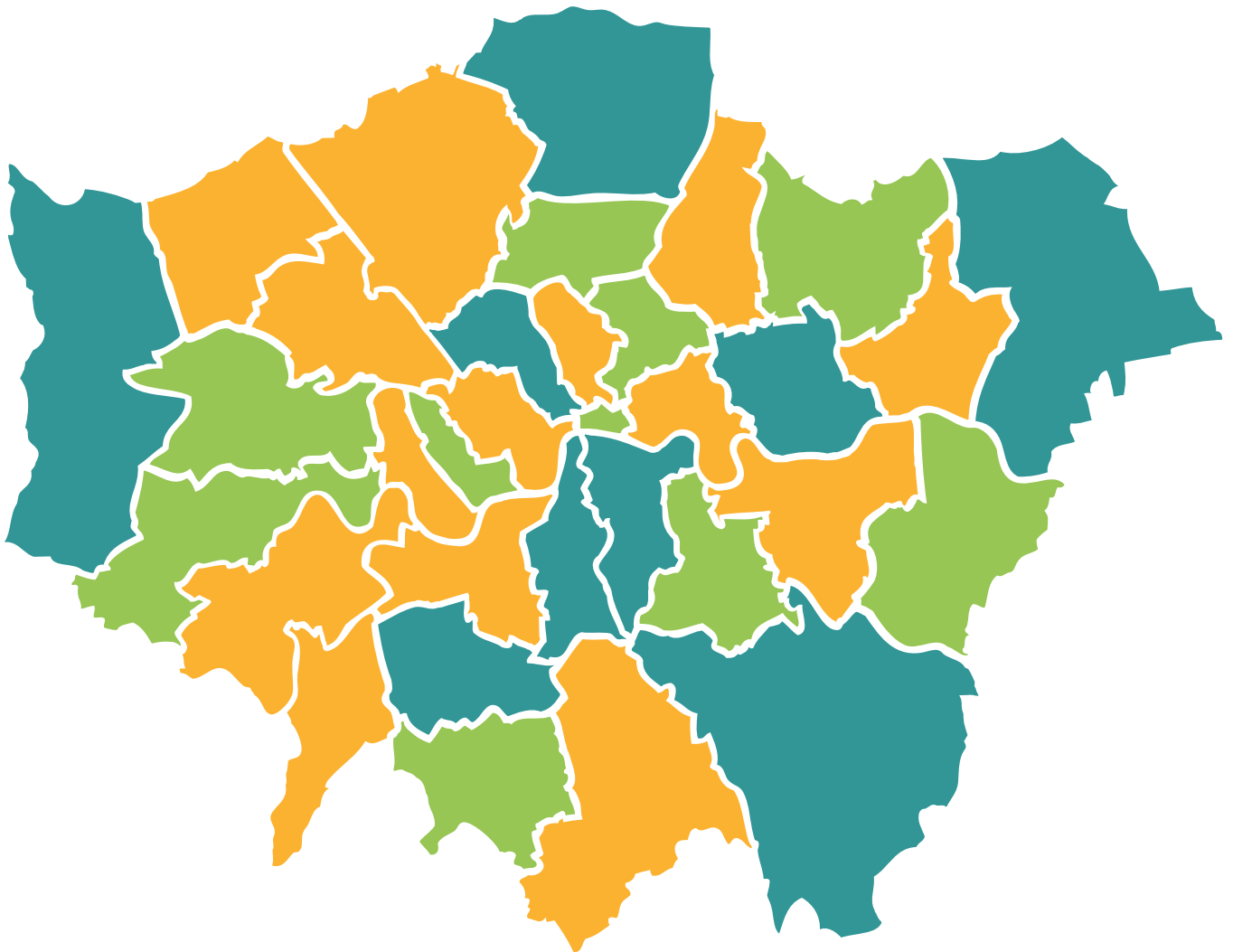


Good Food for All Londoners

2022

Tracking council action on food



Foreword

Welcome to the 2022 Good Food for All Londoners report, tracking council action on food. We know that recent years have been especially challenging to our city, and with a cost-of-living crisis communities still face difficult times ahead. This report shows that despite the challenges, our city's boroughs continue to find innovative ways to ensure Londoners have access to good, healthy food.

It's been promising to see strong work on cash-first approaches which help Londoners maximize their incomes. The rising cost-of-living means that incomes aren't going far enough, and worryingly many families are having to choose between eating and paying for other essentials. By providing cash grants in lieu of in-kind support, such as food parcels, cash-first support is helping reduce the need for charitable food aid. This is particularly important as pressure on food banks is at an all-time high. And, more importantly, it also allows families to access the food that is right for them in a dignified manner.

Food security is especially important for our youngest Londoners. The Mayor of London has announced a £130 million emergency fund to ensure all primary school children in the capital can receive free school meals for the 2023/2024 academic year. We are heartened to read that many councils are also prioritising children's health and wellbeing, including Westminster Council which has become the fifth London council to introduce universal free school meals (UFSM), joining Islington, Newham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets. The report also shows welcome progress on Healthy Start, holiday food and school meals.

We know that there are several social, economic and environmental factors that contribute to what children eat - from family income and how it is spent, to where a child lives, plays or learns. Engaging schools as partners in our work is vital to improving the wider food environment, both inside and outside the school gates. That's why we are pleased to be able to highlight the Mayor's School Superzones Programme: we now have over 50 School Superzones funded across London (and growing!), who are working collaboratively with communities and councils to tackle some of the inequalities that lead to poor health.

The report also shows how boroughs are creatively addressing the climate and nature emergency while focusing on food access. Sustain's Every Mouthful Counts report has found that London is making progress on sustainable procurement, food waste

and climate action plans. For example, Waltham Forest Council continues to support and promote community food growing gardens and small plots. In Chapter 2 of this report you can read about how they are going even further to encourage the use of public land for greening and food growing.

What's clear from this report is that councils are using every resource and partnership opportunity to champion healthy, affordable, climate and nature friendly food, but pressures from the cost-of-living crisis and on health and care services generally are causing longer-term work on healthier food to be squeezed.

While urgent needs must be met, we must avoid deprioritisation of healthy food work. This would leave a legacy of diet-related ill health in families across London, further widen health inequalities, cause additional strain on future health and social services, and harm the great progress made on climate-friendly and sustainable food procurement. We mustn't give up this good work now. We must continue to work collaboratively, developing partnerships and regaining focus on long-term goals to improve our food system. We hope you will be inspired by the examples you find in this report.



Kevin A. Fenton



T Coffey

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The report is coordinated by the London Food Link and Food Poverty teams at Sustain, to celebrate and encourage action by councils on good food issues, spanning several themes and departments. This edition marks the 11th year of tracking council progress on food.

We believe that now, more than ever, the action taken by councils on food needs to be coordinated, valued and prioritised. This will enable councils to address key challenges they face in building healthy, wealthy

communities while contributing to critical agendas such as tackling systemic inequalities, racial injustice and the climate and nature emergency.

The full report, with additional maps are available: www.sustainweb.org/good-food-for-all-londoners/

To find out more about our work visit www.londonfoodlink.org or email londonfoodlink@sustainweb.org

Executive summary

London is a diverse, dynamic city with food sitting at its heart. Councils play a vital role in ensuring food is accessible, affordable, healthy and sustainable.

We are grateful to the 28 out of 33 councils that took the time to respond to our survey between September and December of 2022, enabling the creation of this benchmarking and campaigning tool to help shift London towards a better food environment. Those that could not respond this year are encouraged to get involved in the programmes highlighted in this report and to attend upcoming support events.

Despite a challenging year economically, councils across the capital have been prioritising work on food, and we see scores improving across both food poverty and good food work. We note that those at top half of leader board have active food partnerships and tend to be working across a broad range of our metrics. We give a special commendation to the cross-cutting leaders of both chapters: Tower Hamlets, Islington, Lambeth, and Southwark.

Since last year there has been a promising increase in universal free school meals, holiday provision and Healthy Start food vouchers promotion, as well as provision of meals on wheels services. Progress has also been made on the London Living Wage and Living Wage Places. However, there is a reduction in active food poverty alliances and up-to-date food poverty action plans, and the number of cash-first actions that councils are undertaking. We urge councils to prioritise these areas, especially during this cost-of-living crisis.

