

Food Equality Action Plan



Norwich Food Network

Supported by



NORWICH
City Council

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About the Food Equality Action Plan

BACKGROUND

This Food Equality Action Plan is the 2023 edit of the Action Plan originally presented in 2019. We have streamlined and adapted the plan in response to our learnings and changes seen over time. This plan aims to highlight the actions that groups and organisations can take to support food equality in Norwich.

Our vision is that every Norwich resident can eat well regardless of circumstance.

The Food Equality Action Plan was previously known as the Food Poverty Action Plan. The name was changed to reflect our commitment to everyone being equally able to obtain nutritious and tasty food. The 2019 Plan was created by the Norwich Food Alliance in 2019. This was a group of organisations working together to reduce food poverty in Norwich, funded by Sustain and supported by Norwich City Council (NCC). This role has now been handed over to the [Food Network](#). The Food Network is a networking, information sharing and collaborative group of organisations working in the Norwich City Council area which are active in the delivery of food support – from food growing to distribution and provision. In addition it includes organisations which offer practical support and advice on addressing the causes of poverty and food insecurity.

In April 2019 the Norwich Food Alliance held a Workshop which helped shape the actions proposed under each of the aims. Input was gathered from people experiencing food poverty in Norwich, to make sure that the actions suggested would be practical and useful.

WE HAVE FOUR WORK STRANDS

Increasing skills
and knowledge
around preparing
nutritious meals

Increasing
access to
support
services

Reducing and
making better use
of food waste

Filling
gaps in food
provision

WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED

Not long after the launch of the plan in November 2019, Covid-19 fundamentally changed our society and had huge impacts on individuals and organisations. The pandemic changed many people's circumstances and led to a large increase in demand for food provision. For example, at the height of the pandemic in April 2020 the Norwich FoodBank distributed food for over 1900 people, in comparison to just over 900 the April before. Whilst acknowledging the profound loss that many have experienced, we can also be proud of the incredible response and resilience of groups involved in supporting others through the pandemic.

A few examples of successes seen over that period include:

- The Food Network enabled NCC to spread information with food projects rapidly, and facilitated the sharing of resources and surplus between groups. The Network also helped with efficient referrals due to the deep knowledge of local needs within the group.
- A food hub set up at St Andrews Hall by NCC in response to being tasked with food provision to vulnerable people, leading to some surplus for other active groups and grants for food provision.
- More food parcels were organised and were distributed more widely – including efforts by Connecting Bowthorpe, The Phoenix Centre, Soul and ENYP.
- Soul stepped up to collect from Fareshare when logistics threatened the delivery of provisions.
- Norwich FoodBank responded to an overall decrease in volunteers due to the pandemic along with inability of some to collect parcels by moving to a 100% delivery model.
- The establishment of new hyperlocal groups to respond to neighbours' needs, including food parcels, such as Helping Hands NR5 and in Thorpe.
- Many organisation were involved in the cooking and distribution of meals including the Norwich School the Henderson Trust and NR5 Community Hub volunteers.
- Adapting to local needs – Society Alive changed their provision from community meals to meal deliveries.

We can be proud in saying we have made great progress with many aspects of the plan. We have made particularly strong progress with the launch of several social supermarkets in the Norwich area and several more on the way. For up-to-date information on the social supermarkets see [Nourishing Norfolk Network](#).

- [The Feed](#) – Social Supermarket at Hall Road.
- [ENYP](#) at Russell Street community centre.
- [Soul Foundation](#) operating currently at Mason Road.
- [St Giles Trust](#) at Magdalen Street
- Earlham Nursery in development and expected soon

CONTINUED INCREASES IN DEMAND

There have been continued increases in demand for services that have outlasted the pandemic. The Feed community fridge on Prince of Wales Road used to have around 100 visitors a week from 2020 until the summer of 2022 – but there are now 100 customers a day using the Social supermarket (Hall Road)

Long term consequences of the pandemic along with high inflation and the energy crisis have led to increases in demand from those who have never previously needed emergency support. This has led to an increased emphasis on referrals to other services which new service users might not otherwise be aware of.

Typically, the FoodBank would supply food parcels to those in need following an unexpected event or issue (a big bill, a benefit delay, car repairs etc). However, recently there has been an increase in those referred who simply do not have sufficient income to keep up with rising costs on an ongoing basis. Support accessible at collection points from Citizens Advice and Shelter workers has been well received, and a further worker from British Red Cross is being planned to help with advocacy and befriending.

