

Good Food Local

The London report

Tracking council action on food



2024

SUPPORTED BY
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Foreword

Last year continued to be challenging for many Londoners, with communities across our city feeling the pressures of the cost-of-living crisis. The combination of rising prices and lagging wages and benefit levels have made it difficult for people to afford essentials, including food. That has made action at local authority level in London even more important in supporting the health and nutrition of families – and that’s exactly what this latest Good Food Local: the London report will highlight.

Making food more affordable and accessible is vital, especially for the youngest in our city. That’s why last year, the Mayor announced a £135 million emergency fund to ensure all state primary school children in the capital could receive free school meals for the 2023/2024 academic year. The programme helps deliver an estimated 1.4 million meals each week helping parents financially, providing children with a guaranteed nutritious meal and reducing stigma for those who need them. The Mayor recently announced that he will provide a further £140m to deliver universal free school meals in the 2024/2025 academic year, saving London families up to £1,000 per child.

The Mayor has also invested £3.5m in the Free Holiday Meals programme that has delivered more than 10.1 million meals during school holidays and weekends since April 2023 in partnership with the Mayor’s Fund for London and the Felix Project. We are pleased to see that several boroughs are bolstering statutory holiday food provision including expanding the eligibility criteria.

Creating a food environment that makes it easier for Londoners to make healthy choices is also crucial. It’s heartening to see councils building on the success of the Mayor of London’s pioneering healthier advertising policy on the Transport for London network. Five years since the Mayor introduced the policy, Havering, Newham and Tower Hamlets are the latest boroughs showing leadership by restricting unhealthy advertising.

Councils continue to provide cash-first responses to food poverty to help maximise household incomes and alleviate financial hardship. Cash-first responses give people dignity and autonomy for themselves and their families by putting more money in people’s pockets. We commend the work being done in this area, including increased emphasis on monitoring and evaluation of advice services which helps to streamline services and evidence impact.

This report also puts a spotlight on improvements in joined-up action on food. This includes new food strategies and new cross-sectoral food partnerships,

which are fundamental for paving the way for long-term change and a better food future for our capital. City Hall is committed to seeing this work become more sustainable, that’s why it has funded 21 boroughs to take part in the Food Roots 2 incubator programme. This is enabling food partnerships to develop and operate sustainably, and to focus on increasing Healthy Start uptake.

We also want to acknowledge work in boroughs which is helping to address the climate and nature emergencies. It’s been a strong year for action on climate, with fourteen councils achieving leadership status, and many signing up to the London Food Purchasing Commitment to improve procurement practices. This is important work, and we are pleased to see it gaining traction.

London continues to face multiple serious threats, amidst crises of the cost-of-living, climate, and nutrition-related diseases. We truly commend the progress shown by London councils, and we urge councils to continue to prioritise this vital work. We hope you are inspired by what you read in this report and what we can achieve with local action on food.



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This report is coordinated by the Good Food Local and Food Poverty teams at Sustain, to celebrate and encourage action by councils on good food issues, spanning policy areas which sit under several council departments. We are grateful to the GLA, Trust for London and Impact on Urban Health for providing the funding that makes this work possible.

The information gathered via this year's survey has been displayed in a series of maps that highlight council action, several of these maps are included in the report. The full series of maps can be found online at: www.sustainweb.org/good-food-local/london

Executive summary

We are grateful to the 29 out of 33 London councils who responded to this year's survey. This is the most that have ever taken part, demonstrating that councils are prioritising working towards a healthier, fairer, more sustainable food system, despite pressure on resources. All councils are welcome to participate in our networking, support and celebration events and get involved in the programmes and initiatives highlighted in the report, regardless of whether they took part in the survey.

This has been a momentous year, with the London Mayor extending funding for Free School Meals for another year until July 2025, which will provide nutritious meals to up to 287,000 school children across the capital. This has enabled some councils to help schools go the extra mile in ensuring wider reach and improved quality. The release of this report coincides with the fifth anniversary of the Mayor's Transport for London healthier food advertising policy, and one fifth of all London councils now have their own advertising policy. We give a special commendation to the councils showing leadership across the board: Camden, Greenwich, Islington, Lambeth, Newham, Southwark, and Tower Hamlets.

This edition marks the 12th year of tracking council progress on food. The success of this approach inspired Good Food Local, a new project to encourage more local authorities to commit to action on our most pressing food issues, and this report has been renamed 'Good Food Local: the London Report'. We developed a set of measures aligned with Sustainable Food Places' six key themes for this London report. As a result, we have new sections on community food action, catering and procurement, and the section on 'food access for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people' has been expanded to encompass work on ethnic and cultural diversity across all six key themes. We update the questions annually to keep up with current issues, raising the bar year-on-year and fostering replication of best practice and innovation.

The number of leaders in the food governance section has tripled, with councils committing resource to joined-up work on food despite real term budget cuts. There has also been notable improvement on tackling food poverty, with the number of leaders on cash-first approaches to food insecurity, key to tackling root causes of poverty, increasing this year. On the other hand, the data shows a decrease in scores for food access for older and disabled people. This reflects a concerning country-wide trend of these services being decommissioned despite continued need.

The role councils play in transforming food systems cannot be overstated. We are pleased to see the continuing efforts of so many, at a time when this work is more vital than ever.

London in numbers:

- **12 London food partnerships** are now members of the Sustainable Food Places network, as well as Greater London.
- London relies upon 'just-in-time' supply chains: there is **only 72 hours' worth of food in the city.**¹
- **13 boroughs** now host peri-urban or fringe farms, bolstering the supply of local fruit and vegetables to the capital.
- **25% of Londoners** are living in poverty after housing costs.²
- **213,382 emergency food parcels** were distributed by the Trussell Trust in London between April - September 2023.³
- **Up to £1,000 saved** per child over two years thanks to universal free school meals in primary school and up to 287,000 school children enjoying a hot nutritious meal.⁴
- London households have consumed **1000 fewer calories per week** from unhealthy foods and drinks thanks to the TfL healthier food advertising policy.⁵
- **15 London councils** are supporting small and medium-sized businesses to accept Healthy Start cards.
- **99% of London's food** is brought in from outside the city.¹
- **2.3 million tonnes of food** is wasted across London's food supply chain every year.⁶

Recommendations for action

We continue to encourage local authorities to prioritise joined-up work on food, both cross-departmentally within the council and externally with key local partners, to enable truly innovative and transformational work. This approach supports delivery on multiple council policies and priorities, at a time where councils need to deliver more impact

with limited resources. Our recommendations span six key themes, encompassing the whole food system, from community action and poverty reduction, to wider issues like the climate and nature emergency, economy, and health. Between surveys, councils can use the report's framework to support action on food issues and set internal targets.

Taking action on the six key themes:

Food Governance and Strategy

- Support the development of a food partnership and food strategy covering all key food issues. This should be developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

Food Growing and Other Community Food Action

- Ensure there is a lead council officer for food growing, a clear route for residents to access public land, and support to set up community gardens and develop the skills to grow food.
- Ensure good food is celebrated across the council's communications channels and through a variety of publicly accessible events and projects, and support community food initiatives to develop and thrive.

Sustainable Food Economy

- Put in place a Good Food Retail Plan to improve access to healthy, affordable food in the borough.

Catering and Procurement

- Sign the London Food Purchasing Commitment to ensure that the food bought and sold across council services is healthy, climate-friendly, and never wasted.

Food for the Planet

- Include timebound, specific and measurable targets on food in climate action plans, and assign capacity to act on these commitments.