A key finding of the report is that more councils have published food strategies, with others in progress for 2023. There has also been encouraging innovation in good food economy, with targeted work in retail settings, and an increase in leadership on food growing. There is an opportunity for councils to have a renewed focus on healthier food environments, and to look to champion food within health and climate work.

Not having strong food policy risks the most disadvantaged losing out more, with the current cost-of-living crisis exacerbating existing inequalities. Councils are in a position to act now to prevent widening gaps and prioritise those most in need.

London in numbers:

- **700,000 families** in London are estimated to be living in poverty¹
- London boroughs make up **five of the top ten UK areas** with the highest levels of child poverty²
- **14% of under-16s** are experiencing low food security²
- **43% missing out:** Healthy Start uptake in London in 2022 was 57% on average, meaning thousands of eligible families are missing out³
- **25% of children in London** face hunger during the school holidays¹
- **270,000 primary school children** will benefit from school meals being made universal⁴
- In the food sector, SMEs account for **78% of businesses, 26% of employment and 17% of turnover**⁵
- **1 in 7 workers** is employed in the agri-food sector in the UK⁵
- **10% of London's overall emissions** arise from food consumption – the same as the emissions from the energy use of roughly 1.8 million houses for a year⁶
- For every pound of turnover, local food businesses create roughly **three times as many jobs** as a supermarket⁷

Recommendations for action

It is recommended that councils prioritise joined-up work on food and engage stakeholders including Voluntary and Community Sector organisations (VCS). Councils are encouraged to collaborate across departments and to integrate food into key workstreams. This enables innovation, helps to generate ideas, and ensures the best use of assets for supporting work led by partners or external organisations.

Between surveys, councils can use the Good Food for all Londoners framework to support action on food issues. It can be used as a way to set internal targets on where to do better and to champion cross-departmental work on priority areas.

Taking action on food poverty beyond the food bank:

- Focus on strengthening the cash-first offer and income maximisation in the borough – this is key to reducing poverty overall
- Support VCS to transition from food aid to food trade models, and fund good wraparound support
- Sign up to the Say Yes! to School Meals for All campaign, committing to some of the actions outlined
- Build on commitments made to resourcing Healthy Start food vouchers by creating a target and action plan to increase uptake
- Revisit meals on wheels provision and continue to strengthen referral pathways
- Involve citizens and experts by experience of poverty in decision-making and policy development

Supporting good food for London:

- Champion food within health work and look for new opportunities to integrate food into programmes including Healthy Highstreets and School Superzones and implement a healthier food advertising policy
- Establish a cross-departmental working group on good food, focusing on the development of an overarching good food policy
- Ensure there is support for small businesses to help them become champions of healthy and climate and nature friendly food. Weave this priority into assets including commissions, funding opportunities and projects
- Explore and strengthen pathways set out to enable residents to access land for food growing, proactively seek land to increase access, and ensure this is available to diverse communities
- Join the food procurement working group to ensure that the food bought and sold across council services is healthy, climate-friendly, and never wasted

Beyond the Food Bank

Which councils are leading the way in tackling food poverty?

	Food poverty alliances	Food poverty action plans	Cash-first responses to food insecurity	London Living Wage	Food access for older and disabled people	Food access for BAME people	No recourse to public funds	UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative	Healthy Start	Free school meals	Holiday activities and food	Overall Score
Islington												91%
Newham												91%
Camden												88%
Lambeth												88%
Southwark												85%
Tower Hamlets												82%
Westminster												79%
Greenwich												76%
Enfield												73%
Hackney												73%
Kingston												73%
Waltham Forest												70%
Barking and Dagenham												67%
Lewisham												67%
Merton												67%
Hammersmith and Fulham												64%
Haringey												64%
Brent												61%
Ealing												55%
Barnet												52%
Redbridge												52%
Harrow												48%
Havering												45%
Hounslow												45%
Sutton												39%
Richmond												36%
City of London†												30%
Wandsworth												24%
Kensington and Chelsea												15%
Croydon												9%
Bexley												6%
Bromley												6%
Hillingdon												3%

Note: Councils with the same overall score are in alphabetical order. Leadership councils have been highlighted in orange and non-responders in grey. †City of London corporation has a different infrastructure and covers a smaller geographical area and resident population than other councils. This means on some issues, the corporation may have less opportunity to take action on good food.

Good Food for London

Which councils are showing leadership on joined-up action?

	Joined-up action on food	Healthier food environments	Good food economy	Food growing	Climate and nature emergency and food	Overall Score
Greenwich	Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Blue	Red	93%
Islington	Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Blue	Red	93%
Southwark	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Blue	Red	93%
Tower Hamlets	Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Blue	Red	93%
Lambeth	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Blue	Red	80%
Waltham Forest	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Blue	Light Red	73%
Lewisham	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Blue	Light Red	67%
Merton	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	67%
Newham*	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Blue	Light Red	67%
Hackney	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Red	60%
Barking and Dagenham*	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	53%
Brent	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Red	53%
Camden*	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Red	53%
Ealing	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Red	53%
Barnet	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	47%
Enfield	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	47%
Haringey	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	47%
Harrow	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	47%
Hounslow	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	47%
Hammersmith and Fulham	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	40%
Kingston	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	40%
Richmond	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	33%
Wandsworth	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	33%
City of London†	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	27%
Havering	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	27%
Redbridge	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	27%
Sutton	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	27%
Westminster	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	27%
Kensington and Chelsea	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	13%
Bexley	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	7%
Bromley	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	7%
Croydon	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	7%
Hillingdon	Light Green	Dark Blue	Yellow	Light Blue	Light Red	7%

Note: Councils with the same overall score are in alphabetical order. Leadership councils are highlighted in orange; non-responders in grey (read *Survey approach* on page 35). *See page 23 for more information. †See page 6 for more information.

Chapter 1 Beyond the Food Bank

This chapter summarises council action on food poverty, with a focus on work that seeks to tackle the root causes of poverty and increase dignified access to good food. The information gathered via this year's survey has been analysed across key themes relating to the 'Beyond the Food Bank' approach, and displayed in a series of maps that highlight how councils are progressing, alongside examples of good practice. Maps have not been included for every measure in this report; all maps can be found online at: www.sustainweb.org/good-food-for-all-londoners/

Case studies:

Camden: Raising standards on food provision

Through the Camden Food Poverty Alliance Steering Group, Camden's network of food providers are creating principles to set out what constitutes good food support in Camden. They are designed to ensure food aid providers in the borough provide the best quality, healthiest and most dignified forms of food aid possible, and seek to help organisations that may struggle to identify how to make their services better. These principles were finalised at a recent borough-wide summit and will be ratified as the Camden Good Food Principles.

The council recently funded a co-ordination post for the alliance, committing the support for 18 months. The coordinator is employed by a borough-wide food aid provider, with collaborative supervision. This embeds the voluntary sector as the local lead in tackling food poverty and insecurity in Camden. For the past two years the Alliance has hosted a bi-annual food poverty summit, most recently in February 2023, with attendees from the local VCS and other partners. Council officer time from across public health, strategy and community partnership teams is dedicated to making these summits happen.

Waltham Forest: Championing Black Breastfeeding Week and Healthy Start

Waltham Forest Council runs an annual Black Breastfeeding Week which celebrates Black mums locally and offers advice and support for women of colour who want to breastfeed. The event was started in response to data identifying the opportunity to improve rates of breastfeeding and maternal health in Black and Asian mothers through highlighting the challenges and successes of breastfeeding, particularly in the Black community. Find out more in [this video](#).

This work sits within a wider context of work in the borough to promote infant and maternal health. This includes Waltham Forest Council investing in the Healthy Start food vouchers scheme by funding a new role in 2022 that works exclusively on the scheme; increased promotion of the scheme with partners; exploring how the Healthy Start card could be used to buy food from veg box schemes; and making vitamins available free of charge to all pregnant women, meaning that Healthy Start vouchers in effect go further.

