

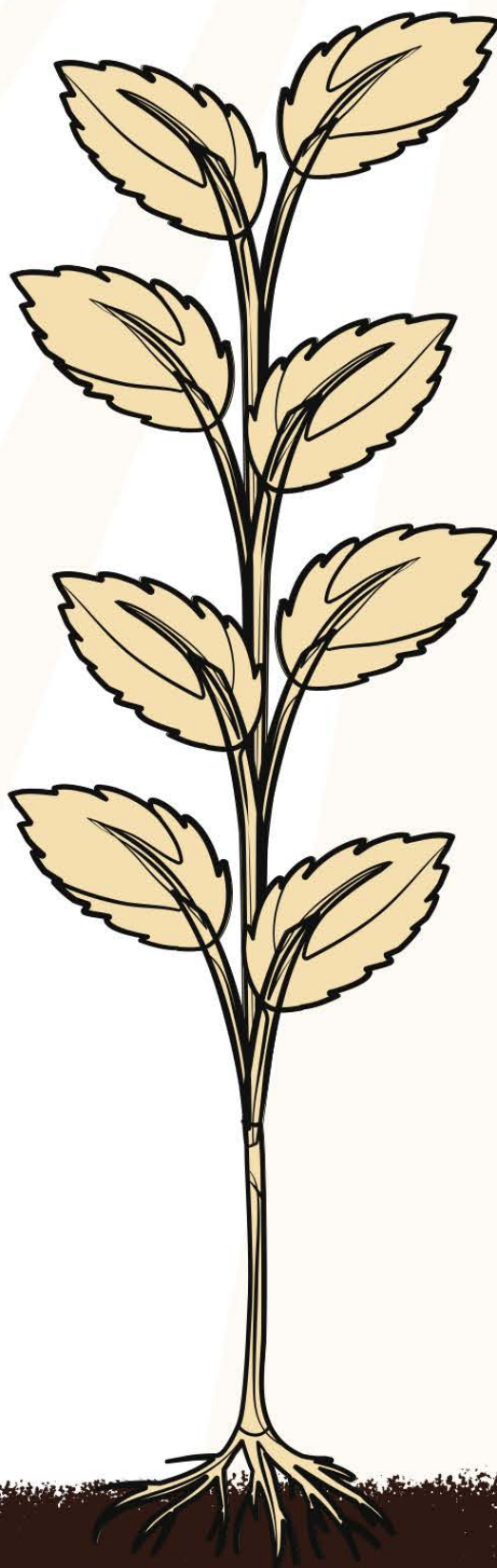


Birmingham's Cost-of-Living Crisis Response:

Spotlight on increasing infrastructure and
capacity in the community food sector

Contents

Introduction	3
Projects	5
Youth Centre Kitchen Support	5
Surplus Food Hub Pilot	7
Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund	8
Affordable Food Models Grant	13
Conclusion & Recommendations	19
Bibliography	21
Authors	22



Introduction

In October 2022, Birmingham City Council launched a Cost-of-Living Response in the wake of increasing food and energy costs. The response had five key initiatives: Warm Welcome; Food Provision; Information, Advice and Guidance; Energy; and Staff Support. In line with the wider Cost-of-Living programme, the Food Provision response had the dual aims of increasing access to and increasing capacity for food provision in the city. The key element of increasing access to food was delivered by providing food projects (food banks, food clubs, food pantries, community cafés, on-street feeding and other groups) with funding to purchase food and other consumables over two consecutive winters. To increase capacity of food projects around the city, we introduced a suite of measures – this report will report on each of these and their impacts.

Food insecurity, a lack of access to nutritious food due to a lack of money and other resources, is associated with poor diets, with food insecure individuals less likely to consume fruits and vegetables and more likely to have unhealthy diets compared to people who are food secure (1). Mixed impacts on overweight and obesity are reported in systematic reviews, but food insecurity is likely to increase overweight and obesity in adults and children (2) (3). It can have a negative impact on children's health including children being more likely to have chronic conditions, poor mental health, and lower educational attainment (4) (5). It is also associated with poorer health in adults, including increased cardiovascular disease, diabetes, mental health and stress (1) (6) (7).

Food insecurity can be considered a spectrum ranging from mild to severe (see Figure 1), and it is helpful to consider the concept of 'treating' food insecurity as moving people away from severe food insecurity towards moderate food insecurity, mild food insecurity and then food security. It is also helpful to consider ways of preventing food insecurity. In our capacity-building funding, we primarily focused on 'treating' food insecurity due to the high need and levels of food bank use in the city, but also explored initiatives to prevent food insecurity.

Figure 1: Food Insecurity Scale. Obtained from the Food & Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (8).



Our work in the Food Provision response was done in collaboration with a wide group of partners and stakeholders who work on food insecurity through the Food Provision group which met fortnightly and then monthly during the Cost-of-Living response. This consisted of representatives from Birmingham's Food Justice Network, the Trussell Trust, FareShare Midlands, ChangeKitchen CIC, The Active Wellbeing Society, Bring it on Brum, the University of Liverpool and representatives from different teams at Birmingham City Council. The work and advice of this group made these initiatives possible!

The 'capacity' strand of the food provision response consisted of the following projects:

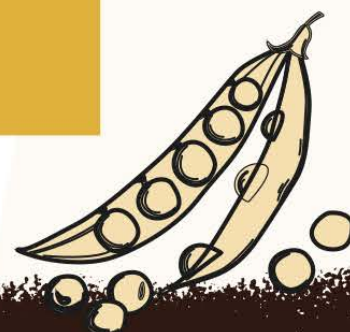
1. **Youth Centre Kitchen Support** – £14,000 of funding for Birmingham Youth Service to improve the infrastructure of their kitchens.
2. **Surplus Food Hub Pilot** – we provided £25,000 as an incubator grant to support a surplus food hub in Balsall Heath, which could transform food that would otherwise go to waste to meals for the community.
3. **The Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund** – a large and wide-reaching grant scheme to the value of £173,000 for food projects to purchase infrastructure and equipment in order to provide more food that is nutritious, culturally appropriate and safe (and hot where appropriate) to more people, in ways that enable dignity, choice and/or socialisation.
4. **The Affordable Food Models Grant** – a more targeted grant scheme to the value of £86,000 for organisations to set up affordable food models in specified locations in Birmingham (deprived areas which did not already have an affordable food model).