Healthy Food for All

- Strengthen and embed cash-first approaches to reducing poverty, including providing crisis support via cash payments and increasing income maximisation support.
- Ensure the council contributes to evaluations of the primary school meals programme, to support improvement of delivery, ensure quality of food, and build good practice and learning.
- Develop a target-driven action plan to increase uptake of Healthy Start cards and vitamins, including training for frontline staff and targeted outreach using postcode-specific uptake data.
- Urgently review food provision for asylum seekers, particularly with regards to food safety standards and infant feeding, and bring together relevant council teams and local partners to improve food access.
- Resource nutritious meal provision inside and outside of the home for older and disabled residents, and ensure strong referral pathways into services.
- Support development of community food projects which go beyond emergency food provision linked up with wraparound support services.
- Assign resource to develop a healthier food advertising policy for the borough.
- Using planning strategies to manage new hot food takeaways.

Overall league table

Which councils are showing leadership on joined-up action?

	Food governance and strategy	Food growing	Community food action	Tackling food poverty	Healthier food environments	Sustainable food economy	Catering and procurement	Food for the Planet	Ethnic and cultural diversity in the food system	Overall Score
Lambeth	Green	Dark Blue	Orange	Blue	Light Green	Dark Green	Pink	Teal	Red	93%
Newham	Green	Dark Blue	Orange	Blue	Light Green	Dark Green	Pink	Teal	Red	
Southwark	Green	Dark Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Pink	Light Teal	Red	85%
Tower Hamlets	Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Pink	Teal	Red	
Greenwich	Light Green	Dark Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Pink	Teal	Red	81%
Camden	Light Green	Dark Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Light Teal	Red	80%
Islington	Green	Dark Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Pink	Light Teal	Red	80%
Waltham Forest	Light Green	Dark Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Pink	Teal	Red	78%
Lewisham	Light Green	Light Blue	Orange	Blue	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Pink	Light Teal	Red	76%
Westminster	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Teal	Light Red	70%
Barking and Dagenham	Light Green	Dark Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Pink	Light Teal	Light Red	69%
Ealing	Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Teal	Red	
Hackney	Light Grey	Light Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Pink	Teal	Light Red	67%
Brent	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Light Teal	Red	
Hammersmith and Fulham	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Light Teal	Light Red	65%
Merton	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Teal	Light Red	63%
Haringey	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Light Teal	Light Red	
Kingston upon Thames	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Light Teal	Light Red	63%
Wandsworth	Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Teal	Light Red	61%
Hounslow	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Pink	Teal	Light Red	
Barnet	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Light Teal	Light Red	56%
Kensington and Chelsea	Light Grey	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Teal	Light Red	54%
Enfield	Light Grey	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Light Teal	Light Red	48%
Redbridge	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Teal	Light Red	48%
Richmond upon Thames	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Teal	Light Red	46%
Havering	Light Grey	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Light Teal	Light Grey	43%
Harrow	Light Grey	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Grey	Teal	Light Red	41%
Bexley	Light Green	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Teal	Light Red	37%
Sutton	Light Grey	Light Blue	Light Orange	Light Blue	Light Green	Light Grey	Light Pink	Light Teal	Light Red	35%
Bromley	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Light Blue	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	4%
City of London	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Light Blue	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	
Croydon	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Light Blue	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	2%
Hillingdon	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Light Blue	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	

Note: Councils with the same overall score are in alphabetical order. Brackets on the left indicate where more than one council recieved the same score. Leadership councils have been highlighted in orange and non-responders in dark grey. Where no action has been indicated, the box is left grey. Read our survey approach on page 39 for more information.

Beyond the Food bank league table

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	No recourse to public funds	UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative	Healthy Start	School meals	Holiday activities and food	Overall Score
Lambeth											90%
Camden											87%
Newham											87%
Southwark											83%
Tower Hamlets											83%
Westminster											80%
Islington											80%
Greenwich											77%
Merton											77%
Brent											73%
Hackney											73%
Hammersmith and Fulham											73%
Kingston upon Thames											73%
Lewisham											67%
Waltham Forest											67%
Ealing											67%
Haringey											67%
Wandsworth											63%
Barking and Dagenham											63%
Barnet											63%
Hounslow											57%
Kensington and Chelsea											57%
Enfield											53%
Redbridge											53%
Havering											47%
Richmond upon Thames											47%
Bexley											40%
Harrow											37%
Sutton											37%
Bromley											7%
City of London											7%
Croydon											3%
Hillingdon											3%

Note: Councils with the same overall score are in alphabetical order. Brackets on the left indicate where more than one council recieved the same score. Leadership councils have been highlighted in orange and non-responders in dark grey. Where no action has been indicated, the box is left grey. Read our survey approach on page 39 for more information.

Ethnic and cultural diversity in local food systems

London is the most diverse region of the UK, with each borough having varied demographics. This diversity is core to London’s identity and drives the vibrant and exciting food scene the city has to offer.

This year we changed the way we ask councils about the work they are doing to promote access to healthy and sustainable food which meets the needs of Londoners from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Previous surveys included questions on this topic as part of our chapter on food poverty, in recognition that people of colour experience higher rates of poverty and food insecurity than the White population. We have now integrated questions on

diversity in the food system throughout all chapters of the survey, to highlight that this should not be a standalone piece of work, but considered in work across each of the Sustainable Food Places Six Key Themes.

Encouragingly, 11 councils are showing leadership by taking cross-sectoral action across all themes, and nine councils received a good practice score for acting across several areas such as food insecurity, economy, community food action and catering and procurement. Whilst it is important to celebrate this work, more can be done to embed inclusion and accessibility into all work being done on food, and to take targeted actions where appropriate.

Ethnic and cultural diversity in local food systems

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



What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Taking 1-3 of the recommended actions.	Taking 4-6 of the recommended actions.	Taking 7-9 of the recommended actions.

Recommended actions include:

- Supporting community food projects led by people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds e.g. through targeted grants, access to land and marketing initiatives.
- Including targeted actions in food strategies/food poverty action plans to support diverse ethnic groups that may be at higher risk of food insecurity.
- Implementing policies or procedures that help ensure council food procured meets diverse dietary requirements and preferences of people in the borough.
- Incentivising food retailers to sell food that meets diverse dietary requirements and preferences of people in the borough e.g. through grants, supporting joint purchasing or discounted access to premises.

www.sustainweb.org/reports/may23-progress-on-diversity-and-anti-racism
www.sustainweb.org/blogs/jun21-food-insecurity-reveals-baked-in-institutional-racism

Theme 1 Food governance and strategy

This chapter summarises council action on taking a joint-up approach to food through food partnerships, policy and strategies.

The Sustainable Food Places (SFP) programme supports a national network of food partnerships who are making healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where people live. Food partnerships bring together stakeholders from across the food system within their local area, to develop and deliver a shared vision for a more sustainable food future.

Food partnerships instigate, coordinate and deliver change across the food system in the six key areas used in this report:

- Representative decision-making and food strategy leadership.
- A community-led and empowered Good Food Movement.
- Improving access to Healthy Food for All.
- Growing a Sustainable Food Economy.
- Transforming Catering and Procurement.
- Ensuring climate and nature-friendly Food for the Planet.

SFP supports 95 food partnerships representing 24 million people across the UK by:

- Providing support, guidance and training.
- Benchmarking and celebrating success through SFP Awards and campaigns.
- Connecting stakeholders across a disparate national food system.
- Facilitating peer-to-peer knowledge exchange.
- Driving policy change at a national level.
- Inspiring a nationwide movement of local food action.

