



# Supporting Frontline Community-Based Organisations in the Fight Against Hunger in the East Midlands

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## Abbreviations

CFM Community Food Member (a membership designation of FareShare Midlands)

FSM FareShare Midlands (UK's largest surplus charitable food redistribution regional hub)

FIN Food Insecurity Network (a public health steering group that was established during the pandemic to promote county-wide responses for food support and embed social eating and local growing into strategic public health agendas)

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## Foreword by FareShare Midlands

FareShare Midlands is the region's largest non-profit food redistribution charity, addressing two of the most urgent issues that face the UK today, food poverty and food waste.

We source good quality food that is surplus to requirements from 360 food industry partners. We rely on an army of volunteers to help redistribute this food to over 550 frontline charities and community groups. In 2021/22, we supplied 7,185 tonnes of food to these organisations who provided meals or food parcels to vulnerable people every week.

Our long-term vision is for food poverty not to exist. While it does, we want to expand our service to reach even further across the Midlands to help many more community groups offer a food service to their beneficiaries. We do this by following our mission, purpose and vision:

**Our mission** – Maximising the social value of surplus food.

**Our purpose** – Fighting hunger, tackling waste, creating opportunities.

**Our vision** – A Midlands region where no one goes hungry when there is food being wasted, no child goes to school on an empty stomach, and where vulnerable people are supported to join or re-join the workforce.

Over the past 3 years, a multitude of national and global factors has forced millions more people into food poverty. We have seen unprecedented levels of economic hardship, along with social isolation and broader dietary related health. Simultaneously, there has been less 'typical' surplus food available at a time when demand has never been greater. Surplus food supplies have shifted towards more 'hard to use' surplus, including short-dated stock, catering-sized products, work-in-progress manufactured foods and seasonal produce. To address these changes, FareShare Midlands have invested to diversify its services to not only maintain but also expand access to valuable food and open up new avenues for surplus redistribution.

Our academic partnership with Coventry University and collaboration with Marsha Smith was established to conduct high-level research to guide future strategic and funding opportunities; support community-based social networks, charities and community groups re-emerge from pandemic emergency services and deliver more sustainable food provision initiatives.

Research set out to guide the development of certain value propositions, products or services that aimed to assist community groups, charities and other potential users to increase and diversify community food services. We set the aim to create a clear understanding of existing, new and emergent markets, their needs and concerns, and where a designed product, service or support package will sit within those markets.

The findings and recommendations have laid the foundations for us to develop and pilot a central meal production service. This model supports the better use of 'hard to use' surplus, adding value to our services and encourages more social eating initiatives emerge, to a more sustainable food provision model.

The insights discussed within this report has not only supported the strategic direction of FareShare Midlands but given us a foundation on which to be part of and build-on a more resilient, sustainable and diverse food system. Thank you to Coventry University and all academics who participated in this research.

# Executive summary

## i. Introduction

The community food sector plays a critical role for people facing adversity, not just through emergency food services, but by providing the lifeline of social contact and connection. The relationship between this sector and the surplus food distribution organisation FareShare was, and continues to be, an important factor facilitating this sector's resilience and long-term sustainability. This study examines for the first time, how and why the model of 'social eating' which has emerged in the East Midlands has been mobilised by community food services, and how the surplus food service that FareShare Midlands offers intersects with this model so effectively. This report shines a light on the incredible efforts of stakeholders to ensure the citizens of the East Midlands region have access to safe, effective, and affordable food, and to the vital social connection that also sustains people. This report, which comprises two sequential studies undertaken by researchers at the Centre for Business in Society at Coventry University, in partnership with FareShare Midlands covers both the course of the pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis. It focuses upon two key questions:

- Firstly, what factors enabled community food services to meet the greatly expanded demand during the pandemic?
- Secondly, what are the factors that enabled community food organisations to deliver key activities, such as 'social eating' events, and how was this facilitated by their networks?

## ii. Summary of the first study

Part 1 of the report focuses on the impact of the pandemic in 2020. Lockdown conditions caused a dramatic rise in the number of households struggling to feed themselves which in turn reshaped the community food sector to meet this heightened need. Significant levels of anxiety amongst the public and the disruption to food supply chains created a landscape of panic. In response, the community food sector mobilised to meet the unprecedented number of requests for food. In Nottingham alone, from March to June 2020 60,000 meals and 16,000 food parcels were made using food from FareShare Midlands and distributed throughout the city. FareShare Midlands significantly expanded its operations to meet the rising demand from community food groups and the increased donations from retail, manufacturing, and catering businesses.

The first study draws out the lived experience of community food groups, FareShare Midlands staff and local authority representatives to detail their actions during the pandemic. This included Nottingham City Council, who worked with an array of community groups to respond to requests for food help.

## iii. The factors that enabled the delivery of community food services during the COVID-19 pandemic

Overall, an extensive city-wide community food sector rapidly expanded its capacity utilising pre-existing materials, resources, skills and forms of know-how to protect vulnerable residents.

- Central funding support, such as that provided by DEFRA, alongside the local authority's decision to target funds to pre-existing groups over emergent ones.
- The local authority set up a food triage system which cascaded requests to local areas and to appropriate community food organisations.
- Local community food groups were already familiar with healthy and safety, as well as food hygiene protocols. Their existing confidence in transforming surplus food into meals ensured an efficient and effective use of FareShare donations as well as the provision of culturally and dietarily appropriate meals.
- Real-time communication between community groups and FareShare staff through platforms such as WhatsApp facilitated the provision of extremely flexible, agile and responsive types of service delivery.
- The capacity and willingness of a variety of stakeholders to work out of hours and at very short notice.
- Pre-existing infrastructure such as storage capacity, fridges and freezers, kitchens, cooks and teams of volunteers.
- The partnerships that FareShare entered into with food industry stakeholders enabled food stocks to be built up and food waste to be avoided.

## iv. The factors that constrained the delivery of community food services during the COVID-19 pandemic

### For community food organisations:

- The precarity of volunteer numbers and the fears of exposing volunteers to COVID-19
- The challenges in adopting new practices to considerably upscale food preparation and food delivery, whilst remaining compliant with rapidly changing guidelines.
- Compliance with rapidly changing COVID-19 measures.
- The nature of the work in terms of responding at short notice to requests for help and the long hours required, particularly for staff.

#### **For FareShare Midlands:**

- The precarity of volunteers, in particular volunteer drivers.
- Social distancing measures at their warehouse facilities led to additional work and had added time implications.
- The introduction of new, often rapidly changing, procedures to comply with COVID-19 guidelines.
- Managing the circulation of community food organisations that closed down versus new organisations that had started up.

#### **v. Summary of the second study**

Part 2 of the report focuses on the post-lockdown landscape, where community food organisations have had no let-up in demand. An increasing number of households are facing adversity as a result of the cost-of-living crisis which continues to exacerbate food insecurity. Households in Nottinghamshire have some of the lowest levels of disposable income in the UK with 1 in 20 city residents seeking debt advice<sup>1</sup>. In response, Nottinghamshire County Council committed £800k of central government funding to prioritise social eating and local food growing in 2022 and this part of the report discusses the activities around setting up a new social eating network in Nottinghamshire County, and on the surplus meal production service that FareShare Midlands launched in 2022.

#### **vi. The factors that enabled the community food sector to set up key activities, such as ‘social eating’ events**

- Social eating events strengthen the offering of community organisations by adding provision and value to their existing services, and eating together was greatly valued as a means of socialising together.
- Making the meal-based aspect of the social eating experience less onerous, more convenient, easier to plan and manage would support groups to develop social eating services in the County.
- Promotion of the event should focus on the social aspect rather than being advertised as a cheap meal or one that is made from surplus food.
- Community food groups benefit from mentoring, from FareShare Midlands and by experienced community mentors, to ensure social eating initiatives are successful and have the most impact.
- FareShare Midlands hold a great deal of complex information about food safety and logistics, and this is an asset that should be used to shape regional food security agendas.

#### **vii. The factors that constrained the community food sector from delivering key activities, such as ‘social eating’ events**

- Many groups are interested in delivering ‘social eating’ activities, but lack the confidence, information and particularly, the peer-to-peer mentoring, which would enable them to transition into meal service activities.
- Most community food organisations share their spaces and therefore experiences issues with food storage capacity, or poorly equipped or undersized kitchens
- Surplus food services remain subject to turbulence and effective community food networks need support to tap into other food resources, perhaps through Local Authority-facilitated bulk purchasing arrangements.

#### **viii. Recommendations to improve the service of the community food sector**

- Investment into social eating and community food projects, and the infrastructural estate, is required to meet the immediate and longer-term need for food and social contact in a post-lockdown society.
- Resources such as the warehouses, chillers and delivery vans used to collect and redistribute food should not be viewed as expressions of charity but as vital frontline infrastructure which requires ongoing funding by partners such as Local Authorities and funding bodies.
- Exploring opportunities to make the work of community food groups less onerous, less time consuming, less costly should be prioritised. For example, by supporting surplus meal provision services with longer term and strategic funding. Making the set-up of new social eating and community food ventures less risky should also be explored. For example, by providing funding for pop-up type events and meal production service trials.

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Cities report on household debt. <https://www.centreforcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Household-debt-and-problem-debt-in-British-cities-1.pdf>

# PART 1

## The fourth emergency service? Understanding the role and reach of frontline food organisations

### 1.1 Introduction

The community food sector represents an invisibilised ‘social’ infrastructure that delivers much more than food. Throughout the lockdowns and into the current cost-of-living crisis the distinctive but overlapping activities of organisations within this sector have become a critical ‘fourth’ emergency service. These activities have gone far beyond the provision of meals to those experiencing food poverty, they have contributed and enabled a wide range of social benefits, such as community cohesion, the prevention of loneliness and isolation and a whole host of other benefits in times of adversity.

This report details the findings and policy recommendations of the two stages of research undertaken by the Centre for Business in Society (CBiS) at Coventry University, in partnership with surplus food redistribution charity FareShare Midlands and a range of community food sector stakeholders. The research helps to shine a light on the ongoing work of the community food sector and is the first of its kind to focus specifically on how ‘social eating’ or community food groups interacted with local authorities and charitable food providers.

Firstly, the research sought to investigate the factors that enabled community food services to meet the greatly expanded demand during the pandemic. We give considerable insight into the experiences of individuals behind the community food organisations and the supportive role of FareShare Midlands. Secondly, the research investigated the overall factors that need to be considered around extending social eating activities and the development of a Nottinghamshire social eating network. This second stage resulted in some specific and tailored guidance for groups that can help them manage the practical aspects of social eating event delivery. This research received two stages of funding under the Coventry University ‘QR’ programme of work that sought to generate research that has a meaningful impact and influential policy recommendations.

This report provides details of each research phase, the methodology employed, the novel insights uncovered and gives both practitioner and policy recommendations to strengthen



Figure 1. A pop-up social eating event at Rhubarb Farm, Nottinghamshire.

the vital service innovations within this sector. Quotes from participants are incorporated throughout the research to embed the voices of those working in the community food space throughout the report. This research phase began during the 2020 pandemic period and has continued into the current ‘cost of living crisis’, showing the timeliness and significance of research which captures and highlights the incredible efforts of stakeholders to ensure citizens of the East Midlands region had, and continue to have, access to safe, effective and affordable food services

The report is organised in the following manner. **Part 1** considers the first stage of the research that focused on the impact of the pandemic. This opens with a reminder of the lockdown context that saw a dramatic increase in the demand for emergency food provision which reshaped the community food sector. Following this we explain the methods employed and report the factors that enabled the delivery of community food services during the pandemic period. Recommendations and research outcomes are then reported.

In **part 2** of the report, we present the findings of our work investigating the factors enabling and constraining the development of a social eating network. Insights into the wider work of FareShare Midlands in developing a meal production service is also presented. **Part 2** details different aspects of the pop-up events curated, online network activities and also gives recommendations and research outcomes.

In **part 3** of the report, we draw the report to a close by giving concluding remarks as a discursive overview of the key learning points from the two research activities. The report also presents a series of policy recommendations that must be brought forward to support the continuation of both community food organisations and FareShare Midlands.

### 1.2 Research context

Toilet paper aside, one of the most immediate and important needs that emerged across the UK during the early stages of the lockdown was the demand for food. Panic buying and temporary shortages created a huge level of anxiety amongst the public about food supplies. Whilst supermarkets scrambled to increase the capacity of their online delivery slots, behind the scenes the community food sector was also mobilising to meet the unprecedented rise in requests for help, as one participant stated:

*“I would say, you know, we’d probably help maybe 10 or 11 families before then, but that escalated. I’ll say from March when COVID-19 struck up until October, I think there were over 121 local families in the local area that we helped out”.*

(Ruth, Centre Manager at a community centre and food bank in Nottingham).

In Nottingham City, where our research was based, during the first three months of lockdown, one food network alone delivered over 60,000 meals and 16,000 food parcels. Much of this food was provided by FareShare Midlands, a regional surplus food redistribution charity who, according to their own internal reporting, saw a 68% increase in the volumes of food they dispatched during this same period. Despite these considerable efforts to ensure residents across the city had access to healthy, nutritious and safe food services, little is known about how this sector worked to meet the record levels of need.

