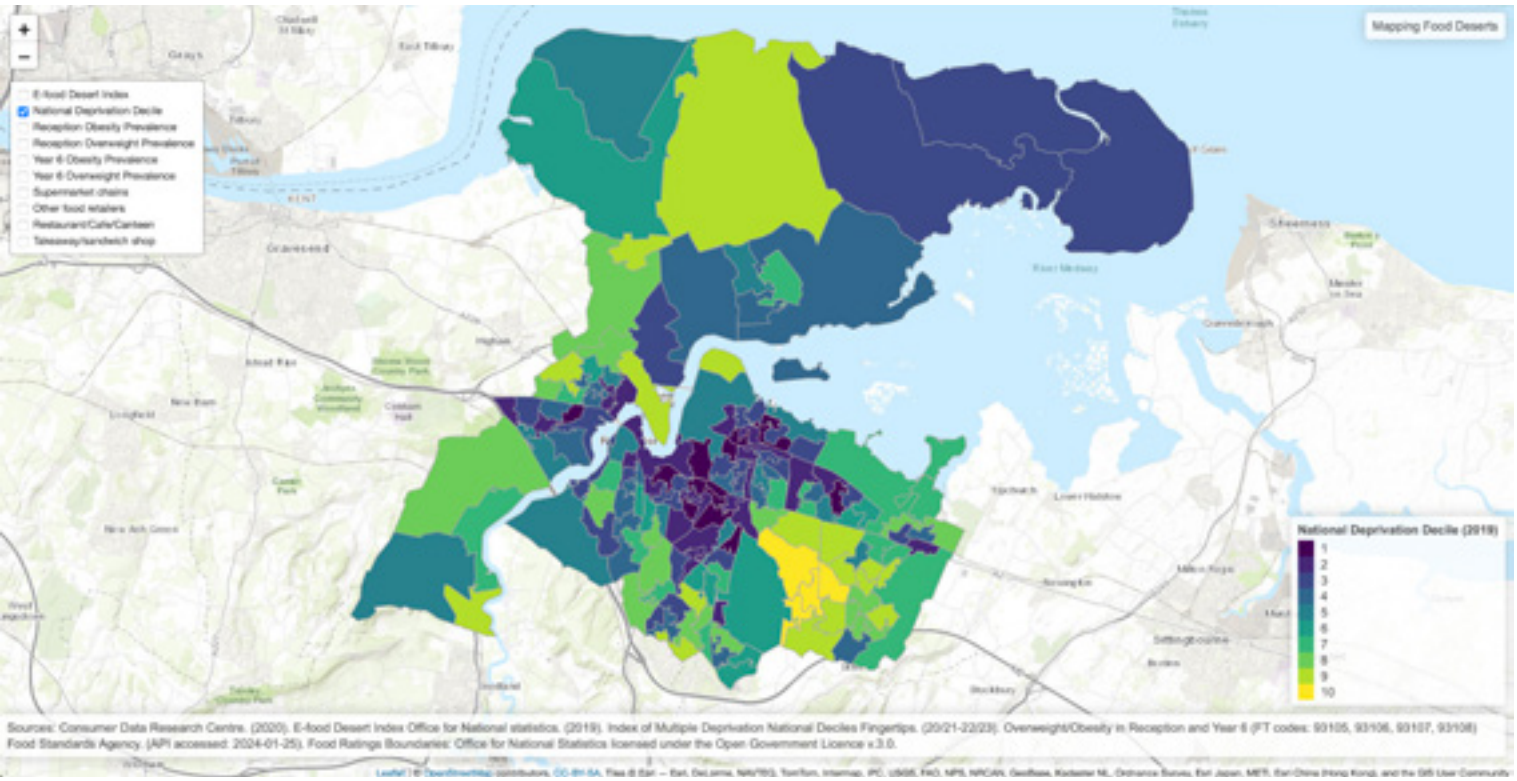


Figure 5: National deprivation deciles for LSOAs in Medway (2019).

their own arrangements with waste management companies to ensure legal compliance. Business waste is outside the scope of the waste strategy.

