#FoodActive2026: Speaker profiles

Professor Matthew Ashton, Director of Public Health, Liverpool City Council and Lead Director of Public Health at Food Active

Professor Matt Ashton is the Director of Public Health for Liverpool City Council and as the Lead DPH for Food Active provides strategic insight and guidance on the direction and programme. Prof Ashton was appointed Director Of public Health for Liverpool City Council in April 2020 in a joint appointment with the University of Liverpool, where he is an Honorary Professor in the Department Of public Health and policy. Matt is also the chair of the Association Of Directors Of Public Health policy advisory group on healthy places, as well as being the chair Of the Faculty of public Health special interest group for health improvement. Matt is also the lead Director of Public Health for the Liverpool City Region Violence Reduction partnership.

Professor John Wilding, Professor of Medicine, University of Liverpool and Honorary Consultant in Endocrinology and Diabetes, Aintree University Hospital

Professor John Wilding leads clinical research into Obesity, Diabetes and Endocrinology at the University of Liverpool, since 1996, after training in Southampton and London. John's clinical interests focus on caring for people with diabetes and obesity and he leads specialist services for obesity at Aintree University Hospital. John's research team focuses on developing and evaluating treatments for obesity and type 2 diabetes. John has published over 400 papers, chapters and review articles, relating to these research interests.

FOOD ACT!VE

HEG Health Equalities Group

Ewan Maule, Chief Pharmacist and Director of Medicines and Pharmacy at the North East and North Cumbria ICB

Ewan Maule is Chief Pharmacist and Director of Medicines and Pharmacy at the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, providing strategic leadership on medicines optimisation, pharmaceutical services and clinical commissioning. He chairs the national ICB Chief Pharmacist Network, co-chairs the ICB Prevention Board and leads system-wide initiatives on healthy weight, obesity treatment, clinical effectiveness and medicines value. He is also an Honorary Professor at Teesside University, supporting pharmacy education, mentoring and research. His work connects policy, clinical leadership and education to improve patient outcomes, promote effective medicines use and support integrated, sustainable NHS services.

Dr Lois Hall-Jones, Consultant in Public Health, Oldham Council

Lois is a Consultant in Public Health at Oldham Council, leading the Health Improvement and Health and Wellbeing portfolios, working with partners to improve population health outcomes, reduce health inequalities, and promote wellbeing across communities. She also serves as Chair of the Bury, Rochdale and Oldham Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP).

FOOD ACT!VE

HEG Health Equalities Group

Professor Louisa Ells, Professor of Obesity and co-director of the Obesity Institute, Leeds Beckett University

Louisa is a Professor of Obesity, registered public health nutritionist, Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health and NIHR Senior Investigator. Louisa co-directs the Leeds Beckett Obesity Institute and is passionate advocate for the voices of lived experience, specialising in compassionate multidisciplinary, cross-sector applied obesity research that address real world priorities.

Louisa has specialised in applied obesity research for nearly three decades, focusing on obesity-related public health, service education, inequalities and disordered eating, delivered using systematic reviewing, mixed methods, co-production and person-centred approaches.

Dr Jack Birch, Research Associate, NIHR Policy Research Unit in Behavioural and Social Sciences, Newcastle University

Dr Jack Birch is a Research Associate based in the Population Health Sciences Institute at Newcastle University. Jack's research interests are focused on public health approaches to obesity, such as whether new treatments for obesity are being equitably implemented, and how effective policy-level interventions are at reducing national obesity prevalence. Beyond research, Jack has contributed to blogs discussing the intersection between mental health and academia. Jack is a member of the Society for Social Medicine and Population Health, serving as the 2027 Chair of the Early Career Researcher committee.

FOOD ACT!VE

HEG Health Equalities Group

Dr Hannah Brinsden, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Food Foundation

Dr Hannah Brinsden is Head of Policy and Advocacy at the Food Foundation where she oversees the organisation's portfolio of policy and public affairs. Hannah previously worked at the World Obesity Federation, most recently as Director of Policy and Programmes working across a range of issues including childhood obesity, food systems and healthcare.

Hannah has an undergraduate degree in Nutrition and Food Science from The University of Reading and a PhD in Food Policy from City, University of London.

Dr Samantha Field, Senior Fellow (Public Health Consultant), The Health Foundation

Dr Samantha Field is a Senior Follow at The Health Foundation and a Consultant in Public Health. Samantha works on public health policy, including the prevention of ill health, commercial and behavioural risk factors, and system-wide prevention strategies.

Samantha's previous experience spans local and national government, international health organisations, academia and the NHS. Before specialising in public health, Samantha trained in internal medicine. Samantha holds an MSc in Global Health Science and Epidemiology from the University of Oxford and works clinically in general medicine and prevention.

FOOD ACT!VE

HEG Health Equalities Group

Michael Viggars, Senior Project Manager, Health Equalities Group

Michael Viggars is Senior Project Manager at Health Equalities Group (HEG). He leads delivery across a number of HEG's programmes, working with local authorities, the NHS, academics and the voluntary sector to tackle health inequalities through action on the social determinants of health.

His work focuses on upstream prevention, commercial determinants of health and health inequalities, including policy, advocacy and non-stigmatising communication about weight. He explores how public health language shapes policy and health outcomes.

Michael holds a master's in International Journalism and a BSc in Sports Science from Liverpool John Moores University and is completing a Master of Public Health at the University of Liverpool.

FOOD ACT!VE

HEG Health Equalities Group