Table 1: A Gantt chart representing the timing of the above projects in terms of when the organisations received the payments.

	JAN 2023	FEB 2023	MAR 2023	APR 2023	MAY 2023	JUN 2023	JUL 2023	AUG 2023	SEP 2023	OCT 2023	NOV 2023	DEC 2023
Youth Centre Kitchen Support												
Surplus Food Hub Pilot												
Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund												
Affordable Food Models Grant												

“The Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund has helped to maintain the momentum, regularity, and delivery of our food project without any disruption. The items purchased using the grant have made it possible to plan better and effectively schedule the delivery of the food project to meet the needs of the community.”

– Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund recipient



Projects

Youth Centre Kitchen Support

Birmingham is the youngest city in Europe – 40% of the population are under the age of 25. While this brings opportunity and vibrancy to our city, youths are a key demographic that have been affected by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Due to school closures, they experienced challenging circumstances during key formative years of their childhood during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the cost-of-living crisis, they then experienced other or compounding pressures. Unpublished research undertaken with >1000 Birmingham youths accessing the Youth Service provision in 2022 demonstrated that the cost-of-living crisis was affecting young people's wellbeing and leading many of them to help their family financially – 21 youths even admitted to having committed crime to support their family. Thus, it was clear that families in Birmingham were struggling to afford food during the cost-of-living crisis. One survey respondent described themselves as "very worried as things in the house are very worrying, sometimes [we] can't afford new shoes etc"; another said, "when I don't have food to eat I always feel worried or feel like I am going to cry".

The Birmingham Youth Service is part of Birmingham City Council. They run 14 different youth centres across the city (see Figure 2), engaging with 1,430 young people on average per week. These centres are situated in deprived areas and therefore are important in engaging with some of Birmingham's most vulnerable young citizens. Due to funding reductions, these youth centres were ill-equipped to provide the youth they serve with good quality food. If the youth centres did have equipment, it was often broken or inadequate to meet the needs of the individuals.

Despite this, youth centres were increasingly finding themselves acting as a frontline service in addressing food insecurity as the young people coming to use their services would often arrive hungry. The youth workers were having to find ways of providing for the youths without adequate equipment – for example, giving out loaves of bread. One youth worker reported a secret handshake with the teenagers attending the youth club, where they would scratch his palm when they shook hands to indicate that they were hungry and needed food. Many of the youth clubs reported similar experiences – young people coming in cold and hungry and the youth workers trying to ensure they had access to some food. There were also reports of the teenagers putting any leftover food into their pockets to take home for the rest of their family, as the whole household was experiencing food insecurity. Thus, while the youth service was working hard to prevent hunger in the youth using their services, the food they were providing was often not enough, or very nutritious, due to the lack of infrastructure.

This funding ensured that 14 youth centres had access to a cooker, microwave, toaster, slow cooker, air fryer, sandwich maker, smoothie maker, water boiler, fridge freezer, pans, cooking trays, crockery, cups and cutlery.

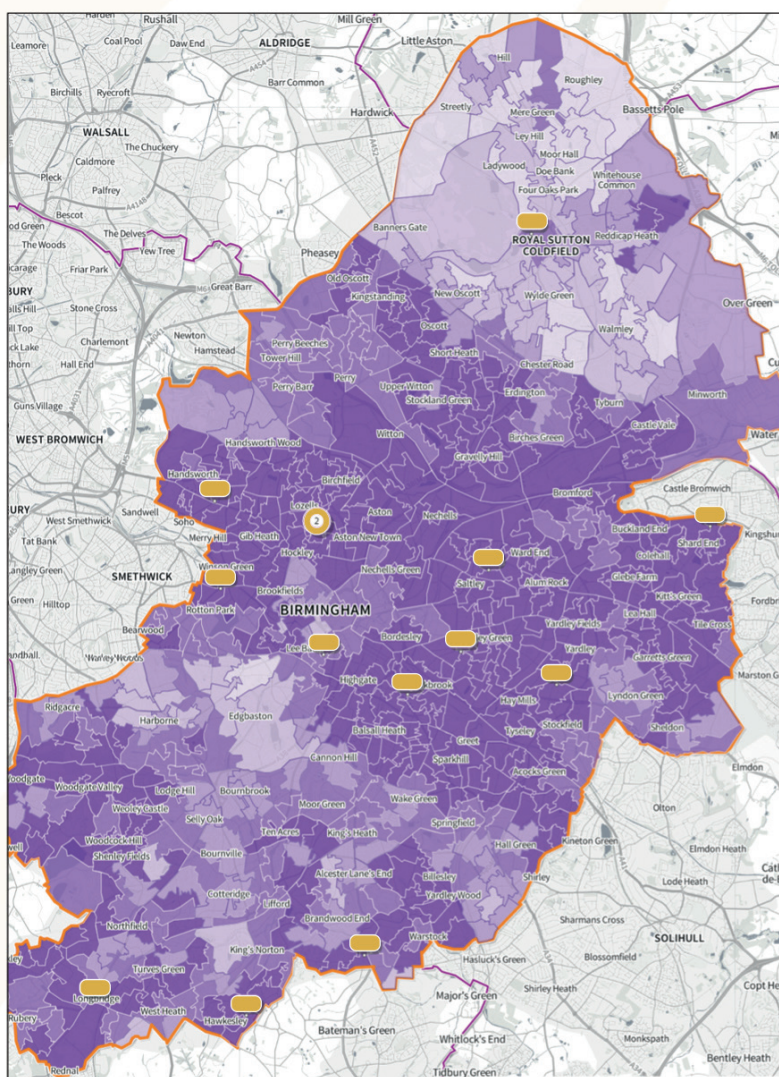
In January 2023, we provided funding to ensure that each youth centre had access to an adequate and functional cooker, microwave, toaster, slow cooker, air fryer, sandwich maker, smoothie maker, water boiler and fridge freezer. It also ensured that there were enough pans, cooking trays, crockery, cups, and cutlery at each youth centre. The items provided varied across the different youth centres as

what was purchased was based on need. This grant therefore supported the youth centres with more capacity to provide hot nutritious meals to the young people using their services. The youth centres provided 57,600 meals to young people over 2023, including additional meals in half term and offering to feed siblings as well. These meals were sometimes all those young people ate that day. As word has spread amongst young people that food is available, the number of people attending the youth centres has increased, and so the offer has been extended as well as developing a wider range of healthy food.

