Local Food Governance in Practice: Unpacking Tensions Between Vision and Implementation in Bradford, UK

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Abstract

This research examines the tension between the ambitions set out in the Bradford Food Strategy and the practical constraints that hinder its implementation. In the absence of a coherent national food policy in the UK, local authorities and partnerships have increasingly sought to address food system challenges through locally developed food strategies. While some scholars present these initiatives as effective mechanisms for change, others are sceptical of their ability to influence complex food systems. This research contributes to this debate by providing empirical insight into the realities of food strategy implementation within a local authority context.

Although considerable attention has been paid to what local food strategies should contain, less research has explored why implementation often falls short of strategic ambitions. This study addresses that gap through an in depth case study of Bradford Council, generating nuanced understandings of the organisational and political barriers that shape implementation processes.

The research draws on qualitative interviews with nineteen elite, hard to reach participants who were either embedded within or closely connected to Bradford Council. A distinctive feature of the study is the researcher's dual role as both practitioner and researcher, enabling access to participants. Findings reveal that, despite being framed as a cross cutting strategy, the Bradford Food Strategy is largely owned by the Public Health Department and lacks wider organisational support. Furthermore, severe financial pressures limit the capacity of officers to engage in strategic work.

The study concludes that the Strategy is misaligned with the underlying drivers of food system challenges. Without stronger national policy mechanisms capable of shaping private sector behaviour, local food strategies alone are unlikely to achieve transformational change. The research provides recommendations for practitioners and identifies future research opportunities in supporting local and regional food system governance, implementation, and resource allocation.

Authors declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite the development of the National Food Strategy, critics have argued that the government has failed to use its position and to allocate sufficient resources to address the challenges proposed within the Strategy (Doherty et al., 2022). The absence of progress has not prevented the development of local movements - local actors advancing a breadth of initiatives on local food policy, practice, and partnership working (Sustainable Food Places, 2025).

Various academics and civil society actors argue that Local Authorities are well positioned to support Local Food Policy (Sustain, 2022; Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 2025; Sustainable Food Places, 2025) and to advance the Sustainable Food Transition, yet there is no empirical evidence suggesting the efficacy of such an approach (Sonnino, 2023). This research investigates in depth the case of Bradford, West Yorkshire, United Kingdom (U.K.) to understand the challenges facing the Local authority regarding the implementation of its Food Strategy.

1.1. Background & Problem Statement

Prior research and civil society advocates have examined various elements of Local Food Policy and Strategy Development, and have made suggestions about what Local Authorities could do to advance the food system transformation agenda.

The influential EAT-Lancet Report suggests a host of actions from production to waste (Willet et al., 2019; EAT, 2022). The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) echoes this sentiment, highlighting the role that cities have in advocating for their citizens on the global stage (Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 2025). The host organisation for Sustainable Food Partnerships in the U.K., Sustainable Food Places (2025), further states that Local Authorities are influential given their resources, powers, and influence over local food economies and culture. Within the academic community, various studies have examined how Local Sustainable Food Partnerships emerge (Giambartolomei, Forno & Sage, 2021; Jones and Hills, 2021). Others have looked at what is included within Food Strategies (Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018), as well as the cohesion and connectivity of Local Food Policy at various levels (Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019; Kidd & Reynolds, 2024). Despite this focus and optimism, however, others argue that no empirical evidence has been generated by those involved to suggest that Local Food Policy is effective (Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto, 2019).

It is suggested that much research on food policy in general has focused on the ideal outcomes of the food system, and that a large gap exists between idealised visions and practical realities at the local level (Sonnino, 2023; Sonnino & Milbourne, 2022). Others have stated that, at best, food partnerships and city-level food policy are spaces of

possibility – but what needs to be recognised are the links between food policy and other complex systems, sectors and priorities (Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto, 2019). Mattioni et al. (2022) argue that part of the reproduction of normative research on local food policy is due to much of the prior research on the topic largely focusing on a select few actors whose role is centred on food. Lever et al. (2019) observe that such actors are typically Public Health Officers. It is therefore suggested that future research should be undertaken to understand internal tensions within Local Authorities and to what extent they are able to develop stronger forms of coordination between different departmental actors (Mattioni et al., 2022).

This research responds to calls for broader perspectives on the challenges related to the implementation of a local food strategy within a specific organisation. It is important to address this gap, as existing scholarship continues to champion the potential of Local Food Strategies whilst simultaneously acknowledging significant challenges around resourcing. This study is informed equally by practice and scholarship, as the researcher was directly involved in the development of the Bradford Food Strategy prior to undertaking this work, and remains involved to date with the ongoing efforts to implement the initiatives proposed within the strategy. Approaching the research as a reflective practitioner, it became clear that many academic and civil society recommendations were often out of step with practical realities, which underscores the importance of the following research aims and objectives.

1.2. Research Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of this study is to conduct an in-depth case study of one specific Local authority in the UK to develop a nuanced understanding of the challenges facing Local Authorities.

To achieve this, the following objectives were pursued:

- To better understand the challenges surrounding the vision-implementation gap in a local food strategy.
- To utilise the Social Innovation Ecosystem (SIE) framework to explore these challenges from several perspectives, using the key elements of the SIE. Elements include Policy, Finance, Markets, Culture, Human Capital, and Supports (Audretsch et al., 2022).
- To undertake a Political Economy Analysis of the above findings to situate the challenges facing Local Authorities within a broader context.

The research questions generated in line with these objectives are:

- What are the challenges regarding the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy

- What are the limitations of local authority-led food strategies more generally?

1.3. Research Scope and Limitations

This research focuses specifically on the Bradford District, West Yorkshire, England. The Bradford District covers 366 square miles, a third of which is urban and comprises the city centre and a diverse mix of towns and villages. The other two-thirds of the district are rural, encompassing moorlands, parks, woods and farmland. The Bradford District is the fifth largest metropolitan borough in the U.K. and is home to over half a million people. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019, Bradford is ranked as the 13th most deprived Local authority in England (1 being the most deprived). The Bradford District has the 10th largest economy in England, valued at over £11.6bn. Over 16,000 businesses across various sectors are based in the District, which employs over 250,000 people. Food manufacturing is noted as one of the sectoral strengths (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025).

Sustainable Food Places (2025), the National Organisation for Local Food Partnerships, recognises three primary structures for Food Partnerships; a. those which exist within third-sector organisations, b. those which are wholly independent, and c. those embedded within Local Authorities. As Bradford Council, or more specifically, the Public Health Department within Bradford Council, is leading the Sustainable Food Agenda locally, the scope of this research is on the latter. Whilst some of the actors interviewed within the research are external to the Local authority, their perspectives are drawn upon to better understand the challenges the Local authority faces in dealing with the sustainable food agenda. This research does not, therefore, look at the challenges facing third-sector or independently organised Food Partnerships, nor the challenges they face in implementing their Food Strategies. Such focus has, however, been researched previously by others (Lever et al., 2019; Yap & Treuherz, 2023; Jackson et al., 2024).

This research does not focus on Food Partnership dynamics or the challenges faced by the Partnership as an entity. Rather, it examines the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy. Put simply, it is concerned with what happens after the Food Strategy development process ends and how the ambitions set out in the document are realised. The intention was to gain a deep, nuanced understanding of the challenges facing one Local authority; thus, this research did not focus on other cities or regions. It is also important to establish a clear boundary for this research. The focus was not on the food system itself, but on various city-level actors who were directly involved with the strategy, or who were involved through inferred responsibilities. Perspectives from senior management were also sought to understand broader organisational challenges. Depth and contextual understanding were prioritised over sample size, and high-quality, hard-to-reach senior participants were deliberately selected for their understanding of

the organisation within which the Strategy exists. This research took place between October 2022 and September 2025, covering scope, data collection, and the writing-up phase. Participant interviews took place between October 2023 and May 2024. The researcher has been embedded within the organisation since November 2020

1.4. Thesis Structure

Having now provided an overview of the thesis, the following paragraphs lay out the document's structure.

Chapter 1 reviews relevant literature on Food Systems Transformation. It begins by defining the food system before exploring high-level challenges. The chapter then sets out aspirations for the food system and an overview of the theoretical requirements needed to realise such ambition. It then focuses on why cities are important focal points for such transformation and reviews a breadth of literature on this topic.

Chapter 2 sets out the methodology, beginning by recapping the research problem. It then explains and provides a rationale for the philosophical positioning, which is within the interpretive paradigm; thus, it is ontologically nominalist and epistemologically anti-positivist. The research approach and design are then explained; an abductive case study undertaken in Bradford, West Yorkshire, is presented, followed by background content on the Bradford District and the Bradford Food Strategy. The research scope, sampling strategy, and participant profiles are then presented alongside data collection methods and the rationale for the interview schedule. After determining the two-fold analytical approach of thematic analysis and political economy analysis, the chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of limitations and an in-depth reflexive positionality account.

Chapter 3, the Findings Chapter, is presented in three sections; a. document analysis, b. abductive thematic structuring of interview data, and c. political economy analysis. The first section groups codes taken from participant interview data around the six elements of the social innovation ecosystem (SIE), namely policy, finance, culture, markets, supports, and human capital. To frame and contextualise this analysis, a political economy analysis is then presented to situate the challenge within micro, meso, and macro perspectives.

Chapter 4, the Discussion Chapter, positions the research findings in relation to the literature discussed earlier. The chapter is built around three themes.

The first section demonstrates how the Food Strategy, in practice, is a public health strategy and explores the implications that arise from this. It highlights that, despite a cross-cutting appearance, the gap between theory and practice does not appear to be closing. The second section draws out nuances regarding resource challenges within

the Organisation and how this impacts the ability to implement the Food Strategy. Whilst others have addressed this in the past, this section suggests that the implications are not adequately understood. The third and final discussion section examines the phenomena of local food policy within the context of earlier scholarship on political economy and neoliberalism, suggesting that the local approach to food system transformation may, in fact, be the wrong approach.

By Chapter 5, the reader will be approaching a well-earned rest as the work is concluded.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on local food partnerships and local food strategies through a political economy lens. It begins by defining the food system and outlining its key characteristics within a corporate food regime, before identifying the externalities generated by this system. Drawing on political economy scholarship, the chapter then highlights the economic challenges associated with the current model, particularly the concentration of power and the structural requirements for meaningful change. It subsequently examines the UK policy response, summarising the UK food strategy and identifying its limitations, notably its failure to address root causes and the insufficiency of allocated resources to implement the elements it does identify. In the absence of substantive political or economic reform, the chapter discusses the emergence of counter-food movements. It then reviews key literature across two central themes: first, local food partnerships and local food strategies as forms of counter food movements; and second, the challenges associated with strategy implementation, including the implementation gap and its contributing factors.

2.1. Political Economy: a theoretical framework

Political economy is a term used for over three hundred years to address the inseparable relationship between political and economic matters of the state. Political economy examines how power, interests, and political institutions shape economic outcomes, and how economic structures shape politics. Political economy is a conceptual framework for understanding how economies are governed and organised, and for examining the distribution of resources and power (Caporaso & Levine, 1992).

Political economy has taken several meanings, but most include the incorporation of two separate societal subsystems, the political and the economic. Noting that much work has been done on defining the separate elements of 'political' and 'economy', Nurmi (2006) highlights the importance of focusing on the activities that take place within political economy. For Nurmi, political economy is about understanding the reasons that underlie specific activity.

Political economy has been used as a theoretical framework to understand challenges within the food system (Gleissman, 2018; De Schutter, 2019; Bene, 2022). Before exploring key literature on 'political economy and food systems', the following section sets out an understanding of what the food system is.

2.2. Power within the Food System

2.2.1. What is the food system?

From a practical and logistical perspective, the categories of activities within the food system are those related to producing, processing, distributing, retailing, preparing, and consuming food (Zurek et al., 2022; Drewnowski et al., 2020). In addition to the activities listed above, Drewnowski et al. (2020) also describe the food system in terms of the outcomes it produces. The authors distinguish between activities, which are what we do within the food system, and outcomes, which are what we get out of it (Drewnowski et al., 2020).

In addition to the food system operations (Zurek et al., 2022) and the outcomes produced by the food system (Drewnowski et al., 2020), Doherty et al. (2021) also include external environmental and socio-economic drivers as contributing elements to the food system. As shown in Figure 1, the Food Systems Diagram distinguishes among food system activities, drivers, and feedback loops (Doherty et al., 2021). The authors highlight the importance of taking a food-systems approach that considers not only the food system's activities and the outcomes they produce, but also the drivers that shape both the activities and the outcomes. Taking a systems approach to food is important because it recognises the interconnections among elements and that actions in one part of the system can create benefits, trade-offs, feedback loops, or unintended consequences elsewhere. By taking a systems approach, decision makers can understand the interconnections between various elements and make decisions, accordingly, taking into account the trade-offs and potential impacts elsewhere in the system. The authors note, however, that a systems approach is discussed more often than it is successfully applied in practice (Doherty et al., 2021).

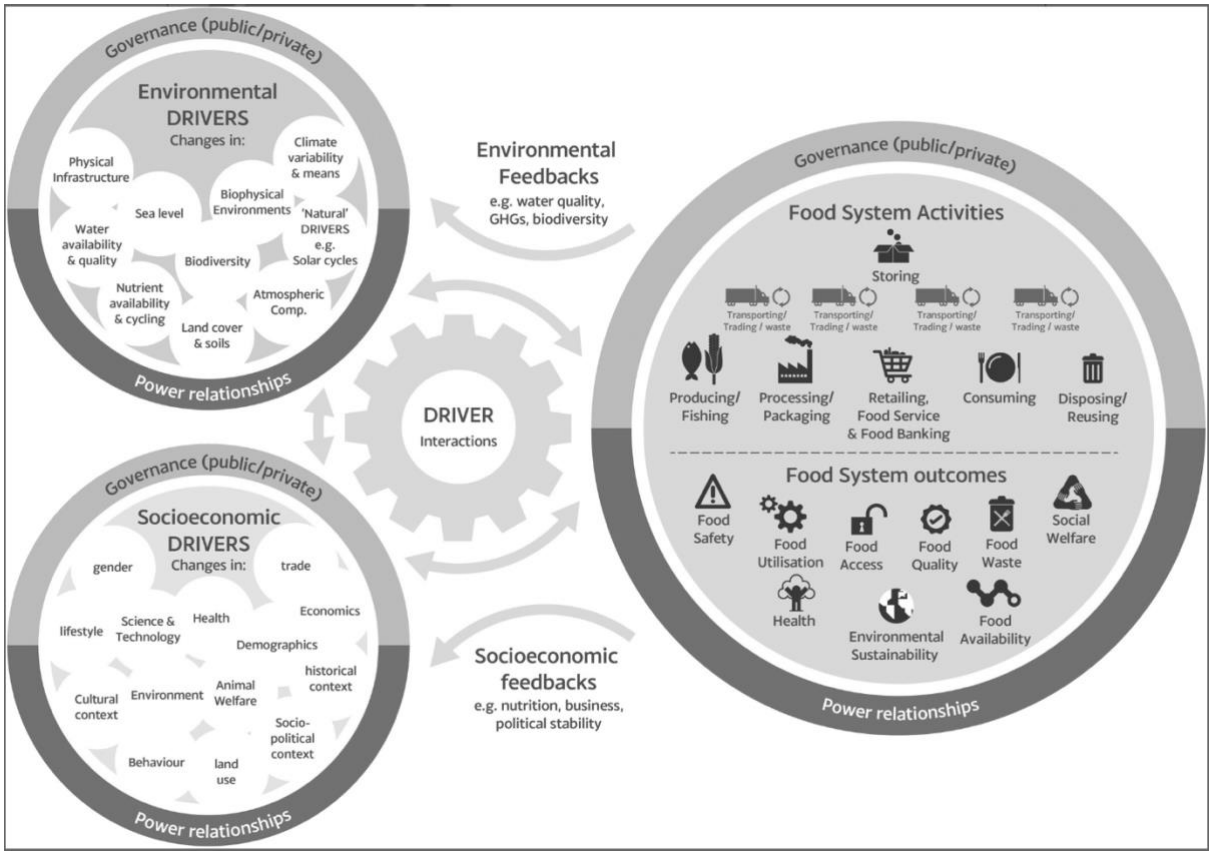


Figure 1: Food System Diagram (Doherty et al., 2021, p. 108)

With this in mind, the food system comprises both the activities and the outcomes related to food. It also includes the social, environmental, economic and political drivers that shape these activities and outcomes within the food system. Whilst the above food system diagram does make reference to both 'politics' and 'economics', it does not directly address or elaborate on the relationship and interplay between the two elements. The political economy lens is helpful for examining the relationship between the two. Before introducing the theoretical framework of political economy, the following section identifies the ideal food system outcomes.

2.2.2. What are desirable food system outcomes?

The Eat-Lancet Report is a widely cited report that proposes the need for a planet-friendly diet that meets the nutritional needs of the global population. The report states that the objective for a sustainable food system is healthy diets from a sustainable food production system (Eat-Lancet Commission, 2019). The report examines whether planetary health diets may be achieved globally by 2050, when the world is set to occupy 10 billion people. It sets out five strategies. Strategy one is to seek international and national commitment to shift towards healthy diets through increased consumption of plant-based foods, including fruits and nuts, and limited animal

protein. Strategy two is about reorientating agricultural priorities from producing high quantities of food to producing healthy food. This is about producing enough calories to feed a growing population and a diverse range of foods that nurture human and environmental health. Strategy three is about sustainably intensifying food production to increase high-quality output. Strategy four is about strong, coordinated governance of land and oceans, including a zero-expansion policy for new agricultural land, restoring degraded land, and improving global ocean management. Strategy five is to at least halve food losses and waste (Eat-Lancet Commission, 2019).

Political economy and food systems

Political economy has been used as a theoretical framework to understand challenges within the food system (Gleissman, 2018; De Schutter, 2019; Giminez & First, 201; Bene, 2022). If political economy is about understanding the reasons that underpin specific activity (Nurmi, 2006), Giminez & First (2019) argue that an understanding of capitalism is needed first, given that the current food system exists within a capitalist food system. If the food system is to be changed, the authors argue, it first needs to be understood. This review does not aim to provide an extensive review of the elements of capitalism, but provides a sufficient overview of key, relevant elements.

A fundamental element of capitalism, according to Marx in Sinner (2010), is private land ownership. For Marx, the presence of private land highlights a tension between individuals' profit-seeking and the common interest on which food system transformation relies.

Commodification of labour is a key element of the capitalist system. This refers to the relationship between owners of capital and workers, whereby owners of capital, or capitalists, employ individuals to generate wealth. In a capitalist society, workers sell their labour to capitalists, who then utilise it to accumulate further capital and power. This cycle is said to persist because workers do not receive the true value of their labour, as the surplus is captured by the owners. This accumulation translates into a concentration of power in the hands of those in possession of capital.

Market competition is another key element of a capitalist society (Skinner, 2010; Giminez & First, 2019). Market competition drives constant pressure on capitalists to maximise efficiency. This drive for efficiency leads to reduced production costs and lower wages. Overproduction is a connected element of the pursuit of efficiency and competition. To manage the product of overproduction, capitalists are pushed to either exploit existing markets more intensively or seek out new ones.

Giminez & First (2019) highlight how overproduction plays out in the food system. The authors provide an example in which 1 in 7 people in the world are going hungry, yet the

world produces enough food for 1.5x the population. The authors argue that the challenge is not about food scarcity but about food access and cost, and that absolute poverty has not changed by producing more food, as the poorest people cannot afford to buy food in a capitalist food system. Echoing Marx in Skinner (2010), Giminez & First (2019) point to the crisis of overproduction as an inherent part of capitalism, particularly capitalist agriculture. Giminez & First also highlight the relevance of price gouging, in that whilst global price increases mean local price increases, global price decreases mean more profits for owners of capital, not lower prices for consumers.

In short, the challenges set out above suggest that the capitalist food system is working as it should; it overproduces, it concentrates power in the hands of a few corporations, and it outsources externalities to the population (Skinner, 2010; Giminez & First, 2019; Benton, 2023). Such externalities are expanded on below.

2.2.3. What are the problems with the food system?

Building on the previous section, the section below now highlights the challenges within the food system.

Environmental Challenges

The food system is widely recognised as a major contributor to global environmental challenges. This can be understood through the Planetary Boundaries Framework developed by the Stockholm Resilience Centre.

According to Rockström et al. (2020), the food system is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. It is also the largest cause of biodiversity loss, terrestrial ecosystem destruction, freshwater consumption, and waterway pollution (Rockström et al., 2020). John Rockström is the former Director of the Stockholm Resilience Centre, which developed the Planetary Boundaries model to quantify the processes that regulate the Earth's resilience and stability. The first paper, published in 2009, was titled Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity, which for the first time brought together nine interlinked planetary boundaries on which the Earth relies to operate safely. These are climate change, rate of biodiversity loss, nitrogen cycle, phosphorus cycle, stratospheric ozone depletion, ocean acidification, global freshwater use, change in land use, atmospheric aerosol loading, and chemical pollution (Rockström et al., 2009).

Subsequent papers from the Centre have noted the human and societal impacts in exceeding planetary boundaries (Steffen et al., 2015) and have developed additional measurements and quantifications (Wang-Erlandsson, 2022). The most recent publication alarmingly notes that Planet Earth has now exceeded six of the nine planetary boundaries. Whilst it is not known what the effects of exceeding planetary boundaries are, it is strongly suggested that they will likely have a drastic and

detrimental impact on our living conditions on Earth (Rockström et al., 2009). Rockström and colleagues state that the food system is a primary driver of our current trajectory towards exceeding planetary boundaries. They argue that a shift from the conventional food system is required towards one that exists within science-based targets at a planetary level (Rockström et al., 2020).

Social Challenges

Not only is the food system causing a range of environmental problems, as highlighted above, but it is also causing social problems, such as the triple burden of malnutrition (Drewnowski, 2020) and the exploitation of workers across the food system (Davies, 2020). The triple burden of malnutrition refers to the concurrent challenge that a. some people are suffering from hunger due to insufficient energy intake, b. others are malnourished, and c. whilst others are obese due to the excessive overconsumption of calorie-dense food (Drewnowski et al., 2020). Regarding exploitation, Davies (2020) explains how the demand for food products within the agri-food system facilitates harmful labour practices and exploitation. These practices are normalised, accepted and embedded, and remain unchallenged.

Economic Challenges

There are significant economic costs associated with the current food system. From a financial perspective, Rockström et al. (2020) estimate that the hidden costs and negative impacts of the global food system and land use amount to around $12 trillion per year, with further predictions that, at the current trajectory, the cost could reach $13 trillion per year. They also note that the global food economy is $10 trillion, highlighting the substantial externalities of the current food system (Rockström et al., 2020). Offering nuance to that costing, Drewnowski et al. (2020) state that the cost alone of diabetes globally was £1.31 trillion in 2015. Webb et al. (2020) note a link between poor diet and nutrition, reduced income potential, and increased healthcare-related costs, which reinforces poverty and inequality. The challenges are not just financially problematic; the food system is also inefficient. According to the website ‘The World Counts’, a third, or 1.3 billion tonnes, of all food suitable for human consumption is wasted each year. This waste occurs across the whole food system, from production through to end of life (The World Counts, 2025).

Having set out perspectives on the problems within the food system, the following sub-sections present different perspectives on the causes of such problems.

2.2.4. What are the causes of problems in the food system?

Problems within the food system are multifaceted and caused by various interconnected factors.

A political focus on keeping food cheap is a primary driver, as governments have sought to keep food costs down because household incomes have not kept pace with inflation (Schoen & Lang, 2014). However, a focus on affordability has negative impacts elsewhere in the system, and the cost of lower consumer prices is externalised socially and environmentally – costs that are not captured in the price the consumer pays for food. To keep food costs low, food production systems operate within a protectionist paradigm that prioritises maximising calorie output at the lowest possible cost. Such a focus, however, overlooks nutrition, supply chain conditions, and environmental impact (Lähde et al., 2023). These challenges are rooted in, and amplified by, free-market ideology, which prioritises profit-seeking, job creation, and low regulation to support profit generation (Benton, 2023; De Schuter, 2019).

From the perspective of scholarship on political economy and food systems, the observed problems within the food system are not failings of the system but rather a product of the corporate food regime, which is firmly situated within a capitalist ideology. The capitalist system is hard-wired to overproduce; it concentrates power in the hands of a few capitalists; it prioritises individual over collective success; and it seeks to profit from commodities (including labour) (Giminez & First, 2019; Bene, 2022).

The following paragraphs indicate some of the ways in which reform may happen and what the requirements are said to be for doing so.

2.1.5. Economics and concentrated power of corporations and requirements for change

Building on the notion that corporate concentration of power is a core tenet of capitalism, Bene (2022) highlights tactics used by such corporations to retain that power.

Bene (ibid) emphasises the need to identify both the visible and the hidden influence that corporations exert over the food system. The visible influence comprises the concentration of ownership of the food system and the political lobbying undertaken in favour of corporate agendas. The invisible influence is the funding of defensive research and development (R&D) strategies that seek to prevent disruptive innovations from reaching the market, thereby protecting corporate interests and assets.

Additionally, De Schutter (2019) points to the practice of retailers procuring from corporate wholesalers and how this reinforces corporate power. De Schutter (ibid) calls this a mutually reinforcing dual consolidation, as food retailers can reduce transaction

costs and achieve efficiencies by purchasing from large wholesalers. The wholesaler has power over producers, as they can negotiate preferential rates due to the volume procured, and also over the downstream retailer, as they can offer a more competitive price than a smaller wholesaler. This practice is self-reinforcing, as the more retailers use large wholesalers, the more power the large wholesalers are afforded. Consumer expectations of cheap food also reinforce this system, so politicians seldom interfere (De Schutter, 2019).

Global financial markets are also identified as a key contributor to maintaining the status quo, as international investment funds are invested in food corporations with the aim of seeking profit and return on investment (Clapp, 2014; Bene, 2022). Because these funds are seeking profit, they have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

For change to happen in the food system, the power of the corporate food regime has to be acknowledged (Bene, 2022; De Schutter, 2019; Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham, 2019; Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018). Some go as far as saying that the corporate food regime needs to be destabilised and disempowered, as there is a tension and incompatibility between a sustainable food system and a capitalist food system/corporate food regime. If the system is to change, big food corporations must be destabilised and disempowered, true competition reintroduced, and smaller producers supported (De Schutter, 2019; Bene, 2022). Competition laws are also suggested as a mechanism for curbing corporate power. However, it is suggested that such actions are unlikely to be adopted, as food corporations have too much influence over politics and consumers would strongly oppose an increase in food costs (De Schutter, 2019).

2.1.6. Political reform and requirements for change

For the food system transformation to take place, Rockström et al. (2020) emphasise the need for major policy and investment shifts. It is policy that needs to incentivise actors within the food system to change their practices, as changes will not happen randomly but as a response to either opportunity or threat (Zurek et al., 2022). From a political economy perspective, however, a change of practice does not address deeper-rooted matters within the corporate food regime, such as private land ownership, nor the incompatibility of private ownership and the provision of public goods (Giminez & First, 2019; Bene, 2022; De Schutter, 2019).

Effective political reform for a sustainable future requires a fundamental shift in how governments incentivise innovation and enforce accountability (Bene, 2022). According to Bene (ibid), it is no longer sufficient for innovations to be merely economically viable; they must be intentionally aligned with the broader vision of a sustainable society. This transition demands a shift away from contradictory policies in which governments advocate for change while simultaneously funding outdated, destructive practices,

whilst badging them as innovation. To bridge this gap, robust governmental oversight is essential to hold actors accountable for their environmental impact. De Schutter (2019) emphasises the need for economic mechanisms like Pigouvian taxes, which force corporations to internalise negative externalities by ensuring they pay the true cost of their production. By combining these penalties for harm with rewards for ecosystem services and good practices, political systems can create a framework that actively supports the shift away from a damaging corporate food regime. As noted above, however, there is strong political resistance to such radical transformation due to implications for consumer food costs (De Schutter, 2019).

Benton (2023) argues that a different ideology is required for market intervention, and suggests one that looks beyond wealth creation and towards a market that delivers public good and public wellbeing. Whilst the need for ideology and policy change is noted, Benton also highlights the complexities of addressing policy for complex challenges such as the food system. As such complex challenges span many policy siloes and disciplines, few governments globally have a handle on ministerial alignment to adequately address them (Benton, 2023). Power sits not just with government, but with private companies who lack accountability. Political economy therefore needs to check the power of incumbents within the food system; those who are resisting change in their own favour. Government must hold these private companies to account (De Schuter, 2019). Benton (2023) also recognises the ministerial misalignment which limits the ability to effectively join up such policy.

Managing unpredictability and risk in transformation is also seen as a core feature of a successful transition (Herrero et al., 2021; Rockström et al., 2020; Benton, 2023). Herrero et al. (2021) also highlight the need for detailed modelling and analytics to understand potential synergies and trade-offs of food system interventions, partly to manage the anxieties of policy makers. Benton (2023) recognises the need to envision how the food system might operate after transformation, and a sequence of practical steps for how we might get there. Without this understanding at the policy making level, be it national or local, the authors argue that an inability to forecast and manage risk will hinder a successful transition.

In 2019, it appeared promising that the UK Government was taking positive steps through the production of its National Food Strategy.

2.1.7. UK Government National Food Strategy

In 2019, Henry Dimbleby, a non-executive board member of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and co-founder of the Leon restaurant chain, was commissioned to produce an independent review of the UK food system. Against the backdrop of post-COVID recovery and the introduction of ELMS to replace

EU agricultural subsidies, Dimbleby argued that the timing could not be better to intervene in food system transformation (Dimbleby, 2021). The independent review, which formed the National Food Strategy, summarised that England is trapped in a 'Junk Food Cycle', noting that the UK is the third fattest in the G7. This is undoubtedly connected to the fact that 80% of processed food in the UK is deemed unhealthy. Recognising the importance of ensuring a level playing field that encourages food companies to innovate together and prevents deliberate laggards from undercutting first movers, Dimbleby called for strong government legislation to support such an endeavour (Dimbleby, 2021).

The Strategy consist of four strategic objectives, underpinned by fourteen recommendations:

Escape the junk food cycle and protect the NHS

1. Introducing a sugar and salt reformulation tax (and use revenue to provide low-income families with fruit and vegetables)
2. Introducing mandatory reporting for large food companies
3. Launch a new 'eat and learn' initiative for schools

Reducing diet inequality

4. Extend eligibility for free school meals
5. Fund the holiday activities and food programme for the next three years
6. Expand the healthy start scheme
7. Trail a 'community Eatwell' programme, supporting those on low incomes to improve their diets

Making the best use of our land

8. Guarantee the budget for agricultural payments until at least 2029 to help farmers to transition to more sustainable land use
9. Create a rural land use framework based on the three-compartment model
10. Define minimum standards for trade and a mechanism for protecting them

Creating a long-term shift in our food culture

11. Invest £1billion in innovation to create a better food system
12. Create a National Food System Data programme
13. Strengthen Government procurement rules to ensure that taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food
14. Set clear targets and bring in legislation for long-term change

(Dimbleby, 2021. pg. 144)

Whilst the recommendations within the Strategy were clear and ambitious, the Government responded poorly and failed to adopt the required systems approach.

Many of the above recommendations were not committed to, and the few that were had already been announced prior to the Strategy's publication. Critics proclaimed that the Government failed to use its position to address the challenge and were frustrated by the small amounts of money allocated to the Strategy. Frustratingly, the proposed revenue-generating sugar and salt tax was ignored, as was the need to reduce meat consumption (Doherty et al. 2022). Unsurprisingly, the Food and Drink Federation took a contrasting stance, firmly supporting the Government's decision to ignore the proposed sugar and salt taxes, arguing that doing so would not reduce obesity but instead increase costs for low-income families (Food and Drink Federation, 2022).

Despite the Strategy not being adequately funded, from a political economy perspective, there is also a misalignment between the proposed actions and the required actions previously discussed. As set out in previous sections, political economy literature firmly roots the observed 'challenges' within the food system as an embedded product of the capitalist, corporation-dominated food system. The UK Food Strategy, however, seemingly failed to identify the root cause of the problems within the food system.

Beyond economic and political reforms, as previously highlighted, 'counter food movements' are also proposed as a route towards food system transformation.

2.3. Misalignment between local actors, and global/ national problems within the food system

2.3.1. Counter food movements

Counter food movements are reviewed as an approach to challenging the dominant food regime. Drawing again on Giminez & First (2019) and their perspectives on how to move beyond the dominant corporate food regime, the authors highlight the rise of 'counter food movements'. The authors suggest that communities can tolerate only so much pain inflicted by the corporate food regime before they begin to push back, rebel, and establish counter movements against the dominant system.

Despite the dominance of the food regime, there are actors in the UK mobilising under Local Food Partnerships to pursue the creation of alternative, value-led food systems (Jackson et al., 2024; Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham, 2019).

The following sections review the literature across two key thematic areas.

- Local food partnerships and local food strategies as counter food movements
- Challenges regarding strategy implementation gap and contributing factors

2.3.2. Local food partnerships and local food strategies as counter food movements

2.3.2.1. Cities as transformative agents

Several civil society organisations position cities as central actors in driving the sustainable food system transformation.

The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) is a collaboration of over three hundred mayors around the world. Collectively, they have committed to advancing local food system governance and driving the sustainable food system transition locally. They believe that cities are well positioned to advance the agenda, partly because they are closer to citizens than national governments and can represent their voices on the global stage. They also argue that they can drive change through their local food economies (Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 2025). Building on the rationale and work of MUFPP, Food Trails ran at a European level between 2020 and 2024 and undertook a range of city-level research, experiments, and practical learning labs with a broad range of stakeholders. Food Trails collaboratively developed local food policies and tested them within Living Labs. These policies were documented as strengthening capacity within the city and enhancing collaboration amongst partners (Eurocities, 2024). Further reinforcing the framing of cities as key actors and mechanisms in driving the sustainable food transition is the EAT-C40 network. Proposed actions within the city

include reconfiguring food procurement, promoting sustainable diets, and reducing food waste (Willet et al., 2019).

Sustainable Food Places is a network of local food partnerships across the UK that are advancing local food system transformation. Sustainable Food Places advocates for local food partnerships to address food system challenges. Cities are encouraged to join the network and follow its six-part framework. The first part is Food Governance and Strategy, which refers to a strategic, joined-up approach to governance and action. The second key issue is the Good Food Movement, which refers to public awareness of good food and food citizenship. Thirdly, Healthy Food for all focuses on tackling food poverty, diet-related illness, and improving access to healthy food. Sustainable Food Economy is the fourth issue and refers to creating a diverse, thriving, sustainable food economy. The fifth issue is the transformation of Catering and Procurement to support local supply chains. Food for the Planet is the sixth and final issue, which seeks to end food waste and tackle the nature and climate emergencies through sustainable food and farming.

Sustainable Food Places identifies three types of partnership, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. The first type is housed and staffed or funded by a public sector organisation, such as a department within the Local authority. These partnerships benefit from internal strategic influence, access to other departments, and possible funding, but are limited by internal bureaucracy, organisational culture, recruitment policies, lack of access to external funding, and an inability to lobby central government (Davies, 2017). The second type is housed by a third sector organisation that secures its own funding to cover its expenses. These partnerships offer more flexibility than being embedded within a Local authority and can also benefit from the status of the organisation of which they are a part. Operational costs are also lower if part of another organisation, and applying for funding in collaboration with the host organisation is beneficial (Davies, 2017). However, third sector partnerships face challenges regarding credibility and legitimacy as smaller organisations, particularly in comparison to Local Authorities, which are seen as more reputable (Davies, 2017). The third structure is fully independent, likely to have minimal resources, supported by volunteers, and to grow over time into official organisations. They are challenged by a lack of resources, working in isolation, and difficulty aligning with the operations of public and third sector organisations (Davies, 2017).

In its impact report, SFP demonstrates how it has developed and scaled the capacity of local food partnerships, supported over one hundred Local Authorities with their food policies, and engaged with MPs (Sustainable Food Places, 2024). Additional contributions include supporting and developing capacity within , connecting organisations across sectors, and catalysing local food innovations (Jones & Hills,

2024).

2.3.2.2. Local Authorities as city-level actors

Several third-sector-led (grey literature) reports take a firm position that Local Authorities are well placed to intervene in the food system (Sustain, 2022a; Sustain, 2022b; Davies, 2018; Local Government Association, 2024).

Local Authorities are said to have many levers at their disposal that can positively influence the local food system. Collectively, Local Authorities spend £69 million annually on food procurement (Sustain, 2022b), which could influence diets across schools, parks, nurseries, care homes, community meals, and leisure centres (Davies, 2018). This procurement could also positively impact local farms, particularly higher-welfare and agroecological farms (Sustain, 2022b; Davies, 2018). Council-owned advertising sites are also noted as places where sustainable diets could be promoted. The planning system is highlighted as a mechanism that could support better farming and limit factory farming. The development and maintenance of food system infrastructure are also noted (Davies, 2018; Sustain, 2022b). Looking beyond operational mechanisms, the Local Government Association (2024) identifies opportunities for engagement, predominantly from a skills and employment perspective. The LGA suggests various additional functions that Councils can play in relation to food supply systems. These include supporting the coordination of funding to help skills and employment in the food and drink sector; coordinating other food-related activities, such as cost-of-living, climate adaptation, and public health; acting as a point of contact and coordinator for government initiatives and funding; and playing a leadership role in addressing consumption. It also includes increasing demand for local produce through procurement processes and encouraging residents to support local retailers that stock it (Local Government Association, 2024).

However, it can be observed that there is tension between potential power and agency, as opposed to actual power and agency. There is little reference to austerity or the structural challenges facing Local Authorities (discussed later in this chapter). It is suggested that these suggestions are based on assumptions that do not reflect the challenges facing Local Authorities.

Based on the above research, power is assumed to stem from collective spending, land ownership, and the identification of potential mechanisms for change within Local Authorities to implement change, again reinforcing the notion of power at the local level and the local ability to influence the food system. Agency over officers is seldom addressed either. Such suggestions are largely misaligned with other research on , which suggests a significant lack of agency due to the central government-imposed austerity policy.

Looking beyond the assumptions about what is possible at the local level, Guthman (2008) argues that attempting to address food-related challenges at the local level reinforces the neoliberal concept of localism, whereby actors attempt to drive change locally whilst structural food system reform remains unaddressed. Based on the political economy literature, the challenges within the food system are inherent to the capitalist, corporate regime – and addressing them requires much greater structural reform than what is possible locally (Giminez & First, 2019; Bene, 2022; De Schutter, 2019).

2.3.2.3. Development, Emergence and Coherence of Food Strategies

Much literature has focused on the development of local food policy; how food policies emerge (Jones & Hills, 2021; Giambartolomei, Forno & Sage, 2021; Jackson et al., 2024; Yap & Treuherz, 2025); the tools and activities used by the network to portray local experiences, develop shared visions, and perform collective action (Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018); and the values which underpin the work of food partnerships (Jackson et al., 2024).

Jones and Hills (2021) undertake a meso-level analysis of how policies come to be made, who puts them on the agenda, institutional arrangements for defining the policy, and arrangements for implementation. As part of a funded evaluation, the authors sought to answer whether, how, and why the Sustainable Food Places Network has influenced food systems governance at the food system level. The evaluation claims that the primary role of the network was agenda-setting and offering methods to support political engagement. Significant barriers, however, are acknowledged, as the network was operating in a dire economic and policy landscape. More resources were required to drive change, as was firm policy support. Whilst the absence of national policy allowed local places to generate locally rooted ideas, the lack of resources or enabling policy has made impactful approaches in sight but out of reach.

Looking at how food policies emerge, Giambartolomei, Forno & Sage (2021) undertook immersive qualitative research in the cities of Cork and Bergamot to study the roles and tactics which actors use to develop urban food strategies. Using the framing of policy entrepreneurship, the authors identify a series of tactics for influencing urban food policy, including defining problems and linking issues, leading by example, building trust, motivation, and legitimacy, linking actors and building networks, generating and disseminating knowledge, facilitating social innovation, and recognising or creating windows of opportunity (Giambartolomei, Forno & Sage, 2021). This research, however, focused on how the strategy came into existence and did not address its implementation or what happens after it is produced.

Focusing on the values of Local Food Partnerships, Jackson et al. (2024) emphasise creating a value-led food system rather than challenging the dominant food system. They examine the values underpinning the work of food partnerships, which,

unsurprisingly, centre on sustainability and healthy eating. However, their research reveals nuances. For example, Sheffield prioritises food cooperatives, whilst Birmingham prioritises the size and diversity of the city. These partnerships are seen as promoting sustainability rather than challenging the current system's unsustainability. This allows them to work towards a positive narrative of change without focusing on the current negative state and how far we are from the level of transformative change required within the dominant food system. Attention is drawn to the limits of scale and the uneasy relations between value-based food chains and dominant industrial food chains. The research also raises questions about how to scale up the good examples.

Yap & Treuherz (2025) self-analyse the processes they undertook to produce a bottom-up, third-sector, complementary food policy, narrating their action research in the paper and focusing on Sheffield's Local Food Action Plan. The authors conclude that their complementary policy can support other forms of local food policy, which they claim are more inclusive and ambitious than those of Local Authorities. The authors also acknowledge the need for further work to understand the conditions that enabled the Strategy to be developed, and, more so, the conditions under which it can be effectively enacted. This may, however, imply that implementation and resource considerations were an afterthought.

Moragues-Faus & Sonnino (2018) examine how place-based food alliances develop, focusing on the tools and activities used by the network to portray local experiences, develop shared visions, and perform collective action. They focus on the activities and tools used by Sustainable Food Cities, now Sustainable Food Places, to 'assemble local experiences, create common imaginaries, and perform collective action'. They look at who is included and what the Food Strategies look like. The authors also emphasise the importance of understanding the wider context in which food partnerships operate, and they acknowledge austerity and other high-level challenges within which urban foodscapes exist. Resource and implementation challenges are acknowledged, and they note that increased control and ownership around food at the city level would require redistribution of resources and power in order to enact the visions within the policies and strategies.