Water Supply in Medway

In Medway, the water supply for the area is the responsibility of Southern Water plc, except for the Halling area, which is supplied by Mid-Kent Water plc. Both companies anticipate that most locations for development within the local plan area 281 can be readily supplied from existing water mains. The Environment Agency has a responsibility for managing water resources. Extraction of water from chalk aquifers is restricted as part of its North Kent Water Resource Management Scheme. Medway Council's local plan states that development proposals must ensure that adequate measures are undertaken to protect surface and groundwater resources (Medway Council, 2003).

Resident Views About Food

Health and Wellbeing Survey
The Medway Health and Wellbeing Survey was sent out to almost 8,000 residents and in total, 3,600 responses were received. The questions around food were created to understand people's eating habits and how they relate to the health and wellbeing of the population. The information collated can then help to develop and implement interventions to help people make healthier food choices.

Fruit and Vegetable Portions Per Day
The results of this survey found that 18.4% of Medway adults did not eat any fruit, 13.8% did not eat any vegetables, and 5.9% did not eat any fruit or vegetables in the previous day. This means that a quarter of Medway adults are not meeting the recommended daily intake of fruit and vegetables. On the other hand, 44.1% of adults reported eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, which is the recommended daily intake. However, this still means that more than half of Medway adults are not meeting this guideline.

The survey also found that people who are more likely to not eat enough fruit and vegetables are those who are:

- Younger
- Male
- Lower income
- Less educated
- Obese or overweight

These findings suggest that there are several factors that contribute to poor fruit and vegetable intake, and that interventions are needed to address these factors.

Finance Constraints Due to Affordability
Participants were asked the "reduced food due to finances" question in the survey to understand the extent to which financial constraints are affecting people's ability to afford healthy food. This question is important because it can help to identify people who are at risk of food insecurity.

By understanding the extent to which financial constraints are affecting people's ability to afford healthy food, we can develop interventions to help reduce food insecurity and improve the health of populations.

- 88.6% of Medway adults always have enough food.
- 8.9% of Medway adults sometimes do not have enough food due to financial reasons.
- 2.5% of Medway adults often experience food shortages due to finances.

These results suggest that food insecurity is a rare problem in Medway, but it is still an issue that affects a small number of people. It is important to note that these results are based on self-reported data, so it is possible that some people

who experience food insecurity may not have reported it. The survey also found that people who are more likely to experience food insecurity are those who are:

- Younger
- Male
- Lower income
- Less educated
- Obese or overweight
- Living in a single-parent household
- Living in a household with children

Cutting the Size of Meals or Skipping Meals
This question was asked to understand the extent to which people are experiencing food insecurity.

- The survey results show that 93.6% of Medway adults have reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food, while 6.4% do not.

The survey results suggests that most Medway adults are food secure. However, a small percentage of adults are food insecure, and this is a fundamental problem that needs to be addressed. There are several factors that can contribute to food insecurity, including low income, lack of employment, and high housing costs. There are also several things that can be done to address food insecurity, such as increasing the availability of affordable, nutritious food, providing financial assistance to low-income families, and educating people about food insecurity.

Healthy Weight Analysis, Campaign and Survey
A healthy weight campaign was commissioned by the Public Health department to further explore the determinants of obesity in Medway. The campaign was heavily informed via a resident feedback survey, along with a period of desktop research. The aim was to investigate motivational drivers of health behaviour based on the Self Determination Theory, which is a theory of human motivation and personality.

A total number of 1,477 responses were received for this survey and the ages ranged from 13 years to 70 and over. Participants were asked about their current dietary behaviours in comparison to the NHS Eatwell guide recommendations. They were asked a further question relating to recent changes in dietary habits to mitigate risk of bias associated with the time of the survey (following the start of a new year)

When asked about their ability to meet the recommended dietary guidelines, most 13-18-year-olds (57%) and most over 18-year-olds (52%) said they were close to meeting the guidelines. There was no significant difference in scores between age categories.