There have also been some additional benefits of this funding, including young people developing new skills around food preparation, cooking and budgeting; sharing knowledge and information to young people and their families (and providing some food parcels to wider families); making the most of the new infrastructure in providing community days and feeding the wider community; and youth centre staff and volunteers undertaking food and hygiene level 2 training.

Impact of the funding

- The funding meant that the youth centres were able to provide 57,600 nutritious meals to young people in 2023.
- The number of young people attending the youth centres has increased due to food being available.
- The range of healthy food available has increased.
- Additional meals were offered during half term, including to siblings.
- Young people increased their skills around food preparation, cooking and budgeting.
- Knowledge and information were shared with young people and families.
- Community days were hosted where the wider community could eat meals.
- Youth centre staff and volunteers undertook food and hygiene level 2 training.



Therefore, our work to improve the youth centre kitchen equipment has been successful in increasing the capacity of the youth centres to provide hot, nutritious food to the people using their services and has had a number of wider benefits.

Figure 2: Birmingham youth centres mapped with Index of Multiple Deprivation at the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level. Darker colours indicate more deprived LSOAs.



Surplus Food Hub Pilot

Despite the high levels of food insecurity, we also have huge amounts of food going to waste in the city. In the UK, 6.2 million tonnes of food is wasted by the food industry each year, and half of that food is still edible (enough for 7 billion meals) (9) (10). Innovative approaches are needed to redirect surplus food so that it goes onto people's plates rather than to landfill. It should also be noted that redirecting surplus food has economic benefits as FareShare (a surplus food distributor) collecting food that would otherwise go to waste and redistributing it to community groups and food projects is estimated to save the UK economy approximately £51 million every year (~£7 million in social value and £44 million in savings to the state e.g. the NHS, schools, and social care) (11). This demonstrates that surplus food solutions can come with value for money for the local authority.

Therefore, we provided an incubator grant for a surplus food hub pilot in Balsall Heath. We funded ChangeKitchen CIC, an award-winning event caterer and social enterprise who utilise surplus food to create nutritious, ethical and innovative vegetarian and vegan menus. ChangeKitchen CIC has been providing vulnerable people in Birmingham with free, nutritious, sustainable and culturally appropriate meals since the COVID-19 pandemic. They were in the process of expanding and upgrading their Balsall Heath community kitchen and training facilities already through a larger grant, and we supported them with some further funding to provide key equipment (commercial walk-in fridge, oven, blast chiller and racking) to ensure the hub was completed.

Funding was utilised to purchase equipment for a Surplus Food Hub including a commercial walk-in fridge, oven, blast chiller and racking.

The hub has enabled ChangeKitchen to deliver more free meals to those facing poverty and utilise more surplus food, thus helping those who are food insecure to eat a more nutritious diet while simultaneously preventing food from going to landfill. The hub has also catalysed the piloting of an innovative healthy fast food takeaway concept – thus there is the potential for long term positive impacts on the city. There have also been local benefits in terms of training and employability. The hub enables work placements for people wanting to go into catering or hospitality. The hub has also provided opportunities to put on healthy eating workshops to help individuals grow in food skills and knowledge, and in doing so supporting individuals' access and capacity.

In its first year, the hub has provided nearly 10,000 free meals to the community. They have also provided hundreds of meals through their Holidays, Activities and Food programme children's holiday club work. The café space has provided a place for people to chat and enjoy a hot drink in the warm – they have also given out nearly 300 free drinks. The kitchen has also facilitated their catering and takeaway business where a further 15,000 people have been catered for through event catering and café meal sales, with nutritious and vegetarian meals have been provided using surplus food that would have otherwise gone to waste. Therefore, this incubator funding has supported an innovative project in the city which can both provide food to communities and prevent food waste.

Impact of the funding

- In the first year, the project provided nearly 10,000 free meals to the community.
- Hundreds of meals were provided through the Holidays, Activities and Food Programme holiday club on the site.
- The café has provided a warm welcoming space for people to connect with others and enjoy a free hot drink.
- Through the catering and takeaway business, 15,000 people have received nutritious vegetarian meals that utilise surplus food that would have otherwise gone to waste.



Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund

The Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund came from wanting to support food banks and other food projects to build and sustain capacity. We knew that many of these organisations were struggling to purchase all the infrastructure and equipment that they needed or were unable to increase their capacity to meet demand due to a lack of resources. Organisations were able to apply for grants of up to £3,000 for infrastructure and equipment that they needed, such as fridges, freezers, thermal boxes, other food storage, shelving, and kitchen equipment.

This grant scheme operated on the following principles, that the infrastructure purchased through the grant would:

- Be for direct food provision (rather than for growing or food waste initiatives)
- Enable dignity and choice (i.e. promoting affordable food models, which offer individuals access to nutritious food and other essentials through either membership or a fixed fee for usage, at a fraction of the normal retail cost)
- Enable provision of nutritious, hot, safe, and/or culturally appropriate food
- Enable socialisation e.g., communal dining approaches
- Increase capacity (e.g., number of people helped or amount of food storage)

67 food projects in Birmingham were given funding of up to £3000 to strengthen infrastructure and increase their capacity.

We funded 67 projects across the city to increase their capacity through the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund. These projects fell into the following categories: general equipment to increase or support what the project was already doing (increasing longevity, capacity, and/or reach), making a new affordable food model, making a new food bank, adding or increasing socialisation/ communal dining, increasing storage and delivering food provision workshops (the numbers in each of these categories can be found in Table 2 below). To see how these projects met these principles, see Figure 3. For our monitoring of the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund, recipients were asked to fill in a report template three months after they received the grant. The report asked about what the grant achieved, key successes and challenges, changes in numbers of users and how each of the principles were met.