Brent: A Right to Food Borough

In summer 2022 Brent Council passed a Right to Food motion through full council, committing to extend statutory entitlements and making the political statement that access to good food should be a universal human right enshrined in national law. The process leading up to this involved a strong local Right to Food campaign which worked collaboratively with frontline VCS organisations to consult the community, to campaign for the motion, to think about what was needed to meet immediate need, and to work towards a borough free from the need for emergency food banks in the long term. The campaign's steering group was made up of people from the local food aid community including Granville Community Kitchen, and it also co-produced a Right to Food summit to build pressure for the motion.

Kingston: A holistic approach to infant feeding

Kingston's Infant Feeding Partnership includes representatives from public health, health visiting, infant feeding teams, Kingston hospital midwives, and an independent lactation consultant. Crucially, volunteer mothers who represent 'Maternity Voices' are also included, who provide insight and feedback that helps develop local breastfeeding services and initiatives. The partnership also facilitates peer-led breastfeeding sessions where there is a need for support.

The Infant Feeding Partnership has an ambition for all partners to be Baby Friendly accredited at Level 3 and whenever progress is made, it is reported and celebrated at the Kingston Partnership Board. This work is just one part of the approach Kingston takes to promote healthy eating and tackle food insecurity, and is part of the reason that the borough has some of the highest rates of breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks in London.

A number of attendees of the partnership also attend the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Infant Feeding and Inequalities, to ensure that local issues and concerns are fed upwards to national government.

Sutton: Flying the flag for Meals on Wheels

Sutton Council remains the only council in London to continually offer a robust, popular, and affordable meals on wheels service, despite a context of increased pressures on local authority budgets. The council receives referrals from social services and other 'in house' teams such as START. These services have been working together continuously over time, with healthcare professionals easily able to refer patients onwards to the service. The service now also takes referrals directly from the public, so they can be reached quicker, and residents do not have to wait to be referred by a professional.

The number of service users varies, but in 2022 approximately 220 customers were using it regularly. Meals are affordable at around £4, and a variety of diets are catered to including vegetarian and coeliac, and religious and cultural needs are provided for. Welfare checks are also included as part of delivery, with any issues or concerns flagged immediately and raised with social care services if necessary.



Credit: Shutterstock

Hackney: Weathering the cost-of-living crisis

In May 2022, Hackney Council published a Poverty Reduction Framework setting out the borough's plan for tackling systemic drivers of poverty alongside robust crisis support. The framework focuses on systemic drivers including insecure work, housing and low pay. There are three levels of solutions present:

- meeting people's immediate needs through effective and compassionate crisis support
- ensuring preventative measures are in place, including a focus on supporting children, and
- systemic solutions such as working to attract industries with well-paid, secure work, and investing in social housing.

The passing of this Cabinet-approved Framework builds on years of work, with the Hackney Food Justice Alliance founded by members of the Hackney Food Partnership in 2018, to tackling systemic drivers of poverty. In 2020 this alliance published a Food Poverty Action Plan, in consultation with people with lived experience of food poverty and their work then helped the council and partners deliver the pandemic response. The Poverty Reduction Framework also sits alongside Hackney's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which involved recruiting and training peer researchers from Hackney's communities. The Health and Wellbeing Strategy included a strong focus on tackling racism as a driving factor of poor health outcomes, alongside the importance of access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food.

Universal free school meals and holiday food provision

Free school meals provide a regular, nutritious source of food which is vital to the estimated 600,000 children living in poverty in London⁸. Holiday food provision supplies additional support to households that are struggling to put food on the table, to ensure that children do not go without outside of term time.

The four councils achieving leadership in last year’s report (Islington, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets), continue to lead by funding UFSM for all primary school aged children. As of January 2023, Westminster has also begun to roll out UFSM in this age group. Many councils are focussing on holiday food provision, with 23 councils now having criteria

for the food provided to ensure it is healthy and/or sustainable, and 17 showing leadership by funding to increase accessibility for children that are not eligible for government-funded holiday activities with food.

With the Mayor of London providing funding for UFSM from September 2023 for all primary schools, councils have the opportunity to broaden access to nurseries and secondary schools, measure and report on uptake of free meals, and fund other programmes such as breakfast clubs, free fruit and vegetables, and holiday food provision.

Free school meals

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action or data reported



What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
A mechanism in place to measure free school meal uptake e.g. cashless catering or a requirement on schools to measure and report take-up of free school meals.	Funding for breakfast clubs. <i>or</i> Funding for fruit and vegetables beyond the government-funded School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme for 4–6-year-olds.	Funding for universal free school meals beyond KS1 (all primary school children and/or secondary school children).

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Universal free school meals

Access to a nutritious meal, free from stigma, is essential to children's social and educational development, and to levelling the playing field to give every child a more equal start in life. UFSM have been linked to higher attendance and better educational performance, as well as providing essential nutrients for health and development. Research from Impact on Urban Health suggests that every £1 invested in UFSM now could deliver a return of £1.71. Five out of

33 London borough councils provide UFSM for all primary age pupils, and funding from the Mayor of London is now set to expand this across London for the 2023-24 school year, as a temporary cost-of-living measure. This does not apply to the tens of thousands of children and young people in nurseries and secondary education across London, who will continue to have unequal access to a nutritious meal during the school day.

Case study:

Newham, an integrated approach

In Newham, their Eat for Free scheme has been integrated into their wider community wealth-building approach. All schools sign up to a programme of grant conditions and principles that include: London Living Wages for all staff working on the catering contract; Food For Life Served Here accreditation; the ability to on-board new SME suppliers in a short timeframe; becoming a Water Only school; working to engage parents as active partners in supporting healthy eating; food literacy work being integrated into the mainstream curriculum, as well as caterers co-producing menus with children and families; and food growing on the school's site.

Case study:

Hammersmith and Fulham's pilot study in two secondary schools

Since 2019 Hammersmith and Fulham Council have expanded the availability of free school meals on the borough through two mechanisms. Firstly, the council has funded an offer of free breakfasts to all of its primary schools. Secondly, the council is running a pilot programme which gives all pupils in two secondary schools access to free lunches. The free school lunches started in January 2020 and are being offered to pupils at Fulham College Boys' School and Woodlane High School.

Case study:

Westminster rolls out free schools meals as part of its cost-of-living response

In Autumn 2022 Westminster City Council passed a motion to fund universal provision of free school meals for all primary age pupils for 18 months, beginning January 2023. The decision forms part of their cost-of-living crisis response, and will therefore be reviewed after the 18-month period.

“*Westminster City Council is determined to help our most vulnerable residents as food prices and energy bills soar. The free school lunch offer is in addition to a £10 million package of cost-of-living support which will create new food banks and help residents pay their energy bills.*”

Councillor Adam Hug, Leader of Westminster City Council.

Say Yes! To School Food for All

Sustain's Children's Food Campaign has a vision in which all children at school are provided with healthy, sustainably sourced, tasty meals that meet their dietary needs, without discrimination. That's why we are calling on all councils across England to join our call to Say Yes! To School Food for All. Councils can sign up to the pledge to:

1. Write to the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer in support of progressive roll-out towards universal provision of school meals
2. Explore local solutions to expanding school meals
3. Encourage local people to participate in campaigns for school food for all

If your council is interested in getting involved and signing the pledge, or if you'd just like to have a conversation about how your council could expand free school meals locally, please get in touch with Barbara Crowther at barbara@sustainweb.org

Food poverty alliances and action plans

Food poverty alliances bring together key stakeholders across the council and voluntary and community sectors (VCS) to carry out strategic, cross-sector work to reduce food poverty in an area. Overall, 23 boroughs have a food poverty alliance, and 20 continue to demonstrate leadership in this area by also working with alliance members to secure funding for joint projects and supplying officer time to support the work.

Food poverty action plans set out shared actions to support those experiencing food poverty and tackle the root causes. In total, 18 councils have a food poverty action plan, 14 of which have been updated

in the last three years, and 11 councils are exhibiting leadership in this area by also funding implementation of the plan. This leaves 10 councils without a food poverty action plan, and five without an active food poverty alliance, which is an increase on last year.

With the ongoing economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic contributing to the cost-of-living crisis which is being felt most acutely by those with less, Sustain urges councils to continue to support the work and expansion of food poverty alliances and to refresh out-of-date food poverty action plans.