Results showed that the person in the household who makes decisions about food purchasing and preparation is often the female member of the household. While there were fewer male respondents, the majority agreed that either their

wife or partner took the lead, or the decision was jointly made.

Community Engagement

We recognise the pivotal role that community engagement plays in shaping our initiatives towards addressing crucial concerns such as food, poverty, food waste, growing, and cooking. To ensure that we gain a comprehensive understanding of the community's needs and aspirations, we embarked on an extensive engagement exercise. By actively seeking residents' perspectives, we aimed to gather a wider range of views, shedding light on their priorities regarding these vital areas. Understanding the community's stance on our goals and strategies to achieve them is paramount. In partnership with the University of Greenwich, we were dedicated to gaining insights that will not only inform our direction but also foster collaborative efforts with the community to create meaningful and sustainable solutions. Their input was invaluable in shaping a more inclusive and effective approach toward these shared goals.

Residents were consulted via a set of 'Let's Talk About Food and Nature in Medway' activities, including an online survey, artist-led food engagements, community food photography, and a stakeholder workshop, where residents over 18 years of age were invited to explore their views on food and nature futures with talks, discussions, and

artworks. The approach consisted of an Innovative dialogue using social learning and arts-based methods on food meanings and nature futures.

Other key sources of community engagement include the Medway Food Partnership's in-house surveys, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, MedwayGo Impact Assessment, and the Medway Can campaign.

The key themes that emerged from the analysis are summarised in Table 4.

Although key stakeholders have been consulted through interviews, the logical framework approach, and surveys, further work will be undertaken to gather a more comprehensive understanding of business and organisational priorities, including the wider business community and schools.

Table 4 – A summary of the key themes and outcomes from community engagement activities.

Key Theme	Outcome
Current worries	Thinking about the food people eat, 87.2% worry a great deal or quite a lot about its cost, 85.1% about its health impact, and 59.6% about its environmental impact.
Current barriers	Disconnect between residents' knowledge and the food system, fruit and veg are expensive, too many fast-food outlets, not enough businesses source food locally, disappearance of town markets, commercial waste often ends up on streets, lack of composting opportunities.
Current good practice	Wide variety of food choices available, food waste collection and disposal opportunities, support for local farms and food businesses, foodbanks, food packaging is improving, food growing opportunities, supporting children to understand food growing and preparation.
What should change and how	More local sourcing, reduce, redirect, and recycle food waste, support healthier food outlets, more residents growing food, reduce packaging, food price, surplus food, more fresh produce, collective action, food education, more plant-based, support farmers, support seasonality.
Top three priorities	Reduce food poverty. Increase awareness and understanding of healthy eating, good nutrition and build cooking skills. Strengthen production, purchasing and consumption of locally grown food.

Current Interventions in Medway

There are a wide range of initiatives in Medway that aim to improve healthy eating levels, tackle obesity, support people experiencing food poverty, increase growing and cooking skills and reduce food waste. For a current list of the obesity and healthy eating related initiatives the Medway Whole System Obesity dashboard is regularly updated by the Medway Public Health team. At the time of the strategy being written, the following projects are actively supporting the vision of the Medway Food Strategy.

Introducing Solid Foods
The Little Food Explorers programme is designed to assist families in navigating the introduction of solid foods to their babies. Through interactive sessions held in various Children & Family hubs across Medway, families and caregivers can explore and experiment with recipes suitable for this phase. These sessions not only focus on providing recipes but also serve as social groups where parents and carers of infants up to one year old can connect. The initiative is headed up by Medway Public Health's Food and Nutrition Team.

Cookery Courses
Little Chefs is a family-oriented cookery course tailored for children aged 2-4 years, inviting both children and their parent/caregiver to participate in interactive sessions to learn more about food, preparing it and where it comes from using books.

