From crisis to resilience

Addressing food insecurity from a social housing perspective

A toolkit from the London Food Insecurity Network

HACT

Peabody

Felix THE FELIX PROJECT



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Foreword

Food insecurity has become an increasingly important issue for communities and organisations alike.

Cost-of-living pressures and stretched public services are all impacting people's ability to afford things we have previously taken for granted, and for many families, the weekly food shop has become a source of anxiety rather than routine. What was once an acute crisis for some has become an everyday challenge for many.

Food insecurity does not exist in isolation; it is closely linked to health and housing stability. When households cannot afford nutritious food, physical and mental health decline, long-term conditions become harder to manage, stress levels rise, and children's development can suffer. As living costs increase, food is often the first area where spending is cut, starting the vicious circle of poor health, which can in turn reduce earnings and put tenancies at risk. There's no doubt that food, health and housing are tightly connected, and if we want communities to thrive, we have to tackle them together.

Housing providers are frontline anchor institutions within their communities. We see hardship early through home visits, welfare conversations, day-to-day interactions with residents and patterns such as rising rent arrears. This places us in a unique position to identify emerging challenges early and respond proactively with the right support.

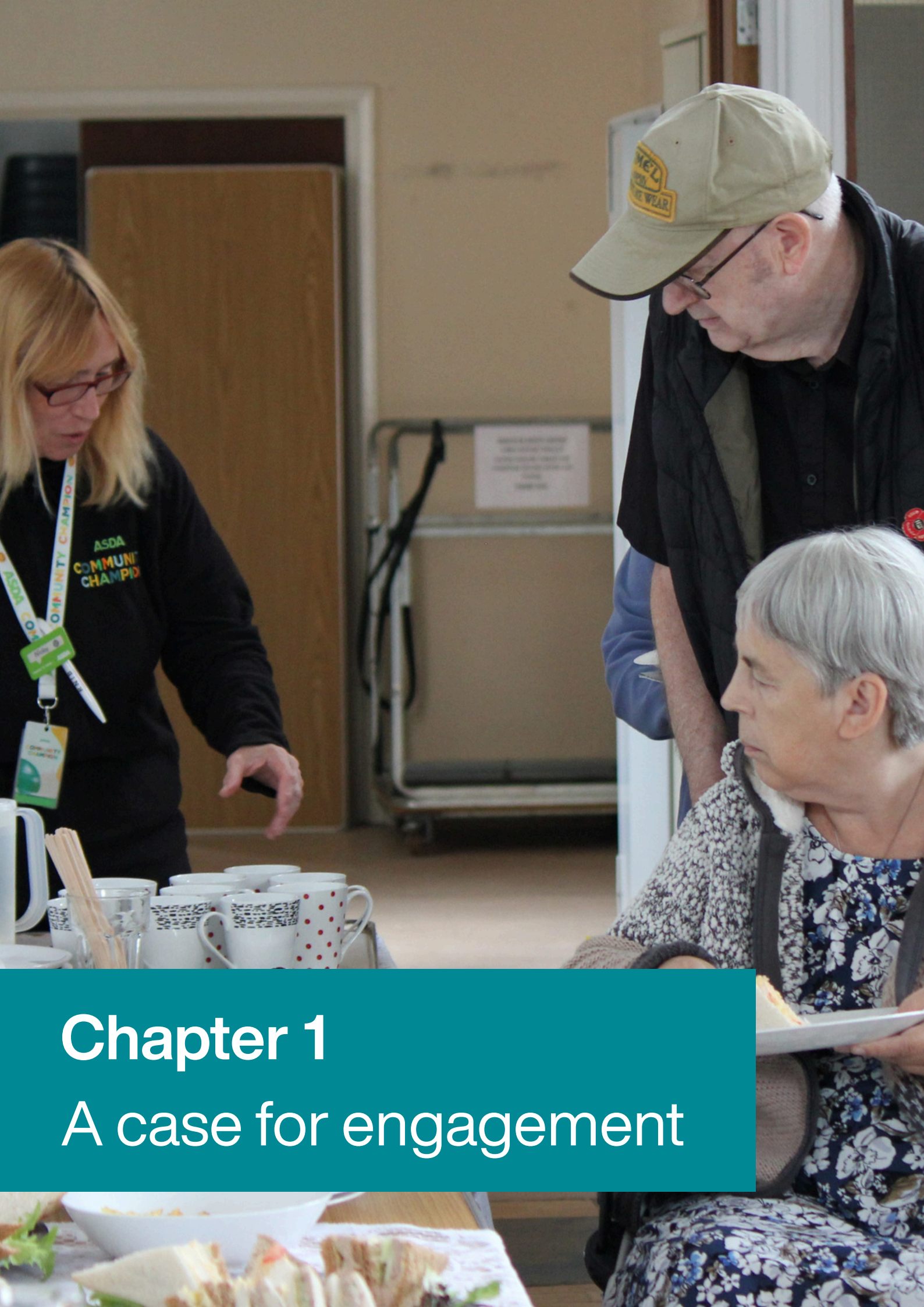


The London Food Insecurity Network (LFIN) toolkit builds on the ongoing work already being done by housing providers. It showcases the knowledge within our Network, encourages organisations to learn from each other, and offers practical support for groups at different stages of their journey. It also shows how larger housing associations can use their scale and influence to support smaller providers and community partners.

Above all, this toolkit is an invitation to collaborate. Tackling food insecurity requires coordinated effort across housing, health, community organisations, local authorities, funders, and residents themselves.

