

Interim report on climate-friendly, food advertising and procurement in English local authorities: a systematic scoping review of policy-related documents

Prepared by Mackenzie Fong^{1,2}, Letitia Sermin-Reed¹, Hannah Forde³, Ruth Westcott⁴, Fran Bernhardt⁴, Jessica Renzella³, Prachi Bhatnagar¹

¹ Population Health Sciences Institute, Newcastle University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, United Kingdom

² NIHR Applied Research Collaboration, North East and North Cumbria, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, United Kingdom

³ Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

⁴ Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, London, United Kingdom

Published January 2026

Aim of report

This report aims to provide a high-level summary of the review process and findings. Full details can be found in the journal manuscript which has been submitted for peer review at the time of publication of this report.

Background

Moving towards diets that are both environmentally sustainable and healthy is vital for tackling the dual international challenges of meeting net zero targets and public health goals [1]. Local governments across the world are influential actors within the food system, with most having policy options to alter specific pathways that can encourage environmentally sustainable and healthy food environments [2]. In England, local authorities (LAs) are administrative bodies responsible for public services in their local areas. Already, 278 of 317 English LAs have declared a climate emergency [3]. Advertising and procurement are key policy domains through which LAs can take climate action to promote food system sustainability [4]. There is already strong precedent in this area; more than 20 English LAs have announced a health-related food advertising policy to restrict the advertisement of high fat, sugar and/or salt (HFSS) products as defined by the Nutrient Profiling Model.

While local governments around the world have recently developed climate-friendly, food procurement and advertising policies, this remains a nascent area of policy. Exploring documents produced across the policy development process, including policy proposals would provide insight into current policy intent, political momentum, how climate-friendly actions are being operationalised, and their potential impact.

Aim of review

The aim of this scoping review was to systematically identify and characterise publicly available, climate-friendly food advertising and procurement policies at any stage of development within LAs in England. This was a descriptive study that did not aim to critically analyse or interrogate the quality of the policies and related documents. We, therefore, do not present judgement on the potential of policies to be implemented and achieve impact.

Methods

Prior to conducting the review, a protocol was registered on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/u932r>). The review was conducted according to PRISMA guidelines. Screening of full documents, data extraction and coding were conducted in duplicate and independently.

Eligibility

Eligible documents pertained to policies that: related to food or the food system; were published at any stage of the policy development process (i.e. including draft policy proposals, LA meeting agendas); were developed by an English LA; focused on advertising or procurement; had a direct or inferred environmental benefit according to the LA; were publicly available; and published after 1 January 2014. Documents that had a broad focus, were aspirational or whose intention was vision-setting e.g., '5-year action plan' were excluded.

Document searches and selection of documents

Relevant documents were identified by searching websites of all English LAs, Google, and relevant websites using key search terms. One reviewer (LSR) screened up to the first 50 results for searches on government websites and Google. If titles were deemed potentially relevant, the full document was independently screened by two reviewers for inclusion (LSR and MF). Any discrepancies in decisions were resolved through discussion between the two reviewers, and a third reviewer (HF, RW, FB) was consulted if consensus could not be reached.

Data extraction

Relevant data were extracted from the documents including: LA name and type, document type (e.g., policy document, LA meeting report), implementation status, verbatim text related to the policy of interest, descriptions of the policy development process; descriptions of how policy impact is evaluated/ monitored/ measured. Policy actions were coded as mandatory if they contained the terms "must", "mandatory", or for advertising, indicated the unequivocal rejection of non-compliant advertising content. Where other terms were used, policies were categorised as "non-mandated/ unclear/ not specified". This categorisation was informed by guidance from legal professionals in the absence of an existing framework.

Results

Advertising policy characteristics and actions

Policy characteristics

Five LAs had developed a publicly available climate-friendly food advertising policy [5-13]. Documents related to these policies were LA meeting reports (n = 4) [6, 10, 11, 13], policy documents (n = 3) [7, 9, 12], and a meeting agenda (n=1) [5]. Policies were identified from the East of England; London; and the South West of England. Policies were developed by London Boroughs, District Councils, County Councils, and Unitary Authorities but not Metropolitan Districts. Most documents were published between 2023 and 2024. However, publication date does not necessarily equate to date of policy ‘sign-off’ or implementation.

Policy actions

Of the five advertising policies, two referred to restricting advertisement of animal products. North Devon Council put forward a motion to ban the advertisement of meat and dairy products [8]. However, the motion was lost following a vote [14]. In 2022, in a council meeting agenda, Cambridgeshire County Council recommended to publish an advertising strategy that includes consideration to environmentally damaging products, including industrially farmed animal products [5]. However, our searches did not identify any publicly available advertising policy documents related to this.