Tri Cookery is a programme designed to deliver essential cookery skills and nutritional knowledge to school children aged 5-17 and their parent/ care giver. This course emphasises the importance of a balanced diet, encourages healthier recipe exploration at home to embed into their lifestyles, and increases understanding of food origins and the importance of eating a diverse range of foods for maintaining good health.

Families engaging in both these courses not only enhance their cooking abilities but also discover effective ways to involve children in meal preparation. Programmes give the opportunity for parent and child bonding and learning together to build healthy habits.

Adult Cookery is a 6-week course exclusively catering to adults aged 18 and above. This initiative aims to support individuals in making gradual adjustments to their eating habits, boosting their confidence in cooking skills, gaining knowledge of quick and healthy recipes, and facilitating effective meal planning to promote a wholesome lifestyle.

All these enriching cookery courses are facilitated and delivered by the dedicated team at Medway Public Health's Food and Nutrition department.

Weight Management Support

Tri Club for families with children aged 5-7 and 7-12:
The programme helps children, and their carers increase their awareness of the importance of both a balanced diet and physical activity as they grow. These free 12-week fun and interactive courses increase confidence for the whole family around eating for health and cover other topics such as portion sizes, body image, what is in our food and much more.

Fit-Fix for people aged 13 – 17:
This free programme is designed to improve young people's fitness as well as improving their knowledge and awareness of making healthier food, drink, and lifestyle choices every day. Personal training, recipes, eating for health, improving self-esteem and confidence, body image and wellbeing advice are just some of the areas covered.

Healthy Way for Adults with a BMI (Body Mass Index) above 25:
This lifestyle programme supports adults over a 12-week period to make minor changes in lifestyle behaviour that can make a substantial difference to their health and wellbeing. The group-based service is delivered face to face, facilitated by trained advisors. The service currently supports approximately 750 people per year.

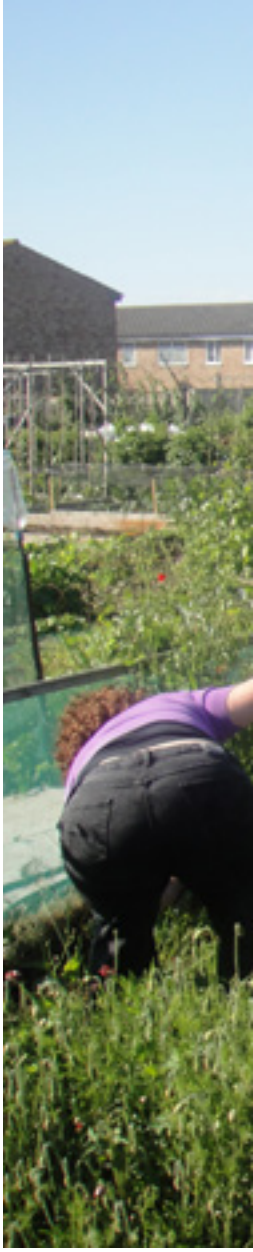
Man v Fat
This programme support men to lose weight over a 14-week period. Man v Fat is a sport-based offer, and the service currently supports approximately 160 men per year.

Healthy Way Plus (HW+):
support the under-represented/high risk adults with a weight loss and healthier habits goal over a 12-week period. The group-based service is delivered face to face, facilitated by trained advisors from organisations and community groups. The service currently supports approximately 100 people per year.

Oviva Virtual Weight Management Programme:
Oviva support adults with a weight loss and healthier habits goal over a 12-week period. The individual based service is delivered via an App or over the phone, facilitated by an expert healthcare professional. The service support approximately 500 people per year.

Health and Wellbeing Coaches:
This programme in partnership with the Medway South Primary Care Network (PCN) offers support and guidance to improve peoples' health and well-being, by providing individual specialist input and supporting them to make lifestyle changes. The service currently supports approximately 150 people per year.