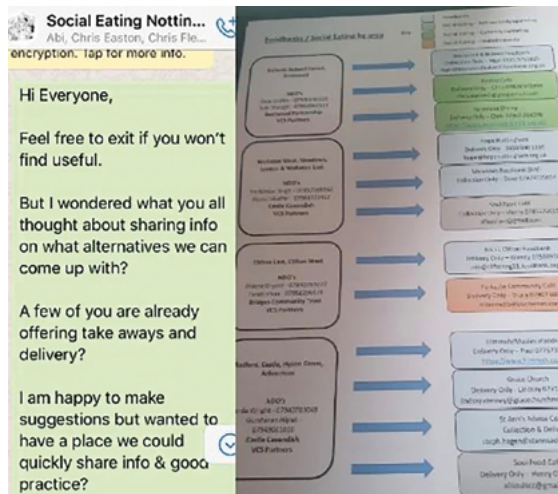


Figure 2. Images of mutual aid group details, a diagram of the food triage system in Nottingham, and the front cover of the Nottingham Arrow detailing COVID-19 support services.

These public meal services usually address food insecurity, support health and well-being through social and public meal services. However, they had to rapidly, and safely, transform the way they delivered food during the pandemic whilst simultaneously grappling with a loss of paying customers.



Figure 3. Video still and comment from interview transcription with Bestop Kitchen, Nottingham.

FareShare Midlands, our research partner, has hubs across the Midlands and during the early stages of lockdown (March to June 2020) they extended their depot footprint into Nottingham to cope with the surge in both demand for food and the volumes of donations coming in from the manufacturing and catering sectors. With exclusive access, our research reveals the challenges and opportunities that arose in this time, capturing a unique snapshot of life at the emergency food service frontline. During the early stages of the lockdown, it became increasingly apparent that record numbers of people who were not on any of the Council's registers as potentially requiring support were emerging. Recent research suggests that in Nottingham City 2 out of every 10 residents either didn't have enough, were struggling to get, or were worried about getting food during the pandemic:<sup>2</sup>

*"I'll be honest, there was a whole load of people that simply weren't on our radar and that we didn't even know were out there needing support."* (John, local authority contact, Nottingham).

### 1.2.1 Research approach

This research followed a primarily qualitative approach to draw out the lived experience of participants, who were recruited initially from the 'Nottingham Social Eating Network' who also signposted us to other groups such as the SaSh Project. During the research period from March until October 2020, 17 in-depth interviews as well as 8 contributions to film and photography exercises were undertaken with community food groups, as well as interviews with FareShare Midlands staff, a corporate partner and a representative from the Local Authority. Due to the lockdown restrictions participants were interviewed online but several site visits were made to 3 locations outdoors where video footage of groups delivering services such as meals, were recorded. In total 18 participants were engaged with consisting of the following groups: Community food group volunteers and staff (13), FareShare staff (3), individuals from corporate partners (2) individuals representing the local authority.

(1). Table 1 gives further details of the participants of the first stage of the research.

<sup>2</sup> UK food Insecurity of adults Jan 2021, Sheffield University. <https://shefuni.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/interactivelegend/index.html?appid=8be0cd9e18904c258afd3c959d6fc4d7>



Organisation Name	Participant Role	Organisation Type
Nottingham City Council	Head of Catering, tasked with leading on community food service provision in Nottingham city during the pandemic	Local Authority
FareShare Midlands	Senior Management Team, Warehouse Manager	Surplus Redistribution Charity
People's Pantry/Himmah Food Bank	Food bank volunteer	Food Bank and Food Pantry Service
Parkgate Community Café	Community Centre Manager	Community Centre
Bulwell Forest Gardens	Fundraiser and Project Manager	Community Gardens
Sycamore Dining	Project Director	Surplus Meal Delivery Service Provider
Bestop Kitchen	Community Leader	Social Eating Project
SFiCE	Community Project Worker	Social Eating, Food Parcel, Meal-Outreach and Cooking Video Projects
Noor Café	Project Leader	Social Eating Project
Salaam/Schalom	Project Leader	Food Parcel, Hot Meal Provision Services
Soul Food Café		Social Eating Project and Food Parcel Provider
Square Meal		Social Eating Project
The Vine	Community Centre Manager	Community Centre and Food Bank
Secret Kitchen	Project Director	Social Eating Project
Greenway Centre	Community Centre Manager	Community Centre and Food Bank

Table 1. Participant information

### 1.3 Research partners and their response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Our research partners responded to the initial UK lockdown in the following ways:

Nottingham City Council rapidly contacted an array of community food groups, established a list of authenticated referral channels, and set up a centralised helpline which triaged food requests to local area managers and then on to the specific groups who could deliver food on a ward-by-ward basis to individuals in need. This was in addition to their statutory obligations to deliver food parcels to government-sanctioned vulnerable residents.

In Nottingham community food groups were operating across most of the wards of the city. Mainly, these are 'social eating' or public meal services, which in pre-COVID-19 times provided affordable meals using foods from FareShare, but this also includes food banks. These groups had to rapidly and safely transform their face-to-face meals into delivery services during the pandemic.

FareShare Midlands extended their depot footprint into Nottingham to cope with the surge in demand for food. Alongside their usual surplus food supplies, they receive large volumes of catering-sized stock, large amounts of short-dated foods and also worked to house and distribute central government-funded ambient or long-life stock.

In the following section of the report, we look more specifically at what enabled and constrained these stakeholders to deliver food services during this time.



Figure 4. 'Photovoice' images from community food groups packing food parcels, Nottingham.

#### 1.4 What factors enabled the delivery of community food services?

The City Council kept statutory food parcel provision ‘in house’ via the network of community food groups and food banks. They avoided the furore around poor quality, contracted-out food parcels by working with trusted partners and by using in-house staff from the catering divisions to procure and process statutory food parcel requests in tandem with the social eating and food bank networks. The City Council also set up a centralised helpline which triaged requests to local area managers and then on to the specific groups who could deliver food on a ward-by-ward basis. The smooth running of this service was also predicated upon FareShare being able to deliver food to these community groups via their DEFRA-funded and conventional surplus stock.

Local community food groups were already conversant with health and safety regulations, food hygiene standards and had the appropriate safeguarding and risk assessments already in place. These groups were already confident in using surplus foods, short-dated and large and variable volumes of food which meant their services dovetailed relatively effectively with the uptick in donations that FareShare Midlands were redistributing. They were already closely linked into their communities, acting as trusted ambassadors during a time of anxiety and flux. These groups are also linked with peers and were able to share information, resources, support and apply for joint funding bids and make requests for help with excess food, for example. These groups used WhatsApp along with FareShare staff to provide extremely flexible, agile and responsive types of service deliveries.

These groups are relatively horizontally organised with a high degree of autonomy which meant they could make decisions quickly, effectively scale their services to meet the rising demands, and respond to dietary or culturally specific requests for food. Groups benefitted from increased funding during this time and their receipt of emergency financial support was also predicated upon them already being known to FareShare Midlands and Local Authorities. Groups partnered, in innovative ways, with local taxi services, for example, to deliver hot meals across the city.

FareShare Midlands worked rapidly and proactively to secure both surplus and ambient food stocks for their regional members:

FareShare Midlands took the pandemic seriously, even prior to lockdown taking effects, they planned for mid to long term food shortages, they set up partnerships with food producers, manufacturers and supermarkets to build food stocks in the region. They were extremely mindful of managing their capacity to service the rising demands for food that their members were experiencing. FareShare were communicative, transparent, accessible and worked long and anti-social hours to ensure food supplies were continuous whilst trying to avoid food waste. FareShare Midlands underwent a period considerable of growth, setting up a new depot in Nottingham and securing large quantities of ambient food for food parcels in partnership with corporates. This food was housed in partnership with the Local Authority who worked closely with FareShare Midlands in order to meet rising demands, ensure relative food supply stability, regularise and diversify the types of stock being redistributed. For example, there was a rise in catering-size surplus which consisted of large volumes of singular types of food and large volumes of short-dated and fresh foods. This meant that the conventional array of stock community food groups usually received was initially disrupted.

The overall picture here is of a fairly extensive, city-wide community food sector working to establish communications between organisations, trying to rapidly extend its capacity, being ‘stress tested’ but which was able to organise and coordinate rapidly due to the pre-existence of a range of material resources, skills, forms of know-how, due to a statutory commitment, but also because of a shared desire to protect vulnerable residents.

##### 1.4.1 What factors constrained the delivery of community food services?

Community food groups who had access to buildings as well as those with a well-established cohorts of volunteers fared better overall, with some groups unable to access council-run venues which impacted their capacity to deliver services. Lack of access resulted from the lockdown of shared facilities in light of the council’s adherence to COVID-19 restrictions. Small kitchens and lack of preparation space made maintaining social distancing problematic for some groups and often meant fewer staff had to work for longer hours.

Groups experienced precarity as vulnerable members of key staff had to shield which impacted their ability to open their services. Groups had to undertake new risk assessments, trial new ways of working and borrow ideas and procedures from the fast food and restaurant sector to transform their social eating services into a meal delivery format. There was no official guidance available for the community food sector despite these groups undertaking the majority of emergency meal provisioning across the city:



Figure 5. Video still from interview with FareShare Midlands warehouse manager, Nottingham.

***“But then keeping the food warm, you know we’ve had to have a bit of a trial and error, so we’ve used kind of things like chip shop would use packaging that pizza places and McDonald’s would use... and then we’ve had to buy some bags where you can keep food hot. So yeah, so we have a 15-minute slot. We serve the food, pack the food and gone.”***

(Theresa, social eating and community centre manager, Nottingham).

As the face-to-face representation of unpredictable Government guidelines, staff and volunteers sometimes faced abuse and felt scared, unsafe and were sometimes abused by residents:

***“I think I have voicemails going at two and three in the morning on my phone that I picked up and the abuse was unbelievable... We’re trying to help them because everybody thought those parcels were coming from local authorities. And everybody should have one! It created absolute havoc and the abuse to everybody was beyond belief.”***

(Theresa, social eating and community centre manager, Nottingham).

Groups across the research all expressed fears around exposing volunteers and staff to situations where they may come into contact with people with COVID-19:

***“I mean, we’ve delivered to some complexes, and most of the people have got COVID-19 in there”.***

(Theresa, social eating and community centre manager, Nottingham).

***“I know what I’ve put into that, I put my life at risk. I put my family life at risk.”***

(Harry, social eating and Church-based food parcel service manager).

Staff and volunteers worked very long hours, often unsociably and felt compelled to go out of their way to help at short notice:

***“12:00 o’clock Christmas Eve, we had a family, a lady coming home with a new baby, got five children. Not one Christmas present and needed food and nappies. And so, I went, and we delivered those things and we managed to scrape together some gifts and presents.”***

(Theresa, social eating and community centre manager, Nottingham).

***“Our community is really heavily relying on us at the minute. And you know what? It’s a burden that you think about when you go to bed at night”.***

(Ruth, community centre and food bank manager, Nottingham).

Groups expressed concern over funding cliff edges with high competition for limited and short-term funding and no transitional funding to support groups as they try and return to face-to-face services:

***“When Boris Johnson says, right, in March, we’re going to lift this... well, the effects of COVID-19 are going to be in these communities for years. They’re not going to end in March, not going to end in September. It’s going to be another year or two between before some families can get back on their feet, and we’ve got to help and support them the best way we can. But how we do it. It all boils down to money and there’s just not enough to go around”.***

(Ruth, community centre and food bank manager, Nottingham).

***“It’s difficult, it’s not easy. It’s difficult. And I’m. You know, sitting here now, I’m thinking the money that we’ve got... only takes up to March. So, I’ve put in a couple of funding bids. I haven’t heard anything... so I’m just really, really worried because come March. I’m not sure what we’re gonna do, so we put a note on our food bank to say this is only going up to March”.***

(Ruth, community centre and food bank manager, Nottingham).

Groups also expressed concern about service dependency especially given the rise in new customers who they often felt needed ongoing support or who had gotten used to meals being delivered rather than coming out to eat at social eating venues:

***“You know the mental health, um, gosh, I think that’s off the scale more than government realize... That’s literally escalated. I think that that’s going to have a longer impact than even the COVID-19”.***

(Theresa, social eating and community centre manager, Nottingham).

FareShare were vulnerable given their volunteer-heavy workforce and this impacted particularly on their driver volunteers.

FareShare also chose to implement early on, a system of distancing within warehouses and deliveries which was an additional work stream at a time of huge demand. FareShare staff were also faced with setting up a new warehouse under instruction from managers who were working remotely.

FareShare expanded their service to meet demand, however, some of the new groups which joined to access food during the pandemic have now ceased operating and this is leading to difficulties for FareShare in sustaining the level of growth. Groups who joined during this time were also used to receiving ambient stock and their expectations need to be managed in order to transition them over to using the usual surplus stock that FareShare distributes.

***“We are in a place where we need to know what our opportunities are... what our risks are... We know that the need isn’t going to go away, but deciding what our response to that need is, is all being thought-through... because the challenge that we face is so massive”.***

(Serena, Management Team, FareShare Midlands).

Despite the overall picture of a city mobilizing effectively to deliver coordinated, safe and effective community food services during the initial lockdown period, there were a number of significant challenges. Our research revealed that establishing the complex material, social and procedural infrastructure necessary to deliver safe and effective food services during the pandemic at short notice and under lockdown restrictions, would have been challenging if not impossible. Valuing the efforts, expertise and reach of the community food sector is critical. These groups and the services they deliver are not a beneficial but ultimately gratuitous part of the regional infrastructure and foodscape, they are essential, highly skilled and motivated experts in delivering safe and effective community food services. These networks have been sustained over time by respectful communication

and a shared ethos around caring for respective communities, Therefore, financial support, whilst vital, cannot stand-in for the relationships and procedures that have been built into and across the charitable and community food sector during the last decade. Investment in these forms of 'social' infrastructure is crucial for both current and forthcoming challenges to UK food security, which as we are seeing currently, are rising instead of receding.