To learn more and join the fast-growing network, please visit: www.sustainablefoodplaces.org

Case study:

Southwark and Newham: Sustainable Food Boroughs

Sustainable Food Places was pleased to welcome Sustainable Food Newham to the network this year. Newham already has a strong track record through the Newham Food Alliance partnership working with grassroots and community organisations that span the geography, food cultures, and inequalities in the borough, collaborating effectively with the council and other anchor institutions. The partnership has been set up to create a space for joined-up work on sustainable food.

Southwark Food Action Alliance (SFAA) has been awarded a Sustainable Food Places Bronze Award. With the Public Health team sitting on the partnership's steering group and providing funding for its coordination. SFAA is made up of about 90 groups, including several working with people with lived experience of food insecurity, such as Parents and Communities Together (PACT). A huge amount of work has gone into achieving the Bronze Award, including input from the council. Southwark council has approved a Right to Food plan which sets out how it will implement the commitment to becoming a Right to Food borough. This includes a range of actions, such as a community grants programme, championing the London Living Wage, supporting frontline and Council staff to act as champions for dignity and implementing a "no wrong door" approach to signposting to further support.



Credit: Jonathan Goldberg

Food governance and strategy

Transforming a local food culture and environment for the better requires a joined-up strategic approach and committed long-term collaboration across sectors, from community grassroots and third sector organisations to businesses and council leaders. This enables collaborative planning and action to help create a healthier, more sustainable, and equitable food system, and drives forward the food agenda in the local area. The Sustainable Food Places (SFP) network describes the key pillars of this work being ‘a strong cross-sector food partnership and an inspiring and ambitious food vision backed by a clear strategy and action plan.’

Councils leading or supporting active food partnerships consistently score better across themes in this report, and were also found to score on average 11% higher on climate and food work in the most recent **Every Mouthful Counts** report.

Encouragingly, in the last few years there has been a growing trend of councils across London developing food partnerships and producing food strategies. Twenty-three councils are now working on food partnerships, nine have a food strategy, and 12 London food partnerships are members of the SFP network.

Food governance and strategy

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



This measure has been externally verified by the Sustainable Food Places programme.

What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
The council is part of an active food partnership. The food partnership has met at least once in the last six months and meets regularly, at least four times a year, and addresses food issues including but wider than just the theme of food poverty.	The borough's food partnership is a member of the Sustainable Food Places (SFP) network and has one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An SFP award. • The council provides officer time or funding to support the work. • The council has a dedicated role working on food in the borough. 	The council/partnership has a current (inclusive of activity in 2023), minimum 3-year food strategy or food plan, that is endorsed by the local authority, including but wider than just the theme of food poverty and public health.

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Theme 2 Food growing and other community food action

This chapter details council action to support more Londoners to grow their own food, increase land available for growing, as well as build a local good food movement and platform community voices.

Case studies:

Hounslow Funding local community food action

Hounslow Council have distributed thousands of pounds in grants and in-kind support to local community projects. For example, £30,000 was awarded to the Health Means Wealth community allotment, which supports residents with learning disabilities and mental health concerns to access free growing spaces and develop new skills. The Community Development Team is supporting the Beaver's Children Centre to regenerate an outdoor area at the Hub Community Centre into a community garden, to teach families about food growing and provide them with fresh, healthy produce. Hounslow coordinates an Environmental Champion Programme, connecting 100 environmental groups and individuals, and offering monthly workshops led by Groundwork around food growing and wildlife friendly gardens. Project support, advice and specialist gardening tools are available to support champions.

The Council has supported the Centre for Food Policy to recruit 10 local residents as researchers exploring the challenges of feeding their families healthy meals in the context of material, financial and social constraints. The resident researchers are working with local and national-level policy stakeholders to co-create policy recommendations based on their experiences. The council has a Community Connectors group of over 100 residents who have volunteered to raise awareness within their neighbourhood and community about a range of health and lifestyle issues, including raising awareness of the Healthy Start scheme.

Barking and Dagenham Growing opportunities

From January to July 2023, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham commissioned School Food Matters to deliver food growing and enterprise programmes to schools across the borough. Eight primary schools and three secondary schools completed the Young Marketeers Programme, which saw students and teachers learning how to grow vegetables at school, prepare vegetable stalls and sell their organic produce at Barking Market. The secondary schools also visited Dagenham Farm to see commercial horticulture in action. Through selling a range of fresh produce, the students raised £236 for a local food charity supporting food-insecure families, and a further £227 was raised by the secondary school pupils to support food education work. After taking part, students have a better understanding of how food is produced, and the nutritional benefits of different foods, as well as increased cooking and gardening skills.

The council worked with Flipside, a local LGBTQ+ community organisation, and the Peer Support Group, a community group for young people experiencing mental health issues, to co-develop a two-year food programme. The programme supports young people who may experience barriers to getting involved in community projects to participate in activities related to food. This summer, a group of 21 young people visited Dagenham Farm to take part in harvesting seasonal vegetables and cooking it at the community centre, supported by local food entrepreneur, Healthy Mind Healthy Grind.



Credit: School Food Matters

Growing for Change in your borough

GROWING FOR CHANGE

Capital Growth is Sustain's food growing network in London, providing in-kind support to groups who grow food in London. We spotlight councils taking leadership and inspire others to do more so that every Londoner has a chance to grow their own food, regardless of their location.

Growing for Change is our latest initiative, focusing on how food growing supports ambitions and objectives across local authorities including greener and safer neighbourhoods, health and wellbeing, community cohesion and climate change mitigation.



Credit: Manal Massalha

Growing for Nature

in partnership with the GLA

- Creating more habitat for nature.
- Planting crops that attract pollinators and improve resilience.
- Increasing access to nature and monitoring biodiversity.

Growing for Climate

- Seasonal growing, using peat-free compost, tree-planting.
- Reducing carbon footprint – reusing, upcycling and sourcing locally.
- Building healthier soils to sequester more carbon and designing to retain water.

Growing for People

- Making links to ensure people benefit from the garden.
- Creating opportunities for shared learning and paid work.
- Ensuring the garden is accessible, welcoming, and well equipped.

Growing for Nature

In spring 2024 Capital Growth will launch its campaign to engage gardens in our Growing for Nature theme to create a baseline of biodiversity across London's food growing gardens. Those taking part will get:

- Bespoke training on measuring and improving biodiversity.
- Invites to events and visits to share ideas and connect with other nature champions.
- Access to seeds, materials and other resources.

What can councils do?

1. **Join Capital Growth's inter council network:** this provides advice, inspiration and cross-council learning through quarterly meetings.
2. **Support Growing for Change:** work with Capital Growth to make the links between nature recovery, nature access and food growing in your borough by helping us get 5-10 gardens engaged this spring.
3. **Promote Capital Growth's work:** encourage your local gardens to join for free, and in particular encourage them to take part in Good to Grow 2024. This will take place 22-29 April, and is linked up with the City Nature Challenge.

Contact: rachel.dring@sustainweb.org

www.capitalgrowth.org/growingforchange

www.capitalgrowth.org/councils-and-food-growing

Theme 3a Healthy food for all: tackling food poverty

For councils across London, soaring levels of food insecurity and the cost-of-living crisis remain key concerns. This chapter summarises council action to address food poverty looking 'Beyond the Food Bank', with a focus on tackling the root causes of poverty and increasing dignified access to good food.

Case studies:

Barnet Prioritising nutrition for asylum seekers

The situation for asylum seekers in hotels is extremely challenging, with many issues being raised about the quality of food provision. Barnet Council has set up a catering working group to look at how to improve food quality in hotels. Barnet has hired a Health Ambassador for asylum seeker and refugee support. The Neighbourhoods and Community team has developed an asylum seeker health action plan which includes sections on food and nutrition as a priority area. This will contribute to a wider migrant health action plan in the future. A pilot project offered a diverse group of asylum seekers a chance to come together, pick a dish that was meaningful to them to cook and eat together. The sessions also aimed to foster communication and integration between communities. Though the pilot only had funding for 3 sessions, these were joyful events for all involved. In Barnet the Healthy Start vitamin scheme has been extended to residents in the hotels across the borough so they can access vitamins at their nearest Children's Centre. This has been heavily promoted with the voluntary organisations working within the hotels to promote with families.