Food poverty action plans

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action or data reported



What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
A food poverty action plan, or similar set of actions linked to a food plan or strategy.	An updated food poverty action plan (written or refreshed since 2019). <i>and either</i> A named officer responsible for oversight of the plan. <i>or</i> A designated multi-sectoral group responsible for implementing the recommendations of the plan.	Provide funding to implement the plan's recommendations and actions.

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UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative works with maternity, neonatal, health visiting and children's centre services and universities to implement evidence-based standards so that babies, their mothers, parents and families are provided with effective support with infant feeding and early relationship building. Social and cultural factors are often cited as barriers to breastfeeding, and the UK has some of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world with eight out of ten women stopping breastfeeding before they want to.⁹

Services which implement Baby Friendly standards receive the prestigious Baby Friendly award, which is a nationally recognised mark of quality care. The Baby Friendly Gold Award recognises how local authorities are sustaining these standards through leadership, culture, monitoring and progression. Baby Friendly Gold is currently maintained by three London boroughs: Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Kensington and Chelsea. Seven boroughs have also demonstrated good practice by achieving full Baby Friendly accreditation.

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action



This measure has been externally verified by UNICEF UK.

What can councils do?

No action	Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
No accreditation <i>or</i> Accreditation suspended.	Stage 1 and / or Stage 2 accreditation <i>or</i> Accredited but awaiting further review.	Full accreditation (Stage 3).	Gold Award.

www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/



This year, UNICEF UK released guideline for local authorities and health boards on supporting families with infants under 12 months old experiencing food insecurity.

Find out more here: www.unicef.uk/bf_local-authorities/

Healthy Start

Healthy Start is a support scheme for people who are pregnant or have children under four and are on low incomes and/or where the pregnant person is under 18. Those eligible receive free vitamins during pregnancy and for children under four, as well as up to £8.50 per week that can be spent on fruit, vegetables, pulses, milk, and infant formula. Several councils are also promoting the use of Healthy Start in settings such as street markets and veg box schemes.

The average uptake of Healthy Start vouchers across London in February 2023 was 63.4%, showing some increase since the August 2021 uptake of 56.6%, following a period of digitisation of the vouchers. This

means that thousands of households are still missing out on this income support, and the potential nutritional benefits from the food and vitamins provided.

Councils were asked what is being done to address low uptake, and encouragingly:

- 27 councils reporting having a designated Healthy Start lead in the council
- 24 councils have a local strategy or communications plan for coordinating and promoting the scheme
- 17 councils are exhibiting leadership by also having a stated target to increase voucher uptake and a plan to achieve this.

Healthy Start

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action or data reported



What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Have a designated person in the council who acts as the central point of contact for information and questions about the Healthy Start scheme.	Have a local strategy or communications plan for coordinating and promoting the Healthy Start scheme, including vouchers and vitamins.	Have a target to increase voucher uptake and a plan of how to achieve this.

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Cash-first responses to food insecurity

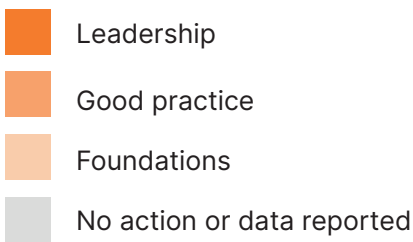
Insufficient income from low pay, insecure work and inadequate social security payments all contribute to poverty, leading to food insecurity, when people do not have enough money to afford a sufficient quality or quantity of food. A cash-first approach is key to tackling the root causes of poverty, as it aims to maximise income, reduce debt and financial difficulty, and provide dignified wraparound support.

A total of 24 councils continue to fund crisis and support payments as well as advice and debt services, and have implemented a streamlined referral pathway, and 13 councils are exhibiting leadership by taking action in all five of the areas measured

to maximise income. However, this represents a reduction in cash-first action from last year, which is particularly concerning given the cost-of-living crisis.

Encouragingly, 14 councils are currently working with the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) to promote their 'Worrying About Money?' cash-first referral leaflets, which are co-designed, step-by-step resources to help people facing money struggles as well as support workers find local advice and cash-first support. We recommend that other councils in London take up the opportunity to work with IFAN to provide holistic support aiming to reduce the need for charitable food aid and maximise people's incomes.

Cash-first responses to food insecurity



What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Taking 1-2 of the recommended actions	Taking 3-4 of the recommended actions	Taking all 5 of the recommended actions

Recommended actions:

- Have a local welfare assistance scheme that provides financial assistance directly to residents in crisis, preferably in cash
- Have a council tax minimum payment of less than 8.5% for low-income residents
- Ensure streamlined referral pathways that help residents access as many forms of support as possible in an integrated way
- Fund welfare benefits and debt advice services (either in-house or contracted)
- Have a discretionary housing payment scheme for residents in economic hardship with at least 90% of the budget for this spent (by the end of the year)

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www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets

London Living Wage

An important part of the cash-first approach is ensuring incomes are high enough to keep people out of poverty, enabling individuals to have a dignified choice of food. The London Living Wage is currently set at £11.95 per hour and applies to everyone over 18 in employment.

Being an accredited Living Wage Employer signals a commitment to pay staff and contractors what they need to live on, not just the legal minimum, so that they can have a decent standard of living including being able to afford an adequate diet. It can provide benefits to employers such as reduced absenteeism, easier recruitment and staff retention,

improved staff morale and wellbeing and better organisational reputation.

This year, progress has been made on London’s journey to becoming a Living Wage City, with three councils now exhibiting leadership by being formally recognised as Living Wage Places compared to two last year, and 15 showing good practice by being recognised as a Living Wage Funder, a Living Hours Employer, or actively engaging local employers on Living Wage, compared to 10 last year.

London Living Wage

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action or data reported



This measure has been externally verified by the Living Wage Foundation.

What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
An accredited Living Wage Employer	Recognised as having Living Wage Funder status (www.livingwage.org.uk/living-wage-funders) <i>or</i> Engaging local employers around the Living Wage and accreditation <i>or</i> An accredited Living Hours employer (www.livingwage.org.uk/living-hours)	Recognised as having a ‘Living Wage Place’ within the borough

Food access for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people

Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME*) people often experience disproportional barriers to accessing food and participating in the food system and are more likely to experience food poverty than White people in the UK, relating to ongoing structural racial injustice.

We asked councils for the second time in this year’s survey what actions they are taking to offer targeted support to these groups to help to address this area of health inequity. This year it is promising to see that an additional two councils are showing leadership by

undertaking action across at least five areas, bringing the total number of leaders in this theme to seven.

Additionally, we asked councils about actions to support those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), a group that includes many Black people and people of colour and people who face high risk of food insecurity. Thirteen councils are showing leadership in this area by taking at least four significant actions to increase funding and food availability to people with NRPF status, with an additional six showing good practice by taking two to three actions in this area.

Food access for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action or data reported



*Sustain usually avoids the term BAME to describe people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, but uses it in this report due to common usage by local authorities. See our [diversity style guide](#).

What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Taking 1-2 of the recommended actions	Taking 3-4 of the recommended actions	Taking more than 5 of the recommended actions

Recommended actions:

- Mapping retailers selling culturally diverse, affordable and healthy food
- Incentivising food retailers to sell culturally diverse, healthy and affordable food
- Supporting food aid providers or community food projects to include a variety of foods for diverse dietary requirements
- Mapping food aid provision across the borough and indicating the diverse types of food available
- Implementing policies or procedures that help ensure council food procured meets diverse requirements
- Supporting BAME-led community food projects e.g. through targeted grants
- Supporting BAME residents to access community food growing spaces or allotments

www.sustainweb.org/blogs/aug20-sustains-commitment-to-tackle-racial-injustice/

Food access for older and disabled people

Malnutrition causes poor health outcomes, reduces quality of life and is expensive for publicly funded services to address. Older and disabled people are at higher risk of malnutrition as they may be less able to access food and prepare meals for themselves. Preventative services such as meals on wheels, lunch clubs and shopping support services increase the availability of nutritious meals, which not only reduces the risk of malnutrition, but offers a frequent point of contact for welfare checks, and an opportunity for social interaction. Unfortunately, meals on wheels provisions have been slashed in recent years, with many of the great initiatives springing up during lockdown periods of the pandemic no longer operating.