THE 2023 EDIT

Based on consultation and review by the Norwich Food Network the Plan has now been updated. The Plan highlights opportunities to create new projects and support current projects - ones which offer solutions to enable all Norwich residents to have access to nutritious and tasty food. A collaborative and networked approach is at the core of these 4 aims: Norwich is lucky to have a wealth of services and projects and connection and community is our strength.

This Plan tries to address both immediate provision and long-term prevention strategies. We include links to current food provision organisations and relevant benefits such as Healthy Start vouchers for those with pressing needs. Deprivation and poverty are complex, and we strongly believe that in addition to this the root causes should be tackled. We suggest the use of referrals to [Norfolk Community Advice Network \(NCAN\)](https://www.ncan.co.uk), in order to provide holistic preventative advice and support intending to improve people's material circumstances in the longer term. This is a free tool that those helping clients may find helpful to use. Norfolk Community Advice Network - Norfolk Community Advice Network ([ncan.co.uk](https://www.ncan.co.uk))

We are confident that the actions presented in this document will make a positive difference on the ground to those in need. But we cannot do it alone! We hope that our plan can provide inspiration to those looking to further help our community.



Food Poverty in Norwich

WHAT IS FOOD POVERTY?

Food poverty is when an individual or family struggle to have enough to eat. This can be triggered by a crisis, or be the result of long term lack of access to a healthy, affordable diet. Food poverty can affect people in different ways: children who no longer have access to free school meals in holiday time, those giving up their own food to allow their families to eat, those who struggle to afford to buy healthy food or those who require support to prepare their meals.

Food poverty tends not to be directly measured by the government. However, food poverty coincides with other types of poverty: if you don't have enough money for food you are unlikely to have enough money for other basic necessities either.

Norwich has more children living in relative low-income households than the UK average: 21.9% in 2021 compared to 18.7% for the UK ([Department for Work and Pensions, 2022](#)). Fuel Poverty also helps predict food poverty: 2020 data shows that 19.6% households in Norwich are fuel poor in comparison to 13.2% in England ([Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2022](#)).

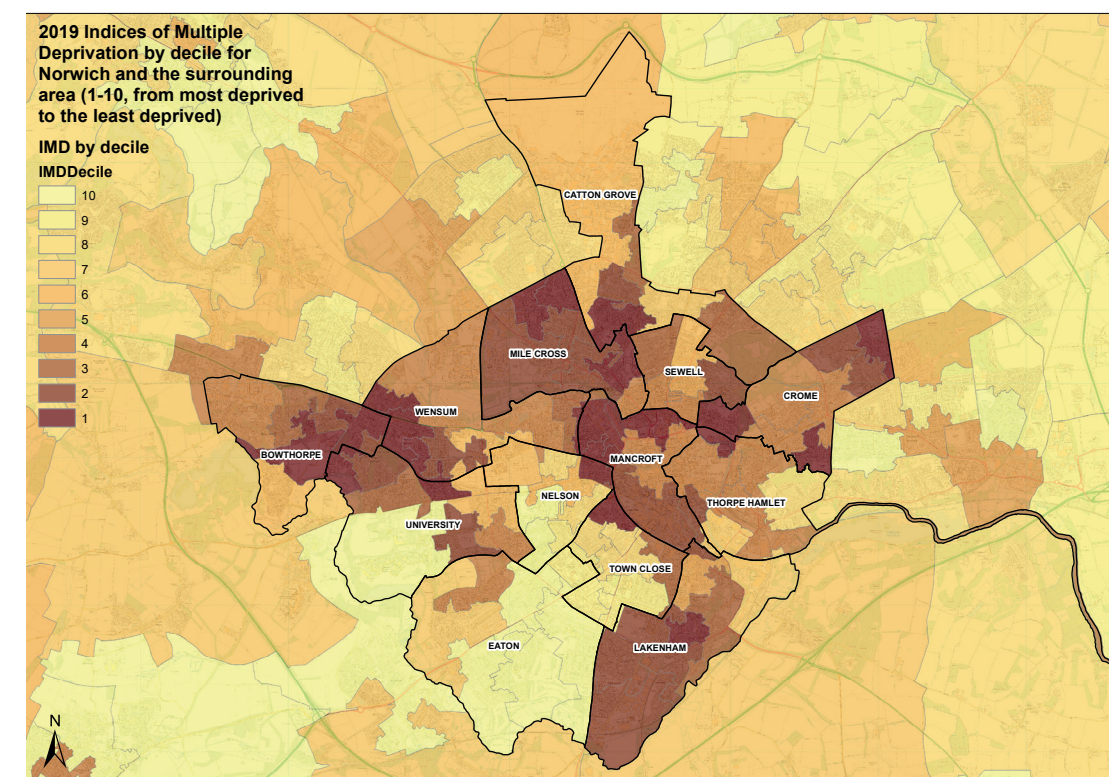
The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019, has shown that Norwich has a disproportionate number of areas which are in the 'most deprived' decile in the UK (21%). From these statistics, and the lived experiences of those in our community, it is clear that Norwich needs to support those vulnerable to food poverty.