The remaining three policies made tangential references to climate change as part of a healthier food advertising policy which restricting advertisement of HFSS products [6, 7, 9-13]. For example, Peterborough stated that there would potentially be a “positive impact” on carbon emissions due to decreased purchase and consumption of HFSS products and this would address climate change [10, 11].

Mandatory vs. non-mandatory

Of the five advertising policies, three used language indicating that the advertising restrictions were mandatory [6, 7, 9, 12].

Procurement policy characteristics and actions

Policy characteristics

Twenty-three LAs had developed a publicly available climate-friendly food advertising policy which were identified mostly in policy documents (n = 13) [15-27]. Policies were identified from all England regions except the North West and West Midlands. Policies were developed by all types of LAs i.e., London Boroughs, District Councils, County Councils, Unitary Authorities and Metropolitan Districts. Most documents were published between 2021-2024. However, date of publication does not necessarily equate to date of policy ‘sign-off’ or implementation.

Policy actions

Procurement policy actions were grouped into types based on previous literature [28, 29] and the data presented in the identified documents. The resulting six policy types were: sourcing of food (n = 22 LAs); changing availability of food options (n = 14 LAs); standards and accreditations (n = 16 LAs); food waste management (n = 14 LAs); information and nudging (n = 6 LAs); and other (n = 3 LAs).

The setting in which procurement policies were applied were categorised based on data presented in the included documents and the expertise of a practice partner (RW). The

categories were: council contracts and tenders; council hosted events; council hosted meetings; council run sites (e.g., leisure centres, cafes); and schools.

Sourcing of food

Twenty-two LAs included actions that pertained to sourcing of food. Sourcing of local (n = 20) [8, 16, 18, 20-24, 26, 27, 30-42], Fairtrade/ethically sourced (n = 12) [15, 20, 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, 32-36, 42], seasonal (n = 11) [18, 20, 23, 25-27, 30, 31, 33-35, 41, 42] and organic (n = 11) [16, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 30, 33, 35, 36, 40, 42] produce were the most common policy actions. These policy actions were mostly applied to council contracts and tenders.

Changing the availability of food options

Fourteen LAs included a policy action relating to changing the availability of food/beverages served. These policy actions included increasing the provision of plant-based options (n = 11) [8, 17-19, 24, 26, 31-33, 35, 37, 38, 43], the provision of plant-based options only (n = 7) [8, 18, 35, 37, 38, 41-43], limiting or reducing animal-based products (n = 3) [20, 35, 43], and having a meat-free day (n = 5) [8, 17, 19, 24, 31, 36]. This policy action was applied to a variety of settings, with the most common being council contracts and tenders, and council hosted events and meetings.

Standards and accreditation

Sixteen LAs included a policy action related to obtaining food standards, accreditations, certifications etc. The most common standards were for meat and dairy (n = 12) [19-24, 26, 27, 30, 34, 35, 40, 42] and fish products (n = 12) [15, 16, 19-24, 27, 30, 33-35, 40]. For meat and dairy products, this included specified standards such as Red Tractor or RSPCA Farm assured, or actions such as avoiding “unsustainable farming practices”. For fish products, commonly specified standards included Marine Stewardship Certification or equivalent, and not purchasing fish from the Marine Conservation Society ‘fish to avoid’ list. These policy actions were most commonly applied to council contracts and tenders.

Food waste management

Fourteen LAs included an action to address waste management as related to food consumption. Of these, 12 LAs included food waste minimisation actions [8, 17, 24, 26, 30-33, 35, 36, 38, 39, 42, 43] e.g., requesting that contracts or suppliers indicate plans detailing how food waste will be minimised; recycling food waste; only ordering the amount of food required at events; and using ingredients from local food surplus organisations.

Information and nudging

Six LAs included actions relating to providing information or nudging. Five involved displaying information related to the environmental impacts of food [30, 35-37, 43] e.g., information about food origin, the carbon footprint of food. Four policies mentioned actions to adapt choice architecture [8, 35, 37, 43], such as showcasing plant-based options and placing plant-based options higher up on menus. The most frequent setting this policy action applied to was council hosted events.

Other actions

Three LAs described other policy actions in procurement policies, such as increasing drinking water availability to avoid the use of bottled water and single-use plastic cups [32, 35]; and not using genetically modified ingredients [30].