#### **1.4.2 The factors that enabled community food groups to deliver safe and effective food services during the COVID-19 pandemic**

##### **Funding**

- Central government funding support, such as that provided by DEFRA, alongside the Local Authority (LA) decision to target funds to pre-existing groups over emergent ones.

##### **Network capacity**

- Local Authority setting up a food triage system which cascaded requests to local areas and to approved and appropriate Community Food Members (CFM).
- Pre-existing networks of stakeholders and customers.
- Relatively horizontal FareShare Midlands (FSM) and CFM structures ensured rapid and appropriate mobilization of resources.
- The capacity of CFM to rapidly switch to food parcel and meal delivery services, and to engage in face-to-face deliveries and social contact activities.

##### **Infrastructure**

- Pre-existing infrastructure such as storage capacity, fridges and freezers, kitchens, cooks and teams of volunteers.
- Supermarkets, LAs, FSM and CFM compliance with pre-existing health and safety and safeguarding regulations.

##### **Social infrastructure**

- CFM pre-existing experience with surplus foods and at-scale meal preparation and the capacity and willingness to produce culturally and dietarily appropriate meals.
- The capacity and willingness of FSM and CFM to work out of hours and at very short notice using for example, WhatsApp, as a real-time communication platform.
- The capacity of groups to engage in highly localized intelligence-gathering on community needs.

#### **1.4.3 The factors that constrained the delivery of community food services during the COVID-19 pandemic**

##### **Funding**

- A funding drop-off despite ongoing requests for food support and the expectation that unemployment, wellbeing and mental health issues will manifest as ongoing challenges.

##### **Network capacity**

- A lack of centralized, community food-specific health and safety guidance and rapidly changing guidelines.

##### **Infrastructure**

- Lack of ownership of, and access to, infrastructures such as kitchens and storage facilities.

##### **Social infrastructure**

- Drop-off of volunteers and a reliance on goodwill.
- As the 'face' of service provision/Governmental funding decisions some CFM encountered hostility and abuse.

#### **1.4 Recommendations**

In light of these discussions and insights, FareShare Midlands (FSM) and its community food members (CFM) can be described as an emergency food service during the initial lockdown period. These efforts were augmented by central Government funding via DEFRA and by supermarket allocating funding and resources to enable CFMs to receive food (when, for example, food donations at supermarkets ceased).

Therefore, recommendations centre around recognising the community food sector as an asset which has mitigated the worst effects of COVID-19. These groups form a social infrastructure that protected, not just poor people, but those struggling to access food for a variety of non-financial reasons. The community food sector, in partnership with FareShare acted as community anchors who provided not just food supplies but a friendly face and safe contact in a time of need. These organisations require ongoing support to ensure they remain accessible in the face of oncoming crises around unemployment, mental ill-health and climate change, for example.

However, what our research shows is that these efforts occurred across and through organisations and that benefits to the community arose when individuals and organisations worked beyond individual job roles.

**Accordingly, the following policy and strategic planning recommendations are made:**

## Funding

- Investment into social eating and community food projects required to meet the immediate and longer-term need for food and social contact in a post-lockdown society.
- Corporate funding, from the plastic bag tax, should be made available to FareShare to employ delivery drivers rather than using volunteers.

## Network capacity

- Regional food security partnerships with Local Authorities and Public Health should be established.
- A 'volunteer passport' system could be developed where volunteers get free health and safety, safeguarding and equal opportunity training and DBS-checking to maintain a bank of validated volunteers who can work across projects when needed.

## Infrastructure

- Infrastructural estate investment is needed in larger-scaled and possibly centralised kitchens that can be used by community food groups.
- Resources such as the warehouses, chillers and delivery vans used to collect and redistribute food should not be viewed as expressions of charity but as vital frontline infrastructure which requires ongoing funding.
- Careful consideration on better use of food surpluses, including short-dated, catering-sized, frozen and 'surplus-surplus' food stocks would help identify possible new food sources and innovate around new models of service provision.

## Social infrastructure

- Maintaining partnerships that emerged during the pandemic period, such as the cross-county and multi-agency Food Insecurity Network (FIN).
- Exploring opportunities to make the work of CFM less onerous, less time consuming, less costly and making the setup of new social eating and community food ventures less risky (by providing funding for taster events and meal production services).
- Community food sector representation at strategic and board level discussions on post-lockdown recovery plans, including at corporate board level, would be beneficial in connecting 'on the ground' need with various intersecting agendas across public health, sustainability and carbon neutrality plans, community cohesion initiatives and more statutory provisioning such as school holiday meal services.

## 1.5 Research outcomes

In light of this research partnership and the strengthening of stakeholder relationships, a number of impacts have been realised. Dr Marsha Smith, lead author of this report, now sits on the strategic board for both Nottingham City and County Public Health Boards. Marsha has directly contributed towards the food-specific strand of the new Nottingham City Eat and Move for Good Health policy. The promotion of social eating is now written into Nottinghamshire's food charter and the research team have been asked to present the research findings to the full council.

As a result of this research, a recommendation was made to Nottingham City Council that central government funding be allocated to FareShare for both ambient food stocks and memberships. FareShare Midlands were awarded £80k to cover both membership fees for groups and to 'in fill' gaps in surplus with conventionally purchased food stocks. The partnership between Nottingham City Council and FareShare Midlands was also promoted at a national Department of Work and Pensions board meeting as an exemplary use of public to procure and distribute food stocks. The findings from the first study have also shaped the strategy for the regional food insecurity network agenda by prioritising social eating and local food growing projects. In total community food sector projects in these areas were awarded £800k in 2022.

As a result of this research, key partners have made a number of important commitments. Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Councils have also committed to utilising more surplus food stocks as way of reducing food costs and aligning food procurement with food carbon neutrality targets. FareShare Midlands has committed to capturing ever greater volumes of surpluses, and in particular, very short-dated, hard to place and missed opportunity surpluses as a way of meeting rising demands for food. This has resulted in a new surplus processing and meal production kitchen pilot in partnership with Nottingham City Council and Sainsburys, a UK 1st.<sup>3</sup> This unit, housed within a catering kitchen at Nottingham City Council's headquarters at Loxley House takes a variety of surpluses and processes them into multiportion meals which are vacuum sealed into pouches and blast frozen, ready for redistribution. These multiportion meals can be defrosted and reheated and dishes such as soups, stews, curries and chillies, and are designed to make running a social eating initiative less time consuming, less wasteful, and by centralising cooking labour and energy-use, less costly.

<sup>3</sup> <https://faresharemidlands.org.uk/press-releases/fareshare-midlands-launches-meal-production-initiative-at-loxley-house-with-nottingham-city-council-and-sainsburys-1168.html>

In the following section of the report, we move on to outlining and discussing the research context, findings and recommendations of the second phase of the research. The study explored the development of a new social eating network operated by Nottinghamshire County Council. Funding to support this development was provided through a central government 'Contain' fund which Nottinghamshire County Council distributed

to support various food and food growing activities, including testing out interest in social eating activities by funding an existing social eating group to run a series of 'pop-up' or social eating 'taster' events. Therefore, understanding which factors enabled and constrained any network development was the focus of the second study.



### FareShare Midlands: Meal Production Trial

**What is Meal Production at FareShare Midlands?**  
FareShare Midlands is embarking on an innovative project, where we'll be turning surplus food into meals and ingredients to support your community services.

For more information on the project, read our full press-release here:  
[FS Midlands Meal Production Initiative at Loxley House | Press Releases](#)



**How you can benefit**


We hope that our Meal Production initiative will:

- Support our Members with a brand new 'sustainable service' that could help raise additional funds
- Reduce the amount of energy our Members use to cook meals
- Support those with small or limited kitchen spaces
- Encourage and support social eating cafes and events
- Re-purpose and add value to surplus foods, making them easier for our Members to use and serve

**Free meals for your organisation**

Our priority is to ensure the meals we produce are beneficial for you and your service users. Therefore, we will be running a **2-month trial period** to put our meals to the test - and we would like you to be involved.

For the trial, the meals we'll provide will be completely **free of charge** but, in exchange, we will require your insight and feedback. We need to learn what works well, what could be improved and what you find most useful for your organisation and service users.



### FareShare Midlands: Meal Production Trial

**Our offer**

All meals will be frozen in portions of 15-30. You can receive:

**Offer 1** - Soups, stews, curries, casseroles etc, to be defrosted and reheated in a **stove pot**

**Offer 2** - Tray bakes including pastas, vegetables bakes, pies etc, to be defrosted and reheated in an **oven**

If you're an existing FareShare member, meals will be in addition to your regular order.

**After the trial**

Following the trial we will consider how the meals can be built into a FareShare membership, to help us cover some of the costs of this new service.

We would like to spend time talking with you, to hear your thoughts and discuss possible next steps.

**Are you interested in receiving meals?**

Please answer the questions below and return to [enquiries@faresharemidlands.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@faresharemidlands.org.uk)






<b>Which offer would you like to receive?</b>	Offer 1	Offer 2	Both - combination of Offers 1 and 2
<b>How often can you receive meals?</b>	Weekly	Fortnightly	Other .....
<b>Are you able to collect, or would you require deliveries?</b>	Delivery		Collection
<b>How many portions per order do you estimate you'll need?</b>			

Figure 6. Images from FareShare's new surplus meal production service information materials, Nottingham.

# PART 2

## Food as the connector: Understanding how frontline food organisations develop into social eating networks

### 2.1 Introduction

The first part of the research showed just how vital the community food sector was during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the community food sector may have hoped to step into a post pandemic space of scaled down food provisioning, instead need is rising rapidly. The partnerships, networks and shared values of the sector are again being called upon to deliver safe and effective food services to growing numbers of people across the Nottinghamshire region as the cost-of-living crisis exacerbates levels of food insecurity.

Food supply chains have been disrupted by a number of forces in recent times; ongoing climate change threatens production, COVID-19 has impacted production and logistics, rising energy prices are hitting production and distribution costs as well as household budgets, whilst Brexit is sending shockwaves of its own to supply chains. The net result has been to increase levels of food insecurity at all geographic scales. The invasion of Ukraine, the 'breadbasket of the world' by Russia and the subsequent geopolitical fallout has further tightened of energy supplies and contributed to rapidly rising energy and food costs. These increases in prices are a key component of the worsening cost of living crisis facing UK householders<sup>4</sup>. Combined with already inflated energy prices, average disposable incomes in Britain are predicted to fall 4%, costing the average household £1,000, according to the Resolution Foundation<sup>5</sup>. Lower income households were already struggling considerably following the pandemic, with food insecurity now higher than pre-COVID-19 levels, affecting 4.7 million adults<sup>6</sup>. Thus, a perfect storm of factors is leading to a food crisis of potentially historical significance.

Indeed, recent research suggests that in Nottingham City 2 out of every 10 residents needed some form of food support during the pandemic<sup>7</sup>. According to the Office for National Statistics some of the lowest priced food items increased by more than 40% since Sept 2021<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, Nottingham residents have some of the highest debt in the UK and in 2017/2018, 1 in 20 city residents had sought debt advice<sup>9</sup>. The city also has some of the lowest rates of disposable income<sup>10</sup>. It is expected that these figures have risen within the post-lockdown and the current cost-of-living period.

Currently, the demands for affordable food resources are growing with FareShare Midlands servicing a record 600 CFM members. FareShare Midlands and Community Food Members (CFM) continue to be key stakeholders in negotiating the availability of and access to, affordable food. However, this rising demand is also coinciding with continued food shortages in the UK which is then affecting the surplus redistribution sector. The cost-of-living crisis means both CFM's and their users are experiencing rising levels of food and fuel poverty.

### 2.2 Research context

Recommendations from the first stage of the research suggested that investment into 'social eating' and community food projects is required to meet the need for food and social contact in a post-lockdown society. Social eating is a term used to describe an event hosted by community food organisations that aim to bring people together to collectively share a meal. They offer a low-cost meal prepared using food surpluses (provided by FareShare) to deliberately serve food communally to improve social inclusion<sup>11</sup>. This call to support the strengthening and extension of social eating has been included in Nottinghamshire County Council's funding distribution priorities as of £800k of central government 'Contain' funding. This funding was allocated according to two strategic priorities- social eating and local growing.

