

EXETER FOOD NETWORK

The network, recently renamed the Exeter Food Network to avoid confusion with the Exeter Community Network, arose from informal discussions that were taking place between a number of Exeter-based organisations interested in food related matters that affect the local community. Its members include:

Devon & Cornwall Food Association, St. Sidwell's Community Centre, the Real Food Store, Public Health, Exeter City Council, Exeter Community Initiatives, Devon & Cornwall Housing, Exeter Food Bank, Exeter Allotments Forum, the Food for Life partnership, and Exeter Council for Voluntary Service

Its aim is to make healthy, sustainable food available and accessible to all. By working with each other, the organisations are able to share ideas and resources, develop new activities and promote the good work already happening in the city.

Sustainable Food Cities

By virtue of an application made by the Network, Exeter recently became the 40th city in the UK to be recognised as a 'sustainable food city'. 'Sustainable Food Cities' is a national body working to develop a cross-sector partnership of local public agencies, businesses and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) committed to working together to make healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where they live.

It has been suggested to me by one activist in this field that Exeter City Council signs itself up separately to the Sustainable Food Cities scheme, in addition to being a member of the Exeter Food Network. Any town, city, borough, district or county can join the Sustainable Food Cities Network as long as it has a cross-sector food partnership working to create a better food system.

Having looked at what happens elsewhere in the country, it seems that other cities are adopting a similar approach to Exeter, with a collective of local organisations, rather than a local authority, signing up for membership. Plymouth, for example, is represented by the Food Plymouth Community Interest Company. I therefore am not proposing that Exeter City Council signs up on its own account, but instead continues with its current collaborative work.

Exeter school holiday meals project

One project already undertaken recently by the Exeter Food Network provided free meals for a number of Exeter's school children during the school summer holidays. Approximately 1.7 million children in the UK are eligible for free school meals and many of these could be going without a daily meal during school holidays.

Exeter's pilot project, funded by a grant from the Exeter Board, not only provided free holiday meals to over 40 school children, spread over a two week period, but also enabled children and their parents to learn about food and cooking, make and eat a meal together and take away both their skills and food to share at home.

Healthy eating - a priority for this Health & Wellbeing Board?

It has also been suggested to me that we should include healthy eating amongst the priorities of the Exeter Health and Wellbeing Board. Rather than debate this now, I should like to suggest that we consider this at our next Board meeting or whenever our next review of our priorities is due.

Cllr Keith Owen

Portfolio Holder for Health and Place

Exeter City Council