

Pupils, patients and public sector workers to prosper through local food procurement

30.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Selection of local authorities in England awarded £155,000 each to improve food procurement practices.

Pupils, patients and public sector workers across England will benefit from healthier, more sustainably sourced meals, as a selection of councils receive grants to strengthen food procurement in their local communities.

Councils including Middlesbrough, Brighton and Hove, Bristol and Cambridge will each receive £155,000 to improve how food is procured, increase the provision of healthier and more sustainable food options, and support local and small food businesses to understand better how to supply to the public sector.

Food Security Minister Dame Angela Eagle said:

With nearly £5 billion spent on food and catering in England each year, the public sector has enormous purchasing power.

That is a real opportunity to improve public health, back local businesses and build more sustainable food supply chains.

By learning from those already leading the way, we can raise food procurement standards right across England and ensure our food procurement spend delivers for the local economy.

England's public sector spends £4.9 billion on food and catering each year. Lessons learned from the grants will help other councils across England source healthier, more sustainable and better value food.

The aim is to use public spending power to support more sustainable food procurement practices across England and work towards the government's ambition for at least half of all public sector food to be sourced locally or certified to higher environmental standards.

The grants also build on each council's Gold Food for Life Served Here or Gold Sustainable Food Places accreditation, recognising national-leading practice and long-term, transformational change in food procurement.

This work forms part of the government's Good Food Cycle, contributing to healthier and more sustainable food environments that meet high animal welfare standards and environmentally sustainable supply chains and resilient domestic food production.

ANNEX - QUOTES FOR USE

Amit Dattani, Director of Soil Association Food said:

"We welcome the government recognising and investing in best practice within the chosen local authority areas having either our Food for Life Served Here Gold certification, or Sustainable Food Places Gold award. It's a positive and encouraging step that our Soil Association programmes are understood for the lasting and transformative changes they create within a local food system. Through the investment into local procurement, data that will be collected and the spotlight on the programmes, this is an important opportunity to show just how much positive change can be implemented when time, expertise and funding is available to support a local food system."

Kath Dalmeny, Chief Executive of the Sustain food and farming alliance that helps to run the Sustainable Food Places Network, said:

"We're thrilled to see five leading Sustainable Food Places enabled to support British and sustainable farmers get their food onto people's plates, in schools and hospitals around the country. Public sector food buying contracts – paid for by taxpayers' money – are an essential way for places to help more British farmers produce healthy food in a way that restores nature, preserves soil and vital pollinators, and reduces dangerous greenhouse gas emissions. Defra's investment in helping local councils and food partnerships to be able to roll up their sleeves and facilitate the contracts, and the flow of fresh food supplies into public catering services is very welcome news. With a focus on fruit, veg and pulses, what a great way to help British horticulture to grow and thrive! We look forward to learning from these initiatives and seeing them rolled out in more places over time."

Leticija Petrovic, Local Food Policy Lead, Food Foundation, said:

"We welcome this investment in local authority food procurement capability. Public sector food has a critical role to play in shaping healthier diets and more sustainable food systems."

"By capturing and sharing best practice between local authorities this programme has potential to accelerate progress toward strengthening links between public sector catering and local, sustainable producers which are essential for driving progress towards the government's food strategy ambitions."

Sam Dyer MBE, Cambridge Sustainable Food CIC, said:

"We are very pleased to see Cambridge City Council receive this DEFRA funding. It builds on years of work in Cambridge to connect food, health, climate and local economic priorities through practical partnership working."

"Through Cambridge Sustainable Food and our wider partnerships and networks, we have helped create the strong foundations needed for stronger local supply chains and more joined up action across the city. Our Sustainable Food Places Gold award reflects that shared effort."

This funding is a real opportunity to take the next step and show what can happen when place-based partnership working and national policy come together."

Vic Borrill, CEO, Brighton and Hove Food Partnership said:

"National policy makers, campaigners, academics all agree that local food procurement is key to making our food system healthier, fairer, and more resilient for everyone. And yet public sector food procurement has proved a hard nut to crack. Whilst across the UK, excellent practice exists, it remains scattered, reliant on individuals rather than embedded systems and national policy has lacked the clear targets that can drive lasting change."

This is why we welcome this announcement from DEFRA that 5 towns and cities (existing leaders in place-based food work) are being funded to pilot transformative public sector food purchasing

practices. This is national / local partnership work at its best - testing how strategy meets reality.

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (www.bhfood.org.uk) bring 20 years' experience of working with our public institutions to encourage them to buy more food from sources that support our community, protect the environment, and keep money circulating in the local economy. We look forward to working with DEFRA and the other places to develop blueprints that show how we can achieve the Government's ambitions for at least half of public sector food to come from local producers or suppliers certified to higher environmental standards."

Heloise Balme, General Manager, Bristol Food Network, said:

2As coordinators of the Bristol Good Food 2030 Partnership, we are delighted that DEFRA is providing this funding to Bristol to strengthen our city's work on local, sustainable food procurement. The Bristol Good Food Procurement Action Plan - developed by partners across the public, private and third sectors - sets out clear ambitions to grow local, sustainable supply chains within the city's public procurement over the next two years.

"This funding gives us a great chance to build momentum, both here in Bristol and alongside other local authorities, and to play our part in the wider national ambition to see at least half of public sector food coming from local producers or suppliers meeting higher environmental standards."

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pupils-patients-and-public-sector-workers-to-prosper-through-local-food-procurement>