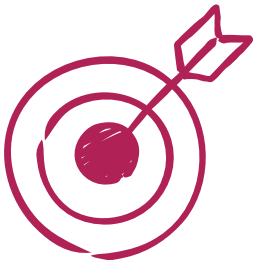
We hope this toolkit supports you in that work and strengthens the partnerships that make lasting change possible.

Sahil Khan,
Director of Community Strategy, Partnerships & Funding, Peabody



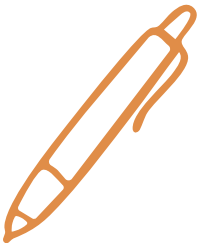
Chapter 1
A case for engagement

Purpose



This toolkit provides housing associations and partners with practical systems-aware approaches to addressing food insecurity across crisis, medium and long-term interventions.

Written by



This document is co-produced, drawing from the skills and expertise of the London Food Insecurity Network facilitated by HACT.

Intended audiences



Primary: Housing association operations teams and leaders; funders and commissioners.
Secondary: Policymakers, system leaders and strategic partners, including housing supply chain partners.

How to use this toolkit



The modular design of the toolkit enables users to dip in and out and access useful information quickly, based on role and need.

The toolkit is suitable for informing investments and delivery of community-facing interventions, strategic planning, systems change initiatives and partnership working.

Glossary

Cash-first approach
Prioritising digital or physical cash payments when providing Crisis Payments (including bank transfers, cash-out vouchers such as through PayPoint, Post Office and ATMs), over food provision. This goes alongside advice and support services to maximise incomes.

Charitable food provision
Charitable help with food for free or at very low cost for people experiencing financial or food insecurity. Providers include food banks, food pantries, social supermarkets and food clubs.

Community food project/enterprise
Projects with a focus on supplying affordable food to their local area, supporting those experiencing food insecurity and bringing the community together. These include pantries and social supermarkets, food co-ops, community cafés, meal services and other local buying groups. Enterprises have a business model built on social value while generating income.

Emergency food provision
Provision of free food to people experiencing financial crisis and food insecurity to prevent hunger. This is commonly done through food parcels, free meals, or providing choice from a selection of items.

Financial resilience
The ability of individuals to withstand and recover from financial shocks.

Food insecurity:
The inability to afford or access the food that people need, often linked to a lack of dignity and choice around food. In most cases this is due to a lack of income but can include other barriers to accessing food such as mobility issues. Food insecurity exists on a spectrum and can be mild, moderate or severe. The UK government measures household food insecurity at a national level through the Family Resources Survey.

Food partnership
An inclusive, cross-sector partnership of public agencies, voluntary and community organisations, businesses and academics collaborating to create lasting change on local food work by agreeing on priorities and action for the local area.

Food poverty
The element of poverty that impact on food access, intake and experiences. The term is often used interchangeably with food insecurity and can also be described as the inability to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.

Glossary

Food poverty alliance
A partnership of organisations, usually from across the public, voluntary, community, faith and sometimes private sectors, who commit to working together to tackle food poverty in their local community.

Trauma-informed approach
A recognition of the extensive and continuing impacts that trauma may have on an individual's life. The impacts of trauma, some of which may not be obvious or disclosed, can make interacting with services a difficult and potentially retraumatising experience. This approach aims to avoid and mitigate this risk whilst creating a safe and empowering environment for all colleagues and customers. The six principles of trauma-informed practice are:

- Safety
- Trust
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Cultural consideration

Wraparound support
Advice and support services co-located with food projects to help people to maximise their incomes and access a range of support services relevant to them. This could include benefit and debt advice, housing support, wellbeing services, addiction support, etc.



Why housing associations matter in addressing food insecurity

Housing associations are uniquely placed to play a transformative role in addressing food insecurity. They have trusted, long-term relationships with residents, deep insight into local need, and access to assets such as land, buildings, data, and community infrastructure that few other organisations can assemble at scale.

Food insecurity is not an isolated issue but is closely linked to housing affordability, income insecurity, health, disability, other marginalised identities and place-based inequality.

When housing providers engage in food work, they are not stepping beyond their remit; they are addressing the conditions that underpin tenancy sustainment, resident wellbeing, and resilient communities. By moving beyond short-term crisis responses and working in partnership with local food networks, housing associations can help shift systems, embed dignity, and contribute to long-term solutions that reduce reliance on charitable food provision altogether, nurture place-based communities and strengthen tenancy sustainment.



Investing in food to improve health and sustain tenancies

Food insecurity and diet-related ill health are shaped by a complex range of factors. A strong body of evidence shows that health is influenced not only by individual behaviour, but by the conditions in which people live, work, and grow. These wider social, economic and environmental factors play a significant role in shaping access to food and health outcomes.

The Marmot principles (8 guidelines developed by Sir Michael Marmot) highlight how social and economic inequalities drive health outcomes. Factors such as:

- income,
- housing quality,
- access to affordable food, transport,
- employment security
- and community infrastructure

all interact to influence what people can eat and how healthy they can be. Where these conditions are constrained, people's choices are constrained too.