Whilst challenges are acknowledged, questions about implementation remain open and do not appear to have considered how initiatives would be realised. The focus instead is on capturing ideal outcomes. For example, Jackson et al. (2024) pose future questions about how to scale up good examples, i.e. how to resource or implement them. Yap & Treuherz (2025) also identify the need to understand the conditions required for the Sheffield Food Strategy to be effectively enacted. Although challenges surrounding local food policy and strategy have been acknowledged, it is not clear that an explicit focus has been placed on understanding why they are not implemented –

this matter seems to be a side observation or comment in pursuit of understanding another matter.

The power of collaboration is noted in the literature as a means by which local actors exert influence through knowledge sharing within networks (Moragues-Faus, 2021). Moragues-Faus examines collective power within networks of cities and s. From this perspective, actors are empowered to collaborate and share knowledge, yet they are inadequately resourced to act. Shared challenges across the network include constraints arising from the socio-economic and political context, limited governmental powers, and scarce funding.

2.3.2.5. Local Food Policy Coherence

Several scholars focus on policy coherence within local government . This highlights the role of local actors in shaping local governance systems by aligning policies that include and support food. Hawkes & Parsons (2019) define policy cohesion as 'the alignment of policies that affect the food system with the aim of achieving health, environmental, social and economic goals, to ensure that policies designed to improve one food system outcome do not undermine others'. In essence, this means that food policy should be complementary and reinforcing. In the local food policy literature, cohesion is discussed as a means of raising the profile and impact of local food strategies (Davies, 2018; Pardoe & Petrovic, 2024; Kidd & Reynolds, 2024).

Davies (2018) identifies several functions within Local Authorities that can facilitate policy cohesion. These include Health and Wellbeing Boards, Local Plans and Core Strategies, Corporate Strategies, city-wide initiatives, Food Strategies, and Scrutiny Committees. Davies stresses the importance of embedding food policy at the highest level of the Local authority. Pardoe & Petrovic (2024) note the role of dedicated Food Strategy Officers in realising policy cohesion. The authors claim that the presence of dedicated officers who can work across council departments and with external organisations is crucial for cohesive policy. Kidd & Reynolds (2024) examine local government food policy coherence and suggest strong alignment among public health, trading standards, environmental health, economic development, planning, and sustainability departments. They do, however, note incohesive policy regarding the management of fast-food takeaways, which presents a clash between economic development and public health. Kidd & Reynolds suggest that this incoherence is a product of incohesion between local and national policy, as national planning inspectors often overrule local decisions to block fast-food planning applications. They reflect on the limits of local government agency when responsibility is devolved without adequate power or resources. Assumed throughout the above papers on policy cohesion is the power and agency of Local Authorities over the food system. Whilst the above studies still frame local actors as having power and agency over food, Kidd &

Reynolds (2024) highlight the limitations of local approaches to food system change and the need for national level policy. Kidd & Reynolds therefore better align with a political economy understanding of the food system challenge, as they recognise that change is needed at national government level, not the local level.

2.3.2.6. Challenges regarding strategy Implementation gap and contributing factors

Whilst Local Authorities are said to have the power and agency to shape visions of a new food system or a new narrative, they lack the power or resources to realise such visions (Mattioni et al., 2022; Doernberg et al., 2019; Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham, 2019).

Doernberg et al. (2019) examine ten German city regions and their approaches to food issues at the municipal level. Regarding policy instruments, the authors grouped them into regulative, economic, informational, and procedural categories. A broader policy analysis found that fewer than half of the cities defined clear, measurable objectives. Some cities set measurable qualitative targets, and some reported on the persistence of food-related projects. The main findings of the study were that the implementation of urban food strategies was in its infancy, yet a wide number of city departments were involved in implementing food-related projects. Awareness of and cooperation with actors beyond the municipality were recognised, including private businesses and civil society. Due to a lack of financial and staffing capacity, actors were noted to have limited steering capacity to implement urban food strategies. Due to the absence of resources at the municipal level, food policy action and food-related projects mainly occurred in response to external triggers and funding made available at higher policy levels. On the observed challenges regarding the implementation of urban food policies, the authors note additional challenges beyond finances. These include insufficient quantities of accessible regional and organic food, poor communication between supply chain actors, low levels of political influence at the local level, and a lack of political support for long-term issues in general (Doernberg et al., 2019).

Mattioni et al. (2022) afford Local Authorities a position of power by focusing on how actors within them challenge the dominant food regime. The paper highlights various ways of enacting power, including discursive, material and organisational tools to challenge the dominant system. Whilst the authors state that the Local Authorities involved display strong commitment to bringing about fundamental change in the food system, they also acknowledge the limitations in that their research speaks only with a few actors who are actively involved in the sustainable food agenda. As they put it, they are speaking to niches within the regime, to use the multi-level perspective (MLP) framing (Geels & Schot, 2007), thus implying that the actors involved in prior research are actively involved with the sustainable food agenda and do not capture wider organisational perspectives. The authors therefore suggest that future research should

be undertaken to understand internal divisions within Local Authorities and to what extent they are able to develop stronger forms of coordination between different departmental actors (Mattioni et al., 2022). This research implies that actors involved in food strategies are perhaps not actors occupying positions of sufficient power, but advocates of the food agenda.

Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham (2019) highlight how neoliberal principles undermine local efforts regarding food and how the global food system trumps local attempts at change. This suggests that whilst local actors have the power and agency to determine a new narrative, they lack power over dominant food system actors. The authors identify several challenges at the local level regarding a place-based approach to food governance. In their case study in Kirklees, West Yorkshire, they explore the potential for, and barriers to, improving the resilience of the local food system. The authors outline a multitude of challenges, effectively stating that the local food agenda is constrained by national policy. The dominance of economic priorities within the local plan was noted to impede partnership working on food, as the main focus was on housing and job creation, not on public health issues, including food. An example is also presented, arguing that priority was given to a multinational supermarket in a planning decision, despite local challenges and evidence of impact on smaller food businesses in the area. Conflicting priorities between Council departments were also noted as a barrier. The analysis in this paper suggests that the previously celebrated potential of local food governance is more challenging in practice than theory suggests, and that local food governance is always shaped by history, geography, and administrative contexts (Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham, 2019). This therefore suggests the power of the dominant food system over local attempts to develop alternatives.

2.3.2.7. Vision-Implementation Gap

Whilst others mentioned above highlight challenges surrounding food policy, several authors highlight a gap between vision and implementation (Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto, 2019; Sonnino, 2023; Sonnino & Milbourne, 2022; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Zerbian et al., 2022).

Sonnino (2023) frame the challenge of systemic food change, drawing on insights from cities, by acknowledging a body of literature that positions cities as the optimum scale for food policy innovation. They argue, however, that no empirical evidence has been generated to understand the meaning and goals of this approach from the perspective of those actively involved in policy implementation, namely municipal officers. The authors argue that the debate on food systems has not gone beyond the abstract level, and that whilst refined descriptions of the nature and functions of a food system and its potential to contribute to a breadth of societal goals are well set out, there is much less focus on testing the perceived benefits in relation to the goals and objectives of the

actors tasked with delivering and implementing food policy. Within their sample, only 29% of food policies, strategies, or plans are actually under implementation, 31% were working towards implementation, and 34% have food-related projects ongoing. The authors also argue that research has not gone beyond the abstract and has instead focused on ideal outcomes of the food system (Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto, 2019). Sonnino (2023) also addresses the implementation of food policies, strategies or plans. Under this focus, the authors recognised a holistic approach to food across the studied cities, in that key topics are included within policies, but that the visions set out within such documents are not translated into practice.

Acknowledging the disconnect between resource flows and food policy implementation, Zerbian et al. (2022) highlight the importance of understanding why resources are not directed towards local food systems work. The authors emphasise the need to look beyond how strategies or policies have been produced and to understand the politics and decision-making regarding subsequent actions and allocated resources.

Coulson & Sonnino (2019) examine several UK food partnerships through exploratory case studies and fifteen semi-structured interviews to better understand the challenges of how food partnership coordinators influence the local food environment and how they navigate the governance and policy context. They emphasise the need to critically analyse the on-the-ground realities of policy implementation and resource use, and to focus on the micro-politics that constrain the potential of food partnerships (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019). Several barriers are drawn from participant interviews. Financially, for example, cities have been hit hard by austerity-driven budget cuts imposed by national government on local government, leading to limited financial resources and inconsistent staffing support. With limited capacity and resources, and no mandatory direction to address food at the local level, the development and implementation of ambitious food policy priorities are lacking. Because there is no mandate for local food policy, food coordinators also cannot hold other actors to account when they are already operating beyond their remit and are not legally bound. The paper also addresses the disconnect between rural and urban areas, noting that many rural areas lack infrastructure to process for the local market. As a result, most food goes through infrastructure owned by big corporations rather than directly into the city. Engaging the private sector is therefore required, but challenges in doing so are frequently noted. These include uncertainty about who should be involved and who could attend without being primarily interested in making a profit. Concerns were also raised about the potential perception that private sector organisations were being given a competitive advantage in the awarding of contracts. Many findings within the paper point to the importance of a national policy, or vertically aligned holistic policies at the national level, of which food partnerships are constrained without. It is also noted, as cited elsewhere, that urban governance cannot be understood in isolation from broader

political and ideological processes. The authors question whether the local action is actually a retraction of state responsibility to underfunded organisations who lack the power to transform the food system (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019).

Having reviewed the previously discussed literature on local food policy, local food partnerships, and local food strategies, it is clear that there are several tensions between locally determined visions and the means available locally to implement them. When factoring in a political economy perspective, there are also limitations on how impactful local efforts could be, even if adequately resourced, given that many of the proposed actions seek to reinforce the dominant food regime rather than challenge it.

2.3.2.8. Power over the Local Level

Several papers address the external powers which hinder local efforts regarding food partnerships and strategies (Sonnino, 2023; Lever et al., 2019; Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018).

Sonnino (2023) asks what the relationship is between the global rhetoric of food system transformation and the realities encountered by food system actors who attempt to enact changes at the local level. In doing so, Sonnino concludes that much debate occurs at the macro-level, with less at the urban empirical level, suggesting that transformation and improved outcomes are occurring within the system. The author notes that the literature has focused on the desired outcomes of food system transformation, not the processes or practical levers, and that there is a need for an empirical focus on the dynamics of urban food policy. The paper also notes that National Government should play a key role in brokering the connection between the global and the local, thus placing the power to implement change at the National level. Sonnino also acknowledges the significant power and resources that the private sector has, but it is difficult to engage with local food policy. This largely aligns with the political economy perspective on food system transformation. What differs, however, is that political economy literature does not see the private sector as difficult to engage, but instead as genetically hardwired to pursue profit, given that it exists within a capitalist regime.

Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham (2019) demonstrate how neoliberal principles undermine local efforts regarding food and how the global food system trumps local attempts at change. The authors draw on a case in Kirklees, West Yorkshire, to show how economic priorities overruled the interests of actors seeking to pursue food-related matters. The case concerns a planning decision approving a national supermarket's opening in the area, despite the local food partnership challenging it and presenting evidence of its impact on smaller food businesses. The authors point to the dominance of economic priorities within the local plan and, at the local level, to the power of the dominant paradigm of economic growth and job creation, which impeded food partnership

working. The authors note an additional challenge in that the local food agenda is largely constrained by National Policy. Part of the challenge the authors identify is that, at the Local authority level, food, in the case of Kirklees, is treated as a matter for the Public Health Department, despite being a much broader interdisciplinary issue.

The authors therefore suggest that the challenges lie in the withdrawal of the state, which amounts to the removal of its power and effectively handing it over to market forces. Whilst civil society groups emerge in place of the state to offer a local, value-led alternative to the food system, they lack the power and resources to effectively fill the gap that the state may once have filled. Instead, the power remains in the hands of corporations. This article again suggests that whilst local actors have the power and agency to determine a new narrative, and to pursue the idea of alternative food systems, they lack the power, resources, or national policy support to effectively achieve positive outcomes (Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham, 2019).

Moragues-Faus & Sonnino (2018) make reference to political economy in their paper, which explores 'translocal governance and its multiple agencies' and focuses on the activities and tools used by the Sustainable Food Cities Network (now known as Sustainable Food Places (SFP). Translocal, in this context, refers to the relationships between Local Food Partnerships and broader external factors and processes which link the local context to the global landscape. Whilst efforts are being made at the local level regarding food, they still exist within a broader landscape. In their paper, the authors note how the wider context and power dynamics impact the capabilities of those within the Sustainable Food Cities Network. Examples range from austerity policies that constrain the involvement of public-sector actors to global issues such as labour markets and climate change. Two main challenges of the network in building a more sustainable food system are noted, a. That increased control and ownership of food system transformation at the local level would require more power and resources, and b. that Food Partnerships needs to provide evidence of the capacity of food partnerships to deliver long-term positive impact.

When considering power, Moragues-Faus & Sonnino (2018) recognise that place-based food systems efforts are inherently embedded in a much broader landscape, and thus subject to various forms of power. They also imply that agency to operate requires significantly more power and resources.

Local Authorities and the Political Economy

Whilst austerity is cited as a factor that inhibits the progress or implementation of local food strategies, there is scant reference to the political economy within which Local Authorities operate. Research presented below situates Local Authorities within a wider

political economy and demonstrates the structural challenges they face (Eckersley & Tobin, 2019; Sowels, 2014; Pautz, 2017).

Their research highlights the activities taking place within a political economy, or the reasoning underpinning those activities, based on Nurmi's (2006) definition of political economy. Eckersley & Tobin (2019) highlight the concept of 'policy dismantling'. The authors use the term policy to mean policy as an action, from signal of intent to final outcomes, rather than just the high-level document itself, as focusing on the high-level content alone cannot reveal changes further down the line regarding implementation. Eckersley & Tobin also address 'policy capacity' and highlight how this has been significantly weakened due to austerity policy. By policy capacity, the authors mean 'the ability to direct resources and make intelligent, informed choices about different policy and strategic alternatives'. The authors demonstrate how Local Councils, in response to an average budget cut of 49 per cent, drastically reduced less-visible parts of the organisation and avoided disrupting the more visible, public-facing services. Policy functions were among the less-visible features that were reduced, which in turn had a negative impact on policy implementation, enforcement, and evaluation. This was not seen as deliberate but as an inevitable response to fiscal constraint. The disproportionate impact in less affluent areas was also noted, with areas having a majority of domestic residents in lower council tax brackets subsequently paying lower council tax revenues, thus reducing council spending power. Austerity was presented as an unavoidable course of action required to counter overspending by the previous Labour government and rising national debt (Sowels, 2014). Whilst public deficit reduction was the official justification, critics argue this was motivated by neo-liberal ideology and part of a mission to reduce the role and size of the state (Pautz, 2017; Sowels, 2014).

2.3.2.9. Perspectives on Strategy Implementation

As the scope of the literature review narrows to focus on the implementation of local food strategies, it is also unclear in the literature whether there is a shared definition of implementation in this context. Several perspectives on strategy implementation are highlighted below.

The classical view of strategy implementation is understood to entail a planned, deliberate focus, whereby management typically determine a process to be followed by others within the organisation. The process is linear: first, a strategy is developed, then it is implemented. Implementation (or non-implementation) is treated as binary, in that it is either implemented or not, and success or failure is internalised (Chandler, 1962).

The emergent view of strategy arose in protest against the top-down, binary assumptions of the classical view of strategy. In turn, the emergent approach views strategy development and implementation as interconnected, rather than as distinct,

separate stages. The emergent approaches also recognise the importance of power relations in determining strategic outcomes (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Strategy as practice advances from the traditional perspective, which treats strategy as something an organisation has, to something an organisation does, embedded as practice within the organisation. Strategy as practice treats strategy as non-static and not something to be executed, but as an ongoing practice shaped by context, interpretation, and power (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

The performativity of strategy views strategy as an object that generates action through its own communication. In this perspective, strategies are used as objectives to signal alignment, identity, and legitimacy. Such an approach is particularly present in sustainability and corporate social responsibility, where the documents seek to shape perceptions and behaviours rather than fully realise the ambitions set out within the documents (Cabantous, Gond & Wright, 2018).

2.3.2.10. Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on local food partnerships and local food strategies through a political economy lens. It began by defining the food system and outlining its key characteristics within a corporate food regime, before identifying the externalities generated by this system. Drawing on political economy scholarship, the chapter then highlighted the economic challenges associated with the current model, particularly the concentration of power and the structural requirements for meaningful change. It subsequently examined the UK policy response, summarising the UK food strategy and identifying its limitations, notably its failure to address root causes and the insufficiency of resources to implement the elements it did identify. In the absence of substantive political or economic reform, the chapter discussed the emergence of counter food movements. Finally, it reviewed key literature across two central themes: first, local food partnerships and local food strategies as forms of counter food movements; and second, the challenges associated with strategy implementation, including the implementation gap and its contributing factors.

Whilst various challenges have been identified regarding local food policy, predominantly austerity and a lack of resources, less explicit focus has been placed on understanding the challenges related to implementing local food strategies. Local Authorities are noted as complex organisations with competing priorities (Lever et al., 2019). Supporting this notion, Mattioni et al. (2022) suggest that actors' views on sustainable food strategies are unlikely to be representative of the whole organisation, as research has likely been conducted with actors actively engaged in the food strategy process. Thus, the research does not reflect the perspectives of broader actors.

The above literature review lays the foundations for this research project, which seeks to utilise a political economy approach to understand:

What are the challenges regarding the implementation of Urban Food Strategies within Local Authorities? Moreover, what are the overall limitations of local food strategies?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Recap of research problem

A critical perspective on Urban Food Strategies suggests that there is no empirical evidence demonstrating that urban food policies are being effectively implemented (Sonnino, Tegoni & De- Cunto, 2019), and that research on urban food policy has mainly focused on desirable outcomes of the food system (Sonnino, Tegoni & De- Cunto, 2019; Sonnino, 2023). At the time of writing, there is limited research that has undertaken an in- depth case study of a single Local authority to understand the challenges faced in implementing Urban Food Strategies from the perspective of actors involved in their implementation. As discussed in an earlier section, much of the focus of food strategies at a Local authority does not extend beyond public health departments, despite food being a much broader, interdisciplinary issue (Lever et al., 20190; Mattioni et al., 2022). Mattioni et al. (2022) also note that most studies on local food strategies have focused on actors within organisations who are already engaged with the topic of food. They refer to this as 'niches within niches', which refers to Frank Geel' s Multi-level perspective framework. This means that various perspectives have been gathered from those supportive of and involved in the sustainable food agenda, but less is known from the perspective of other actors within the complex organisations that Local Authorities are, to understand broader perspectives on the matter which may be hindering implementation. The literature review section argues that prior studies have produced positive, affirming research on various elements of local food strategies, primarily regarding their development, without exploring the challenges which practitioners face in practice post strategy development. It also does not appear that such research has been undertaken by somebody simultaneously occupying both the role of a Local authority Officer tasked with implementing an Urban Food Strategy and undertaking research to understand what the challenges are.

This research therefore challenges normative assumptions about Local authority- led Urban Food Strategies by undertaking an in- depth case study within one Local authority to understand, from the perspective of actors themselves, what the challenges are regarding the implementation of Urban Food Strategies.

3.2. Research Philosophy

Burrell & Morgan's four-paradigm model for social and organisational analysis is widely regarded as the most influential framework within social research. The four paradigms are functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist, and radical structuralist. Each is grounded in a distinct philosophical perspective across two axes of subjective–objective and radical change–regulation (Hassard, 1991).

This research is undertaken within the interpretative paradigm. It assumes that food strategies are implemented (or not) by human actors; therefore, the perspectives of these actors and how they make sense of their social worlds are central to this research question.

The ontological position of the interpretative paradigm is nominalist, treating reality as socially constructed rather than objectively existing. It regards society as less stable and non-concrete, a product of subjective experience. The epistemological position of the interpretative paradigm is anti-positivist, holding that knowledge is subjective and that reality is formed through interaction and interpretation. The interpretative paradigm challenges the notion that researchers should pursue objectivity and instead embraces the researcher's role as an active part of the research process. Interpretive research therefore seeks to understand the perspectives of actors immersed in context and how they construct meaning within their social world (Hassard, 1991; Burrell & Morgan, 2019).

3.3. Research Approach and Design

This study employs an abductive approach to research. Seminal authors on abduction, Dubois & Gadde (2002), are drawn upon to inform this research. Traditional research approaches are inductive or deductive. Inductive research builds theory from data, and deductive research tests hypotheses from theory with data. Abduction combines elements of both, interpreting empirical data in relation to theories to explain findings. It involves a dynamic process of moving back and forth between theory and empirical observation. The authors claim that abduction is best used when the researcher seeks to develop new theory, as it supports generating plausible explanations for themes drawn from the data.

As this case study seeks to understand the challenges of implementing urban food strategies, an area less explored in the literature, induction or deduction are not helpful approaches. As abduction allows for the generation of plausible explanations of empirical observations, it is deemed the best approach for this research. Whilst the research question focuses on what the challenges regarding food strategy implementation are, an abductive approach also allows plausible explanations to be posed as to why these challenges are occurring, rather than just reporting on the challenges which participants observe. Interview data were analysed using an abductive approach, involving an iterative movement between empirical material and theoretical concepts. In the first stage, interview data were organised through what is here termed 'abductive thematic structuring of interview data' – this is presented in Findings Chapter 3.1. This involved grouping data around themes, which served as a heuristic device to make sense of the empirical material and identify patterns of relevance.

Importantly, this stage was not intended to constitute a standalone thematic analysis in the conventional sense, but rather to provide an initial structuring of the data. In the second stage, these thematically organised data were selectively drawn upon to inform a political economy analysis, through which the underlying dynamics of power, resources, and institutional constraints were examined.

This two-stage approach reflects an abductive logic, whereby empirical observations informed theoretical interpretation, and vice versa, enabling a more conceptually grounded analysis of the Food Strategy.

Case study Approach

A case study approach has been chosen for this study. According to Henwood & Shirani in Flick (2022), case studies are a valuable approach for exploring complex phenomena within a specific context and can generate detailed insights into specific instances. By generating empirical insights, such data can inform theoretical development, with the caveat that such cases are not representative but instead allow deeper insight into a specific instance. Yin (2018) also notes that a case study approach is appropriate for understanding a phenomenon in relation to the context in which it exists, particularly when multiple perspectives contribute to a broader understanding of the studied phenomena. Eisenhardt (1989) also states that it is valuable to produce case studies in underexplored areas. As the implementation of Food Strategies has received less focus than their development, and the gap between vision and implementation is less studied (Sonnino, 2023), the case study approach is deemed a relevant and valuable way to understand this phenomenon.

Bradford is chosen as an illustrative example, primarily because of prior involvement in strategy development, which affords unique insight and ultimately access to elite participants. This is particularly relevant, as Mattioni et al. (2022) observed that prior research on local food policy and strategy was largely undertaken within supportive echo chambers and seldom captured broader organisational perspectives.

The selection of methods was guided by the research aim to explore local food strategies as complex, context-dependent phenomena shaped by political and economic forces. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to enable in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives and power relations, which would not be adequately captured through structured interviews or survey-based approaches (Kvale, 2007).

Document analysis was utilised to examine policy narratives and institutional priorities (Bowen, 2009), offering a systematic means of analysing the narrative within Bradford's formal strategy document against the realities and experiences of the interviewed

participants. It is the contrast between the two that helps us to better understand the vision-implementation gap. .

Alternative approaches, such as ethnographic observation, were considered given the dual role of council officer and researcher. However, this was deemed unsuitable, as the research focused on the perspectives of other, less-heard-from actors on the implementation of the food strategy, rather than on my own perspective as an embedded researcher. A reflective journal was kept for the first few months of the research, but it was then decided not to continue with this approach. Reflection was useful for considering positionality, but it was not a suitable tool for understanding others' perspectives and, therefore, not a suitable means of answering the research question.

Semi-structured interviews were selected to explore stakeholder perspectives and underlying power dynamics. While structured interviews or surveys could have enabled broader data collection, they would not have captured the depth and nuance required to understand complex governance processes (Kvale, 2007). Quantitative methods were not adopted, as the study does not seek to measure variables or establish generalisable causal relationships, but rather to interpret meanings and institutional dynamics within specific contexts (Creswell, 2014). An alternative approach could have been to study multiple Local Authorities to develop multiple case studies. However, as this research in its current form demonstrates, despite being embedded within the organisation, it was still challenging to reach some actors. As part of addressing the identified research gap of hearing from less-heard actors regarding local food strategies, the decision was made to focus on one organisation rather than multiple.

As this research is the first (known at the time of writing) to focus exclusively on the challenges of implementing urban food strategies, it seems fitting to pursue a deeper dive to generate rich insights. Future research may seek to make comparisons, generalisations and challenges across other cities once an understanding of some of the foundational challenges is generated through this research.

3.4. Research Context - Bradford District

Research Boundaries

The boundary was drawn between those perceived to be involved with the Council-owned strategy and those with a senior perspective on the challenges facing the Local authority. This decision was made because the research focuses on the implementation of the strategy; thus, the views of Officers and external partners who have a stake in the Strategy were sought.

Time Horizon

Qualitative interviews took place over a nine-month period between 2023 and 2024.

The researcher's engagement with the organisation commenced in November 2020 and remains ongoing at the time of writing this thesis.

Targeted sampling

Three distinct groups of actors were identified when scoping suitable participants for interview. A summary of participants' roles and involvement is set out in Table 1 below.

Group one comprised actors actively involved in the development and implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy. Identifying participants within this group was the most straightforward, as I had developed relationships with them during the Strategy Development period. Group two comprised actors whose work areas are referenced within the Strategy, but who I knew were not actively engaged, despite being referenced in the document. These participants were identified by cross-referencing proposed activities and outcomes within the Food Strategy against personal knowledge of colleagues within the Public Health Department and the organisational structure, to determine who to speak to. This insight was gained through practice. For example, the Strategy document itself references food waste, but the Bradford Food Partnership does not reference any Food Waste Officers. I also knew from prior involvement that nobody from the Waste Department was involved.

Group three comprised 'Elite Participants' (Empson, 2017). These were senior officers who were not necessarily implied in the Food Strategy but held positions within the Organisation, and I considered they would provide valuable insight into where the Strategy sat within the broader organisational context. These were accessed via Senior Officers supportive of this research project. Empson (2017) states that interviewing elite participants can be highly valuable for research, as speaking with senior decision-makers offers deep insight into an organisation and generates rich data. Elite interviews typically reveal rich data on strategy, leadership and organisational norms, and offer insights that are not publicly visible. However, elite interviews can be difficult to obtain. Gaining entry is particularly challenging, as there can be many gatekeepers between the researcher and the elite participants (Empson, 2017). This is where the researcher's positionality proved highly valuable, as it helped to access such participants. The inability to access certain other participants also demonstrates how difficult it can be to access elite participants.

Groups were identified and constructed this way to look beyond those with an active interest in the Strategy, or, as phrased by Mattioni, Milbourne & Sonnino (2022), niches within niches. Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is used to recruit less identifiable participants and is commonly used in qualitative research to access harder-to-reach participants (Patton, 2015).

Some participants were recommended by other participants. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked to recommend other potential participants who might be interested in taking part. This was also to overcome selection bias and in acknowledgement of potential blind spots.

A post was also shared on LinkedIn to try to attract additional respondents. This resulted in one additional person being contacted. Access to Senior Officers within the organisation was obtained through snowball sampling. Even with Senior Officer support, it was very difficult to access the 'elite participants' occupying senior roles within the organisation. Without senior sponsorship for this research project, it would have been highly unlikely that access to such officers would have been obtained. As the researcher had not been an Officer prior to or during the research project, such sponsorship would also have been highly unlikely.

Several participants were also recommended by the above-mentioned participants.

For example, Participant 7 was not involved in the Strategy but was suggested to speak to, as they were based in the district and, at the time, were delivering a DEFRA-funded engagement project. Participant 13 was not involved in the Strategy but was working on food-related projects in the district as part of regional-funded work through the West-Yorkshire Combined Authority. Participant 10 lives in the district and works for a National Environmental Regulator, expressed general interest in the research, and wanted to take part.

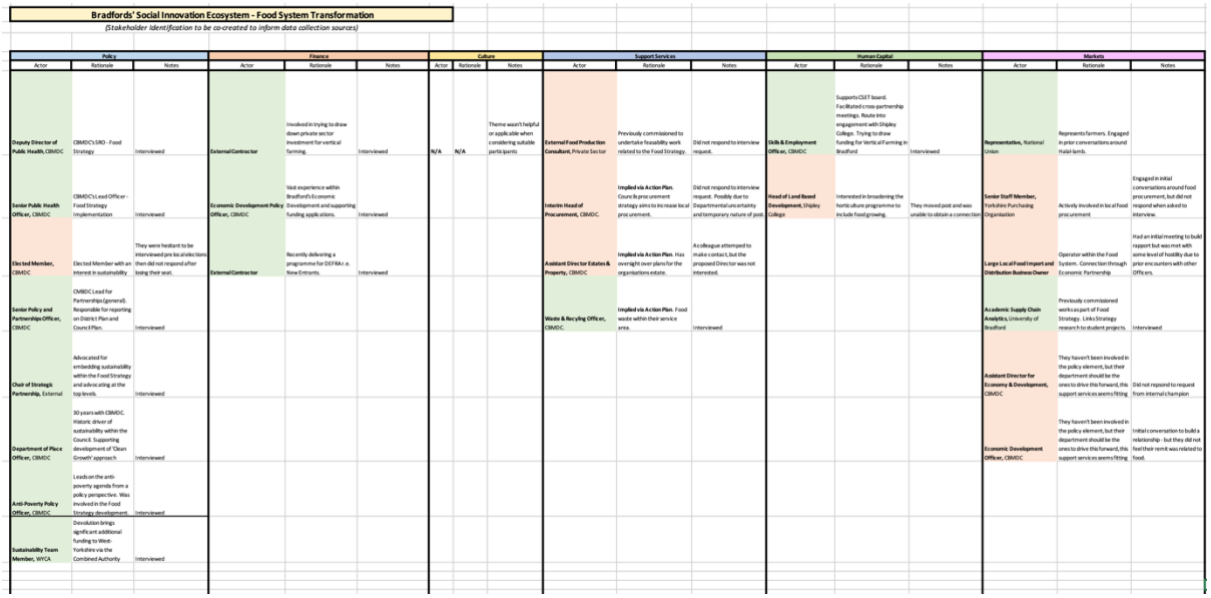
3.6. Participant Summary

ID	Role & Expertise	Relation to Strategy	Sector/ Organisation	Interview Format	Interview Date	Interview Duration
1	Skills & Education	Directly involved	Bradford Council	Teams	13/10/23	1:14
2	Academia – Food Supply Chains & AI	Directly involved	University of Bradford	In person	08/11/23	1:10
3	Senior Leader, Public Health	Directly involved	Bradford Council	Teams	17/10/23	0:54
4	Public Policy, Research & Anti-Poverty	Directly involved	Bradford Council	Teams	17/10/23	1:15
5	Senior Leader	Senior Officer	Bradford Council	Teams	18/12/23	0:50
6	Board-Level Sustainable Development Advisor	Directly involved	Independent	Teams	18/10/23	0:58
7	Contractor	DEFRA contractor	Social Enterprise / Community Sector	In person	27/10/23	1:09
8	Senior Leader, Public Health	Directly involved	Bradford Council	Teams	10/11/23	1:14
9	Public Health & Sustainability Researcher	Directly involved	University of Leeds	Teams	02/11/23	0:40
10	National Regulator	Not involved	National Regulator	Teams	27/10/23	0:59
11	Vertical & Regenerative Farming Research and Operations	Directly involved	Independent Contractor	Teams	11/01/24	0:30
12	Senior Sustainable Development Professional	Regional Government	West Yorkshire Combined Authority	Teams	10/01/24	0:48
13	Waste & Resource Efficiency	Not involved	Private Contractor	In person	26/01/24	1:05
14	Sustainability & Place Development	Senior Officer	Bradford Council	In person	15/03/24	1:01
15	Executive & Political Advisor	Senior Officer	Bradford Council	In person	14/03/24	0:44
16	Land Advisor	Directly involved	Farmers Union	Teams	26/03/24	0:59
17	Parks & Woodlands	Senior Officer	Bradford Council	In person	25/03/24	1:02
18	Waste & Recycling	Senior Officer	Bradford Council	In person	27/03/24	0:43
19	Economic Policy	Senior Officer	Bradford Council	In person	04/04/24	0:54

Table 1. Participant Characteristics and Interview Context

Desirable but inaccessible participants

There were several participants who were deemed to have valuable insights. These participants were identified in collaboration between the researcher and two internal sponsors within the organisation. Below is a screenshot (see image 3) of the original stakeholder identification map, which was developed to inform potential interview participants. Names have been removed and replaced with job titles that are close enough to reflect their roles but vague enough to preserve anonymity.



Bradfords' Social Innovation Ecosystem - Food System Transformation

(Stakeholder identification to be co-created to inform data collection sources)

Policy			Finance			Culture			Support Services			Human Capital			Markets		
Actor	Rationale	Notes	Actor	Rationale	Notes	Actor	Rationale	Notes	Actor	Rationale	Notes	Actor	Rationale	Notes	Actor	Rationale	Notes
Deputy Director of Public Health, CBMDC	CBMDC's SRO - Food Strategy	Interviewed	**External**Contractor	Involved in trying to draw down private sector investment for vertical farming.	Interviewed	N/A	N/A	Theme wasn't helpful or applicable when considering suitable participants	**External Food Production Consultant**, Private Sector	Previously commissioned to undertake feasability work related to the Food Strategy.	Did not respond to interview request.	**Skills & Employment Officer**, CBMDC	Supports CSET board. Facilitated cross-partnership meetings. Route into engagement with Shipley College. Trying to draw funding for Vertical Farming in Bradford	Interviewed	**Representative,** National Union	Represents farmers. Engaged in prior conversations around Halal lamb.	
Senior Public Health Officer, CBMDC	CBMDC's Lead Officer - Food Strategy Implementation	Interviewed	**Economic Development Policy Officer**, CBMDC	Vast experience within Bradford's Economic Development and supporting funding applications.	Interviewed				**Interim Head of Procurement**, CBMDC.	**Implied via Action Plan.** Council's procurement strategy aims to increase local procurement.	Did not respond to interview request. Possibly due to: Departmental uncertainty and temporary nature of post.	**Head of Land Based Development**, Shipley College	Interested in broadening the horticulture programme to include food growing.	They moved post and was unable to obtain a connection	**Senior Staff Member,** Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation	Actively involved in local food procurement	Engaged in initial conversations around food procurement, but did not respond when asked to interview.
Elected Member, CBMDC	Elected Member with an interest in sustainability	They were hesitant to be interviewed pre loc al elections then did not respond after losing their seat.	**External**Contractor	Recently delivering a programme for DEFRA: i. e. New Entrants.	Interviewed				**Assistant Director Estates & Property**, CBMDC	**Implied via Action Plan.** Has oversight over plans for the organisations estate.	A colleague attempted to make contact, but the proposed Director was not interested.				**Large Local Food Import and Distribution Business Owner**	Operator within the Food System. Connection through Economic Partnership	Had an initial meeting to build rapport but was met with some level of hostility due to prior encounters with other Officers.
Senior Policy and Partnerships Officer, CBMDC	CMBDC Lead for Partnerships (general). Responsible for reporting on District Plan and Council Plan.	Interviewed							**Waste & Recyling Officer**, CBMDC.	**Implied via Action Plan.** Food waste within their service area.	Interviewed				**Academic Supply Chain Analytics**, University of Bradford	Previously commissioned works as part of Food Strategy. Links Strategy research to student projects.	Interviewed
Chair of Strategic Partnership, External	Advocated for embedding sustainability within the Food Strategy and advocating at the top levels.	Interviewed													**Assistant Director for Economy & Development**, CBMDC	They haven't been involved in the policy element, but their department should be the ones to drive this forward, this support services seems fitting	Did not respond to request from internal champion
Department of Place Officer, CBMDC	30 years with CBMDC. Historic driver of sustainability within the Council. Supporting development of 'Clean Growth' approach	Interviewed													**Economic Development Officer**, CBMDC	They haven't been involved in the policy element, but their department should be the ones to drive this forward, this support services seems fitting	Initial conversation to build a relationship - but they did not feel their remit was related to food.
Anti-Poverty Policy Officer, CBMDC	Leads on the anti-poverty agenda from a policy perspective. Was involved in the Food Strategy development.	Interviewed															
Sustainability Team Member, WYCA	Devolution brings significant additional funding to West-Yorkshire via the Combined Authority	Interviewed															

Image 3: Stakeholder mapping exercise

Table 2 is derived from the screenshot above to expand on it, improve readability, and explain the logic behind participant identification. It also explains why some of the proposed participants were not interviewed.

Suggested Participant	Rationale	Notes
Deputy Director of Public Health, CBMDC	This person was the Senior Responsible Officer for the development of the Food Strategy.	Interviewed
Senior Public Health Officer, CBMDC	This person was the lead officer for the implementation of the Food Strategy.	Interviewed
Elected Member, CBMDC	This person was an elected member with an interest in sustainability.	This person was contacted, but declined to be interviewed pre-local elections due to political instability regarding their seat at the time of request.
Senior Policy and Partnerships Officer, CBMDC	This person was the Council's lead Officer for partnerships and worked closely with the Council's Senior Leadership Team.	Interviewed This person was also a personal sponsor for the research project and helped to obtain access to other interviewees.
Chair of a Strategic Partnership, External and Independent	This person was part of the Food Strategy development, and a vocal advocate for embedding sustainability within the Food Strategy. They have local political capital and sit on various high-level boards within the District, including the Wellbeing Board.	Interviewed
Officer within Department of Place, CBMDC	This person has historically worked on the sustainability agenda within the Council and is known for having a good strategic overview of the operations within the organisation.	Interviewed
Sustainability Team Member, West-Yorkshire Combined Authority	This person was suggested due to role that devolution plays in bringing additional funding to West-Yorkshire through the Combined Authority.	Interviewed
Economic Development Policy Officer, CBMDC	This person has worked for over 25 years on Bradford's Economic Development agenda. They also supported the scoping of a commission piece of work which followed the publication of the Food Strategy which sought to better understand the Bradford Food Economy.	Interviewed
External Contractor, Private Sector	This person had been involved in small working group (myself included) which was trying to obtain Government funding for Vertical Farming innovation in Bradford.	Interviewed

	Their insight was deemed valuable as they were one of the few known private sector actors working collaboratively with the Food Strategy.	
External Contractor, Third Sector	This person had recently delivered a 'New Entrants' programme for DEFRA.	Interviewed
Waste & Recycling Officer, CBMDC.	This person was proposed as a participant as their role was Implied via the Food Strategy, given that addressing food waste sits within their service area.	Interviewed
Skills & Employment Officer, CBMDC	This person supports a skills and employment board. They had also facilitated collaborative meetings regarding funding applications for Vertical Farming work proposed within the Food Strategy.	Interviewed
Representative, National Union	This person represents land owners as part of a national union. They attended several of the Food Partnership meetings, and had previously had conversations around local Halal-lamb production and consumption (an area included within the Food Strategy).	Interviewed
Academic in Supply Chain Analytics, University of Bradford	This person had previously undertaken one of the commissioned pieces of work which followed the production of the Food Strategy.	Interviewed

Table 2: An iteration of the stakeholder mapping exercise shown in image 3

3.7. Data Collection Methods

The methodological approach adopted in this research is justified by its alignment with the study's aim to analyse local food strategies as complex, context-dependent phenomena shaped by political and economic forces. A qualitative, abductive design enables exploration of meanings, institutional dynamics, and power relations, which are not readily captured through quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The use of document analysis and semi-structured interviews is appropriate for examining both formal policy and strategy narratives and stakeholder perspectives (Bowen, 2009; Kvale, 2007), which is deemed critical for understanding the vision-implementation gap. This combination allows for a nuanced understanding of the implementation gap and the role of local food partnerships within broader political-economic structures. While the findings are not generalisable, they provide analytically transferable insights into similar governance contexts.

3.7.1. Document Analysis

Document analysis is a research method for analysing the content of the strategy document itself. It is also a systematic approach to interpreting policy texts and institutional materials (Bowen, 2009). As Prior (2003) notes, documents are treated not merely as sources of information but as socially constructed artefacts that reflect underlying power relations.

This document analysis adopts the methodology developed and used by the Department for Foreign, Commonwealth & Development (2023). The Government Department produced this as part of the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice. Given that this research challenge is grounded in practice and focuses on the implementation of the Strategy, this approach is deemed highly appropriate. As set out in the guidance document, the purpose of Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is to provide a clear understanding of the political context in which a phenomenon exists. In short, it seeks to understand how things work, or do not work, in a given context.

To understand why things are the way they are regarding a specific dilemma within a specific context, the PEA approach unpacks the issue by exploring the interactions between three levels of analysis. These are Foundations or Structures, Formal and informal processes and rules, and Actors and stakeholders. Foundations and structures refer to macro-level factors that require consideration. Examples include history, geopolitics, and economic systems. Formal and informal processes and rules, or meso-level factors, refer to laws, social norms, values, or behavioural patterns. Actors and stakeholders, or the micro-level, refer to individuals or organisations. The Political Economy Analysis explores dynamic interactions across these three levels of analysis. Guiding questions are paraphrased from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development

Office (2023) to frame and prompt each sub-section.

3.7.2. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nineteen participants, of whom at least 50% were deemed to be 'elite participants'. Participants were given the option to undertake the interview online via MS Teams or in person.