Kensington and Chelsea Investing in alliance work and wraparound support

The food poverty alliance in Kensington and Chelsea provides food support across the borough via organisations at the heart of the communities they serve. They provide a range of activities and opportunities for resident engagement, health and wellbeing and referrals into advice agencies as well as food support. Some organisations provide advice on issues at a hyper local level and specialised services, such as the Food Bank in Earl's Court

which provides support to refugees, and the Community Market in Lancaster West which supports residents with substance dependency and mental health issues.

Kensington and Chelsea Social Council is the local umbrella organisation for the voluntary and community sector in the borough and they are contracted by the Council to coordinate the food partnership and support residents to reach council and community-based support services. They commenced delivery of the Community Resilience Support Programme in November 2022, with funding from the council, hosting several community events offering advice and support to residents. The approach evolved in April 2023 into an 'Advice in Community Settings' model with advice provided at Food Banks and community sessions. Alongside this, money-worries training has been delivered by local advice agencies to 60 people across 50 organisations to improve support to residents, with 'top-up' training where necessary. Estimations by the service providers show thousands of interactions from residents with the services per annum.



Credit: Pexels

Food poverty alliances and action plans

Food poverty, a symptom of wider poverty and structural injustice, remains a key concern for councils in London, with poverty rates over 40% in some boroughs.

Food poverty alliances bring together key stakeholders across the council and voluntary and community sectors (VCS) to carry out strategic, cross-sector work to tackle food insecurity. Food poverty action plans, or similar actions linked to a wider food strategy, set out recommendations based on the needs of the local population to address food poverty, taking actions beyond emergency food provision to tackle the root causes of food insecurity.

In total 10 councils are showing good practice with either a published or developing food poverty action plan, and a named council officer or designated alliance responsible for enacting this plan. A further nine councils are showing leadership with an up-to-date action plan and funding to implement the recommendations. This leaves three councils with plans but no funding or responsible contact to carry out the recommendations, and concerningly 12 councils report no action in this area. With rising food insecurity during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, we urge councils to look beyond emergency food provision and prioritise longer-term strategic work to tackle food poverty and associated inequalities.

Food poverty action plans

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



The map for food poverty alliances can be viewed online at www.sustainweb.org/good-food-local/london

What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
<p>The council has a published food poverty action plan, or similar set of actions linked to a food plan or strategy.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>or</i></p> <p>The council is developing or refreshing a plan, with resource to implement it.</p>	<p>A named council officer is responsible for oversight of the plan.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>or</i></p> <p>A designated multi-sectoral group is responsible for implementing the plan.</p>	<p>The plan is up to date and inclusive of activity in 2023.</p> <p>The council is funding implementation of the plan's recommendations and actions.</p>

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Cash-first responses to food insecurity

Poverty and food insecurity cannot be tackled until incomes match the cost of living and protect people from financial crises. At a national level, this equates to adequate social security payments, wages, and secure work. Sustain supports the Trussell Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Guarantee our Essentials campaign to ensure that benefits cover the cost of living as well as the Independent Food Aid Network's (IFAN) advocacy for cash-first approaches to food insecurity.

At a local level, cash-first approaches focus on maximising income through financial and benefit advice services, linking people up with support services, and

providing timely and dignified financial assistance, enabling people to buy food and other essentials.

There are now 15 councils showing leadership in this measure, two more than last year, demonstrating a more coordinated approach to providing streamlined services, as well as using data to track whether applications are successful and improve the service. A further 14 councils are achieving a good practice score, and 16 councils have worked with IFAN to develop cash-first resources for the borough. Nevertheless, with 25% of Londoners living in poverty more needs to be done to strengthen cash-first approaches and ensure services have a wider reach.²

Cash-first responses to food insecurity

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



What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
<p>Fund welfare benefits and debt advice services.</p> <p>Provide financial assistance directly to residents in crisis.</p> <p>Reduce council tax payments for low-income residents.</p>	<p>Support forums or partnerships which share knowledge, practice and information on making successful cash-first applications.</p> <p>Have a streamlined referral pathway that helps residents access as many forms of cash-first support as possible in an integrated way.</p>	<p>Support organisations to collect and collate data about cash-first applications made and the reasons some are not successful.</p>

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



Food access and experiences for asylum seekers in London

There are serious concerns across London about inadequate food and nutrition access, and a lack of positive food experiences for asylum seekers. Decisions on asylum status often take several years, leaving people, particularly infants and children, at risk of malnutrition and driving physical and mental health issues.

Asylum seekers generally have limited funds to pay for food and little to no kitchen facilities, meaning they are reliant on cheap, unhealthy food, and/or meals provided by their accommodation which may be unpleasant and not culturally appropriate. There is particular concern about unsafe infant feeding practices and malnutrition among children, as well as food hygiene issues, which are being reported across several boroughs.

In October 2023, Sustain launched a new project funded by Trust for London and in partnership with frontline organisations Jesuit Refugee Service UK and Life Seekers Aid to explore food experiences of asylum seekers in London. The research included carrying out focus groups with participants with lived experience, interviews with frontline staff and local authorities, and developing case studies of good practice from councils and the voluntary and community sector.

The main aims of the project are to:

- Draw attention to the issue of food access and experiences of asylum seekers.
- Raise the voices and be informed by people with lived experience.
- Produce guidance and recommendations on local action that can be taken.

A secondary aim is to highlight key areas where national policy change is necessary.

From this research project, Sustain will produce a report in **March 2024** including a summary of our findings, case studies of positive local action, and a set of recommendations for local authorities, food partnerships and other local actors to improve local food access for this population. These findings will be tailored to London local authorities but will be relevant to other local authorities across the country.



Food access for people with no recourse to public funds

People with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) cannot claim most benefits, tax credits or housing assistance, leaving them at risk of food insecurity with limited options for support. This includes migrants that are subject to immigration control, such as people with temporary work and study visas, and asylum seekers.

While asylum seekers are waiting for their claim to be considered, which can take several years, they are not allowed to work, and receive limited financial support. Many are housed in 'contingency accommodation', often with no kitchen facilities, making it challenging for people to meet their

nutritional needs and dietary preferences. Others with NRPF condition can find themselves in crisis if a job is lost, or may struggle to get by on a low income.

Twelve councils are showing leadership by taking all of the recommended actions. A further seven councils are achieving a good practice score by taking several actions, such as funding projects that support people with NRPF, and providing targeted food or financial support. We urge councils to review food support for this group, who are at risk of malnutrition and damage to mental health perpetuated by an ongoing lack of dignified access to appropriate food.

Food access for people with no recourse to public funds

- Leadership
- Good practice
- Foundations
- No action



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.

Recommendations include:

- Providing food support for migrant families with infant children, as suggested by UNICEF UK, including support to access infant formula.
- Widening the eligibility for council-funded community food so that it is accessible to residents with NRPF. This should include breakfast clubs, holiday provision with food, and food aid.
- Widening the eligibility criteria for financial support programmes (such as the Household Support Fund) to include residents with NRPF.
- Providing targeted financial or food support for people with NRPF.
- Funding projects or organisations supporting food access for asylum seekers and refugees.