FOOD INSECURITY EXPERIENCE SURVEY

As part of the Food Alliance's evaluation in 2019 we conducted a FIES (Food Insecurity Experience Survey) to try to get a snapshot of the level of food insecurity seen by those accessing food provision services in Norwich. Of those surveyed, 42% were renting from the council, and 31% were in accommodation owned by the Housing Association. This highlights what we already know about food insecurity - that it affects those on low incomes and those who are already known to the council. The largest age demographic surveyed was between 45-54, but ages ranged from 16-24 to 65-74. 63% of our sample were single individuals, 21% families and the rest couples or sharing. The sample was balanced for gender. The sample was predominantly white British, 89%. We cannot say for sure that the sample was entirely representative of food insecurity in Norwich due to a limited sample size, but we feel it does give some insight into those who were surveyed at FoodBanks, FoodCycle and The Feed.

The FIES we conducted had 8 questions - each is an indicator of food insecurity in the last 90 days. 78% of respondents answered "yes" to 5 or more of the 8 questions. A vast majority reported being worried about not having enough food to eat due to a lack of money or resources (95%) - these concerns are clearly based on stark realities as within the previous

90 days almost the same number of people had experienced a time when they had to skip a meal. In terms of quality, 74% had experienced a time when they were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food, and 83% had experienced a time when they ate only a few kinds of food. In terms of quantity 83% reported having eaten less than they thought they should, and 61% reported not eating when they were hungry. The extreme end of this is running out of food, which 83% had experienced, and not eating for a whole day, which 41% had experienced in the last 3 months. From these results it appears that both quantity and quality of food are important aspects of food insecurity in Norwich, and that both are lacking for a majority of people who answered the survey. It appears that there needs to be more food available overall, and that there should be a greater variety of offerings. This was echoed in our April Workshop, and in our subsequent Service User Survey.



WHAT DO WE ALREADY HAVE?

Norwich has a thriving array of charities and community groups who are working to relieve the pressure on those in or in danger of food poverty. On [The Feed website](#) there is a list of food provision available in Norwich. Many of the groups in the list address crisis provision in the city centre, however those experiencing food poverty are in a wide array of situations, including families and individuals who may be securely in housing or not.

Travel into the city centre to receive food assistance is not always possible, and we identified that there is the potential for more community-based meals outside of the city centre which could appeal to a wider demographic in a more localised area. The changing demands of the pandemic has led to some community meals being modified, but as we continue to rebuild, we would encourage new offerings to be set up.

Plan Development Activities

Developing a plan involved gathering data on deprivation in Norwich, this included the food insecurity experience survey data and also information on the uptake of Healthy Start vouchers and free school meals. A map was created showing these data for Norwich and used in the development of the plan in the April 2019 Assessment of Need Workshop.

To create the initial plan we asked for contribution from local groups and charities to the Workshop in April 2019. There were 4 main aims under which suggestions and offers were made. Upon reviewing these we have taken the most achievable goals and incorporated them into the plan. To make sure that these plans were going to be practical for those experiencing food poverty, we took these ideas to potential service users through a survey. Surveys were taken at the following places: New Hope Christian Centre (FoodBank), FoodCycle, Oak Grove Community Church (FoodBank), Gateway Alive (FoodBank centre), Trinity United Reformed Church (community meal) Harford Community Centre (independent foodbank) and The Feed.

The first question on the survey asked respondents to evaluate how important each "aim" was on a scale of 1 to 5. All 4 aims received an average response of at least 4 out of 5, which lends evidence that there is general support for the 4 aims that were chosen, from the people that might benefit from such actions.

When responsibility for the Action Plan was handed over to the Food Network, we set about gathering input from our members and editing the plan to suit the Norwich situation of 2023. Much has changed since the plan was first published in 2019, and it is important to update the plan to reflect the changes seen since Covid-19, as well as the more recent effect of high inflation on the cost of living.