The benefits of using semi-structured interviews include allowing the researcher to explore topics in greater detail and to deviate from the proposed questions. They also facilitate the gathering of rich, nuanced data and can be adjusted to suit the various participants (Caillaud et al., in Flick, 2022).

Interview questions were piloted with several Senior Officers, mainly to seek their feedback on the framing and language used for the questions. They were selected because they had an understanding of the Food Strategy process, and their perspectives were valued. Their support was also important for gaining access to other Senior Officers, so this was a good opportunity to keep them engaged with the research project. This was deemed particularly important for the group of participants who were not involved in the Food Strategy development or implementation, as there was a risk the language used was too technical.

Minor amendments were made to the language and framing of the questions to reflect the feedback, but the fundamental essence of the questions was not altered. It was also suggested that two sets of interview schedules were produced to reflect the need to change wording, as one group of participants had insight into the phenomena of urban food strategies, whilst the others did not. The general essence of the questions was not altered, just rephrased to support access.

3.7.2.1. Rationale for Interview Questions

The interview guide was based on a paper in the Social Innovation literature that examined the needs of social innovators within a Social Innovation Ecosystem (SIE).

Isenberg (2010) is frequently cited in relation to the founding of the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (EE) concept. The EE consists of six components that are said to enable entrepreneurial activity: leadership and policy, finance, culture and media, support services, human capital, and markets. Similar to EEs, Sustainable Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (SEEs) also consist of economic actors and supporting organisations. Unlike the EE, all actors within the SEE support sustainable practice (Forrest et al., 2023). As actors within the SEE focus on social and environmental value creation in addition to economic/ profit, additional support is required due to the challenges faced by sustainable entrepreneurs (Volkmann et al., 2021).

Whilst such examples are business-led and entrepreneurial-focused, underpinned by a neoliberal philosophy and rooted within a paradigm of economic growth, the concept of ecosystem thinking is helpful in that it encourages looking beyond component parts and transcending siloed thinking. The Social Innovation Ecosystem (SIE) is increasingly used as an approach for tackling societal challenges (Pel et al., 2019; Howaldt et al., 2016) as it addresses the need to change social practices, not just implement new technologies (Domanski et al., 2020). Audretsch et al. (2021) note a lack of a common definition for social innovation but reference the definition of Murray (2010). A social innovation must:

- Address a social need,
- Include an innovative element such as a new approach,
- Implement a product or service,
- Improve a given situation,
- Develop new relationships and collaborations.

Acknowledging that such ecosystems are constructed and enacted by actors, Audretsch et al. (2021) seek to understand the emerging needs of social innovators as actors within the social innovation ecosystem. The six elements of the ecosystem are policy, finance, culture, human capital, supports, and networks (Audretsch et al., 2022). In the paper, Audretsch and colleagues interviewed various social innovators to understand their needs and mapped them in relation to the elements of the ecosystem.

Paraphrasing Audretsch et al. (2022), social innovations must generate new solutions to social problems, enhance social capacity through new relationships and collaborations, and bring about systemic change that improves social outcomes. With this in mind, I posit that Urban Food Strategies constitute a series of proposed social innovations under this definition. As Audretsch et al. (2022) were also interested in the needs of social innovators within the ecosystem, I saw value in utilising this thinking, as I too was interested in the needs of those actively trying to implement the proposed social innovations set out within the Strategy. This was based on the assumption that if I could ask what people needed to implement the Strategy, I would also be able to infer their challenges regarding lack of implementation. Interview questions were therefore framed around the six elements of the Social Innovation Ecosystem: policy, finance, culture, human capital, supports, and networks.

Whilst making no claim that these headings are the most suitable, the decision was made that it was more beneficial to ask questions within this framework than to pose a generic, closed-ended question such as ‘what do you need to support you to implement the food strategy,’ or ‘what challenge are you facing regarding implementing the strategy’.

Due to the broad nature of the interview questions, not every participant could answer each question. In the group of participants not involved in the strategy, who thus

possessed less knowledge of the matter under investigation, some questions went unanswered. To counter this, I adapted the question to suit the situation when I felt it was required. I expected this to be the case, but I see it as a reason to opt for semi-structured interviews. This also did not pose a challenge, as the research sought to build an understanding of the challenge, not to compare the perspectives of different actors across different groups.

3.8. Qualitative Data Analysis

Data were analysed in two phases. The first adopted a novel approach to analysis, 'abductive thematic structuring of interview data'. The second phase adopted a Political Economy Analysis to contextualise the findings across the micro, meso and macro levels.

Thematic Analysis of interview data. Drawing on the guidance of Braun & Clarke (2021) in Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide, six phases for thematic analysis are used to structure this sub-section on data analysis.

Before setting out the six stages of reflexive thematic analysis, the core assumptions of such an approach are summarised from the perspective of the methodological researchers Braun & Clarke (2022).

Researcher subjectivity is treated as a primary tool for reflexive thematic analysis, not a problem of bias that needs managing. When analysing and interpreting data, the authors do not believe that data can be accurate or objective, but rather weaker or stronger. On coding, the authors encourage immersion and deep engagement, which allow time for reflection. They also challenge the idea that multiple coders automatically enhance coding quality, arguing that quality depends on reflexivity and depth of interpretation rather than shared consensus. On themes, the authors' stance is that themes are not waiting in the data to emerge, but are actively produced by the researcher and their underpinning knowledge and assumptions, which must be acknowledged and considered. They also note the difference between patterns of meaning in relation to a shared idea or concept, and summaries of meaning related to a topic. On researcher reflexivity, the authors emphasise that data analysis is an art rather than a science, and that reflexivity and an acknowledgement of the researcher's role in producing research are central to good analysis, and thus must be owned and acknowledged (Braun & Clarke, 2022). With these core assumptions in mind, the following sub-section walks the reader through the six phases for reflexive thematic analysis; 1. Familiarising yourself with the dataset, 2. Coding, 3. Generating initial themes, 4. Developing and reviewing themes, 5. Refining, defining and naming themes, 6. Writing up, as taken from Braun & Clarke (2021), which reflects changes to the analytical approach in the typically cited Braun & Clarke (2006).

Dataset Familiarisation: All interviews were recorded and transcribed. I first processed the audio files through Otter AI, a departmentally approved audio-to-text transcription service, before manually reviewing each recording and editing the AI-generated transcription to ensure accuracy, while also spending time familiarising myself with the contents of the transcripts.

Coding: The coding phases took place over several rounds, looking for relevant features within the data that answered the overarching research questions. I initially tried to use NVivo, but I did not feel it allowed me to engage with the data in the way I felt most comfortable. I instead opted for a manual approach consisting of several steps.

I started by using a digital tablet/e-reader (Remarkable 2). I underlined relevant passages of text and assigned them a data code. The data code reflected the participant's initial and the position of the passage on the transcript. For example, JS.08 would refer to the eighth highlighted passage within John Smith's transcript.

Once I had done this for all transcripts, I created Miro boards for each SIE element and summarised the data points onto virtual sticky note. This allowed me to visualise the data points, and each sticky note contained the identification number (e.g. JS.08) to support writing up at a later stage.

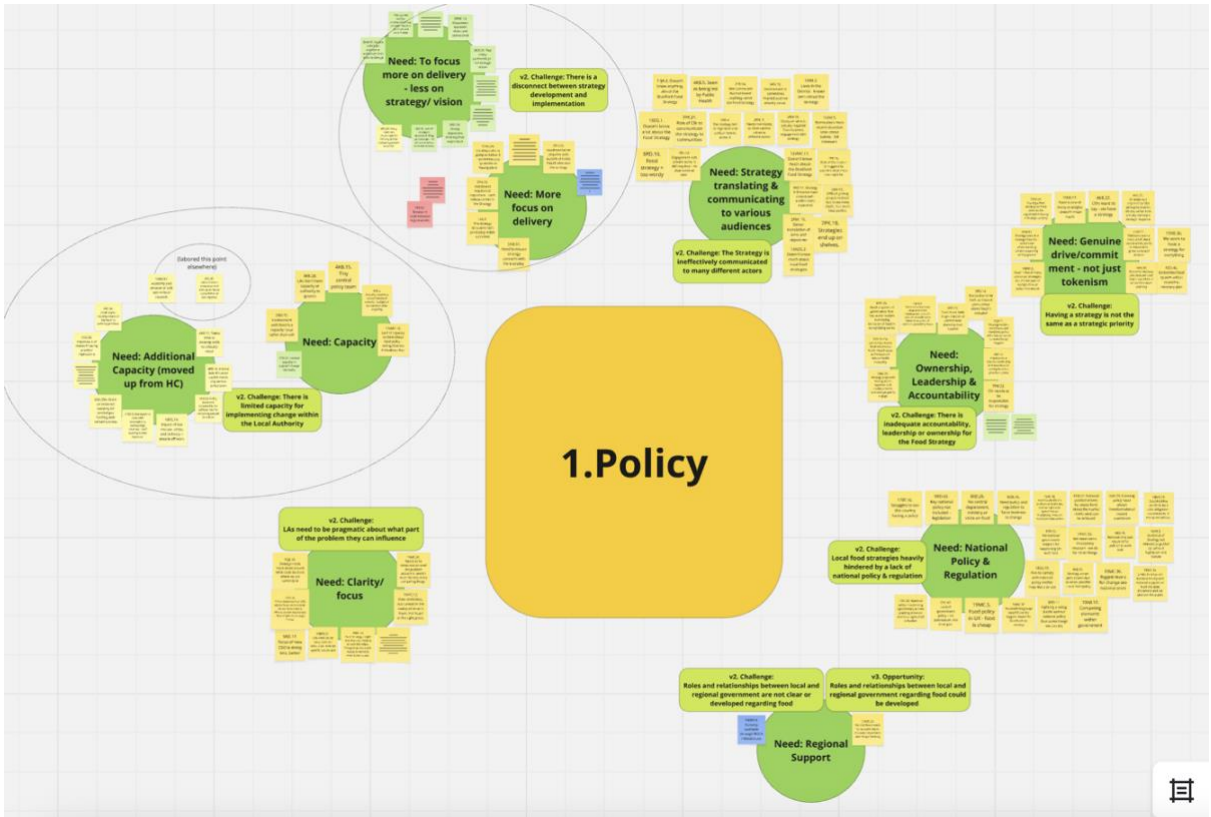


Image 1: A screenshot of the Miro board which documents part of the coding process.

Generating initial themes: Once I had summarised data onto sticky notes as explained above, I could then move them about to start generating themes, as shown on image 1 by green circles.

Developing and reviewing themes: The process of developing and reviewing themes was iterative and took place over several months. During this period, areas of overlap and duplication became apparent, which led to themes being combined or discarded to improve the themes now present. This process involved continuously asking whether the data answered the overarching question, as participants often deviated from the question at hand and spoke at length about food-related problems that were not related to the question of local authority food strategy implementation and were therefore often discarded. Supervisors were also used as a sounding board.

Refining, defining and naming themes: This overlapped with the development and review of themes and was an iterative process that took place over a period of time.

This was a complex period, as I was obsessing over 'not missing anything' within the data. But it was useful to reflect on Braun & Clarke (2022), who remind us that the analytical process is subjective and reliant on the researcher to generate data, and that data is not itself objective and waiting within the transcripts to be extracted.

The final theme names were captured in a table with reference to a code that links across to unique data points on the interview transcripts (see image 2).

Writing up: A table was then produced to support the next stage of writing up the findings (see example in image 2). By including the theme name and data location within the table, this acted as a template to start writing up the findings. After copying the quotations from the transcript onto the draft write-up, I then went through and built in narrative to contextualise the data.

SIE Heading	Code	Data Location
1. Policy	**1.1. The Strategy is ineffectively communicated to many different actors**	11JA.3, 4KB.5, 7PK.14., 5RD.16., 10IM.2. 7PK.21., 1AG.4., 2KM. 9., 2KM, 65., 16AW.5., 18EG.1., 12VMC.11., 7PK,16., 3TH.12., 5RD.11., 2KM.63., 5RD.10., 13AGG.2., 2KM.10., 7PK.18.

Image 2: A screenshot showing an extract from the write-up table

Interview data were processed using the above approach for each of the six elements of the six 'Social Innovation Ecosystem' themes that informed the structure of the interview questions. This provided a consistent framework for collating responses. Given the overlap across participants' accounts and the presence of material not

directly relevant to the research question, the data were then systematically grouped and refined. This process involved organising the data around key themes, which served as heuristic devices to support sense-making and to identify patterns of relevance within the empirical material. This stage of analysis is described here as abductive thematic structuring of interview data. It is not presented as a standalone thematic analysis, but rather as an intermediate analytical step within a broader abductive approach. Its primary purpose was to organise and reduce the data in a structured way, enabling subsequent theoretically informed analysis.

The outputs of this process were used to structure the initial presentation of the empirical material and to inform the subsequent political economy analysis presented in the findings chapter.

3.9. Political Economy Analysis

This research adopts the methodology produced and used by the Department for Foreign, Commonwealth & Development (2023). The Government Department produced this as part of the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice. Given that this research challenge is grounded in practice and focuses on Strategy implementation, this approach is highly appropriate.

The guidance was used to interpret and explain the empirical findings generated in this thesis through a Political Economy lens. As set out in the guidance document, the purpose of Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is to provide a clear understanding of the political context in which a phenomenon exists. In short, it seeks to understand how things work, or do not work, in a given context. The three key elements of the Political Economy Analysis asks:

- What is the underlying issue or problem?
- Why does the situation persist in this form?
- How can change come about?

As part of the PEA process, it is claimed that a better understanding of the following issues will be generated:

- Who the influential actors are,
- How power is distributed and contested, and who is excluded from power,
- Practical constraints that limit the use of power,
- Formal and informal norms that shape behaviour and influence decisions,
- How these factors affect incentives and ability to achieve change,
- In addition to the role of ideas, capacity, identities, and loyalties, which priorities are likely to prevail when there are multiple objectives

- How and why change really happens, and what combination of actors, incentives, processes and capacity lead to shift in outcomes.

To understand why things are the way they are in a specific dilemma within a specific context, the PEA approach unpacks the issue by examining interactions across three levels of analysis. These are Foundations or Structures, Formal and informal processes and rules, and Actors and stakeholders. Foundations and structures refer to macro-level factors that require consideration. Examples include history, geopolitics, and economic systems. Formal and informal processes and rules, or meso-level factors, refer to laws, social norms, values, or behavioural patterns. Actors and stakeholders, or the micro-level, refer to individuals or organisations. The Political Economy Analysis explores dynamic interactions across these three levels of analysis.

Guiding questions are paraphrased from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (2023) to frame and prompt each sub-section. Whilst the focus of this thesis is on the challenges of implementing urban food strategies, the PEA process also yields suggestions for how such challenges may be addressed through realistic pathways of change and interventions that are both technically sound and politically feasible.

Given the practical nature of the research phenomena, adopting the Political Economy Analysis framework as a lens to interpret the empirical data generated as part of this thesis is more fitting and valuable than a purely theoretical lens.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of York's ethics committee prior to conducting participant interviews to ensure adherence to the University's codes of practice, guidelines on research integrity, and general GDPR compliance.

In the process of applying for ethical approval, no challenges beyond the fundamental ethical practices applicable to all research were identified, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and the right to withdraw.

Informed Consent: Participants received comprehensive information about the study and provided written consent confirming they had received research briefing and agreed to take part in the study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: Identifiable information was anonymised, and data were securely stored on password-protected University drives.

Right to Withdraw: Participants were informed of their right to withdraw without consequence until a specified date.

3.11. Limitations of the Methodology

Generalisability

This study has generated rich insights into a specific context, based on contributions from the people involved in the case study. The intention was not for the findings to be generalised. It is unclear whether this could be replicated, given the researcher's positionality as both a practitioner within the field and a researcher, which undoubtedly facilitated access to the participants who contributed to this research. The limitation is therefore less in the methodological approach and more in the application and applicability of the overall research.

Future research should seek to understand the challenges of implementing urban food strategies in other contexts. This could be achieved without occupying the same insider position that I have, by speaking with people who occupy similarly high-level positions within the Local authority to obtain diverse, lesser-heard voices from 'elite participants' who have a perspective on strategic challenges.

Social Innovation Ecosystem Framing

The Social Innovation Ecosystem framing was used to structure the research questions and group the research findings. Therefore, it must be clarified that these elements did not appear organically but were structurally determined and may not occur if not explicitly asked for. Future research may seek to inductively determine whether these headings are useful or whether the challenges are felt elsewhere too, but this research was abductive and did not seek to validate the SIE headings.

On reflection, the questions were also quite clunky and required rephrasing and reinterpreting. This does not, however, detract from the overall findings, but it does acknowledge that I would reconsider the framing of the questions if we needed to revisit this.

Semi-structured Interviews

The limitations of semi-structured interviews are acknowledged, as the interviewer inevitably influences participants' responses. The researcher frames the question, may ask it in a specific way, emphasising certain parts, or choose to focus on specific elements of a response. Whilst positivist research seeks (arguably unsuccessfully) to remove research bias, interpretivist researchers instead seek to mitigate it through reflexivity (Finlay, 2002). This is undertaken in the final section of this methodology chapter.

Participant selection

Participants were selected based on their perceived insight into the phenomena. Identifying and interviewing those directly involved with the Strategy was relatively straightforward. Less straightforward was identifying and gaining access to those not involved with the Strategy, which relied on my knowledge of the organisation and my relationships with other colleagues who could suggest relevant people to speak with. Gaining access to participants with whom I did not have existing relationships took time and relied on introductions from those I did. These too took time to materialise.

There were additional people whom I would have liked to interview, but even with senior support and introductions I was unable to interview them. Participants I was unable to gain access to included officers in Procurement, a Senior Leader in Economic Growth, Planning, and the Chief Executive Officer, Land & Asset Management. Critics may query the purposive sampling which occurred which was largely based on assumptions around who may have a view on the topic, but as the Food Strategy literature is scarcely looking beyond those involved in Public Health (Lever, 2019), a degree of experimentation was necessary. Some of these assumptions were informed by the grouped outcomes within the Bradford Food Strategy. For example, when it discussed reducing food waste, I approached a colleague within the Waste Department for an interview. To counter this bias, I did ask participants for suggestions as to who else might be useful to interview.

Resource Constraints

Time and resource constraints limited the number of participants I could interview. Perhaps with more time, I could have campaigned for the availability of other participants who did not respond to my request or to those of other senior sponsors within the organisation.

3.12. Reflexivity Statement

There is a call for a reflexive approach to qualitative research, in order to own the researcher's perspective rather than slipping into the positivist approach of avoiding researcher bias and input. Scholars argue that much modern organisational research is facing criticism for its pursuit of objectivity, which does not align with the philosophical underpinnings of the discipline (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Cunliffe, 2003).

Cunliffe proposes the term 'radical reflexivity' as a way for organisational researchers to go beyond truth claims and avoid accepting their research at face value, given the subjective nature of society. They propose questioning how researchers and

practitioners contribute to the shaping of truth claims and the construction of meaning. In doing so, one's own philosophical commitments and logic must be acknowledged and subject to critique through reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2003).

In a highly cited paper in qualitative research, Finlay (2002) claims that reflexivity has potential value in research, as it helps to understand the researcher's impact on the research, rather than avoiding it. Reflexivity promotes rich insight by drawing on personal reflections on the research, and it creates space to look for and confront unconscious motivations and assumptions within the methodology. Reflexive practice also allows for evaluation of the research approach, the methods adopted, and the outcomes. It also allows for scrutiny by bringing forward such vulnerabilities and owning and presenting them rather than ignoring potentially impactful factors (Finlay, 2002).

Finlay (2002) offers five approaches to consider regarding reflexivity, namely introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction. Reflexivity through introspection involves examining one's own beliefs and assumptions and considering their impact on the research. Reflexivity through intersubjective reflection attends to power dynamics, tone, and the flow of conversation between the researcher and the participant. Reflexivity through mutual collaboration treats participants as equal knowledge co-constructors and seeks their reflexivity in the research as well, to keep the participant voice within the research. Reflexivity through social critique examines the power balance between the researcher and the participant. Reflexivity through discursive deconstruction analyses the language used to consider what was and was not said within the research. No specific approach is prescribed, nor is it encouraged that all tools be adopted if only symbolically and not sufficiently or meaningfully engaged with. Instead, it is suggested that the researcher reflect on which best fits the circumstances. The section below engages with the five areas of reflexivity (Finlay, 2002).

Reflexivity through Introspection

The first area to address, which a positivist would undoubtedly call bias, is that I am both a practitioner employed part-time by the Local authority of which I am also a researcher, and thus I am deeply connected to and passionate about the Bradford Food Strategy. I was involved in the initial development working groups of the Strategy and continue to be involved in its implementation. This cannot be escaped, and I would argue that it has generated more insight through the research findings than if I had conducted such research within another organisation, or if somebody else had undertaken this research without my contextual grounding.

Reflexivity through intersubjective reflection

Across all interviews, I wanted people to feel comfortable and able to talk openly with me. As I had pre-existing professional relationships with various degrees of familiarity to all but two of the participants, there was already a sense of familiarity and comfort with the majority of participants. I do not see that these existing working relationships negatively impacted the credibility of this research, and in fact I maintain the view that such relationships allowed for a greater depth of discussion and for gaining access to such participants, which I do not believe would have been easy without an existing relationship.

I do not see that I had any power over the participants. No participants were coerced into taking part by other colleagues, for example, nor were they excessively pestered beyond a few follow-up emails, which I attribute to busy calendars rather than a lack of will to take part. I also do not see that any participants or 'sponsors' had any power over me in this research that may influence the presentation of the findings.

My reactions and follow-up questions undoubtedly shaped the discussion, and I too shared anecdotes with the interviewees to maintain the conversational flow to which I had become accustomed when speaking with them outside the interview environment. I did not feel it appropriate or comfortable to drop my naturally conversational style and to act like an interviewer with people whom I class as peers.

Reflexivity through mutual collaboration

There may have been value in mutual collaboration, including participant reflection on how I captured participant voice and on preliminary themes. Practically, I am not sure how this would have worked as part of a PhD thesis, nor am I convinced there would have been any uptake, given that this area of work is not high on most participants' priority lists. I do recognise, however, that this could have added value by strengthening and validating my own interpretation of the phenomena.

Reflexivity through social critique

Mindful of potential power dynamics and not wanting participants to question their understanding, or lack thereof, of the research phenomena, I took a conversational approach when conducting the interviews. When I sensed a participant was uncomfortable with a particular phrasing of a question, I would rephrase it in a way I thought might be more appropriate, or skip it completely.

Regarding structural inequalities, it must be acknowledged that the sample did not reflect ethnic or demographic groups. Only two participants were non-white. Fourteen of the total nineteen participants were male. I would argue, however, that this is a broader structural problem of under-representation in the roles of interest, rather than

an unconscious oversight to exclude anyone. I asked participants if they could recommend any people of interest whom I might speak to, as a way of trying to overcome potential blind spots as a white male and to ensure I was not unconsciously seeking out other white males. However, such recommendations may also have been unconsciously biased.

Reflexivity through discursive Deconstruction

As I had worked with some of the participants on specific projects, there were several situations in which participants shared certain information or details that I assumed were part of typical conversation, in which not all details need to be included because it is assumed the other person knows what is meant. In these situations, I asked the participants to elaborate so that the unspoken meaning was captured within the interview recording.

Chapter 4: Findings

Thus far, the thesis has reviewed the literature on local food strategies and food partnerships, and on how they are positioned as counter-movements against the dominant food regime. The previous section presented a methodology for how this thesis approaches the question: What are the challenges regarding implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy? Moreover, what are the limitations of Local authority-led Food Strategies more generally?

This findings chapter is structured into three parts.

1. An overview of West-Yorkshire-based Food Strategies or Partnerships – this provides a summary of the five local authority areas of West-Yorkshire in order to situate Bradford within a regional context.

2. Document analysis of the Bradford Food Strategy – this analysis is informed by political economy theory to provide a deeper, critical assessment of the strategy.

3. Qualitative data based on actors surrounding the Bradford Food Strategy – this data highlights challenges, according to actors, regarding the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy. It then presents a political economy analysis which situates the challenges, as presented by actors, within a broader structural and theoretical context.

4.1. Overview of West-Yorkshire based Food Strategies or Food Partnerships

This section situates the Bradford Food Strategy within the context of other West Yorkshire-based Food Strategies.

West Yorkshire is a metropolitan county in northern England, comprising the five local authority areas of Bradford, Leeds, Wakefield, Calderdale, and Kirklees (see figure 2). The region includes a mix of large urban centres and smaller towns, alongside surrounding rural and upland areas. Its economic and social landscape reflects a legacy of industrial development, with varied patterns of population, deprivation, and local governance across the area. These characteristics make it a useful setting for examining local policy approaches and the organisation of food systems. An overview of the Food Strategy content is set out in Table 3 and expanded on below.

As shown in Table 3, the themes across the West Yorkshire Food Strategies are consistent despite some variation in labelling. Not all local authority areas have Food

Strategies. Bradford, Leeds, and Calderdale do, but Kirklees and Wakefield do not. Kirklees has 'Meeting Kirklees's Food Needs', and Wakefield has 'Our Charter'. A main apparent difference is the governance structure of the Food Strategies. The Leeds and Bradford Food Strategies are published by the local authority, whereas the Calderdale Food Strategy is published by the Calderdale Food Network, a third-sector partnership with support from the local authority. Kirklees' food network is hosted by the third-sector organisation Good Food for All Kirklees, and Wakefield's Charter is published by the third-sector organisation Wakefield District Good Food Partnership. Regarding action, Bradford, Calderdale and Leeds, the areas with strategies, have high-level action plans to support the strategic vision. None, however, have resources allocated to the actions. Kirklees Food Network does not set a vision, nor does it mention resources, but instead appears to be a network of food-related projects. Wakefield's Charter contains some actions which are nestled amongst general statements. None of the five local authority areas make reference to the resources required to realise their food strategies, network, or charter. Based on the information available online, there is also no obvious reference to engaging primary food system actors.

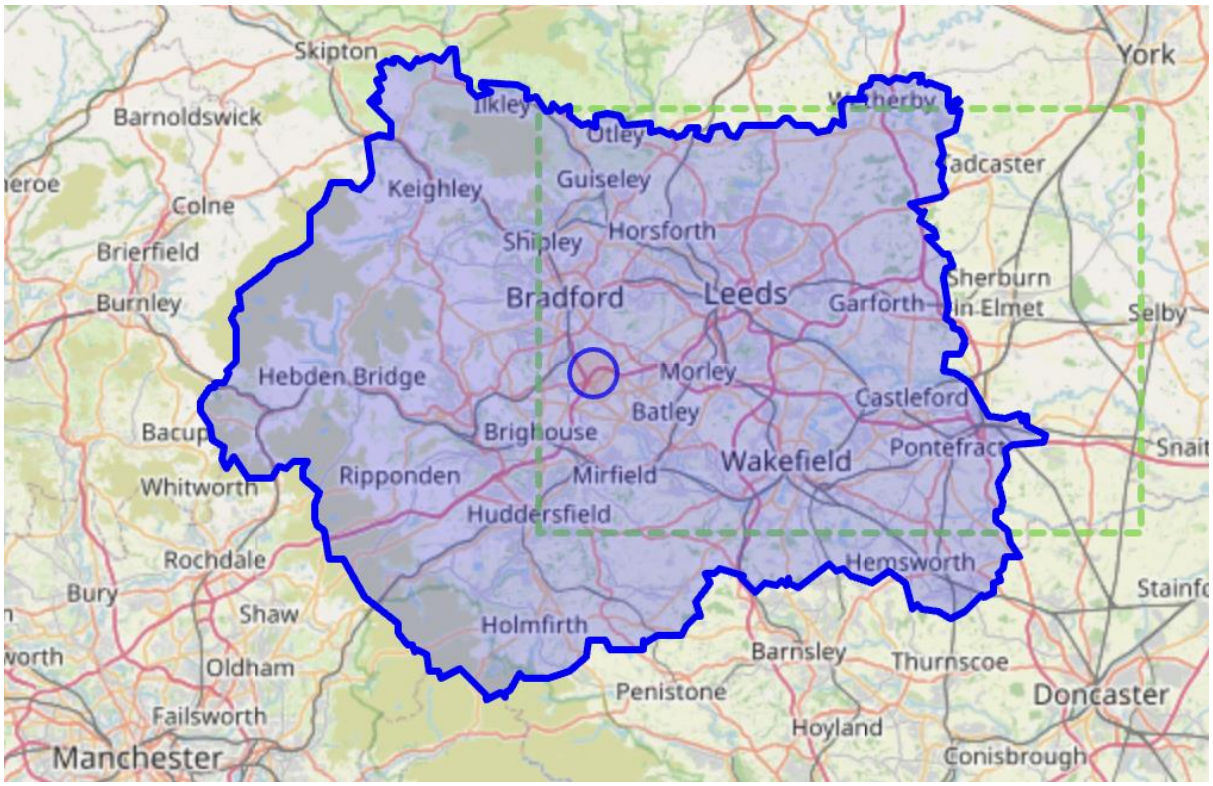


Figure 2: Map of West Yorkshire (OpenStreetMap contributors, 2026).

Local authority Area	Core Themes	Lead Organisation
Bradford City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council (2023d)	Bradford Good Food Strategy 2023 - Creating an Eating Well culture – developing knowledge and skills, and access to healthy affordable food - Tackling Food Insecurities – increasing access to, and availability of, healthy fresh low-cost food. - Community-led food growing – sustaining and expanding local food production - A sustainable food system for all – creating a resilient and sustainable food system which protects biodiversity and reduces impact on climate change	City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Leeds (Leeds City Council, no date)	Leeds Food Strategy 2022-2030 - Health and Wellbeing – Helping people to improve their health and wellbeing through eating well. - Food Security & Economy – Working to give everyone in Leeds access to nutritious food as part of a diverse, inclusive and vibrant food economy. - Sustainability & Resilience – Ensuring Leeds' food system is fit for the future and supports our climate action plan	Leeds City Council in partnership with Foodwise Leeds
Calderdale Calderdale Vision 34 (2026)	A Food Strategy for Calderdale 2026-34 - Affordable Sustainable Food for All - Inclusive, Empowered, Good Food Movement - Sustainable, Nutritious Food for All Children - Sustainable Local Food Economy - Planet-Friendly Food System	Calderdale Food Network in partnership with Calderdale Council
Kirklees Good Food for All Kirklees (no date)	Meeting Kirklees's Food Needs - Low-cost food - Emergency food - Community café - Community cooking - Community growing group	Good Food for All Kirklees
Wakefield Wakefield District Good Food Partnership (no date)	Our Charter - Our people – everyone has access to healthier, good quality, safe and affordable food. - Our prosperity – the district has a vibrant, thriving and diverse food economy that works for people as much as they work for it. - Our planet – we have a food system that doesn't harm biodiversity and the wider environment. We support the needs of today without limiting future generations.	Wakefield District Good Food Partnership

Table 3. An overview of West-Yorkshire Food Strategies

4.2. Document Analysis of Bradford Food Strategy

Whilst the above section provides a headline overview of the Food Strategies within West Yorkshire and how they compare or differ from each other, this sub-section analyses the Bradford Food Strategy and related action plan to offer a deeper, theoretically informed analysis of the Strategy. Document analysis is used as a systematic method for interpreting policy texts and institutional materials (Bowen, 2009). It was adopted because it enables the systematic examination of policy texts to identify key themes, priorities, and omissions. However, it does not provide the deeper interpretive focus on language, meaning making, and power relations that would be generated through discourse analysis. Document analysis is seen as particularly appropriate where the research aims to understand the substantive content and structure of policy documents, rather than the discursive construction of meaning within them (Bowen, 2009). As per Prior (2003), documents are treated not merely as sources of information but as socially constructed artefacts reflecting underlying power relations.

This document analysis adopts the methodology developed and used by the Department for Foreign, Commonwealth & Development (2023). The Government Department produced this as part of the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice. Given that this research challenge is grounded in practice and focuses on implementing the Strategy, this approach is highly appropriate. As set out in the guidance document, the purpose of Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is to provide a clear understanding of the political context in which a phenomenon exists. In short, it seeks to understand how things work, or do not work, in a given context. The three key elements of the Political Economy Analysis asks:

- What is the underlying issue or problem?
- Why does the situation persist in this form?
- How can change come about?

As part of the PEA process, it is claimed that a better understanding of the following issues will be generated:

- Who the influential actors are,
- How power is distributed and contested, and who is excluded from power,
- Practical constraints that limit the use of power,
- Formal and informal norms that shape behaviour and influence decisions,
- How these factors affect incentives and ability to achieve change,
- In addition to the role of ideas, capacity, identities, and loyalties, which priorities are likely to prevail when there are multiple objectives
- How and why change really happens, and what combination of actors, incentives, processes and capacity leads to a shift in outcomes.

The above points are used as subheadings to structure the document analysis.

To understand why things are the way they are in a specific dilemma within a specific context, the PEA approach unpacks the issue by examining interactions across three levels of analysis. These are Foundations or Structures, Formal and informal processes and rules, and Actors and stakeholders. Foundations and structures refer to macro-level factors that require consideration. Examples include history, geopolitics, and economic systems. Formal and informal processes and rules, or meso-level factors, include laws, social norms, values, and behavioural patterns. Actors and stakeholders, or the micro-level, include individuals or organisations. The Political Economy Analysis explores dynamic interactions across these three levels of analysis. Guiding questions are paraphrased from the Department for International Development (2023) to frame and prompt each sub-section.

Whilst the focus of this thesis is on the challenges of implementing urban food strategies, the PEA process also offers suggestions for addressing these challenges through realistic pathways of change and interventions that are both technically sound and politically feasible.

4.2.1. Finding 1: Those involved with the Food Strategy are primarily advocates of a better food system, but lack power over the food system

This finding highlights a perceived imbalance within the Food Strategy process, whereby many participants are viewed as committed to improving the food system, yet remain constrained in their ability to meaningfully shape or influence it. This section identifies key actors, their interests, and their sources of power, with regard to the Bradford Food Strategy.

Bradford Food Partnership

Living Well hosts the Food Partnership and is the body that led the development of the Food Strategy. Living Well is a collaborative extension of the Local Authorities Public Health Department. Within the Local authority, it falls under the Living Well area of work, where responsibility for the Food Strategy resides (MyLivingWell, 2025). Living Well's interests are to improve health outcomes for the Bradford District. There are several observations about the power Living Well holds. As the strategy's convener, they have power over who is invited to contribute to the strategy's development and who is not. As the strategy's author, they have the final say over its content.

The Food Strategy Websites position the Food Partnership as responsible for operational direction and for convening partners under a whole systems approach.

> ''Their role is to provide the operational direction of the 'Good Food' strategy, and to bring together key district partners to operate as a 'Whole System' to help influence and shape a healthier and more sustainable food system'' *(City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025d)*

The Food Partnership Members and Supporters are responsible for creating the vision of the Food Strategy (MyLivingWell, 2025). They are predominantly public and third-sector representatives. Apart from one food wholesaler and food redistribution organisations, the partnership representatives are not operators of the dominant food system. Given the broad representation within the partnership, their interests are varied, but are assumed to be shared in that the Food Strategy should encapsulate each party's interests. Their interests are assumed to vary based on the nature of their work, but there are areas captured in the Food Strategy.

Whilst the website captures those involved in creating the vision, it does not differentiate between those involved in the visioning and those involved in the implementation. The strategy document does not capture attendance at partner-related meetings, nor does it capture information about their operational roles regarding the implementation of the Food Strategy.

As a result, the Food Strategy appears to bring together actors with strong normative commitments to food system change, while leaving existing structures of power and decision-making largely intact.

4.2.2. Finding 2: Operational food system actors, the actors who occupy power within the food system, appear absent from involvement with the Bradford Food Strategy

This finding points to a significant gap in participation within the Bradford Food Strategy, particularly concerning the limited involvement of operational actors who hold substantial influence within the wider food system.

Missing Actors

A 'whole systems approach' is referenced within the strategy, but the food strategy membership does not reflect a 'whole systems approach'. The strategy demonstrates systems thinking – but based on the partnership's membership, it does not demonstrate systems practice.

Farmers, for example, are a missing actor. Whilst farmers themselves are not listed on the membership, their voice and interests are, in theory, represented through the National Farmers Union. Through their involvement in the strategy's development, they have influence over the suggested content considered for inclusion within the strategy.

As it is Living Well who have the final power of the pen, or editorial responsibility for the strategy, it is them who have the final say.

Food businesses are also largely absent from the partnership. One food business, 'Deli Fresh', is listed on the partnership's membership page. They are an operational food business based within the St. James Wholesale Market. They have operational power within the food system as they buy and sell food. They have the power to engage with the Food Partnership or not, given that doing so is not mandatory nor enforceable. When speculating on their interest, as a private sector organisation, it is assumed that they are interested in meeting consumer needs in order to generate profit. Whilst their involvement in the partnership is captured on the 'members and supporters website' (MyLivingWell, 2025), their practical involvement is not clear, nor are the related actions towards implementing the content of the strategy.

There are no large corporate food businesses involved with the Food Strategy, despite Morrisons, one of the largest UK food retailers, originating in Bradford and still having its headquarters there.

Several Local authority functions are referenced or implied in the food strategy, including economic development, catering, food procurement, and waste (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b). These functions are not included in the Food Partnership membership list. Their absence suggests that related actions are unlikely to be operationalised without the involvement of the relevant Officers. For example, establishing a supply chain network surely relies on the skills, remit, and authority of those within the Economic Development Department, rather than those within the Food Partnership, Living Well, or the Public Health Department.

Consequently, the absence of these powerful operational actors raises questions about the Strategy's capacity to influence systemic change beyond advocacy, coordination, and localised intervention.

4.2.3. Finding 3: The Bradford Food Strategy demonstrates food system thinking – it does not demonstrate food system practice.

This finding suggests that, while the Bradford Food Strategy adopts the language and conceptual framing of food systems approaches, this is not consistently reflected in its practical modes of operation or implementation. This section explores how actors interact with each other and how alliances shape outcomes. Based on the Food Strategy document and the Bradford Food Partnership website, it is unclear how actors interact with each other or how alliances will shape outcomes. It can be assumed that the partnership's collaboration has resulted in a Food Strategy.

Food Strategy Interests

The principles that guide the Food Strategy, as reported in the Strategy document, are centred on the health of Bradford District residents. This is evident in the sections titled 'our vision' and 'principles to guide the strategy'. The strategy vision reads:

> ''To put accessible and nutritious food for all at the heart of Bradford's policies and actions. We do this in order to reduce health and social inequalities, to improve health and wellbeing and to create a secure and sustainable food system that works for people and strengthens our local economy'' (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b, pg.6.)

The guiding principles read:

- We put prevention first
- We work to reduce food inequalities and promote dignity and choice
- Our food sector is sustainable and ethical
- People and communities are the District's great assets
- We are collaborative

(City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b, pg.6.)

As a document, the Strategy reads holistically, as it states, taking a systems approach. Proportionally, it is heavier on content related to poverty and health, likely because the membership is predominantly composed of public and third-sector partners. Actions related to commercial food production and supply chains are less prevalent than those related to poverty and health. This is unlikely to surprise the reader, given the embedded bias of those who published the Strategy, who scarcely appear to represent the dominant food system.

Accordingly, the Strategy appears to embody food systems thinking at the level of discourse and ambition, but falls short of translating these principles into embedded food systems practice.

4.2.4. Finding 4: The Bradford Food Strategy and related action plan represent a symbolic articulation of aspirational actors with implementation and resourcing left unspecified.

This finding indicates that the Bradford Food Strategy and its accompanying action plan function primarily as expressions of shared aspiration, while offering limited clarity regarding delivery mechanisms, accountability, or resource allocation.

There is an accompanying document on the Food Strategy website titled 'Bradford District Sustainable Food Partnership - Refined Action Plan – July 2023' (MyLivingWell, 2023). An action plan is a detailed outline of the specific actions that must be taken to

achieve stated objectives, including what will be done, by whom, within what timeframe, and using what resources (Bryson, 2018; Robbins & Coulter, 2018).

Based on the above definition of an action plan, it includes specific actions to be taken to achieve the stated objectives. This is missing from the Food Strategy and Action Plan.

'What will be done' is an element of an action plan. This is present within the Food Strategy and Action, as there are various proposed actions.

'By whom, or identifying responsible persons' is another element of an action plan. Whilst there is a reference to the partnership as a whole being responsible for the strategy, there is no mention of accountability for specific actions set out in the strategy.

> ''A new Sustainable Food Partnership Bradford District owns and leads the Strategy…'' (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b Pg. 3).

There are also proposed actions for which relevant partners or officers are not represented within the Food Partnership, as highlighted in an earlier section on mission actors. The Governance section states that the Sustainable Food Partnership is responsible for owning and leading the strategy. Relevant actors, such as those working in waste, procurement, and economic development, are not listed on the Food Partnership membership page.

There is an acknowledgement of the lack of representation, and the Strategy references broadening engagement.

> *''We will be working to broaden representation of the new Sustainable Food Partnership, continuing the co-production process for tangible actions and annual priorities''* (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b, pg.14.)

Beyond this action statement, there is no breakdown of the practical tasks required to effectively broaden the Partnership's representation. There are no further publicly accessible documents indicating that tangible actions or annual priorities have been produced. 'Time frame' is cited as a key element of an action plan. This is not mentioned in the Food Strategy or the Action Plan. 'Resource use and allocation' is a key element of an action plan. The Food Strategy states that:

> ''The Bradford Good Food Strategy is currently putting together a detailed action plan that will allocate resources and respond to the more immediate needs from the pandemic, as well as longer-term solutions that will address these wider factors and underlying causes of poverty'' (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b, Pg. 9.)