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www.sustainweb.org/reports/oct23-nrpf-food-insecurity-survey-in-brief

Tackling food poverty: children's food

Food insecurity is higher in households with children, with London having the highest child poverty rates in England. Childhood is a vital period for growth and development, with poor nutrition impacting long-term health and life chances. Children are dependent on others to receive the nutrition they need, therefore council action has a key role in ensuring access to healthy food.

Case studies:

Merton Going for Gold

Merton has a high level of breastfeeding support available to residents including peer support groups, 1-2-1 breastfeeding clinics and a specialist clinic led by an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant. Merton council holds Stage 3 full re-accreditation with the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative, with all Health Visitors trained to meet required standards. Merton Health Visiting services are embedded within the Children's Centres, with staff trained to support all households with breastfeeding, as part of their progress towards a Baby Friendly Gold award. Merton takes a holistic approach to breastfeeding, with the support and message of Baby Friendly linked in with family hubs, borough work on healthy weight, the Southwest London infant feeding strategy, midwifery, and voluntary services. Merton's infant feeding services were shortlisted for a Nursing Times award in 2021, awarded a place on the National Institute for Health Research improvement leader fellowship, and the specialist breastfeeding clinic was showcased at the UNICEF annual Baby Friendly Initiative conference in 2022.

Wandsworth Supporting school food

Wandsworth council is working to ensure all children in the borough have access to good, nutritious food through their new School Food Strategy and accompanying action plan. This work includes expanding eligibility criteria for free school meals, targeting additional support via breakfast and afterschool provisions, and supporting schools to get the maximum pupil premium funding that they are entitled to using the low-income family tracker (LIFT) the Council has invested in, which will support movement towards a simplified 'auto-enrolment'

system. The strategy also highlights work on food education for students, and food sustainability.

In 2023 Wandsworth awarded a new catering contract following the adoption of a model specification from the charity, School Food Matters. The aims of the school meals service for Wandsworth include providing high quality, healthy and sustainable food, increasing school meal uptake, adopting a whole school approach to healthy eating, ensuring a motivated and valued workforce, and embedding sustainable practices. Caterers are required to deliver food that is inclusive, with foods that reflect diverse communities, cater for allergies and intolerances, and meet requirements for SEND children, allowing everyone to thrive.

Camden Bolstering holiday activities and food funding

Camden's HAF programme offers free holiday clubs for children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals. In Summer 2023, 2,724 children were supported with hot healthy meals and enriching activities across four weeks, meaning 35% of Camden's FSM eligible children took part. Camden's delivery partners, such as youth clubs and charities, faced high demand for places, far outstripping the number on offer. Therefore, Camden Council invested an additional £100,000 to supplement the HAF programme across summer and winter 2023 and Easter 2024, in recognition of the increased pressures faced by families, and the rising demand for the HAF programme.

In total, 329 more places were made available to FSM-eligible children in summer 2023, compared to the previous year, primarily attributed to these additional funds. The Camden HAF programme focused a substantial part of their investment on supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), increasing the number of places offered to children requiring one to one support or a specialist placement by 33% in summer 2023 compared to summer 2022. Watch the HAF Summer 2023 video here: www.bit.ly/48psxW8

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

Good nutrition and secure early relationships in the first years of life are crucial for healthy growth and development, with lifelong consequences of failing to meet infants’ needs. Social and cultural factors are often cited as barriers to breastfeeding, the UK having particularly low rates with only 31% of infants in England between six and eight weeks after birth being exclusively breastfed in 2023, and eight out of ten women stopping breastfeeding before they want to.⁹

The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative enables public services to better support families with feeding and developing close and loving relationships so that all babies get the best possible start in life.

Services implementing the Baby Friendly standards receive the Baby Friendly award, a nationally recognised mark of quality care. The Gold Award recognises how local authorities are sustaining these standards through leadership, culture, monitoring and progression, and is currently maintained by three London boroughs: Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster. Additionally, nine councils are maintaining a good practice score by achieving full Baby Friendly accreditation.

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

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



This measure has been externally verified by UNICEF.

What can councils do?

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

www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly



Universal free school meals

The Mayor of London believes it is incredibly important that we give our youngest Londoners the best possible start in life. This academic year, the Mayor has committed a historic £135m in emergency funding to deliver free school meals to state-funded primary school children in the capital. Up to 287,000 children across London are benefitting, with 1.4m meals funded each week. Families in every borough in the capital are saving upwards of £440 per child across the school year.

In January 2024 the Mayor announced an extension to the funding, committing a further £140m to continue free school meals for another academic year. This is in recognition of the continuing impact of the cost-of-living crisis on families. The proposed new funding will see boroughs offered £3 per meal to help to continue to deliver the meals from September 2024. This is 18.5% higher than the amount they receive from Government.

It is the first time ever that free school meals have been available to all primary aged pupils in state-funded mainstream schools, special schools and pupil

referral units in the capital. Children in Years 3 to 6 in primary school had previously only received free school meals if they lived in households earning less than £7,400 a year – after tax, including benefits, and regardless of the number of children in the family.

Partnership working has been vital to the success of the policy, with boroughs, schools and partner organisations playing a central role throughout policy development and implementation.

To support schools and boroughs, they have been provided with best practice guidance and resources to help communicate with families, increase capacity, maintain pupil premium funding and other logistical considerations. The Mayor also set aside £5m of funding to act as a contingency for any extraordinary costs associated with the delivery of the meals.

The Mayor believes that no child should be punished for circumstances beyond their control, and no child should be forced to go hungry, so will continue to call on Government to step forward and provide the funding to make this permanent.



2023 was a momentous year for provision of free school meals in London.

In January, Westminster joined Islington, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Southwark in extending meal provision to all primary school children, and also included nursery children. This was swiftly followed by the Mayor of London's announcement to provide £135 million of funding for all London boroughs for the 2023/24 academic year. There has been a tremendous effort across councils, catering providers and school leaders to deliver this from September.

Tower Hamlets has subsequently expanded its meal offer to all secondary pupils, and Westminster to Key Stage 3 pupils up to year 9, whilst Southwark has been additionally targeting secondary school pupils from households in receipt of Universal Credit. Several boroughs are also topping up the Mayoral funding of £2.65 per meal, for example Newham now funds meals at £3 per day, and Southwark at £2.90 for secondary school meals – all well above the national government funding rate of £2.53. Meanwhile Camden Council had committed to make universal primary meals permanent beyond 2023/24, regardless of continuation of mayoral funding, and neighbouring Brent has launched a Family Food Fund for the 2023/24 academic year to support other children not entitled to school meals but still on benefits with a low income.

All London boroughs taking part in this year's report have mechanisms in place to promote and measure free school meal uptake for those eligible. However, several boroughs including Lambeth and Lewisham went the extra mile in 2023 to explore use of opt-out rather than opt-in automatic enrolment processes, to reach more pupils – with significant returns to schools in terms of pupil premiums as well as more children enrolled for meals. A pan-London approach on auto-enrolment is now being explored, so watch this space in 2024.

The nutritional quality of meals and healthy eating remains in focus for many boroughs. Southwark has a Food Flagship network of schools for best practice, Sutton audits nutritional quality, Wandsworth has launched a 3-year School Food Strategy, whilst Barking and Dagenham, Tower Hamlets and Newham ensure both quality and sustainability of meals, as well as other social benefits such as payment of living wages, by making these conditions of grant funding. We have also seen strong collaboration between public health and education teams to promote Healthy School Awards; Lambeth has engaged over 2,500 pupils so far in Eat Them to Defeat Them campaigns to increase intake

of vegetables, and several boroughs continue to promote Food For Life accreditation. In Merton the majority of schools taking up the council contract are opting into a second meat-free day in addition to Meat Free Monday.