This year, we are pleased to see that 11 councils are now showing leadership in this theme by either funding an in-house service or commissioning external meals on wheels services, compared to only five last year. Additionally, nine councils are showing good practice by supporting strong referral pathways into meals on wheels services, for example by working with health professionals, hospital discharge teams and/or adult social care. Only 10 councils reported funding lunch clubs in the borough

We urge all councils to strengthen referral pathways, look to examples of good practice, and reassess if this need is being met in their borough.

Food access for older and disabled people

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action or data reported



What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Signposting people to meals on wheels services for example via social services and information	Supporting strong referral pathways into meals on wheels services, for example by working with health professionals, hospital discharge teams and/or adult social care	Funding an in-house meals on wheels service or services <i>or</i> Commissioning an external meals on wheels service or services

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 London Food Poverty Campaign Coordinator
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You can read more about these vital services and good examples of meals on wheels providers in our report [here](#).

Engaging people with lived experience of poverty

The principles of democracy and participation should be embedded in government at every level, and local government should seek to consult and engage all of its citizens, especially those who are most impacted by their policies and programmes. Many local authorities are making a good effort to do this, with a wide range of approaches being taken. For this first time in 2022, Sustain asked councils in London about their work to engage, consult or be led by people with direct experience of food poverty.

Learning from our research

Of the 28 councils who responded to our survey, 11 gave information in response to this new question. Of these 11 councils, around half were meaningfully

engaging residents facing poverty on the design or delivery of council services or policies. The other half were carrying out work that sits at the lower end of the **'ladder of participation'**, such as blanket surveys.

Below we set out findings from this research, ranking activities according to their efficacy and utility as tools for co-production and democracy. Whilst we recognise that councils do a range of good work to consult and engage residents, here we focus on local authorities' work on food and/or poverty. For a more detailed analysis of our new findings, see our briefing paper [here](#).

Contact Isabel Rice, London Food Poverty Campaign Coordinator at isabel@sustainweb.org

Level	Type of work	Examples
Foundation	Informing	Clear, accessible and non-stigmatising information is readily and easily available to residents about services and support and about how to feedback to council
	Consulting	Surveys and questionnaires sent to residents about experiences of poverty or asking what the council should do to address it
Good practice	Engaging	One-to-one or group conversations held with people experiencing food poverty, to better understand their experiences and insights on how the problems they face should best be solved. Facilitated in respectful and kind ways, in contexts where people will be comfortable, and with clear follow-up
	Embedding consultation throughout the council	Teams, staff or departments are set up to ensure the whole of the council embeds democratic and consultative principles into their work. Information, guidance and training disseminated on how to work collaboratively with the community
	Co-producing research with food system leaders	Peer researchers are trained and employed to conduct research in communities on their experiences, the issues they face, and what needs to be done to build a more just food systems. Researchers are recruited from the VCS, community leaders, food business owners, etc.
Best practice	Co-producing research with people with lived experience of food poverty	Peer researchers are trained and employed to conduct research in communities on their experiences, the issues they face, and what needs to be done to build a more just food system. Researchers are experts by experience in food poverty
	Empowering communities to allocate resources	Decisions about funding allocation is made by community members, rather than council staff. Most commonly through 'Resident Research Panels', comprised of a broad spectrum of residents, with the ability to make final decisions about where money is allocated
	Co-designing a vision for a more just food system with people experiencing food poverty	Workshops held which are open to anyone and which ensure people experiencing food poverty are welcome and involved, that focus on envisioning structures and principles for a more just food system. Often arts-based, and run by trusted VCS groups already embedded in the community

Weathering the cost-of-living crisis

Following a challenging few years of national and international events, the UK is now facing the sharp edge of greatly inflated living costs, plunging more people into food insecurity. Many face difficult decisions around eating or heating their homes, and charitable food aid providers in London are under great pressure from increasing demand for their support.

In response to this difficult context, councils were asked to provide information about approaches they are taking to support residents to weather the cost-of-living crisis.

All councils reported responding in some way to tackle this emergency, including promoting warm hubs or spaces over the winter, some of which provide food. Most importantly, councils were asked about their cash-first approach and the responses showed:

17

councils have officially declared a cost-of-living crisis

9

councils are taking action to increase wages beyond what was planned

27

councils have a strategy or plan to help residents manage the crisis

24

councils have a strategy or plan to help local voluntary and community sector organisations

16

councils have a strategy or plan to help local businesses

The Boroughs Food Group, convened by the London Food Board, provides support to local authorities and external partners by sharing data and good practice on food work across the capital. The group continues to meet quarterly to learn from each other with the aim of expanding work on healthy and sustainable food issues in London. Two recent meetings have included a focus on local authority responses to the cost-of-living crisis, with councils sharing examples of innovative initiatives to support residents to weather the storm.

Sustain will continue to encourage London councils to share good practice and prioritise supporting residents to access the food they need in a dignified manner, focusing on cash-first approaches and affordable food provision and moving away from reliance on charitable food aid.



Credit: Shutterstock

Chapter 2 Good Food for London

This chapter covers five core themes that reflect different ways councils can bring good food to the borough, including taking joined-up and collaborative action on food; supporting healthier food environments; fostering a good food economy; enhancing and increasing opportunities for food growing across the borough; and responding to the climate and nature emergency in relation to food.

This initial section includes case studies to celebrate good practice and innovation from across the capital, before going on to look at council action under each core theme.

Case studies:

Islington: Transitioning to a sustainable food partnership

Islington first launched a food strategy in 2010 and, while council led, the partnership was far wider. Over the years, the council supported the group with officer time and support in the delivery of their objectives but more recently actively sought to transition to a more sustainable model of governance. This included finding an independent chair and supporting the steering group to also become more independent.

The partnership is now council supported rather than council led, with a strategic partnership board that is independently chaired with representation of elected members, senior council officers, voluntary sector and NHS. The co-ordinating group reflects this with a tight-knit selection of 50/50 council officers and voluntary sector. As well as providing support at meetings, various council teams continue to offer support and deliver on objectives, for example by helping with funding bids and delivering community meals and engagement activities.

The partnership is realigning its goals, having focused on food poverty between 2017-2022, to return to a whole food system approach.

Newham: Community wealth building

Newham launched its Community Wealth Building Strategy in 2020, with the aim of using its purchasing power and influence to keep wealth in the local economy. The council procures food and catering from local SMEs, co-ops and social enterprises and is actively helping these food providers get onto council supplier lists, as well as integrating them into contracts for healthy and sustainable food in council-run settings such as nurseries and care settings.

Newham's LATCO catering company, Juniper Ventures, serving 23,000 meals each school day, have a procurement policy that makes it able to bring on SMEs as suppliers swiftly and simply.

As part of a social value approach to how property is managed, the Council's Commercial Property Services team review the food offer of potential tenants, not leasing to those with a high sugar, salt and fat content. The same approach is taken to tenancing and licencing in park and library food spaces. Ice cream vans are not licenced to trade in council parks. Benefits of this include the absence of diesel engines in public spaces and more Sugar Smart spaces.

A council-wide approach to catering and hospitality has been implemented, and is included in the manager's portal. Supported by their SMART Food team of nutritionists, it makes it easy for officers to use in-house and small local business suppliers for events, however large or small, that promote health and well-being, community wealth building, inclusive employment and the Climate NOW agenda.



Transitioning to a sustainable food partnership;
credit: London Borough of Islington Council

Haringey: Healthier advertising success

Haringey Council implemented its healthier food advertising policy in July 2019, aligning with the Mayor of London's flagship policy on the Transport for London (TfL) network, restricting the advertising of products that are high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS), and was the first council in the UK to do so. In addition to the evidence of the health impacts from the University of Sheffield and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, both TfL and Haringey have reported that they have not lost advertising revenues since implementing the policy.

Haringey Council said: "Haringey's advertising policy is an integral part of its action to protect children's health and encourage healthy behaviours through targeted interventions. All agreements with external providers adhere to this policy and there has been no financial loss to the council as advertising spaces are allocated to other advertisements that don't promote HFSS products, alcohol, gambling or other activities that are harmful to the health and wellbeing of communities."