The above-mentioned action plan is referenced online, dated July 2023 (MyLivingWell, 2023). But as highlighted above, the action plan re-states a breadth of far-reaching actions. It does not mention resource allocation.

The Strategy also states that resources will be collectively assigned.

> ‘’We will be working to broaden the representation of the new Sustainable Food Partnership, continuing the co-production process for tangible actions and annual priorities, collectively assigning resource and capacity to deliverable programmes and regularly evaluating and reporting on progress (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b Pg. 14).

Neither the strategy, the action plan, nor related documents on the Living Well website suggest that the resource has been made available either by Living Well as the Strategy conveners, nor through other partners.

‘Measurements or evaluation’ are another element of an action plan and are used to determine whether proposed actions have been realised. Within the Food Strategy and Action Plan, measurements of success are included in published logic models, but they primarily refer to ‘system-wide’ outcomes and are not directly related to the actions proposed within the strategy. It is difficult to determine how the strategy is being implemented, or the impact of the strategy itself, as the referenced measurements are not directly related to the proposed actions but reflect broader desired food system outcomes.

As such, the Strategy can be understood as a symbolic statement of intent that articulates collective ambition, but leaves the practicalities of implementation and resourcing insufficiently defined.

4.2.5. Finding 5: Actors around the Bradford Food Strategy occupy a voluntary function – their existence is not mandated by Government which constrains their power.

This finding highlights the institutional limitations faced by actors involved in the Bradford Food Strategy, whose roles are largely voluntary rather than formally mandated through government structures.

The Food Strategy governance section states that the Sustainable Food Partnership is responsible for owning and leading the Strategy. However, it neither captures nor explains the significance of this responsibility being self-appointed rather than government mandated.

This arguably means that whilst Partners are able to articulate problems and propose actions, they lack the mandate to enforce engagement from others to implement the proposed actions. Whilst a previous section quotes the aspiration to broaden representation within the Partnership, it does not address the Partnership's voluntary structure. As there is no obligation to have a Food Partnership, it is reasoned that there is no obligation for other missing actors, such as those in economic development,

catering, procurement, or waste, to engage with the Partnership or take responsibility for the actions proposed within the Strategy. Governance, as referenced within the Strategy, identifies how the Partnership fits into the Local authority and District governance.

> ''A new Sustainable Food Partnership Bradford District owns and leads the Strategy. It will report on progress to our Living Well Steering Group which reports up to the District's Wellbeing Board, the lead Partnership for the District (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b Pg. 3).

Governance in this sense is understood to mean reporting lines and does not reference allocation of resources or capacity to support implementation.

As identified in a prior section, the strategy does not adequately address governance arrangements for allocating the resources and capacity required to implement its proposed actions. More importantly, it fails to engage with the limited authority that the Partnership and its members hold over the dominant food system itself. While the Strategy articulates a clear vision, the Partnership appears to lack both the resources necessary to implement the new vision and the power to influence the broader food system.

This analysis suggests that the Food Partnership functions as a non-mandated, voluntary governance arena, with limited clarity on how strategic actions will be realised in practice. It lacks defined decision-making responsibilities, does not specify available or required resources, and provides little indication of how coordination will be achieved across actors. As a voluntary arrangement, it appears to have limited capacity to compel stakeholder engagement, further constraining its ability to realise the ambitions set out within the food strategy.

As discussed in an early section of the literature review, the food system is firmly embedded within capitalism, which Giminez & First (2019) call a corporate food regime. Whilst the actors within the Bradford Food Partnership are assumed to be governed by the pursuit of a better food system, the corporate food regime is governed by the rules of capitalism, which prioritise efficiency and profit (Giminez & First, 2019).

Consequently, the voluntary and non-statutory nature of these actors limits their authority, reducing their capacity to exert influence over broader food system governance and decision-making.

How formal and informal rules influence behaviour in context

This subsection explores how formal and informal rules influence behaviour in context.

A dominant narrative throughout the Food Strategy is the term 'Whole Systems Approach', which appears to have shaped its framing. A whole systems approach recognises health outcomes as emergent properties of complex, adaptive systems, requiring coordinated action across multiple levels and sectors rather than isolated interventions (Public Health England, 2019; Rutter et al., 2017).

However, there appears to be a disconnect within the document between the 'whole systems approach narrative' and the 'whole systems approach practice'. The strategy sets out an understanding of the problems in the food system and proposes actions, but it largely fails to a. turn proposed ideas into practical projects, b. identify the required resources and capacity, and c. propose relevant actions based on the involvement of the actors involved.

4.2.6. Finding 6: The impact of austerity and how it limits power and capacity is not adequately reflected within the Food Strategy

This finding suggests that the Bradford Food Strategy does not reflect or engage with the structural effects of austerity, particularly in relation to how reduced public funding and institutional capacity constrain action.

This subsection explores how structural conditions shape the workings of politics and institutions. A key yet unacknowledged factor shaping Living Well's and the Food Partnerships' capacity to govern and implement the strategy is austerity. To understand the implications of austerity for local government , Eckersley & Tobin (2019) are drawn upon, particularly their concept of 'policy dismantling'. The authors use the term policy to refer to policy as an action, from a signal of intent to final outcomes, rather than just the high-level document itself, because focusing on high-level content alone cannot reveal changes further down the line in implementation. Eckersley & Tobin (2019) also address 'policy capacity' and highlight how this has been significantly weakened by austerity. By policy capacity, the authors mean 'the ability to direct resources and make intelligent, informed choices about different policy and strategic alternatives'. The authors demonstrate how Local Councils, in response to an average budget cut of 49 per cent, drastically reduced less-visible parts of their organisations while avoiding disruption to the more visible, public-facing services. Policy functions were among the less-visible features reduced, which in turn negatively affected policy implementation, enforcement, and evaluation. This was not seen as deliberate but as a response to fiscal constraint. The disproportionate impact in less affluent areas was also noted, particularly in areas with a majority of domestic residents in lower council tax brackets, who consequently paid lower council tax revenues, reducing council spending power.

Austerity was presented as an unavoidable course of action required to counter overspending by the previous Labour government and rising national debt (Sowels, 2014). Whilst public deficit reduction was the official justification, critics argue this was motivated by neo-liberal ideology and part of a mission to reduce the role and size of the state (Pautz, 2017; Sowels, 2014). This is a seemingly powerful and influential matter that is not reflected in the ambitious, far-reaching food strategy.

As a result, the Strategy risks underestimating the extent to which austerity shapes the limits of local power, capacity, and the ability of actors to deliver meaningful food system change.

4.2.7. Finding 7: The Food Strategy identifies topics which exist at a much larger scale than it has the power to influence

This finding highlights a tension within the Food Strategy between the scale of the issues it seeks to address and the comparatively limited authority available to influence them at the local level.

The Bradford Food Strategy reflects a neoliberal ideology by localising responsibility for what is a national or even global problem (Giminez & First, 2019; Guthman, 2008; Bene, 2022). Guthman (2008) argues that attempting to address food-related challenges at the local level reinforces the neoliberal concept of localism, whereby actors attempt to drive change locally – whilst structural food system reform remains unaddressed. Equally, the references above to Pautz (2017) and Sowels (2014) highlight the relevance of the ideologically informed pursuit of a small state through budget cuts and subsequent reductions in power.

While the strategy recognises broader political and economic issues and outlines associated actions, it does not translate these into concrete steps at the local level or clearly distinguish between what can be delivered locally and what requires national intervention. An example of this is provided below.

> ‘’A wide range of organisations and partners help tackle the root causes of poverty and the underlying issues that prevent households from accessing sufficient and healthy food’’ (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b, pg.6)

If the root causes of poverty and the failings of the food system are products of a much larger capitalist system, such a challenge cannot be addressed locally, despite the ambition to do so (Giminez & First, 2019; Guthman, 2008; Bene, 2022). Evidence in the Food Strategy supports this claim, demonstrating Guthman’s (2008) point about localism and showing how local actors are trying to take responsibility for national problems.

The Food Strategy also includes a multi-layered diagram that outlines the various factors influencing a food system. These include governmental, community environment, individual, sociocultural, agricultural, industry and market, and global (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2025b, pg.5).

Although the strategy recognises multiple levels of intervention, it does not clearly allocate responsibility across appropriate governance scales (national, regional, local). As a non-mandatory framework without formal authority or dedicated resources, actors capacity to implement actions that extend beyond their existing remit, it is interpreted that this is unlikely to be implemented. Despite demonstrating an understanding of the broader influences of the food system, the Food Strategy positions local actors as stewards of problems that are national, or even global, in scope. Although the strategy articulates an understanding of these challenges and proposes a range of responses, participating actors lack the mandate, authority, power, and resources necessary to realise many of its stated ambitions.

Consequently, the Strategy engages with systemic food issues that extend beyond its jurisdictional and political reach, raising questions about its capacity to meaningfully influence these larger-scale dynamics.

4.2.8. Pathways to Change

Based on the above analysis, one obvious pathway to change is to determine which actions are locally relevant, applicable and deliverable. Drawing on the reviewed literature, Bene (2022) highlights the importance of 'counter movements' as an approach to tackling the dominant food regime. Jackson et al. (2024) also emphasise the pursuit of value-led food systems.

Another key pathway for change emerging from the document analysis is the need to establish an action plan that sets out the specific actions required to achieve stated objectives, including what will be done, by whom, within what timeframe, and using what resources (Bryson, 2018; Robbins & Coulter, 2018). Actions must also be grounded in the actors who are actively involved in the partnership.

Given Guthman's (2008) claim that local food policy essentially devolves responsibility for a national problem to the local level, this must be kept in mind when advocating for food system change, ensuring that local efforts or counter movements are alongside structural change, not in place of it.

4.2.9. Summary

Analysis of the Bradford Food Strategy indicates that the Bradford Food Partnership, convened by Living Well within the Public Health Department, is the central actor shaping the strategy. Membership appears to be predominantly representatives from public and third-sector organisations whose shared interest lies in advocating for a healthier, more equitable food system. Key actors are missing, including farmers and food businesses, particularly large corporations that dominate the food system. Relevant local authority functions (e.g. procurement, economic development, waste) are referenced in the Strategy, yet relevant Officers appear absent from the partnership membership. Whilst the strategy adopts a nominal 'whole systems' framing, its priorities are weighted towards health and poverty, reflecting the composition of its membership, with comparatively limited attention to production and supply chains. Actor interactions and alliances are loosely defined, with unclear operational roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities. The action plan seemingly lacks ownership, timelines, resources, and evaluation mechanisms. Collectively, this suggests a largely aspirational or symbolic document. Governance arrangements appear weak, with no clear mandate, limited authority over resources, and little indication of how the broader food system is governed beyond reporting structures. Although systems thinking is rhetorically embedded, there appears to be a disconnect in practice. The strategy reflects a neoliberal tendency to localise responsibility for systemic food issues without corresponding powers or resources, positioning local actors as stewards of challenges that are national or global in scope.

Key Findings are as follows;

- Finding 1: Collectively, it is assumed that those involved with the Food Strategy are primarily advocates of a better food system, but lack power over the food system

- Finding 2: Operational food system actors, the actors who occupy power within the food system, appear absent from involvement with the Bradford Food Strategy.

- Finding 3: The Bradford Food Strategy demonstrates food system thinking – it does not demonstrate food system practice.

- Finding 4: The Bradford Food Strategy and related action plan represent a symbolic articulation of aspirational actors with implementation and resourcing left unspecified.

- Finding 5: Actors around the Bradford Food Strategy occupy a voluntary function – their existence is not mandated by Government which constrains their power.

- Finding 6: Austerity induced budget cuts has shrunk the size of the state, hollowed out capacity, and limited the power of Local Government

- Finding 7: The Food Strategy identifies topics which exist at a much larger scale than it has the power to influence

4.3. Qualitative Data

4.3.1. Empirical Findings: Abductive Thematic Structuring of Interview Data

This first section of the findings chapter presents empirical data drawn from participant interviews. It outlines the challenges actors report in implementing the Bradford Food Strategy. There are five key themes within this empirical section. These themes are informed by both the social innovation ecosystem framework, which structured the interview schedule, and key elements of political economy, including governance, power and scale. The subheadings that structure the next section are:

- Local Food Governance in Practice
- Impact of Significant Financial Challenges
- Resource Challenges & Organisational Culture
- Erosion of Human Capital within the Organisation
- Economic & Market Constraints

This presentation of interview data lays the foundations for the following findings section, which undertakes a political economy analysis that situates the actors' perspectives within a broader structural explanation.

4.3.1.1. Local Food Governance in Practice

The analysis highlights that the Food Strategy has not been effectively communicated or widely engaged with, resulting in limited awareness and ownership among relevant stakeholders. This lack of engagement is further reflected in the finding that many key actors remain unaware of the Strategy, indicating shortcomings in its dissemination. There is also evidence that food businesses, in particular, have not been adequately engaged, creating a disconnect between the Strategy's ambitions and the operational realities of the food system. Internally, the Strategy does not appear to be a shared organisational priority, limiting cross-departmental ownership and coordinated action and suggesting a degree of organisational disconnect from the outset. Beyond the local level, the absence of statutory obligations or clear national direction means that the success of local food strategies is largely dependent on voluntary engagement and constrained local resources. This is compounded by a lack of regional food policy, which contributes to fragmentation and a lack of coherence across governance levels. Finally, local food strategies are often misaligned with the scale and complexity of global food system challenges, raising questions about their capacity to meaningfully address issues such as sustainability, equity, and resilience.

The Food Strategy has not been well communicated or engaged with

Interviewees represent a breadth of roles across the public, private, and third sectors, and all are, in some way, connected to food-related projects or have work areas referred to within the Food Strategy. Perspectives within this sub-section include expertise in vertical farming, waste management, regional government, and national legislation. Despite working in related areas, each interviewee reported no meaningful understanding or engagement with the Food Strategy. Empirical data suggests that some participants are unaware of the strategy, despite their area of work being referenced in it; some are unclear about what their role could be in its implementation; and some are unsure how to translate the objectives into practical action.

Interviewees identified several shortcomings in the communication of the Food Strategy. Many relevant actors were simply unaware of its existence (1.1.1), suggesting it has not been effectively shared beyond a small group within the Local authority. Others argued it needs to be made more relevant to a wider range of stakeholders (1.1.2), as its objectives do not clearly align with their priorities. Food businesses, in particular, as interviewees argue, have not been adequately engaged (1.1.3), limiting both awareness and practical implementation. These gaps indicate that the strategy remains poorly communicated and insufficiently embedded within the Local authority, or within the businesses which constitute the local food system. On the surface, there appears to be an assumption of poor communication or poor management of the strategy implementation process, which is a reason why the strategy is not being implemented.

Relevant Actors are unaware of the Food Strategy

Participant Fourteen shares that although they had previously delivered a DEFRA-funded programme related to food in the local area, they had no knowledge or understanding of the Food Strategy.

> Interviewer: *What do you know about the Bradford Food Strategy?*
>
> Participant sixteen*: Yeah, well, other than talking to you about it Ben, I don't know anything. I haven't seen it anywhere, you know, I'm not unconnected, you know, in fact, quite the opposite, you know.*

In this account, the participant emphasises that they are well connected and that their lack of knowledge of the Food Strategy is not due to being disconnected. This could also suggest a disconnect between DEFRA, as the commissioning body, and the Local authority, given that the commission did not direct the participant to engage.

In another example, Participant Eleven demonstrates a lack of knowledge of the Food Strategy despite having been involved in a prior working group in which we had worked together and was catalysed by the Food Strategy.

> *Interviewer: What do you know about the Bradford Food Strategy?*
>
> *Participant eleven: No, I don't know.*
>
> *Interviewer: Don't know anything about it? No involvement so far either? That was the next question.*
>
> *Participant eleven: No, no*

This example suggests that although the Food Strategy had convened a working group, the participants had not recognised their involvement in the Strategy.

Participant Eighteen works for the Local authority's Waste Department, which has food waste as part of its remit. Again, they know little detail about the Food Strategy and are not actively engaged in its implementation, despite food waste being a core element of the Strategy.

> *Interviewer: What do you know about the Bradford Food Strategy?*
>
> *Participant eighteen: I asked the AD [Assistant Director] what [they] thought, and [they] went like this (shrugs), and [they] said, it's, its food waste, you know, okay, right. So that's, that's' I don't know a lot about the Food Strategy, and that's my honest opinion.*

This insight can be interpreted as demonstrating a disconnect between the ambition set out in the Food Strategy and the Implementation taking place within the Local authority. As the participant refers to themselves and their Assistant Director, who also did not know about the Food Strategy, this suggests a Departmental disconnection, rather than the individual Officer being disconnected.

Poor communication and engagement are therefore interpreted as contributing to the vision-implementation gap. On the surface, a focus on communication and engagement assumes that if the right actors knew about the Strategy, they would be able to influence it.

Food businesses have not been adequately engaged with the Strategy

Several themes emerge from interview data regarding a lack of engagement with food businesses throughout the development and implementation of the Strategy, highlighting the difficulty of enacting a food systems approach. Nuance around engagement with the private sector also emerges, as an interviewee identifies local tensions and explains how this makes it challenging to view the food sector as a

homogeneous group when engaging with the Food Strategy. The quote below suggests that private sector engagement was an afterthought and that adequate engagement with the private sector would have led to engagement with the Strategy. From the participant's perspective, the lack of engagement with the private sector is attributed to the absence of a vision or plan to do so. This suggests that a systems approach is not taken in practice.

> *''... the second thing for me which probably could be like an annex, or sort of sub-project within the strategy work is or update is the work of how to engage and bring the private sector and commercial organizations into the food system. it's mentioned a few times in the strategy, but it doesn't really have a clear vision or plan, and it might be something that we sort of learn from and look at sort of developing as time goes on'' (Participant Three)*

Whilst the participant states that business engagement might be developed in the future, they also state that there is no clear plan for doing so. It is, however, problematic that the food system is operated primarily by the private sector, yet the private sector has not been engaged in the production of the Food Strategy. The participant also states there is no clear vision or plan for engaging with businesses, and that it might be looked at, which suggests that there may be a disconnect between the outcomes set out within the Food Strategy and the practicalities of how the food system operates.

Digging deeper into the nuance of what it means to engage private sector food businesses, Participant Two draws attention to the complexity that the private sector is not a homogenous group and that within the sector there is competition and tension between businesses, which the Strategy would not capture by just looking at the private sector as a homogenous group.

> *''Like, oh, he's there, oh, it's interesting that he's there as well, and he's that, he's that [...] the broader strategy wouldn't see that, they'd just see sort of, players in the same space'' (Participant Two).*

This account suggests that engaging the private sector is inherently difficult and that the complexities are not properly understood by the Public Health Department (which also acknowledges this shortcoming in a later section). This nuance recognises the importance of acknowledging competition within the local market and the inherent tensions and competition among actors acting in their own interests.

In the quote below, Participant Three does not identify market competition as the challenge, but instead sees it as a lack of skills to engage food businesses. They also attribute a lack of engagement from the relevant District Partnerships as part of the challenge.

''... but it lies outside of the skill set of public health, and this is where I think we need [...] the Sustainability Partnership, Economic Development Partnership, colleagues from economic development across the Council, any business forums that we work with, the Local Enterprise Partnership, [...] but as we've come to realise with a lot of the food strategy work, the coordination has tended to, and I would imagine for the foreseeable future, will sit within Public Health... which is a challenge on its own'' (Participant Three).

The interviewee is aware of various bodies that may be able to work with them on the business engagement but claims they are not currently doing so. This perspective suggests that broader representation within the Council, including Partnerships beyond Public Health, would support the implementation of the Food Strategy, as the presence of such Partnerships would be able to engage effectively with food businesses. However, as noted by Participant Two, this view overlooks the competitive nature of a non-homogeneous sector, thus presenting structural challenges to engaging with the whole sector.

Examining the theme of engagement and communication, this sub-section has reported several perspectives from relevant actors who were unaware of the Food Strategy despite their roles being connected to food or inferred within the Food Strategy. Complexities regarding the translation of the strategy from abstract to practical, as well as the challenges of keeping partnership meetings relevant for a range of actors, were noted. Each represents a narrow part of the system and thus has specific interests. It was then highlighted that food businesses, despite being the primary organisations involved in the production and distribution of food, have not been involved in the development or implementation of the Food Strategy.

The Food Strategy is not a shared priority within the organisation

The point below underscores the need for adequate resources to bridge the vision-implementation gap, and the need for whole-organisational buy-in to secure those resources. To achieve whole-organisational buy-in, a comprehensive systems approach appears necessary to ensure food is not reduced to the responsibility of a single department.

Local Authorities across the country are expected to address a broad range of issues amid competing priorities. Despite the existence of an approved Food Strategy, interview accounts suggest that, in practice, food is pushed down the priority list due to competing pressures within the organisation. From the perspective of a Senior Officer who works closely with senior leaders and politicians, there is a subtle but important distinction between an organisation having a food strategy and one that strategically prioritises food within its operations. The Council Plan and the District Plan are

highlighted as key documents for local policy, and it is understood that food must be included within these documents if it is to be taken seriously within the Local authority. Accounts from within the Policy Team are further drawn upon to understand their perspectives on where food really sits within the broader, complex organisation. Through these accounts, it is reasoned that food is not a shared priority of the whole organisation.

Food Strategy ≠ Food as a Strategic Priority

Interviewees emphasize the importance of understanding the Food Strategy in relation to the wider organisational context, rather than as a standalone strategy. Participant Two explains that, whilst the Food Strategy has been developed by Public Health, it is one of many strategies within the Council's broader policy suite, and that it is a sub-strategy rather than part of the Local authority's core constitution.

> *Interviewer: ''What do you know about the Bradford Food Strategy?''*
>
> *Participant Two: ''I know enough to know that it was developed and led by Public Health, it's been adopted and approved as a corporate policy and strategy. It's one of many in that suite; it's not part of our Council's constitution or part of the policy framework, so as such, it's a sub-strategy to the Council Plan and part of the overall family of strategies and plans that the Wellbeing Board looks after on behalf of the District Partnership. So, it's [...] one of a number of thematic strategies...*

This insight suggests a series of competing priorities within the Local authority. The description of the strategy as 'one of many' particularly emphasises these competing priorities. Referring to food as a thematic strategy suggests that the participant views the food strategy as an isolated topic, rather than a cross-cutting and holistic topic that spans several departments, teams, and agendas.

Participant Fifteen shares their perspective on differentiating between the existence of a strategy and a strategic priority. Having spent time working with local politicians and Senior Officers, Participant Fifteen believes that strategies can sometimes be tokenistic or paid lip service to. From this insight, it is understood that commitment to a cause may be better understood by looking at whether and how resources are allocated to delivery. ''But you can, anyone can do a strategy, you can have all the pots and pans and plans in the world, but then it's about who's gonna deliver it, and I think something we pay lip service to having'' (Participant Fifteen).

If the Food Strategy is only paid lip service and attention is not given to delivery or to the provision of additional resources, it is understood that food is not a shared strategic organisational priority beyond the Public Health Department. This extract identifies the importance of adequate resources and demonstrates how unfeasible the proposals

within the Food Strategy are if they are not accompanied by sufficient resources.

Food is not embedded within other key documents

The insight below suggests that the vision-implementation gap stems from a lack of policy cohesion within the organisation, specifically that the Food Strategy is not embedded within the Council Plan. This reflects a lack of organisational coherence and siloed working. Interviewees suggest the Food Strategy is unlikely to become a priority due to structural and capacity constraints. While embedding it in the Council Plan could improve buy-in, this is seen as improbable given the organisation's focus on fewer priorities. A shrinking policy team further limits capacity for new commitments. More broadly, officers note that the Local authority relies on partnerships rather than direct governance, lacking the authority, budget, and control to implement policies independently.

For context, the Council Plan and the District Plan are documents which interviewees reference. The Council Plan is the parent plan for the whole Organisation. The District Plan is the shared plan for the district and is owned by various anchor organisations within the district. This is governed by the Wellbeing Board, which is the highest level of Governance within the District.

A Senior Officer, Participant Five, works within the policy team. Their view is that if the importance of the Food Strategy were referenced within the Council Plan, it would receive greater organisational support, as it would be referenced in the organisation's parent document. This implies that power and resources would be allocated to the Food Strategy if other actors within the organisation were mandated to support the agenda via its presence within the organisation's parent document, the Council Plan. They do not, however, believe that the Food Strategy will be included in the Council Plan due to constraints within the organisation and the focus of the new Chief Executive on doing less, better.

> *'' […] so I think it's important that it's referenced […] in the Council Plan, […] because … the new Chief Exec is definitely focused on doing less but doing it well. So, I think for it to be in a Council Plan as key priority would mean that you would automatically probably get better buy in across the Council. I'm not actually sure, given the challenges within the Council, that it's, it's gonna hit that mark (Participant Five).*

Based on this insight, the absence of the Food Strategy from the Council Plan — the organisation's parent document — together with the focus on doing less but better, suggests that the Food Strategy is not currently, and is unlikely to become, an organisational priority. There is an assumption within this quotation that being referenced in the Council Plan implies resourcing and power. It is not explicitly stated that being referenced in the Council Plan guarantees additional resource allocation, but

this is inferred. This suggests that the Local authority has agency over where it allocates resources. This, however, is challenged in the following sub-chapter of the findings, which explicitly focuses on financial challenges.

Impact of limited policy capacity & limits of the organisation to govern

The perspective of Policy Officers within the Organisation offers a nuanced view of the idea that the Food Strategy is not a shared priority of the Organisation, by examining the shrinking capacity of the policy team, which in turn reduces agency, and the lack of capacity to govern in a broader sense within the organisation. This suggests that the vision-implementation gap is linked to a reduction in agency within the organisation, a direct consequence of broader organisational challenges and competing pressures. In the extract below, a Senior Officer within a policy function suggests that their team is shrinking and that there is often not enough capacity to deal with existing functions, let alone take on new commitments.

> ''If you're saying, would my team have a tangible role… on actually delivering the strategy, I suppose that would be something that we would have to think about, because our policy team is shrinking, and what I'm not sure about is always that we've got enough people to go around and do everything that we would ideally like to do'' (Participant Five).

This insight underscores the importance of considering both the commitments made by the organisation and the capacity within the organisation to deliver them. If the policy team is shrinking and struggling to manage existing pressures, the challenge extends beyond securing organisational buy-in and support to securing additional resources and capacity to act differently. This insight also suggests that officer agency is being reduced and that officers are struggling to respond to current challenges.

Looking beyond the issue of organisational buy-in and capacity, Participant Four, a Policy Officer within the above-mentioned team, questions the Local authority's ability to govern and differentiates between governance and governing. This highlights the importance of agency being accompanied by resources.

> *''So, policy [team] doesn't have a budget, it doesn't have line management authority, at least at the level I work, so it doesn't […] have the traditional kind of assets that you might use to manage, lead, direct, […] there's no, there's no command of assets. So, a lot of the work is essentially around, kind of brokering and partnership forming (Participant Four).*

> *'' Governance is a really interesting term in itself because it's different from governing, […] we just don't have the authority and capacity to directly govern, we are dependent on our relationships with partners, […], and our ability to lead and influencee''. (Participant Four).*

An interpretation of this dilemma may therefore be that the challenge is not only about making the Food Strategy a shared priority within the organisation but also about acknowledging the limited capacity of officers to act, and about understanding what the limits of the Local authority might be in taking on additional non-statutory responsibilities, such as the actions set out within the Food Strategy.

There are no statutory obligations or national direction for local food strategies

A key challenge discussed in this subsection is the lack of national policy or statutory obligation that mandates Local Authorities to act on food sustainability, which in turn contributes to the vision-implementation gap. A Policy Officer shares their view on statute, explaining that whilst Local Authorities are legally required to provide services such as adult and children's social care, for example, topics such as sustainable food are treated as non-essential, particularly during periods of austerity when funding for public services is cut, meaning non-statutory work is not prioritised. Difficulties in determining where to house such a topic are discussed, as are the reasons why food is reduced to being treated as a public health matter. Issues around alienating the public also arise in the absence of national support and direction, before highlighting an example related to food waste, whereby National Policy has not been welcomed locally.

There is a need for statutory obligations to advance 'place-based' food work

Statutory obligations are set by the central government, and having a Food Strategy is not among them. This contributes to the vision-implementation gap.

For context, it is useful to draw on an extract from an interview with Participant Four, a longstanding Policy Officer, who explains how local functions and services are determined, but ultimately how the direction is set by national government. They explain that in times of financial struggle, the operation of the organisation is reduced to providing the services and functions for which Government holds them accountable.

> *''... a lot of the things that local government does are set nationally, and some of which is a statutory obligation. [...] we have statutory obligations in adult social care, [...] children's social care, and what we can and can't do is set in statute... and one [...] one of the consequences of not having much funding is that the, [...] services and functions we perform, increasingly get reduced to core statutory functions'' (Participant Four).*

A clear dilemma arises. When the national government defines statutory obligations, limited funding leads local authorities to focus solely on statutory duties. As a result, non-statutory initiatives such as Food Strategies receive neither the attention nor the resources required for successful implementation, since they are neither mandated nor

monitored by central government. It is therefore assumed that national direction is required for the successful implementation of Food Strategies, thus bridging the vision-implementation gap.

Central Government direction is not always positive or welcomed

Despite the clear articulation of the restrictions Local Authorities face in implementing the Food Strategy, and the strong case for increased National Policy, it is also clear that any mandate must be accompanied by relevant resources. An extract from an interview with the Local Authorities Recycling Manager explains the challenges they face with the recent implementation of the local food waste collection scheme. This highlights the importance of statutory obligations being accompanied by adequate resources.

> *''...we have this policy, and the new environmental bill, [...], the environmental policy, so we have to comply, whether we like it or not'' (Participant Eighteen)*
>
> *''... it's very expensive to run, I don't think I'd be out of turn saying £3.6 million that we've been allocated, but that's just to buy vehicles, food caddies, caddies for indoors, but not to run the service'' (Participant Eighteen).*

Here, Participant Eighteen states that whilst the Local Authorities are instructed to undertake such services, they are only remunerated for the capital expenditure and not for the increased revenue costs required to run the service. They also recognise the impact this has on the relationship between the Council and the general public, a theme explored in a later section.

> *''We're already on the backfoot, sometimes for introducing these things, because [communities] don't realise that we have no choice in this, and that's where we struggle sometimes, we've got that barrier between them and us at the moment'' (Participant Eighteen).*

This insight again highlights a link between national policy and local impact. Whilst the council has no say in undertaking this new food waste service, this creates tensions between the organisation and the public. It also contributes to the ongoing challenges within the Local authority, which is expected to take on more work with no additional funding. If the vision-implementation gap is to be bridged, this finding suggests that adequate resources from central government to support mandated obligations are required.

Food is relegated to public health, which limits a systems approach

Part of the challenge contributing to the vision-implementation gap seems to be that the Food Strategy is not owned by the Organisation as a whole and is reduced to the Public Health Department. Several extracts from interview data are drawn upon to link this to

the national policy landscape. In the quotation below, Participant Five echoes the above sentiments about food not being a statutory obligation, but also expands on this, noting that even if it were, the Local authority would not know how to manage it effectively within its existing structures.

> ''I think there's a deeper piece *[…]* that food is not a statutory obligation on the local authority, and creating a food system is not something that is a legal obligation, and even if there was, we wouldn't quite know which bit of the structure to put it in, or whose job it was to look after it'' (Participant Five).

The participant cited below perceives this challenge to be the same at the national level, where food does not sit neatly within a single Government Department and in fact spans many, each with competing goals, objectives, and priorities. As central government has no clear governance system for food, it seems inevitable that the challenge is felt at the local level too.

> *''… there's no single government department that is responsible for saying, right, here is our approach to sustainable food systems, and this is how we support local, local governments […] doesn't exist, it […] sits loosely across a variety of government departments. That unfortunately permeates down into Local Authorities […], and therefore, unfortunately, it ends up being levelled at public health'' (Participant Three).*

Offering additional explanations for why food has become a public health issue at a local level, Participant Three explains how the only dedicated funding within the local authority sits within the budget of the Public Health Department.

> ''… the other linked issue is that Public Health is generally the only team in Local Authorities that has any kind of ring-fenced money for work within food, which presents a problem in itself; it means that we have the ability to do some small projects and some sort of medium or larger projects, but very little systemic change, and also the over-reliance on other departments''. (Participant Three).

Given the broader financial challenges within the Organisation, and the only relatively secure funding being the Nationally distributed Public Health Grant, the portrayal of this puzzle, when presented this way, slots together and provides a reasonable explanation for why food is reduced to a public health issue and does not secure broader involvement from the organisation as a whole. A broader connection with the National Policy landscape must also be acknowledged, as the absence of policy to support Local Authorities in tackling their financial challenges, or indeed a national policy aimed at reducing public spending, cannot be overlooked. The vision-implementation gap, based on this insight, is therefore related to siloed working within the organisation, which is replicated in how central government approaches food governance. The fact that the Public Health Department is also relatively better resourced is also a product of central

government policy.

There is an absence of regional food policy

An absence of regional policy also contributes to the vision-implementation gap. Several participants recognise the need to look beyond the boundaries of the city, given the complexities of the food system, which do not align with local authority boundaries. Participant Nine, for example, notes the importance of a strategic focus in the middle ground, something that sits between local and national government. In West Yorkshire, and now emerging across the country, regional governance organisations, or Combined Authorities, are collectively made up of the Local Authorities within the region. In this case, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, or WYCA. Whilst some participants recognise there may be funding opportunities available that could be accessed through WYCA, a challenge is also identified in that the powers and limits of the Combined Authority are opaque and not properly understood locally. Participant Twelve is a Sustainability Officer within the Combined Authority who does not believe food is being looked at strategically within WYCA. They also explain how food needs to be prioritised locally in order to become a regional priority, given that the Combined Authority is a collective of Local Authorities.

The need for regional food policy

Stating the need for a strategic focus between the local and the national level, Participant Nine recognises the limitations of city-based food strategies in that the food system does not take place within the city boundaries. They also believe that the National Food Strategy is too broad, and that something is required in the middle.

> *''I think that something else that needs to be considered [...] it's all well and good having these strategies for a city, or for a place, but the food system is not, it's not done in a city, so I think we need like regional, [...] food strategy, [...], because [...] we have [...] the National Food Strategy, [...] then it almost needs to be a middle ground '' (Participant Nine).*

This insight highlights the broader challenge of local approaches to addressing food-system issues at a local level, as the food system is multi-spatial and spans city boundaries. Further discussing devolved power to the regional level, Participant Eight notes the opacity of the processes and explains that it is unclear what powers exist within Regional Government and what this means for shaping the local food environment.

> *''...it's not very easy to understand what powers have been devolved to Manchester [Combined Authority], or what powers have been devolved to West-Yorkshire [Combined Authority] ... but they're definitely different, right? ... what are the upper*

limits of the current knowledge of our local ability to legislate in favour of a positive food environment?'' (Participant Eight).

The above quotes highlight a perceived need for a regional food policy and a lack of understanding of the broader regional devolution policy process. Both examples attribute agency to regional government, whilst the latter point suggests a lack of understanding of the regional opportunity to address food system challenges. The following section presents a perspective from within regional government to understand their view on the vision-implementation gap.

Why Regional Governments are not focusing on Food Strategies

The participant below suggests that a lack of policy capacity within the West-Yorkshire Combined Authorities (WYCAs) sustainability team is one reason why connections are not being made between regional support programmes and the contents of local food strategies. Participant Twelve is an Officer who primarily works with businesses on sustainability and the circular economy. The extracts below offer their perspectives on why there is an absence of a regional approach to sustainable food.

> *''Our, our policy capacity around business sustainability isn't what it could do it be really. So, we haven't got people that are picking up stuff like, what's going on in Bradford around the Food Strategy, how might that impinge on businesses?'' (Participant Twelve).*

The participant further explains that whilst there is a separate Climate and Environment Policy Team, it is not focusing on food as their main focus is on carbon and energy. Due to a lack of capacity to look beyond this focus, the participant assumes that food is left to the city level as a strategic issue.

> *''... we have a separate Climate and Environment Policy Team, [...] I guess, [...] their focus is far more on sort of, carbon, and when we say carbon, we really mean energy [...] carbon, slash, energy, [...] mitigation and climate adaptation, you know, the flooding, all that kind of stuff [...]I think their policy capacity is really kind of eaten up by those large areas of work, and I don't know that they've particularly got a huge amount of capacity to be thinking about food [...], I guess they kind of let the District's focus on that'' (Participant Twelve).*

Based on the above understanding, it can be seen that a reason for regional government not focusing on food within its sustainability work is a primary focus on carbon reduction through energy, rather than looking at sustainability more holistically and including food as a priority area.

Local government needs to prioritise food in order for the Combined Authorities to focus on food

It is suggested that local government Directors and Leaders must first prioritise food as a strategic matter to influence the Combined Authority's focus. Participant Twelve explains their view of how the Combined Authority operates financially and how decisions are made regarding funding for strategic priorities.

> *''... the investment plans of the Combined Authority which shape... all of our funding [...] goes through our assurance processes. The first stage of which is a strategic assessment [...] So, if a project comes in, it's strategically assessed against [...] the investment strategy... the assessment strategy is a piece of work that's agreed at the Combined Authority level as to what the priorities for the region are in terms of where we should be investing more money. So, if food strategies are, are a priority for our constituent local authorities... and that's one of the key priorities if they want to get into that investment strategy.... that [...] opens up then the ability to shape where funding goes [...] so it's ... getting your leaders and directors to be talking about food strategy as a regional priority'' (Participant Twelve).*

Following this logic, it is suggested that Food Strategies must be a shared priority of the individual Local Authorities in order to permeate into Combined Authorities, thereby indicating both agency and power at the local authority level to influence the priorities of the regional level. However, as a previous section demonstrates, Food Strategies do not appear to be a shared priority of the Local Authorities, and are therefore unlikely to permeate into the investment strategies of the Combined Authority or to receive the required support and resources. This implies that if Food Strategies are to become a local priority, they would become a regional priority, thus supporting the bridging of the vision-implementation gap.

However, Participant Fourteen offers another perspective, arguing that dedicated funding for Food Strategy-related work may not necessarily be required and that food may instead be embedded within an existing funding stream within the Combined Authority.

> *''..., there are still funds around that the Council and increasingly through devolution with West-Yorkshire Combined Authority have as additional funding steams and it's really about the flex. Either it's a fund that pays for food related stuff, or it's a fund that pays for something that indirectly is designed to have a food intervention that leads to the outcomes that you're seeking'' (Participant Fourteen).*

This participant's perspective suggests that food may not need to be an explicit priority for the local authority, but creativity could help integrate food-related outcomes within existing funding frameworks. It does, however, highlight the importance of additional resources, which, as noted throughout these findings, are largely absent.

Local Food Strategies Are Misaligned with Global Problems

This subsection explores the global food industry alongside Local Food strategies and questions whether they are the right tools for solving the challenges contained within the Food Strategy, thereby highlighting the conceptual suitability of the Food Strategy for addressing the challenges set out within it. From this perspective, the vision-implementation gap arises from a misalignment between the proposed problem set out within the strategy and the strategy as a solution to those problems. Given that the UK only produces approximately 60% of the food it consumes (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2024), reliance on global food production limits what can be realised locally and reinforces the need for National Policy.

Two participants acknowledge the structural and systemic nature of the problems within the food system, recognising that the root cause lies elsewhere, even though the symptoms surface locally. With this in mind, they argue that local government must be clear about its role in such structural challenges and act accordingly.

Participant Nineteen, referenced below, describes the food system as a global industry. On the face of it, they argue, the problems within that system may seem local, but they contend that the problems we see are actually caused elsewhere. The participant therefore argues that Local Authorities need to be clear about where the problem really lies and be pragmatic about what can be done at a local level.

> *'' I think, I think being really clear that food is [...] a global industry, [...] so a lot of the drivers around what seem a local issue, are actually happening elsewhere, and understand that, understanding your power to intervene and to create change'' (Participant Nineteen).*

This perspective highlights that structural challenges and incentives shape the problem, and that Local Authorities need to be mindful of the appropriate level at which to intervene. This view suggests that the Food Strategy is misaligned with the scale of the problems set out in the document itself.

The findings presented above highlight a range of policy and governance-related challenges that significantly constrain the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy. Participants identified a lack of communication and limited engagement of relevant actors in the Strategy's development and delivery, alongside a perception that the Food Strategy remains confined to the Public Health Department rather than being a shared organisational priority. The absence of strong National Policy is seen to further restrict progress, as is a lack of focus on food at the regional level. Participants recognised that many food system issues stem from global structures, underscoring the need for Local Authorities to be pragmatic when identifying the levers for change available to them. These findings reveal that weak multi-level policy alignment and an absence of cross-departmental commitment are significantly hindering the effective

implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy. This demonstrates how the food agenda was siloed from the outset, reduced to a task for the Public Health Department rather than a broader set of stakeholders, including the private sector.

4.3.1.2. Impact of Significant Financial Challenges

This section presents challenges, drawing on the insights of those interviewed, regarding the financial difficulties encountered when implementing Urban Food Strategies. The interviewees make it clear that the financial difficulties faced by Local Authorities significantly hinder the ability to drive strategic change, highlighting budget uncertainties, external cost burdens, and the risk of financial collapse as key issues. The role of Private Sector funding is also raised, highlighting difficulties in accessing resources, the disconnect between available finance and local goals, and the broader issue of finance responding to symptoms rather than addressing structural problems.

The link between the successful implementation of the strategy and the broader financial challenges facing the local authority is highlighted as a key contributor to the vision-implementation gap. Participant Three below highlights the severity of the financial challenges currently facing Local Authorities.