Many councils continue provide funding for breakfast clubs and holiday periods. In Wandsworth the council works with Magic Breakfast, whilst during holidays Lambeth and Kensington and Chelsea councils report providing £20 per week or £4 per day per eligible child. In Kensington and Chelsea, this will have resulted in an estimated 4,900 meals provided in the 12 months to March 2024. However, these programmes have relied on revenues from the government Household Support Fund, which at time of writing has not been extended beyond March 2024, raising concern that these vital services could be lost.

Following the success of the Mayoral funding for free school meals in primary schools and the ongoing high cost of living, the Mayor's January 2024 announcement of continuation funding for the 2024/2025 academic year is greatly welcome.



Credit: Jon Goldberg / Children's Food Campaign



Credit: Jon Goldberg / Children's Food Campaign

School food and holiday food provision

This academic year has seen the introduction of Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) for primary school children in London, championing the importance of a daily nutritious meal, with £135 million of investment from the Mayor for the first year, and £140 million now pledged for the second. UFSM helps children living in poverty, provides financial relief to families, and improves the health outcomes and educational attainment of all children in the class.¹⁰

Camden, Islington, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Westminster councils are showing leadership by investing in UFSM beyond this funding, with actions including committing to long-term UFSM

funding, extending eligibility, or topping up the value of meals provided. Additionally, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Wandsworth councils have developed school food improvement programmes to improve the quality and monitoring of school food. Councils have an exciting opportunity to build on current momentum and help win further progress towards healthy school food for all children.

Several councils are bolstering statutory holiday food provision, with 17 councils continuing to show leadership by providing funding to expand eligibility criteria, and 12 receiving a good practice score for working to ensure healthy and sustainable food is provided to children.

School food

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



The map for holiday food provision can be viewed online at www.sustainweb.org/good-food-local/london

What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Have 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 in schools beyond government-funded School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme for four- to six-year-olds.	Invest in UFSM beyond the existing primary school funding from the Mayor of London for the academic year 2023/2024. <i>or</i> Have a school food improvement programme for the borough, including council staff time to monitor effective delivery.

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Theme 3b Healthy food for all: healthier food environments

The environment into which we are born and live greatly impacts on our health and life chances, with the food system around us playing a core role in health outcomes, including a huge variation in life expectancy across the capital.¹¹ This chapter explores council action to promote the availability of a diverse range of healthy food, and limit availability and advertising of unhealthy food.

Case studies:

Tower Hamlets Veg vouchers and healthy advertising success

Tower Hamlets are supporting around 250 families experiencing food insecurity to access affordable fresh produce via Children's Centres and GP surgeries. The vouchers provided through GP surgeries are for participants with a physical or mental health condition who are also experiencing food insecurity. Evaluation reports from the first year show that the vouchers provided by GP surgeries have reduced participants experiencing mild to moderate food insecurity from 70% to 29%, increased fruit and vegetable intake, and improved physical and mental health outcomes. These projects are delivered with Alexandra Rose Charity and Bromley by Bow.

In May 2023, Tower Hamlets introduced a Healthier Advertising policy to restrict the advertising of products high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) through the Council. It aims to reduce exposure to unhealthy images that are often targeted at children, young adults and people living in more disadvantaged areas.

Lambeth Fruit and veg on prescription

Lambeth Council has commissioned a Fruit and Vegetable on Prescription scheme targeted at residents at risk of high blood pressure and on a low income. The Public Health team has been working with the A.T. Beacon Project and Alexandra Rose Charity to develop the intervention, which consists of weekly health advice, wrap-around support, and blood pressure checks, alongside the collection of an £8 voucher with an additional £2 for each household member.

The project has increased the variety and consumption of fruit and vegetables eaten by the target group. Wellbeing and stress levels, including financial worries have improved, healthy behaviours increased, and health conditions improved. Findings show that 71% of participants have improved blood pressure readings, 62% increased activity levels and 100% have reported an increase in happiness levels. The scheme is also helping to improve the local economy by spending of the vouchers at local food markets.

As part of the School Superzone programme, Lambeth Council is also working with local convenience stores to increase the range and sales of healthier, affordable food and to accept Healthy Start payments.

Redbridge Food that serves the community

During some community engagement events, Redbridge council found that Bangladeshi communities did not feel well served by existing healthy cooking interventions, which did not focus on traditional cooking or ingredients. In response, the council established the Bangladeshi Healthy Eating Project: a programme of six cooking and dietary workshops aimed at empowering participants with knowledge and skills to cook healthy Bengali meals. Each week, 23 participants cooked a healthy version of a meal they had selected and received dietary advice, including the basics of a balanced diet, understanding type 2 diabetes, and the nutritional values of Bengali foods. The programme was found to successfully increase knowledge of type 2 diabetes and encourage healthy food and drink swaps including reducing sugar intake. 100% of participants reported increasing their knowledge of how to cook healthier meals, and they also reported they would pass on the healthy eating messages to friends and family. There is evidence that residents of Bangladeshi ethnicity are at higher risk of experiencing certain long-term conditions, such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, so this intervention targets benefits to high-risk groups.



Calling for an industry levy to make our food healthier

All children should be able to live healthily and access nutritious food, no matter where they live. We know that families want affordable, tasty, convenient and healthy food, but our high streets, school canteens and supermarket shelves are flooded with food overloaded with fat, sugar and salt. To improve our health, we need companies to improve what goes into the food they sell.

As much as 85% of the salt we eat is already in our food when we buy it, and just three categories – biscuits, confectionery, and desserts – are responsible for 60% of the added sugar that we eat at home. This excessive sugar and salt consumption is linked with increased cases of serious illness including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and various cancers. In London, obesity rates are rising and the Mayor has made it a priority to prevent diet-related illnesses as part of the 'Healthy Place, Healthy Weight' Strategy. To achieve this, we need the government to take action and make sure there are financial incentives for companies to do the right thing and produce tasty, affordable food without it costing our health.

Companies are skilled at improving their recipes. They do it all the time – usually to make their products taste better and increase sales. Sadly, too many businesses do not prioritise our health unless they are made to. The Soft Drinks Industry Levy led to companies reducing the amount of sugar in soft drinks by 46%, and we have an opportunity to build on this success now.

Recipe for Change is a coalition of 41 health organisations, Royal Medical Colleges and food campaigners led by Sustain, Obesity Health Alliance and Food Foundation, with support from Impact on Urban Health, British Heart Foundation and Action on Salt and Sugar.

Join the campaign or find out more information:
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68%

of the public support an extension to the Soft Drinks Industry Levy if the money raised went to programmes supporting children's health.



£1.5 billion

raised through the Soft Drinks Industry Levy, used to fund National School Breakfast Programme and other initiatives.



2 million

cases of disease could be prevented over 25 years with a new industry salt and sugar levy, including CVD, type 2 diabetes and various cancers.



3.7 million

quality adjusted life years could be gained, worth £77.9 billion to the economy over 25 years, with a new industry levy.

WE ARE CALLING FOR

1. The government to build on the success of the Soft Drinks Industry Levy by introducing a new levy on unhealthy food.
2. Businesses to change the recipe of the food and drink that they sell to make them healthier for all of us.
3. To invest revenue raised from the levy in children's health and access to good food.

Visit recipeforchange.org.uk to check out our calculator, which shows how much a new levy could benefit your constituency.

Healthier Food Advertising Policy

We are delighted to celebrate five years since Sustain supported the Mayor of London to write and implement the Healthier Food Advertising Policy across Transport for London (TfL). This opened up the opportunity for councils to develop policies across their own advertising estate – an ambition many local leaders have previously identified to champion their residents' health. Since then, it's been fantastic to work with London boroughs and successfully support a fifth of them to get the policy over the line and reap benefits for local residents.

