

Belfast Sustainable Food Partnership

Background and Recommendations for a renewed sustainable food partnership in Belfast

Part 1 - Summary Report

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for Belfast City Council

February 2023



Belfast
City Council

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1. Introduction

The issue of sustainable food is complex and multi-layered, requiring action by communities, public and private sector organisations and businesses, and local, regional, national, and global governments; it can only be delivered by many partners working together. The world's focus is on climate change and the cost-of-living and inequality crisis. People's awareness is heightened to the damage we are doing to our planet and there is more recognition that our food production system must change.

In 2020 Belfast adopted its first Resilience Strategy which set out one of its Ambitions to develop greater sustainability around the food system in the city. Taking a systemic, evidence-based approach to strengthening Belfast's food system will improve the City's resilience to future shocks.

With local food partnerships across the UK and in Northern Ireland adopting and progressing with the Sustainable Food Places (SFP) Framework, it is timely to revisit Belfast City Council's work for the SFP Bronze Award and co-design an Action Plan for progression to Silver and Gold.

2. Key Objectives of the Study

The overall objective was to develop a Sustainable Food Places Framework for Belfast, with associated action plan, building on the work that was undertaken in 2015 to secure the initial Bronze Sustainable Food Place Award.

Work on the food partnership is commissioned as part of the work of the [Resilience and Sustainability Board](#) through the Belfast Resilience Strategy.

The outcomes identified in the initial brief were:

- Initial scoping and stakeholder engagement
- Belfast Sustainable Food Partnership Framework and Action Plan

3. Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Evidence Gathering

The research team carried out a wide-ranging programme of in-depth interviews with key stakeholders: these included people who had sat on the Belfast Food Network (BFN, now Nourish NI) advisory committee as well as key people within the community, voluntary and social enterprise (CVSE) sector, Council, government and industry, with an emphasis on balancing representatives of large organisations and small organisations. Some key stakeholders were identified because of their job or role, and others because of the person themselves, and the contribution they have made in the past to sustainable food over a variety of roles.

Beyond key stakeholders, our surveys were sent out far and wide, and to a certain extent there was a process of self-selection in who responded (for example just one major supermarket responded). The research team believes this is valid, as working with the willing is a sound principle for building a movement. The time parameters of the research also limited the extent to which we could complete a thorough survey of the whole food system, and we believe this is the work of the partnership, and once all actors are engaged much of the work of the partnership will be achieved. However, we think we have presented a valuable representation of the major parts of Belfast's food system.

The purpose of these interviews was to firstly engage stakeholders, to understand the food system in Belfast in order to understand who the key stakeholders are, what the main areas of work and issues are, and to get feedback on what structures would be most appropriate for a Bronze re-accreditation and a future Silver Bid. It has been 7 years since the Bronze bid submission, and BCC has lost the institutional memory of the work done. This report aims to gather all the work done and being done to enable BCC to take a lead in future SFP work.

The research team also carried out desktop research into best practice and current thinking in food justice across the UK and aimed to document (as far as possible in the timeframe available), the work being done around sustainable food in Belfast, including providing an up-to-date version of the Belfast Food Network's records on initiatives across the city.

4. Summary Findings and Recommendations

Interviews with stakeholders uncovered a number of key themes around current work on Sustainable Food in Belfast. In summary, we are at an important moment in history and multiple sources of evidence show that our food system needs to radically change to adapt to evolving circumstances. In light of this and multiple current crises (climate, cost-of-living and inequality, biodiversity) there is an urgent need for a joined-up overview of activities in the city.

The Sustainable Food Places Award is seen as a suitable base framework for achieving this change, as it aligns with the priorities of stakeholders, as well as with the Belfast Agenda, the DAERA Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework, and is an established system across the UK with proven success for making change happen.

Belfast City Council (BCC) is seen as the most suitable organisation to take on the role of coordinating efforts, facilitating communication between partners across the city, and taking a lead on moving a Silver SFP award forward. In order to obtain a Silver award a strong cross sectoral partnership must be achieved, and relationships in some areas of sustainable food in Belfast are not presently strong.

The issues around making the food system work in Belfast are many and varied, and information from stakeholder interviews are summarised in Part 2 - Chapter 7 - Underpinning Research. Priorities include:

1. The need to join up work on food across the City

2. Building food citizenship, and working away from treating people as consumers
3. Promoting all the benefits of local community food growing, and joined up working across the public sector to release land for food growing
4. Access to public land for community food growing
5. Re-establishing the Food Poverty Working Group and encouraging the Living Wage
6. Supporting small and medium enterprises through a variety of initiatives
7. Continuing work on community wealth building through procurement policy
8. Increasing rural/urban connections across the food system in Belfast

This report proposes an action plan for establishing a democratic structure for the Silver SFP award work which should take account of existing structures and bring the best of all sectors to the table, while minimising unnecessary structures and meetings.