> *''...'' the challenge here, it's... that most local authorities are so pressured, and finances are... financial risk of collapse... '' (Participant Three).*

As highlighted by several participants throughout this section, there is growing concern that, without adequate financial support from central government, Local Authorities' ability to sustain their operations and invest in long-term projects, such as initiatives proposed within the Food Strategy, is increasingly compromised. This point underscores the importance of understanding the Food Strategy within the context of the broader Organisation. Based on this account and other shared views throughout this section, the negative state of local authority finances is understood to be significantly affecting the organisation's ability to deliver its basic functions, let alone non-statutory matters such as Food Strategies.

Unsustainable Finances

Participant Fourteen believes that the financial situation faced by Local Authorities at present may be the worst ever and alludes to the inevitability of further reductions in capacity.

> *''Tens of Local Authorities who are facing probably the hardest, most unprecedented financial challenges they've ever faced in their life[...], a lot of assumptions that the council would lead on an issue or take a role in it, it's highly likely that a number of places will not be able to do that (Participant Fourteen).*

This participant's insight suggests that Local Authorities are facing significant financial challenges, with no sign of additional funding flowing from central government. This point emphasises the challenges facing the organisation and highlights the practical limitations that these financial constraints have on the organisation. The participant highlights a disconnect between the expectations placed on Local Authorities by other actors and the financial realities they face. It is suggested that this is not just a local problem but a broader issue affecting other Local Authorities across the United Kingdom.

Offering additional insight into the financial challenges Local Authorities are grappling with, Participant Three highlights operational constraints that limit where available funding flows. They explain that core services, such as Children's and Adults' Social Care, are so expensive and of such high priority to the organisation that the organisation's investments are heavily weighted towards these frontline services. As Local Authorities are so focused on delivering immediate, essential services (such as adult social care, children's services, housing), they lack the time and capacity to allocate attention to or invest in food systems, even if these could improve public health in the long term.

> *''The challenge here, it's about that most local authorities are so pressured [...]that, A. they can't physically invest money into food systems, because all the money is allocated against... day to day operations of the local authority, and then they also have no capacity to be able to take it even from a sort of non-financial perspective to embed it across local level, because we're so pressured with the adult social care, or children's services (Participant Three)*

The challenges faced by the organisation serve as a reminder that the broader state of the organisation's finances must be considered. In the account above, Participant Three explains that it is not just money that is absorbed in funding frontline services, but also Officer capacity. The financial state of local government as a whole cannot be ignored or understated when questioning why the (non-statutory) Food Strategy is not receiving the attention it requires, thus contributing to the presence of a vision-implementation gap.

Future budgets are unknown and working on year-to-year settlements

Participants Fifteen and Nineteen discuss the impact of short-term funding commitments from central to local government, which is understood to be a key contributor to the vision-implementation gap. They convey that solving problems and working strategically requires long-term leadership, commitment, and resources. However, the lack of resources at present and uncertainty around future resources mean that longer-term work becomes unattainable. This demonstrates the power

central government has over local government through the resources it makes available.

> *''And that's the only thing about public funding[…] it's third or fourth one year financial settlement[…] how can you have joined up policy and investment in things like this if you don't know what your budget is going to be the following year? How can you employ people on that basis? How can you create new jobs (Participant Nineteen).*

> *'…, scarcity of resource, it's forcing us into short term […], settlements from government are all over, you don't know what you're getting, you get it for one year, you don't know what you're getting the next'' (Participant Fifteen)*

It appears that the challenges arising from uncertainty over future funding settlements are beyond the local authority's control, so it is unclear whether such challenges can be addressed within the organisation. The example above highlights the importance of financial stability within Local Authorities and the need for long-term funding commitment from central government, enabling Councils to plan and act on a longer timescale than they are currently financially able to. This directly affects Officers trying to implement elements of the Food Strategy, as they are unable to make the commitments or investments required, as set out in the Strategy, due to the lack of certainty around the next annual funding cycle. Without clarity over future funding cycles, the commitments to food-related projects and programmes required to deliver against the Food Strategy cannot be made.

Long-term outlook for local authority finances

Due to the significant challenges Local Authorities across the country are facing, it is reported below that high levels of borrowing from central government have taken place in order for Local Authorities to remain financially solvent. Recognition is shown of intergenerational poverty and the long-term impact this borrowing will have, in that the debts accrued now, just to remain solvent (not necessarily for any strategic investment), will remain for the next forty years.

> *''We're gonna be borrowing for about forty years to get ourselves out of this hole, next generation's gonna pick up the tab'' (Participant Fifteen)*.

This point highlights the desperate measures that Local Authorities are being forced to take in order to remain financially solvent.

The participant below highlights how Local Authorities are selling off assets in order to remain financially solvent and how this impacts the organisation's ability to have a direct influence over the food system. Participant Sixteen shares their views on selling off council farms and indicates the negative impact that such a decision will have on the

local authority. They refer to a lever of change that the Council could have accessed, namely working with tenant farmers to determine how Council-owned land might be used, but this is a missed opportunity if the land is sold off to plug a short-term budget shortfall.

> *''Yeah, well, and also selling off your tenant farms, it's not gonna[...] going to solve your problems, [...] that money is going to go so quickly, whereas you could be having a stable income every year from the, the rent that people are paying, [...], surely the council that can have the terms of the tenancy be, this land will be used to produce food in whatever way'' (Participant Sixteen)*

Furthermore, Participant Sixteen links this asset sale to broader national problems, including the ageing of the farming population and the restriction of access to farmland for those not born into farming families.

> *''...the biggest issue is the loss of people coming into agriculture from outside of it, and with such an aging sector, we need young people to come into farming and the only way they can do that, If they haven't been born on a farm is to come in as a tenant farmer[...] that land is going to be sold to what, developers to build a load of houses on? (Participant Sixteen).*

The interviewee suggests that, as the local authority has been reduced to selling off its farmland, it is not only short-sighted, having only plugged a temporary funding gap, but it has also restricted future farmers from accessing tenanted land. The final point hinted at by the participant is that, if the land is sold for housing development, this is a much bigger national problem, as the stock of productive land for food production is being reduced due to reactive budget plugging, rather than any considered strategic trade-off. The broader context of these findings demonstrates how the farms are being sold off in response to financial struggles facing the organisation, a product of national government withdrawing funding to local government . In this example, the local authority cannot set requirements around farming practices on its tenant farms, as the broader challenges facing the organisation are forcing the sale of those farms. This demonstrates where financial burdens are contributing to the vision-implementation gap.

Challenges faced by Public Health Department in making upstream investments

The following accounts are from Senior Officers within the Public Health Department. Their accounts explain the challenges they face when trying to make investments into the upstream structural issues related to food, particularly emphasised is how it is central government which determine set the parameters for where funding can be spent.

''... I'm part of the leadership team, which have authority over the distribution of the public health grant in Bradford, which obviously has to be balanced against different interests that sit within the Council as well as, [...] particularly during times of austerity [...]. In terms of the financing at the minute, the public health grant, [...] the public health outcomes don't have explicit outcomes around the food system in them and therefore, as a result, it is very difficult to justify investment against a food system when there's technically not an outcome that we're looking to see and it also fits back to the age old issue of about how, where in the timeframe of causality do you put the majority of the investment'' (Participant Eight)

The above account identifies three key challenges regarding investment in addressing structural issues. The first is a recurring theme, namely that the Organisation's broader financial state dictates where investments are made and how competing priorities are balanced. Secondly, there are no explicit national outcomes for food, which makes it difficult for Officers to make investments, particularly where other explicit outcomes do exist. The third point concerns the timeframe of causality in investment decisions, although it does not appear that Officers have much agency over this for the reasons stated above. This participant insight suggests that the challenges regarding financing actions set out within the Food Strategy require changes to the way that central government funds local government. Although the Public Health Leadership team have agency to allocate resources, it is central government which sets the parameters within which Officer agency can be enacted.

The following extract suggests that, where there is agency regarding investment within the Public Health Department, it occurs only for small-scale investments, which are insufficient to create systemic change within the food system.

''The other issue linked is that public health is generally the only team in local authorities that has kind of ring fenced money for work within food, [...], it means that we have the ability to do some small projects and some sort of medium or large projects, but very little systematic change'' (Participant Three).

The challenges related to what the Public Health Grant can be allocated towards appear to stem from restrictions set by the central government, but also the broader financial state of the local authority. Where financing is available, it is not enough to tackle the grand ambitions set out within the Food Strategy, hence contributing to the vision-implementation gap. If the gap is to be bridged, it is suggested that additional funding is required, and that specific outcomes related to food must be determined by Government in order for funding to be allocated from the Public Health Grant.

Lack of large-scale investment available to Local Authorities for implementing Food Strategies

Lack of access to large-scale investment is a key contributor to the vision-implementation gap. Interviewees discuss the scale of investment required to drive strategic change within the food system and express doubt that this can be generated within the District. The Senior Officer responsible for the Food Strategy notes that there are no known large-scale funding pots for Local Authorities to access, and also highlights challenges in accessing funding more generally.

The above sub-section identified that the Public Health Department is only able to make small investments in short-term projects, but it's acknowledged that large-scale investment is required to be impactful and transformational. It is understood by the participant that, however, no known or accessible large-scale funding is available to the local authority to implement the changes it sets out within its Food Strategy.

> *''So [name removed] will say, well the biggest thing we can do is free school meals for everyone aged zero to twenty, [...] that's about £20bn [...]it's utterly unaffordable'' (Participant Fifteen).*

> *''... but we don't have... sort of large-scale funding external to the Council , [...] if we look at it from a food system perspective, there's not like, there's a pot of money'' (Participant Three)*

With the above points in mind, it is clear that the size and scale of the investment required far exceed what is currently obtainable by the Council. As a result, many high-level ambitions set out in the Strategy are largely unattainable and require significant external funding that is not currently available to Bradford Council. This matters because, although participants have been able to set a local vision, they lack the resources to deliver effectively what they have set out to do within the Strategy.

Investable propositions need to be developed

The lack of funding to develop investable propositions is seen as a contributor to the vision-implementation gap in the Bradford Food Strategy, as the proposed interventions within the Strategy have yet to be developed.

Drawing on the perspective of Participant Six, it was highlighted that proposed initiatives within the food strategy that support a sustainable food system require further development, and that seed funding is needed to develop and create a marketable investment package. Such funding is not currently being made available.

'' I would like to think that what we actually need next [...], is kind of seed corn funding to work up some of these [...] project opportunities, to the point where they can be marketed and promoted to attract inward investment'' (Participant Six)

The importance of funding is highlighted by the participant above in order to develop investable propositions; thus, the challenge is understood to be that project development funding is not being made available. As there is no funding, there is no capacity to take proposals from ideation to delivery, thus contributing to the gap between the vision set out within the Food Strategy and its practical realisation. This quote serves as a reminder of the conceptual limitations of local approaches to food system change. Food Partnerships are bottom-up, voluntary, non-regulatory approaches to driving change. Whilst the participant above offers their time to the agenda pro bono, they identify the need for additional resources in order to develop a business case to attract inward investment. Whilst the participant can offer their time, skills and knowledge to the agenda, they note that 'seed corn funding' is now required in order to move the work on from ideation to investment ready. This highlights that whilst voluntary approaches to local food governance can take the agenda so far, there comes a time when additional resources are required; resources that are not currently available.

The public sector does not typically deal with investors

The challenge presented below suggests that investment exists regarding food, but that dealing with such investors to generate finance from them is not a skill set typically held within the local authority.

> *"... investors [...] putting money into some seed work around the Bradford food economy might just show that there is a return on investment when, for very little money, they could get a big return because they would, they'd have first mover advantage, but it involves dealing with people of a world that most of us in the public sector have never dealt with, and talking to them in a language they understand'' (Participant Fourteen).*

This aligns with a prior point regarding the need to develop investable propositions and the finance required to do so. This view suggests that the local authority not only lacks the resources to develop investable propositions but also the knowledge or skills to engage effectively with investors (especially as Public Health Officers are responsible for the Strategy). This perspective assumes that, with the right skills and resources to generate investable propositions, investors would allocate funding to Bradford-based initiatives as set out within the Food Strategy, thus bridging the vision-implementation gap.

Intra-organisational resources are separate and not collectivised

This section examines the disconnect between finance and resources for shared goals across organisations. In short, whilst there may (or may not) be a shared collective vision regarding the food system contained within the Food Strategy, there are suggestions that finances at the local level are not aligned and that there are in fact tensions between organisational budgets, which prevent collaboration from taking place. In turn, this contributes to the gap between vision and the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy.

Participant 2, referenced below, acknowledges the importance of cohesive resource allocation to work together effectively. They suggest, however, that resources are fragmented, which leads to individual actors acting out of self-interest rather than collective interest towards a shared pursuit.

> *''If you're able to navigate your resources collectively towards a shared vision and goal, and anyone, everyone benefits... [...] it shouldn't be, how do I benefit, but how do we collectively benefit?'' (Participant Two)*

This insight is understood to refer to the challenges facing underfunded public and third-sector services. It is understood that the participant is referring to organisations needing to pursue goals that benefit themselves, rather than being able to genuinely collaborate with other organisations. Acknowledging the challenge of sharing resources in partnership across organisations, Participant Nineteen reflects on the realities of what this entails in practice.

> *''...because we become narrowed in our focus, [...] we've [...] had to create these [...] health and wellbeing boards, but the problem with that is, the reality of that is, they are still individual organisations with individual competing budgets, and really that notion of us pooling and working collaboratively, [...] it sounds fine in principle, and actually the [...] policy person [...] partnership who's in that job, [...], anybody, whose got the word partnership coordinator[...], they'll be all for it, but then when you actually go back into the guts of the organisation, the people actually to make it happen, it's not their job to do that, and they go, wait a minute, you mean, I've got to stop spending money on this, to give it to those guys'' (Participant Nineteen).*

This extract suggests that whilst the organisation at the board or partnership level supports working together and pooling resources, the practicalities at the service level do not necessarily align. This would mean reducing the budget in one part of the organisation to increase the budget of another. Regarding the Food Strategy, this challenge highlights the complexities involved in reallocating resources towards the initiatives set out within the Strategy, particularly where multiple Council Departments or external organisations are involved.

This set of findings reveals that severe financial constraints fundamentally limit thelocal authority's capacity to implement the Bradford Food Strategy. Participants highlighted persistent budget uncertainties, external cost pressures, and the broader risk of financial collapse as major barriers to strategic action. These insights suggest that without stable, coordinated, and strategically aligned funding, the ambitions of the Bradford Food Strategy remain difficult to achieve.

4.3.1.2. Resource Challenges & Organisational Culture

This section sets out the findings from interview participants, coded as cultural challenges to the implementation of the Food Strategy. Whilst culture is inevitably difficult to define, and there are overlaps between results sections within this thesis, the two key headings are framed as 1. A negative reputation and perception of the Council, and 2. Culture of siloed working.

Impact on Staff Morale

A theme alluded to in the above section by Participant Eight regarding negative perceptions of being associated with the Council as an employee is expanded upon in this section. This addresses the impact of low morale within the Council due to negative perceptions and judgements from the wider public. It is suggested that a poor working culture is a product of austerity and the local authority having to make difficult financial decisions. In the example below, a connection is made between the local authority being forced to close a waste refuse site and how this feeds into a poor relationship between the local authority and members of the public. Regarding the vision-implementation gap of the Food Strategy, the point below suggests that existing in such a negative environment has an impact on staff morale and negatively shapes officer motivation. It is understood that low morale prevents Officers from supporting non-statutory objectives, such as those set out within the Food Strategy.

A quote from Participant Eighteen draws a link between the difficult financial decisions that have been made within the Waste Department and how this has an impact on staff morale.

> *''... there is a massive budget deficit isn't there, and all departments, particularly ours, because we've just had to close three household waste sites, and we've had to put prices up as well, some really tough decisions have had to be made, and it obviously impacts on us, I think it impacts on moral as well [...] ''I can see it, and it impacts on sickness I think as well, because I hear that, the stress of people, and I'm hearing it more and more now than I ever heard it before, and I've been here thirty odd years'''' (Participant Eighteen)*

The above quote illustrates the negative impact that working within an organisation facing severe financial challenges can have on staff morale, particularly where cost-

saving decisions affect the public. This is understood to be relevant to the vision–implementation gap of the Bradford Food Strategy, as it highlights the practical realities experienced by Officers within the local authority. As noted in the policy section, food is not a statutory obligation and therefore relies largely on voluntary efforts within the organisation, as there is no organisational leadership directing or requiring Officers to engage with the Food Strategy. This point is expanded upon in a later findings section.

The quote below is from an Officer within the Skills Department who offers insight into the culture that is currently shaping their Department and hindering organisational collaboration. Participant One links a lack of collaboration and partnership working within their own department (Skills) to the broader financial landscape of diminishing financial resources. They also see that this is negatively impacting staff wellbeing and is a contributor to a lack of collaboration within the organisation regarding support for broader agendas, such as the Food Strategy, which is not directly related to their areas of work.

> *''…I think the resistance comes down to people often being very busy with what they're focused on… with quite a lot of pressure […]to charge for their services, […], so you know, they're trying to make their service profitable, or to be zero cost to the council […], they're probably under resourced, so because of that, someone's working with systems that aren't as fully functional as they'd like, so they're experiencing some stress, they're feeling like they're burdened with their daily workload, and then trying to carve out some space to work with others is, there's real challenges in that''. (Participant One).*

The above quote implies a connection between a challenging organisational context and a culture of poor collaboration. This demonstrates how the retraction of central government is playing out, with the Skills Department required to be zero-cost or profit-generating for the Council. This example suggests that, in pursuit of profitability or zero cost to the Council, additional work, such as supporting the Food Strategy, is not prioritised, as the primary goal of the Department and Team is to reduce costs – not to advance an agenda for which it is neither directly responsible nor funded.

This findings section has presented insight into participants' perceptions of the cultural challenges faced by Local Authorities in implementing the Bradford Food Strategy. Whilst not directly addressing the implementation of the Food Strategy itself, these insights paint a rich picture of the contextual environment in which Bradford Council is currently operating, within which the implementation of the Food Strategy cannot be understood in isolation.

The following sections provide insight from interviewees into the cultural challenges related to working in siloes. Two framings are used, focusing on inter-organisational siloes within the Council and intra-organisational siloes between the Council and

external organisations. Section 3.2.1. looks at perceptions of intra-organisational cultural challenges, or cultural challenges between various teams and departments within the Council. Section 3.2.2. explores intra-organisational cultural challenges, or cultural challenges between the Council and other organisations.

There is a lack of collaboration within the Council

This section draws on participant insights into cultural challenges within the Council that hinder collaboration and demonstrate a lack of a systems approach in practice. Firstly, a lack of alignment between strategy and operations is discussed. Participant One raises an issue around organisational values and organisational practice, and doubts that the former are truly embedded in the latter. They believe that the organisation is so complex and disjointed that they are unable to know what is happening across it. The following topic explores the nature of competing priorities within the local authority. Participant Nineteen contrasts supermarkets, which have clearly defined functions, with the complexity of Local Authorities. Here, it is presented that the complex nature of local authority demands leads to non-collaborative working. Participant Four then raises a previously covered challenge within the policy section, noting that there are just too many strategies and priorities for Officers to meaningfully engage with, thus a lack of collaboration is inevitable. Finally, in this sub-section, Participant Eight discusses the importance of accountability and shares their perspective that accountability for the Food Strategy was essentially passed from an organisational level to a Departmental level. Collectively, this section suggests the importance of understanding the context in which the Food Strategy exists.

Misalignment between strategy and operation

Misalignment between organisational values and organisational practice is a challenge that Participant One discusses. The participant quoted below acknowledges the importance of organisational values but suggests that they are not effectively reinforced or embedded in the organisation's operations.

> *'' It's really important to have values and to be clear with them, but it's also, how are we seeing those be reinforced, or built into our working day or week? Or whatever it, that's the challenge for the organisation'' (Participant One).*

Despite collaboration being a shared organisational goal, the participant suggests that it does not happen in practice. To further illustrate this, the participant explains that Officers work across broad working areas but are often unaware of what one another are working on, as each focus on their own area of expertise or siloed knowledge. The participant also suggests that different departments have different agendas and that they are not always aligned with one another.

''And one of the challenges [...], is that we're all in our own particular area of expertise or siloed knowledge, and so trying to find constructive and effective ways of actually knowing what the left or the right or the foot or the hand is doing[...] it sometimes feels... some, one particular area is committed to this, and another area, maybe another part of the council has a different agenda, and so you would think that there'd be some good alignment with those two agendas, but it seems at times not to be in it, It just feels a little frustrating'' (Participant One).

From these accounts, it is suggested that there is a disconnect between the values the Council wishes to adhere to and those it actually adheres to in practice, particularly as the perception of these values is claimed to differ across departments. The above participant suggests that this is a broader organisational challenge, and it is therefore interpreted as not necessarily unique to the Food Strategy. This is relevant to understanding the vision-implementation gap, however, as it demonstrates the cultural disconnect across thocal authority. As previously established, the Food Strategy is a public health initiative – not one shared across the organisation.

Competing priorities within the organisation

It is suggested that the cultural challenges experienced within the local authority stem from the complex matters it deals with. Reflecting on the challenge of not being joined up as an organisation, Participant Nineteen suggests that the nature of a local authority is inherently complicated and comes with a variety of trade-offs that must be navigated in order to utilise the limited resources it has available.

''...even as a council, we're not joined up, and we are not corporate enough, and it's because actually[...] we have to deal with everything, you know, I think it's really easy for a private company, even something like Morrison's which is quite complicated[...] it's quite a straight forward thing they do[...] they fill it with food, and they sell it to people. Whereas actually we're doing far more than that, and we're having to consider everything, all the time, and understand those trade-offs, this, you know, it's difficult, it's not easy'' (Participant Nineteen).

The key point drawn from the above interview extract is that the participant alludes to the organisation's inherent complexity as a factor that hinders working in a joint, collaborative way. This suggests that part of the challenge in implementing the Food Strategy is that it exists within the wider complexities that Local Authorities face. It also highlights the importance of limited resources and how decisions and trade-offs are made within the boundaries of the resources available, as established in previous sections, which are dictated by central government.

There is a lack of Accountability or Ownership

The absence of clear accountability or organisational ownership for the Food Strategy appears to contribute to its vision–implementation gap, as there is no formal directive from senior officers requiring disengaged departments to support the delivery of the activities outlined in the Strategy. The following paragraphs discuss accountability and ownership of the food agenda and offer insight from a Senior Officer who led the development of the Food Strategy. The quote below highlights how the Food Strategy has advanced due to motivation and the ability to exercise agency within the Public Health Department, rather than to a mandate or instruction from the Organisational Leadership.

> *''If I'm totally honest, it genuinely comes down to the personal motivations of individuals working in a team. There is very little[…] there is no drive from elsewhere… (Participant Eight).*

This is understood to be problematic and to contribute to the vision-implementation gap, as the Food Strategy references various other departments, yet those in charge of the Strategy lack the power or mandate to instruct others to be involved in the delivery of the initiatives within the Strategy. This also highlights a broader gap in food system governance, in that Local Authorities, as whole organisations, are not taking a role – in this case, it is just one department.

The quote below highlights a cultural challenge related to a lack of accountability in the commissioning of the Food Strategy. Participant Eight states that although the strategy was initiated by the Executive, the responsibility was then passed on to the Public Health Department, with no accountability to provide updates. The request to develop a Food Strategy by the Chief Executive Officer is therefore understood as being tokenistic and symbolic.

> *''I think the executive interest in food, where it initiated the work […] was probably time limited down to a sort of forty eight hour period, after which they then dispatched it and the fact that it was picked up by officers that wanted to maintain, sustain and improve food meant that it happened, not because the governance and accountability was then put in place to ensure we kept returning with food [strategy], […] Like, oh, nobody was going to ever really follow up, […] nobody in the Health & Wellbeing Board has come back and say hey, what's happened to that 2017 agenda, […] So the fact it landed with a motivated and interested party, who then made it into something bigger and better, is again very much down to the individuals and the motivations within that of wanting to embrace it'' (Participant Eight).*

The above insights suggest that the CEO's request was to develop a Strategy, but that there was not necessarily an ambition to implement the proposals set out within it. This perspective is inferred from the lack of governance or accountability in place following

the CEO's request for the development of a Food Strategy. Although the Officer was afforded agency to produce a strategy, that agency was not accompanied by the relevant power or resources within the organisation to successfully implement the initiatives set out within it, hence contributing to the gap between the proposed vision and the lack of implementation.

Lack of collaboration between organisations

This section contains various insights into the challenges of perceived poor collaboration between the Council and partner organisations. Whilst not explicitly focused on the Food Strategy, it provides valuable context on the difficulties of partnership working. Participant Five, a Senior Policy Officer, believes there are too many partnerships for the available resources and that relationships are destined to be strained when operating with limited resources. The absence of delivery partnerships is also addressed, emphasising that people want to be involved in strategic decision-making partnerships but often not in delivery partnerships. When discussing cultural challenges between the Council and partner organisations, Participant Five, a senior policy figure whose role involves partnership management, notes that there are too many partnerships for the available resources. They suggest that relationships can be damaged between partners if there are more demands than the Council can meet.

> *''... maybe have too many partnerships, and that's too many partnerships for the resource that we have to manage the partnerships well, [...] then you can damage relationships when you don't operate within an honest and open and transparent environment about the possibilities of what can be delivered'' (Participant Five).*

The above quote is taken to mean that relationships between organisations and the local authority become tarnished because the strategies and relevant partnerships (in this case, the Food Partnership) are misled by the contents of the Strategy document. Partner organisations then become disenfranchised when the resources needed to deliver against the Strategies are not made available, and relationships are damaged. The above quote is understood to challenge the overreach of Strategies and Partnerships, which set ambitions beyond what they are feasibly able to implement, resulting in damaged relationships.

Further to the theme of partnerships, Participant Five (quoted below) reflected on their experience of managing local collaborations, noting that the focus is often on contributing to the development of a strategy document rather than on delivering the actions it proposes. Although this comment does not refer specifically to the Food Strategy but to local authority strategies more broadly, it remains relevant, as it suggests that the gap between vision and implementation is not unique to the Food Strategy but represents a wider challenge faced by local authorities.

> ‘’…people are quite wedded *[…]* to having more partnerships than they can cope with within their diary, and then action doesn’t happen between meetings to create, *[…]* the change. […] we have quite a lot of strategic partnerships, as decision making bodies, but the structure isn’t underneath it to do the delivery […] don’t necessarily want to come to the delivery partnership, they want to go to the decision making partnership’’ (Participant Five).

These accounts, when presented together, suggest the importance of both strategic direction and delivery capacity, and indicate that the latter is lacking. This contributes to understanding the vision-implementation gap in the Bradford Food Strategy by suggesting that such a gap is not limited to the Food Strategy but reflects a much larger challenge facing the local authority.

Summary

Overall, this subsection of findings highlights two main cultural challenges affecting the implementation of the Food Strategy: a negative reputation and perception of the Council, and a culture of siloed working. Participants described how poor public perception, shaped by cost-cutting measures, tokenistic consultation processes, and the invisibility of much Council activity, has damaged trust and engagement. Internally, participants pointed to weak collaboration, misalignment between organisational strategy and daily operations, and competing priorities that limit meaningful engagement across departments. These internal issues extend externally, with too many partnerships and limited resources leading to unmet expectations and strained relationships. Collectively, these findings suggest that both reputational and cultural barriers constrain the Council’s ability to implement the Food Strategy effectively.

4.3.1.3. Erosion of Human capital within the Organisation

This section of the findings chapter presents accounts from participant interviews regarding a perceived erosion of human capital within the organisation, which they believe contribute to the challenge of implementing the Bradford Food Strategy. The first section suggests that a mass erosion of human capital is taking place within local authorities, and examples are drawn upon to demonstrate how this is restricting the organisation’s ability to act innovatively and to support initiatives such as the Food Strategy. A connection is then made to private sector consultants and how they are used to fill the voids created by shrinking local authorities, which take with them valuable human capital. Challenges are identified, including that procuring private consultants is expensive, poor value for money, and is seen to be upskilling the private sector at the expense of the public purse.

There is an erosion of human capital within local authorities.

This account from Participant Ten refers to a neighbouring local authority and the recent redundancies, which have reduced workforce capacity by several hundred people. The participant notes the erosion of skill sets and how this impacts the operation of Local Authorities – thus directly reducing the ability to implement the Bradford Food Strategy.

> *''…and when you consider that local councils are, well, look at Kirklees, what have they let, one thousand five hundred go not so long ago, you know, massive, massive, as are the skill sets being eroded, and you know, how do you maintain that going forward?'' (Participant Ten).*

Reinforcing the above point and elaborating on why a reduction in workforce numbers has an impact within the local authority, Participant Seventeen discusses how a reduction in capacity following redundancies means that more operational tasks become the responsibility of the remaining staff, and that this reduces the capacity for dealing with innovations.

> *' … the organisation has basically been cut in half in the last fifteen years […] we've got fewer staff, every time somebody leaves, they're hardly ever replaced, so the work doesn't all disappear, it lands on somebody else's desk, so the bandwidth to deal with innovation is increasingly reduced'' (Participant Seventeen).*

The two quotes above highlight the impact of austerity and ongoing budget cuts, which are shrinking the size of the workforce within Local Authorities. This is seen to contribute to the vision-implementation gap of the Food Strategy, as there is less capacity to take on additional work across the organisation. As the second quote notes, reduced capacity and human capital have a direct impact on the ability to manage innovation. This includes non-essential work, such as initiatives proposed within the Food Strategy, as operational demands do not decrease in line with the size of the workforce.

In discussing how Local Authorities deal with the erosion of human capital within the organisations, Participant Six refers to the hiring of private-sector consultants. They explain that this reliance is a challenge primarily due to the sheer cost, and that the private-sector skill set, or human capital, is being developed at the expense of the Local authority budget.

> *''Consultants are a special case because we do have our expert consultants in the district and within our reach […] I've got two issues. One is the sheer cost and the business model, especially the expensive end of the consultants market […] really not really getting what you're paying for when so much money is going to partners, but also that they're potentially learning from us[…] consultants coming in, spending*

time in Bradford, working on this stuff, will actually go away better consultants than they arrive, and that doesn't quite work for us'' (Participant Six).

Here, Participant Ten claims that obtaining the human capital of external consultants is a challenge because it is expensive, not value for money given the business model structure that pays less-engaged partners, and because the private sector develops its human capital at the expense of the public purse. This example demonstrates how, as the state retracts responsibility for supporting local government , private sector actors are able to profit by plugging the Human Capital gap left within the local authority. Regarding the vision-implementation gap of the Food Strategy, a reduction in staff means there are fewer people to support organisational innovation – and reliance on external consultants depends on funding from central government (funding that is noted as currently absent).

4.3.1.4. Economic & Market Constraints

This final section of the findings chapter sets out a range of perspectives on market-related challenges and how they impede the local authority's efforts to implement its Food Strategy. The section begins by highlighting a disconnect between the outcomes set out in the Food Strategy and the operations of food businesses. It sets out several reasons for businesses' lack of engagement, including local competition that restricts collaboration within the market, the primary focus of senior leaders within food businesses on paying salaries rather than innovating, the need for businesses to receive a return on their investment for engaging, and the need to see a competitive advantage in engaging with sustainability as a concept. It then explores the Council's lack of control over the market, suggesting that its relationship with food businesses is not operational. An example of political challenges in the local enforcement of undesirable food outlets is also drawn upon to demonstrate the challenges that Local Authorities face, even when utilising the levers they have access to. The power of commercial interests is then illustrated through an anecdote drawing on an example from a neighbouring district, where a large fast-food corporation successfully challenged local policy that would have restricted its location in a certain area. It then suggests a lack of demand for good food, and that where such demand exists, it is accessible only to those with the means to pay the high costs associated with such produce. Export markets are defined as those willing and/or able to pay for high-quality UK produce, whereas the local Bradford market is seen as neither willing nor able to pay for it. The benefits of choice and convenience within the market are presented as major barriers to change, suggesting that markets do, in fact, work for most people. The final part implies that the local authority is tinkering around the edges of a much greater economic challenge. A focus on economic growth is criticised, and instead, economic functions are suggested that focus on creating value across the system, rather than just

generating and extracting profits. Collectively, this analysis suggests that the challenges faced by Local Authorities in implementing a Food Strategy are a product of a broader economic system and thus beyond their ability to influence.

There is a disconnect between Food Strategy outcomes and food businesses' operations

This section first explains why engagement between food businesses and the Food Strategy is so important. It then outlines the challenges that are preventing this engagement, demonstrating a disconnect between the ambitions set out in the Strategy and the operations taking place within the food businesses.

Importance of absent businesses engagement

As already discussed in an earlier section, it has been established that food businesses have not been involved in the development or implementation of the Food Strategy. This is noted as problematic, given that the food system is largely owned and operated by the private sector. An extract from an interview with Participant Nine is drawn upon as a reminder of why engagement with private-sector businesses is important: from their perspective, it is because they can directly influence what consumers buy from their businesses.

> *'…so businesses have a role to play in terms of the food environment. So, for example, a restaurant or a supermarket can support customers to choose or purchase healthier things, because of affordability, availability, and things like that, that role, they have a pretty big part to play'' (Participant Nine).*

If officers agree with this statement, the challenge is therefore to incorporate the proposed outcomes set out in the Food Strategy into business operations. The following section, however, presents several perspectives on why engagement between officers and food businesses is not taking place. This is because influencing the private sector is beyond the remit of the local authority.

Businesses are not engaged with the Food Strategy

Many elements of the Bradford Food Strategy require private-sector operators to change their practices. The following quotations offer various perspectives on why engagement with such organisations is not taking place. Firstly, Participant Thirteen identifies a challenge in engaging with businesses on sustainability: the matter always comes back to costs.

> *''It's how we get that nudge effect within businesses to think more about responsibility about some of their business decisions, and you know, at board*

level, management team level, it still exists as an agenda item, a tiny agenda item I expect, and it's the MD or chief finance officer will always come back to cost'' (Participant Thirteen).

This point highlights the financial implications of sustainability that the Food Strategy does not adequately capture – namely, that businesses without national government regulation predominantly exist (with the exception of specific social enterprises or value-led businesses) to produce a profit. As the participant above alludes to, it is finances that leadership within an organisation focuses on – not changing their business practices to reflect the ambition of the local food strategy. Additionally, Participant Eleven notes that senior leaders within the private sector are more focused on generating income and paying salaries than on innovation. Therefore, topics like engaging with the Food Strategy are not a priority.

''Scientists are innovative, people like me are innovative, but if we talk about the heads of the business, directors of business, they need to pay salaries, they need to take care of finances, so they are less interested in innovation or anything, they are mainly interested in income'' (Participant Eleven).

In the point above, the participant differentiates themselves from business leaders, positioning themselves as an innovator. This highlights an important point about homogeneity, namely that even innovators within private-sector organisations are governed by external factors and institutional dynamics. Similarly, Participant Two discusses the time pressures and competing priorities that organisations face. They suggest that businesspeople are busy and that, whilst they would probably like to be engaged, without any incentive they are unlikely to do so.

''There's a need to translate impact and return on investment because many of these organisations are, these players are very busy. They'd like to tick the box of, yes, we're engaged, but other than that, it's probably not really giving them anything else, other than yes, we're in this forum'' (Participant Two).

The above challenges highlight the limitations of creating local food supply systems, as businesses are governed by external forces rather than by the ambitions set out in the Bradford Food Strategy.

According to Participant Four, the final challenge in engaging the private sector with the Food Strategy relates to the sheer size of the sector. Even if the local authority succeeds in engaging several representatives, they will still represent only a small proportion of the broader private sector. The participant suggests that even if some businesses engage with the Council's strategy work, the few businesses that they engage with are not influential enough to change the way that the rest of that sector acts.

…so the extent to which you can, you can get buy in, I mean effective leverage… let's say it was one hundred small businesses in an area… and I've got two of them at my meetings, but to what extent can those two, whatever they say in that meeting, and however useful and effective they are, exercise enough of a representational voice and enough of… enough leverage or authority to bring the rest of the ninety-eight with them?'' (Participant Four).

The above highlights the need for national policy to influence the sector as a whole – rather than relying on individual businesses to take action, which, based on the prior accounts presented, is not occurring because such organisations are focusing on business-as-usual activities.

This subsection presented a range of views on the challenges of engaging businesses with the Food Strategy. Whilst there are several perspectives, it seems that the inherent nature of market competition is restricting collaboration between the local authority and food businesses, and thus presents a structural challenge for the local authority, as wider structural factors govern the food system, not the local authority food strategy.

The Local authority Lacks Control Over the Market

Based on participant insights throughout this section, it is evident that the local authority lacks control over the food market and is therefore misplaced in including such ambition within its Food Strategy. In the extracted quotes below, two participants (Two and Six) refer to Morrisons as key parts of the food system within the district. The first quote from Participant Two suggests that the Council has a relationship with the supermarket, Morrisons, but that this is not an operational relationship with the Council.

''… we've got Morrison's head office, I think still… very little engagement. And, you know, they operate on their own, and that's, that's their thing, the local authority doesn't[…] I think it has a relationship, but not really a kind of operational relationship'' (Participant Two).

Again drawing on Morrison's, Participant Six notes that the company was once a leader in integrated local supply chains, yet this is now being sold off through private equity. This subtly highlights an important challenge about where control in the market really lies. In this extract, the participant appears to be alluding to Morrison's once having a strong farm-to-fork system, but that the DNA of private equity is about maximising profits from the acquired assets, not necessarily maintaining the original values and ethos. This signals a much larger challenge, in that these issues are a product of capitalism and will not be solved at the local level. Whilst Morrison's is currently a Bradford-based food business, the operational DNA is not about providing the local district with food, but about generating profits for its private equity ownership.

''We've got Morrison's in the district who, in many ways, were, probably past tense, an absolute beacon of integrated supply chains, farm to fork, but they're going through the financial mincer of being private equity owned and that looks like that may all get split up'' (Participant Six).

This point highlights the global, capitalist nature of the food system, which, whilst operating locally, is shaped by much broader market and economic forces beyond the reach of the Bradford Food Strategy. Even with greater power and resources, the UK remains heavily reliant on global imports and produces approximately 60% of the food it consumes (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2024). Whilst land in Bradford could contribute to greater food security for the UK, particularly through lamb production on its hilled terrain, incentivising such changes requires national policy direction, not vision-setting by local authorities.

The power of commercial interests is more powerful than local authority policy

Providing another example that highlights a challenge regarding the local authority's influence over the market, Participant Eight draws on an example from a neighbouring district, where it is suggested that the global fast-food company KFC used its corporate power to challenge a local authority's decision to limit the number of takeaways near schools. The quote demonstrates an attempt by the local authority to restrict the location of fast-food restaurants within certain areas via its Local Plan. As this would have prevented KFC from opening a store in an area assumed to be within the proposed restricted zone of the Local Plan, KFC hired a planning director to challenge the restriction clause, which would have gone against the company's interests.

''Because some of these powers, for example, we used to have SPDs, Supplementary Planning Directives, [...] we're not encouraged to do them anymore, [...]. KFC, for example, had stuff pulled out of Wakefield's Local Plan because it was not in their favour [...], and at the same time that they are say on Henry Dimbleby's, let's be a good corporate ally person, and so for me that bit around legislation, what are our powers locally?'' (Participant Eight).

Asking the question 'what are our powers locally?', the Participant alludes to the limitations of local policy in restricting the practice of global corporations such as KFC from exerting their power within the market to overturn local attempts to restrict the location of fast-food organisations in the name of promoting a healthier food environment for local people. Whilst the local authority is able to specify certain local restrictions within local planning policy, such decisions are not supported by the broader political environment, as private sector organisations are able to have planning decisions overturned at the national level. There is also a point about private sector engagement in the above quote, which highlights the tension between what they say

and what they do. In the above example, KFC joined a corporate social responsibility group yet continued to lobby against local actions to curb the rapid spread of fast-food organisations. The point is relevant to the vision-implementation gap of the Bradford Food Strategy, as it demonstrates the power of the Market in shaping the food system – not the ambitions of those seeking to change the system.

Cost and restricted access to good food

Further limiting local approaches to changing the food system are the implications of cost. Sharing their perspective on a conversation with a local meat wholesaler, Participant Two highlights how the market for sustainable food is expensive and serves a high end clientele, thus is inaccessible to most people.

> *''So they were procuring really clean, lean meat, procured locally, you know, and their meat was very expensive, but he was really trying to tell me that his clientele is a particular type'' (Participant Two).*

The above example therefore suggests a challenge, in that whilst small pockets of the market may be able to provide local meat for those who can afford it, many cannot afford to eat this way. This suggests that many people in Bradford cannot afford to eat locally sourced lamb. Participants Two and Sixteen suggest that UK produce is instead exported to countries which are willing to pay the price.

> *''We also connected with a guy [name removed] from [name removed] down in Wales, and again his point was, you know, we, our, our meat's too expensive for Bradford's market, we export our top, top stuff to Europe, and Belgium, and France, where they are willing to pay the price'' (Participant Two).*

> *''UK produce beef and dairy, well dairy more being like cheese, and lamb as well, the highest value markets are the export markets'' (Participant Sixteen).*

The challenge identified here signals to the nature of global markets, in that whilst an animal may be produced in the UK, if there is not the demand to buy it and consume it locally, it will be sold via an export market. This again highlights an example whereby market forces operate beyond the control or influence of the local authority.

Markets work for most people

Again, a conceptual limitation of local approaches to influencing the operations of the local food system is the view that consumers en masse are largely supportive of the current system. The notion that markets work for most people is highlighted by Participants Eight and Nineteen. Participant Nineteen explains how well the food market serves demand at a good price – thus the market logic and the value it offers consumers are assumed to be more attractive than initiatives that propose developing a sustainable food system, which is associated with increased costs.

''The thing about markets is choice, and it's, there's no two ways about it, the food industry itself, we point to the fact that consumers can eat whatever they want, whenever they want, at a pretty decent price for the most part, that's a huge win, and I, actually most people would agree with them'' (Participant Nineteen).