Healthier Food Advertising Policies restrict advertising of foods high in saturated fat, sugar and/or salt, using the DHSC Nutrient Profiling Model to set reliable and evidence-based limits to what can and cannot be displayed. The measure was introduced to address the growing prevalence of childhood obesity and health inequalities, but there are also valuable co-benefits for sustainability. In light of this success in London, there is growing interest from councils both across the UK and from governments all around the world.

The benefits seen across London from the TfL policy include reductions in purchases of unhealthy foods, including a notable 20% reduction in sugary food purchases.¹² The advertising policy is also expected to result in 95,000 fewer cases of obesity, 3,000 fewer cases of diabetes, and 2,000 fewer cases of cardiovascular disease. In sum, these impacts are estimated to have saved the NHS £218 million.¹³

Notably, TfL's revenues increased by £2.3million after the first year the policy was introduced,¹⁴ and of the 12 councils that have brought in a Healthier Food Advertising Policy across the UK, no council has seen any loss in revenue as a result.

If you would like to introduce a Healthier Food Advertising Policy in your borough to create measurable health benefits for your local community, get in touch with Fran Bernhardt on fran@sustainweb.org.



Theme 4 Sustainable food economy

This chapter summarises council actions to support and grow a local food economy, increasing opportunities for residents to access local, healthy and sustainable food, and retaining wealth within the borough.

Case studies:

Greenwich Training and investment for good food

Greenwich has a Good Food Retail Group comprising partners from environmental health, economic development, public health and GCDA (a local social enterprise). The aim of this Group is for partners to understand each other's roles and responsibilities relating to the good food economy agenda and work collaboratively to improve their good food retail offer. This year, there has been public health investment into the economic development and environmental health teams to build capacity for good food retail work, and the partnership has helped good food be considered as part of broader economic drivers such as Community Wealth Building.

The economic development team has worked hard to relocate and protect the continued delivery of the main Woolwich fruit and veg market as the town centre undergoes regeneration, for example through reducing costs for local traders. The Woolwich market traders have also been supported to transfer over to the digital Healthy Start card scheme.

Good food business training is delivered by GCDA, and their training kitchen is used for a diverse range of food start-ups and entrepreneurs to develop and test recipes before going to market. HAF providers received training to reach the council's standards relating to healthy, sustainable, safe, affordable and culturally appropriate food, and have been supported to procure from local businesses. As part of the Sustainable Food Strategy, the council has committed to develop a Cultural Food and Advice service which is focused on ensuring culturally appropriate food and support is readily available within the borough.

Southwark Improving choice and promoting access

Southwark Council are expanding on Good Food Retail work in the borough to ensure that healthy, sustainable and diverse food is available to all. They have mapped the 40 convenience stores taking part in their Good Food Retail Scheme for provision of food from diverse cultures, and are now working to engage five more Afro-Caribbean stores to support them to provide both culturally appropriate and healthier foods. All convenience stores participating in the scheme are supported to implement and promote healthier food options, as well as the Healthy Start scheme, increasing residents' options of where to spend their Healthy Start card and keeping more of this money in the borough. This year, the council committed to funding the programme for a further 3 years, expanding the number of stores involved by 20 each year (up to a total of 60), and working to incorporate more sustainable and culturally appropriate food options to the "100 lines list" that has so far been developed.

Southwark are part-funding the Rose Voucher scheme to increase access to fresh fruit and vegetables, with 80% of beneficiaries coming from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background. Rose vouchers are promoted by market traders, and the council is working to increase the number of traders promoting and accepting Healthy Start card payments.



Credit: Alexandra Rose Charity

Sustainable food economy

A Sustainable Food Economy means a diverse and thriving supply chain from ‘farm to fork’. This requires supporting decent livelihoods; championing high standards; and encouraging better infrastructure, shorter supply chains, and good food enterprises that celebrate affordable, healthy and sustainable food.

Nine councils are showing leadership in this theme by undertaking actions including supporting food SMEs with training and advice, establishing new markets, and having a Good Food Retail Plan to support growth in the sector. Fifteen councils are working with local retailers to promote the use of Healthy Start in markets and convenience stores, to improve

the variety of foods families using the scheme can access, and encourage spending to remain in the local economy. Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Lambeth, Southwark and Tower Hamlets councils have partnered with Alexandra Rose to provide Rose Vouchers, which help families on low incomes to buy fresh fruit and vegetables. A further 15 councils are funding community food enterprises which provide the community with lower cost food and other support, such as food coops and community cafés. We are pleased to see the variety of actions being taken by councils, and the effort being made to make good food affordable and accessible to residents.

Sustainable 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
Reference the local food economy and/or a commitment to increasing access to healthy and sustainable food from local food businesses in strategies.	<p>Increasing the number of SMEs accepting Healthy Start cards.</p> <p>Supporting traders to be more sustainable through reducing waste, linking up with local suppliers, or supplying climate friendly food.</p>	<p>Providing training, advice and support for food SMEs which targets those run by and/or serving diverse groups.</p> <p>Helping to establish new fresh food markets.</p> <p>Having a Good Food Retail Plan.</p>

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Connecting Community Food Enterprises

In recent years there has been a huge growth in the community food enterprise sector, operating under a range of trading models such as food cooperatives, community cafés, pantries and community shops, and local veg box schemes. These projects help people to access affordable food, but move beyond emergency food provision, operating membership schemes, solidarity pricing, or other low-cost models. Many have additional aims related to environmental sustainability and community togetherness. They are often described as moving 'up the food ladder' from emergency food aid, as they cater to people at risk of food insecurity but help to prevent them experiencing financial crisis via wraparound services such as benefit or debt advice.

Community-based food projects offer dignified spaces where communities can come together and engage with food, from growing, to cooking, to sharing meals, to accessing affordable groceries, creating a positive food environment where people want to spend time, rather than somewhere they have to go because they are in need of crisis support.

In a future where no one experiences poverty, these projects remain key community assets, improving food skills, bringing people together, and providing nutritious food.

However, the sector faces multiple challenges, from funding and developing sustainable business models, to diversifying food supply and reducing reliance on surplus food, all while demand soars.

Councils have an opportunity to work with VCS partners to explore more financially sustainable models, and link up support services, creating a more resilient local response to food insecurity, as well as potential other benefits to health and wellbeing.

Sustain's Connecting Community Food Enterprises project, funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, aims to learn from a network of community food projects to produce resources that support sustainable development of the sector and help emergency food aid providers that wish to transition to trading models, as well as brokering relationships with social investors

to strengthen local resilience to food insecurity and promote wellbeing.

Sustain has been working with four regional partners over the past year: Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, Bury Voluntary, Community and Faith Alliance, Feedback Liverpool, and Waltham Forest Food Partnership. Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency have also provided training and business support to partners. The project has brought community food enterprises together to learn from each other, discuss challenges and opportunities, and inform a toolkit to help other enterprises which Sustain will publish in March 2024. This will include information on areas such as business planning, financial forecasting, food supply, and working with social investors.



Credit: Stafford Hall Pantry, Waltham Forest

Visit the website to find out more about the project, and explore case studies of organisations in our network.

→ www.sustainweb.org/good-food-enterprise/connecting-community-food-enterprises

→ www.sustainweb.org/good-food-enterprise/case-studies

Theme 5 Catering and procurement

This chapter summarises council work on catering and procurement, one of the key areas councils can act on to reduce food-related emissions, and promote climate and nature-friendly food while supporting local economies.