A well-established social eating initiative, The Secret Kitchen, received funding to undertake a series of 'pop up' social eating events. These were aimed at enabling groups across the County to try social eating in their venues without receiving a surplus delivery or having to cook a meal. These events were staged to expand the membership of community organisations in receipt of food from FareShare and to support the formation of a network of social eating spaces. The first study in this report demonstrated how beneficial a networked approach had been to delivering community food services in the City, both for groups and food recipients and this follow-on research sought to understand the factors that would enable of constrain network development in the County. Alongside this agenda from the Local Authority, FareShare Midlands is also piloting a meal production service designed to diversify and expand the types of surplus that it can receive, and to create meals and

<sup>4</sup> Global Food Insecurity Blog, Coventry University. <https://blogs.coventry.ac.uk/researchblog/a-perfect-storm-the-war-in-ukraine-escalates-global-food-insecurity-risks>

<sup>5</sup> Resolution Foundation Report on UK Living Standards. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-living-standards-outlook-2022>

<sup>6</sup> The Food Foundation (2021). A crisis within a crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on Household Food Security. [https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/FF\\_Impact-of-Covid\\_FINAL.pdf](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/FF_Impact-of-Covid_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> UK food Insecurity of adults Jan 2021 Sheffield University. <https://shefuni.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/interactivelegend/index.html?appid=8be0cd9e18904c258afd3c959d6fc4d7>

<sup>8</sup> Office for National Statistics Report on Food Pricing. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/trackingthelowestcostgroceryitemsukexperimentalanalysis/april2021toseptember2022>

<sup>9</sup> Centre for Cities Report on UK Debt. <https://www.centreforcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Household-debt-and-problem-debt-in-British-cities-1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Levelling up? People in Nottingham, Manchester and Leicester have 'lowest disposable income in the UK', I-News Report. <https://inews.co.uk/news/levelling-up-nottingham-manchester-leicester-disposable-income-uk-1711863>

<sup>11</sup> See the academic journal paper co-authored by Dr Marsha Smith for a more in-depth understanding of social eating initiatives – Smith, M. and Harvey, J. (2021) [Social eating initiatives and the practices of commensality. \*Appetite\*. 161,105-107.](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2021.105107)

meal components which can make the delivery of social eating activities cheaper, more convenient, and less onerous.

In this second study we look at how a social eating network can be developed by examining the factors which enable and constrain network development. We consulted customers, social eating hosts, a well-established social eating group and we also deployed surveys and a follow-up webinar as ways of gaining insight into demand, capacity, needs and opportunities- creating a range of recommendations and insights that can support stakeholders to target funding and support and which have implications for regional food security policy.

### 2.2.1 Research approach

Adding to the multi-method approach of the first research stage, 8 pop-up social eating research events were organised with both new and existing Nottinghamshire community food groups. At these events, a research 'data plate' for customers to complete was dispersed, photographs and fieldnotes were gathered and a post-event feedback note co-produced with The Secret Kitchen was given to each group.

**Secret Kitchen** are running pop-up social eating events with a number of community organisations across Nottinghamshire. These events will be held at the following venues. Please check **Secret Kitchens Facebook page** for more information about each event or contact the groups directly.

1 Social Action Hub, Rainworth	<b>Fri 18 March</b>	(dinner 5-7pm)
2 Clipstone Family Action, Clipstone	<b>Sun 27 March</b>	(lunch 1pm)
3 St Pauls, West Bridgford	<b>Fri 1 April</b>	(dinner)
4 St Peters Rooms, Ruddington	<b>Sat 23 April</b>	(dinner 5pm)
5 Newark College	<b>Thurs 5 May</b>	(dinner 6pm)
6 Meet, Greet and Eat, West Bridgford	<b>Fri 6 May</b>	(lunch 1-3pm)
7 Rhubarb Farm, Langwith	<b>Thurs 12 May</b>	(dinner 5-7pm)
8 Feel Good Gardens, Sherwood Pines	<b>Fri 20 May</b>	(lunch 1pm)
9 Bean Block Cafe, Newark	<b>Thurs 9 June</b>	(dinner 5-7pm)
10 Metropolitan Housing, venue tbc	<b>Fri 17 June</b>	(lunch or dinner tbc)

These events give local communities a **FREE** taste of social eating and will help groups decide how to take social eating projects forward in their communities

If you want to know more about the pop-up social eating project Call **Marsha Smith** from Coventry University on **07746216459**

This project is funded by Nottinghamshire Public Health, FareShare Midlands and Coventry University

Figure 7. Pop-Up Social Eating Event flyer.

A flyer, distributed via the Food Insecurity Network (FIN) and local public health workers attracted around 15 enquiries to host a pop-up social eating event. Of the 15 enquiries, a proportion were groups that were just emerging did not yet have an organisation, venue or volunteers to successfully host a social eating event. They were unsuitable to host a pop-up event but were invited to the events which were successfully scheduled. 2 groups cancelled their pop-ups due to staffing issues and in one instance, due to late communication by The Secret Kitchen which meant the group did not feel sufficiently confident at running an event at relatively short notice. Coventry University also contributed to this project by organising the setup of these 8 events that ran over the summer of 2022 and by running a series of participant surveys and recorded written and photographic fieldnotes. In total 250 data forms were completed by customers across the 8 events (an example of the 'data plate' exercise is provided in Appendix iii).

In order to connect this social eating fieldwork with the new meal production pilot, a survey was also constructed which sought to better understand the capacity of these groups to receive and use the meal production service. All 10 groups that were initially booked in completed a survey that was emailed out looking more closely at their set up, space, storage and cooking facilities and their interest in, and capacity to receive, this range of new FareShare Midlands surplus products and services (the responses to the survey questions can be found in Appendix iv). The survey responses were also compared with researcher observations of each site in-situ which allowed better understand the complexities around both setting up new social eating spaces and the role of this service within those plans.

### 2.3 Community food groups and the surplus meal production service

In response to rising requests for food support FareShare Midlands has committed to capturing ever greater volumes of surpluses, and in particular, very short-dated, hard to place or 'missed opportunity' surpluses as a way of meeting rising demands for affordable food supplies. The first study in this report resulted in the piloting of a new surplus processing and meal production service, based out of Loxley House, Nottingham City Council's headquarters.

Using the catering kitchen, large volumes of surplus food can be processed and repackaged and also made into one of 3 meal-type options. This new service, a UK 1st where a local authority is collaborating with a charity around meal production, aimed to reduce food, energy and staffing costs by centralising services and producing food at-scale. Although insights into the piloting of this service are not completely within the remit of this project, it was decided that gauging potential interest whilst conducting these pop-up events would be a useful starting point for evaluating the potential for take-up of this service.



The survey asked the emergent social eating groups a series of questions about their current set up such as what services they already offer and who their main beneficiaries are, the groups connections to other groups (such as food banks), venue access, kitchen and equipment and storage facilities, their funding and staffing situations, the impacts of the current cost of living crisis on their current and planned projects, their current surplus deliveries and items that they need to purchase, reflections on their successes and challenges to their development and finally, their interest in the FSM meal and surplus processing offers.

The survey shows that there is high level interest in the surplus meal processing and production service with products as well as clear understandings that these types of services can save community food members time, energy costs, staffing costs and monetary costs. One condition that was observed was that the pricing structure must be agreeable for sufficient uptake. Although meal components were the most popular choice, there was not a huge difference in preference for either meals, meal components or processed produce. It is therefore recommended that a modular meal service where meal components are produced (pasta sauce, veg curry, shepherd's pie base, cheese sauce, soup, etc) are made alongside other components (potato topping, cooked pasta or rice, crumble topping, etc) so that meals can be mixed and matched to suit and groups can combine packs to suit their customers more readily.

Concerns were raised about the cost of meals and around having to purchase minimum amounts. Certain groups expressed concern over having inadequate storage and wanting to test products to ensure they were of adequate quality and suitability for their customers.



Figure 8. Flyer for FareShare's meal production launch day, Nottingham.

### 2.3.1 Feedback from the meal production survey

#### Need

- The majority of groups have seen a rise in demand for food with the current cost of living crisis being the main motivator for people seeking further support from CFM.
- Groups wished to extend provision to cover groups identified as vulnerable in their communities such as elders, isolated people and those with long term mental and physical health issues (therefore, meal provision via FSM would enable these groups to spend more time reaching out to and engaging with these groups, who may also require greater support in-situ alongside accessing a meal).

#### Funding and capacity

- Nearly all groups indicated that grant funding was their main source of income and that they are experiencing precarity around funding, especially due to rising energy and food costs. Research exploring how other community food groups across the UK monetise their activities may be beneficial.
- Challenges for groups were identified in handling the volumes, variability of surplus food and getting the types of food supplies they need.
- Support was requested with paperwork such as insurance and risk assessments, applying for funding, getting adequate space and storage, recruiting and retaining volunteers and minimising over dependency upon key staff members.

#### Current activities

- Social eating activities were the most popular service offered, but several groups also ran food banks, food clubs and pantries showing that community food member can utilise surplus in a variety of forms and that extending their repertoire of surplus-use via cooked meals is a useful way of extending choice and food socialisation and food literacy for customers (aligning with public health agendas).
- Groups were well-networked within communities, but it is recommended that FSM considers supporting mentoring and peer-to-peer networking activities to continue to promote and strengthen social eating activities across the region.
- Groups also wanted to increase provision to more customers (again, supporting where the FSM meals offer could be useful).

#### Food provision

- Groups are supplementing their surplus delivery with other fresh, ambient and chilled items and although it is made clear that surplus cannot 'do everything' within these settings, there may be some further research to understand the purchasing habits across the network as bulk purchasing items such as

oil or herbs and spices or tinned goods might be a way of leveraging the networks budget as a whole to purchase food stocks at a cheaper rate.

### Social infrastructure

- Key to the success of groups was their relationship with FSM, charging for meals (even a small charge) providing an element of meal choice (even if meat and vegetarian option), their volunteers and networks, identifying skilled cooks who can cook on small budgets, the groups had high levels of community engagement, support from other organisations and their venues being seen as hubs where more than one service was being provided.
- Organisational resilience and the perseverance of staff despite adversity were also seen as key strengths across this cohort.

### 2.3.2 Surplus meal service recommendations

This data makes it clear that several interventions can be suggested. Firstly, making receiving, processing and cooking less onerous. By simplifying the process of producing meals, groups are not as dependent upon key staff members to cook. By utilising a pre-made meal service, groups can increase the capacity of mealtimes without a huge increase in staffing or volunteer numbers, and these pre-made meals can enable groups to spend more time connecting with current customers and going out to reach new ones.

Most groups reported that alongside social eating activities, portioning out meals to take away was also of interest and FSMs idea about hub and spoke structures for distributing meals is borne out by these findings. However, we already know that food compliance and reheating issues are an area that needs careful consideration. A pre-made meal service was also identified as a way of testing out whether social eating activities would be of interest to their communities and so it is recommended that further ‘pop up’ activity using the meal service might be a useful way of engaging with emergent groups and extending the model across the region.

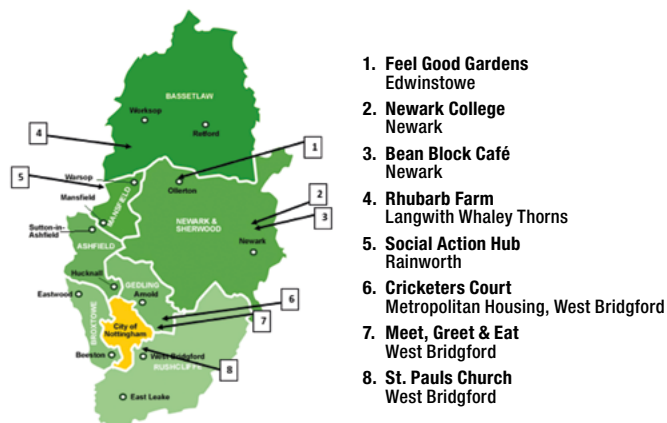
### 2.4 Pop-up social eating events

Social eating initiatives are ‘a mode of food provisioning and eating that have become increasingly popular in the UK. These organisations provide a menu of low-cost meals prepared using food surpluses and deliberately serve food communally to improve social inclusion’<sup>12</sup>. They are further described as ‘community-based initiatives that provide an integrated model for recovering and using surplus food, localizing food and providing spaces of interaction that can address food insecurity, support health, well-being and social capital. Generally,

these social eating projects [...] cook and provide nutritious meals in a community venue for a suggested donation of, for example, £2.50 per three course meal for adults. The meal is generally offered once a week in venues such as children’s centres, community centres and churches’<sup>13</sup>. The delivery of an affordable, sociable and surplus-utilising meal provision, which is well-established in Nottingham City through its network of social eating spaces (see the Nottingham Social Eating Network<sup>14</sup>) was proposed by the Nottinghamshire Food Insecurity Network as an exemplar model which could support the diversification of community food provision into Nottinghamshire County.

During the research period The Secret Kitchen (who are a well-established social eating initiative that have been delivering social eating activities in the City and County for over 10 years) provided a freshly cooked meal for up to 80 people per venue, at these 8 sites across the county. Groups were also able to ask an experienced mentor questions about running a service and this was followed up with an online webinar and networking opportunity (discussed later in the report). Even at the early stage of organising, it became apparent that groups at the sites listed below understood the value of collaborative eating activities but there were considerable differences in approach, capacity and viability. Groups ranged from those that wanted to add on a (free) meal service to existing food parcel and food club activities, extending food service provision. Some groups were interested in bolstering their food supplies with what was perceived to be a more ‘environmentally friendly’ food resource. Other groups had already planned to host a meal event of some kind and were keen to try out a model which had been successfully implemented in other communities. A third category of groups were keen to provide a social meal to their networks but were unsure on how to begin, how to recruit volunteers and what being a FareShare community food member actually entailed.

### The Nottinghamshire ‘pop-up’ social events were held at:



1. **Feel Good Gardens**  
Edwinstowe
2. **Newark College**  
Newark
3. **Bean Block Café**  
Newark
4. **Rhubarb Farm**  
Langwith Whaley Thorns
5. **Social Action Hub**  
Rainworth
6. **Cricketers Court**  
Metropolitan Housing, West Bridgford
7. **Meet, Greet & Eat**  
West Bridgford
8. **St. Pauls Church**  
West Bridgford

<sup>12</sup> Smith, M. and Harvey, J. (2021), ‘Social eating initiatives and the practices of commensality’, *Appetite*, 161:105-107.