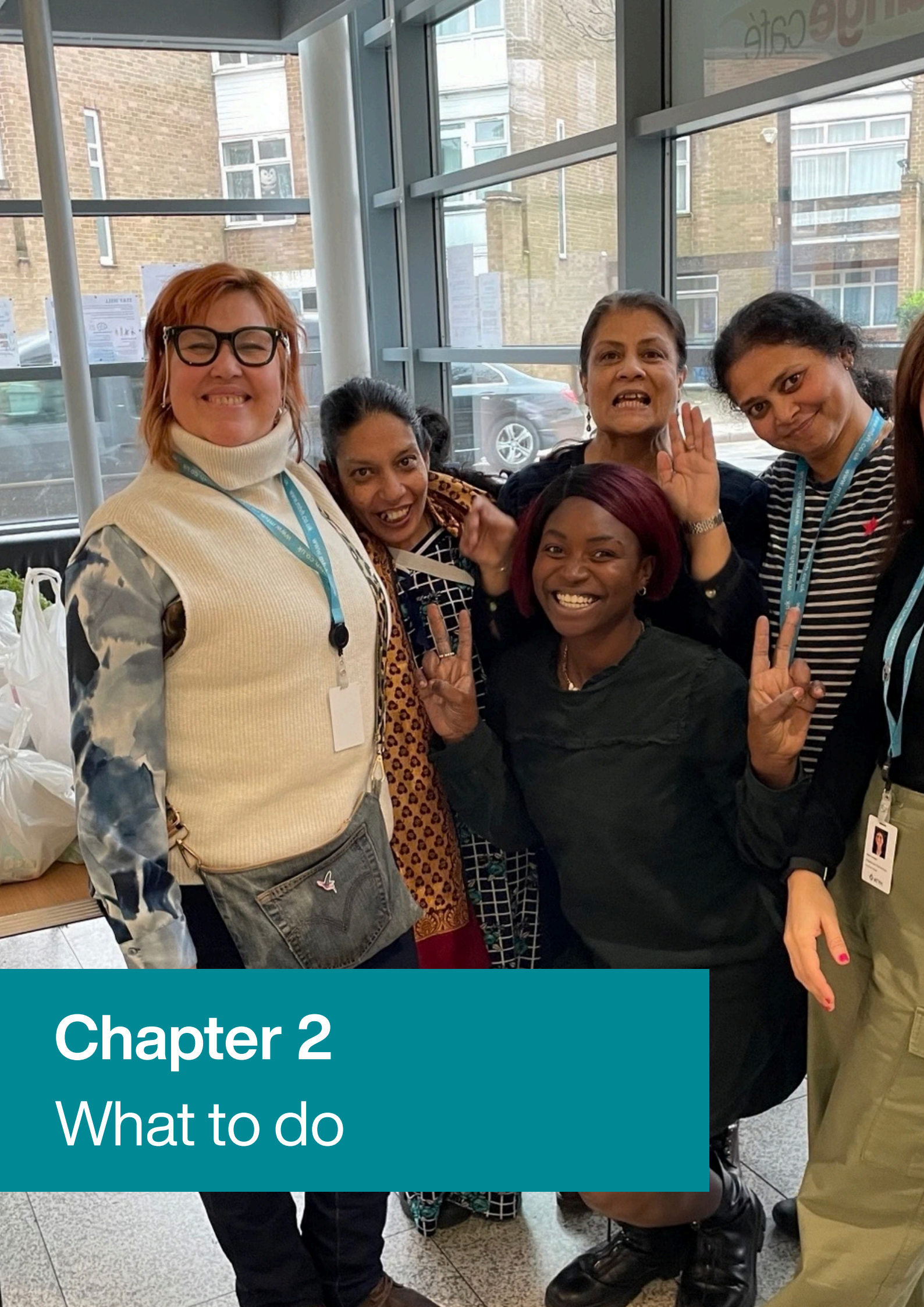
For households facing low incomes, rising living costs or insecure housing, food insecurity is not about a lack of knowledge or motivation. It is about trade-offs between food and energy bills, rent, travel, or caring responsibilities.

In these circumstances, diet-related ill health becomes more likely, not because people are making poor decisions, but because healthier options are harder to access, afford or prioritise.

Recognising food insecurity as a structural issue, rather than an individual one, is essential for designing effective responses. It shifts the focus from short-term fixes and stigma towards prevention, dignity and systems-level change.

Housing associations and partners are well placed to act on this understanding, because they can influence many of the wider determinants of health through housing, place-based working and trusted relationships with communities.

This toolkit is grounded in this perspective: addressing food insecurity as part of a **broader approach to reducing health inequalities**, improving the environments in which people live and **enabling communities to thrive.**



Chapter 2
What to do

Principles for investing and responding to food insecurity

In recent years, there has been a growing consensus across the sector that moving *'beyond the food bank',* from emergency food provision as a sticking plaster to reduce hunger, to strategic work that addresses the causes of food insecurity and seeks to reduce and prevent it.

Sustain, **The Felix Project** and several other charitable organisations working in the food poverty space have co-authored a statement on dignified access to food, setting out four pillars or areas of action.

The four pillars are:

1	2	3	4
Prioritise a cash-first or income-focused approach to food insecurity.	Provide nutrition security and address diet-related health inequalities.	Support community food assets and infrastructure while working to end the need for charitable food provision.	Implement good food governance.

Pillar one links to a strong body of evidence and growing sector consensus that cash-first or income-focused approaches are effective and dignified responses to financial crisis.

Providing people with direct financial support enables households to meet their immediate needs in ways that work best for them, while reducing stigma and supporting longer-term resilience. Research suggests that people with lived experience of food insecurity prefer to receive cash payments rather than food parcels, as it provides dignity, autonomy and choice, and there is very little evidence of 'misuse'.

Principles for investing and responding to food insecurity

This approach is reflected in the government's Crisis Resilience Fund (CRF) guidance which will be implemented from 1 April 2026 and has the potential to transform local crisis support.

The guidance advises that crisis support should be **ideally provided via direct cash transfer,** but taking a "cash-first-but-not-cash-only" approach, meaning other types of support such as vouchers, furniture or in kind support can be provided when this is more appropriate to the individual.

Where possible and appropriate, **crisis support should be provided alongside accessible and inclusive advice and support services** which help to build financial resilience, and address root causes of the issues being faced. Emphasis should be put on taking a **person-centered and needs-based approach** to providing support that is individualised.