This points to a fundamental conceptual challenge. Whilst the Food Strategy sets out social and environmental outcomes that require changed consumer practices, this participant notes that the market gives consumers such freedom to choose whatever food they want to eat. This also demonstrates the neoliberal narrative playing out in practice, in that the responsibility for a sustainable food system is placed on consumers making the right choices, rather than addressing structural factors such as poverty and failing to effectively regulate or legislate the private sector (Guthman, 2008). Drawing upon another anecdote, Participant Eight discusses market convenience within the context of first-generation migrants, who, in their view, are very much enjoying such newly accessed markets, which make their lives much easier and more convenient.

> *''So they're happy with their lot, because for, certainly in some of that first generation migrants that we've just been working with [...] they are just delighted with the quality of everything, which we might perceive to be appalling, and so it's really, really difficult narrative [...] the cooks will be seeing the level of convenience food as a delight [...] I've got things that I used to make back home that I'd spend hours making, and now the guy down the road makes it and it's cheaper than me cooking'' (Participant Eight)*.

Again, this points to a fundamental challenge in relying on consumer demand to drive change in the food system. Participant Eight acknowledges the inherent difficulty of shifting consumer perceptions of newfound market conveniences, particularly for those who have not experienced them before. Therefore, the messaging within the Food Strategy faces a difficult task in persuading people not to use these conveniences and to adopt lifestyle changes. This point highlights the limitations of a consumer-led approach to transforming the food system. The challenge presented above is clearly beyond the reach of a local authority and highlights a conceptual weakness of the local food strategy.

Local Food Strategies are tinkering around within a capitalist system

As set out throughout this chapter, the food system is a global beast subject to market forces. A recurring theme addressed by Participants Eight, Nine, Fourteen, and Seventeen is that the Food Strategy is 'tinkering around the edges' within a much greater capitalist system, which highlights the conceptual weaknesses of a local food strategy by revealing structural limitations and conceptual challenges. Drawing on an extract from an interview with Participant Eight, the way economic revenue is generated

through the promotion of unhealthy food is established. The participant identifies this as the root cause of the obesity problem and acknowledges that the work they are undertaking as part of the Food Strategy is only scratching the surface of the problem.

> *''… we are to some extent fighting a disheartening and losing battle without really strong national policy. It is very, very hard because at the end of the day, the role that, particularly that commercial determinants and corporations hold within our food system, mean that our powers are… feel like we're tinkering around the edges of the complexity of the problem […] promoting the consumption of highly processed food, […] in a capitalist environment, that's what generates economic revenue (Participant Eight).*

The challenge is understood as an economic one, as revenue is generated through the sale of unhealthy food in the market. It is acknowledged that addressing this challenge requires national policy. Whilst the Bradford Food Strategy seeks to influence a good food culture, it cannot, as suggested throughout this chapter, influence the operations of private-sector food businesses. Also reflecting on the capitalist nature of the food system, Participant Seventeen ponders whether food outcomes, such as those set out within the Food Strategy, have ever been socially designed, or whether they have always been about increasing sales.

> *''Have we ever engineered food culture before with a specific outcome in mind as a society or has anybody.? I mean, the driving motive is generally, I want to sell more cornflakes (Participant Seventeen).*

Again, this example points to a challenge in that food is, and potentially always has been, left to market forces. From this perspective, local authority Food Strategies are the wrong mechanisms for tackling the identified problem. Policy mechanisms that can address profit being generated from creating obesity are instead required.

Limits to Capitalism and Growth

This subsection, and the final section within the results chapter, present two accounts that challenge the notion of economic growth and suggest that the economy needs to shift its focus beyond growth, towards the generation of value rather than simply on profit. The account below from Participant Fourteen suggests that new economic systems are required that generate value, not just financial profit. This implies that part of the problem restricting the desired outcomes set out within the Food Strategy is that, in our current profit-seeking and extracting system, the whole system is set up to work in this way.

> *''If this scales, lots of people feel like this is a good economic thing to progress and develop and that, that economy model is not just about profit and commercial*

income generation, the commercial view there is that about the generation of value. So good twenty-first century thinking is about how does value get generated through the system using commercial thinking, and commercial practices, where thing are able to be costed and woven together in such a way that the system benefits'' (Participant Fourteen)

In this framing, the challenge is not with the Local Authorities but with the economic system, which prioritises profit over value that would contribute to the outcomes of the Food Strategy. This thinking is evident in the sections above, which discuss the perceived limitations of engaging with businesses, as the drivers of those limitations all relate to profit rather than to creating value. Again highlighting flaws within the current economic system, Participant Nine discusses the need to think beyond economic growth and towards a wellbeing economy. They contend that without this change, businesses will continue prioritizing profit solely from an economic perspective. They also point out that GDP is an inadequate indicator of a nation's overall condition, as it does not reflect increased well-being or health.

''... there's a wellbeing measure[...] every country looks at GDP and ultimately, the higher GDP [...] it doesn't correlate with having a higher wellbeing or higher health of the nation, and then you get to a point where GDP will start to drop because people can't work, can't make the money that enables the growth so there needs to be a bigger focus on wellbeing, especially because we're getting to the point where there's not enough jobs because of AI, like, all of that other stuff that means wellbeing has to become priority'' (Participant Nine).

With these two accounts set out above in mind, a convincing case is made that the local authority operates in an economic environment over which it has no influence – thus highlighting the conceptual limitations of local food strategies.

Summary

The findings highlight a range of market-related challenges that constrain the local authority's ability to implement the Food Strategy. Participants noted a disconnect between the Strategy's objectives and the operations of local food businesses, with limited engagement due to competitive pressures, a focus on immediate financial returns, and the need to view sustainability as offering a competitive advantage. The Council's influence over the market is noted to be absent, and regulatory levers are required to shape business behaviour, but such levers rest with central government. Low local demand for high-quality food further limits market impact, while export markets and affluent consumers drive most demand for premium produce. Participants suggested that the local authority's interventions address only surface-level issues and that economic structures are focused on growth and profit rather than on creating value across the food system.

These insights indicate that market dynamics present fundamental barriers to the effective implementation of the Food Strategy and highlight conceptual challenges in such an approach.

4.3.2. Political Economy Analysis

This section draws on a guidance document produced by the UK Government Department, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development (2023), to interpret and explain the empirical findings generated as part of this thesis through a Political Economy lens. As set out in the guidance document, the purpose of Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is to provide a clear understanding of the political context in which a phenomenon exists. In short, it seeks to understand how things work, or do not work, in a given context.

The three key elements of the Political Economy Analysis asks:

- What is the underlying issue or problem?
- Why does the situation persist in this form?
- How can change come about?

As part of the PEA process, it is claimed that a better understanding of the following issues will be generated:

- Who the influential actors are,
- How power is distributed and contested, and who is excluded from power,
- Practical constraints that limit the use of power,
- Formal and informal norms that shape behaviour and influence decisions,
- How these factors affect incentives and ability to achieve change,
- In addition to the role of ideas, capacity, identities, and loyalties, which priorities are likely to prevail when there are multiple objectives
- How and why change really happens, and what combination of actors, incentives, processes and capacity lead to shift in outcomes.

To understand why things are the way they are in a specific dilemma within a specific context, the PEA approach unpacks the issue by examining interactions across three levels of analysis. These are foundations or structures, formal and informal processes and rules, and actors and stakeholders. Foundations and structures refer to macro-level factors that require consideration. Examples include history, geopolitics, and economic systems. Formal and informal processes and rules, or meso-level factors, include laws, social norms, values, and behavioural patterns. Actors and stakeholders, or the micro-level, refer to individuals or organisations. The Political Economy Analysis explores dynamic interactions across these three levels of analysis.

Guiding questions are paraphrased from the Department for International Development (2023) to frame and prompt each sub-section.

Whilst the focus of this thesis is on the challenges of implementing urban food strategies, the PEA process also yields suggestions for how such challenges may be addressed through realistic pathways of change and interventions that are both technically sound and politically feasible. Given the practical nature of the research phenomena, adopting the Political Economy Analysis framework as a lens to interpret the empirical data generated as part of this thesis is more fitting and valuable than a purely theoretical lens. Following the above mentioned guidance, the starting point of the Political Economy Analysis process is to identify the high level question. Previously referred to throughout as the research question, this is:

What are the challenges regarding implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy? Moreover, what are the limitations of local authority led food strategies more generally?

4.3.3.1. Actors, interests, and sources of power

Key actors

In the methodology section, a deliberate distinction was made between actors who were a. within the council and actively involved with the Food Strategy, and b. those referred to but not actively involved with the Food Strategy. When zooming out to consider the broader food system, however, it becomes apparent that many key actors have not been included in the Food Strategy's development or implementation process.

Food Strategy Advocates

Food Strategy advocates, based within the Public Health Department, are the active custodians of the Food Strategy. They are the actors tasked with implementing it. Given their involvement with the strategy, it is reasonable to assume that their interests lie in improving food-related outcomes.

> *''…as we've come to realise with a lot of the food strategy work, the coordination has tended to, and I would imagine for the foreseeable future, will sit within Public Health… which is a challenge on its own'' (Participant Three).*

While they possess certain positional advantages, such as access to ring-fenced funding that shields them from wider organisational financial pressures, they ultimately lack the power to enact significant change across the broader local authority.

> *''… the other linked issue is that Public Health is generally the only team in Local Authorities that has any kind of ring-fenced money for work…* and also the over reliance on other departments*'' (Participant Three).*

Although the public health department has ring-fenced funding, there are still limitations on how that funding is allocated, as it is national government that sets the public health outcomes and allocates the public health grant to Local Authorities. The quote from the participant below demonstrates their limited agency over the distribution of the grant.

> *''In terms of the financing at the minute, the public health grant, [...] the public health outcomes don't have explicit outcomes around the food system in them and therefore, as a result, it is very difficult to justify investment against a food system when there's technically not an outcome that we're looking to see'' (Participant Eight)*

Whilst Officers have the power to allocate funding locally, allocations must still align with a broader outcome framework determined by central government; thus, central government are understood as the institution that sets the parameters within which local authority Officers can exercise agency. It is proposed, therefore, that the relationship between national government and local government limits the agency of Local Officers, creating a barrier to allocating funding against the Food Strategy to implement actions set out within it. Further nuance on this point is set out within this chapter.

In order for Food Strategy Advocates to make systemic change, sizeable funding is required, which a Senior Officer does not believe will be made available locally.

> *''...really, for us to make systematic change, it's going to need large scale investment that is unlikely to be generated in the district itself...'' (Participant Three)*

Without the relevant funding being made available to Food Strategy Advocates, as custodians of the Food Strategy, it is difficult to see how many elements of the Strategy will be implemented, particularly the ambitious visions, which will surely require millions of pounds of investment. As shown in the quotes above, the public health grant made available to advocates does not have clear outcomes related to food, and there is doubt that additional investment will be generated locally.

It is also apparent that the Food Strategy Advocates lack power over key food system actors. The participant below highlights limited engagement with private-sector food businesses, including Morrisons, which is a Bradford-born business. The participant suggests that whilst Bradford Council has a relationship with Morrisons, it is not an operational relationship regarding food. The reference to a relationship with Morrisons is understood to mean a financial relationship, in that Morrisons pay business rates to Bradford Council. Despite being located in Bradford, the Food Strategy Advocates do not have engagement with the largest food business in the District.

> *''Yeah, I mean, this is probably the main area of particular weakness [...]we've got Morrison's head office[...] very little engagement [...] they operate on their own [...] the local authority [...] has a relationship, but not really a kind of operational relationship'' (Participant Two).*

The relationship between the Council and Morrison's is understood to be largely transactional. As Morrison's contributes significant business rates to the Bradford District, this financial dependence surely gives Morrison's power over the Council, especially amid budgetary pressures, as the Council needs to ensure funding flows from businesses via rates. The Council has no authority over the company's operations.

A further example below highlights the limited power the Food Strategy Advocates have over commercial food system actors in Bradford. It demonstrates the power imbalance and how private interests are seen to prevail over public health. The quotation below from a Senior Health Officer highlights previous attempts to challenge commercial actors, which they were encouraged to stop. The participant also points to a neighbouring City, Wakefield, which tried to use planning policy as a lever to improve health outcomes but was overpowered by a commercial actor.

> *''Because some of these powers, for example, we used to have SPDs, Supplementary Planning Directives, we don't have them anymore, well, we're not encouraged to do them anymore [...] KFC, for example, had stuff pulled out of Wakefield's Local Plan because it was not in their favour, and so the commercial determinants, and you know what they did, they employed their own planning director because they are like building control'' (Participant Eight).*

These examples highlight the power imbalance between local advocates for a better food system and the powerful, dominant corporate food system actors. Although advocates are developing strategies, the power is stacked against them. The power of corporations is seen to supersede the ambition within the strategy, and despite what advocates aspire to locally, the power largely sits beyond them.

This analysis supports Finding 1, as identified in the document analysis of the Bradford Food Strategy. Finding 1 observes that 'it is assumed that those involved with the Food Strategy are primarily advocates of a better food system, but lack power over the food system'.

Broader Local authority Officers

The next group of actors to be considered is the Broader local authority Officers. This group includes officers whose work areas are implicated in the Food Strategy but who were not actively involved in its development or implementation. Their primary interest lies in delivering and supporting the priorities within their own areas of responsibility. As

this section will show, these officers are increasingly stretched by competing organisational priorities and a shrinking workforce, as illustrated by the example below. Tackling Food Waste is an element of the Bradford Food Strategy. Participant Eighteen works for the local authority's Waste Department, which includes food waste as part of its remit. The quotation below suggests that neither the Officer being interviewed, nor their Assistant Director knows much about the Food Strategy, despite their area of work being a key element of the Strategy.

> *Participant eighteen: I asked the AD [Assistant Director] what [they] thought, and [they] went like this (shrugs), and [they] said, it's, its food waste, you know, okay, right. So that's, that's' I don't know a lot about the Food Strategy, and that's my honest opinion.*

Participant Two explains that whilst the Food Strategy has been developed by Public Health, it is one of many strategies within the Council's broader policy suite, and that it is a sub-strategy, not part of the local authority's core constitution.

> *Interviewer: ''What do you know about the Bradford Food Strategy?''*
>
> *Participant Two: ''I know enough to know that it was developed and led by Public Health, it's been adopted and approved as a corporate policy and strategy. It's one of many in that suite, it's not part of our Council's constitution or part of the policy framework, so as such, it's a sub-strategy to the Council Plan and part of the overall family of strategies and plans that the Wellbeing Board looks after on behalf of the District Partnership. So, it's [...] one of a number of thematic strategies''...*

This insight suggests a series of competing priorities within the Local authority. The strategy being described as 'one of many' particularly emphasises these competing priorities. Referring to food as a thematic strategy suggests that the participant views the food strategy as an isolated topic, rather than a cross-cutting and holistic topic that spans several departments, teams, and agendas.

The interview extracts below offer a structural explanation that restricts the agency of Officers.

> *''...I think the resistance comes down to people often being very busy with what they're focused on... with quite a lot of pressure of their... to charge for their services [...] they're trying to make their service profitable, or to be zero cost to the council [...] they're probably under resourced, [...] systems that aren't as fully functional as they'd like, so they're experiencing some stress, they're feeling like they're burdened with their daily workload, and then trying to carve out some space to work with others is, there's real challenges in that (Participant One).*

This participant insight suggests that actors within the local authority have limited agency to take on additional work, including actions set out in the Food Strategy, unless it is going to contribute financially to their department. Whilst there may be potential agency, there is limited capacity to realise it and support the agenda without formal direction. This matters because it is assumed that realising actions set out in the Food Strategy requires additional resources. The previous section drew on Food Strategy Advocates, who noted limitations in attracting new resources – this section highlights challenges in allocating existing resources.

The above quote, and the quote below, suggest why current and existing resources are not being re-allocated to deliver the proposed actions within the Strategy.

> *''… the problem at the minute that we all have as a local government employee, is available bandwidth […] the organisation has basically been cut in half in the last fifteen years […] we've got fewer staff, every time somebody leaves, they're hardly ever replaced, so the work doesn't all disappear, it lands on somebody else's desk, so the bandwidth the deal with innovation is increasingly reduced'' (Participant Seventeen).*

Many aspects of the Food Strategy extend beyond the remit of the Public Health Team, and structural constraints limit the Team's engagement with the wider organisation. As noted above, there is a notion that other Officers within the organisation also have limited agency, given the drastic reduction in the overall organisational budget over previous years.

The financial challenges facing the organisation appear to impact the implementation of the Food Strategy, as they limit the agency of other Officers within the Council to work on non-mandatory matters. There is also a broader point here, expanded upon later in this findings chapter, which reflects the impact of central government retracting support to Local Authorities, or what Eckersley & Tobin (2019) refer to as 'policy dismantling'.

This analysis supports Finding 6, as identified in the document analysis of the Bradford Food Strategy. Finding 6 suggests that the impact of austerity is not adequately reflected in the ambition of the Bradford Food Strategy, and that budget cuts has shrunk the size of the state, hollowed out capacity, and limited the power of Local Government

Missing actors

As highlighted in the document analysis chapter, food businesses are a missing actor in the Bradford Food Strategy – despite owning and operating the vast majority of the food system (Worldpanel by Numerator, 2025). However, the membership of the Bradford Sustainable Food Partnership is predominantly made up of the public sector, third sector, and academia, with only one private-sector food organisation listed (My Living

Well, 2025). This suggests that the key actors involved in the Food Strategy are primarily those advocating for improved food system outcomes, rather than representing the operational actors within the system itself. Consequently, there is a significant disconnect between those seeking systemic improvements and those who currently control and operate the dominant food system.

The participant below is an expert in supply chains and works extensively with local food businesses. They were involved in commissioned work to support the Food Strategy, which included talking with local business owners about it. This participant believes that food businesses would like to be involved in the Food Strategy, but ultimately they are in business to generate profit.

> *''There's a need to translate impact and return on investment because many of these organisations are these players are very busy. They'd like to tick the box of, yes, we're engaged [with the Food Strategy], but other than that, it's probably not really giving them anything else, other than yes, we're in this forum'' (Participant Two).*

The need for a return on investment suggests that companies would be interested in engaging with the Food Strategy if there were financial incentives. If businesses are seen as too busy to engage voluntarily with the sustainable food agenda, this highlights the limitations of relying on non-mandatory approaches to food system transformation, particularly as Local Authorities are not in a position to financially incentivise local food businesses to change their operations. The above quote also shows that the majority of private-sector food businesses are governed by the pursuit of profit, not by the actions set out in the Food Strategy. Whilst dominant traditional food businesses are neither mandated nor incentivised to change their operations, it is difficult to see how they would contribute to the visions and ambitions set out in the local food strategy, particularly the element seeking to create a sustainable food system for all.

The food sector is not homogeneous, however, and there are businesses at all levels undertaking transformative actions to positively impact the food system, particularly social enterprises which are driven by generating value in the food system (Doherty & Kittipanya-Ngam, 2021). Such businesses are not, however, referenced in the interviews conducted as part of this research, hence it is also noted that missing actors surrounding the Bradford Food Strategy are value-driven food businesses.

Interactions between the Council and private sector food businesses

The primary missing interaction is between those responsible for the Food Strategy (Public Health Department) and the operational businesses that collectively make up the food system itself.

‘’… the second thing for me […] how to engage and bring the private sector and commercial organisations into the food system. it’s mentioned a few times in the strategy, but it doesn’t really have a clear vision or plan’’ (Participant Three)

The language used suggests that engaging private food businesses was not a primary consideration in the Food Strategy, despite the private sector being the primary operators of the food system. While the strategy acknowledges the need for such engagement, it provides no clear plan for achieving it. This gap is significant, given that private businesses constitute the operational food system, highlighting that the strategy is largely driven by actors seeking an alternative, better food system rather than engaging with the current one. References to ‘bringing the private sector and commercial organisations into the food system’ reinforce this framing. A cited reason for the limited engagement is a lack of knowledge or expertise, as acknowledged by a Senior Responsible Officer for the Food Strategy. This offers an explanation for why the ‘a sustainable food system for all’ element of the strategy is not being advanced – as it requires an understanding of the private sector, which the participant does not see to exist within the Public Health Department.

‘’… but it lies outside of the skill set of public health, and this is where I think we need, you know… but as we’ve come to realize with a lot of the food strategy work, the coordination has tended to, and I would imagine for the foreseeable future, will sit within Public Health…’’ (Participant Three).

When framed this way, the Food Strategy Advocates are interested in transforming the food system but lack the commercial acumen to work effectively with the private sector to develop investable food propositions. The following quote challenges this notion of engagement and highlights the limitations of trying to engage local food businesses.

An extract is drawn below from interview data with Participant Four, a Policy Officer. For this participant, the challenge in engaging the private sector with the Food Strategy relates to the sheer size of the sector. Even if the local authority succeeds in engaging several representatives, they will still represent only a small proportion of the broader private sector. The participant suggests that even if some businesses engage with the Council's strategy work, the few businesses that they engage with are not influential enough to change the way that the rest of that sector acts.

…so the extent to which you can, you can get buy in, I mean effective leverage… let’s say it was one hundred small businesses in an area… and I’ve got two of them at my meetings, but to what extent can those two, whatever they say in that meeting, and however useful and effective they are, exercise enough of a representational voice and enough of… enough leverage or authority to bring the rest of the ninety-eight with them?’’ (Participant Four).

This point highlights the limitations of local food strategies in engaging with dominant food system actors. Whilst some may voluntarily engage in local food strategy conversations, their engagement is limited to their own participation and does not represent all other businesses.

Whilst the challenge above regarding Food Strategy Advocates engaging with local food businesses is surely valid, it is a conceptual limitation which Participant Four highlights. This highlights the need for National policy to influence the sector as a whole – rather than relying on individual businesses to take action, which, based on the prior accounts presented, is not occurring due to such organisations focusing on business-as-usual activities.

This section has demonstrated that a key challenge is the local authority's inability to work effectively with private sector food system operators, who are the dominant custodians of the existing food system. Whilst Food Strategy Advocates, they lack the power over food system operators. This aligns with Finding 2 from the document analysis, that operational food system actors, the actors who occupy power within the food system, are largely absent from involvement with the Bradford Food Strategy.

4.3.3.2. How actors interact with each other and how alliances shape outcomes

Interactions between council departments

It is apparent that within the local authority there are many competing interests between departments. The quotes below explain how such competing interests are spread across a broad organisation that is largely disconnected. The second quote suggests that this is due to the nature of all the functions that contribute to the make-up of a local authority. This matters because the Food Strategy is a holistic document that references work areas across various council departments, yet as established, the Strategy is owned by the Public Health Department, not the whole organisation.

> *''And one of the challenges [...] is that we're all in our own particular area of expertise or siloed knowledge, and so trying to find constructive and effective ways of actually knowing what the left or the right or the foot or the hand is doing...''(Participant One)*

> *''... even as a council, we're not joined up, and we are not corporate enough[...] we're having to consider everything, all the time, and understand those trade-offs, this, you know, it's difficult, it's not easy'' (Participant Nineteen).*

As the Strategy relies on changes taking place within other departments, it is crucial that there are strong relationships and shared agendas between the departments. It is suggested above, however, that such relationships are not present due to siloed working, and that different departments have different agendas. As set out in previous sub-section, there are various reasons that are contributing to this lack of joint up

working which based on the view of those interviewed, primarily point to the financial challenges facing the organisation. Whilst the food strategy demonstrates food system thinking, as per Finding 3, the above account demonstrates that food system thinking is not being translated into practice within Bradford Council due to financial challenges.

This section has explored micro-level interactions within the Political Economy Framework, highlighting the interests and sources of power among key actors in the Food Strategy. Food Strategy Advocates are positioned as actors who are committed to achieving the strategy's outcomes but lack the means to influence a food system dominated by private sector actors. Local authority Officers, constrained by over a decade of austerity, are primarily focused on cost-saving, leaving limited capacity for non-statutory duties, especially without executive support. The absence of key actors representing the operational food system is significant; examples such as Morrison's and KFC demonstrate the power these organisations hold over the Council. Interactions between actors are further complicated by strained relationships between the Council, partners, and the public, largely due to resource limitations imposed by central government austerity. Ultimately, the most critical missing interaction is between the Council and private sector food businesses, who control the system of which the strategy seeks to influence.

4.3.3.3. How formal and informal rules influence behaviour in context

Policy cohesion

Policy cohesion is seen as an informal rule that influences behaviour within the local authority. The participant quoted below is a Senior Policy Officer. They believe that for food to become an organisational priority, it must feature in the organisation's parent document, the 'Council Plan', and that doing so would support buy-in from other colleagues across the organisation. When framed this way, the participant views the presence of a topic in the Council Plan as a rule that influences the organisation's behaviour. The participant is, however, doubtful that food will become such a priority, given the Chief Executive Officers' direction to focus on fewer work areas.

> *'' …so I think it's important that it's referenced, so in the Council Plan, I think it's because … the new Chief Exec is definitely focused on doing less but doing it well. So, I think for it to be in a Council Plan as key priority would mean that you would automatically probably get better buy in across the Council. I'm not actually sure, given the challenges within the Council, that it's, it's gonna hit that mark (Participant Five).*

The shared rule influencing behaviour in this instance is the idea that if a topic, in this case food, is featured in the organisation's parent document, it will automatically gain support from other officers. The quote below, however, challenges the significance of

policy cohesion, or of referencing food within the Council Plan. The participant points out that policy requires additional resources and action to realise the strategy or policy outcomes set out in the Food Strategy. As set out in prior findings, the organisation is in financial despair and lacks the required capacity or resources to act innovatively. The participant therefore suggests that the challenge is less about policy cohesion and more about the resources allocated to that policy.

> *''But you can, anyone can do a strategy, you can have all the pots and pans and plans in the world, but then it's about who's gonna deliver it, and I think something we pay lip service to having'' (Participant Fifteen).*

From this perspective, policy cohesion alone is deemed insufficient if it is not accompanied by additional resources. This lack of allocated resources for the Food Strategy is therefore noted as a primary contributor to the vision-implementation gap in the Bradford Food Strategy. This is not to discount the potential value of policy cohesion, but the latter quote highlights the importance of resourced policy, not just cohesive policy. This supports Finding 3, that the Bradford Food Strategy demonstrates food system thinking – it does not demonstrate food system practice. Building upon that finding, the above account suggests that part of the reason, or part of the vision-implementation gap, is due to lack of policy cohesion with the organisation. It also suggests that policy cohesion must be reinforced with adequate financial resource to be meaningful.

There are no rules stating that Bradford needs a Food Strategy

Statutory obligations are legal responsibilities set by central government and enacted by local government. Having a Food Strategy is not a statutory obligation placed on Local Authorities, so there is no rule from central government requiring Local Authorities to take action regarding Food.

> ''I think there's a deeper piece *[…]* that food is not a statutory obligation on the local authority, and creating a food system is not something that is a legal obligation, and even if there was, we wouldn't quite know which bit of the structure to put it in, or whose job it was to look after it'' (Participant Five).

Participant Four in the extract below elaborates on the importance of this. They explain how local functions and services are determined and that, ultimately, direction is set by national government. They explain that, in times of financial struggle, the organisation's operations are reduced to providing the services and functions for which Government holds it accountable. In practice, this means that officers are not required to support the actions set out within the Food Strategy.

… in reality, Local Authorities are also subservient to national governments, and a lot of the things that local government does are set nationally, and some of which is a statutory obligation. […] one of the consequences of not having much funding is that the, the services and functions we perform, increasingly get reduced to core statutory functions'' (Participant Four).

The latter part of the quotation highlights the significance of food as a policy area not underpinned by statutory obligation. In resource-constrained conditions, local authorities are compelled to prioritise activities for which they are legally accountable. In the case of the Food Strategy, the absence of a statutory requirement from central government, combined with limited capacity to act voluntarily, appears to be a key factor in its limited implementation. This points to a broader dilemma inherent in voluntary, locally led approaches to food policy. Where national government defines statutory duties and funding constraints incentivise local authorities to focus on these obligations, non-statutory initiatives such as Food Strategies are deprioritised. Lacking both a formal mandate and monitoring, they receive insufficient attention and resourcing to be effectively implemented.

This suggests that stronger national direction may be necessary to support implementation. In particular, a clearer statutory framework or policy mandate could help bridge the gap between strategic vision and delivery, as evidenced by the Bradford Food Strategy. This supports finding 5 which observes that actors around the strategy occupy a voluntary function – their existence is not mandated by Government which constrains their power.

Broader organisational rules

Looking at the rules that govern the broader organisation, there are formal requirements that the local authority must remain financially solvent – a matter that several participants report as a major challenge facing the organisation.

''…''the challenge here, it's… that most local authorities are so pressured, and finances are… financial risk of collapse… '' (Participant Three).

''Tens of Local Authorities who are facing probably the hardest, most unprecedented financial challenges they've ever faced in their life[…], a lot of assumptions that the council would lead on an issue or take a role in it, it's highly likely that a number of places will not be able to do that (Participant Fourteen).

''And that's the only thing about public funding[…] it's third or fourth one year financial settlement[…] how can you have joined up policy and investment in things like this if you don't know what your budget is going to be the following

year? How can you employ people on that basis? How can you create new jobs (Participant Nineteen).

'…, scarcity of resource, it's forcing us into short term […], settlements from government are all over, you don't know what you're getting, you get it for one year, you don't know what you're getting the next'' (Participant Fifteen)

As several participants highlighted, there is growing concern that without adequate financial support from Central government, Local Authorities are increasingly constrained in their ability to sustain core operations and invest in longer-term initiatives, such as those proposed within the Food Strategy. This underscores the importance of situating the Food Strategy within the wider organisational context. The evidence presented suggests that the deteriorating financial position of local authorities is significantly limiting their capacity to deliver even statutory functions, let alone non-statutory initiatives such as Food Strategies.

Participant insights further indicate that these financial pressures are both acute and ongoing, with little expectation of increased funding from Central government. This highlights not only the practical limitations imposed by resource constraints, but also a disconnect between the expectations placed on local authorities by external actors and the financial realities they face.

Moreover, as Participant Three emphasises, the impact extends beyond financial resources to include officer capacity, which is increasingly absorbed by the demands of frontline service provision. The broader fiscal condition of local government therefore plays a critical role in shaping organisational priorities. In this context, the limited attention given to the (non-statutory) Food Strategy can be understood as a consequence of structural financial constraints, contributing to the persistence of a vision–implementation gap.

The quote below from a Senior Officer demonstrates the impact on local government of taking on exceptional financial support to remain financially solvent. Where the participant refers to 'getting ourselves out of this hole', this is understood to mean the repayments on the borrowing that has taken place to remain financially solvent.

''We're gonna be borrowing for about forty years to get ourselves out of this hole, next generations gonna pick up the tab'' (Participant Fifteen)

In 2024, Local Authorities received exceptional financial support, which Boakye & Webb (2024) describe as a 'pay day loan' for local government. Whilst central government recognise that Local Authorities are financially struggling, they increased the cost of borrowing to remain solvent by one percentage point to 5.7%. A representative of the Department for Levelling up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC), the department responsible for local government argued that the department had deliberately

increased the interest rates available to Local government s to incentivise the sale of Council-owned assets, rather than taking on additional debt from the Government (Boakye & Webb, 2024). This sale of assets is observed within Bradford by Participant Sixteen and included the sale of Council-owned farms.

> *''Yeah, well, and also selling off your tenant farms, it's not gonna [...] going to solve your problems, [...] that money is going to go so quickly, whereas you could be having a stable income every year from the, the rent that people are paying, [...], surely the council that can have the terms of the tenancy be, this land will be used to produce food in whatever way'' (Participant Sixteen)*
>
> ''...so many tenant farms used to be council farms, and there's been a real decline in tenant farmers numbers and abilities to get into farming as a tenant, because a lot of councils have sold off their tenanted land to make money'' (Participant Sixteen).

The examples above signal a key rule that dictates how Local Authorities operate – the need to remain solvent. From this point, it also follows that Central government are retracting responsibility and localising the financial failure onto local government . Rather than Central government supporting local government through challenging times to remain financially solvent, they are instead enforcing, through fiscal mechanisms, that Local Authorities themselves (and future generations) bear the cost of taking loans to remain solvent. This context is crucial for understanding the context in which the Food Strategy exists, and it offers insight into the current operational priorities within the local authority.

This analysis support Finding 6 which claims that the impact of austerity and how it limits power and capacity is not adequately reflected within the Food Strategy. The above extracts demonstrate how austerity plays out within the organisation, and how it limits the ability of the council to advance elements of the food strategy.

4.3.3.4. Governing institutions and how they operate

This subsection focuses on several layers of the 'metaphorical onion' in food governance surrounding the Bradford Food Strategy. It begins with the Public Health Department, the conveners of the Food Strategy, then zooms out step by step through Bradford Council, the regional West-Yorkshire Combined Authority, national government, and market-led institutions.

Public Health Department

At the local level, the lead officer for the Strategy has established that the Food Strategy is governed by the Public Health Department. As discussed in the previous findings section on micro-level interactions, those involved with the Food Strategy are positioned as advocates for a better food system, rather than operators of the food

system. This group of actors has the power to govern the contents of the Strategy and its narrative, but lacks the authority to secure additional resources or to mandate other Officers across other Departments. Looking at the factors that govern the Public Health Department, it was also set out in an earlier section that national government have significant power over the Public Health Department through the Public Health Grant. In an earlier section, a participant highlighted that whilst there is local autonomy around resource allocation, it still must align with the Central government-dictated Public Health Outcomes. As these outcomes do not explicitly include reference to food, it is claimed to be difficult for the Public Health Department to allocate resources to food, as there are no explicit food-related outcomes.

Whilst the custodians of the Food Strategy have the authority to govern its contents and narrative, they are themselves governed by funding restrictions imposed by national government, which limit their ability to allocate funding to the Strategy. This is a key element that contributes to the vision-implementation gap.

Bradford Council

There is a clear absence of broader governance around food within Bradford Council. The quotes presented below shed important light on the proposed reasoning for why the Food Strategy came into existence in the first place. This implies that it was not because food had become an organisational priority, but in response to external pressures around food insecurity.

> *''There is very little… well, there is no drive some from elsewhere, this is a sort of, there has been, saying that we had a Chief Executive asking for that, but that was driven around the food insecurity challenges that we were getting ''[…] the fact it landed with a motivated and interested party, who then made it into something bigger and better, is again very much down to the individuals and the motivations within that of wanting to embrace it'' (Participant Eight).*

The above quote is key to understanding the vision-implementation gap, as it offers insight into why the Food Strategy was developed in the first place. As the Officer above (responsible for the strategy's development) implies, the strategy was not produced because the organisation decided to develop one; it was driven by external pressures to address food insecurity. With no organisational governance in place, the participant suggests that the Food Strategy was never an organisational priority and advanced only because a group of people was interested in advancing it. It is understood that the Food Strategy was not an organisational priority of Bradford Council, but rather the initiative of individual Officers who took the prompt to develop it. As this participant suggests, there was no organisational drive to produce it, hence it lacked high-level support for implementation or for advancing initiatives proposed within it. Some of the resource

allocation matters and siloed working challenges identified in previous sections may indeed be addressed if the Senior Leadership within the organisation rallied around it; however, as this insight, supported by others in this chapter, demonstrates, the Food Strategy is not a shared organisational strategy.

Academic definitions of strategy implementation help to clarify what is happening in practice. Based on a classical understanding of strategy implementation, whereby a vision is set and resources are allocated against that vision (Chandler, 1962), the account presented so far suggests that the Food Strategy was never going to be implemented, as no new resources have been allocated against the strategy, nor have existing resources across various departments been allocated against it.

As the Food Strategy (according to the Senior Officer who produced it) is reported to have emerged from external pressure rather than organisational desire, the term 'performative strategy' may help explain the observed phenomena. For Cabantous, Gond & Wright (2018), a performative strategy signals intent, provides legitimacy, and acknowledges the referenced issues as important. As this account suggests that the local authority has limited power over the food system and limited internal resources, the development of a performative strategy seems inevitable. This point supports Finding 5 which notes that actors around the Bradford Food Strategy occupy a voluntary function – their existence is not mandated by Government which constrains their power. The analysis above reinforces this finding, and adds nuance, in that it demonstrates the Lead Officer lacks meaningful mandate from the organisation, as well as national government.

West-Yorkshire Combined Authority

In 2020, Bradford became part of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority as part of the Devolution Deal, which led to the creation of the West Yorkshire Mayor role, as agreed by the five local councils: Bradford, Calderdale, Leeds, Wakefield, and Kirklees. The Devolution Deal gave powers, funding, and responsibilities to the Combined Authority and Local Authorities to make local decisions regarding transport, adult education, skills and jobs, infrastructure, housing, regeneration, and regional economic recovery (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2025). It is understood, based on the perspective of Participant Twelve, a Combined Authority Officer, that food policy is not being addressed at the regional level due to limited capacity, and that this is instead left to the city level.

> '....I don't know that they've particularly got a huge amount of capacity to be thinking about food policy side of things, I guess they kind of let the District's focus on that'' (Participant Twelve).

When pressed on what might be required for the Combined Authority to prioritise food at the regional level, the participant believes that local governance must inform regional governance, given that regional governance is a collective of local governance. The participant suggests that local government Directors and Leaders must first prioritise food as a strategic matter in order to influence the Combined Authority's focus. Participant Twelve explains, in the quote below, their view on how the Combined Authority operates financially and how decisions are made regarding funding for strategic priorities.

> *''... the investment plans of the Combined Authority which shape... all of our funding [...] goes through our assurance processes. The first stage of which is a strategic assessment [...] So, if a project comes in, it's strategically assessed against [...] the investment strategy... the assessment strategy is a piece of work that's agreed at the Combined Authority level as to what the priorities for the region are in terms of where we should be investing more money. So, if food strategies are, are a priority for our constituent local authorities... and that's one of the key priorities if they want to get into that investment strategy.... that [...] opens up then the ability to shape where funding goes [...] so it's ... getting your leaders and directors to be talking about food strategy as a regional priority'' (Participant Twelve).*

Following this logic, it is implied that Food Strategies must be a shared priority of the individual Local Authorities in order to permeate into Combined Authorities, thus suggesting both agency and power at the local authority level to influence the priorities of the regional level. However, as an earlier section demonstrates, Food Strategies do not appear, based on the perspectives presented, to be a shared priority of the local authority, so food is unlikely to permeate into the investment strategies of the Combined Authority and receive the required support and resources. This perspective implies that if Food Strategies are to become a local priority, food could become a regional priority and access investment funding, thus helping bridge the vision-implementation gap.

An alternative perspective is presented by Participant Fourteen, who suggests that the Combined Authority may not necessarily need to explicitly focus on food policy to effectively advance food-related outcomes.

> *''..., there are still funds around that the Council and increasingly through devolution with West-Yorkshire Combined Authority have as additional funding steams and it's really about the flex. Either it's a fund that pays for food related stuff, or it's a fund that pays for something that indirectly is designed to have a food intervention that leads to the outcomes that you're seeking'' (Participant Fourteen).*

This participant suggests that the resource could be obtained through Combined Authority funding if it is framed to fit within other funding streams, and that funding specifically for food may not be required.

Central government

Central government is presented as a key organisation with authority over the local level. Previous sections have already set out the power the Central government has over local budgets and how cutting budgets or mandating austerity measures significantly constrain local actors' ability to allocate resources to Local Food Strategies. This section will not cover old ground, but instead demonstrate how a lack of coordination at the national level influences a lack of coordination at the local level, and how properly coordinated national policy can have a significant impact locally. Participant Three in the quote below highlights an implication: food is a topic that spans several government departments. As food doesn't have a clear home within the Central government, they argue that the same is replicated locally, which means it ends up resting in the Public Health Department (due to ringfenced funding, as shown in an earlier section).

> *''... there's no single government department that is responsible for saying, right, here is our approach to sustainable food systems, and this is how we support local, local government s [...] doesn't exist, it [...] sits loosely across a variety of government departments. That unfortunately permeates down into Local Authorities [...], and therefore, unfortunately, it ends up being levelled at public health'' (Participant Three).*

If there is inadequate coordination nationally regarding strategic food system work, it should not be surprising, as Participant Three notes, that the same issues are replicated locally. Despite a lack of joined-up working nationally, Central government recently demonstrated the impact it can have on matters regarding food and highlighted that real power for change in the food system sits at the national rather than the local level.

Between collecting the data used in this thesis and writing the discussion section, there has been a substantial policy change to expand Free School Meals to all families receiving Universal Credit benefits from September 2026. The Government claim that this will lift 100,000 children out of poverty (Department for Education, 2025). The impact of this policy alone demonstrates the strength and importance of national policy and the impact it can have on food. Whilst this must be celebrated, the broader context of national governance must be discussed, as Free School Meals are only one part of the challenges facing the food system.

At the national level, there is no single government department responsible for food (Lang, 2022). At the time of writing, DEFRA are leading on the Government's 'Good Food

Cycle', which seeks to transform the UK food system by making it healthier, sustainable, resilient, affordable, and economically strong (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2025).

Just as the food agenda is led by Public Health at the Bradford level, national work is siloed within DEFRA at the central level. As stated in prior sections, this is problematic, as progress relies on the engagement of other departments for policies, strategies and initiatives to be effectively implemented. As this is a central challenge, it is perhaps also felt locally, as there is no clear central governance over food.

This analysis aligns with Finding 3 which claims that the Bradford food strategy demonstrates food system thinking – it does not demonstrate food system practice. The above account suggests that such a phenomenon is the reproduction of a national challenge.