5. Year One Action Plan for the Sustainable Food Partnership

Theme	Key actions	Lead	Timescale	Resource	Outcome
Engagement	Follow up with participants from the "Good Food for Belfast" (22nd June) event, with outcome summary, next steps and inviting them to be involved in future.	Climate Team	January 2023	Climate Team	Maintain warm and genuine relationships and keep stakeholders informed of the outcomes of their work and future process.
Establish position of SFP work within Council	Meet with Council colleagues, especially in Community Planning, to agree this action plan and agree where Belfast SFP Partnership coordinator be situated. (Potential for a role in each team with carefully aligned roles).	Climate Team	January 2023	Climate Team & Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty Team	Buy in within council and agreement achieved on the actions, steering group, next steps and key dates.
Establish Steering Group	<p>Convene first meeting of Steering Group.</p> <p>Agree Terms of Reference for the Partnership.</p> <p>Agree a Food Poverty Working Group (FPWG) leader(s).</p>	Climate Team and John Woods	March 2023	Climate Team & Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty Team	<p>Belfast SFP partnership is re-established, with a broad base and enthusiastic membership.</p> <p>Plan for re-establishing FPWG agreed.</p>

Bronze Status	Renew the City's Bronze SFP award.	Belfast SFP Steering Group.	Sept 2023	Climate Team	<p>Retain Bronze status.</p> <p>Information of food activity in the city up to date.</p> <p>Basic level of engagement made with current food actors in the city, and awareness raised of the City's Bid for Silver Award.</p>
Food Poverty Working Group	Re-establish the Food Poverty Working Group, with a self-identified mission and values.	FPWG leader, with support from BSFPP Coordinator	Jan - June 2023	Belfast City Council cross departmental	A body to have oversight of all emergency food, food poverty and income/benefit maximisation in Belfast, with input into strategic campaigns to end food poverty, for example living wage campaigns, (plus self-identified purpose and objectives).
Build Relationships and the partnership	<p>Continuing to build relationships with key food actors in the city by organising up to five workshops, (potentially on each of the remaining five key themes) to plan an "easy win" project or support an existing local initiative.</p> <p>Prioritise empowering attendees to take action and get actively</p>	BSFPP Coordinator, Steering Group and key stakeholders.	April 2023	BSFPP	Engagement from key stakeholders in each theme area, build working relationships, create a sense of purpose and momentum, and attract people who want to take action on sustainable food.

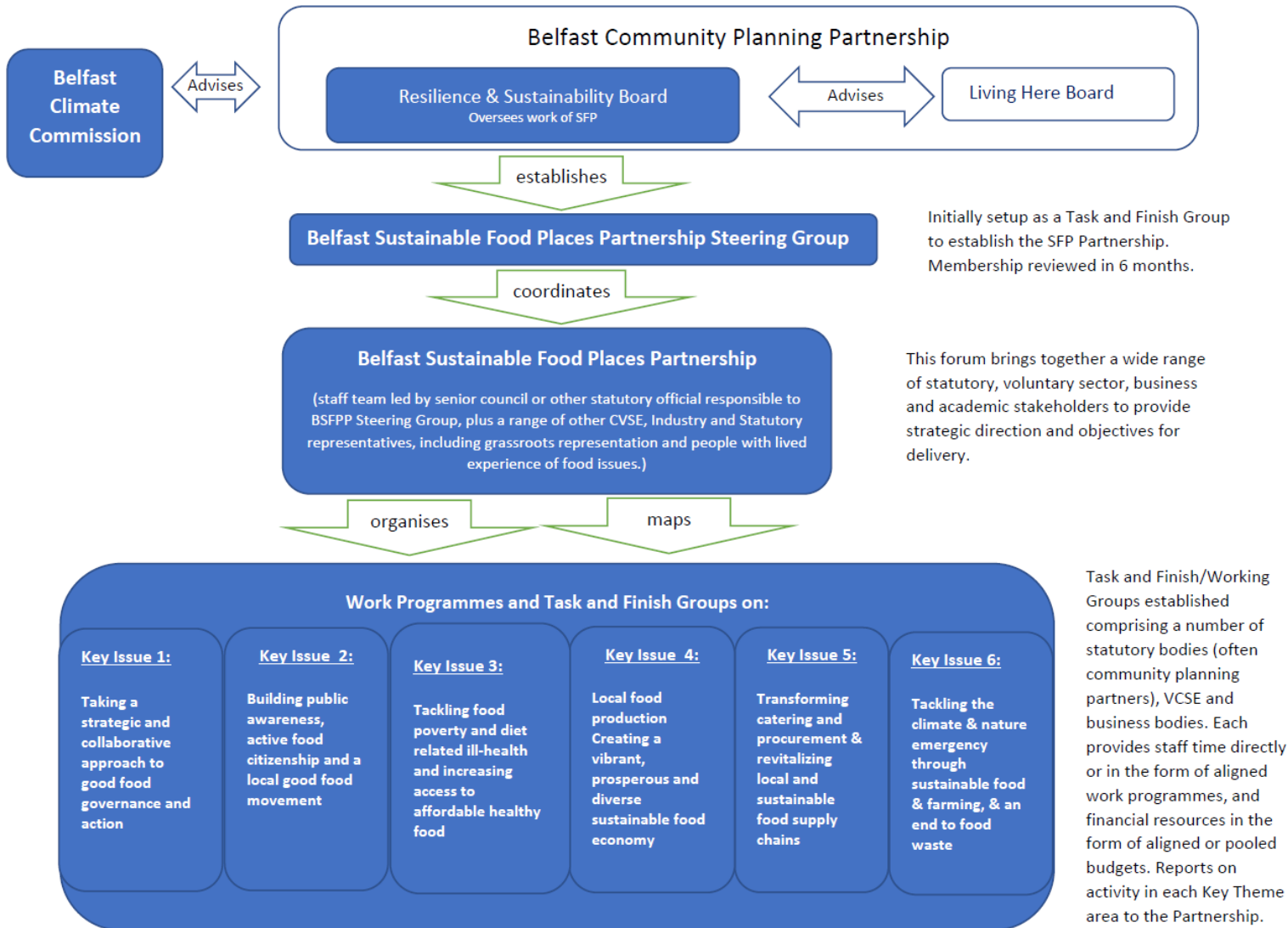
		involved in the partnership. Refer to Arnstein's Ladder of engagement or other model of participation.				Share the power of the partnership with a wider range of stakeholders.
Develop Sustainable Food Strategy and Action Plan to achieve Silver City status.		With input from a wide range of stakeholders develop a three-year strategy, to be reviewed and updated each year.	BSFPP Steering Group, with input from stakeholders.	August - December 2023	BSFPP	A plan to achieve Silver status (with additional self-identified aims), with broad engagement and support, and resources and communication in place.
Food Manifesto for Belfast		Develop a food manifesto for Belfast, communicating the vision of the network.	BSFPP Steering Group, with input from stakeholders.	April - June 2023	BSFPP	Clear communication of priorities and direction of travel with the public.
Establish Partnership	SFP	Develop a name, brand, logo and identity. Develop online information for the partnership linked to the BCC website. Draw up a social media and internal communications plan for the partnership.	BSFPP	August - October 2023	BSFPP	Established identity and communication channels.