Mandatory vs. non-mandatory policy actions

Of the 167 individual policy actions contained in included procurement policy documents, 19 used language indicating that these were mandatory.

Development processes for advertising and procurement policies

Across all identified LAs, eight described the processes for developing the policies [6, 7, 9-11, 13, 30-32, 39, 40, 43]. The most frequently reported process was consultations (n = 6) with relevant council teams [30, 32, 40], subject matter experts [31], a charity [10], and food service providers [39]. Other processes included conducting engagement activities (n = 3) [13, 40], surveys (n = 2) [13, 31], using external research (n = 1) [31], interviews (n = 1) [31] and a piloting exercise (n = 1) [43].

Compliance monitoring and impact assessment of advertising and procurement policies

Thirteen LAs merely mentioned monitoring policy compliance without providing further detail [12, 15-17, 20-22, 24, 26, 30, 31, 33, 39, 40, 42]. Thirteen LAs included efforts to measure compliance and of these [12, 15-17, 20-22, 24, 26, 30, 31, 33, 39, 40, 42], seven provided details of how compliance would be measured [12, 16, 21, 22, 24, 33, 40]. Six LAs mentioned metrics for compliance success [12, 16, 21, 22, 24, 40], such as reporting scope 3 emissions (procurement policies) and maintaining records of all food and drink advertisements drink (advertising policies). Only one LA described assessing the impact of the policy, although only during the transitional period [43]. Five LAs described penalties if policies were breached, such as payment reduction or contract termination [12, 16, 21, 24, 40].

Strengths and limitations of review

Strengths

- We included documents from across the policy development spectrum, providing an understanding of the types of policies being considered by LAs, even if not yet implemented.
- We reported a high level of detail (specific policy actions), which provides relevant detail to real world practice and policy making.
- We worked closely with practice partners, drawing on their expertise, experience and professional networks to enhance the trustworthiness of our findings.

Limitations

- We only included publicly available documents. This means we cannot determine what is happening “behind closed doors” in LAs.
- We did not formally assess the quality and implementation viability of identified policies. Therefore, caution is advised if considering developing a policy based on those presented in this review.
- The implementation status (e.g., developed or implemented) of policies was not clear in the majority of identified documents. Therefore, we cannot ascertain the difference between policy intention and policy action.

Recommendations for policy, practice and research

Policy and practice

- Those LAs without a current climate-friendly food advertising or procurement policy are encouraged to leverage their unique and important position in local policymaking by introducing procurement and advertising policies that are consistent with their stance on climate change.
- The specificity, scope, and compliance monitoring of the identified policies varied significantly, and most policy actions were deemed not mandatory. National-level policies and standards could help create consistency and accountability across LAs, reduce the risk of public and commercial backlash, ensure policies achieve their intended environmental impacts, and remove the onus on small, resource-rationed, local teams whose resources could be diverted elsewhere.

Research

- While there are a growing number of English LAs announcing health-related advertising policies, we identified comparably fewer publicly available food advertising and procurement policies with a focus on climate. One potential reason for this is the absence of a government-backed tool for categorising food/beverage products based on their environmental impact. Future research is needed to develop a model like the Nutrient Profiling Model, that also incorporates environmental and other social and ethical impacts. This will be critical for developing, implementing and monitoring climate-friendly advertising and procurement policies.
- Further research is needed to evaluate barriers and enablers to identified policies and the impacts of these on environmental outcomes.
- Studies are needed to examine how the framing of climate-friendly food policies (e.g., around health, animal welfare, or climate goals) influences public and political acceptability, particularly for more contentious measures targeting meat and dairy.
- Researchers reflected that the absence of public policy documentation is not necessarily an indication of an inaction. LAs may take less public routes to ambitious policy development for several reasons e.g., to avoid public and corporate backlash.
- Researchers are encouraged to engage with policy makers and share current, accessible evidence of the impacts of the various policy actions.

Funding

This review was supported by The Wellcome Trust (SHIFT (Sustainable Healthy Interventions for Food Transition), Award ID:227132/Z/23/Z). MF and SB are funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) North East and North Cumbria (NENC) (NIHR200173). HF is also supported by a Wellcome Trust Early Career award (award ID: 314488/Z/24/Z). The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care. The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of this report.

References

1. Rockström J, Thilsted SH, Willett WC, Gordon LJ, Herrero M, Hicks CC. The EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy, sustainable, and just food systems. *Lancet*. 2025;406(10512):1625–700.