Table 2: The number of Affordable Food Infrastructure projects in different categories (some projects are in multiple categories)

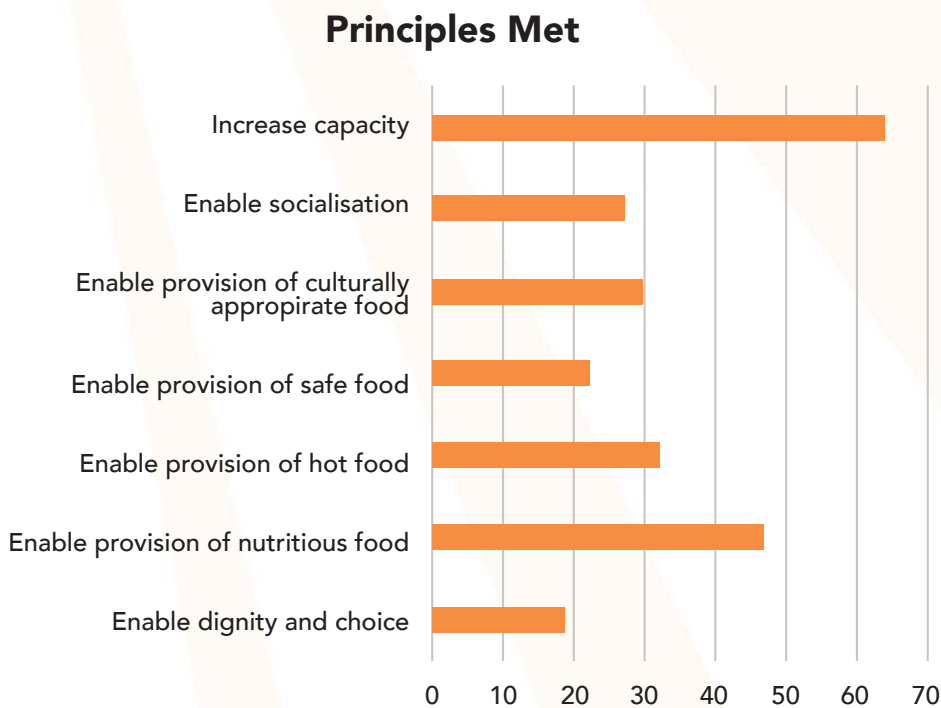
TYPE OF PROPOSAL	NUMBER OF PROJECTS
General equipment to increase or support what the project was already doing (longevity, capacity, and/or reach)	48
Making new affordable food model	6
Making new food bank	2
Adding/increasing socialisation/ communal dining	10
Increasing storage	17
Food provision workshops	7

Impact

“Overall, the Affordable Food Infrastructure Grant has played a pivotal role in the project’s successes by enhancing food accessibility, expanding reach, fostering collaborations, improving frequency and consistency of support, and receiving positive community feedback. These achievements highlight the project’s ability to effectively address food insecurity and make a meaningful difference in the lives of those in need.”

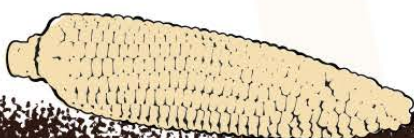
– Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund recipient

Figure 3: Principles met by Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund projects.



Increased Capacity

The key aim of the grant was to increase the capacity of food projects in Birmingham. In this, the grant was highly successful. All organisations reported that the number of people they were supporting either increased or stayed the same following receipt of the grant. Overall, organisations reported 6,650 more users following the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund (across the 41 projects that reported numbers), representing a percentage increase of 65%. More than half of respondents also reported that the funding helped their project to reach more types of people – communities listed included different religious groups, different ages, different ethnicities, different sexual orientations and different gender identities, students, people living in temporary accommodation / Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), more low-income individuals, both the unemployed and the employed, domestic abuse survivors, refugees and asylum seekers, people living with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, and local communities in general.



Impact of the funding on capacity

- All 67 projects reported that the number of people they could support stayed the same or increased at a time when many projects previously did not have enough resources to stay open.
- At least 6650 more people were supported as a result of the funding (65% increase).
- Over 50% reported that the funding helped their project reach new people and communities.

Projects reported having increased:

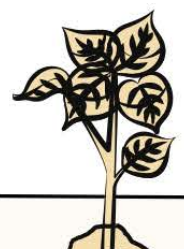
- Efficiencies and streamlined services,
- Menu offerings and range of products including food, toys and hygiene products,
- Opening hours and number of sessions,
- Streams of work and project offer, including:
 - Grab-and-go system at a community café
 - Breakfast club at a school
 - On-street feeding work
 - A van to reach more people and deliver food more widely
- Provision of culturally appropriate and diverse food,
- Ability to fix or upgrade old equipment.

Improved storage helped projects:

- Stay open,
- Decrease food waste,
- Spend less time shopping and need fewer shopping trips,
- Provide a greater variety of food,
- Introduce food rotation and stocktaking systems that saved the organisations money.

Food safety was positively impacted including:

- Purchasing cool boxes and insulated carriers for safer transport of food,
- Utilisation of allergen labelling equipment,
- Purchasing better cleaning items and equipment to ensure cleaner kitchens.
- One project said the funding helped their Food Hygiene Rating increase from 1 (major improvements necessary) to 5 (very good).



Provision of Culturally Appropriate Food

Another principle of the funding was for the provision of culturally appropriate food, and projects described how they were able to welcome all types of people and communities and celebrate them with more diverse menus. One organisation even said that them being able to now serve culturally appropriate food had made a big difference to people using their service and being more open about their circumstances, describing it as “a real breakthrough for our organisation”.

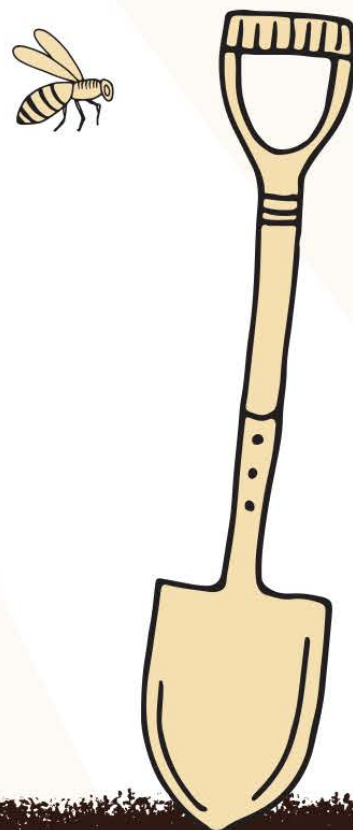
Community Connectedness and Indirect Benefits

When asked to describe the successes of their project, many put indirect benefits of the grant. One of the other principles of the funding was to support socialisation of people using the project. Organisations reported that through being able to serve more hot and cold drinks and hot food helped people to sit and eat together, leading to more friendships, deeper conversations, people feeling less alone and fewer arguments and issues while waiting for the project to open. They also described a greater sense of community ownership, and one organisation described how their food provision had meant people engaged with the community centre and its other activities and support more widely, leading to other benefits for them. This particularly included more engagement with signposted services and wraparound support (e.g. debt advice, budgeting workshops, healthy eating workshops, benefit support etc.), highlighting the role of food projects as a route to engage with people more holistically.