Case studies:

Barking and Dagenham Bringing local food to kids

In Barking and Dagenham, the Sustainable Meals Healthy Futures Campaign has been promoting the value of sustainable catering to schools. The council-owned caterer, BD Together, are a Food for Life Silver accredited caterer that cater for 44 schools. BD Together pay the London Living Wage to staff as Barking and Dagenham council are an accredited Living Wage Employer.

Barking and Dagenham has worked with local, organic wholesaler the Better Food Shed and BD Together to deliver seasonal, organic produce to all HAF organisations along with seasonal recipe cards. In Summer 2023, they partnered with Made in Hackney to run a plant-based food and nutrition training session for 20 people from 10 HAF provider organisations and develop plant-based recipes tailored to demographics of the borough, to accompany the seasonal produce they delivered. Feedback was that the clubs had more confidence to deliver creative nutritional activities that helped support children to understand the importance of healthy eating, with a focus on plant-based food.

BD Together work with a range of local suppliers and are planning to pilot purchasing produce for school meals from the Better Food Shed after good feedback from the HAF programme. They are also developing an apprenticeship programme to get more catering and hospitality trainees into school kitchens. Level 2 Production Chef apprentices will experience working in real school kitchen environments while developing their knowledge at local further education institution Barking & Dagenham College. Trainees will benefit from an enhanced curriculum at the College that champions the three pillars of sustainability and diverse world cuisines. The apprenticeships are part of BD Together's strategic plan to raise awareness of school cheffing as a great career choice or pathway to other parts of the industry, and of the College's plans to provide progressive food and hospitality further education training.

Waltham Forest Gold-plated catering

Waltham Forest Catering provide catering services to 42 primary schools across the borough, working hard to support the council's climate goals. They developed the Autumn-Winter menu for this academic year with the support of ProVeg, winning a Gold School Plates award for their work. They are also working with ProVeg to develop a tool to measure the carbon impact of their increasingly plant-based menus. The catering team have a variety of strategies for encouraging pupils to eat the plant-based meals on offer. As well as running multiple events such as 'Save the planet day', the catering team host taster sessions of new plant-based dishes in schools. They have developed two cartoon characters, Forest Eco Rangers, to help promote the meals, and Omari Mcqueen, a teenage plant-based chef, has demonstrated recipes to primary school pupils. The Forest Green Rangers football team will be holding workshops in four primary schools in January to promote and introduce the wider benefits of plant-based living.

The council has drafted a Green Events Guide that states events should source from environmentally conscious caterers and to better consider how much catering is required, and plan how any surplus food will be used, for example donated to food banks.



Credit: fizkes, Shutterstock

Catering and procurement

Spending over £70bn on procurement each year across the UK, councils have a real opportunity to leverage their buying power and cut the emissions of our food systems. Local authorities play a vital role in normalising climate-friendly diets in public settings, making food that's good for people and the planet a normal part of life, from school years and into our working lives.

It is encouraging to see four councils have achieved leadership in catering and procurement in the first year we've included this as a separate theme. The highest scores have been awarded to those who have signed the London Food Purchasing

Commitment, which means they will align menus with a planetary health diet. We're pleased to see 18 councils in the Food Procurement Working Group, which gives councils the support and resources they need to sign the Purchasing Commitment. We highly recommend other councils follow suit, to join the movement towards healthy, environmentally just food. A further nine councils were found to demonstrate good practice through taking a variety of approaches to improving their catering, for example having policies for sustainable food at events on council land, gathering anchor institutions to develop good practice, and building community wealth through purchasing from local SMEs.

Catering and procurement

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



What can councils do?

Foundations	Good practice	Leadership
Committing to some action on better procurement, e.g. having a policy for serving healthy, sustainable food at events on council land.	Already taking action to serve healthy, sustainable food, for example adopting meat-free days, building community wealth through purchasing from local SMEs, or having Food for Life Served Here accreditation.	Sign the London Food Purchasing Commitment. Join the Food Procurement Working Group.

Ruth Westcott
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www.foodfortheplanet.org.uk

Use your food buying power to deliver on your climate goals

Making changes to the food you buy across your council's services and how much goes to waste could help you to cut carbon emissions, make cost savings, advance your public health objectives, and invest in your local communities.

ReLondon and the One World Living theme of London Councils' Climate Programme (led by London Borough of Harrow) have developed a Food Purchasing Commitment to help you realise these opportunities.

London's Food Purchasing Commitment contains unified targets for London's councils to ensure the food you buy:

- is climate-friendly
- champions local, sustainable food producers and growers
- is never wasted

Four councils have signed the Commitment so far: Hackney, Hounslow, Lambeth and Newham. These founding signatories are helping create a city where food is deeply valued, sustainably produced and never wasted, benefitting people and the planet. Your council could be next.



Credit: Unsplash

Want to learn more about London's Food Purchasing Commitment and what it means for you?

Visit the webpage:

<https://relondon.gov.uk/circular-food-procurement>

Get in touch with Rachel Shairp at rachel.shairp@relondon.gov.uk.

Rachel is working closely with the London Borough of Hackney, the borough food lead for the One World Living theme of London Councils' Climate Programme.

Put climate, nature, and health at the forefront of your food provision with Food for Life

Food that's good for health is good for the planet

Every day over a million Food for Life certified meals are served throughout the UK, prioritising climate, nature, and health through the food we eat.

Food for Life works with caterers to ensure that kitchen practice, procurement, and the food on plates showcase your work in reducing carbon emissions and support your net zero plans.

Our training, consultancy and certification frameworks help caterers reduce costs, improve employee wellbeing, and increase meal uptake.

Easy access to expert advice

We provide easily accessible training and consultancy offers for groups of any size and experience across all areas of sustainable catering. Our bespoke courses are open to all with topics including waste management, sustainability policies and procedures, menu development, nutritional guidelines support and carbon calculation tool through Cool Food Pro.



Credit: Unsplash

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. 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.

4. Speak to our experts at Food for Life to start your sustainable catering journey and assess how you can make changes to your catering.

Get in touch today

To book a free appointment with one of the Soil Association's sustainable catering experts email us at sustainablecatering@foodforlife.org.uk



Survey approach

As in previous years, Sustain designed a survey to collect the information used and scored in this report, based on over a decade of close work with councils on food issues. Feedback from external partners and councils was used to shape the questions and scoring criteria.

All councils in London were invited to complete the survey to self-report on action taken and future plans, and data was verified by Sustain and external partners. The data presented was collected between October and November 2023, and councils were able to provide additional information until January 2023. Where available, data from external sources has been included for councils that did not respond to our survey to provide a more accurate picture.

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

The league tables provide an overview of council performance in each theme (indicated by colours) and how they ranked comparatively (indicated by order and percentage score). We also indicate which councils are leaders, this being the top scoring councils overall and in the food poverty measures.

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February 2024

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 Good Food Local

Good Food Local is a new phase of work, funded by Impact on Urban Health. Our aim is to roll out the tried-and-tested Good Food for All Londoners approach across the UK so that more local authorities commit to action on our most pressing food issues, while continuing to work closely with London Boroughs with the kind support of the GLA. As well as working closely with a regional partner to pilot the approach, we are developing a benchmarking tool available to all local authorities in the UK to support a collective, national voice for councils and promote opportunities for collaboration on our most pressing food issues.

About the London Food Poverty Campaign

The London Food Poverty Campaign is funded by Trust for London and works with the GLA, councils, food partnerships and other London organisations to encourage policy and practice that aims to go beyond the provision of emergency food support and tackle the root causes of food insecurity. As well as the annual Good Food Local: the London report, the team supports councils year-round with developing joined-up and strategic food poverty work, and runs projects focussing on the lived experience of minoritized groups at higher risk of food insecurity, to develop good practice recommendations.

sustain
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