2. Cohen N. Roles of Cities in Creating Healthful Food Systems. *Annu Rev Public Health*. 2022;43:419–37.
3. Climate Emergency UK. Climate Action Plan Checklist [Available from: <https://climateemergency.uk/other-resources/>].
4. Sustain. Every mouthful counts. 2023.
5. Cambridgeshire County Council. Council Meeting Agenda 2022 19 July 2022.https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/CCC_live/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=jW0FQPvmGMSmTAdMWKGOFhdWz9v0BDKjNpHm1DFd8H13gYYL%2fFYA%3d%3d&rUzwRPf%2bZ3zd4E7lkn8Lyw%3d%3d=pwRE6AGJFLDnlh225F5QMaQWCtPHwdhUfCZ%2fLUQzgA2uL5jNRG4jdQ%3d%3d&mCTIbCubSFfXsDGW9IXnlG%3d%3d=hFflUdN3100%3d&kCx1AnS9%2fpWZQ40DXFvdEw%3d%3d=hFflUdN3100%3d&uJovDxwdjMPoYv%2bAJvYtyA%3d%3d=ctNJFf55vVA%3d&FgPIIEJYlotS%2bYG0Bi5oIA%3d%3d=NHdURQburHA%3d&d9Qjj0ag1Pd993jsyOJqFvmyB7X0CSQK=ctNJFf55vVA%3d&WGewmoAfeNR9xqBux0r1Q8Za60lavYmz=ctNJFf55vVA%3d&WGewmoAfeNQ16B2MHuCPMRKZMwaG1PaO=ctNJFf55vVA%3d
6. London Borough of Havering. Cabinet: Advertising and Sponsorship Policy. 2023 13 September 2023.<https://democracy.havering.gov.uk/documents/s70925/5.0%2016.08.23%20-%20Cabinet%20Report%20Advertising%20and%20Sponsorship%20Policy%20with%20Policy%20and%20EQHIA%201.5.pdf>
7. London Borough of Havering. Advertising and Sponsorship Policy. 2023.<https://www.havering.gov.uk/downloads/file/6348/advertising-and-sponsorship-policy-with-eqhia>
8. North Devon Council. Council Meeting. 2024 17 July 2024.<https://democracy.northdevon.gov.uk/documents/g2983/Agenda%20frontsheet%2017th-Jul-2024%2018.30%20Council.pdf?T=0>
9. Peterborough City Council. Peterborough City Council Healthier Food and Drink Advertising Policy.<https://democracy.peterborough.gov.uk/documents/s52952/Item%206.%20Appendix%201%20-%20Healthier%20Food%20and%20Drink%20Advertising%20Policy%2023.05.24.pdf>
10. Watkins E. Cabinet Agenda Item No.6: Peterborough City Council Healthier Food and Drink Advertising Policy. 2024 17 June 2024.<https://democracy.peterborough.gov.uk/documents/s52951/Item%206.%20Cabinet%20Report%20-%20Healthier%20Food%20and%20Drink%20Advertising%20Policy.pdf>
11. Atri J. Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee Agenda Item No.9: Peterborough City Council High Fat, Salt and Sugar Food and Drink Advertising and Sponsorship Policy. 2024 12 March 2024.<https://democracy.peterborough.gov.uk/documents/s52139/Item%209.%20AH%20Scrutiny%20Committee%20Report%20-%20HFSS%20advertising%20March%202024.pdf>
12. London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Tower Hamlets Council Healthier Advertising Policy.<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.towerhamlets.gov.uk%2FDocuments%2FPublic-Health%2FHealthy-food%2FTHAdvertisingPolicy.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

[-%20Item%2014%20-%20Procurement%20Strategy%20and%20Environmental%20Purchasing%20Policy%20-%20Environmental%20Purchasing%20Policy.pdf](#)