	Apply for a development grant from SFP for a year of programmes in the City.	Climate Team	February 2023	Climate Team	Resource for a food coordinator position in the Council for 2 years.
Funding Opportunities	Other funding opportunities collated, agreed options presented to BSFP Steering Group. Developing partnerships for delivery and securing of investment.	BSFPP Coordinator and Climate Team	February 2023	Climate Team	Funding options agreed by BSFPP Steering Group Funding secured for delivery.
Increase Membership and support local initiatives	Hold a series of BSFPP workshops to increase BSFPP membership and identify priority areas for work to input into BFN 3 year strategy.	Steering Group and BSFPP Coordinator	March - June 2023	BSFP	Increased membership and funding to local groups, and actions to input into strategy.

6. Milestones for the First Year of the Partnership

1. Assemble a Belfast Sustainable Food Place Steering Group (which can also act as the Belfast Climate Commission Food Working Group)
2. Appoint a Chair
3. Terms of Reference agreed
4. Staffing structure agreed between Climate Team, Steering Group and Resilience and Sustainability Board and/or Living Here Board.
5. A visioning or Theory of Change workshop planned by the Steering Group and offered to the wider potential partnership membership.
6. Re-establishment of Food Poverty Working Group, with resource budget and Terms of Reference agreed with Steering Group.
7. Renew the City's Bronze SFP award.
8. Secure funding for and recruit at least one Food Coordinator for Belfast.
9. Staff and Steering Group work together to plan at least five workshops in the year exploring potential areas of collaboration, offered to the wider potential partnership membership.
10. Develop a food strategy/action plan
11. Develop a name, brand, logo and identity for the Belfast SFP Partnership.
12. Create a website for the partnership, link to from the BCC website.
13. Draw up a social media and internal communications plan for the Partnership.
14. Carry out an [SFP Health Check](#) within the first year.

7. Suggested Governance Structure for the Sustainable Food Partnership



8. Next Steps

The key next steps of the work are:

1. The Resilience and Sustainability Board take a lead with support from staff in the Climate Team to establish a small representative steering group of key stakeholders who throughout early 2023 can agree the terms of reference for a new Sustainable Food Partnership, reaching out to stakeholders (identified in the preparation of this report) and establish smaller working groups and partnership working to address the key issues.
2. A priority for CVSE stakeholders and Council alike is a working group to address the cost-of-living crisis and food poverty.
3. Once the Belfast SFP Partnership is established, work can then take place to develop a 3-year action plan for the progression of the city from Bronze to Silver Award.