In September 2022 we met to present the new suggested actions to the Network and made the final changes necessary to the Action Plan.

**Formation of Norwich Food Alliance
2018**

**Assessment of Need Workshop with
Local Groups 2019**

**Development of
Action Plan**

**Evaluation of Plan by
Service Users**

**Launch of Food Poverty Action Plan
2019**

**Handover of Plan to Food Network
2021**

Food Network meeting

**Online survey to all Food Network
members**

**Presentation of new actions
2022**

**Launch of Food Equality Plan
2023**



Further Recommendations from Research

FOOD EDUCATION

Around 43% of our sample from the 2019 service users survey had children. Most were not aware of their children receiving information about food and nutrition in school. Less than half of parents thought their children had a good understanding of what a healthy meal consists of. Of those parents who responded 'Yes', that their children do receive food and nutrition education, 75% responded that their children do pass on what they have learned. It therefore seems that when food and nutrition education is available children wish to share their new knowledge with their families. The vast majority of people (93%) thought they themselves did have a good idea of what constitutes a healthy meal. 62% of all those surveyed said they would be interested in receiving recipes for cooking on a budget. This shows that it is likely that the barrier to preparing such meals were financial constraints. We have taken this as evidence that projects around food and nutrition for young people and children could be particularly beneficial, and that healthy, low-cost recipes should be made accessible. In fact, 81% did not know where to go to learn about cooking healthy food on a budget. This makes it clear that more could be done to promote those courses which are already available. This could be achieved through making information more accessible between different skills and food provision organisations so that those who want to can access what is available. The results from the survey also indicate that there is equal demand for online and paper copies of recipes and highlight the diversity of accessibility required when planning to distribute these types of information.

HEALTHY START

Healthy Start is a means-tested government scheme which provides vouchers for expecting mothers or those with young children. The vouchers can be used towards healthy foods such as milk, vitamins, fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables, and infant formula milk. As of 2018, Norwich had 1294 eligible people. However, only 63% of those eligible had claimed them. It also appears that in most postcodes, fewer eligible people are claiming healthy start vouchers than last year. Just 17% of the surveyed parents were in receipt of Healthy start vouchers. 48% believed they were ineligible. 20% of parents did not know about them and 10% were yet to apply. It could be the case that some of those who believed they were ineligible are in fact eligible, however the age of their children was not asked for in this survey. There are at least 10% who appear to be eligible but have not applied, and another 20% who did not know about the vouchers, some of whom may be eligible. From this it appears that there is opportunity to increase uptake through increasing awareness, making eligibility criteria clearer and removing barriers to application.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

38% of parents responded that their children receive free school meals. 38% responded that they were ineligible. Only 7% did not know about them, and another 7% were yet to apply. It could be the case that those who have identified themselves as ineligible are potentially eligible. However it appears that there is good knowledge about free school meals among those surveyed.

GROW YOUR OWN

For those who do not already grow their own food (81%) the most frequently selected response was a lack of space, with over 2/3 citing this as a reason. This implies that more could be done to highlight affordable, available spaces for growing your own food such as allotments or community gardens.

FOOD SURPLUS

The survey asked for views on the use of food surplus. Almost all of the responses to this question were positive, which perhaps means the stigma of using food surplus has lessened as environmental consciousness has increased among the population. There is also evidence of a lack of clarity over what food surplus is. However, a majority said they would be interested in receiving food surplus to use at home.

COMMUNITY FRIDGES

The responses to this question highlighted a general lack of awareness of the existence of community fridges. Many people did not know about them, or how they operate. For many people, the distance would still be too great to travel to and from the fridge. From this, we feel that supporting the community fridges to be more visible, as well as supporting the setting up of new fridges around the city would help people access fresh food locally. The survey also asked if the respondents would be willing to access support and advice at the location of the fridge (like a community hub – as is in effect in some community fridges) and 61% said that they would. This would be beneficial in increasing access to support services.

SOCIAL SUPERMARKET

There was some confusion with this question over what a social supermarket is, as Norwich does not have one locally at the time of writing. Caveats were also mentioned on the surveys, such as depending on the price and types of products offered. When asked if they would be willing to pay a small membership fee to access a social supermarket (this is one way of structuring a community supermarket) 59% responded yes to this question, 14% responded No and 27% responded don't know.

