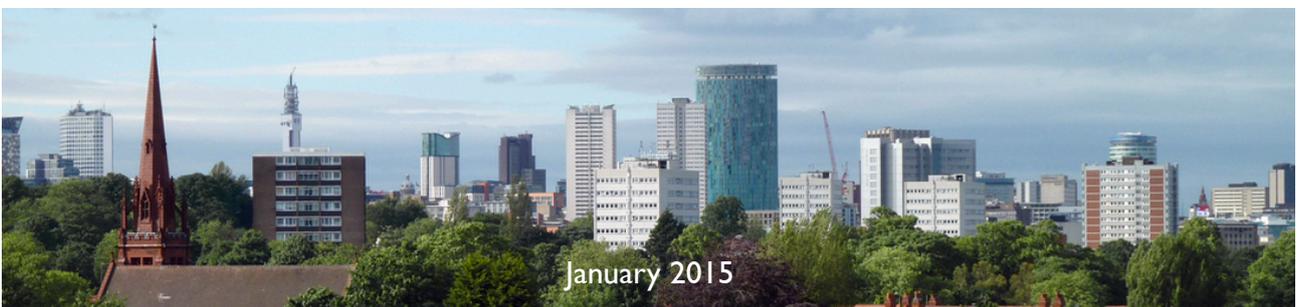


BIRMINGHAM FOOD COUNCIL

OUR RESPONSE TO

responding to the challenge
looking to the future

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
BUDGET CONSULTATION
2015



The Birmingham Food Council

The Birmingham Food Council is Community Interest Company incorporated in March 2014. It takes an interest in all matters relating to food and its impact on the well-being of all Birmingham's citizens, and on the economy of the city. We receive funding from Birmingham Public Health.

There are a number of budget proposals we wish to comment upon:

BD 1, 4 and 5: Economic Development proposals

While we appreciate the difficult financial position of the City Council and understand the requirement for reductions in economic development spending, we wish to emphasise how important the remaining funds are allocated. Of particular interest to us is the newly-established Food Hub Zone.

Food has a huge, often over-looked impact on the city's economy.

It is a diverse sector integral to the economic fortunes of the city. Birmingham's inhabitants spend over £3bn every year on food and drink. In addition, it is a rapidly growing business sector. Several major niche players in the UK food sector are here, founded only within the last 25 years, business activity largely unnoticed until recently by many in the city.

The importance of food, however, cannot be simply measured in monetary terms. The social significance of food and how it is produced, distributed and consumed cannot be overstated, neither can the longer term economic impact of decision-making on matters of social significance.

There are clear tensions between the political desire to attract investment to the local food industry through initiatives such as the Food Hub Zone and to support local businesses *and* the health and social issues caused by obesity and increasing levels of food poverty *and* poor enforcement of food standards in Birmingham.

We draw your attention to our recently published interim report and discussion document, [Food & the city economy](#); our final report is due in the spring once we have gathered responses to this.

In the light of our research to date, we believe the food sector provide tremendous business and social opportunities for Birmingham. We plan to consult with interested parties, including the City Council, in 2015-2016 to help generate a major policy document to help maximise the potential leadership role our food sector can play.

We would therefore welcome the opportunity to help shape thinking about the most effective way to develop the Food Hub Zone.

EW4: Establish an Energy Services Company

We agree that the Veolia contract presents a huge opportunity to improve the way we manage waste, and trust that your thinking is not restricted to establishing an energy services company. A key consideration must be how we manage the significant volume of food waste in the city. Whilst the initial challenge is to look at ways to reduce and then redistribute food 'waste' that is fit for human consumption, exploring the disposal options offered by anaerobic digestion should also be firmly on the city's agenda.

PHI: Public Health

We cautiously welcome the proposal to target 'lifestyle' services, such as weight management, at those who will benefit most from them, querying your assumption that it is possible to effectively identify and reach these individuals.

Birmingham has the 311th highest rate of childhood obesity of 324 local authorities. As Birmingham's Centre for Obesity Research reports that 40% of our youngsters are leaving primary school are obese or overweight, rising to 60% in Edgbaston, it could be argued that *all* our children should be targeted.

We ask that the City Council satisfies itself that the proposed targeting of public health spend combined with the cuts to children's centres outlined in proposal CYP2 do not interact and reduce our ability to tackle childhood obesity in the city.

We are pleased to note that you are not proposing any further reductions to the environmental health service. We draw your attention, however, to their current under-funding which is severely undermining their capacity to ensure the safety and integrity of our food supply.

We draw your attention to the [Elliott Review Birmingham](#), and Professor Elliott's welcome role on [our Panel of Experts](#). These give the City Council the opportunity to take a UK lead in tackling food crime, and engage in the serious national debate about the decline of public laboratories in the country, whilst recognising the parlous state of food analysis and testing at Birmingham City Laboratories is symptomatic of a national malaise.

WAS2: Voluntary sector advice

We are very concerned about the proposed cuts to advice services, and suggest it may well be a false economy. As the City Council knows all too well, Birmingham is a complex city with some wards having very high levels of deprivation.

Moreover, the dramatic hike over the last year or so in the use of food banks has not escaped anyone's attention, a reflection on a sudden deprivation of the most basic of human requirements that some of our citizens are forced to face. [Recent reports](#) show that a many people using food banks are experiencing a temporary financial crisis. Removing debt advice services could well exacerbate this situation and increase demand for other services including your own homelessness and care services.

Income generation

A number of your savings proposals are based on generating income, some from sponsorship. Whilst sponsorship can present opportunities that the City Council is right to actively pursue, we urge you to be highly selective with whom you partner. The sponsorship deal with Coca-Cola in the active parks scheme, for example, is a grave cause of concern to us in itself, and in the damage it has done to the reputation of Birmingham.



We trust that this response to your budget consultation is helpful to you. As indicated above, we would be pleased to help you develop your policies and plans in any way you feel would be useful.



Chair, Birmingham Food Council CIC