Schools providing food support also described similar benefits of better engagement with parents using their food project to again build more of a sense of community. Thus, through our grant scheme supporting organisations to meet the immediate need of food insecurity there have been positive outputs for longer term needs as well. One organisation also described how the funding has helped them leverage for further funding and a faculty application. This demonstrates the positive ripple effects that funding food insecurity infrastructure can have, and how funding primarily to ‘treat’ food insecurity can also have a role in prevention through affordable food models and wraparound support.

Additional impacts of the funding:

- Increased community connection
- Reduced social isolation
- A more welcoming environment
- Increased community ownership
- Increased engagement with other projects at the same site
- Increased signposting and wraparound support
- Increased engagement with family members of school pupils
- Increased sense of community
- Funding to “treat” food insecurity helped prevention through increased affordable food models and wraparound support.

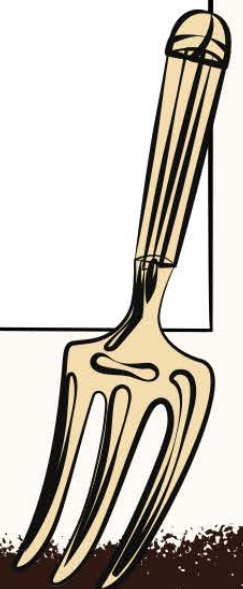


Challenges

The grant recipients were also asked to describe the challenges associated with their funded work and their projects more widely.

Challenges included:

- Staff and volunteer retention, motivation and consistency.
- Volunteers delivering projects in addition to their actual jobs.
- High costs of equipment and storage space.
- The funding couldn't be used for rent, utilities and staffing cost which was a limitation.
- Having to choose between desirable items and essential items due to limited funding.
- Delays out of people's control including planning approvals, building work and installations.
- Decrease in the amount and quality of surplus food.
- Keeping on top of expiry dates of food.
- Meeting dietary requirements of people using the project.
- Trying to predict how much food needed to be prepared each day.
- Trying to meet the needs for food and wraparound support with limited capacity and time.
- Higher demand for support than projects could deliver, even with additional funding.
- Ensuring the projects were being utilised by those who needed support most.
- Reaching the target population and increasing awareness of the project with those people.
- Getting access to rooms and spaces, and adapting the spaces to meet the project needs.
- Matching opening times to service user needs.
- Registration of service users could be chaotic.
- Transport and access to the projects, especially for elderly service users.
- Being able to sufficiently support members with additional needs and challenging behaviours.



Staffing and Human Resources

The most frequently mentioned challenge was that of staff and volunteer retention, motivation, and consistency, with the reports describing how this can impact consistent delivery of support. Solutions listed by the organisation included work to recruit more volunteers from a wide range of sources including colleges, leisure centres, and religious institutions and keeping a better record / database of volunteers. These issues were compounded by the fact that those leading on the projects are often doing this alongside their actual jobs.

Resources and Core Costs

In addition to time and human resource challenges, another key issue was the limitations in resources generally. High prices of equipment and storage space were noted as challenges for the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund. More generally, while the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund and the Emergency Food Aid Fund covered the costs of the infrastructure and food and other consumables going directly to citizens respectively, neither of these grants covered the other core costs for the organisations like rent, utilities, and staffing costs, and organisations mentioned challenges in covering these aspects. Some organisations also noted prioritising essential items over desirable ones like high vis jackets because the resources they had were not able to cover everything. Delays in plan approval, building work, and installations were also noted.

“The primary success of this project has been the ability to ensure our kitchens are fully safe and compliant. This is both in terms of our offering to the customer in terms of menu choice and accessible information on ingredients and allergens, as well as safety within the kitchens for our staff and volunteers.”

– Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund recipient



Food Provision

Other challenges noted related to food provision itself. Organisations described the decrease in the amount and quality of available surplus food over the grant period, which was challenging as surplus food has become a cornerstone for many of these organisations. Keeping on top of expiry dates of food items is also a challenge, particularly for surplus food, but this can be partially mitigated by better stock management to avoid wastage (supported by improved storage thanks to the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund). Dietary requirements also presented a challenge, but food labelling and conversations with people who had dietary requirements were able to abate issues associated with this. Organisations noted that judging how much cooked food was needed for each day and balancing meeting the needs for food and wraparound support were also issues. Projects also noted consistently high demand for food that they struggled to meet even with the increased capacity and efficiency enabled by the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund.

On the other hand, ensuring that those who needed the service were using it so that it wasn't being taken advantage of was noted as a barrier to overcome. Thus, reaching the target population and ensuring they were aware of available services presented a challenge. Partnerships, community gatekeepers, social media, outreach and helping people understand what the services were and who they were for were listed as potential solutions.



Logistical Challenges

Some logistical issues were also noted by grant recipients. These included access to rooms and spaces for the projects (especially in schools) and working to adapt the spaces as well as possible. Linked to this, getting the optimal opening times for service users required some fine-tuning, as did registration of participants upon arrival which could be chaotic. Transport to the project also presented an issue sometimes, particularly for elderly service users. Finally, supporting members with additional needs and challenging behaviour can be problematic for food projects; one organisation described how they wanted everyone to feel welcome and supported, and so have learnt to accommodate people by inviting them to come and shop at times which tend to be quieter, in order to help them have a calmer environment. Thus, while there have been some challenges related to the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund and its projects, projects have been proactive in overcoming these issues, and generally, successes have outweighed the challenges.