The CRF guidance encourages local authorities to develop high-quality crisis services that can provide direct financial support, including cash transfers within 48 hours, alongside advice and wider support.

It also signals a move away from reliance on emergency food parcels as the default response, except where this is the best or preferred option for an individual. This lines up with the government's manifesto commitment to 'reduce mass dependence on emergency food parcels.'

The direction of travel across the sector lines up with this ambition to reduce dependence on food banks and emergency food provision and strengthen cash-first responses including advice and support services that build financial resilience, and support sustainable community food infrastructure that people engage in because they want to not because they have to.



Principles for investing and responding to food insecurity

For **housing associations**, this does not mean withdrawing support where food provision is currently valued or needed, and in many cases, food is a brilliant way to engage people, build trust and create welcoming spaces. However, it does mean carefully considering how existing services can evolve and take good practice evidence into account. This may include co-locating advice and income maximisation support within food banks, improving referral pathways to local crisis support and CRF-funded services, and avoiding the creation of new food banks where alternative cash-first options could be developed.

Guidance also puts a lot of emphasis on prevention and building financial resilience, i.e. good quality advice and support services which are accessible.

Throughout this toolkit, cash-first approaches are prioritised where appropriate, alongside advice and support, as part of a broader effort to address food insecurity in ways that promote dignity, choice and long-term stability. The focus is on listening to the voices of people facing food insecurity and delivering the support they really need, rather than only giving food as a quick fix.

For more information on the government's Crisis and Resilience Fund and how this impacts the charitable food sector, see this set of FAQs developed by **Sustain, Independent Food Aid Network** and **Sustainable Food Places**.



Longer term planning

Many housing associations are and will need to continue to provide crisis support through food assistance projects and other types of support. However, this toolkit aims to allow breathing space to think not just about short-term crisis responses, but also in the medium and longer term.

The London Food Insecurity Network has created a valuable space for housing associations, local authorities, charities, VCSE organisations, food partnerships and funders to 'look above the parapet' of short term crisis work that can often feel like firefighting, and come together to share learning, collaborate, and map food provision across London. Through peer-to-peer support and coordinated action, LFIN has strengthened local responses to food insecurity and enabled significant collective impact. In terms of Governance and Leadership, encouraging housing association representation on food boards and strategic partnerships, directly offers an opportunity to influence at scale.



The food ladders framework

Drawing on work by Sustain and Dr Megan Blake, the food ladders approach offers a practical framework for understanding different levels of intervention in response to food insecurity from crisis response through to long-term, systemic change, emphasising community-led and empowering initiatives. Using this approach has enabled us to categorise and organise the toolkit into a modular format, allowing users to dip in and out depending on their impact objectives, organisational capacity, and level of investment. In this way, the ladder is not just a theoretical reference point, but a structuring device that helps users navigate options, assess ambition, and identify the most appropriate entry points for action.

The food ladders approach has been implemented across the UK in multiple places, taken on by food partnerships and local authorities as a useful tool to support moving beyond reliance on emergency food provision.

What is a food ladder?

The food ladders approach is a novel, evidence-based and community-scale intervention. Using food not just as nourishment but as a tool for connection, empowerment and social innovation, complementing rather than replacing national responses. Instead of simply filling household food gaps, food ladders progressively builds resilience through three interconnected rungs:.

Rung 3 Self organised: policy & systems change

Where communities lead their own asset-based projects such as social enterprises, cooperative food growing, or regular social meals to improve access to good food, tackle loneliness, and create local opportunities. Ultimately, this helps communities to become places where people want to live, raise children and grow old.

Examples:

- Right to Food advocacy
- Income, health & climate links
- Resilient supply chains
- Inclusive procurement
- Embedding food justice in Housing Plus work
- Food growing and right to grow
- Community gardens & allotments
- Seed schemes
- Urban agriculture partnerships
- Power to local people
- Community led activities
- Cook for good
- Food co-ops
- Community led social enterprises

Rung 2 Capacity building: stabilisation and resilience

Offers non-stigmatising activities like shared cooking, training, food pantries, holiday clubs, and vouchers to expand skills, reduce stress and build networks of trust.

Examples:

- Cooking, budgeting and food skills
- Local authority and neighbourhood engagement
- Community food projects e.g. *holiday food clubs, cooking clubs, community kitchens and cafes*
- Affordable food schemes e.g. *social supermarkets, food clubs, pantries, low cost meal provision and mobile grocers*

Ideally, these should include or link to wrap-around support, benefits advice, financial support, employment help, legal advice, migrant support, domestic violence, addiction services and broader wellbeing services.

Rung 1 Catching crisis: immediate, tangible support

Provides crisis support such as emergency food aid and access to services.

Examples:

- Food banks
- Soup kitchens/free meal providers
- Winter and summer food markets
- Emergency food vouchers
- Surplus food redistribution to emergency food providers
- Food redistribution
- Fast referral pathways
- Cash first equivalent

The sector in action: good practice case studies

L&Q

The Lewington food bank

Offering dignity, kindness and reassurance to people when they need it most. L&Q established the Lewington Foodbank in 2020 in response to...

R1 → R2

Read more

MTVH

The Chalkhill food security programme

It's not just food; it's the reassurance that we're not alone. Since 2024, MTVH residents in Chalkhill have...

R1

Read more

MTVH

Mama's Kitchen, Clapham Park

Transforming lives through integrated food and wellbeing support . Integrated support through Mama's Kitchen at The Cube in Clapham Park combines...

R2

Read more

Clarion Futures

Maximising food markets

Clarion Futures has developed the winter markets model into a year-round community initiative that brings residents, partners and local...