Tipping the Balance:
An Adult Weight Management Programme. This comprehensive programme prioritises individualised care, focusing on enhancing both physical and emotional well-being while facilitating behavioural changes. Tailored specifically for adults with a BMI >40 or >35 with a Co-morbidity, this initiative offers personalised one-on-one guidance. Through expert advice and support, participants are empowered to navigate lifestyle modifications that promote achieving and sustaining a healthy weight. Presently, this service extends its support to approximately 500 individuals annually.



School and Early Years Education Setting Support

Food for Life Medway is a three-year programme commissioned by Medway Council's Public Health team, working with schools to champion healthy and sustainable food through the whole school approach. Food for life is a part of Medway's whole-systems approach to tackle and prevent childhood obesity following an increase during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is integrated with wider teams and initiatives such as the Medway Food Partnership and the whole-systems obesity and child health agendas. The programme follows a whole school approach to food, embedding a healthy food culture throughout the entire school experience, ensuring consistency: the healthy and sustainable food served is learnt about in lessons and reflected in the daily life of the school. Pupils leave Food for Life schools able to grow and cook food, and with an understanding of where food comes from. Across Medway, schools enrolled with Food for Life aim to establish a healthy-weight food environment where children are supported to navigate obesogenic environments beyond the school gates. This enables schools to create a culture that supports healthy weight, setting the habits of a lifetime.

The Healthy Early Years Award (HEY) is a Medway Public Health Team project delivered in partnership with Medway Early Years (MEY) bringing a harmony of early year specialisms together. The HEY award recognises the key work that all childcare settings are doing to; positively influence children's growth, development, and achievement, teach children and their families the importance of nutrition early, provide the perfect environment to encourage children to establish healthy eating habits and the role physical activity plays in child development. There are 4 levels, Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum where at each level settings demonstrate how they are meeting key areas related to eating well, physical activity, oral health and wellbeing and the impact this has on their children, families, and staff.

Medway Go

MedwayGo is the name of Medway's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme funded by the Department for Education. It aims to provide support for school aged children (reception to Year 11) in receipt of benefits-related free school meals, to keep them active, healthy, engaged over the school holidays and provides a hot, healthy nutritious meal, as they would at school. The provision is managed by Medway Public Health working with a wide variety of providers to offer healthy meals, physical activity and enrichment activities for Easter, Summer, and Christmas school holidays.

Food Charity Support

In line with the current 2023-2024 funding, the Household Support Fund provided by the government aims to assist vulnerable households facing financial hardship by offering financial aid for essential expenses such as food, utilities, and other necessities. Some of the funding from the Household Support Grant includes working with the Medway Food Partnership partners to identify charities, community partners and the voluntary sector. These funds are then allocated and used to promote healthy eating sessions and provide food, supporting

vulnerable households in maintaining nutritious diets and overall well-being.

Food Growing

Medway Adult Education provide opportunities for those new to growing their own produce to learn what the stages of plant growth are and how to nurture those plants throughout. Participants are taken through seed germination up to harvesting and seed gathering, in environments such as allotments, and community garden spaces. The aims of the programme include to inspire and enable people to grow their own crops in the spaces available to them, consider what makes healthy soil and learn and use ecologically friendly methods to create good, healthy, and effective environments for food growing. Outcomes include that people take home, cook, eat and share crops they have grown on-course and donate other produce to local food backs and community cafes.

Hot Food Takeaway Guidance

Medway Council has produced a guidance note on hot food takeaways for use in consideration of new planning applications. Its purpose is to help reduce obesity particularly among children, to promote a healthier environment and to assist the creation of a more diverse and vibrant offer in retail areas. The guidance supports a 400m buffer around schools to manage the siting of takeaways and restrictions on hours of operation. From 2018-19 to 2022-23, 17 applications for hot food takeaways have been received, of which 13 have been refused.

Where Do We Want To Be Over The Life Of The Strategy?

To achieve the vision of the Medway Food strategy, the partnership has identified eight goals that will be achieved over the next 6 years.