Solutions suggested by projects include:

- Developing local partnerships
- Engaging with community gatekeepers
- Using social media to raise awareness
- Outreach activities
- Introducing quiet hours for service users who require a calmer environment

"Through these challenges, we have learned the importance of adaptability, collaboration, and proactive problem-solving. By actively addressing these challenges, we have been able to improve our operations, enhance cultural inclusivity, strengthen outreach efforts, and work towards the long-term sustainability of the project, ultimately maximising our impact on the community."

– Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund recipient

"The grant has been the driving force behind the project's remarkable successes in addressing food insecurity and enhancing the overall well-being of residents within the refuge. Through the acquisition of additional fridge freezers, made possible by the grant, the project has experienced a profound transformation in its ability to provide essential food support to the survivors."

– Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund recipient

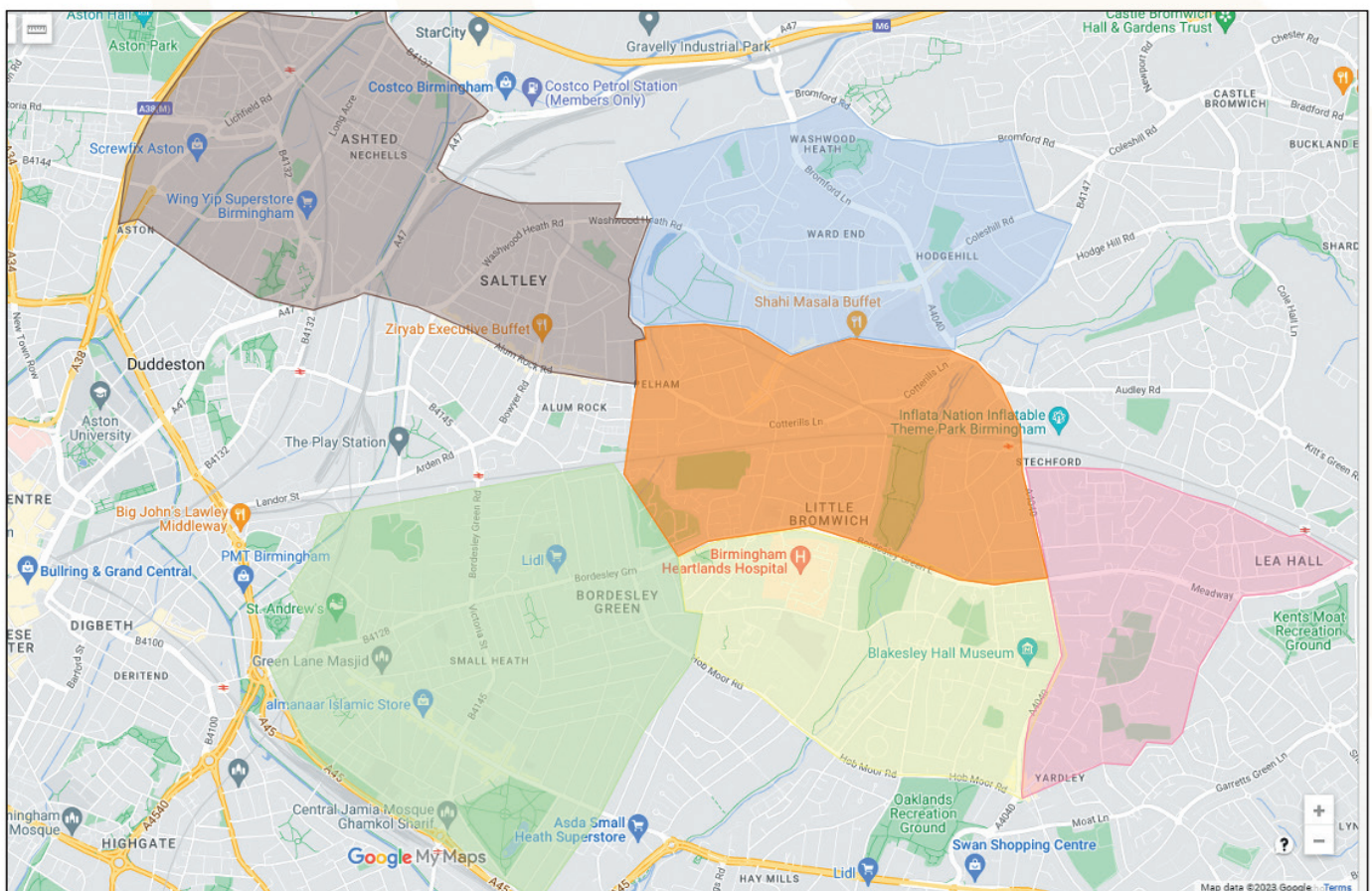


Affordable Food Models Grant

Affordable food models include food pantries, food clubs, social supermarkets and some community fridges, based in locations that are embedded in communities. These models offer individuals access to nutritious food and other essentials through either membership or a fixed fee for usage, at a fraction of the normal retail cost. Affordable food models support people on low incomes to stretch their budgets further each week, in ways that promote dignity and choice. They have been demonstrated to be a potential way to 'treat' and also prevent food insecurity by acting as a halfway house between a food bank and a supermarket.

One of the aims of the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund as described in the previous section was to generally encourage the initiation of more affordable food models (explicitly listed as a use of the fund under the dignity and choice principle). Through the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund, we supported the initiation of 6 food pantries. However, we identified that there were still areas of deprivation where there was high food insecurity and food bank use that did not have a food pantry. Therefore, we ran this innovative grant scheme where we offered grants of up to £20,000 to organisations to set up Affordable Food Models in specified locations in Birmingham (the amount depended on the needs of the applicant as they set out their costings in the application form). We asked for the approach to have sustainability at its heart, seeking to initiate new affordable food models that would last beyond the cost-of-living response period and not rely on future funding from the Council.

Figure 4 shows six of the eight zones targeted for the Affordable Food Models grant. The other two zones were Druid's Heath and Erdington.



Location 1: Yellow
Location 2: Pink

Location 3: Orange
Location 4: Brown

Location 5: Blue
Location 6: Light Green



Six projects in priority areas of the city were supported with the funding:

- Two new affordable food projects were set up.
- Two food banks expanded their projects to include an affordable food offer.
- One food bank converted to become an affordable food model project.
- One affordable food project was able to stay open.

