

ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	Plant-based and reduced meat and dairy diets: discussion paper
Meeting date	11 September 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	Following questions to Council from several members of the public on the Council's stance on plant-based diets in relation to climate change, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Environment & Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel requested a preliminary discussion paper on the issue in order to stimulate debate.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: Environment & Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel consider the information presented in the discussion paper in order to give their views on possible approaches Cabinet may wish to take in relation to the promotion of plant-based and reduced meat and dairy diets. These proposals will then be subject to further evidence-gathering and consultation.
Reason for recommendations	To explore the issue and assist Cabinet select the most appropriate way forward for the promotion of plant-based and reduced meat and dairy diets in the organisation and community, in order to achieve emissions reduction and meet our climate commitments.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Andy Hadley, Portfolio Holder for Climate Mitigation, Environment and Energy
Corporate Director	Graham Farrant, Chief Executive
Report Authors	Gail Scholes, Interim Head of Policy, Sustainability and Inclusion Neil Short, Strategic Lead: Climate, Resources and Sustainability Becky Beaumont, Sustainability Officer
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. According to the United Nations, approximately one third of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions are linked to the global food system. Food needs to be grown and processed, transported, distributed, prepared, consumed, and sometimes disposed of. Each of these steps creates greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. The largest portion coming from agriculture and land use. Animal-based foods, especially red meat, dairy, and farmed shrimp, are generally associated with the highest greenhouse gas emissions. Plant-based foods – such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, peas, nuts, and lentils – generally use less energy, land, and water, and have lower greenhouse gas intensities than animal-based foods.
2. In order to meet the Net Zero by 2050 target, the UK Climate Change Committee recommends a 20-50% reduction in all meat and dairy consumption. In response, local authorities have adopted various approaches, ranging from endorsement of the Plant-Based Treaty advocating veganism to support of the Countryside Alliance in support of farmers and retaining locally sourced meat on the menu.
3. In response to public questions at Full Council on 23 July 2024, the Leader reiterated the Council position on the issue: ‘Changing to a meat and dairy-free diet is an important component in reducing our personal carbon footprint. However, we do feel we should promote and encourage rather than mandating plant-based options.’
4. The Plant-based and reduced meat and dairy diets discussion paper presented at Appendix 1 has been compiled in order to allow debate as to the possible approaches the Council can take to facilitate this promotion and encouragement.

Options Appraisal

5. Option 1: Environment & Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel discusses and reaches consensus on approaches to promote and encourage plant-based and reduced meat and dairy diets for further evidence-gathering and consultation.
6. Option 2: Environment & Place Overview & Scrutiny Panel discusses but is unable to reach consensus on approaches to promote and encourage plant-based and reduced meat and dairy diets.

Summary of financial implications

7. Dependant on the views of the Panel, any actions proposed will need to be subject to further assessment to establish any financial implications (e.g. procuring vegan products instead of meat for internal catering may have cost implications).

Summary of legal implications

8. Dependant on the views of the Panel, any actions proposed will need to be subject to further assessment to establish any legal implications

Summary of human resources implications

9. Dependant on the views of the Panel, any actions proposed will need to be subject to further assessment to establish any human resources implications.

Summary of sustainability impact

10. Adopting plant-based and reduced meat and dairy diets is intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and lessen environmental impact on the planet, therefore their promotion and encouragement should be of benefit. However, dependant on the views of the Panel, any actions proposed will need to be subject to further assessment to establish sustainability impact. Decision Impact Assessment no. 680 has been completed and resulted in a Low carbon footprint rating for this initial activity.

Summary of public health implications

11. Adoption of plant-based and reduced meat and dairy diets can have health benefits if implemented correctly, ensuring essential nutrient levels are maintained for good health. Any recommendations will be subject to consultation with the appropriate bodies to ensure this is achieved.

Summary of equality implications

12. The discussion paper itself will not mandate any changes. However, if changes were to be made to the availability of plant-based and reduced meat and dairy foods in Council catering and promotions, there would be positive equalities outcomes. Faiths and cultures that are not able to consume certain animal products would be ensured of suitable food and drink at Council functions and outlets, as ethical veganism is a protected belief under the Equalities Act 2010. Therefore, action to increase availability of plant-based foods is in line with diversity and inclusion objectives. The [EIA conversation/screening document](#) is available and is awaiting approval by the EIA panel.

Summary of risk assessment

13. Dependant on the views of the Panel, any actions proposed will be subject to a risk assessment.

Background papers

Published works:

- The Sixth Carbon Budget: The UK's path to Net Zero – Climate Change Committee
- The National Food Strategy: The Plan - National Food Strategy Team
- The Plant-Based Treaty

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Plant-based and reduced meat and dairy diets: discussion paper