

Alan McCarthy
Chief Executive
Brighton & Hove City Council
King's House
Grand Avenue
Hove BN3 2LS

22 December 2007

Dear Alan

Promoting and adopting the Food for Life Partnership standards – request for a report to the Sustainability Commission

Under the Brighton and Hove City Council Procedural Rule 19.3 I would be grateful if you could place this letter on the agenda of the Sustainability Commission which will meet on 9 January 2008.

Food is an area of key significance to sustainability. The production, processing, transport and cooking of food, as well the disposal of resulting waste, have major environmental impacts. The Sustainable Consumption Roundtable assessed food to be, along with home energy use and transport, to be one of the three most significant areas of consumption contributing to climate change;¹ the Food Climate Research Network estimates that food contributes at least 19% of the UK's greenhouse gases, and other studies put the figure significantly higher.² The food and farming sectors make a significant contribution to the UK economy. Food's contribution to health and wellbeing, nutrition and obesity, is clear, and it is intimately connected to personal identity and social interaction.

There has been a significant spotlight on food in schools in recent years, following campaigns by civil society organisations, such as the Soil Association, and celebrity chef Jamie Oliver. Food in schools is crucial not only because it is a great opportunity to influence the market through procurement, but also because it can significantly influence children's attitudes and behaviours around food – setting the tastes of the next generation. The response from government has been the creation of the School Food Trust, some additional funding to improve school meals and the introduction of new mandatory nutritional standards.

This is a significantly good start, and is coupled with excellent work by the joint Council-PCT 'healthy schools' work,³ again backed by a national government initiative. However, despite a welcome recognition that school food should be

¹ See http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/I_Will_If_You_Will.pdf

² See

<http://www.fcrn.org.uk/frcnresearch/presentations/PDFs/FCRN%20generic%20ppt.ppt#451,11>, Overall food-related contribution to GHG emissions

³ See <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=b1130682>

treated in a holistic way through a 'whole school approach', most initiatives on school meals have focused on health and neglected sustainability issues.

As the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable's 'Double Dividend' report shows, this is a major missed opportunity, since nutrition and sustainability can go hand-in-hand.⁴

This divide is bridged by the new Food for Life Partnership Mark scheme.⁵ The Food for Life Partnership is a five-year £17m Lottery-funded initiative, led by the Soil Association, to transform food culture in schools and communities across England, bringing together the practical expertise of the Focus on Food Campaign, Garden Organic and the Health Education Trust. The Partnership describes its mission as "to reach out through schools to give communities access to seasonal, local and organic food, and to the skills they need to cook and grow fresh food for themselves. We want a new generation to explore how their food choices impact on their health and that of the planet, and to rediscover the pleasure of taking time to enjoy real food."

Schools – and caterers – can work through bronze and silver levels to achieve a Gold-level Food for Life Partnership Mark. The different awards set standards for organic, local, seasonal, fair trade and sustainably-produced food on school menus, and for involving students in growing and cooking their own produce.

There are, of course, a number of welcome initiatives on sustainability in schools, including the Department for Children, Schools and Family's sustainable schools programme and the EcoSchools awards. The Food for Life awards explicitly complement rather than duplicate these schemes, and guidance on the common elements is available from the Food for Life Partnership and on the teachernet website.

Given the excellent opportunities for progressing sustainability through the Food for Life Partnership, I would like to request that the next Sustainability Commission receives a report into the scheme and into the possibilities for Brighton and Hove City Council to:

- Work with schools to attain Food for Life Partnership Gold Marks
- Work with schools to get at least one school in Brighton and Hove awarded 'Flagship' status
- Include a stipulation in the next corporate school caterer contract that the contractor must hold – or attain during the life of the contract – a Gold-level Food for Life Partnership Catering Mark

Given that this work may require action by a number of council departments – and perhaps by external partners – it would be helpful if the report could contain recommendations that the Sustainability Commission can make to other service committees.

It may also be possible and helpful for the Commission to receive a presentation from the Food for Life Partnership. I would encourage the Commission to extend an invitation to the Partnership to attend the next Commission meeting.

Yours sincerely

⁴ See http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/Double_Dividend.pdf

⁵ See <http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/>

Cllr Paul Steedman
Queen's Park ward (Green)

cc: Estelle Woodcock, Committee Administrator, Sustainability Commission