Impact of the funding:

- Wraparound support and activities were co-designed and enhanced.
- Pathways to enable people to transition from food bank use to food pantry use were streamlined.
- Volunteer training was delivered.
- Software was introduced to support services.
- A wide range of individuals within local communities were reached.
- Those who utilised the projects reported that the food pantry enabled their money to stretch further.

The Affordable Food Models grant scheme supported the initiation of two brand new affordable food models, the addition of an affordable food model to an existing food bank in two locations, and the conversion of a food bank to an affordable food model in one location. It also supported one affordable food model to keep going over the funding period, a slight departure from the aim of the grant but the funding panel felt that this was an appropriate use of the funding as the underlying thread of the grant was to ensure Affordable Food Models in the different zones. It is worth noting that we did not receive any applications for certain zones, despite proactively reaching out to organisations in those areas - and therefore the grant was not able to initiate Affordable Food Models in all 8 zones. Further, more in-depth work is needed with communities in these areas to identify their needs in relation to food insecurity and what food provision solutions will best support them.

All of the funded Affordable Food Models were functioning by the end of March 2024, by which time they had already reached an additional 1,500 people. Key impacts reported included enhancing and codesigning wraparound support and activities, streamlining pathways to moving from the food bank to the food pantry including identifying current food bank users which could benefit from using the pantry instead, training volunteers and introducing software to support the service. The affordable food models were reported as reaching a wide range of individuals within their local communities. One of the organisations reported seeing a significant need for their new Affordable Food Model, thus corroborating the benefits of the grant. One of the Affordable Food Models described their success in terms of the lived experience of one of the people using their service, for whom accessing the pantry has made a big difference in having her money stretch further particularly helping her be able to afford her utility bills.



Successes

Other key successes of the new projects listed included:

- An Affordable Food Model is being run alongside a coffee morning to support people and reduce loneliness and isolation.
- The Affordable Food Model provides dignity for those experiencing food poverty.
- The project helps to develop relationships with the community.
- Wraparound support combined with the food bank helps to signpost and support individuals more holistically.
- The new model that was established worked noticeably better than the food bank, increasing the value of the service to the participants and offering a greater choice of foods.
- Volunteers received induction and training.

Challenges

The organisations were also asked what the key challenges were. The following challenges were listed:

- Explaining the model and helping people understand that they were not a food bank (with a solution listed as briefing volunteers and staff on how to confidently talk to people about how the model works).
- The food pantry quickly becoming at capacity (one of the solutions listed was to limit people to two visits a month).
- Food pantry dependency of people getting 'stuck' using the pantry.
- Planning how the food pantry works alongside the food bank.
- People queuing for the pantry really early, leading to health and safety issues (the solution being a ticketed system).
- Limited supply of surplus food (with the organisation having to top up with supermarket purchases).

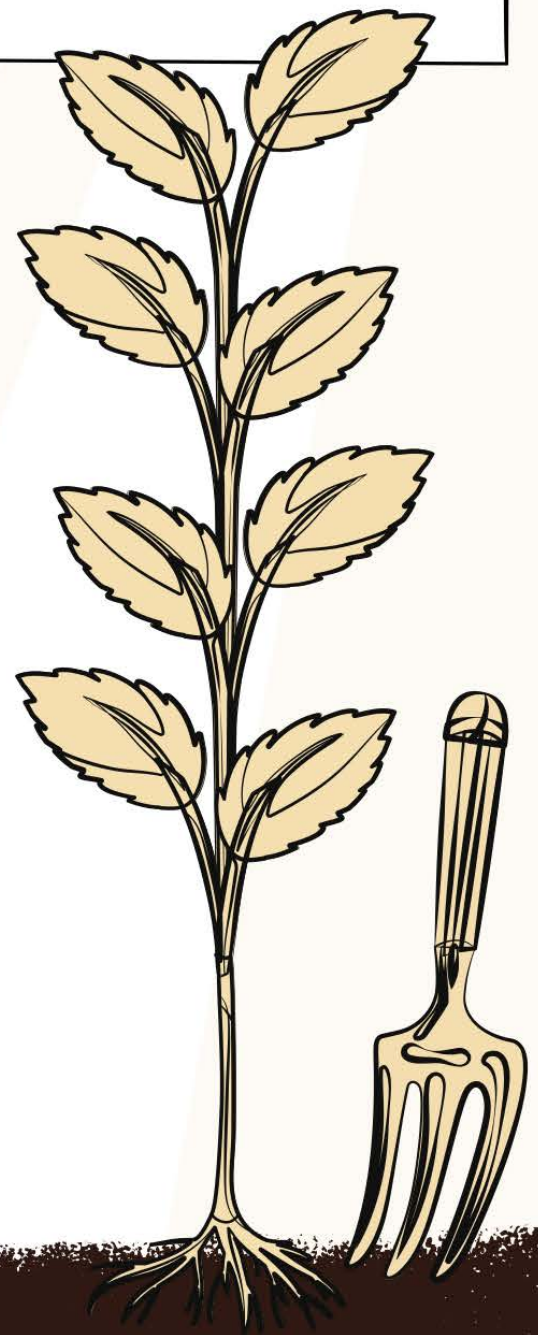
Tips for starting an affordable food model

Finally, organisations were asked to say what advice they would give to people starting their own affordable food models:

- Be clear on the objectives of the model and communicate this carefully, empathetically, and clearly in order to manage expectations of members and prevent inappropriate usage – membership criteria is a useful tool for this, too.
- Use a range of approaches to access good quality and varied food, including building relationships with local shops, and supporting and encouraging members to try new foods, for example by providing recipes and talking them through the food item.
- Consider how long-term overhead costs will be met – although the costs of food may be covered by membership, there will still be costs, for example for rent and staff. Employ strategies to keep costs as low as possible.
- Work out the referral process and model in an outcome-focused way (especially when alongside a food bank) to identify and target people who will benefit most and provide wraparound support where possible.

“The pantry is still in the early days of becoming established, however we have already seen a significant need for the service and we have begun the conversations with people accessing the pantry to gain a greater understanding of their situation to be able to support or sign-post forwards. Initial concerns over getting the project up and running have not materialised and early indicators are that the project is a positive benefit to the community in which it is located.”

– Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund recipient



Conclusion & Recommendations

We sought to increase the capacity of food provision in the city, through providing funding to support:

- 1) improved youth centre kitchens;
- 2) a surplus food hub pilot,
- 3) existing food projects purchasing infrastructure and equipment in order to provide more food that is nutritious, culturally appropriate and safe (and hot where appropriate) to more people, in ways that enable dignity, choice and/or socialisation, and
- 4) new affordable food models in targeted areas of need.

These grants have demonstrated the benefits of supporting community groups with food provision infrastructure as this can increase capacity with direct benefits in terms of access to food and also have indirect benefits. It also demonstrated the utility of doing a wider exploratory grant to see what ideas the community food sector have and then running a more focused and targeted grant with more specific outputs.

Learnings and recommendations for the future:

Recognise that small, open pots where people can apply for funding for the infrastructure that they need can be beneficial for food provision organisations.

The capacity-building element of the food provision response has involved the organisations identifying what they need and applying for funding for this. This has empowered organisations to apply for funding for what their project is doing or could do, rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach.

Consider mechanisms to prevent food insecurity as well as treat food insecurity.

The primary focus of the cost-of-living response has been 'treating' food insecurity (i.e. providing food to people who are already food insecure to mitigate the impacts of food insecurity). Given the nature and depth of the cost-of-living crisis, this has been the appropriate focus. However, it is also important to support initiatives that seek to prevent food insecurity, particularly affordable food models and wraparound support.

Ensure food provision includes nutritious and culturally appropriate food.

Food insecurity is a lack of access to nutritious food, and therefore it is vital to ensure that this need is met. This will prevent further health issues from food insecurity. As noted in the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund feedback, providing culturally appropriate food can help foster positive and impactful relationships with communities.

Invest in food provision capacity to help more people access community initiatives.

Food provision is clearly a key gateway that draws people into community centres and initiatives, and therefore can be utilised to help people access additional support that they need. This was seen in both the youth centre kitchen support work and the Affordable Food Infrastructure Fund.

Remember that organisations will be limited if core costs aren't covered and consider holistic approaches to supporting organisations.

This has been a key learning for the cost-of-living food provision response. It would help organisations to be able to apply for more general funding with which they can purchase food and/or infrastructure but which also covers core costs such as rent, utilities and staffing. By not covering this, grants aren't holistically supporting food projects and helping them run over the long term.

Encourage joined-up approaches across the community food sector and seek to raise awareness of the projects that are already there to local communities.

Throughout the cost-of-living response we have aimed to support organisations that were already working in local food provision and Birmingham's communities, which we believe has been the right approach. Often there are a number of organisations working close together with similar communities and in similar areas, and so it is important to ensure joined-up approaches that work together to the benefit of these communities. It is also helpful to raise awareness of the support that is available to communities locally, including signposting to individual projects where appropriate.

Understand the challenges that the third sector has around consistent staffing and volunteering and explore approaches to address this.

Many of the organisations we have worked with on the cost-of-living response have identified that staffing and volunteers is a challenge. It would be helpful for Birmingham to consider these issues in volunteering and work to increase volunteers in the third sector. However, it is increasingly clear that funded staff rather than volunteers are needed for consistent projects in the community food sector, and grants in this space should include provision for funded staff to deliver projects.

Identify areas where more Affordable Food Models are needed, particularly in East Birmingham, and work to address this, including with other stakeholders who work in this area.

Although our targeted approach led to the initiation of Affordable Food Models in East Birmingham, several of the zones did not receive any applications. It may be that more collaborative work is needed to initiate appropriate dignified food support in these areas.

Bibliography

- (1) Yau A, et al, 2020. Socio-demographic characteristics, diet and health among food insecure UK adults: cross-sectional analysis of the International Food Policy Study. *Public Health Nutrition*, Vol. 23(14), pp. 2602-14.
- (2) Morales ME, Berkowitz SA, 2016. The Relationship between Food Insecurity, Dietary Patterns, and Obesity. *Current Nutrition Reports*, pp. 5(1):54-60.
- (3) Nettle D, Andrews C, Bateson M, 2017. Food insecurity as a driver of obesity in humans: The insurance hypothesis. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, Vol. 40, p. e105.
- (4) Kirkpatrick SI, McIntyre L, Potestio ML, 2010. "Child hunger and long-term adverse consequences for health." *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 164(8), pp. 754-62.
- (5) Shankar P, Chung R, Frank DA, 2017. Association of Food Insecurity with Children's Behavioral, Emotional, and Academic Outcomes: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, Vol. 38(2), pp. 135-50.
- (6) Liu Y, Eicher-Miller HA, 2021. Food Insecurity and Cardiovascular Disease Risk. *Current Atherosclerosis Reports*, Vol. 23(6), p. 24.
- (7) Abdurahman AA, Chaka EE, Nedjat S, Dorosty AR, Majdzadeh R, 2019. The association of household food insecurity with the risk of type 2 diabetes mellitus in adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *European Journal of Nutrition*, Vol. 58(4), pp. 1341-50.
- (8) Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2024. Insecurity, Hunger & Food. Cited: 16/08/2024. Available from: <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>.
- (9) Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), 2022. Hidden Waste: The Scale and Impact of Food Waste in Primary Production. Cited 16/08/2024. Available from: [Hidden Waste: The scale and impact of food waste in primary production](#)
- (10) WRAP, 2022. Surplus Food Redistribution in the UK 2015-2021. Cited 16/08/2024. Available from: [WRAP-Surplus-food-redistribution-in-the-UK-2015-to-2021_0.pdf](#)
- (11) FareShare, 2018. The Wasted Opportunity. Cited: 16/08/2024. Available from: [J3503-Fareshare-Report_aw_no_crops.pdf](#)



Authors

Dr Rosemary H. Jenkins, Senior Public Health Officer,
Food System Team, Public Health Division, Birmingham City Council

Sarah Newton (previously Pullen), Food System Lead, Food System Team,
Public Health Division, Birmingham City Council



Find out more at [birmingham.gov.uk/FoodRevolution](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/FoodRevolution)

Special thanks to:

Members of the Food Justice Network, the Trussell Trust, FareShare Midlands, ChangeKitchen CIC, The Active Wellbeing Society, Bring it on Brum, the University of Liverpool, and people from teams across Birmingham City Council that supported with mobilising the Cost-of-Living Response.

Their work and advice made these initiatives possible!