Merton and Waltham Forest: Serving more plant-based meals in schools

Merton Council has recently put more emphasis on reducing emissions from school meals provision and increasing the plant-based meals offer for schools. This includes implementing an optional second meat free day in the standard menu offer for primary schools and offering a broader range of plant-based dishes for schools to select. These changes have been well received by schools, as the council worked with the catering company to promote the menu.

In 2022, Waltham Forest won the Green Menu League Award for serving up one million plant-based school meals a year across 50 primary schools, naming school dinners in Waltham Forest 'the greenest in the UK'. In addition, where food and catering are required by the Council, it is specifically purchased from local providers, plus onsite catering services are delivered by a local SME.

Waltham Forest : Flourishing food growing

Waltham Forest Council has long supported and promoted community food growing gardens and small plots in the borough. In the last year, the council has doubled the offer to residents by reducing the maximum size of an allotment from 10 rods (traditional full-size allotment) to 5 rods, getting more newcomers to grow their own. The council ensures allotments are used at their full capacity, keeping allotment lists active and diverse, and encourages allotment plot holders to grow organic. Further work is now taking place across council services to encourage the use of public realm land for greening and food growing.

The council-owned Hawkwood Nursery leased to OrganicLea is a training centre for organic and agroecological growing in the borough and beyond, as well as running the local Food Growers Network. The council, in collaboration with OrganicLea, provide a free 2-day training programme to allotment holders entitled 'Getting started on your allotment plot'. The council have also developed a 'first of its kind' food growing strategy (to be published in 2023), which recognises the impact of climate and the economic pressures faced currently.



Flourishing food growing in Waltham Forest; credit: London Borough of Waltham Forest Council

Joined-up action on food

Collaborative planning and action between policy makers, organisations and VCS organisations helps create a healthier, more sustainable, and equitable food system, and drives forward the food agenda in the local area. Areas with these food partnerships can be seen generally to perform better on measures related to food, such as food poverty and the climate and nature emergency.

The Sustainable Food Places (SFP) network, coordinated by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain, supports and advocates for partnerships, providing a framework for driving progress and sharing good practice on transitioning to a more

sustainable food system. Nine councils in London are members of the SFP network, with three additional councils being part of an active food partnership seeking membership in 2023. Five councils in London now hold a SFP Bronze Award and one has achieved Silver.

Encouragingly, twelve councils now have a published food strategy, ten of which have been renewed in the last three years and seven other councils are currently working on a food strategy, committing to a collaborative approach, and demonstrating the value of a joined-up approach to food in the city.

Joined-up action on food

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action or data reported



The councils marked with a * are recognised for their efforts in taking a joined-up approach on food, despite not meeting the criteria outlined in this survey.

What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Set up, join or support a food partnership, that is a member of the Sustainable Food Places network.	<p>Council must have foundations and one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A food strategy or food plan, including but wider than just the theme of food poverty. The council provides officer time or funding to support this work. SFP Award. 	<p>Take a joined-up holistic approach to food, and support and enhance collaboration.</p> <p>Keep a food strategy up to date (refreshed at least every 3 years).</p>

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Healthier food environments

All children deserve to grow up healthy no matter where they live, yet in London, nearly 40% of children have an unhealthy weight,¹⁰ disproportionately affecting those in the most deprived areas. Increasing the flow of healthy food in every neighbourhood is key to tackling diet-related health conditions.





Sustain promotes a holistic approach to achieving healthier diets. Responses showed:

- 23 councils are running the Healthier Catering Commitment
- 13 reported having the Soil Association's Food for Life Served Here award

- Eight have run a Veg Cities campaign
- 12 made recent progress on a Sugar Smart campaign or a Local Government Declaration on Sugar Reduction and Healthier Food

Four councils (Haringey, Southwark, Merton and Greenwich) are implementing a Healthier Food Advertising policy, which restricts advertising for less healthy food and drinks. Additionally, 15 councils are working to support food aid providers to transition to more sustainable models of food trade. There is scope for considerable progress in this area, with potential benefits to Londoners today and for generations to come.

Healthier food environments

	Leadership
	Good practice
	Foundations
	No action or data reported



This measure has been externally validated by the Soil Association and the Healthier Catering Commitment.

What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Run a campaign (or equivalent) to support healthier communities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sugar Smart • Veg Cities • Healthier Catering Commitment 	Make progress on these commitments and review targets annually. <i>or</i> Implement a Healthier Advertising Policy.	Demonstrate a joined-up approach to achieving healthier diets and integrate food into health workstreams and projects. <i>and</i> Implement a Healthier Advertising Policy.

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 Vera Zakharov, Veg Cities, Sustain
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www.vegcities.org

www.sugarsmartuk.org

Good food economy

A thriving local food economy containing diverse SME food businesses can contribute to a more resilient food system and healthier neighbourhoods, and provide residents with access to affordable, healthy, diverse, and sustainable food, as well as build community wealth. The results highlight seven councils showing leadership in this area, with a further 11 showing good practice, demonstrating collaborative work across departments and a focus on improving the local food economy alongside health.

Eighteen councils have policies or plans that reference increasing access to healthy or sustainable food from food SMEs, and three have an up-to-date Good Food

Retail plan. Ten councils are supporting new fresh food markets, helping to reduce costs to traders and assisting them to take part in schemes such as Healthy Start and Rose Vouchers, so people on lower incomes can access more fresh produce.

Nine councils are providing training to food SMEs that includes promoting healthy or sustainable food, and working to target underrepresented groups with the training, and 14 councils have delivered initiatives to promote the local food economy and SMEs in the last year.

Good food economy

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action or data reported



What can councils do?

This section included several questions covering a variety of actions that councils can undertake to promote a local good food economy. Examples of actions at different levels include:

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Procure food or catering from local SMEs, coops or social enterprises.	Explore projects to improve the availability of affordable, healthy and/or sustainable food in settings such as convenience stores, street markets or other retail settings.	Take action to support emergency food providers to transition towards more financially sustainable models of food provision. Provide training, advice and support for food SMEs which target those run by and/or serving underrepresented groups.

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Local approaches for a good food economy

Sustain advocates for a good food economy that builds community wealth through creating jobs and circulating money locally, and celebrates locally sourced or made foods and diverse cultures. Locally run good food enterprises and localised shorter supply chains that provide food for these businesses have a significant role to play in boosting jobs and the local economy, supporting agroecological farmers, improving public health, as well as taking action on climate and nature.

With the impact of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, millions of people across the UK are struggling to afford and access the food they need, with councils and many others significantly increasing the amount they spend on food purchasing. Many London councils have realised the power of their procurement as well as the importance of a good food economy in building resilience, and are exploring ways to support food entrepreneurs and enterprises to thrive, including many social enterprises who sell healthy and sustainable food.

Find out more below about three different areas where councils can foster a good food economy.

Convenience stores

One approach being taken by a number of councils in London is to target convenience stores to make healthier food and drink options more accessible to shoppers.

Why convenience stores?

The pandemic showed how convenience stores are an integral part of local communities, with many families in low-income areas relying on them for their daily food needs. However, these stores often stock fewer healthier options owing to a lack of confidence by retailers that the products can sell. The cost-of-living crisis has put further pressure on the situation with many healthier products being more expensive. Local interventions supported by national wholesalers has achieved some exciting scalable results.

What councils are doing: A healthy food basket approach

Two examples of councils working with convenience stores to improve their healthy food offer are Southwark and Greenwich.

In Southwark, the council and Impact on Urban Health jointly commissioned Rice Marketing to support 40

trial stores located in low-income areas of Southwark to achieve a 22% increase in the availability of healthier options. Retailers welcomed impartial advice on what healthier options to stock from a Top 100 product action plan. The campaign was supported by 13 suppliers and work with local Cash and Carry, Bestway Wholesale, saw a 1000% increase in the sales of healthier options following a two-day push campaign. In addition, all 40 stores will receive collateral promoting their acceptance of the new digital Healthy Start card to increase uptake in the borough and through convenience stores. The project is now moving in to a second phase which will expand the number of convenience stores involved, enhance promotion of Healthy Start and further the work with wholesalers.

