

CASE STUDY, DOCUMENT

Bridgend Leads the Way in Localising Public Sector Food Procurement: PDF

Bridgend County Borough Council embarked on a pioneering journey to explore how food procurement for schools and care homes could be made more local, sustainable, and socially impactful.

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Overview

Bridgend County Borough Council embarked on a pioneering journey to explore how food procurement for schools and care homes could be made more local, sustainable, and socially impactful. With the support of consultants North Star Transition, and inspired by successful NHS food sourcing models, the project used Bridgend as a practical case study to develop cross sector learning and new procurement approaches that could influence change across Wales.

A Local Lens with National Implications

The initiative stemmed from Welsh Government's ambition to strengthen the Foundational Economy—the everyday sectors, like food, care, and education, that are rooted in local communities and essential to people's lives. North Star Transition was appointed to build on their work with NHS Wales food sourcing and apply those lessons to other public settings, including schools and care homes.

Bridgend became the focal point of this research and action, serving as a live testbed for innovation in food procurement.

"I was delighted to be part of this," said Jo Protheroe, from Bridgend Council.

"This wasn't just about our food contracts and highlighting the work that we are doing here in Bridgend—it was an opportunity to take stock and evaluate to help us meet our ambitions of providing more locally grown/produced food. Healthy food is critical to developing our future generation, and now a diet rich in ultra processed fast food has caused record obesity levels in children. Sadly, the cheapest food is often the most unhealthy so we must take advantage of the breakfast clubs and Universal Free School Meals to ensure that there are at least 2 meals a day where we feed children healthy food.

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We also know that the Climate crisis is rapidly changing the global production of food, and so it is logical to me that we must take every opportunity to support the growing of food domestically and agroecologically to make us more resilient. In essence the project was about reframing how we think about food, how we value it, and how we ensure that procurement becomes a tool for local prosperity and public health.”

What the Project Involved

The work was delivered through a webinar, and deep-dive conversations with school catering teams, care home managers and suppliers. The aim was to understand the barriers, opportunities, and aspirations within the system and develop a model for more local, lower carbon, healthier food sourcing.

Key strands of the project included:

- Engaging catering staff and care home managers to understand their challenges and motivations
- Mapping current supply chains to identify where food was coming from and where change was possible
- Designing procurement criteria that placed value on local sourcing, health, and sustainability
- Scoring tenders using robust criteria focused on social value and decarbonisation

The Role of Procurement

At the heart of the project was a passionate belief that procurement is a powerful tool for change. Rather than seeing it as a bureaucratic hurdle, Bridgend Council used its contracts as levers to:

- Encourage suppliers to increase the percentage of locally produced food

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- Embed social value and decarbonisation criteria into scoring systems
- Support a shift in mindset from cost-driven buying to values-led sourcing

This was already becoming standard practice in Bridgend's wholesale contracts, and the project helped formalise and expand that approach—making it more measurable, strategic, and replicable.

What Made It Work

A few key ingredients contributed to the project's success:

- Cross-sector collaboration: Schools, care homes, and suppliers were all involved in shaping the outcomes.
- Leadership with passion: Procurement and Catering for Schools champions within the council who truly cared about food, children's health, and community wealth building.
- Actionable insight: North Star Transition brought deep experience and practical tools from NHS food reform that could be applied directly to local authorities.
- Policy alignment: The project built on existing Welsh Government aims around social value, climate, and health.

Impact and Learning

- Locally produced food is being prioritised in tenders and frameworks
- Procurement teams are more confident in using social value and sustainability as scoring criteria
- Catering and care staff feel heard and included, helping to drive cultural change
- The project has laid the groundwork for replicable models across other local authorities in Wales

"We've always had the ambition to bring more wealth back into our communities," jo reflects. "Now, we're doing it in a way that's structured, measurable, and aligned with

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what our citizens actually need.”

Conclusion

The work in Bridgend shows how food can be reframed—not just as a commodity, but as a lever for wellbeing, environmental sustainability, and local economic resilience. By embedding these values into procurement, and working collaboratively across the public sector, this project is helping Wales lead the way in building a better food system from the ground up.

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