Goal 1: Reduce Food Insecurity:
The MFP aims to reduce food insecurity in Medway by ensuring that vulnerable individuals and families have access to an adequate and nutritious food supply. This goal will be measured through surveys, data collection from local food banks and regular monitoring of key indicators such as tracking the number of individuals and families accessing emergency food support and gradually decreasing its reliance and access to healthy food options.

Goal 2: Increase Awareness of Healthy Eating / Improve Food Literacy:
By 2030, the MFP aims to increase awareness and understanding of healthy eating habits among Medway residents, with a particular focus on marginalised / hard-to-reach communities. The goal is to reach, educate and enhance food literacy among the population participating in educational programmes and workshops on nutrition and cooking skills. This will be evaluated through pre- and post-programme assessments, surveys, and feedback from participants.

Goal 3: Minimise Food Waste:
The MFP aims to reduce food waste in Medway, in line with the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration. Reducing food waste will help to reduce carbon emissions across Medway. This goal will be achieved through collaborative efforts with local businesses, organizations, council teams and residents, encouraging the adoption of effective food waste reduction strategies, such as composting and redistributing surplus food.

Goal 4: Establish Community Garden Projects:
The partnership aims to establish a specified number of community gardens in Medway to provide residents with opportunities to grow their own food and increase self-sufficiency. These interventions will be carried out by facilitating community gardening initiatives to empower residents to grow their own food, promoting sustainability and fostering a sense of community. Planning also has a role to play in ensuring the availability of space for food growing through the provision of private and communal gardens.

Goal 5: Increase Sustainable Food Production:
The partnership will work towards engaging further with food businesses to increase the percentage of locally sourced, sustainable food in the region by supporting local growers, food producers, and reducing the environmental impact of food production. The interventions to achieve these will include initiatives such as launching campaigns to educate consumers about the environmental and social impacts of their food choices and promote sustainable alternatives, providing training and signpost local farmers to funding opportunities to transition towards more sustainable and regenerative farming practices. In our efforts to supporting the changes in our climate, the partnership aims to enhance food security in Medway by implementing sustainable practices into our planning, to make sure that we minimise food waste and have reliable supplies of food for our community.

Goal 6: Strengthen Local Food Economy and Procurement:
The Medway Food Partnership aims to support and increase the production and consumption of locally grown and locally sourced by 2030. This goal will be assessed through data collection on local food sales, consumer surveys, and engagement with local producers. MFP will look at methods to encourage residents to consume a higher proportion of fresh, locally sourced fruits, vegetables, and other food products to promote healthier diets and support the local economy. This will also include efforts through the planning system to control unhealthy food availability and promote accessibility of retail facilities selling fresh food.

Goal 7: Establish Strong Collaborative Networks:
The partnership will strive to establish partnerships with local organisations to strengthen its efforts and create a more inclusive and resilient food system. This will be achieved by collaborating with Local businesses, including supermarkets, restaurants, and food producers. This collaboration may involve initiatives such as surplus food redistribution, responsible sourcing, and packaging reduction etc. This work will also include the delivery of training in conjunction with partnership with local universities (University of Greenwich and University of Kent), signpost food entrepreneurs to funding opportunities and facilitate connections between local producers and buyers, thereby stimulating the growth of sustainable food businesses.

Goal 8: Enhance Food Education and Awareness in Schools:
The partnership will continue to work in collaboration with the Soil Association/Food for Life programme to increase the number of schools incorporating a whole-school food education programme and healthy eating into their curriculum.

Medway Food Partnership Priorities

To achieve these long-terms goals, the Medway Food Partnership will agree annual priorities that reflect the priorities of the partnership in that year and the opportunities that present themselves over the life of the strategy. These annual priorities will be reported to the Medway Health and Wellbeing Board via the Medway Healthy Weight Network. The immediate priorities for the partnership include the following.