In Greenwich, the Good Food Retail subgroup has been planning a cross-borough approach to the convenience store model, building on their pilot from 2020. Starting in a Superzone, a group of council and third-sector officers will be guided through the Healthy Basket Model by Rice Marketing, with a view to building in-borough skills to make the work sustainable.

What can councils do?

Through bringing together Public Health specialists with those working with local business and on economic growth and skills, councils can start to look at ideas that build healthier options and help SMEs to capture some of the market growth in this area.

To find out more or to discuss a project idea, contact Stephanie Rice stephanie@ricemarketing.co.uk www.ricemarketing.co.uk

Supporting a local VCS-led approach

Southwark Council has been supporting the charity Pembroke House and a network of neighbourhood-based groups to develop the concept of a neighbourhood food model in Walworth, Southwark. This work builds on the energy and collaboration of the council, VCS and residents mobilised during the pandemic, while shifting emphasis towards long-term strategic goals.

Why a Neighbourhood Food Model? How can a neighbourhood play a greater role in transforming its own food system?

The neighbourhood of Walworth has a population of 45,000, and an approximate annual spend on food of £94,000,000. The approach aims to determine how more of this wealth can be kept in Walworth, and how



Credit: Shutterstock

community-led businesses can thrive, creating better-paid local food jobs.

A set of projects and partnerships are testing interventions to accelerate change. Interventions support community kitchens, community cafés, collective buying schemes, food growing, and local supply chain development.

Community ownership and governance is key. One early success is the Walworth Community Pub, a newly constituted Community Benefit Society that has formed to develop a new pub, with affordable food at its core.

Collaboration and learning are facilitated through an Action Learning Group in which projects and organisations share operational and strategic challenges. An online Knowledge Sharing Platform supports the sharing of insights and planning across projects, and Neighbourhood Food Tours are being developed with residents to give Walworth's food projects and enterprises greater visibility.

What can councils do?

Councils can use an asset-based approach to work with local VCS providers who are equipped to work at this level, as well as roll out key elements of their success across the borough.

Find out more at: www.pembrokehouse.org.uk/walworth-neighbourhood-food-model/

Investing in community food retail

Sustain is currently working with four pilot areas on a new Good Food Enterprise initiative to explore how councils as social investors can help community food retail and enterprises transition from food aid to food trade.

Why community food retail?

The idea of community food retail is not new, but the need for a better understanding of the role of this sector is essential. Following an explosion in the growth in emergency food provision, and now a crisis in terms of supply, the programme will explore how projects have developed into community enterprises to give people on lower incomes or people in deprived communities access to healthy, affordable food in dignified and culturally appropriate ways. It will also importantly show how and where councils can invest in helping this transition and build more resilience into the sector. It aims to showcase how the right support can create lasting change to help more people eat well and ultimately provide a more sustainable food supply and good jobs at a local level.

The project will be providing opportunities for learning and sharing good practice.

To find out more or to discuss a project idea, contact Sarah Williams of Sustain at sarah@sustainweb.org

Ripe for change

Transforming how London feeds itself

The Mayor of London, ReLondon and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, in coordination with London Councils' One World Living group, are supporting boroughs, businesses and civil society to transition towards a circular economy for food in London – realising a system where food is deeply valued, sustainably produced and never wasted.

Action on food can tackle many of today's biggest health, economic and environmental challenges. In London, food accounts for almost 10% of the city's carbon footprint. Meanwhile, in a cost-of-living crisis, one in six adults in London are experiencing low or very low food security.

Key facts about London's food system⁶

78% of consumption emissions from food come from imports, occurring outside the city.

Over 1/3 of food produced to supply London is lost or wasted.

1% of the capital's food supply comes from local farming and production.

67% of 'food waste' in London is edible but just **0.5%** is redistributed.

There is potential to reduce London's consumption-based emissions by up to 31% per year by reducing food loss and waste and transitioning to more sustainable diets.

The Mayor of London, ReLondon and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation are working together on London's Food Flagship Initiative (FFI); the goal is to collaborate with actors across the city's food value chain to reduce food waste, encourage more sustainable diets, and increase the amount of food supplied to London that has been grown using agroecological practices, and locally where possible. The interventions supported by the initiative are also intended to improve food access and affordability.

The Food Flagship Initiative invites London boroughs to get involved and join the collective effort to create a low carbon, healthy and fair food system in London. On the following page are three key opportunities for collaboration included in the London's Food Footprint Progress Report, available [here](#).

“ The Food Flagship Initiative is working with London's boroughs to reduce food waste and encourage more sustainable diets, as well as agro-ecologically and locally grown food. By getting involved with this important initiative, London's boroughs can play an influential role in reducing London's waste and climate impacts, and achieving a sustainable future.

Shirley Rodrigues, Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy



Credit: August de Richelieu

See what's already happening and get involved

1. Leading by example through food procurement

A local authority **food procurement working group** is supporting London's local authorities to ensure that the food they buy and sell across council services is healthy, climate-friendly, and never wasted.

As major buyers and providers of food in the city, London's boroughs can play a key role in shifting to a low carbon, healthy, fair food system, improving the health and environmental impacts of the meals they serve. The working group is developing a city-wide commitment on sustainable diets, sourcing and food waste reduction which will make council-bought meals both better for the planet and good value for money.

2. Eat Like a Londoner



Launching in March 2023, 'Eat Like a Londoner' is the new pan-London education and awareness-raising campaign, managed by ReLondon and supported by 23 London boroughs, the Greater London Authority and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

The new campaign will empower London residents to reduce the carbon impact of their household food consumption by reducing household food waste and eating more plant-rich meals. ReLondon is inviting more boroughs and other partners to get involved to grow the campaign and create real, positive change for people and the planet.

3. Pioneer projects

Meet three pioneering projects already underway with boroughs across London.

Forward Food: Supporting chefs to cook tasty plant-rich dishes



Low confidence among chefs to design delicious veggie dishes was identified by the Food Flagship Initiative as a barrier to shifting to lower-carbon diets. In September 2022, the Forward Food programme ran a plant-based masterclass to upskill 15 chefs from 6 London universities. Hosted by University of West London, with ingredients donated by Natoora, all participants committed to increase the number of plant-based dishes on menus. Forward Food are seeking more institutions to deliver sessions with.

Food Connect: Redistributing surplus food to people in Southwark and Lambeth



Launched at the Albrighton Centre, Southwark, in March 2022, Food Connect has since redistributed over 226 tonnes of food in zero emission vehicles, equivalent to 563,000 meals via community fridges to over 14,000 households in Lambeth and Southwark. The service, funded by GLA, Starbucks and Southwark Council has created seven new jobs and saved 436 tonnes CO2eq. With proof of concept, new sites have opened in Lambeth, and additional sites planned in Hackney and Merton.

Source: Creating hyper-local waste-energy-food loops in Poplar Harca



Recycling unavoidable food waste in densely populated areas has many benefits, but also logistical and technical barriers. With support from social housing provider Poplar Harca, Tower Hamlets Council and the London Legacy Development Corporation, LEAP's SOURCE is scaling a micro-biodigester to process 150kg of food waste from social housing residents, providing green jobs and skills.

To find out more about participating in any of the activities above, please get in touch with Rachel Shairp, ReLondon's food lead, at Rachel.Shairp@relondon.gov.uk



SUPPORTED BY
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Food growing





Sustain's Capital Growth network is thriving across London, supporting councils to be proactive about ensuring Londoners can access land to grow. Growing food not only bolsters a nutritious food supply, but supports physical, mental and social health and benefits the environment.

Encouragingly, 25 councils have food growing in a strategy or policy. Eighteen councils include growing in planning policies, and eight review how these policies are enacted. Fifteen councils have designated officer time to work on food growing, 17 provide grants or materials, and 20 are working with partners to develop growing spaces. Sixteen

are connecting growers with food providers, including those that provide to people with limited access to good food.

Accessing land for food growing is challenging, with many councils making use of publicly owned land and parks to expand opportunities. Nine councils reported tracking land available for growing and setting targets to increase availability, a small increase from last year, and 15 are taking steps to ensure that diverse groups can access land. This year eight councils are demonstrating leadership in food growing, testament to the hard work by councils and the increased priority of this food issue.