ACCESS AND AWARENESS OF SERVICES

The FoodBank is well represented in this survey: 52% of respondents had used a foodbank (however many of the people surveyed were asked at foodbanks) of those who were not surveyed at a foodbank, 1/3 had used one in the past. There was a roughly equal split between people who did know about the many free meals available in Norwich and those who did not. This indicated that more could be done to highlight food provision around the city through sharing information between food providers. Of those who attended the free meals in Norwich, they were asked to say which was the most important thing about the meals were. The findings show that although free food is important to most respondents, that there is an equally important aspect of social connection. It appears that Norwich must be doing quite well in this area for so many people to have selected it as an important reason to attend meals.

1. Increasing Skills and Knowledge around Preparing Nutritious Meals

Norwich becomes a place where community groups and services work together to signpost those in need to resources and information on preparing nutritious meals on a budget. Groups and services help remove barriers to growing food, through sharing knowledge and resources.



ACTION	HOW
1. PUBLICISING Increase awareness about services in Norwich that provide education and training in food preparation and healthy meals	a) Use LUMi, the Feed Food Assistance info and other available resources to promote local opportunities for people to learn how to cook affordable healthy meals. b) Widen the remit of The Feed online food assistance info to include Healthy start vouchers/Free school meals links and other forms of food info/support across Norwich such as community fridges and community meals.
2. RECIPES Promote recipes for nutritious meals on a budget	a) Use recipes from Norfolk County Council food waste reduction team and Think Food, foodbanks and other resources in paper and online form (recognising literacy and lack of fuel can be an additional barrier to access).

ACTION	HOW
3. GROW YOUR OWN Promote available services to support people who want to grow their own food	a) Promote use and availability of existing growing spaces, such as allotments. b) Support and promote wider projects to help people to grow their own food c) Setting up of community projects teaching people the knowledge of how to grow their own food in small spaces and provide free seedlings or seeds
4. COOKING SKILLS FOR ALL Develop projects promoting cooking skills for all households	a) Work with partners to support funding proposals for projects teaching cooking skills for people of all ages b) Incorporate cooking skills, recipes and knowledge opportunities into projects such as social supermarkets and community meals

2. Reducing and Making Better Use of Food Waste

Norwich becomes a place where partnerships with food suppliers enable food surplus to be successfully distributed to those at risk of food poverty, through charities and to households. This would allow fresh and healthy foods to be accessible to those at all wealth levels.

ACTION	HOW
1. COMMUNITY FRIDGES Promote and support existing and new community fridges to enable more people to be able to access fresh surplus food for their households	a) Promote and support existing community fridges as part of the wider food network including listing on The Feed food assistance info and promoting in Foodbanks

3. Increasing Access to Support Services

Increasing access to existing support services through raising awareness of current provision, information sharing and improved accessibility. Groups and services work together to maintain an up to date list of food provision in Norwich, as well as other relevant support services, so wherever support is first sought the same information can be passed on.

ACTION	HOW
1. HEALTHY START AND FREE SCHOOL MEALS Promote Healthy Start vouchers and Free School Meal benefits to encourage and increase in take up by eligible families	a) Promote uptake of Healthy Start and FSM benefits in The Feed Food Assistance Info and other resources such as Citizen
2. SUPPORTING REFERRALS Increasing access to wider advice and support	a) Find opportunities to support those in food poverty to access wider advice and support, encourage direct referrals to reduce possible client anxiety and for the increased success of the support process

4. Filling Gaps in Food Provision

Norwich already has a wealth of food provision throughout the week. However, there is considerable overlap and the latest information is not always easy to access.

ACTION	HOW
1. INCREASING PROVISION Identifying areas/groups that could be better served with food provision. Supporting new community food projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Creation a map of provision and identify gaps in provision through mapping provision against needb) Work with partners in these areas, or other interested partners to explore new opportunities (community meals, community supermarkets or other)
2. COMMUNITY SUPERMARKETS Support and encourage proposals for and project delivery of, community supermarkets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Making places where people can get affordable food for use in their own homes using food surplus and other food sourcesb) Integrating a community cafe for free to access food combined with referral to social support servicesc) Hosting cooking courses on site

HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

Measuring outcomes tend not to be everyone’s favourite way to spend their time, however in order to be successful in securing funding for current and future projects so that we can support and expand on the work that is already being done, these things do need to be mentioned. These aren’t just for show – they can also help you see how the work you are doing is making a difference and potential ways of improvement – meaning that your effort makes the biggest impact – which is what we all want for Norwich.



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**COULD YOUR ORGANISATION SUPPORT
THE PLAN WITH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:**

**FUNDING, VOLUNTEERS, TIME, SPACE,
PUBLICITY OR DISTRIBUTION?**