Market governance

The final level of governance to discuss regarding Local Food Strategies is market governance, which is arguably the most relevant level for the day-to-day operations of the food system. This section demonstrates how market governance operates in isolation from the ambitions set out within the Bradford Food Strategy, and hence identifies the conceptual limitations of local attempts to transform the food system. The simple premise of market governance is supply and demand, and without local demand, or the financial ability to buy local produce, the market will seek out demand elsewhere, as noted in the quote below, which is from mainland Europe.

> ''We also connected with a guy [name removed] from [name removed] down in Wales, and again his point was [...] our meat's too expensive for Bradford's market, we export our top, top stuff to Europe, and Belgium, and France, where they are willing to pay the price'' (Participant Two).

As the above quote suggests, within market governance, if a local producer increases the value of their product, they will seek a market that supports this value and is willing to pay for it. If there is no local market for this higher-value produce, market governance dictates that they will sell to a higher-value market. Regarding the Bradford Food Strategy, this point highlights that the local market is governed by external forces, such as supply and demand – not the Bradford Food Strategy. Whilst the Strategy aspires to 'more food being grown, purchased and consumed locally', this requires consumers to be willing and able to pay increased costs. If sustainable produce is too expensive for the local market, as implied above, then non-sustainable produce will be imported to feed the local population. Ultimately, the point here is that the Food Strategy can aspire to what it likes - it is market logic which dominates the food system (Benton, 2023; Lang,

2022). It also cannot be overlooked that this was a political decision to keep the cost of food cheap (Schoen & Lang, 2014).

Market governance works for people

There is a major challenge to the convenience and acceptance of market governance within the current, dominant food regime. Although those involved with Local Food Strategies are engaged in this debate, the participant quoted below highlights the fundamental challenge that the current food regime works for most people. The quote below also highlights the perceived benefits of market governance for consumers, namely that it offers choice at a low cost.

> *''The thing about markets is choice, and it's, there's no two ways about it, the food industry itself, we point to the fact that consumers can eat whatever they want, whenever they want, at a pretty decent price for the most part, that's a huge win, and I, actually most people would agree with them'' (Participant Nineteen).*

> *''So they're happy with their lot, because for, certainly in some of that first generation migrants that we've just been working with [...] they are just delighted with the quality of everything, which we might perceive to be appalling, and so it's really, really difficult narrative [...] the cooks will be seeing the level of convenience food as a delight [...] I've got things that I used to make back home that I'd spend hours making, and now the guy down the road makes it and it's cheaper than me cooking'' (Participant Eight).*

In these quotes, the participants directly address the choice and convenience that a free market food system offers consumers. This is important, as it underscores the need for regulation and legislation to shape the food system – rather than relying on consumer demand or other localised initiatives such as Local Food Strategies. As highlighted in the prior point, the market responds to supply and demand. There is greater demand for a range of affordable food – thus the market responds to it.

The points highlighted above address the tension between the aspirations for a better food system, as set out within the Food Strategy, and the practical realities assumed to be facing consumers.

The Lead Officer for developing the Food Strategy recognises the complexities of the problem in the food system. As the participant quote below states, there are opportunities to leverage change at the local level, but ultimately, it is the large corporate food companies which operate the food system, and it is those who have the power within the food system.

‘’… we are to some extent fighting a disheartening and losing battle without really strong national policy. It is very, very hard because at the end of the day, the role […] that commercial determinants and corporations hold within our food system […] feel like we’re tinkering around the edges of the complexity of the problem, and the way that food providers are working on our system, essentially, and promoting the consumption of highly processed food, because economically, in a capitalist environment, that’s what generates economic revenue (Participant Eight).

The above quote shows that the participant is aware of the scale of the problem and that they are ‘tinkering around the edges’. This suggests that the vision-implementation gap is not due to a lack of understanding of food system economics, but rather to a lack of power, control or influence over the dominant food system.

Finance Sector Governing Food Business

Despite being locally based, food businesses are subject to wider global forces and, as such, national policy is at minimum required to address these challenges, which are far beyond the local authority level. The Participant below raises an important point about private equity ownership.

‘’We've got Morrison’s in the district who, in many ways, were, probably past tense, an absolute beacon of integrated supply chains, farm to fork, but they’re going through the financial mincer of being private equity owned and that looks like that may all get split up […] it is a reminder of some of the vulnerability of big business’’ (Participant Six).

Global financial markets are identified as a key contributor to maintaining the status quo, as international investment funds are channelled into food corporations to seek profit and return on investment (Clapp, 2014; Bene, 2022). Because these funds are seeking profit, they have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. In the book ‘Our Lives in their Portfolios: Asset Managers and why they rule the world’ (Christophers, 2024), a compelling case is made for how private equity asset management really works. According to Christophers, the primary pursuit of asset management is not to generate steady revenue from ownership, but to inflate asset prices and realise profits on sale.

The participant above refers to how the company was once leading the way in integrated local supply chains, yet this is now being sold off through private equity. This subtly highlights an important challenge about where control in the market really lies. In this extract, the participant alludes to Morrison’s once having a strong farm-to-fork system, but notes that the DNA of private equity is about maximising profits from acquired

assets, not maintaining the original values and ethos, as reinforced by academic literature on political economy and food systems (De Schutter, 2019; Bene, 2022; Giminez & First, 2019).

This signals a much larger challenge, as these issues are a product of capitalism and will not be solved at the local level, or perhaps even the national level. Whilst Morrison's is currently a Bradford-based food business, the operational DNA is not about providing the local district with sustainable food, but about generating profits for its private equity ownership. Collectively, the above section supports Finding 7, that the Food Strategy identifies topics which exist at a much larger scale than it has the power to influence.

If the rules of private-equity ownership are dominating our food system, Local Food Strategies will only scratch the surface of the challenge. One way in which Bene (2022) argues that local efforts can challenge the dominant food system is through the creation of counter-movements. This is not mentioned in the interviews or in the strategy document analysis. Even if it were included, the issues outlined above present challenges surrounding resource and capacity allocation.

Summary

This section has examined the formal and informal rules and the institutions that shape the Bradford Food Strategy. Three key rules were identified.

First, whilst not dismissing the importance of policy cohesion, resource allocation appears key to implementing the Food Strategy. Whilst embedding the Food Strategy within the organisation's parent policy may help to gain traction, it will not, in itself, lead to implementation without additional resource allocation. Resource allocation, it seems, is largely determined by Central government funding, so cohesion alone does not guarantee additional resource allocation. Second, there is no rule mandating that Local Authorities must have a Food Strategy, and under austerity, councils focus primarily on legally required services. As having a Food Strategy is not a rule imposed on the Council by Government, it is argued that it does not receive the required attention or resource, as it is not mandatory. Third, there is an overarching rule that the organisation must remain financially solvent. This limits resource allocation for the Food Strategy and drives irreversible acts such as asset sales, including council-owned farms, as incentivised under national government direction through 'Exceptional Financial Services'.

Regarding institutions that govern the space around food, four levels of governance were discussed: local, regional, and national government, and the market. Within local government , the Food Strategy is largely governed by the Public Health Department rather than the wider council. There is a 'bottom-up' drive from actors enacting agency,

and an absence of senior organisational leadership. At the Regional Government level, there is a reported absence of a regional food policy or prioritisation of food, although insights suggest that coherent local prioritisation of food may influence regional investment priorities. While national government are reported to demonstrate significant negative influence over the ability of local actors to implement the Food Strategy, there are nods to the positive influence of national policy. Example initiatives, such as the recently announced Free School Meals advancement, highlight the impact of national policy on local outcomes.

Finally, market governance is positioned as the primary level of governance that dictates the food system. This level of governance is largely disconnected from the Food Strategy, which, under a corporate food regime, operates in the name of profitability rather than advancing Local Food Strategies.

4.3.3.5. How structural, historical, and geographic factors shape political and institutional power relations

Austerity

Austerity, or reduced public spending, is a major structural factor that has severe consequences for the operations of Local government , as this demonstrates throughout. This is shown to negatively impact the whole organisation – not just the ability to deliver against a Food Strategy. The impact of austerity and reduced finances on the organisation's ability to operate innovatively was a common theme in the prior participant interviews presented. This organisational context directly limits the organisation's ability to act innovatively or undertake additional work, such as the initiatives proposed within the Food Strategy.

> *''Tens of Local Authorities who are facing probably the hardest, most unprecedented financial challenges they've ever faced in their life…'' (Participant Fourteen).*

To understand the implications of austerity for local government , Eckersley & Tobin (2019) are drawn upon, particularly their concept of 'policy dismantling'. The authors use the term policy to encompass the full policy cycle, from signals of intent to final outcomes, rather than focusing solely on high-level documents, which, in isolation, cannot reveal changes further down the line in implementation. Eckersley & Tobin (2019) also address 'policy capacity' and highlight how this has been significantly weakened by austerity. By policy capacity, the authors mean 'the ability to direct resources and make intelligent, informed choices about different policy and strategic alternatives'. The authors demonstrate how Local Councils, in response to an average budget cut of 49 per cent, drastically reduced less-visible parts of the organisation and avoided disrupting the more visible, public-facing services. Policy functions were

among the less-visible features that were reduced, which in turn had a negative impact on policy implementation, enforcement, and evaluation. This was not seen as deliberate but as a response to fiscal constraint. The disproportionate impact in less affluent areas was also noted, particularly in areas with a majority of domestic residents in lower council tax brackets, which subsequently paid lower council tax revenues, thus reducing council spending power. Austerity was presented as an unavoidable course of action required to counter overspending by the previous Labour government and rising national debt (Sowels, 2014). Whilst public deficit reduction was the official justification, critics argue this was motivated by neo-liberal ideology and part of a mission to reduce the role and size of the state (Pautz, 2017; Sowels, 2014).

From a macro-level perspective on the challenges of implementing local authority food strategies, the ideological shift to reduce the size of the state, or local government, through the state's austerity policy is clearly a key contributor to the vision-implementation gap in the Bradford Food Strategy.

Central government are making the ideological decision to cut the funding which local government receive – this is a primary reason, and arguably the most fundamental reason, in the case of Bradford, based on the actors spoken with, for the existence of the gap between the vision and implementation of the Food Strategy. This reinforces and elaborates upon Finding 6: The impact of austerity and how it limits power and capacity is not adequately reflected within the Food Strategy.

Devolution

It is apparent that two phenomena are occurring at the same time – whilst the power of local government is reportedly shrinking, the power of Regional Government appears to be growing. Devolution is the devolvement of power from National to Regional Governments. Within participant interviews, the importance of Regional Government is emphasised.

> *''... the role of devolution, so I don't know what, how to find out, well I can't even find out on google, it's not very easy to understand [...] what powers have been devolved to West-Yorkshire... (Participant Eight)*.

The examples above refer to emerging changes in the landscape of local and regional government. The English Devolution Bill is referred to here, promising to decentralise power from central government to regional and local government . The Bill sets out plans to move beyond Whitehall micromanagement and emphasises the important roles that Mayors play in attracting well-paid jobs, building affordable homes, and developing public transport. The Bill states that Mayors are to receive more power over housing, planning, transport, energy, skills, employment support, and more. There is also reference to net zero, which includes Housing Retrofit, Local Energy Plans, Heat

Networks, and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2024). However, there is no reference to food.

The West-Yorkshire Combined Authorities Corporate Plan 2024-25 echoes similar sentiment and alignment with that set out by Central government in the Bill. The visions and mission within the Corporate Plan 2024-25 are:

- A prosperous West-Yorkshire – an inclusive economy with well paid jobs
- A happy West-Yorkshire – great places and happy communities
- A well-connected West-Yorkshire – a strong transport system
- A sustainable West-Yorkshire – making lives greener
- A safe West-Yorkshire – a region where everyone can flourish

Based on the West-Yorkshire Combined Authority Corporate Plan 2024-25, it is apparent that neither the terms food, nor eating, are included within the document (West-Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2024).

Based on the 2023 Annual Review, West-Yorkshire Investment Strategy (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2023), it is again apparent that the follow investment priorities do not make reference to food.

- Investment Priority 1: Good Jobs and Resilient Businesses (including entrepreneurialism)
- Investment Priority 2: Skills and training for people
- Investment Priority 3: Creating Great Places and Accelerated Infrastructure
- Investment Priority 4: Tackling the Climate Emergency, and Environmental Sustainability
- Investment Priority 5: Delivering Sustainable, Integrated, Inclusive and Affordable Transport
- Investment Priority 6: Creative Industries, Culture, Heritage and Sport

When searching for the term ‘food’, there are several references. These include the impact of rising food costs on household budgets, food poverty, and the impact of reduced disposable income on food and drink venues. The strength of the food production sector on the West Yorkshire economy is also acknowledged. On Investment Priority 3 – Creating Great Places and Accelerated Infrastructure, there is a connection between the benefits of improved infrastructure and access to food (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2023). Whilst there are references to food within the investment strategy, they appear in no way significant to realising the ambitions within the Bradford Food Strategy, nor do they propose additional investment into any food-related projects or initiatives which would support the delivery of proposed initiatives within the Bradford Food Strategy.

The overarching questions shaping this sub-section question the conditions that shape how politics and institutions work, and how history, identity or regional divides shape power and society. In response to these questions, it is clear that food is not a topic which is being given due consideration within the evolving landscape of devolution. Whilst major structural changes are indeed taking place regarding devolved power from central to regional level, and are paving the way to rewire the operations of the country, it is also clear that food is not being included as part of this rewriting of power distribution.

4.3.3.6. Ideas, ideology, and dominant narrative

There is a dominant narrative observed regarding the free market and economic growth.

Food left to the market

It is questioned below as to whether the food system has ever been engineered or whether it has always been subject to market forces.

> *''Have we ever engineered food culture before with a specific outcome in mind as a society or has anybody? I mean, the driving motive is generally, I want to sell more cornflakes (Participant Seventeen).*

In contrast to the above point, Lang (2022) argues that whilst the neoliberal ideology has dominated the UK's approach to food policy since the closure of the Ministry of Food in 1955, the UK Government did not prioritise governance over food. During the post-WW2 period, the Ministry of Food played an active role in food governance. This included oversight of distribution and rationing, regulation against hoarding and profiteering, and promotion of public health and public growing campaigns. Lang marks 1980 as a significant period when the dominance of the neoliberal ideology under then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher took hold. In line with the principles of neoliberalism, Lang argues that the core principles of private ownership, deregulation, and an overall reduction in state intervention were applied to matters concerning food. This, in turn, paved the way for the growth of supermarkets and corporate dominance, which sought profit from the food system at the expense of the environment and health, previously prioritised by state governance. Another key theme Lang highlights is the colonial hangover, and how the UK is still reliant on the global market to provide its food, which is why national food production has not been prioritised (Lang, 2020). This point suggests that national government intervention in the food system is possible, and indeed has occurred in the past. Not intervening is an ideological decision, and it is this that needs addressing to improve the food system – not local food strategies. Whilst it is apparent throughout this research that Bradford Council lacks the resources required to implement its Food Strategy, this section argues that it is Central government intervention that is required – not local.

This section argues that food has been subject to neoliberal policy, and thus reduced the topic to market forces rather than the responsibility of the national government. It does not seem that the relevant enabling conditions will be set by the national government to enable local food strategies, as doing so is not in line with the neoliberal ideology

Fixation with economic growth

Part of the broader challenge regarding addressing challenges in the food system is a fixation with economic growth. In line with the previously discussed implications of neoliberal ideology, the comment below highlights the shortcomings of GDP as the dominant measure of a country's success.

> ''… every country looks at GDP and ultimately, the higher GDP […] it doesn't correlate with having a higher wellbeing or higher health of the nation, and then you get to a point where GDP will start to drop because people can't work, can't make the money that enables the growth so there needs to be a bigger focus on wellbeing, especially because we're getting to the point where there's not enough jobs because of AI […] all of that other stuff that means wellbeing has to become priority'' (Participant Nine).

This point frames the national context in which challenges within the food system exist. From this perspective, it is argued that national governments are not addressing challenges in the food system, as their primary measure of success is economic growth – not improving the food system. Because government intervention is seen to threaten economic growth, this is taken to justify reduced state intervention. However, this point suggests that such an approach is short-sighted, as a time will arise (perhaps it has already) when the negative costs of ill health outstrip economic growth.

This view aligns with insights from political economy approaches to food systems, which emphasise how contemporary agri-food systems are structured around capital accumulation, market expansion, and the consolidation of power among dominant actors (De Schutter, 2019; Giminez & First, 2019; Bene, 2022). Within this literature, the organisation of food production and distribution is understood to prioritise efficiency, competitiveness, and profitability, often at the expense of social and ecological sustainability. Scholars highlight dynamics that are misaligned with sustainable food systems, including the pursuit of lower-cost land, labour, and inputs; the promotion of monocultures; and the dominance of industrialised farming models embedded within global supply chains. These structural characteristics reflect a broader political economy in which food systems are shaped by global market imperatives rather than local needs. In this context, the conceptual limitations of Local Food Strategies

become clearer, particularly their ability to influence or reconfigure a global food system that is deeply embedded within market-led and growth-oriented dynamics.

4.3.3.7. Overview

This thesis set out to answer the following question:

‘’What are the challenges regarding the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy. Moreover, what are the limitations of local authority-led food strategies more generally?’’. The findings are summarised below, followed by a

- Finding 1: Collectively, it is assumed that those involved with the Food Strategy are primarily advocates of a better food system, but lack power over the food system.
- Finding 2: Operational food system actors, the actors who occupy power within the food system, appear absent from involvement with the Bradford Food Strategy.
- Finding 3: The Bradford Food Strategy demonstrates food system thinking – it does not demonstrate food system practice.
- Finding 4: The Bradford Food Strategy and related action plan represent a symbolic articulation of aspirational actors with implementation and resourcing left unspecified.
- Finding 5: Actors around the Bradford food strategy occupy a voluntary function – their existence is not mandated by the broader council, nor central government which constrains their power.
- Finding 6: The impact of austerity and how it limits power and capacity is not adequately reflected within the Food Strategy.
- Finding 7: The Food Strategy identifies topics which exist at a much larger scale than it has the power to influence.

This findings section has demonstrated the multi-scalar challenges that constrain the implementation of the Bradford food strategy which largely support the earlier presented document analysis of the Bradford food strategy. Through a political economy lens, it becomes clear that these challenges are not simply operational but are structurally embedded across micro, meso, and macro levels.

At the micro-level, while food strategy advocates can articulate a vision for a more sustainable and equitable food system, their capacity to enact change is significantly limited by a lack of resources, authority, and influence over both internal departments and the wider food system. The inclusion of other local authority officers further highlights how prolonged austerity has eroded organisational capacity, restricting the council’s ability to engage meaningfully with non-statutory initiatives.

At the meso-level, the findings show that while policy cohesion and strategic alignment are necessary, they are insufficient without adequate resourcing and institutional

backing. The voluntary nature of local food strategies, situated outside statutory requirements, leaves them vulnerable within an organisational context shaped by fiscal constraint and competing priorities. Furthermore, the governance of the food strategy is dispersed across multiple institutional layers, from local departments to combined authorities, central government, and market actors, each exerting influence in ways that both enable and constrain action.

At the macro-level, broader political-economic conditions, including austerity, processes of devolution, and the marketisation of the food system, fundamentally shape the terrain in which local strategies operate. These dynamics reinforce a system in which responsibility for addressing food system challenges is devolved to local actors, while the structural drivers of those challenges remain largely unaddressed.

Taken together, both the document analysis, and the participant interview data demonstrate seven key findings which illustrate how the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy is constrained by a wider political economy marked by limited state capacity, fragmented governance, and the dominance of market-led food systems. In this context, the strategy reflects a broader model of neoliberal localism, in which responsibility is localised while power and resources remain unevenly distributed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The previous chapters set out the abductive thematic structuring of interview data and the political economy analysis of the challenges related to implementing the Bradford food strategy. This chapter discusses how these elements relate to the broader body of literature. There are two key analytical elements that structure this chapter, both informed by a political economy perspective. The first is Organisational Governance; the second is devolved power without responsibility or resources. Throughout this discussion, the chapter highlights several key points that challenge the assumptions about the power at local authority level over the food system by presenting the challenges that restrict Bradford Council from implementing its food strategy. In doing so, it contributes to the literature on local food strategies by:

a. Confirming the existence of a vision-implementation gap, and offering several explanations for why, in Bradford, such a gap occurs.

b. Highlighting the importance of understanding the power central government has over local government,

c. Drawing upon various interpretations of the concept of ‘strategy implementation’ to question what is actually meant by implementation,

d. Challenging the notion of private sector engagement at the local level by questioning whether engagement is in itself the desirable outcome,

e. Highlighting the limitations of the conceptual approach to local food strategies in relation to high-level food system transformation literature.

f. Challenges of implementing a food systems approach without the presence of key food system actors

5.1. Disconnected Organisational Governance

5.1.1. Cross-cutting strategy or a departmental strategy?

Holistic food strategy Implementation

Based on both document analysis and participant accounts, it is apparent that whilst the content of the Bradford food strategy is holistic, the realities of implementation are not. Despite adopting the systems approach as set out by advocates for Local Food Partnerships, Sustainable Food Places (SFP), the Bradford food strategy appears, in practice, to be a Public Health Strategy, mirroring earlier observations of Lever et al. (2019). Empirical research demonstrates how this is problematic because the Public Health Department has a limited remit and cannot implement much of the strategy, despite their commitment and desire to do so.

Whilst the themes present within the Bradford food strategy are holistic and far-reaching, and when analysed for content and policy cohesion (for example, Kidd & Reynolds, 2024), the Bradford food strategy appears quite compelling. When analysed for implementation, however, the empirical insights suggest that proposed initiatives are not being implemented despite being included within the strategy. This reinforces the gap between vision and implementation, as highlighted by Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto (2019), Sonnino (2023), Sonnino & Milbourne (2022), Coulson & Sonnino (2019), and Zerbian et al. (2022).

As noted by Mattioni et al. (2022), much prior research on local food partnerships had been conducted with those actively involved in Food Strategies; therefore, this research responded to this by sampling actors who were assumed not to be actively involved in the Strategy. This both reinforces the need to seek perceptions of a broader array of actors and the need to focus not just on the ideal outcomes of a strategy, but also on the mechanisms which do or do not exist to effectively implement the strategy.

The food strategy being a matter for the Public Health Department and not the broader organisation also echoes earlier findings of Lever et al. (2019), who expressed, with regard to Kirklees Food Partnership (a close neighbour of Bradford), that the food

strategy was the responsibility of the Public Health Department, despite being a much broader interdisciplinary issue. Lever and colleagues recognise the complexity of Local Authorities and that the views of actors with whom they interact regarding the sustainable food agenda are not necessarily representative of the whole organisation. As demonstrated above, this is reproduced in Bradford.

Whilst those who developed the food strategy (predominantly Public Health Officers) followed and incorporated guidance set out by advocates for the local food agenda, Sustainable Food Places (SFP), this led to the production of, on the surface at least, a holistic food strategy. It did not involve many of the actors referenced within it outside of the Public Health Department. This research demonstrates and echoes earlier research suggesting that Food Strategies tend to reflect the views of a limited subset of respondents whose views align with the agenda, rather than those of the broader organisation (Lever et al., 2019; Mattioni et al., 2022). Whilst the food strategy document may take a systems approach and demonstrate systems thinking within, this research has shown that food systems practice does not appear to be taking place.

Whilst confirming the existence of a vision-implementation gap, as noted by Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto (2019), Sonnino (2023), Sonnino & Milbourne (2022), Coulson & Sonnino (2019), and Zerbian et al. (2022), this research extends knowledge on this topic. It demonstrates that, in the case of Bradford, the gap between vision and implementation partly stems from a disconnect between the strategy's ambitions and the engagement of relevant officers with the strategy. This highlights the importance of not assuming engagement based on the contents of a strategy alone, and of recognising that the local authority is not a homogeneous organisation – the strategy only reflects the views of those involved, as highlighted by Mattioni et al. (2022).

Several conceptual understandings of Strategy Implementation can be drawn upon to offer a potential explanation for why the Bradford food strategy references mechanisms and levers beyond the immediate control of the Officers leading on the strategy. As acknowledged within the literature review, there has been more focus on food strategy development and ideal outcomes from the food system (Jones & Hills, 2021; Giambartolomei, Forno & Sage, 2021; Yap & Treuherz, 2025), but less focus on strategy implementation (Sonnino, 2023; Sonnino et al., 2022).

Given that little focus has been placed on the implementation stage, it is unsurprising that exploration has also not been undertaken of different conceptual understandings of what it means to implement a food trategy. Whilst this work does not make a definitive claim to draw upon all understandings of the concept of strategy implementation, there are three relevant concepts drawn upon below that could explain the vision-implementation gap.

Firstly, the classical view of strategy implementation is suggested to mean a planned, deliberate focus, whereby, typically, a management team determines a process to be followed by others within the organisation. The process is linear, with strategy developed first and then implemented. Implementation (or non-implementation) is treated as binary, in that it is either implemented or it is not, and success or failure is internalised (Chandler, 1962). Based on this traditional perspective of strategy implementation, it could therefore be reasoned that the strategy has not been effectively implemented due to managerial or organisational failure.

Applied to the Bradford Food Strategy, such a reading would suggest that limited implementation could be attributed to shortcomings in the processes of strategic communication and stakeholder engagement undertaken during its development. However, while this framing offers one possible interpretation, it risks oversimplifying the complexity of implementation by attributing causality to internal organisational performance, rather than considering broader structural and contextual constraints.

Second, the emergent view of strategy arose in protest against the top-down, binary assumptions of the classical view of strategy. In turn, the emergent approach views strategy development and implementation as interconnected, rather than distinct and separate stages. This means that strategy is not developed and then implemented, but that implementation takes place over time and in response to changing circumstances. The emergent approaches also recognise the importance of power relations in determining strategic outcomes (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Based on this emergent perspective, it could be reasoned that the strategy is still in the process of being implemented, and that ongoing actions and decisions will contribute to its implementation.

Third, the performativity of strategy views strategy as an object that generates action through its own communication. In this perspective, strategies are used as objectives to signal alignment, identity, and legitimacy. Such an approach is particularly evident in sustainability and corporate social responsibility, where the documents seek to shape perceptions and behaviours rather than fully realise the ambitions set out in them (Cabantous, Gond & Wright, 2018). Based on the above conceptual understandings of strategy implementation, this research proposes that the performative view of strategy aligns most closely with the current phenomenon playing out in the case of Bradford. Whilst the strategy as a document clearly signals intent and that the contents set out within it are important, the following reasoning suggests that no related actions are taking place. The above perspective offers a significant insight into the vision-implementation gap highlighted within the literature (Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto, 2019; Sonnino, 2023; Sonnino & Milbourne, 2022; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Zerbian et al., 2022)Whilst the above discussion offers a line of reasoning as to why the vision-implementation gap may occur in the case of Bradford's Food Strategy, the following

section offers an explanation as to why it is reduced to being a Public Health matter in the first place.

5.1.2. Officer agency versus organisational leadership

This empirical research suggests that the Food Partnership functions as a non-mandated, voluntary governance arena, with limited clarity on how strategic actions will be realised in practice.

Further contributing to understanding of the vision-implementation gap in relation to the Bradford Food Strategy, the analysis suggests that tensions exist between officer agency and organisational structures of governance and accountability. While officers may exercise agency in developing strategic initiatives, such as the strategy, this does not necessarily translate into sustained implementation capacity if wider organisational systems do not provide supportive leadership, oversight, or adequate resources.

From this perspective, the production of the Bradford Food Strategy may be understood as the outcome of discretionary action at officer level, rather than the result of coherent executive direction or a sustained, cooperative organisational mandate. This raises questions about the extent to which strategic initiatives are institutionally anchored beyond their initial development phase. However, rather than framing this solely as an issue of internal accountability or managerial oversight, as suggested by classical models of strategy implementation (Chandler, 1962), this study argues that such explanations are insufficient on their own.

Instead, the Strategy's limited implementation capacity should be understood in relation to wider structural conditions shaping local government . In particular, literature on policy dismantling highlights the cumulative effects of prolonged austerity on the capacity of local authorities to maintain, let alone expand, non-statutory policy areas (Eckersley & Tobin, 2019). From this perspective, constraints on implementation are not merely organisational in nature, but reflect broader shifts in resource availability and institutional stability, as a product of the broader dismantling of local government . This is also observed in the literature, where the agency of actors is assumed and structural challenges are not adequately addressed. This example can be seen in Zerbian et al. (2022), where the authors observe no commitment to implementing the food strategies within the Local Authorities they studied. They reasoned that although projects and policies had been developed, the values of the organisation had not – thus inferring that if the values of the organisation, or actors within the organisation, were to change, the strategy may be implemented. By looking at structural factors, however, this research presents a different understanding, seeing the problem not as a problem of

organisational value in which the views of actors within it can be changed, thus inferring agency, but as a product of the structural challenges facing the local authority.

5.1.3. Policy cohesion and the Bradford Food Strategy

This section challenges assumptions about food policy and policy cohesion that appear in the literature (Davies, 2018; Pardoe & Petrovic, 2024; Kidd & Reynolds, 2024). It also suggests that policy cohesion, in itself, should not be seen as the goal, and that placing such a focus assumes agency within the local authority to act on food without adequately accounting for the implications of resource limitations.

As argued in earlier sections, whilst the Bradford Food Strategy may appear cohesive as a document, its position and support within the local authority appear less cohesive, based on interview data. It is argued that a focus on policy cohesion alone assumes actor agency and does not adequately weigh the importance of resource allocation. Without addressing resource allocation, it is difficult not to view local food strategies as performative.

Policy coherence is taken to mean the alignment between two or more policies that should be complementary and ideally mutually reinforcing. This should give policy interventions the best chance of success. Equally, policy incoherence undermines efforts to join up policy (Hawkes & Parsons, 2019).

Policy cohesion is identified within Local Food literature as a key element in raising the profile of and supporting the efficacy of Local Food Strategies (Davies, 2018; Pardoe & Petrovic, 2024; Kidd & Reynolds, 2024). Davies (2018) identified influential functions at the local authority level with regard to policy cohesion and advocates cohesion through such mechanisms. Suggested functions include the Health and Wellbeing Board, Local Plans and Core Strategies, Council Plan or Corporate Strategy, City-wide initiatives, Food Strategies, and Scrutiny Committees.

The findings suggest that there is limited policy cohesion in relation to the positioning of the Food Strategy within the Council's wider organisational framework. While the Strategy has been formally adopted as a corporate policy document, it sits within a broader suite of strategies and does not appear to be embedded within the organisation's core policy architecture or constitutional framework. This raises questions about the extent to which non-statutory strategies are institutionally prioritised within local government structures.

Based on the above insights, the Food Strategy is incohesively embedded within the Organisation, as it does not feature within the Council Strategy. It could therefore be reasoned that, on the surface, a lack of policy cohesion is part of the reason why a gap exists between the vision and implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy, because it

does not feature in the organisation's parent document. Based on the above insight, this should guide the involvement of other departments in relation to food. It is noted that the participant assumes organisational agency too, thus both the participant and the literature place emphasis on the concept of cohesion.

This discussion challenges the relevance of policy cohesion and suggests that this contributes to a performative view of strategy.

This research contrasts with the recently published findings of Kidd & Reynolds (2024), who examined the policy cohesion of local government food policies and reported results that directly contradict the research presented in this thesis. The authors observed, in their study of 30 local government participants (one of whom was Bradford), that several departments within local government exhibit a strong degree of policy cohesion. These departments include public health, trading standards, environmental health, economic development, planning, and sustainability.

Based on the insights generated in this research, policy cohesion is not evident in practice in Bradford, despite the above research claiming it is. A potential explanation for this discrepancy may be that the authors analysed the content of the Strategy document rather than the practicalities of implementation (as noted above, there are several differing perspectives on what is meant by strategy implementation within the broader strategy literature). This replicates a previously discussed challenge, whereby research has focused on the concepts that exist within a policy document, rather than on whether they are implemented (Sonnino, Tegoni & De-Cunto, 2019; Sonnino, 2023). It is possible that Kidd & Reynolds reproduced this issue, as they are observing cohesion with regard to the written document, and it is not clear that their research looks at the practical implications that follow the document. There is perhaps an assumption that policy coherence brings additional policy resources. It may also be that a shared understanding of what it means to implement a strategy or policy has yet to be determined within the local food policy/strategy literature, given that the focus has been more on development than on implementation.

This research suggests that, despite what the Strategy document contains and its cohesiveness within the organisation, the real challenge is making adequate resources available to effectively implement the Strategy. It is suggested that prior research on policy cohesion likely focused more on which initiatives are included within the strategy and how they connect to other departmental functions, rather than on how the initiatives within the strategy are practically delivered, or not. This is an important nuance in relation to discussion regarding policy cohesion, as it suggests that policy cohesion alone does not necessarily lead to the strategy being resourced or to the effective implementation of proposed initiatives. A lack of implementation is perhaps therefore less about a lack of policy cohesion and more about a lack of resources flowing towards the Food Strategy. A way of querying this in practice would be to ask

whether, and how, other initiatives set out within the Council Plan receive resources, or whether this too is a performative strategy, based on the definition of Cabantous, Gond & Wright (2018). Based on the financial challenges prior reported which are facing the local authority, it is difficult to comprehend that the challenge is strictly limited to the food strategy.

As emphasised in the earlier section, the presence of a holistic food strategy does not necessarily mean it will be implemented holistically. The same caution applies to policy cohesion. Referencing food in other strategies does not, in itself, guarantee that adequate resources or capacity will be directed towards realising the ambition set out within the cohesive policy. As highlighted by Zerbian et al. (2022), the flow of resources should be the focus, since resources will support the implementation of the proposed initiative.

Based on the perspectives presented earlier on strategy implementation, the approach to policy cohesion appears aligned with the performative view of strategy, as defined by Cabantous, Gond & Wright (2018). In this perspective, strategies are used as an objective to signal alignment, identity, and legitimacy. This approach is particularly evident in sustainability and corporate social responsibility, where documents seek to shape perceptions and behaviours rather than fully realise the ambitions set out within them. This is challenging, however, as it is not clear that legitimisation alone will produce the resources required to implement the proposed initiatives within the strategy.

It is important here to refer back to the work of Ingram & Thornton (2022) as a reminder that it is not the activity itself, in this case policy cohesion, that is desired, but the outcome related to the proposed food-related initiative, which does not appear to be occurring in the case of Bradford. Perhaps there is an assumption being made by those pursuing policy cohesion (Davies, 2018; Pardoe & Petrovic, 2024; Kidd & Reynolds, 2024) that policy cohesion leads to policy resources. If so, this fails to recognise the significance of the challenges facing local authorities regarding austerity and the limited resources available within the local authority following fourteen years of austerity (Eckersley & Tobin, 2019). Such financial challenges are demonstrated in this research and elsewhere (Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019). Thus, it appears that research on policy cohesion and on food strategy implementation more broadly, does not adequately capture the implications of what austerity means in practice. It is hoped that the detailed findings presented in this research and the following discussion section contribute to a better understanding of this.

The following section discusses the resource challenges facing the local authority and contextualises the Food Strategy within this broader context to further demonstrate how resource constraints are hindering the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy.

5.2. Devolved power without responsibility or resource

5.2.1. Central government induced resource challenges within the organisation

Challenges around resource allocation feature prominently in the literature on local food policy (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Doernberg et al., 2019; Zerbian et al., 2022). Coulson & Sonnino (2019) recognise that cities have been hit hard by austerity and budget cuts, which lead to limited financial resources and inconsistent staffing support for Food Partnerships, thereby hindering the development and implementation of Food Policies. Zerbian et al. (2022) emphasise that the presence of food strategies and policies is not enough, and that additional focus is required on politics and decision-making to understand why resources are not flowing towards implementation. Doernberg et al. (2019) observed that a lack of resources and capacity led to limited progress in implementing initiatives within the strategy, and that where progress did occur, it was due to external triggers.

This empirical research offers insight into why resources are not flowing towards implementing the Food Strategy. The analysis identifies four key reasons.

First, the Public Health Department is limited in what it can resource due to restrictions surrounding the Public Health Grant. Second, there are no known sources of additional funding to implement Food Strategies. Third, senior leadership is not allocating resources to the Food Strategy, as it is not a legal obligation, and in times of financial hardship, Local Authorities are reduced to providing legally mandated functions. Fourth, even with Senior Leadership support, Local Authorities receive short-term annual settlements, so they cannot make strategic investments, as the resources they will or will not receive the following year are unknown.

Based on participant accounts, particularly from those actively in charge of the Food Strategy within the Public Health Department, it appears that adequate resources are not flowing to Local Food Strategies, primarily due to the lack of a national government mandate. This demonstrates that whilst there is local agency to determine an agenda or produce a strategy, the real importance is arguably whether they are effectively able to resource the proposed initiatives – which, based on the above view, is determined by central government.

Based on this insight, sufficient resources are not flowing from within the Public Health Department to implement the Food Strategy, due to limitations imposed by central government on where such funding can be spent. A second reason funding is not flowing towards implementing the Food Strategy is that there are no known sources of funding outside the local authority to implement Local Food Strategies.

Senior Leadership within the Council are not allocating resources or capacity across the organisation, as the organisation is resource-poor due to austerity. This is a challenge observed by several scholars, including Moragues-Faus & Sonnino (2018), Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham (2019), and Zerbian et al. (2022). This empirical research adds detail on what this means in practice. During times of austerity, the organisation is reduced to providing only legally mandated services, and having or implementing a Food Strategy is not one of them.

Based on this research, it is apparent that the organisation is reduced to providing legally required core functions during financial hardship, and having or implementing a Food Strategy is not among them. This connects to a prior point regarding the limitations of policy cohesion and organisational leadership; the two can be present, but without available resources, it is clear how initiatives proposed within the Strategy would be resourced. As highlighted below, even with the required support from Senior Leadership, the Council cannot make strategic investments due to the short-term settlements it receives from central government.

This research addresses a question raised by Zerbian et al. (2022) about the importance of understanding politics and decision-making and how they influence the flow of resources towards implementing Food Strategies. Whilst Zerbian and colleagues suggest the challenge lies in organisational values, this insight offers a different perspective. The research presented in this thesis suggests that resources are not flowing towards the Food Strategy because doing so requires longer-term investment that is not enabled by central government. The politics are not intra-organisational, as implied by Zerbian et al. (2022), but a product of a deliberate hollowing out of Local government through central government-imposed austerity policies as part of a mission to reduce the role and size of the state (Eckersley & Tobin, 2019; Pautz, 2017; Sowels, 2014).

The references to participant interviews above contribute to understanding the challenges posed in the literature regarding why and how resources do not flow towards supporting the implementation of Local Food Strategies. In short, the Public Health Department is limited in what it can resource due to restrictions surrounding the Public Health Grant. There are no known sources of public funding to implement Food Strategies. The third suggested reason for why resources are not flowing towards the implementation of the Food Strategy is that Senior Leadership are not allocating resources, as it is not a legal obligation for them. In times of financial hardship, Local Authorities are reduced to providing legally mandated functions – which a Food Strategy is not. Even with Senior Leadership support, Local Authorities receive annual settlements, so they cannot make strategic investments, as the resources they will or will not receive the following year are unknown. In this case study of Bradford Council,

these are the primary understood reasons why the organisation is not resourcing, thus implementing the Food Strategy.

The challenge is less about understanding how organisational values contribute to resources not flowing towards food initiatives, as in Zerbian et al. (2022), and more about understanding the structural challenges that drastically limit the agency of the local authority. Whilst others referenced throughout this research highlight the presence of austerity and how this decreases capacity (Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Zerbian et al., 2022), this research not only confirms the notion but also characterises the practical implications by demonstrating tangible examples in which austerity is not just a challenge but a fundamental and structural barrier. This is particularly pertinent for central government to understand, as outcome 10 in the Good Food Cycle references the role of local food partnerships which are supported or coordinated by local government . If local government are to adequately support the agenda, the impact of austerity must be acknowledged and addressed.

5.2.2. Austerity, policy dismantling, and the impact on the Local authority

Whilst Local Authorities have the power and agency to shape visions of a new food system or a new narrative, they lack the power and resources to enact such a vision (Mattioni et al., 2022; Doernerg et al., 2019; Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham, 2019).

By explicitly focusing on the broader conditions facing local government , particularly the impact of reduced funding and policy dismantling, this research situates the local authority as being at the whim of central government and shows that the impact of austerity in practice hinders strategy implementation.

Within the political economy analysis, one section focused on ‘Broader Organisational Rules’. One of the primary rules governing the local authority is that it must remain financially solvent. This rule governs the behaviour of the organisation and is set by central government. This rule was connected to austerity, a policy aimed at reducing public spending, which Sowels (2014) state was presented as an unavoidable course of action required to counter overspending by previous governments and to tackle rising national debts. Drawing upon Eckersley & Tobin (2019), local government had to respond by dismantling less visible parts of the organisations, particularly the less visible public-facing roles. This significantly weakened policy capacity, particularly regarding the ability to direct resources and to make informed decisions about different policies and strategies. It also limited the ability of Council Officers to implement, enforce, and evaluate the impact of policies and strategies. Whilst public deficit reduction was the official justification, critics argue this was motivated by neo-liberal ideology and part of a mission to reduce the role and size of the state (Pautz, 2017; Sowels, 2014). As noted by Moragues-Faus & Sonnino (2018), for control and ownership

of food system transformation at the local level to occur, more power and resources are required at that level. As this research has demonstrated thus far, no additional power or resources appear to have been distributed to local government , and in fact the opposite is occurring, which challenges the notion of local authorities having power to intervene in the food system as suggested by various civil society actors (Sustain, 2022a; Sustain, 2022b; Davies, 2018; Local Government Association, 2024).