Food growing

	Leadership
	Good practice
	Foundations
	No action or data reported



What can councils do?

This section included several questions covering a variety of actions that councils can undertake to promote food growing in the borough. Examples of actions at different levels include:

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
<p>Have designated officer time to support food growing.</p> <p>Ensure that specific support for community food growing is included in the council's planning policies.</p>	<p>Work with developers to ensure accessible community gardens are part of the design of new developments.</p>	<p>Take a cross-cutting approach across council teams to food growing and build capacity for food growing roles.</p> <p>Review how planning policies that support food growing are enacted.</p>

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Is your menu climate-friendly?

With the current complex economic climate, the challenge of increased costs has been felt across the catering industry. Yet there is a silver lining: caterers are reducing costs, improving employee wellbeing, and increasing meal uptake by putting climate, nature, and health at the forefront of their business.

Mounting pressure

In a competitive market, caterers need to demonstrate an ability to deliver high-quality food safely. Caterers are under mounting pressure to understand the issues when it comes to crucial topics, from palm oil to single-use plastics, animal welfare and climate change. It's a big challenge. Caterers are striving to meet bigger targets with smaller budgets.

What's good for health is good for the planet

Food for Life works with caterers to sift through 'greenwash' - to establish what catering for human and environmental health looks like for kitchen practice, procurement, and plates.

Recognising that climate, nature and health are interlinked is vital to understanding how to make your business greener. What's good for health is usually good for the planet.

A green recovery

A green recovery is best for people, the planet, and the resurgence of the catering industry.

The great news is you don't have to become specialists - there is help available to caterers of all sizes.

To book a free appointment with one of the Soil Association's sustainable catering experts visit: **Food for Life** or contact Sophie Pritchard at spritchard@soilassociation.org



Top tips for healthy, climate-friendly menus:

1. Use less but better meat

Many chefs have reduced meat on their menus by introducing meat free days or lowering the meat content in recipes. By saving money on quantity, chefs can purchase higher welfare produce such as organic or free range.

2. Reduce ultra-processed foods on menus

Research associates ultra-processed foods with obesity, cancer, type-2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. These foods also typically have a much higher environmental footprint than fresh, whole foods. You can read more about this in the [Soil Association's Ultra Processed Foods report](#).

3. Use less or better palm oil

Keep your palm oil products to a minimum or, where necessary to use palm oil, use Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certified palm oil.

4. Make a food waste reduction plan

One third of all food produced is thrown in the bin - then we have to pay someone to dispose of it. To ensure the fresh, healthy meals you serve are being eaten, measure your food waste.



Credit: Shutterstock

Healthy Place, Healthy Weight mission

Spotlight on School Superzones

The Mayor of London has a mission, and that's to ensure that all London's families find it easier to eat healthy food and be active where they live, learn, shop, work and play.

He knows that the environment outside of the school gates has a role in this, and can sometimes make it difficult to stay healthy. In fact, every day London's children and their families are exposed to health hazards such as fast-food takeaways, traffic fumes, and London's highly polluted air. These tend to cluster around areas with the greatest needs and the least resources, burdening some of the most vulnerable Londoners and further widening health inequalities.

That's why in 2018 and 2019 the Mayor set out to work with local communities, schools and councils to create zones around schools that promote good health. That's how the School Superzones programme was born.

School Superzones are areas around schools where the place-shaping powers of local authorities are used to shape healthier environments for children, young people and their families to live, learn and play. Together with schools and local communities, they work to tackle barriers to good health by taking action on unhealthy food and drink advertising, working with local takeaways to make their food healthier, or establishing food growing areas. The most important thing is that they keep children at the heart of the programme and prioritise the greatest needs.



Credit: Lambeth Council © Greater London Authority

London's Superzones



There are now over 50 School Superzones in London, and City Hall has granted nearly £700,000 in funding to help schools across 20 boroughs create a healthier, greener, safer, and more prosperous environment for their communities. Some of them are focused on creating healthier food environments.

For example:

- Enfield is working in partnership with Bite Back 2030 (a youth led movement campaigning for healthier food to be more affordable, accessible and appealing) on a Youth Pod project where young people can hang out with friends, eat healthy food, and interact in a safe, unstructured social environment.
- Croydon is improving the food environment around the school using the Healthier Catering Commitment, which is a scheme that helps food businesses offer healthier choices to their customer. It recognises that businesses making straightforward changes to ingredients, processes and portion sizes can help improve the diet of customers and increase profits.
- Barnet is working with businesses to promote Barnet's Healthier High Streets Programme, creating a good food retail plan. It is also developing healthy eating behaviour change interventions, and exploring opportunities for food growing spaces and community gardens.

Moreover, in Lambeth, the Healthy Place, Healthy Weight mission is funding a project to understand the role of convenience stores in encouraging children to make healthier choices in the Oval/Vauxhall School Superzone. The work is supported by Impact on Urban Health, Rice Marketing and the Association of Convenience Stores who will be looking at how the learning can be shared and replicated in other School Superzones.

There have been many challenges in the past two years, including the Covid-19 pandemic, budget cuts and now the cost-of-living crisis, yet schools and boroughs across London continue to do incredible work for the health and wellbeing of their communities, and we remain committed to creating a city where all children can thrive, regardless of where they live.



Credit: Shutterstock

Climate and nature emergency and food

The climate and nature emergency is the single greatest threat to human health and nature faced by humanity, and it profoundly affects our ability to produce food. Councils have significant power to transform the food and farming system and influence the diets of citizens and the food grown locally, so that these are better for people, planet and the local economy.

It is encouraging to see nine councils now achieving leadership in this theme compared to three last year, by declaring a climate and nature emergency and publishing a climate action plan that seeks to address food and farming's role. Many councils have either

published, or are drafting, food policies which include serving sustainable meals in schools, running meat-free days, offering food waste collection services, developing good food guides for vendors and caterers, and running awareness-raising campaigns which promote both healthy and climate-friendly food messages. Points were also awarded for joining the London Circular Food Procurement Working Group, which aims to align council food procurement across London with Planetary Health Diets. Six councils have joined and logged actions on the **Food for the Planet Toolkit** which helps councils understand their power over food and climate change and calculate emission reductions from taking action.

Climate and nature emergency and food

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action or data reported



What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Declare a climate and nature emergency.	Publish a Climate Action Plan that includes measurable, time bound actions on reducing emissions from food, and sign up to the Food for the Planet Toolkit for simple actions to tackle the climate and nature emergency.	<p>Set targets and take action to reduce emissions from food procurement, tackling food waste and supporting sustainable farming.</p> <p>Join the London Circular Food Procurement working group to bring council-controlled food in line with planetary guidelines.</p>

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Survey approach

As in previous years, Sustain designed a survey to collect the information used and scored in this report, based on our decades of close work with councils on food issues. External partners and feedback from councils were used to shape criteria. All councils in London were invited to complete a survey and self-report on action taken and future plans. Where available, data from external sources has been included for councils that did not respond to our survey.

The scoring and maps show three levels of action based on survey responses: foundations, good practice and leadership. For some measures, we identified actions to indicate a council's progress level; for some measures, it was the total number of actions taken that was used to determine the level.

The league tables provide an overview of council performance in each theme (indicated by colours), how they ranked comparatively (indicated by order and percentage score), with an indication of councils who achieved overall leadership.

To qualify for leadership overall, councils cannot have a zero mark in any of the themes, and can only have a minimal amount of foundation levels (only two to qualify for leadership in the Beyond the Food Bank chapter, and one to qualify for the Good Food for London chapter).

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About Sustain

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, tackle climate change and restore nature, improve the living and working environment, enrich society and culture, and promote greater equality. It represents around 100 national public interest organisations, and cultivates the movement for change, working with many others at local, regional, national and international level.

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About London Food Link

Part of the food and farming charity Sustain, London Food Link is the voice of good food in London. Our network is made up of individuals, enterprises and organisations who are working for better food in the capital and represented on the London Food Board.

We lead and partner on policy initiatives, campaigns and practical projects to improve the food system. As well as this report, this includes the London Food Poverty Campaign, Capital Growth and The Jellied Eel magazine.

www.londonfoodlink.org



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