<sup>13</sup> Luca, N., Smith, M., Hibbert, S., & Doherty, B. (2019). House of lords select committee. Submission for ‘food, poverty and the environment- ‘how to make a healthy, sustainable diet accessible and affordable for everyone?’, written evidence (FPO0032), 24.4.2. I

<sup>14</sup> [www.socialeatingnetwork.org](http://www.socialeatingnetwork.org)

Description of pop-up host organisations:

Organisation	Type	Venue	Attendees
Feel Good Gardens	Community interest company, community gardening site.	Outside space and a portacabin. Small domestic style kitchen.	16
Newark College	Higher education college.	Canteen space with catering kitchen and serving area.	46
Bean Block Cafe	Run as a café during the day.	Café space with children's play area. Small catering kitchen which was closed.	14
Rhubarb Farm	A horticultural-based social enterprise.	A farm site and meeting rooms, with a marquee hired for the event.	80
Social Action Hub	Small, independent charity supporting local residents with support services including food parcels and a food club.	Small, domestic style kitchen with serving hatch and dining room.	16
Cricketers Court	Housing association.	Elder complex with a medium-sized domestic kitchen, serving hatch and large dining room.	30
Meet, Greet & Eat	Community group being hosted in local authority venue offering surplus food shop, and social events for locals with a focus on people with learning difficulties and disabilities.	Large sitting and dining space with a very small kitchenette, upstairs are meeting rooms where lunch was served.	34
St Pauls Church	Church group.	Medium-sized, well-equipped kitchen, serving hatch, side dining room and a large main hall.	14



Figure 9. Photographs taken during fieldwork showing the variety of pop-up social eating event venues at Rainworth Family Action, Rhubarb Farm, Newark College, Feel Good Gardens, and Meet, Greet & Eat, Nottinghamshire.

Located across Nottinghamshire, from the pop-up events were held in a variety of social settings from elder, residential complexes to food and social hubs, Church groups and community gardening projects. The venues ranged from portacabin dining rooms at rural community allotment sites, to church hall spaces, a college canteen, outdoor marquees, purpose-built community centres, and a residential complex. The range of facilities varied but a proviso to participation was that groups had some capacity to heat and serve a meal.

Photographs and fieldnotes highlight common issues which arose during the set up and delivery of a social eating meal. These insights, which will be discussed in the following section, enabled us to better understand, beyond a willingness and interest in delivering a social eating event, what material constraints exist in communities and which forms of targeted support may be highlighted in policy recommendations. The preparation, delivery, set up, service and clear down undertaken by The Secret Kitchen also enabled us to collect rich, reflective insights from an experienced provider who tended to emphasise where ongoing provision would be made challenging and where changes could be made. It was also crucial to observe The Secret Kitchen as their reflexive or habitual way of working, developed through 10 years of running social eating events, formed a suite of behaviours which



Figure 10. Photographs taken during fieldwork showing the pop-up social eating meal service arrangements at Rhubarb Farm, and Meet, Greet & Eat, Nottinghamshire.

appeared largely routine but which on inspection, also proved to be a source of information which has also shaped the report recommendations.

Customers varied according to the pre-existing network that each organisation had developed, and various cohorts were engaged including families, elders and people with disabilities, refugees and people with mental health issues. Levels of enthusiasm were high, with some groups going to great lengths to advertise ahead, transport in customers and even erect marques to house diners when their own, internal venue space was limited. Overall, customers were very welcoming of the opportunity to eat a free, freshly made meal and to participate in giving feedback. A data plate was handed out which is a simplified and partly pictorial data collection sheet, constructed to try and make the data collection easy, approachable and suitable for those eating at the event who may not want to be disturbed by an overly long or formal interview. The data plate had space for customers to write their thoughts but also words that could be circled- such as 'price', 'healthy', 'family friendly', 'time of meal', 'feel welcome', 'homemade' 'meal too expensive', 'hard to get to', 'unwelcoming', 'wrong type of food' or 'I don't know anyone here', for example.

This approach proved useful because in-situ, the spaces did not always lend themselves to having one overall announcement about the nature and scope of the research. Instead, the researcher went from table to table ensuring customers completed an ethics form in accordance with Coventry University policy, and to explain how to add insights onto the data collection sheets. It became clear in some venues that numbers of customers were illiterate, struggled to understand the printed information sheet or struggled to complete the form in some way. These conditions were relayed by host organisations, some of whom kindly sat with customers to scribe their answers or to read through the participant information and ethics forms. Many participants circled words to indicate their sentiments and added a few sentences on the data plate space in the centre rather than write at length. Care was taken to ensure that customers enjoyed their meal over prioritising data collection.

***'Good time but not good time if wont v. welcome'***

(Customer 'data plate' response to being asked about what made the pop-up social eating event a success).

Around 250 responses were collected from customers across the 8 pop-up events. Feedback was positive overall with enthusiasm shown for both the host organisations and the social eating activity itself.

***'friendly atmosphere, new possibilities before not done, good tasting delectables, good portions and the choice if wished for another helping'***

(Customer 'data plate' response to being asked what made the pop-up social eating event a success, Rhubarb Farm).

Post-pop-up, each group was sent a summary report outlining the findings from their customer surveys and specific advice to support their set up and service should they decide to continue with social eating activities. The following suggestions have been developed from overall customer data analysis, however, each host organisation also received their own, specific report with customer feedback and responses to observed issues with the facilities, for example.

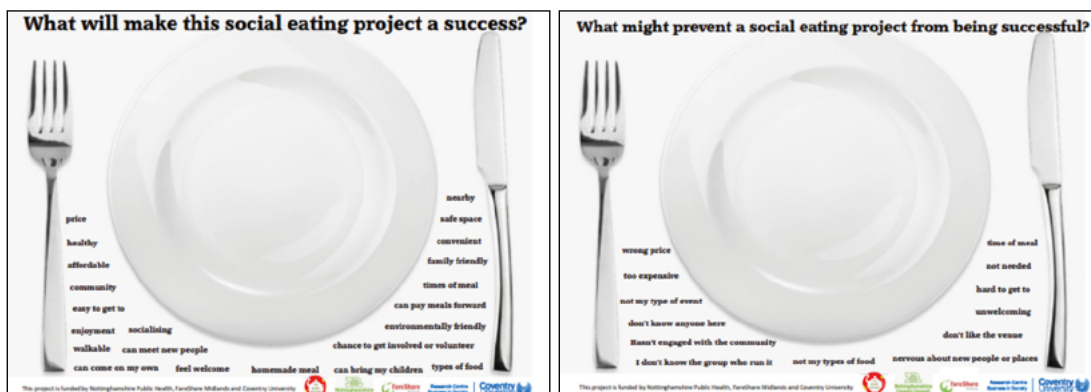


Figure 11. Images showing the 'data plate' customer survey exercise.

## 2.5 Customer feedback insights from the pop-up social eating events

### Organisations and set-up

- Community food groups are community anchor organisations, and this is greatest asset as they are trusted ambassadors within their communities, and they are able to reach customers that may not be serviced by other providers. When adding social eating on to existing services, this strengthens their offer, attracts new diners and persuades customers to stay for longer periods of time.
- A well-known and an accessible venue (with disabled access) was seen as attractive and if the venue is less accessible, customers wanted group transport or clear bus service information.
- Having someone at the threshold/a greeter to welcome people into the space, especially for those who may be attending alone was seen as very beneficial. Social awkwardness, under confidence about being in public setting, and social anxiety were referred to multiple times. Existing mental health challenges have been exacerbated by the lockdown and people need more support in transitioning back into public spaces in ways that feel welcoming, non-judgmental, safe and informal. Organising the queue in case it is busy/controlling the lobby area in case it gets busy, anticipating that there may be high levels of noise if there are lots of children attending, for example.
- Taking place at times when families can eat together (such as after school or early evening), with time to socialise after the meal.
- Organising the space so that there are quieter and lively areas for different types of eaters.
- Setting the space (where possible) with some longer and smaller tables so people can talk across the tables and move around the space, highchairs, family-friendly tables, tablecloths, sidelights or floor lamps to create a nice lighting effect. Using plates and crockery/cutlery rather than paper plates was preferred.

### Branding and advertising

- Advertising meal as cheap or as made from 'food waste' is unappetising and potentially stigmatising. Ensure advertising focuses on social aspects rather than surplus or 'cheap' meals.
- Advertising the menu ahead of time was requested but this may not always be possible due to variances in surplus supplies (if used).

- Different adverts for different audiences (with partner organisations also advertising and signposting people) was seen as beneficial, i.e., via Facebook, with leaflets or posters, signposting by partner organisations or via school newsletters.
- Linking in with other providers in the area such as food banks or mother and baby groups to cross-advertise each other's eating events.

### Menu and cost

- A number of customers wanted a free or pay as you feel meal. Each group will have to decide if this would be sustainable or whether a 'suggested donation' might be a better way of steering people to pay a basic contribution or whether you set the meal at a cheap price and focus on getting higher numbers of eaters to maintain a level of income.
- Managing the balance between customer meal preferences and encouraging people to try new things will be a consideration when choosing menus and working with customers to build up trust and interest in trying new dishes.
- Free soup to try new ingredients/flavours, for example.
- Overall, customers wanted 'homemade' style foods with an emphasis on 'traditional' meals and child friendly menus.
- Vegetarian/vegan options were also requested.
- Affordable price and with the price clearly marked. People are happy to pay a couple of pounds for a meal. Consider a 'suggested donation' model for a meal which may mean that people can aim to pay but not be excluded because of this.
- Deals for families, take-away pots, healthy, simple, nutritious, child-friendly meals.
- Tea and coffee were requested, and this might mean that even if people don't want a meal themselves, they could have a hot drink, and warm spaces are particularly important presently. Themed meals or a monthly 'social' evening with board games, for example, might be a novel way of attracting customers.

### Social benefits

- Socialising together is hugely valued, and customers expressed an interest in regularly returning to events if they know about them ahead of time.
- Making new friends, time to talk with people, friendly staff and volunteers, feeling welcome and cared-for, feeling part of the community and being able to participate and contribute in small ways were seen as very important.
- Opportunities to volunteer, especially informally and gain food hygiene certification for example.



Figure 12. Photographs taken during fieldwork showing meal serving and used plate collection activities, Newark College, Nottinghamshire.

- Adding social eating events to existing services such as a social supermarket, food bank or youth club was seen important as this would add value to the service and ensure people did not have to travel excessively, undertake too much scheduling and organisation and crucially, they might already know people there (which was seen as very important).



Figure 13. Photographs from fieldwork showing access points in venues such as a serving hatch and disabled access, Rainworth Family Action and Feel Good Gardens venues.

In the following section the insights from the fieldwork are discussed. In order to provide some overall network feedback, the data has been themed by meal-stage. Setting up and thresholds, kitchen facilities, setting up the space, serving, queuing and clear down are all presented in sequence with photographs and fieldwork notes used to draw out some key challenges. Overall, these insights continue to build a case for what factors will enable and constrain the set-up of a new social eating network in Nottinghamshire.

### 2.5.1 Insights for social eating groups - event set up

Alongside engaging with customers, researchers also took site photographs and recorded notes about the set up and meal service, including insights about the entrances to spaces, storage and cooking facilities. As stated, these additional

data collection methods were crucial in understanding the practices and processes that occur prior to, during and after a social eating mealtime. These findings give us the 'behind the scenes' insights which can help shape pragmatic policy recommendations by revealing some of the complex conditions that groups have to navigate in their efforts to provide nutritious, affordable mealtimes. This occurs in settings that may not always be ideal and by groups who may be hesitant to set up services due to a lack of clear understanding about the social eating model and surplus food supplies, for example. By highlighting these complexities our research showed what types of support were needed to encourage network growth and expansion, and where further support needs to be targeted.



Figure 14. Photographs from fieldwork showing table set up to maximise socialising at Rhubarb Farm.

The Secret Kitchen had to prepare meals ahead of the events and transport them in hot boxes, according to environmental health regulations, which sometimes proved labour-intensive. Once on site The Secret Kitchen encountered a varying degree of readiness and multiple issues which had to be sorted out by asking for help from staff or volunteers, sometimes through changing serving or seating plans and sometimes by requisitioning extra volunteers to hold doors open, find parking spaces and source extra equipment such as suitable tables.

Gaining access to building and putting the food into the kitchens or service spaces required careful coordination. As shown in the following photographs, each venue was different and there were different ways of accessing the sites which emphasises the challenges of getting customers to, and into, social eating spaces. . None of these issues were insurmountable and all hosts worked hard to accommodate any last-minute changes or to suggest how obstacles could be overcome.



Figure 15. Photographs illustrating the variety of venues- from marquees, community centres, allotment sites to sheltered accommodation complexes.

Communication was improved over the research period with The Secret Kitchen requesting more depth site details in order to better understand the layout and serving spaces at each venue, for example, so that any potential challenges could be addressed. However, with sometimes large groups of hungry customers, who were also accessing the usual services that groups offered such as social supermarket shopping, created challenging working conditions for researchers and The Secret Kitchen alike. This gave us a pragmatic insight into the complexities that sit behind the front-facing servicing of community meals and as such, was a crucial insight into understanding how social eating networks can be developed and sustained within communities in Nottinghamshire.

Having an external provider bringing hot food on site was broadly convenient for the hosts and it allowed them to focus on engaging with customers, observing how The Secret Kitchen worked, the types of meals they created under those conditions. It gave groups an opportunity to 'test out' whether their customers would like a regular social eating event without any of the extra workload associated with cooking for large numbers of people. This meant that they did not need to invest in equipment such as large pans, train volunteers, undergo environmental health registration, make storage available for surplus foods or spend time applying for funding, for example, without being sure whether the model was suitable for their project and community.