R1 → R2

Read more

Clarion Futures

A 'village market' model

The village markets are about far more than food - they strengthen community. Village markets provide free surplus fresh and packaged food still...

R1

Read more

The Felix Project

Winter market collaboration model

Moving from one-offs to longer-term integration. Across the past three winter periods, a winter food markets programme has been designed...

R1 → R2

Read more

Notting Hill Genesis and Nourished Routes

Community workshops

At Factory Quarter Community Hub, NHG supported Nourished Routes CIC to deliver the Cook for Good...

R2 Read more

Cook for Good CIC and Peabody

The Cook for Good programme

Cook for Good, an award-winning Community Interest Company (CIC), operates a place-based social enterprise model on the...

R2 → R3 Read more

St. Giles Trust and Alchemic Kitchen

Mobile food outreach

Mobile food outreach vans are an emerging model for improving access to affordable, healthy food in communities with limited retail...

R2 Read more

Hyde Housing

The Islington food pantry

A community food pantry has been established in Islington to provide sustained support to residents experiencing cost-of-living pressures..

R2 Read more

Peabody and Sustain

Strategic social investment in community food systems

Peabody has adopted a strategic, place-based approach to tackling food insecurity across London and the...

R2 → R3 Read more

The London Food Insecurity Network

Practice sharing and peer support

This network coordinates and convenes housing associations, local authorities and charities for practice sharing, peer-to-peer support...

R3 Read more

Cook for Good

Cook for Change

Cook for Change is a fully funded, founder-led programme designed to drive wider social change through food and cooking. Developed in...

R3 Read more

Reflecting on the food ladders approach

In conclusion, the food ladders approach offers a coherent framework for examining and organising food-related projects and spaces, aligning with a wider shift away from purely crisis-driven responses.

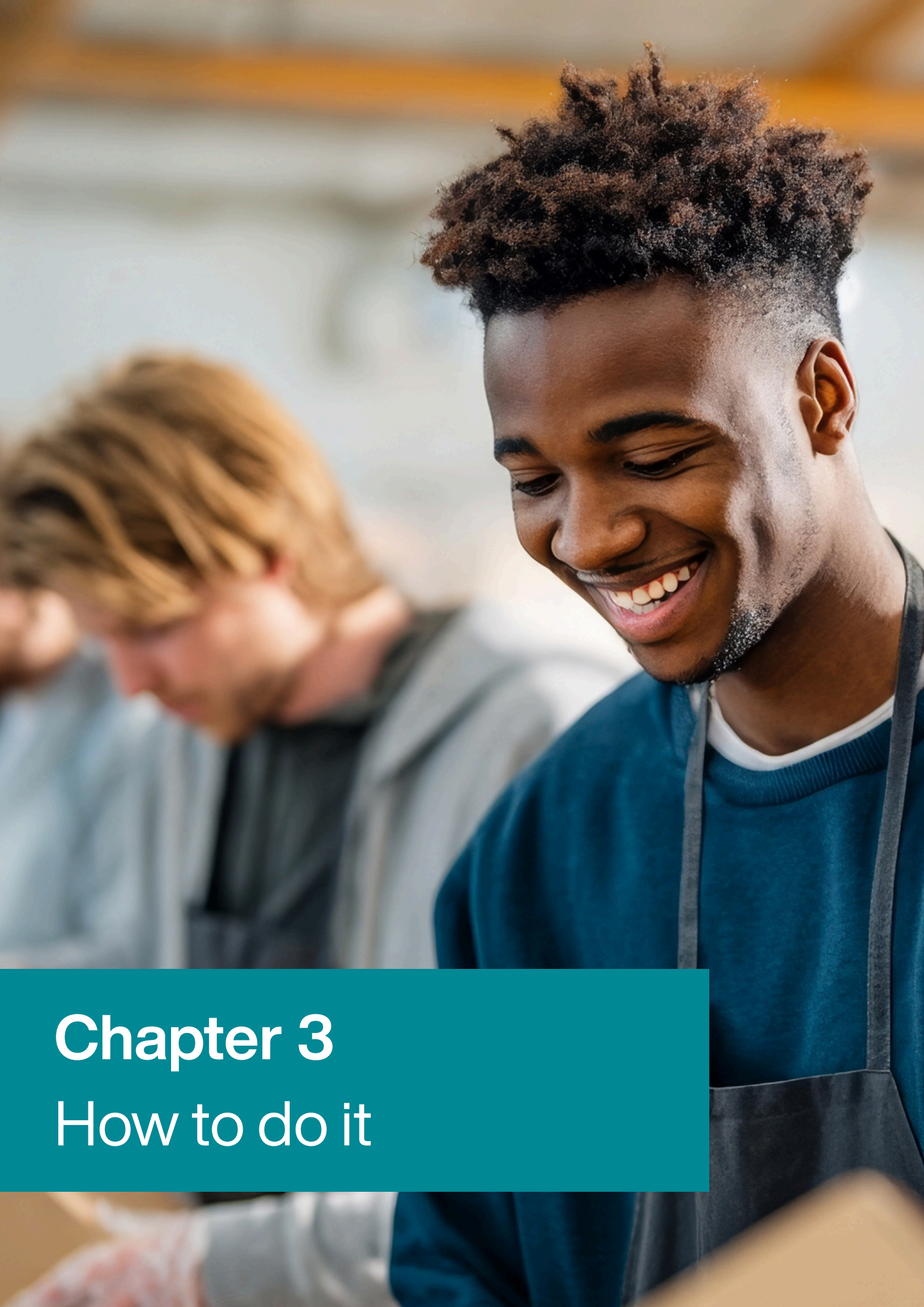
While acute need, scarcity and crisis continue to exist, food ladders provides much-needed breathing space by enabling longer-term, preventative and resilience-focused interventions.