Kidd & Reynolds (2024) observe that national government devolves power without resources and credits Local Authorities when interventions are positive, or blames them when they are not. This research takes a different stance, however, in that whilst it does not disagree with the overarching sentiment, it does not observe that central government are blaming Local Authorities. Instead, perhaps more subtly, food advocates within third-sector organisations are putting pressure on Local Authorities to undertake tasks (Sustain, 2022a; Sustain, 2022b; Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, 2025) which they are not adequately resourced to do. A hyperlocal example of this also occurs within the organisation itself, as set out in a prior section, the Council Executive handed over responsibility to the Public Health Department for developing a Food Strategy with no additional power, resources, capacity, leadership, nor governance.

This matter of resource implications must be given greater significance if Local Authorities are to effectively implement the initiatives proposed within their food strategies, and to bridge the gap between vision and implementation.

5.2.3. The private sector food system is not governed locally

Private sector food organisations possess significant power and resources (Benton, 2023; De Schuter, 2019), yet they are difficult to engage on local food policy (Sonnino, 2023). It cannot be overlooked that the food system is owned and operated by private sector corporations (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Halliday & Barling, 2018). Engaging with the private sector is a frequently reported challenge in the literature (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Sonnino, 2023) and has also been observed in the case of Bradford. The following section unpicks this challenge.

Whilst prior discussion has highlighted issues related to a lack of resources and shortcomings in policy cohesion, it is also pertinent to address an issue identified in the literature regarding a lack of engagement between the private sector and Local Food Strategies. EAT (2022) claim that City Authorities have the power to shape markets and influence the private sector regarding sustainable and healthy food. Despite this claim, engaging the private sector with Local Food Strategies was a challenge noted in several studies and reports (Davies, 2017; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Sonnino, 2023; Willet et al., 2019). This research reproduces the challenge of a lack of engagement between private sector organisations and offers some practical explanations for why this is so.

The first reason engagement has not taken place is that there were no plans to engage businesses from the inception of the Strategy.

This lack of engagement perhaps reinforces the Public Health Department's lack of understanding of the private sector elements of the Food Strategy, particularly regarding the framing of 'bringing the private sector into the food system', when the private sector in fact dominates the food sector (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Halliday & Barling, 2018). When looking at the definition of the food system by Drewnowski et al. (2020), which, to paraphrase, indicates that the food system comprises both the operations within the food system and the outcomes produced by the food system, the above quote from the Lead Officer for the Food Strategy suggests an understanding of the desired outcomes for the food strategy, but not of the private sector operations which make up the food system operations. Such reasoning may also be true, particularly of civil society actors who afford power and agency to cities and local authority actors without demonstrating adequate understanding of how they operate (Sustainable Food Places, 2025; Sustain 2022a; Willet et al., 2019, Milan Urban Food Pact, 2025).

The second explanation for why engagement does not take place between private-sector food businesses and the Food Strategy is that the skill set required to do so lies beyond the Public Health Department.

This suggests that engaging the private sector on food could hypothetically take place at the local level, should people with the right skill set be engaged with the Food Strategy. As noted in earlier discussion, however, there is currently no practical policy cohesion regarding food, and actors beyond the Public Health Department are not engaged with the strategy. Thus, the strategy seems unlikely to become a priority for Officers within other departments who might have the skill set to engage the private sector.

A challenge is raised, however, with the notion that the private sector can be engaged with the Bradford Food Strategy, and with whether engagement is even desired. Both perspectives suggest that the local authority should or could involve private-sector food companies, provided they have the right skillset and approach. As the political economy analysis demonstrates, however, private-sector food operators are not governed by the Bradford Food Strategy but by market logic, as per research on political economy and food systems (Gleissman, 2018; De Schutter, 2019; Giminez & First, 201; Bene, 2022).

Drawing upon high-level food strategy literature, Ingram & Johnson (2022) differentiate between measuring activities related to food and outcomes related to food. The example of engaging private-sector businesses at the local level is a case of seeking an activity rather than the outcome. Surely the aspiration is not simply to engage businesses with the strategy, but for them to act differently so as to improve their impact on society, the environment, and the economy. As set out in the high-level

literature on food systems, it is a change of operations that results in positive outcomes that is desired (Ingram & Johnson, 2022), not just the isolated action of engagement with food system actors.

This research therefore contributes to the literature by challenging the importance of private-sector engagement with Local Food Strategies, despite the reported challenge in doing so.

As noted in the literature on food system transformation, power for food system change predominantly lies with national government and the private sector (Schoen & Lang, 2014; Lähde et al., 2023; Benton, 2023; Pope et al., 2021) – not with local government engaging businesses regarding their food strategies.

This line of reasoning and argument offers insight into why local food strategies are struggling to engage with the private sector and suggests the limitations of attempting to do so. Through this discussion, it is posed that the challenge is not around local authorities engaging private-sector food actors, but the fact that such engagement is suggested, given that food system literature acknowledges that such power to influence the private sector sits with central government (Benton, 2023; De Schutter, 2019; Schoen & Lang, 2014) – and not local government .

If the food system is governed by neo-liberal, free-market principles in line with central government ideology (Gleissman, 2018; De Schutter, 2019; Giminez & First, 201; Bene, 2022), rather than the shared values set out in the Bradford Food Strategy, the challenge is not engaging with local businesses but amending the way they operate – a task that must sit with central government (Benton, 2023; De Schutter, 2019; Schoen & Lang, 2014).

What is therefore observed through the pursuit of Local Food Strategies is the localisation of the challenges within the food system to the city or local authority level. This reflects a neoliberal ideology that devolves responsibility without providing power or resources, whilst also failing to challenge the structural power of corporations (Guthman, 2008; De Schutter, 2019).

Whilst this section has discussed engaging with private-sector businesses and the challenges in doing so, the following section discusses how, in the absence of national policy and a local focus on food policy, actors working with the local authority in Bradford unconsciously seek to reinforce the challenge they seek to solve.

5.2.4. Neoliberalism and recreating the problem locally

The Bradford Food Strategy reflects a neoliberal ideology in that it localises responsibility for what is a national or even global problem. Previous sections have responded to the need to situate Local Food Partnerships and Food Strategies within

broader contexts (Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto, 2019; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018), primarily by focusing on the context of the organisation within which the strategy exists. This following section will discuss the context of neoliberalism, within which the strategy also exists. Prior research has acknowledged that local food policy is a product of neoliberal ideology and that it reinforces the problem it seeks to resolve (Guthman, 2008). This problem can be seen playing out in the case of Bradford too. This discussion therefore moves beyond identifying the practical challenges regarding the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy, to reinforcing prior research on the conceptual weakness of local food strategies (Guthman, 2008; De Schuter, 2019). What is observed in the above example is what Guthman (2008) noted in California, that Local Food Policy Councils frequently fall back on localised, market-driven solutions that individualise responsibility and depoliticise food access. As the local food policy landscape is embedded within a global market that reflects broader neoliberal trends, such as the privatisation of public resources, deregulation, reduced state responsibility, and a reliance on market-based solutions (Guthman, 2008). If successful in generating such investable propositions, as the actor set out above, following Guthman's reasoning, the actions above would reproduce the same outcomes as the dominant, profit-seeking food system. Benton (2023) argues that a different ideology is required for food system intervention, and suggests that it should look beyond wealth creation and more towards a market that delivers public good and public wellbeing.

Whilst the first part of this discussion explored the gap between the vision and implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy, it concluded by highlighting the limitations of the local food strategy approach. The discussion above has demonstrated that the challenges preventing Bradford Council from implementing the Food Strategy are largely beyond its control and are a product of central government-induced austerity, which has dismantled the organisation's capacity. Equally, when looking to the food systems literature, it is central government that are said to play a role in tackling the problems in the food system, not local government . Various literature notes an absence of power and resources at the local level (Doernberg et al., 2019; Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham, 2019; Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018; Jones and Hills, 2021; Kidd & Reynolds, 2024). The above discussion, however, highlights the need to be deliberate about what power and resources are to be requested locally, if the high-level food literature states that power sits with central government. The pursuit of localised power and resources, in itself, reinforces the neo-liberalisation of challenges within the food system by localising the non-local problem. If the assumption is that Local Food Strategies seek to effectively challenge the dominant food system, or create viable alternatives in spite of the dominant system (Jackson et al., 2024), Local Strategies therefore need to look beyond wealth creation and more towards a market that delivers public good and public wellbeing (Benton, 2023), rather than simply attracting inward

investment, as demonstrated by the participant in Bradford, or the pursuit of localised power and resources, as in the above-mentioned literature.

4.2.5. Summary

What is observed in the case of Bradford is that officers within the Public Health Department signal an understanding of a problem through a performative Food Strategy, yet lack the organisational support or resources to implement it effectively. The resource challenge the organisation faces, based on analysis presented throughout this research, stems from central government's retrenchment of the state's role, which, as observed, has a detrimental impact on the operations of the local authority – a significance that does not appear to be adequately understood within the literature or third-sector reports. In the absence of funding, an external partnership is established to develop investable propositions, which, if successful, would reproduce the same logic it sought to resolve. However, such efforts, for better or worse, are up for debate and did not succeed because they were not resourced by the local authority.

Whilst such debate occurs regarding the benefits of Local Food Policy, Strategy, and Partnerships, the national government food strategy remains inadequately progressed, and the power of commercial actors remains unaddressed.

If the goal of Local Food Strategies, Policies, and Partnerships is to transform the food system to improve social, economic and environmental outcomes, perhaps the focus of cities, Local Authorities, and Local Food Strategies requires conceptual debate in light of the structural conditions in which they exist.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the challenges facing Bradford Council regarding the gap between vision and the implementation of its local food strategy. Moreover, it sought to better understand the general limitations of local approaches to food policy.

The central aim of the research was to undertake an in-depth case study of one specific local authority in the U.K. in order to draw out a detailed understanding of the challenges facing Local Authorities regarding food strategy implementation. To do so, it utilised the six elements of the Social Innovation Ecosystem (Policy, Finance, Culture, Human Capital, Supports, and Markets) in order to draw out different perspectives on the challenges actors were facing. A Political Economy Analysis was then undertaken on the above-generated findings in order to situate the challenges within a broader context.

6.1. Overview of key findings

Insights from participants in this case study highlight a range of organisational and structural challenges that contribute to the vision-implementation gap in the Bradford Food Strategy. These insights are drawn from interview data structured around six key elements: policy, finance, culture, support, human capital, and markets.

The empirical findings are presented across five interconnected themes, derived from participants' perspectives on the challenges of implementing the Strategy:

- Local Food Governance in Practice
- Impact of Financial Constraints
- Resource Pressures and Organisational Culture
- Erosion of Human Capital
- Economic and Market Constraints

At a surface level, the limited implementation of the Strategy may be attributed to the actions of those directly involved, particularly in communication and stakeholder engagement. Indeed, participants noted that the Strategy has not been widely communicated or meaningfully engaged with, leaving many relevant actors unaware of its purpose or relevance. However, a deeper analysis reveals that these issues are symptomatic of broader structural constraints.

Significant financial pressures facing local authorities, combined with competing organisational priorities and fragmented internal resources, severely limit the capacity for meaningful engagement with and implementation of the Strategy. In addition, the erosion of human capital within the organisation constrains both operational capacity and the ability to influence the wider food system. Beyond the local level, the absence of statutory obligations, clear national direction, and a coherent national food policy

framework limits the authority and resources available to Bradford Council to act effectively. This underscores the importance of policy alignment across multiple scales, including local, regional, national, and international.

Finally, these challenges are compounded by the dominance of commercial interests and market forces, which often outweigh local policy ambitions. As a result, local food strategies risk remaining under-resourced, fragmented, and misaligned with the scale of global food system challenges, suggesting that stronger national policy intervention may be necessary to bridge the gap between strategic vision and implementation.

Through a Political Economy Analysis, it is evident that a key contributor to the vision-implementation gap in the Bradford Food Strategy is that the local authority, Bradford Council, assumes a leading role in driving food system change without adequate power, authority, or resources to do so. This reflects a broader neoliberal logic that localises responsibility for improving food-related outcomes at the local level, whilst the state withdraws responsibility and allows the private sector to determine solutions (Guthman, 2008). This situation is further amplified by neoliberal governance, whereby the state not only devolves responsibility for food to local actors but also strips them of agency by withdrawing resources and capacity as a result of austerity policy. The findings of this research illustrate that actors supporting the Food Strategy possess an ambitious vision and a clear understanding of the problem, as well as an intention to address it; however, their ability to act is constrained by structural limitations imposed from above.

As demonstrated through various anecdotes and high-level literature, there is also a conceptual disconnect between the vision set out within the food system and a commercially concentrated food system. Central government hold the power to regulate and shape markets, not local government.

6.2. Contribution to literature

6.2.1. Contribution to the ‘vision-implementation gap’

A key contribution of this research is to the reproduction of and a deeper understanding of a vision-implementation gap (Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto, 2019; Sonnino, 2023; Sonnino & Milbourne, 2022; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Zerbian et al., 2022).

This contribution first requires clarification of what vision and implementation mean. The vision, as highlighted in the literature review, is the Bradford Food Strategy. The strategy proposes a number of initiatives, projects and programmes. This is the vision the organisation and its partners have for the local food system. The vision does not, however, identify resource or capacity requirements for achieving the proposals it sets out. Nor does it differentiate between the relevant governance levels at which proposed

actions could take place. High-level challenges, such as tackling poverty, are beyond the reach of a local authority, yet still appear in the Strategy.

It is not apparent that previous research has determined what is meant by implementation, perhaps because more focus has been placed on local food policy, strategy and partnerships, particularly on strategy content and development processes (Giambartolomei, Forno & Sage, 2021; Jones and Hills, 202; Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018). By examining different understandings of what 'strategy implementation' means, a contribution is generated.

Based on a traditional understanding of strategy implementation, a strategy is first determined, and then resources and capacity are allocated to realise the objectives set within the strategy (Chandler, 1962). Under this view, there is a gap between the vision and implementation in Bradford, as resources are not being allocated to bridge the two. Financial challenges are evident throughout this thesis, particularly in the findings chapter on financial challenges. Findings under the headings of culture and policy also demonstrate the impact that financial challenges have on the organisation, and how broader organisational financial challenges contribute to an inability to secure additional support, capacity, or resources from other actors within the organisation.

From this perspective, the gap between the vision and the implementation of the Food Strategy is explained by an absence of resource allocation. The performative understanding of implementation, however, offers an alternative explanation.

Performative implementation signals intent and ambition towards an agenda (Cabantous, Gond & Wright, 2018). As the Strategy does not sufficiently reference the allocation of finance or resources against proposed initiatives within the document, it is reasoned that the Strategy signals intent or ambition towards those initiatives. Equally, as the document references matters beyond its remit or reach, this is also seen as signalling intent or ambition, hence the Strategy aligns with an understanding of performative rather than traditional implementation.

It is not clear, at least in the case of Bradford, what benefit the local food system is gaining from the implementation of a performative strategy if additional resources to catalyse further action are not being provided. This research suggests that a performative approach to implementation is occurring due to a lack of available resources within the local authority. Moreover, the political economy chapter highlights that it is not as simple as the organisation failing to allocate resources to the strategy, but rather a product of a much larger tension between central and local government. This also demonstrates the importance of focusing on how 'food systems practice' can occur – and not just 'food systems thinking'. Without moving from systems thinking to systems doing, it is difficult to see how the vision-implementation gap will be bridged.

6.2.2. Contribution to discussion around 'place-based food systems'

This study contributes to the literature on Local Food Policy and Strategy by highlighting conceptual limitations in the ability of cities and local governments to change the practices of local food businesses.

Whilst the resourcing challenges suffocating local government may eventually be resolved, allowing them to implement the initiatives set out within the strategies, there are still challenges that require central government intervention (Benton, 2023; Drewnowkski et al., 2020; Schoen & Lang, 2014). Through a political economy analysis of implementation challenges, the views of several participants serve as a reminder of the global nature of the food system, largely dominated by private sector actors – a set of stakeholders absent from the Bradford Food Partnership.

This research further suggests the need for systems practice, not just systems thinking. Research discusses systems thinking and taking a systems approach (Doherty et al., 2022), as does the Bradford Food Strategy, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council (2023), and advocates for local food partnerships (Sustainable Food Places, 2025). This research demonstrates, however, a clear disconnect between systems thinking and systems doing, or systems practice. Despite the Bradford Food Strategy adopting a systems approach on paper, it is still led from within the siloed Public Health Department. It lacks input from the other Departments it references, and it lacks input from the private sector which operates the food system (Worldpanel by Numerator, 2025). This contribution highlights the importance of looking beyond systems thinking and focusing on systems practice. This research, particularly the political economy analysis chapter, has begun to outline some of the challenges which are hindering systems practice by situating the observed challenges surrounding the implementation of Bradford's Food Strategy within a broader political economy context.

This research also contributes to the literature on local food policy by distinguishing between catalysing actions and catalysing outcomes. Prior literature notes difficulties in engaging private-sector businesses with local food strategies (Davies 2017; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Sonnino, 2023; Willet et al., 2019). However, it does not appear to differentiate between business engagement and changes to business operations. The political economy analysis section and the findings section on markets serve as a reminder that businesses are governed by the pursuit of profit and by regulations imposed on them by national government – not by Local Food Strategies of the cities in which they operate. Changing the operations of food-system businesses therefore requires regulation, not engagement around a Local authority strategy. As Ingram & Johnson (2022) state, it is positive outcomes in the food system that are sought, not the activities alone. Whilst Local Authorities may, in principle, convene activities that engage with private-sector businesses, such engagement will not change the economic system within which food businesses operate – this is a matter for Central government.

Linking back to the prior contribution on strategy implementation, this research therefore critiques attempts at business engagement with local food strategies as a performative substitute for regulation or legislation.

This contribution does not seek to question whether Local Food Partnerships or Strategies add value, but it does highlight their limitations in tackling the challenges of the dominant food system. By studying the case of Bradford and the challenges actors face in implementing the Bradford Food Strategy, this thesis provides original contributions on the challenges facing Local Authorities with regard to implementing local food strategy. If strategies are to successfully produce positive outcomes, it is apparent that they must be strategically aligned at various levels across the local, regional, national and international. Without such alignment and support, particularly from the regional and national, local approaches to food-system transformation are significantly restricted.

Whilst others have noted the prevalence of austerity (Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018; Lever, Sonnino & Cheetham, 2019) and a lack of resources, and how these present challenges for Local Authorities implementing Food Strategies (Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018; Doernberg et al., 2019; Jones and Hills, 2021, Sonnino 2023), this research deliberately sought out implementation challenges rather than capturing them as a by-product of another research focus. In doing so, this research adds a deeper understanding and presents rich, in-depth findings about what this means in practice, from those within the complex organisation that is Bradford Council. It demonstrates emotion, highlights burnt-out and demoralised Officers, and a seeming lack of hope. Part of this contribution is undoubtedly due to the dual position of the researcher, which means that participants are not mere participants; they are colleagues experiencing similar challenges within the same organisation, largely in pursuit of the same cause; improving the Bradford District for those who live, work and play within it. This research presents a real, sobering account of the realities facing Local Authorities after 14 years of austerity, and really puts metaphorical meat on the bones about what the frequently used term, ‘austerity’, really means. Austerity is not a challenge – it is a fundamental force which is strangling the operation of local government . Reflecting the importance of austerity to the food system, a contribution is made to the food system diagram of Doherty et al. (2021) to include ‘austerity’ as a socioeconomic driver that impacts the food system. This is reflected in the diagram below.

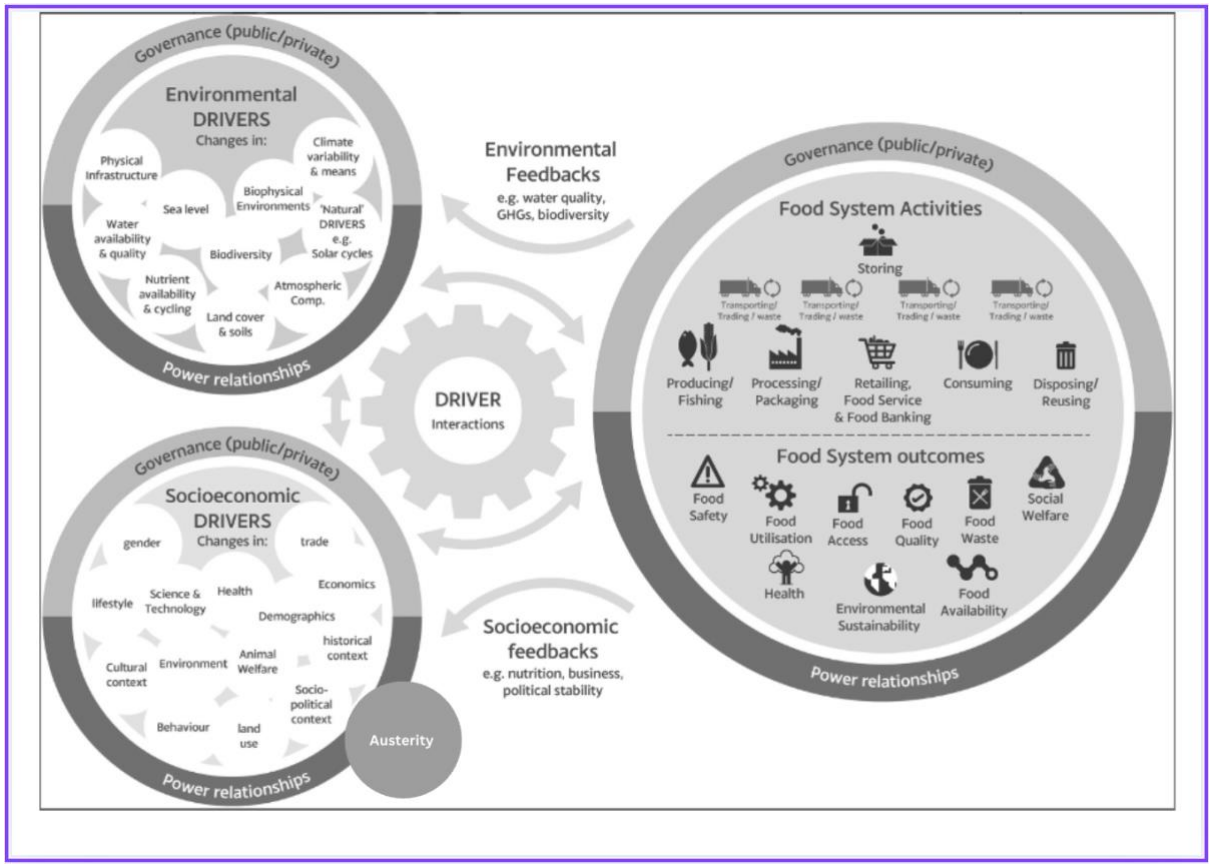


Figure 3. Food Systems Diagram figure adapted from Doherty et al. (2021, p. 108)

As set out in the Literature Review, much prior research has focused on the development of Local Food Strategies, but there has been less focus on what happens once the Strategy has been developed (Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018; Doernberg et al., 2019; Jones and Hills, 2021; Sonnino, 2023). The empirical insight presented in this thesis is that, in the case of Bradford, very little progress has been made with strategy implementation due to organisational and structural challenges facing the Organisation. Whilst this study focused on one Local authority and did not seek to be generalisable, it is difficult to see how other Local Authorities are not facing similar challenges. Future research may wish to validate this.

An additional contribution to the literature on Local Food Policy and Strategy is the adoption of a novel research design. The Social Innovation Ecosystem framework structured the participant interview schedule and, in turn, the thematic finding headings. It was through the adoption of this framework that such detailed information was obtained from participants. It is doubtful that such detail would have been obtained if participants were simply asked to explain implementation challenges, particularly among those with little or no involvement with the Food Strategy. Whilst not claiming to be a perfect framing for such an endeavour, the framing did present participants with several different stances to consider the challenges they face. Without such a framework, such challenges may not have been drawn out.

A valuable contribution of this research is a reminder that a Strategy reflects those who generate it. In this case, it is the Public Health Department and various committed, predominantly third-sector partners – not the organisation as a whole, nor the private-sector operators of the food system. This echoes prior findings by Lever et al. (2019), who observed that food was reduced to a Public Health agenda within Kirklees Council. This research offers a related contribution by explaining why responsibility for food has been situated within the Public Health Department. In short, this positioning is partly due to the Department's relative financial stability compared with the rest of the organisation, as it receives the ring-fenced Public Health Grant from central government.

Despite being labelled an organisational strategy, this research shows that, in practice, the strategy is owned by a specific, small group of actors rather than the whole organisation. This research also contributes to the literature on Local Food Policy and Strategy by serving as a reminder that a Local authority is not a homogeneous organisation, but a highly complex organisation with many competing priorities, all of which are important to understand as part of the context in which Local Food Policy and Strategy exist.

Undertaking a Political Economy Analysis informed by various actors within and close to the Organisation offers a rich, deep understanding of the broader challenges facing the Organisation regarding the implementation of the Bradford Food Strategy. This research emphasises the importance of contextual circumstances and how they dictate whether resources flow towards implementing elements of the Strategy. This responds to a prior challenge noted by Sonnino, Tegoni & De Cunto (2019), which encouraged future research to recognise the link between food policy and other complex systems, sectors and priorities.

A final contribution regarding the limitations of Local Food Strategies is that this research reminds us that the problem within the food system is not a local problem – it's a global problem, the effects of which are felt locally. This research addresses challenges regarding Local Food Policy engagement, reminds us of the different forces governing different actors, as demonstrated through the Political Economy Analysis, and highlights the need for multiple policies at multiple levels in order to be effective. Whilst those leading Food Strategies are governed by the pursuit of improved food system outcomes, legacy food businesses are governed by, and have benefitted greatly from, the pursuit and extraction of financial profit. The two are largely incompatible, but it is the latter which have the power to drive change (Benton, 2023; De Schuter, 2019). The contribution is therefore a reminder to keep the higher-level challenges in sight through the normative reproduction about the potential for Local Food Strategies.

None of this insight is particularly new or radical, but connecting literature on local food policy with high-level food system literature serves as a reminder to future works to

retain a connection between the high-level requirements set out for food system transformation and what can feasibly be driven at the local level. Of course, change will play out locally if directed and resourced by central government (Doernberg et al., 2019), but this research demonstrates that without radical reform and resourcing towards local government , the change will not be driven from within Local Authorities.

Finally, to avoid misinterpretation, the inability of local government to implement Food Strategies is by no means seen as a failure on their part. Failure, this research argues, is a product of austerity-induced policy dismantling. The vision-implementation gap is a product of well-meaning, ambitious yet largely powerless actors driving the agenda. Most importantly, it is a product of a much larger neoliberal approach to the problem, which, if we are not careful, can easily misdirect the most intelligent, well-meaning practitioners and academics from focusing on and tackling the root of the problem.

6.3. Implications

6.3.1. For Local Government Policy & Practice

Regarding implications for local government policy and practice, this study has various implications.

The process of undertaking a Political Economy Analysis set out to understand politically feasible ways to change the status quo at the local level regarding Food Strategy implementation. A primary implication for Local Actors is the need to be very deliberate and focused about what they can and cannot control. The Bradford Food Strategy is clearly highly ambitious and broad, yet there are not enough of the right actors nor resources mobilised around it to bring it to life, and actions within it are beyond the reach of the Local authority. The Action Plan should be revised to reconsider how to act in practice, rather than thinking strategically about the challenges in the food system and what the actors around the table can either directly control or immediately influence. Critical analysis should be given to any suggestions or recommendations made regarding what could or should be done locally. As this research has demonstrated, just because academics or civil society actors state that something should be done does not mean the resources will be present to do so. This is not in any way dismissive of external guidance, advice, or support, but it does mean being deliberate about what is focused on and considering whether the relevant resources are present. As evident in this research, the ambition of the Food Strategy far exceeds the skills, knowledge, capability, power, or resources required to drive practical action around food-related initiatives.

If Local Authorities and Local Food Partnerships are to continue focusing on food system transformation, they should consider the political economy perspective and the

point made by Bene (2022) on the importance of developing counters to the dominant food system, rather than reinforcing the dominant one which it seeks to transform.

6.3.2. For Regional Government Policy & Practice:

A macro-level factor that Food Strategy practitioners may seek to influence is the emerging phenomenon of Devolution. Drawing on insight from the WYCA Officer about their understanding of the Investment Strategy, those involved in the Food Strategy may continue to make the case for food as an organisational priority to push for it becoming a regional priority. Demonstrating where food aligns with the values and priorities of that Department may also help make the case for better collaboration.

Effort should be made regionally to influence Regional Policy and to ensure that the importance of food is recognised within the work areas and priorities of the Combined Authorities. As discussed earlier, academics have referred to this as Policy Cohesion. Whilst there is a case for such cohesion, as this research has argued, the ultimate goal is surely to obtain additional resources to generate action that contributes to positive food system outcomes, not merely the act of policy cohesion. If this logic is sound, then Regional Authorities should seek to build food-related projects into existing spending commitments and programmes.

A practical example could be a collaboration between the White Rose University Consortium and Metro Mayors to support and integrate with the ongoing work taking place within DEFRAs Good Food Cycle. This work may seek not only to obtain additional resources to generate positive action at a regional level, but also to identify opportunities for building food-related work into currently allocated funding and Officer responsibilities.

If regional bodies are to focus on food system change, they should consider the political economy perspective and a point made by Bene (2022) on the importance of developing counters to the dominant food system, rather than reinforcing the dominant one that it seeks to transform.

6.3.3. For National Government Policy & Practice:

For local governments to continue advancing Local Food Strategies, the national government must recognise their role and influence within the wider system. However, this recognition will only come through strong leadership and advocacy at local and regional levels, which can highlight opportunities for innovation across the food system.

Reversing the austerity policy after fourteen years will not undo the damage caused, but it will offer hope for a better future trajectory for local government. Provided local government receives adequate additional resources and the boundaries are clearly set,

mandating local authorities to take action on food will catalyse action and internal leadership through statutory obligations. The ongoing development of the National Food Strategy must learn from, incorporate, and enable the ambitions and visions set out at the local level. It must also tackle the root cause of the problem by effectively regulating and legislating the private sector. Both approaches are surely required, not either or.

The national government's Good Food Cycle highlights the importance of place-based work, especially in Outcome 10: People are more connected to their local food systems and have the confidence, knowledge and skills to cook and eat healthily (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2025b). As this outcome explicitly states that proposed activities can be amplified by place-based food partnerships, supported or coordinated by Local Authorities, it is essential that the challenges identified in this research are understood by senior civil servants in DEFRA. This research offers a perspective that is rarely heard; one from within a Local authority that is actively trying to advance this agenda. Senior civil servants should consider these perspectives to ensure that assumptions and decision-making around place-based initiatives are informed not only by positive or optimistic evidence, but also by the real-world difficulties experienced at the local level. At a minimum, Local Authorities need additional resources to fund any additional activities proposed by national government. If additional actions or activities are proposed without additional resources, additional action cannot be expected given the harsh financial circumstances observed in the research.

6.3.4. Practical contributions for actors involved with the Bradford Food Strategy

There is a clear need and value in continuing to make food an organisational priority, not only because levers for change sit elsewhere within the organisation, but also to make the case to the West-Yorkshire Combined Authority to make food a priority within their investment plans. Given that actors outside Public Health, and elsewhere within the organisation, are constrained by limited resources and capacity for innovation, this cannot be dismissed. With this in mind, the Public Health Department should look at ways to relieve some of this capacity by working dynamically and offering support and capacity to other departments so that they are better able to support the food agenda. Demonstrating how food aligns with that department's values and priorities may also help make the case for better collaboration.

The need to maintain motivation and avoid burnout is of paramount importance. Despite major structural challenges and the odds being stacked against local actors transforming the food system, people continue to make great efforts and progress.

Despite Local Authorities being broken, cash-strapped, and not obliged to do so, they still continue to pave the way with ambitious food system transformation.

Based on this, the following practical interventions are suggested for Bradford Council, but are surely relevant for others too where circumstances are similar and challenges are relatable.

Revisit the Food Strategy Action Plan

- Revisit the Food Strategy Action Plan to reflect the discussion around the Political Economy Analysis and to be specific and deliberate about what those involved are actually able to command or influence in the current circumstance, following Bene's (2022) framing of creating countermovements against the dominant regime.

Capacity and momentum building around a counter movement

- Develop an offer from Public Health to others regarding support for other Departments related to food-related projects
- Continue to host Food Partnership events to maintain and grow the number of supportive advocates
- Actively offer support from Public Health to existing or proposed initiatives to ensure they can exist, grow and scale

Improving visibility

- Support the translation of Food Strategy outcomes into shared language for actors as required – help others to understand where they might contribute.

6.4. Policy recommendations

6.4.1. Local Government policy recommendations

Proposed policy interventions for local government are well documented and disputed within this research – hence it was not the focus of this research to propose local government policy interventions, but rather to examine why they were not being implemented.

One pragmatic recommendation, however, may be to consider the internal dynamics presented within this research and to question whether the term 'local government policy' is indeed helpful at all. As this research has shown, Bradford Council does not have a local food policy – it has a Food Strategy owned by several Officers within a specific Department. The following policy interventions at Regional and National level

are instead offered as a contribution of this research.

6.4.2. Regional Government policy recommendations

Consider food in relation to existing financial commitments and work packages to determine where a focus on food may contribute to existing goals

Explore practical examples of where food may be a future consideration for regionally devolved powers, ensuring a focus on developing counter-movements that challenge the dominant food system, rather than reinforcing it.

6.4.3. National Government policy recommendations

If local government is to continue advancing Food Strategies, national government must recognise the scope of its remit and its ability to influence the broader system within which local governments operate.

Progress is being made at the national level with national government's 'Good Food Cycle', and the emphasis within this acknowledges the importance of place. It was in fact in Bradford that the Good Food Cycle was launched. If the 'Good Food Cycle' is to be effective, national government will likely benefit from understanding the challenges set out in this research. It is therefore recommended that the Senior Civil Servants within DEFRA working on the Good Food Cycle engage with the challenges presented in this research.

Recognising that, like local authorities, national government is a complex, multi-faceted organisation with many competing priorities, DEFRA Civil Servants may also benefit from engaging with the department responsible for local government (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)) to ensure collaborative, cohesive working between the departments on matters related to food. It is unclear whether or how MHCLG is engaged with the Good Food Cycle, but reading this research may be a good starting point for understanding the challenges Bradford faces in implementing its Food Strategy.

Reversing the austerity policy after fourteen years will not undo the damage caused, but it will offer hope for a better future trajectory for local government. Provided local government receives adequate additional resources and its remit is clearly defined, mandating Local Authorities to take action on food will catalyse action and stimulate internal leadership. The ongoing development of the National Food Strategy should adequately resource local government and Food Partnerships to enable the visions set out at the local level.

6.5. Limitations

This study is subject to various limitations. Whilst these limitations do not detract from the findings, it is important to consider the contextual factors within which this research exists.

This research, by design, observed the challenges of one Local authority in Bradford. As set out in the methodology, Bradford faces various challenges that characterise the City, and the Council prioritises and responds to these priorities. Thus, there will undoubtedly be nuanced understandings based on Officers and Partners working with Local Authorities within different contexts. It is not assumed that all Local Authorities face the same financial challenges, or that they face similar challenges in implementing their Food Strategies. What can be assumed, however, is that all local government s have been hit by the austerity policy – and not just Bradford. Equally, the overarching driver of business to derive profit is universal. What can be assumed is that local government lacks regulatory power or influence over the dominant food system. Whilst elements of the food system are surely located within the bounds of city regions – the forces which drive them are not. Food businesses operating within the local government boundaries are governed by a neoliberal ideology shaped by government, not a local food strategy.

Despite obtaining nuanced perspectives from lesser-heard, senior actors within and closely connected to the Council, it cannot be escaped that this research only represents the perspectives of the nineteen actors who were interviewed (twenty if the experience and contribution of the author is included), which naturally shapes and influences the final product which this thesis has become.

The process of undertaking a PhD inevitably takes time, in this case three years, during which much has changed in the approach of central government to food. This research must, therefore, be considered a product of the time in which it was produced. The whole project took place between October 2022 and September 2025, whilst participant interviews occurred between October 2023 and May 2024.

These limitations do not detract from the findings but demonstrate an awareness of the importance of reflection and reflexivity required for undertaking good-quality social research.

6.6. Future research directions

This research has hopefully demonstrated the value of working at the intersection of research and Policy. One would therefore encourage future researchers to create similar arrangements.

Future research must be aligned with the practicalities facing Officers. Abstract, theory-advancing research will not be helpful to practitioners experiencing the realities drawn upon throughout this research. Visionary yet unimplementable findings are unhelpful to Local Authorities whilst facing their current challenges; thus, future research seeking to be practically useful must bear this in mind.

Additional in-depth case studies into Local authority areas will surely help to paint a better picture of the challenges faced regarding Food Strategy implementation. Perhaps there is a question to first consider, however, as to whether such an enquiry is required. This study should not be duplicated for the sake of determining whether the challenges are observed elsewhere – the focal point must be on achieving positive food system outcomes, and not on understanding this challenge for the sake of academic enquiry alone. This is something which future research on local food strategy must be mindful of, and such a decision is to be made by future researchers who may wish to first consult various representatives of their Local Authorities before embarking on said projects. Emphasis must be placed here on the deliberate phrasing of 'various representatives' to echo one of the primary objectives of this thesis, which was to seek the perspectives of various actors, and not just those actively engaged with the Food Strategy.

Additional research would be valuable at the Regional Government/Combined Authority level. Additional perspectives would be beneficial on how resources are allocated within the Combined Authority, and on what would be required to raise food up the agenda. As previously noted, the end goal is not Policy Cohesion in itself, but obtaining additional resources that can contribute to food-related outcomes. Policy Cohesion may be a required step, but future research should keep in mind that this is surely not the end goal. Future research may therefore set its sights accordingly and seek to understand the impact of Policy Cohesion within Local Authorities regarding Food Strategies. More specifically, how it does or does not lead to increased resource allocation towards food initiatives.

6.7. Final Closing Statement

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the various challenges facing Bradford Council in implementing its Food Strategy.

Its contribution lies in undertaking an in-depth case study of one Local authority to generate perspectives on policy, finance, culture, human capital, supports, and markets, drawing on lesser-heard voices within prior research on Local Food Policy. It is through subsequent Political Economy Analysis that such challenges are contextualised within constraints far beyond the control of the Local authority in question. Ultimately, by looking at the Strategy within the broader context of the Council

and the broader political economy, the impact of austerity and how it plays out in practice is a key contributor to the vision-implementation gap. Situating the concept of local food strategy within a broader neoliberal, market-led food system also challenges the efficacy of a local approach to Food Policy.

Impacts of the food system will continue to be felt locally. Change will play out locally. As it stands, the conditions are not ripe for change to be spearheaded locally.

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Appendix 1 - Interview Guides

Schedule 1 – for those deemed as actively involved with the Strategy

Introductory Question

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and your role…

Policy

2. What do you know about the Bradford Food Strategy?
3. How have you been involved with the Food Strategy so far?
4. How does Bradford District having a Food Strategy impact your ability to contribute to the Sustainable Food agenda?
5. What changes to the Food Strategy would help you to advance the Sustainable Food agenda?

Finance

6. How do you access funding in relation to food related work?
7. How does finance affect your ability to contribute to change in relation to food?
8. What financial changes would help you to better contribute to the sustainable food agenda?

Culture

9. What does your Organisation and Team prioritise/ focus on, and how is this decided?
10. How would you describe the culture of partnership working, both within your Organisations, and with external partners?
11. How does your Organisational and Team culture affect your ability to contribute to the sustainable food agenda?
12. What cultural changes would help you to better contribute towards the food agenda?

Supports

13. Where do you look for support (professionals/ organisations/ resources) regarding the sustainable food agenda?
14. How does working with these professionals, organisations & resources support affect your ability to contribute to the sustainable food agenda?
15. What additional support from other professionals, organisations or resources would help you to better contribute to the sustainable food agenda?

Human Capital

16. What Skills/Education/Training are you aware of in relation to the sustainable food agenda?

17. How do the available Skills/Education/Training impact your work around the sustainable food agenda?
18. What changes in the arena of S/E/T's might help advance the sustainable food agenda in Bradford?

Markets

19. How do we create a market for good food in Bradford?
20. Are you aware of any innovative food businesses? If so, what makes them innovative?
21. How do these Innovative businesses affect your ability to contribute to the sustainable food agenda?
22. What might support you to better engage with innovative food businesses?

Conclusory Questions

23. Are there any other crucial elements not yet discussed that unlock change in relation to you being able to contribute to the food agenda?
24. Can you think of anybody else that I should speak with about this?

Schedule 2 – for those deemed as not actively involved with the Strategy, including Senior Officers

Introductory Question

1. Tell me bit about your role – what are you trying to achieve?

Policy

2. What do you know about the Bradford Food Strategy?
3. What might need to happen for you/your organisation to contribute to the Food Strategy?

Finances

4. Are you aware of any sources of finance that might support Bradford with implementation of their Food Strategies?
5. What financial changes would help you to contribute towards the food agenda/ implementing the Food Strategy?

Culture

6. What does your Organisation and Team prioritise/ focus on, and how is this decided?
7. How would you describe the culture of partnership working, both within your Organisations, and with external partners?
8. What cultural changes might help with implementing the Food Strategy?

Supports

9. If a food business approaches you wanting to change their operations, where would you look for support? Who would you seek information from?
10. What additional support would help you do more around food?

Human Capital

11. What additional human capital/ Skills, Education, Training, would you/ your team/department need to become more involved in Food Strategy implementation?
12. What additional human capital/ Skills, Education, Training is required for the local food strategy agenda?

Markets

13. In your opinion, what is enabling or preventing food business from innovating, and why do you think that? How do you bring them on the journey?
14. What might enable you to better enable/ engage with innovative food businesses?

Conclusory Questions

15. Are there any other crucial elements not yet discussed that unlock change in relation to advancing the Food Strategy/ sustainable food agenda?
16. Can you think of anybody else that I should speak with about food and the Bradford Food Strategy?