However, beyond The Secret Kitchen bringing meals on site, The Secret Kitchen was also able to reflect, with prompting from the researcher, some of the features of each venue which might support or hinder the delivery of social eating activities in each venue. From this information we were able to develop some overall feedback (alongside the specific report that each group received post-event). This insight is discussed in the following sections alongside a variety of site photographs.

### 2.5.2 Insights for social eating groups - event facilities

Within the survey findings, the impression is that most hosts have adequate storage, cooking and serving facilities. However, in-use, these facilities were not always easy to access or use. Some groups had either no kitchen or a small kitchen and some groups had no freezer or limited storage space. Survey results show that most groups share their spaces to some extent with other users and half have limited access to their venue. The following sets of photographs illustrate the size and scope of the kitchens, many with what could be considered as domestic-scale facilities but some of which were catering-scale. Whilst the catering kitchens lend themselves to servicing greater numbers of customers, they also had more technical challenges around equipment, such as understanding how to switch on commercial extractor fans and ovens, accessing locked cupboards and working appropriately at sites where equipment was already in use for other services such as a college canteen and a commercial café.



Figure 16. Photographs from various sites showing more domestic-scale kitchens.

Groups usually had better access and knowledge of spaces with domestic cooking facilities, but which often had limited facilities such as limited counter/preparation space or a limited number of cooking hobs which did not always accommodate larger sized pans.



Figure 17. Photographs from various sites showing the larger-scale kitchens.

Kitchens that features facilities for catering for a large number of people presented complexities such as understanding the sequence of buttons needed to switch on the extractor fan, without which the ovens will not light or accessing the locked knife drawer in a canteen kitchen. There was instances when staff had to improvise a serving area using a table as there was no hatch or suitable surface space, and also use paper bowls to serve hot food.



Figure 18. Photographs from various kitchens showing washing up and food disposal facilities.

These kitchens were used by other groups and had been cleaned down prior to their closing time. This meant that staff and volunteers had to acquire new bin bags and fit them or gain access to locked cupboards which had chemical cleaning equipment in them. Sometimes it was not clear where food or packaging waste should be disposed of and volunteers were reluctant to leave full bin bags in-situ for example, as this may have caused an issue with the usual users of the space.

### 2.5.3 Insights for social eating groups - event service

Serving large numbers of customers in spaces which are not always designed for mass catering was a challenge. Although The Secret Kitchen asked for more specific information about each site, challenges still arose during service, especially in those places which did not have any type of current café service or where the set up was designed around the user groups, and not with food services in mind. Evidently kitchen facilities are crucial but a range of other issues about the suitability of a site were explored. For example, the photographs below show a commercial café where individual meals and snacks are served. This space was not designed to serve out from large pans or trays, so a table had to be improvised outside the hatch to better facilitate the social eating meal service.

Doors and entrances were a challenge when accessing the site. Fire doors closed automatically and when people were carrying large and sometimes hot pans, they could not get through them. Door codes were a considerable issue. The Secret Kitchen and the research team were locked out of venues where there was a door code on many occasions. Where Hot boxes had to take up onto the second floor of a building which required using a lift which, a staff-only entrance code had to be entered. Further to this at one site there were no suitable tables to take the weight of a large pan of food safely, so staff and volunteers improvised with a desk. However, this was too high for The Secret Kitchen to use easily, and the researcher was called in to support the serving of food.



No one these issues were insurmountable, however, and all participants helped each other to overcome challenges, often improvising as they went. The photographs show that careful attention to the site and venue, access arrangements and suitability of equipment are crucial issues which can determine the development of social eating services. Despite the motivation to run these types of service not all venues lend themselves easily to storing, preparing, cooking and serving the larger volumes of 'one pot' meals that social eating services need to make economies of scale and to best utilise surplus foods.

Staff and volunteers may be familiar with the space as they currently use it but will need support and advice about how the run social eating events in them and particularly how to either use different strategies for using the space or be supported to develop partnerships with other sites where the facilities may be better suited to serving the social eating model.

A hugely positive aspect of the pop-up events was of course the food. The Secret Kitchen was careful to communicate with hosts about the type of food their customers might want. These choices had to be negotiated with surplus that The Secret Kitchen had available. With an emphasis on 'homemade' and 'traditional' dishes, as well as the constraints of transporting and serving food up, menus were dependent upon The Secret Kitchen's long-standing experience and expertise contributed towards a well-run, appetising, safe, and sociable meal experience.



Figure 19. Photographs showing different transition points within spaces such as hatches, fire doors and impromptu serving areas.



Figure 20. Photographs showing meal service, with various strategies of serving meals such as pre-plating desserts and using volunteers to serve meals directly from the pan.

Knowing which types of dishes transport well without spoiling their appearance, knowing which dishes continue to cook whilst hot, knowing which dishes would overcook or discolour over time, which dishes maintain their temperature, understanding which dishes can be easily served into relatively uniform portions, which dishes can be served without excessive spillage or mess, which dishes can be easily decanted in to takeaway containers, catering for dietary requirements (where possible), allergen labelling and serving people at a table or via a queue—all of these issues were considered by 'The Secret Kitchen' and as such form a valuable bank of know-how that hosts will need to actively access and learn when developing their own services. Hosts usually served the food to customers after it had been plated up. The Secret Kitchen advocated the practice of pre-plating, and pre-portioning rather than self-service to ensure a less chaotic and safer dining experience by preventing customers taking too-large portions, spilling food, using serving spoons for one dish in another (cross contaminating), and avoiding issues around customer hygiene (such as people with dirty hands picking up food from shared plates).

Another benefit of The Secret Kitchen providing the food at these events, beyond them taking responsibility for the meal provision, was that hosts were able to spend time welcoming customers across the threshold, serving people and engaging with them. Setting tables up so people had to sit in groups,

putting on music, having refreshments- all of these preparations helped to create a positive environment where customers felt at ease and were encouraged to socialise. Customers noted extensively in the data plate forms that feeling welcome and a friendly atmosphere were really important to them. With many respondents noting challenges around mental health, enabling hosts to spend time with customers is a valuable effect of making the preparation of a meal less onerous.



Figure 21. Photographs showing diners eating in various venues, with both formal and impromptu seating areas, and with varying degrees of accessibility for disabled customers, for example.

Eating spaces were also a consideration when venues were not designed for these activities- bringing chairs and tables into spaces, concerns about staining carpets with food, access for people with disabilities, the ambience and sound-levels in the space (especially when there are larger crowds), organising queues or serving people at the table- all of these issues were important considerations which affected the customer experience, alongside the more obvious issues around the food itself.

#### 2.5.4 Insights for social eating groups - The Secret Kitchen Café mentor suggestions

Alongside the researcher recommendations developed through data analysis, *specific practical suggestions were also provided by The Secret Kitchen* which draw attention to building up customer numbers and managing surplus food.

##### Building up and maintaining customer numbers

- A greeter at the door is a really useful volunteer role. Many customers are anxious about going to a new place for the first time. A friendly welcome can help with this.
- Allocate specific volunteer roles such as unpacking and storing food, preparation (such as peeling and chopping), taking money, washing up, taking down tables and putting away chairs- if people can see that volunteering may involve a really simple task, then they may be more inclined to help and breaking down tasks allows you to see exactly where you will and won't need extra help. Print off a list of specific tasks with space to put a name and number and leave them on the tables for customers to complete if they wish.
- Setting up the space to have a nice ambience is also important- use music and softer lighting when possible.
- Everyone has an opinion on food and the types of food they like and dislike. Food is a great conversation topic that most people can contribute to, and these types of conversational topics are commonly used to bridge towards new eaters and between themselves to establish rapport.



Figure 22. The Secret Kitchen logo

- Many people experiencing food insecurity enjoy cooking for themselves and others, they enjoy eating hot, homemade food, and most have positive memories and associations of shared mealtimes so even if they are struggling to cook themselves do not assume that they lack interest or skills.
- A meal is a reason to come to a project; a two or three-course meal is a reason to stay. This means meals are an ideal way of building social relationships, meeting and maintaining new friendships, and when staff and volunteers eat with service-users, it forms valuable connection time that is often harder to develop in outdoor or formal settings. If wraparound services are on-site, then invite their staff and volunteers to eat with service-users.
- Without the capacity to cook and eat, food skills can be lost, and people struggle to engage in the reciprocity and hospitality at the core of our common food culture. Therefore, social eating services can help protect and enrich a person's quality of life, by offering choice and chances to get involved.
- Do not be afraid to refuse foods that you will not use. Sometimes organisations and individuals will donate very short-dated products but do not feel compelled to take anything you cannot use or redistribute. Food waste does happen.
- Expect that you might have to deal with a lot of packaging and that you may need to negotiate extra bin space or have a specific volunteer role around packaging recycling or composting.

### 2.5.5 Overall feedback from the pop-up events

#### The social eating model

- County residents and service providers comprehend the social eating model- it is not abstract or difficult to understand. Delivering it may be more complex but there is overall goodwill and openness to projects providing socially oriented meals to the public
- Groups want more than written or video content type information, building relationships with experienced peers, gaining reassurance, and tapping into 'know how' is viewed as a crucial basis for network development. This 'know how' is not necessarily transferred in formal ways but is picked up by observation, guided practice and through social relationships.
- Making the food aspect of the social eating experience less onerous, more convenient, easier to plan and manage would support groups to develop social eating services in the County.

#### Social eating network

- Having a network of already established groups in Nottingham City provided the model for public health bodies to fund extend social eating activities into the County. This 'foundation' upon which new networks can be built is crucial and therefore recruiting existing providers is an important first stage in any strategic plans.
- Venues and equipment are key. Each group will need to work through how the social eating model will work on their site. Storage and cooking facilities may need to be improved by targeted funding for freezers and large pans, for example.

### 2.6 A network webinar

Alongside the pop-up social eating events, one Notts Social Eating Network meeting has been delivered and participants have agreed to run quarterly peer-to-peer meetings to support their emergent network. This online forum is being used to support the identification of the benefits/costs/potential outputs of social eating so that the model can be better communicated,

#### Managing surplus

- Process and freeze down gluts into sauces and stews, for example.
- Build up smaller amounts of surpluses such as cheese to create one, larger cheeseboard as a 'treat'/high value part of meal.
- People like to have some choice, even if it is between a meat and a vegetarian choice.
- If possible, make snacks, fruit, water, and extra servings of bread, yoghurts, etc., available on a side table where volunteers can oversee people taking the extras they want. Exemplar projects run occasional themed food activities, and they keep the kitchen door and serving hatch areas open so people can feel confident about the food being prepared.
- Logistically, projects who already offer vegetable-rich foods can advise other providers on how to do this logistically and cost-effectively. Popular dishes are the perennially loved roast dinner, but stews, curries, pasta dishes, salads, fruit salads, and homemade desserts are always enjoyed.
- Inviting eaters to make menu suggestions, giving people the opportunity to try new foods via small taster dishes, and extra food to takeaway are ways of managing either small or larger amounts of surplus.
- Through batch cooking, fuel and food can be conserved, and by tapping into networks such as local growers, supermarkets, markets and take-aways groups may be able to access affordable, fresh foodstuffs to complement their surplus delivery.

as per the suggestions in the previous report. During the webinar participants gave feedback about their experiences of hosting an event, shared their plans for the future and promoted current activities. The findings of the second study were communicated to the pop-up social eating event hosts and these groups had the opportunity to ask questions and share contact details.

See Appendix v for list of webinar participants.

### 2.6.1 A network webinar - overall feedback

#### Social eating network

- Participants wanted to engage in networking events, either online or face to face.
- Groups recognise the benefit of understanding what other social eating projects offer and some, such as Meet, Greet & Eat and St Pauls are already engaging in partnership working (mixing social eating with a social supermarket). Not replicating work was agreed as important and similarly, identifying gaps in provision through networking with peers was also seen as crucial to developing social eating in the County.
- Whilst FareShare Midlands is now providing online content for social eating groups (such as information on food hygiene regulations and engaging volunteers) embedding social eating model knowledge amongst community food members via peer-to-peer support is valuable. Developing relationships between peers is viewed as doing more than educating groups about the benefits or drawbacks of the model. It is also seen as an important way of building contacts that may be useful in other ways and contexts, such by partnership working or understanding when other events may be on and avoiding replication.
- Groups felt that mentoring was very helpful and that having initial contact with an experienced member helped them feel more confident and that they could ask questions as they arose in an informal way. Observing how another group serviced their social eating activities was deemed very useful. Working with a mentor also enabled them to better understand what surplus is and how it can be best utilised, and the types of menus that work well with social eating events (one pot, etc).
- What the pop-up events also bring to attention was the limitations of some venues and managing space when there are lots of people around and the work involved in cooking. The meal production service was welcomed, and several groups identified that they could scale up provision whilst minimising their workloads by accessing that service.