It offers a clear and practical starting point for housing associations and communities to build progressively *“up the ladder”,* strengthening local capacity and reducing vulnerability over time.

Importantly, the approach aligns closely with Sustain’s four pillars, reinforcing their relevance and providing a shared structure and focus for this work.

It also helps when mapping existing food provision in an area to look at building up other types of community food infrastructure that does not already exist, and consider how projects can be more led by communities themselves.





Chapter 3
How to do it

Starting points

This section supports translating theories and approaches into action in your contexts and organisations.

It supports those who want to start investing in food insecurity initiatives and/or review current activity and investments.

Shaped by learning from the London Food Insecurity Network, it is a chapter to share useful ‘do’s and don’ts’, help you consider what’s needed in communities and connect with existing actions.



1 Understanding your organisation's current activity

Whether this is directly led by your team or other teams in the organisation, clarifying the current position will support your next steps.

For the social housing sector, this may involve checking what the housing tenancy sustainment officers currently do,

e.g.: *do they issue emergency food vouchers or make referrals into food banks? Do any of the community leads sit on food partnership boards in local areas that your organisation has homes in?*

As you capture this information, consider:

- What activity do you know about? For example, does your organisation currently fund food banks, markets, and vouchers?
- Where does this activity sit in the Food Ladder? Is the activity focused on crisis responses? Does it leverage any local or national systems to change efforts?
- Which team or colleague is involved?
- How much investment do they have for the food initiative?
- Are there any dedicated staff members for this work?
- Are there any partnerships in place that address food insecurity?
- Is there any impact data or learning about the current activity?



2 Understanding the needs and wants of the community

This will help provide an understanding of how your efforts can be best directed.

Consider what data and insights you have within your organisation. What data do you have on rent arrears and customer satisfaction scores? Could you join a resident meeting or panel to discuss food insecurity and community needs with them? This could include reviewing rent arrears data and resident engagement insights.

There is useful data collected by **Trussell Trust** on the use of food banks and this can help highlight which geographies may benefit from further support. Public Health teams also publish really useful insights about local health outcomes and risks, and this too can help guide and inform investment choices.





3 What assets are available?

Housing organisations are often custodians of vital community assets, including community centres, outdoor spaces, land as well as commercial spaces. Consider engaging with your Assets team to identify what is available and how these could be utilised to support the impacts you are looking to create.

4 What's out there - mapping and gapping

Before setting up a new food project, it is important to understand what provision already exists locally, helping avoid duplication, identify other services you can work with and highlight gaps in support.

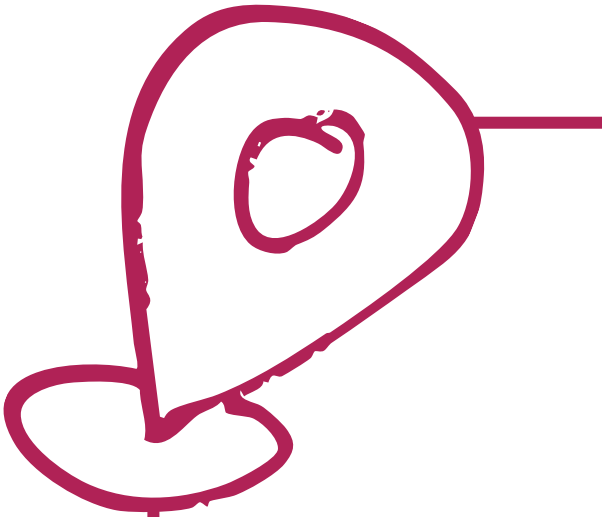
In some areas, this may mean strengthening or connecting into existing food provision rather than creating something new, or focusing instead on services that are missing, such as community kitchens, advice and support services, or income maximisation support.

Tools such as the Sustainable Food Places food system mapping guide can support this process. It supports local partnerships to map their entire food system, identifying key organisations, activities, assets, gaps and relationships across areas such as food production, distribution, access, affordability, health and sustainability.

Many local Food Partnerships across the UK have already mapped local food systems. We recommend contacting your local authority to find out which organisation coordinates your local partnership and asking them to share current maps and directories. Further maps highlighting useful food insecurity initiatives include:

- BigBarn maps farm shops, farmers markets
- Better Food Traders has a digital map covering 400 locations
- Sustain provides a directory of food co-ops and community kitchens
- Independent Food Aid Network, maps local food aid across the UK

If you work in London, you can also review the LFIN's map, that shares who is active across London and connected to social housing, where they are working, and the focus of their activity.



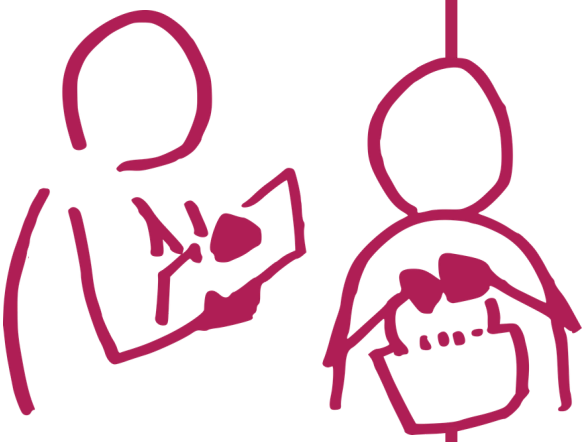
5 Collaborating with communities

Alongside service mapping, co-development is key. Engaging with residents through conversations, focus groups or surveys helps ensure that any response reflects what people want and need.