26. St Albans City and District Council. Sustainable Procurement Strategy 2022 December 2022. <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/2020%20SADC%20Sustainable%20Procurement%20Policy%20Dec%20update.pdf>
27. London Borough of Waltham Forest. Sustainable Procurement Policy 2015–19. https://www.adamproviders.co.uk/assets/uploads/files/LBWF_-_Sustainable_Procurement_Policy_2015-19.pdf
28. Barbour L, Lindberg R, Woods J, Charlton K, Brimblecombe J. Local urban government policies to facilitate healthy and environmentally sustainable diet-related practices: a scoping review. *Public Health Nutr.* 2022;25(2):471–87.
29. Grech A, Howse E, Boylan S. A scoping review of policies promoting and supporting sustainable food systems in the university setting. *Nutr J.* 2020;19(1):97.
30. Brighton and Hove City Council. Brighton & Hove City Council Good Food Standards. 2021 April 2021. <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/business-and-trade/contracts-and-tenders/brighton-hove-city-council-good-food-standards>
31. Bristol City Council. Sustainable Procurement Policy. 2021 20 December 2021. <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s69443/Appendix%20A%20-%20Further%20essential%20background%20and%20detail%20on%20the%20proposal.pdf>
32. Limb A. Good Food For Cambridge: Sustainable Food Policy Statement & Moving Towards A Sustainable Food City. 2018 28 June 2018. <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/documents/s43168/180613%20Sustainable%20Food%20committee%20report%20FINAL.pdf>
33. City of London. Low Carbon Procurement Guide. <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/assets/Business/low-carbon-procurement-guide.pdf>
34. Durham County Council. Sustainable Buying Standard: Food. 2022 4 February 2022. <https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/37607/Sustainable-Buying-Standard-Food/pdf/SustainableBuyingStandard-Food.pdf?m=1648030871553>
35. Exeter City Council. Draft Sustainable Food Policy. <https://committees.exeter.gov.uk/documents/s89488/Draft%20Sustainable%20Food%20Policy%20v2%202023.pdf>
36. Leeds City Council. Appendix B - Food Procurement Guidelines. 2022 8 September 2022. <https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s238788/Leeds%20Food%20Strategy%20Report%20Appendix%20B%20101022.pdf>
37. Norwich City Council. Item 13(g): Plant-Based Food 2023 14 March 2023. <https://cmis.norwich.gov.uk/Live/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=lvNvSdAi0bG%2bo2ooi0iT DafD56iDoMu%2bGfQjmiYy8A3YmvmolG%2fE%2bg%3d%3d&rUzwRPf%2bZ3zd4E7lkn8Lyw%3d%3d=pwRE6AGJFLDNlh225F5QMaQWctPHwdhUfCZ%2fLUQzgA2uL5jNRG4jdQ%3d%3d&mCTIbCubSFfXsDGW9IXnlg%3d%3d=hFflUdN3100%3d&kCx1AnS9%2fpWZQ40DXFvdEw%3d%3d=hFflUdN3100%3d&uJovDxwdjMPoYv%2bAjvYtyA%3d%3d=ctNJFf55vVA%3d&FgPIIEJYlotS%2bYGoBi5oIA%3d%3d=NHdURQburHA%3d&d9Qjj0ag1Pd993jsyOJqFvmyB7X0CSQK=ctNJFf55vVA%3d&W>

[GewmoAfeNR9xqBux0r1Q8Za60lavYmz=ctNJFf55vVA%3d&WGewmoAfeNQ16B2MHu
CpMRKZMwaG1PaO=ctNJFf55vVA%3d](#)

38. Oxford City Council. Agenda Item: Plant-based Food and Sustainable Farming 2023.

39. Ali J. GW1 School Food Procurement Framework. 2024 17 June 2024.<https://modern.gov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s120932/Report%20GW1-%20School%20Food%20Procurement%20Framework.pdf>

40. Azad A. Cabinet: Environmentally Sustainable Procurement Policy. 2022.<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s88341/Orbis%20Environmentally%20Sustainable%20Procurement%20Policy%20Cabinet%20Report%2027.09.2022.pdf>

41. Winchester City Council. Agenda and Decisions 2023 24 March 2023.<https://democracy.winchester.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=412&MId=4338>

42. Winchester City Council. Guide to Sustainable Procurement. 2024 May 2024.<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=535ccf2a33c82d8c4dac45e030f50cdb6ab4120e87c5cf727fd030e02fe50995JmltdHM9MTc2MzA3ODQwMA&pfn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fcid=2bcce6b0-67d3-6ea5-16e3-f4e9668b6fae&psq=winchester+guide+to+sustainable+procurement&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cud2luY2hlc3Rlci5nb3YudWsvYXNzZXRzL2F0dGFjaC80NTc1NS9XaW5jaGVzdGVyLUNpdHktQ291bmNpbC1HdWlkZS10by1TdXN0YWluYWJsZS1Qcm9jdXJlbWVudC5wZGY>

43. Stewart C. Plant-Based Catering Options for Civic Events Report. 2023 19 January 2023.<https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/documents/s61568/Plant-Based%20Catering%20Options%20for%20Civic%20Events%20Committee%20Report.pdf>