- The Secret Kitchen have also maintained contact with groups offering mentoring and advice about some of the practical aspects of running social eating events and the development of this type of support is recommended as a useful way of supporting the growth and strengthening of social eating activities across the region.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.7 The factors which enabled the set-up of a social eating network

#### Leveraging expertise and mentoring

- A pre-existing social eating network which provided tried-and tested a model of working- demonstrating the proof of concept.
- Pre-existing expertise within that network being enrolled in mentoring and buddying roles. Identifying and including mentors or ambassadors who can share knowledge and build confidence in groups is one way in which the social eating networks can be developed. This approach can valorise the expertise of existing members, enable members to showcase their projects, extend networks and reach and use already-existing assets within communities.
- Peer to peer networking also builds social relationships that can be sustained beyond initial start-up support and opportunities for groups to connect should be developed when new networks are setting up. Public health and LA funding should be targeted towards supporting mentoring activities
- Know-how and expertise held in community food groups is an asset which underpins much of the good work already done. The production of social eating toolkits and an online resource portal would further support this work

#### A positive message and brand

- Promoting social eating activities around the themes of community, participation, affordability, convenience and socialising are all 'move-towards' issues rather than restrictive, reductive or 'move away from' issues. This emphasis helps attract customers which will support the sustainability of the network. The LA can undertake branding and advertising activities to promote the network and list social eating spaces on their websites alongside emergency food provision such as food banks. This is often an activity that groups do via Facebook, but broader cross-county advertising would be helpful in normalising social eating and increasing customer interest

<sup>15</sup> Also responding to the need to better communicate the benefits of social eating, The Secret Kitchen and Newark College hosted Countryfile in December 2022 to film content for their Christmas special broadcast. This reached a national audience. Waste Knot and Ferry Fast also ran a social eating network development dinner with Newark College in January 2023, and connecting stakeholders from across the County, further embedding social eating into the agendas of community food projects and stakeholders such as Newark County Council.

- There is a current emphasis during this cost-of-living crisis on group activities, pooling resources, efficiencies of scale and the meeting of multiple needs via integrated services (such as food procurement procedures also responding to food waste reduction and food carbon neutrality targets). This is also bolstered by climate change concerns and overall rethinking of overly individualised ways of delivering services- there is an opportunity to use the social eating model to align a variety of strategic agenda outputs and it should be advertised both externally, and internally by LA and public health bodies
- Leveraging relationships with other stakeholders such as the LA to join procurement budgets together could be explored- could FSM and LA's work to bulk purchase for gaps in supply so that social eating networks can be expanded with a means of servicing rising demand?

#### **Taking a 'test and learn' approach**

- Further 'test and learn' and taster events should be funded as many groups wanted more than 1 social eating session and requested 3 to 5 sessions so that they had adequate time to observe in depth, build up relationships and competences and work out how the model could best be applied to their particular cohorts. Much more 'hand holding' is required if early-stage funding is to result in ongoing and sustained social eating activities
- Using the meal service via further pop-up provision to show the utility of the product is recommended- groups want to know what the offer is and how it is actually used via practical experience.

#### **Developing meal production services**

- The social eating model, especially when combined with the meal production service forms a powerful intervention that can meet multiple outputs and facilitate the expansion of social eating networks by centralising the costs and workload of producing meals and free groups up to spend more time engaging with their communities and promoting and managing social eating events
- Modular meal component services will enable groups to have greater flexibility (and control) over their menus and it may be a better way of FSM processing food stuffs by removing the need to fashion a 'whole' meal in one service period and by allowing them to offer an array of frozen meal components such as frozen pre-cooked carbohydrates, proteins and sauces, for example, that can be mixed and matched

The development of a meal production service that can take food surpluses at-scale, centralise the use of staff, food and fuel and create efficiencies, is an essential stage of regional food

security development. Building the infrastructure necessary to cycle surpluses at-scale also pre-empts regional plans for increasing local food growing. With this vital step, scaling up local food production becomes possible as there are facilities to receive, process and distribute locally grown produce. Social eating networks can also be strengthened by attracting new audiences and markets who want to consume more sustainably produced produce

### **2.8 The factors that constrained the set up a social eating network**

#### **Estate and Infrastructure**

- Venues with adequate storage, kitchen and serving space are in short supply and many spaces are not built to accommodate the social eating model.
- Many groups share space with other groups which can make access to storage, such as the freezer or cupboard space needed to store food, challenging.
- There are gaps in geographical provision, and areas where they may be need but not sufficient facilities.
- The rising costs of energy are putting an enormous strain on groups. Venue costs are rising, and groups are precariously hosted in centre's which are threatened with closing down.
- Many venues do not have adequate freezer space to take advantage of the frozen meal service offer. Available equipment may not be energy efficient.
- Without investing in an at-scale meal production service, groups will always be burdened with a high level of responsibility for the day to day operating of social eating activities.

#### **Adequate, affordable and appropriate food supplies**

- Rising food prices and food shortages add to the precarity of food supplies for social eating groups.
- The FareShare meal service is completing its pilot phase, groups require clear information about pricing so that they can apply for funding and/or price their meals accordingly.

#### **Funding and volunteering**

- Some central government funding has been allocated to support community groups to extend and sustain social eating activities, but these funds are oversubscribed.
- Local and regional funding will struggle to affect the upstream issues on food supply created by the cost of living crisis, climate change, the continuing war in Ukraine and Brexit.

- Without a clear model and offer, funding to support it, and identification and enrolment of social eating mentors, emergent groups may not sustain themselves.
- Identifying staff and volunteers who are confident enough to cook for large numbers of people is a challenge.
- Recruiting and retaining volunteers remains a challenge and there is still a high level of dependency upon key staff members.

### **2.9 Overall recommendations to improve the delivery and impact of social eating events**

The aim of the funded pop-up activities were to enable groups to try out the social eating model in a convenient and cost-free manner but also to support the development of a network of new social eating spaces in Nottinghamshire. The benefits of a networked approach, as practiced during the City groups both prior to, during and post-lockdown were viewed as central to extending that provision into Nottinghamshire. The development

of a network of social eating groups also supports FSM strategies around extending the use of surplus within the County and for enabling the best use of surpluses via meal provision. Meals bring not only the additional benefit of social engagement and inclusion around a nutritious and affordable food offer, but they also utilise fresh (and perishable) ingredients which aligns with the types of surplus that FSM receives (and has to rapidly redistribute). Understanding how to use these types of food is something that can be learned through experience but by providing opportunities to work in peer-centred ways, groups build relationships, resilience and gain support and encouragement through their networks. A phone call can often achieve more than watching a training video and positioning experienced social eating groups as experts raises their status and profile.

In the following section 3 policy recommendations and three potential impacts of policy implementation are discussed.

## **PART 3**

# **Sustaining us from day to day, as well as in times of crisis: Supporting frontline food organisations**

### **3.1 Policy recommendations**

Strategically moving away from an overfocus on food insecurity and food waste-reduction in favour of more socially inclusive and socially beneficial messaging is important if affordable community food services are to minimise stigma. Evidently many groups operate in, and are anchor organisations to, individuals and communities experiencing hardship. Therefore, explicit marketing along these issues may not be necessary. Emphasising fresh, nutritious and affordable mealtimes where people can participate, feel welcome and engage in social activities both helps to reframe customers positively and also attract a broader cohort of customers who can support the sustainability of social eating activities. Developing a network of social eating groups can support a culture shift which normalises group eating and therefore extends the benefits of the model beyond much current emergency food.

Therefore, this report puts forward 3 recommendations to change policy to facilitate the further expansion of social eating events and their benefits:

#### **1) 'Joined up' and 'complementary' funding**

Funding support should be directed towards organisations who are setting up, maintaining and extending community food services. These activities represents good value for public money. These services are accomplishing much more than feeding people. They represent space and place embedded networks which are delivering multiple benefits to their end users, and they hold extensive skills concerning food safety, volunteer management and community engagement.

- Oversight on funding and the allocation of a staff roles such as local food coordinator would help ensure all relevant community food organisations are working in complementary ways.
- Funding should be allocated to network-building and peer support activities.

## 2) Scale-up meal production

When a service such as the FareShare Midlands meal production is added to these plans, a scaled-up, networked, regional impact can be accomplished across a number of intersecting policy areas.

- Policies which support ‘joined up’ activities which produce outputs across a number of conjoined areas are favoured (such as those that simultaneously impacting upon food insecurity, nutrition and public health, community cohesion, mental and physical wellbeing and environmental sustainability and food waste reduction, for example).

## 3) Better targeted funding and support

Therefore, the following opportunities have been identified which can be addressed through funding support and policy measures:

- Community groups need funding support to host taster or test and learn events so that they can try out the meal service and ‘social eating’ model without investment or risk.
- These activities need to happen more than once, and funding should be provided to support new groups with 3 to 5 onboarding sessions, for example.
- Funding should be made available to support buddying, mentoring and network-building activities, without which groups may fail to sustain their initial enthusiasm due to lack of confidence, practical experience or feelings of siloed working.
- Funding should be made available for groups to buy-in to the meal service, such as covering the first years cost so that groups can build up income for to purchase the meal service membership the following year.
- Freezer, secure storage and dishwasher funding can aid groups who currently lack sufficient resources to provide meals at-scale.
- Significant infrastructural investment is crucial to upgrade kitchens, food storage, preparation and distribution resources. Thought should be given to creating funding specifically to support larger scale, innovative ventures which require industry expertise and environmental health alignment, for example, such as large-scale factory-standard kitchens which can produce 1000’s of meals per day.
- Funders should support groups to better evidence how their services can impact upon local and regional food security, public health and carbon neutrality agendas.
- Funders should consider long term grants for regional coordinators to link groups together, host networking

activities, maintain regional public-facing websites, collect overall efficacy data and join regional networks together, to create national impact.

The potential impacts of these types of funding and policy measures are as follows:

### Increasing access to affordable and nutritious meals

- Meal services such as the one outlined in this report can enable groups and through them, individuals, to access affordable pre-cooked meals at a time when food, energy and heating costs are high. This will positively impact upon food insecure groups and those currently struggling with high living costs.
  - Increasing access to affordable and nutritious meals in a social setting can beneficially impact food socialisation and food literacy among eaters, and increase food-wellbeing, overall.
  - Community groups identify that ‘normalising’ and destigmatising the consumption of surplus-made products is necessary for all available food resources to be consumed by a variety of eaters for a range of reasons. Groups identify that eating together in groups is a ‘future food’ behaviour that moves away from overly individualised provision to more group and socially oriented services.
- Macro and micronutrient insecurity amount people experiencing food poverty is an emergent area of concern for public health. Meal services can offer a complete, pre-cooked meal that has been made from fresh ingredients, minimally processed and immediately frozen- maintaining its nutrient value.
- A modular meal offer (with a vegetable stew and then an accompanying rice or potato topping, for example) enables groups to mix and match their meal offers, this will ensure individuals can access meals that are culturally and dietarily appropriate.
  - Meals can be repacked into take-away containers. This can positively impact those who may not be able to attend a mealtime- enabling them to still access a nutritious meal. This will impact levels of consumption of convenience and ready meals consumption (which may not be as nutritious).

### Building resilience and capacity in community groups

- At a time when community groups themselves are experiencing high energy and heating costs as well as rising requests for support, meal services, for example, minimise running costs, impacting upon the capacity of community groups to keep their services open.
- With a much-simplified 're-heat and eat' model, meal services can enable new groups to be more readily established and for existing groups to build further capacity into their 'social eating' activities.
- Less time spent preparing food means that groups can increase contact and engagement activities. This will impact upon the mental and emotional wellbeing of service users by ensuring that people experiencing post-lockdown anxiety or loneliness, for example, can be more closely supported.
- The lower costs of the meal service vis a vis purchasing food from retailers means that other activities such as engagement and educational activities can be funded- building capacity within community groups.
- The meal service makes volunteer recruitment easier, with less reliance on key staff members, as there are less complex cooking tasks.
- The FareShare Midlands meal service is shaped by customers preferences and tastes. The established lines of communication between FareShare Midlands and its members, and their willingness to tailor their offer to be maximally inclusive, ensures that co-productive values are 'baked in' to this service. This service also moves away strategically, from the connotations of food waste and stigma which often accompanies emergency food provision- focusing instead on participation, pleasure, socialising and environmental stewardship.
- Due to its relative affordability, the meal service is more sustainable than alternatives such as bulk purchasing ingredients and food stuffs from retailers.
- Due to accessing surplus foods within the production chain that cannot otherwise be used (such as partially cooked, very short-dated or catering-sized packs of foods) FareShare themselves can increase the volumes of food they redistribute. This builds capacity into the surplus redistribution sector by ensuring that community members have sufficient and appropriate variety of food which in turn ensures they sustain their membership.

### Impacts upon food-related environmental sustainability targets

- Utilising all available food resources is crucial when our food supply is becoming precarious due to a number of factors. Looking forward, processing ever higher volumes of surplus food prevents edible food from entering landfill and an at-scale meal service will impact upon regional food carbon neutrality targets and food waste disposal costs.
- The reduction in packaging also represents a reduction in local waste (especially where bin spaces are often shared with other groups).
- Local strategies such as Nottingham City's Carbon Neutral 2028 targets can be supported through these projects.

### 3.2 Research outputs

*The following outputs have been delivered or influenced during the two research phases:*

- FareShare Midlands launched a new surplus processing and meal production kitchen with Nottingham City Council and Sainsburys, a UK first.<sup>16</sup>
- Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Councils have committed to utilising more surplus food stocks as way of reducing food costs and aligning food procurement with carbon neutral targets.
- Nottingham City Council has asked to meet with the project researchers to discuss putting social eating target commitments into their next manifesto.
- During a *Future Food Symposium* event GBIS researchers, FSM and Central England Coop delivered an online presentation to an international audience of circa. 100 people in September 2021.<sup>17</sup>
- Researcher has attended and contributed 11 meetings with the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Food Insecurity Network (FIN) and leads on the social eating agenda.
- 8 pop-up research events.
- 1 customer survey.
- 1 webinar and networking event.
- Seminar '[Getting 'surplus food' to those in need during a cost-of-living crisis: The scaling-up of social eating in the East Midlands](#)' delivered in December 2022.<sup>18</sup>
- 1 FareShare Midlands staff team presentation in Birmingham.