Lived experience and resident voice should play a central role in shaping food-related support, supporting approaches that are relevant, valued and sustainable. This should include ongoing feedback and iterative development of a project, to ensure services continue to meet needs.

Consider how you can join existing resident forums to engage with community members as well as those charities and community organisations who have trusted relationships in the community to inform your early thinking as well as forge relationships to support future design and development of investments.

As you shape your intervention, we recommend continuing conversations with residents and colleagues to co-design and develop the plans.



6 What can you do?

This is to get you thinking about where you want to invest and why. Using the Ladder framework (see Chapter 2), you can consider what kind of activity and infrastructure you want to invest in and activate.

Rung 3: invest in system change (self organised)

- Growing schemes
- Join local food partnerships
- Influence and support local authority policy developments
- Embed food in wider health strategies
- Support national campaigns to address the structural barriers causing food insecurity

Rung 2: invest in resilience (capacity building)

- Fund food partnerships
- Community markets
- Cooking skills & food budgeting

Rung 1: strengthen crisis infrastructure (crisis)

- Expand voucher schemes
- Improve referral pathways

7 Now, next year and the future

You may not be able to take all the ideas forward, so before investing or starting any new activity, it can be helpful to agree on what can be done now and how this can build over time.

It may be that next year; you want to build on the early work and expand into further activity and strategic engagements. Doing this can help you identify what will be important to track and measure in the short term to help build a case for future investments in the longer-term interventions and/or help you get the insights you need to test the ideas you have for future work in this space.



8 Measuring your impact

Identify the most important changes you want to see in the short and medium term and use these to identify a handful of key measures that will help you know if and when these outcomes take place.

The UK Social Value Bank is a useful tool to help understand the real impact interventions have through capturing how an indidivual views a particular area of their life or community and how they view it after the intervention or project has started.

We also recommend capturing qualitative data to help bring community members and partners' stories to life and chart their experiences of the efforts you invest and work in.

9 Supporting systemic change

Think about structural issues that you can act on and in your planning consider why residents are experiencing food insecurity and how you can help address this with holistic support.

Alongside the projects and activity you invest in and support, there are a number of actions that can further support longer term changes and this includes:

- Joining your local Food Partnership to collaborate and shape the local food systems
- Encourage your local authority to join the Good Food Local movement
- Sign up to receive news and updates from organisations championing greater food security in the UK, including Feeding Britain and Sustain



Dos and don’ts checklist

These dos and don’ts draw on the collective wisdom of the London Food Insecurity Network.

They form a co-produced implementation guide that highlights good practice and common challenges in developing sustainable food networks, with a particular focus on promoting dignity, responsible land stewardship, effective communications strategies and collaborative delivery.



Dos

1 Put dignity first

- **Do** consider providing cash or vouchers so people can buy their own food.
- **Be** inclusive (access, digital inclusion, language, disability, LGBTQ+).
- **Do** communicate what is on offer, when and how people can engage.
- **Be** fair and consistent.
- **Do** avoid intrusive questioning or proof of need.
- **Do** design services to reduce stigma and trauma. Emergency food provision is inherently linked to hunger trauma, stigma and lack of dignity. Consider the most appropriate model in this context and how to mitigate trauma.
- **Do** use welcoming language and clear communication.
- **Do** enable choice where possible (e.g. shop-style shelves, swaps).

2 Collaborate early

- **Do** partner with local food projects, councils, advice services, housing providers, schools, health, and community groups, local food and poverty networks, faith and community groups, housing associations, GPs.
- **Do** where possible co-locate services or ensure clear signposting pathways and 'warm referral' routes.
- **Do** map existing provision and avoid duplication.

3 Understand local need

- **Do** engage residents before designing services.
- **Do** monitor and evaluate projects without overburdening people.
- **Do** consider cultural and dietary needs, household types, age groups.

4 Get food safety right

- **Do** register as a food business with the local authority.
- **Do** follow hygiene and allergen guidance.
- **Do** train volunteers in food safety.
- **Do** ensure proper storage systems (ambient, chilled, frozen).

5 Plan for sustainability

- **Do** diversify food supply: surplus redistribution, retail and catering partnerships; community and corporate donations; bulk or cooperative buying; and where possible sourcing from local businesses and growers.
- **Do** plan funding for core costs (rent, utilities, fridges, insurance).
- **Do** start small and then scale up.
- **Do** explore sustainable income models diversifying income streams and businesses planning when possible.

6 Safeguard volunteers and users

- **Do** have safeguarding policies.
- **Do** provide clear volunteer roles and rotas.
- **Do** support, train and protect volunteer wellbeing.
- **Do** empower and support service users to get involved where appropriate.

7 Connect to wider support

- **Do** use food projects as a gateway to advice and services.
- **Do** work with specialist partners rather than doing everything yourself.

Don’ts

1 Don’t create shame or stigma

- **Don’t** make people queue publicly.
- **Don’t** collect unnecessary data.
- **Don’t** treat people as passive recipients, use feedback to develop the project.
- **Don’t** remove choice, dignity or autonomy.
- **Don’t** treat people differently or single people out.
- **Don’t** overcomplicate rules.

2 Don’t rely on emergency models long-term

- **Food** banks are not a sustainable solution or a fix for root causes. Think about structural issues that you can act on, why residents are experiencing food insecurity and how you can help address this with holistic support.
- **Don’t** rely solely on volunteers, provide staff support to ensure training and to provide support, protect against burnout.
- **Don’t** ignore income maximisation and wider support pathways. Link into local support provision and train staff and volunteers to signpost to support available.
- **Don’t** work in isolation, you can’t do it all partner with trusted and specialist services.
- **Don’t** signpost lots of people to other services without forming a relationship with them first and understanding their capacity.