Sustainable Food Places Network

The Medway Food Partnership is an active member of the Sustainable Food Places Network, a UK-wide initiative that brings together local food partnerships committed to developing sustainable food systems. Through this network, the MFP gains access to resources, expertise, and best practices from other local partnerships across the country. This involvement ensures that the Medway Food Partnership remains informed of the latest developments and benefits from shared learning experiences. By participating in the Sustainable Food Places Network, the MFP strengthens its capacity to implement sustainable food initiatives and exchange knowledge with other communities facing similar challenges. Medway wants to achieve the bronze status as a Sustainable Food Place by the end of 2024.

Medway Council Events Policy

The Medway Food Strategy links in well with the Council's Outdoor Events Policy to ensure that food is promoted in a positive and healthy way at council run events. Embedding healthy eating and climate change principles into this policy can help encourage residents to eat healthier and make more sustainable food choices, as well as featuring local food vendors and growers to help make Medway a more sustainable community. The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs' Sustainable events guide (DEFRA, 2007) offers a checklist that consider the social, economic, and environmental impact of delivering events. These include being energy and water efficient, the 3 R's – reduce, reuse, recycle, working with local suppliers, transport systems, catering and social wellbeing to name a few. Medway wants to operationalise such a policy by the end of 2024.

Medway Council Healthier Food Advertising Policy

A Food Advertising policy will protect children from unhealthy eating habits, which can lead to obesity. Food advertising is the promotion of food products through various channels, such as television, radio, print, and social media. Food advertising can influence people's food choices, and it can be particularly harmful to children, who are more vulnerable to its effects. The policy will address the link between obesity and advertising in Medway from council owned platforms where advertising of products high in fat, salt and sugar are seen by the public. By taking these steps, we can help to reduce the prevalence of obesity and improve the health of our population.

Food for Life Project

Providing children with the skills and knowledge they need to live healthy and sustainable lives is a key priority for Medway. The Soil

Association, Food for life project has been commissioned by Medway Council's Public Health team to deliver a whole-school food and nutrition programme to schools across Medway over three years.

The programme is working with up to thirty schools each year by:

- building school staff expertise in growing and cooking
- supporting schools to achieve the Food for Life School Awards
- involving caterers and pupils to improve menus.
- hosting school farmers markets with local producers and much more

Food for Life is also offering one-to-one support, expert training, and a wealth of resources to schools in Medway.

Procurement

In terms of procurement, the local authority has a huge amount of buying power and can therefore significantly influence improvements to the local food economy as well as improving environmental outcomes and enhancing social value. There are many elements that can create a sustainable food system. The council can use the robust tools that are in place to support environmentally sustainable food through the Public Services (Social Value) Act (67). This is an area where part Two of the National Food Strategy could be implemented to go further.

Appendices

A - Key Food Terms

Whilst developing the Medway Strategy, it was essential to consider all the key food terms, which include:

- Food Security (Access and Equality)
- Sustainable Agriculture and Carbon Footprint
- Local Food Systems
- Food Waste reduction
- Community Growing
- Food Education
- Healthy Eating and Oral Health Promotion
- Food Policy and Governance
- Partnerships and Collaboration

B – Log Frame

The Medway Food Partnership will be looking to use a Logical Framework Matrix (LFM) alongside the development a food strategy to ensure that it captures systematic planning, coherent execution, effective monitoring, and evaluation of the strategy's implementation, contributing to its success and impact.

It will be used to articulate the strategic goals, objectives, activities, outputs, and outcomes of the food strategy in a clear and structured manner, whilst aligning it with the overarching goals and objectives, creating consistency in planning.

It provides a framework for defining indicators and benchmarks to measure progress and success in implementing the strategy. This allows for effective monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's impact.

The LFM helps identify potential risks or challenges in executing the food strategy, enabling proactive planning to mitigate these risks.

It serves as a communication tool, allowing stakeholders to easily understand the strategy's components, objectives, and expected outcomes.

It assists in resource planning by mapping activities to resources needed, facilitating effective allocation and utilisation of resources in line with strategic goals.

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