

London Flagships – Vision

Our relationship with food matters. 10% of British children are already dangerously overweight when they start primary school. By age 11, one in five are obese. Poor diet leads to further complications later in life, ranging from diabetes to cancer. In sum, the public health bill for unhealthy eating costs taxpayers billions of pounds annually.

It's not too late to turn things around. We know that food-centred interventions can have a powerful impact on health. For example, by improving practical cooking skills and making fresh food easily accessible, we can improve the quality of what people eat. This has implications not just for improving health, but also attainment. Well-fed children learn better in schools. Learning how to cook will prepare them for later life. What's more, communal food activities such as cooking and eating can positively affect individual wellbeing and social cohesion more broadly.

The government's recently launched School Food Plan has created a fantastic opportunity for all London boroughs to make huge gains around improving food through schools. Practical cooking is a requirement in the new curriculum; the Department for Education has released funds to increase take-up of school meals and set up breakfast clubs; and universal free school meals for the first three years of school will be introduced from September 2014.

Using the School Food Plan as a critical foundation, we want to go the extra mile in two chosen Flagship Boroughs. The Flagships are about demonstrating to an international audience the vast impact on health and attainment achievable through a whole environment change approach, centred on food. The Flagships will build on the catalytic work of the School Food Plan by expanding the reach beyond schools to drive food reform across the wider Borough community.

This coordinated programme of food reform takes inspiration from a similar 'whole environment' approach adopted in Finland in the 1970s, which had staggering results. Following changes across restaurants, supermarkets, schools, food manufacturers, local infrastructure and more, the annual mortality rate from heart disease fell by 80%, and average life expectancy rose by more than five years.

London has already been leading the charge in the battle to eat well. The GLA has supported many great initiatives, including Capital Growth and Healthy Schools London. The Mayor's Fund has invested heavily in breakfast club provision in the capital's schools. Four London Boroughs have of their own initiative introduced universal free school meals for primary schools, long before central government support materialized. Others are pursuing innovative regulatory reforms to limit unhealthy takeaway outlets, using the recently launched Take-Away Toolkit.

We want our city to continue to lead the way, in this country and across the world.

Our five-year vision for London Boroughs is improved **health** and **attainment** across the community – fostering individual wellbeing and social cohesion along the way.

We think this can be achieved by Boroughs bringing together existing food and diet related programmes and launching new initiatives in a coordinated approach

Specifically for health, our goals are: **(1) reduce child obesity, (2) reduce adult diabetes.**

And for attainment: **(1) increase children's academic performance, (2) increase adult self-sufficiency** (e.g. increased cooking skills, decreased dependency on food banks, improved employment rates)

In order to reach these long term goals, we want to see four short term changes around food across the community. Because if people have better diets, they will be healthier and improve their overall life chances.

1. PROVISION: Improve the quality of food available

Unless people have easy access to affordable good food and fresh ingredients, then it's hard for them to eat healthily even if they want to.

2. KNOWLEDGE: Increase understanding of how diet impacts health

Even if good food is available, unless people understand why eating well matters, they won't necessarily try to make healthy food choices.

3. SKILLS: Develop practical cooking skills

Even if people appreciate the importance of healthy eating, unless they have practical cooking skills and affordable access to an appropriate 'kitchen', they won't be able to produce good food for themselves.

4. VALUES: Foster a love of good food

Even if all of the above are in place, unless people have a desire to eat well and cook good food, they won't develop healthier diets.

In brief, we know where we want to go. But we're leaving it to you, the Boroughs, to tell us how you're going to get there. You are the ones who know best what's happening on the ground, and what exactly needs to be done in your particular context. It is likely that Boroughs will be doing many of these things already, but perhaps not in a joined up, strategic way.

Here are some examples of activities, which might produce these four short-term outcomes:

Improve quality of food available

- Provide healthy free school meals to children beyond central government's commitment for reception, Year one and year two
- Ensure the availability fresh fruit and veg stands in stores in 'food deserts'
- Restrict junk food outlets through planning regulations
- Run a 'healthy checkouts' initiative in supermarkets
- For those who need it most, simply working with schools and community groups to run 'food clubs' with year round access to food to prevent hunger

Increase understanding of how diet impacts health

- Run a borough-wide public health information campaign around food and diet
- Carry out nutrition education programmes in schools

Develop practical cooking skills

- Support schools in delivering cooking requirement in new national curriculum
- Set up after-school and holiday cooking clubs for families

Foster a love of good food

- Engage families in food growing through community gardens
- Organise local food festivals