3 Don’t underestimate logistics

- **Don’t** forget to think about storage, food safety and delivery logistics of food
- **Don’t** run without clear opening hours and stock controls.
- **Don’t** overlook insurance, safeguarding, health & safety, or risk assessments.

4 Don’t duplicate existing provision

- **Don’t** set up a new food project without checking nearby provision.
- **Don’t** compete for the same donations or volunteers unnecessarily.

5 Don’t overlook inclusion

- **Don’t** assume people can travel easily, speak English fluently, read and write or use digital systems.
- **Don’t** assume people can navigate services alone or have access to devices/internet.
- **Don’t** assume people feel safe/comfortable accessing support.
- **Don’t** exclude those who don’t “fit” a neat category.

Closing reflection

Food is essential not just for survival, but for people to thrive and live healthy, fulfilling lives. It is deeply connected to culture, family, faith, work, celebration, and a sense of belonging. Yet food insecurity remains an issue in the UK. Rising costs of essentials mean many people are forced to cut back on food. As food prices rise faster than inflation while incomes remain fixed, people are losing quality, choice and dignity, harming both their physical and mental health. This is unacceptable, but change is possible.

Food insecurity is closely linked to broader poverty. It affects people receiving social security benefits as well as a growing number of working people whose incomes don't cover living costs. Marginalised groups, face even greater risks. While emergency food provision has grown, communities are also developing more sustainable support through food projects and wraparound services.

National policy change is key to addressing the structural causes of poverty and unequal access to food. The current Labour Government has acknowledged that mass dependence on emergency food parcels is "a moral scar on our society" and more must be done to ensure people engage with community food initiatives by choice, not necessity. Local action is critical.



Place-based partnerships between grassroots groups, public services and community leaders can help tackle the root causes of food poverty while responding to local needs. Housing associations, with their community insight, assets and commitment to social value, are key partners. This toolkit supports them to work strategically with residents and partners to address food insecurity and poverty.

Beyond crisis support, food initiatives can strengthen communities connecting people to services, building confidence, reducing isolation, and improving nutrition and food skills and create joyful spaces for communities to come together. There is already a wealth of good practice to learn from. By building on this, listening to residents and working with partners, housing associations can help people not just cope, but thrive. We encourage you to lead, collaborate, and act now to make change.

Isabel Rice, Food Poverty Campaign Coordinator, Sustain

Useful links

- Alliance for Dignified Food Support
- Alliance for Dignified Food Support: Resources and research
- Connecting Community Food Enterprises toolkit
- Food poverty & digital power: The social realities of digitising food assistance in England (Susanne Jaspars, Yasmin Houamed, Iris Lim)
- Good Food Local
- Independent Food Aid Network: Cash first
- Institute of Health Equity: Evidence to action reports
- Neighbourly: City Harvest London
- Sustain: Case studies
- Sustain: Models of food projects
- Sustain: Key resources
- Sustainable Food Places
- Sustainable Food Places member map
- Trussell and Policy in Practice report on Crisis Resilience Fund
- University of Bath and BaNES Council: Food access toolkit

Useful apps

- Too Good To Go
- Olio
- Karma
- Kitche
- FareShare Go

The London Food Insecurity Network (LFIN)

Peabody, **HACT** and **The Felix Project** partnered to establish the **London Food Insecurity Network** (**LFIN**) in 2023, a cross-sector collaboration dedicated to reducing food insecurity among social housing residents across the capital. We have been united in our goal that no social housing resident should go to bed hungry.

LFIN was created to convene as many London-based housing associations, voluntary organisations, and community groups as possible, building a shared platform for action. LFIN aims to move beyond isolated initiatives by developing a coordinated, collective strategy that combines frontline insight, data, resources and practical delivery models.

Through collaboration, shared learning and joint planning, LFIN seeks to design and implement impactful interventions such as crisis support and longer-term, preventative approaches. This ensures that social housing residents across London have improved, dignified and sustainable access to food.

Thank you

None of the work considered in this toolkit would be possible without the dedication of those teams working with communities to provide support, collaborate in place and champion longer term change for a more equitable food system.

A huge thank you to all those members of the London Food Insecurity Network for their engagement and commitment to partnership working alongside the day-to-day transformations they foster

Finally, a huge thank you to the working group who co-produced and developed the detail of this toolkit. With out your expertise, time, and energy this would not have been possible.

Isabel from **Sustain**, *Denise* from **Clarion**, *Jo*, *Patricia* and *Sam* from **L&Q,** *Saba* from **MTVH,** *Sahil*, *Andrea* and *Rob* from **Peabody,** *Grace* from **Notting Hill Genesis** and *Julie* from **Hyde Housing**.

A2Dominion
BME London
City Harvest
Clarion Housing Group
Commonside Community Development Trust
East End Homes
Fareshare
Feeding Britain
Gateway Housing
Greater London Authority
Hackney Council
Hexagon Housing Association
Home Group
Hyde Housing
Islamic Relief
L&Q
Lewisham Homes
Lewisham Local
Look Ahead Care and Support
Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing
Notting Hill Genesis
Nourish Hub
Octavia One Housing/Riverside
Orbit Group PA Housing
Poplar HARCA
Riverside Community Association Ltd
Royal Borough of Greenwich
Southern Housing
Southwark Food Action Alliance
St Giles' Trust
St Jude's Centre
City Harvest
The Guinness Partnership
Sustain
Waltham Forest Community Food Partnership
Waltham Forest Council
Wandle Housing

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https://hact.org.uk/collaboration/london-food-insecurity/

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