<sup>16</sup> <https://faresharemidlands.org.uk/press-releases/fareshare-midlands-launches-meal-production-initiative-at-loxley-house-with-nottingham-city-council-and-sainsburys-1168.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/about-us/research-events/2020/future-food-symposium>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kB4bJex-z68>



- Researcher briefed Nottinghamshire County Council to consider using FSM services to fulfil their Holiday Activity Fund activities and sat in on the first meeting discussing this potential contract.
- Researcher sits on the Nottinghamshire County Council's Public Health board and proposed that the central government Contain funding of £800k be directed to supporting social eating and local growing initiatives. Social eating projects in the County awarded almost £40k in funding.
- Briefing the City Council to directly support FSM with £80k and £20k of Department of Work and Pensions funding.
- 3 meetings with Nottingham City Council's Eating and Moving for Good Health Board and researcher recruitment on to the food strand of that Board. A first draft of the food strand strategy has been submitted that names the community food network and FSM as key stakeholder in food security and nutritious food provision within the city.

### 3.3 Research outcomes

- The findings from the first study shaped the regional food insecurity network agenda by highlighting the value of social eating and local growing activities- leading to £800k in awarded funding.
- Recommendations resulting from this research have led to a greater allocation of funding to FareShare Midlands for both ambient food stocks and community food organisation membership.
- Nottingham City and County Councils have committed to utilising a greater amount of surplus food in their food procurement practices.
- FareShare Midlands have committed to capturing a greater amount of short dated surplus food and setting up facilities to transform surplus into meals. Through a partnership between Nottingham City council and the UK supermarket Sainsburys, surpluses are now being processed into multi-portion meals.
- Report author Dr Marsha Smith is now an active board member of both Nottingham City and County Public Health boards contributing towards to direction of food specific policy.

### 3.4 Final conclusions

Despite often working 'under the radar,' often quietly, and without much publicity or fanfare, the community food sector nonetheless delivers much more than food to citizens across the East Midlands region. They are an example of public money for public good who, during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated

their deep worth and commitment to the communities they serve. The report highlights the opportunity to mobilise the more-than nutrient, calorie and commercial aspects of food, such as its capacity to bring people together to foster shared understanding and collaboration, to create 'safe and inclusive spaces for experimentation and interaction with food', to use 'positive language of empowerment around food' and to develop 'place-specific levels of support that enable the recognition and enhancement of locally based assets to create transformations in communities. They extend the reach of statutory bodies out into communities where there is need and they are well-placed to deliver the types of services required in both the current cost-of-living crisis but also in a future where more social, sustainable and regionally controlled food services are required. The expansion of 'social' eating services requires not just funding but investment in infrastructure, and particularly infrastructures that can produce and distribute meals at-scale to maximise efficiencies.

This report highlights community food activities that pragmatically to move us from an individual consumption and behaviour-change approach towards community-oriented models of working. These approaches recognise not only the nutrient value of purchasable food, but also the significant role of food in maintaining the social relationships which sustain individuals and strengthen community ties. Community food projects meet community needs, as communities themselves identify them, and they give expression to the needs of citizens to prioritise pleasure, reciprocity, sharing, caring, conversation and dignity alongside cost and nutrition.

As stated, this work is often invisible yet it this report highlights some tried and tested models of delivery which are underpinned by already existing knowledges, resources and competencies. In order to continue the efforts to create food security in our region in ways that are just, inclusive, accessible and sustainable, sharing the insights and practices of community food organisations is crucial. Our report offers much hope that the seeds of social transformation have already been sown- a complex new technology, an abstracted ideology or a long-shot strategy are not needed. Instead, these groups are demonstrating that making best use of all food resources, building infrastructural capacity and creating not-for-profit, and socially oriented food networks is already underway.

The challenge is to recognise the value of this work, not only through funding it, but also by promoting shared food as a powerful 'future food practice' which sustains us from day-to-day, as well as in times of crisis.

## Appendix i - In depth interview questions

**Interview questions for other stakeholders (including Local Authorities, industry bodies and Public Health) Precise questions will be adapted for each stakeholder as required.**

- 1) Introduce yourself/Your organisation/Explain the role of.....?
- 2) Can you describe how your organisation responded to the Pandemic with regards to food provisioning?
- 3) What enabled and constrained your capacity to deliver these services?
- 4) Why are community organisations important in the fight against food wastage/insecurity/hunger?
- 5) What are the challenges of working with community organisations? What do you see as the barriers in expanding the work they do?
- 6) Pick out cultural and regional differences?
- 7) How can community organisations be better supported going forward? What works well?
- 8) What role does your organisation play in supporting food redistribution through community organisations?
- 9) What forms of due diligence are carried out/how are standards checked and maintained?
- 10) How are decisions made in terms of what funding and support is provided to organisations?
- 11) What role does national policy play in supporting food redistribution? What would you like to see or how could policy play a role?
- 12) What policy measures can be introduced to help your organisations work with these partners?
- 13) Elaborate upon your relationship with FareShare- nature of relationship, type of partnership, shared vision? The outcomes of this partnership and any development plans?
- 14) Describe and explain how the Pandemic has impacted upon food need and generated challenges for delivering food. What has the NCC learned from this experience that will shape your relationship with FareShare/ community food groups?
- 15) Any other reflections or issues you'd like us to capture?

## Appendix ii - Film and photography instructions

**Community organisations in the fight against food insecurity in the Midlands Research Project - Capturing the realities of charitable food provisioning**

Brief for video contribution

The Centre for Business in Society at Coventry University are currently undertaking a piece of research to better understand the important work of community organisations. We want to capture the on the ground reality of community food provision. Whilst there has been lots of media coverage of food insecurity over the pandemic, we want to hear what it has really been like carrying out the important work on the frontline.

We are requesting short video entries detailing the work you do and your experiences, in particular your reflection on the rise in donations over the pandemic period and the impact this has had on your work.

The videos you share will help us understand the lived experience of volunteers and may also be included in a short film.

**For taking the time to provide a video that covers the content listed below, we offer a £20 All4one voucher for participating. The voucher will be sent to you.**

**Content requested:**

- A short video which shows things you think are interesting and important. You can talk as you film to create a commentary, or you can film one of your colleagues and ask them to talk (with their consent of course!) you can focus on any of the following:

- What is the role you undertake? Why do you do this and what impact does it have?
  - What does your role involve – explain and demonstrate- for example, receiving, sorting, cooking and delivering meals, working with other organisations or coordinating volunteers.
  - How does a typical day 'look' like to you?
- What challenges have you faced over the course of the pandemic? How did your role change and what have you learnt?
- What are the best things about doing what you do?
  - What things worry you, or are a concern for you?

**Format required**

- Video in landscape orientation is preferred but submission in portrait acceptable.
- Short videos of 30 seconds to 3 minutes.

**Submission guidance**

- Submit videos via WhatsApp to Marsha or by another format such as emailing.

- Ensure that you have completed the consent form

Many thanks, The Research Team

David Bek, Marsha Smith and Jordon Lazell – Centre for Business in Society, Coventry University

## Appendix iii - Sample of the customer 'data plate' data collection sheet



## Appendix iv - Analysis of FareShare Midlands survey for community food members

### 1. Participant information

#### 1.1 Location and overview

10 community food organisations completed the survey. This consisted of organisations located across the Nottinghamshire area. Figure 1 gives the location of the survey respondents showing a cluster outside Nottingham and Mansfield and Newark on Trent, with a further two located in more rural locations.

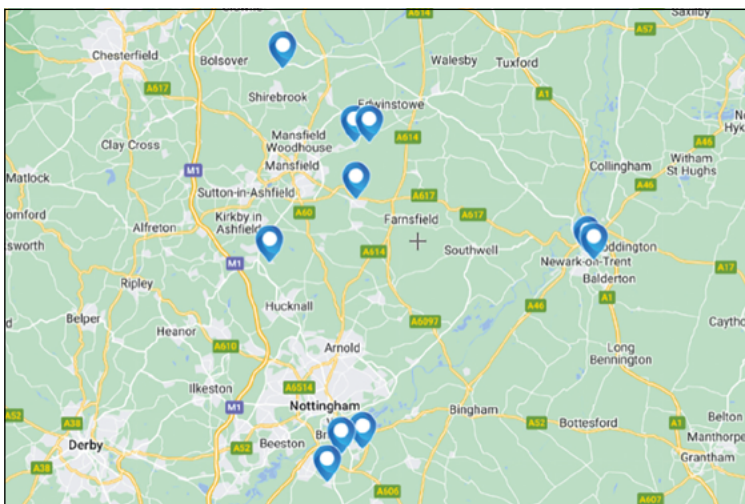


Figure 1: Location of participant organisations

Table 1 gives an overview of the key response information for each of the participant information. This is described in more detail in the following sections.

Participant ID	Post code	Services	Type of service user	Venue capacity	FareShare Delivery frequency	Purchase further ingredients?
CFM1	NG11	Food pantry	General public	100		No
CFM2	NG20	Social eating project, Food pantry, Mobile food pantry, Meal delivery	The elderly, Families, Young adults, General public	100	Once a week	No
CFM3	NG24	Food bank, Food pantry	Families, Young adults, General public		Once every 2 weeks	Yes – Top up meat of vegetarian ingredients to provide a main meal
CFM4	NG21	Social eating project, Food club, Food bank	General public	90	Once a week	No
CFM5	NG24	Social eating project, Food bank, Food pantry	The elderly, Families, Young adults, General public		Everyday food is collected from supermarkets	Yes – Dried goods
CFM6	NG2	Social eating project, Community café, Meal delivery, Takeaway meal	The elderly, Families, Young adults, General public	50	No regular commitment	No
CFM7	NG21	Social eating project, Community garden and food growing project	People who are isolated, who have long-term illnesses or mental health conditions	20		Yes - Vegetables, herbs, spices, store cupboard ingredients (e.g. flour, sugar, tinned goods etc)
CFM8	NG15	Social eating project, Takeaway meal	Families, General public		Once every 2 weeks	Yes - herbs spices stock oil
CFM9	NG21	Social eating project, Food club, takeaway meal	The elderly, Families, Young adults, General public	100	Twice a week	Yes - herbs and spices, milk, fresh meat
CFM10	NG2	Food bags and Social supermarket	The elderly, Families, Young adults, General public, adults with additional needs	70	Once a week	Yes - Items such as bread fruit and vegetables

Table 1: Overview of information on participant organisations.

Responses stated that there were further groups they the organisations would like to provide further but are not currently accessed. This included

- Vulnerable groups
- A greater portion of older people
- People that are isolated
- People with long term health conditions or mental health conditions
- Adults with additional needed.

Seven of the ten organisations indicated they would like to increase the number of customers they provide for with responses indicating that a further 25 to 50 people could be recipients of their service

### 3. Venue access

The survey findings show that most service users walk to the venues from which the organisations operate. Followed by access by car and public transport. In most cases the organisation hold a key to the venue, with only two cases where direct access via a key is not possible.

In terms of the type of venues from where the service is offered, these range from community spaces to local cafes, as well as a farm and a college. Five of the organisations indicated that they have easy access to their venues and can come and go as they want, with three requiring the permission of others and two indicating that they only have access at certain times. Eight of the ten participant organisations have to share their space with other organisations.

### 4. Connections with other groups

Six of the respondents deliver their services in partnership with others. These partnerships include:

- Relationships with supermarkets to source food for food bank operations and a community fridge.
- Working with organisations such as Neighbourly that secure volunteer time
- Relationships with local cafes to provide a venue for services
- Relationship with a local church that also hire the same space

Participant ID	Storage capacity for ambient, chilled and frozen food	Kitchen and cooking facilities	Condition of venue, storage, and equipment
CFM1	600L fridge freezer ~240L freezer 360L fridge Double cupboard	Small kitchen, limited cooking availability. Small oven and microwave	Quite dated
CFM2	Plenty	Limited	A mix of old and good used
CFM3	Large upright fridge which has 6 shelves to house chilled food. No freezer at the present time	Onsite kitchen facilities. Catering course has its own kitchen facilities	Less than one year old fridge
CFM4	2 American fridge freezers	Adequate, large kitchen	We'll maintain high standard newish cooker
CFM5	Double catering style fridge and freezer with 2 additional domestic fridges and freezers and a chest freezer	Use Cafe facilities for our social eating events	Good condition
CFM6	Large fridge and freezer. Budget to purchase another freezer but awaiting electrics installation	Large kitchen with a range of sinks, dishwasher, oven, fridge and freezer	Relatively new kitchen. Limited storage. Adequate equipment
CFM7	Chilled: 1 large fridge Frozen: 1 medium freezer. Ambient: any spare space in our portacabin	1 decent sized kitchen with a 4-ring electric cooker, domestic oven, 1 sink, and cutlery/crockery for 20+ people. A large domestic fridge/freezer	It is an old but functional portacabin. Storage is good; the venue is redecorated as often as possible.
CFM8	5 freezers and fridge freezers. Racking for ambient in purpose-built garden room	Own kitchen with large pans and large range cooker	Older freezers
CFM9	2 Large fridges and a small under counter freezer. Large 14ft storage shed and a bank of 40 x 600cm x 50cm shelving in the Social supermarket and kitchen	Kitchen and cooking facilities that can feed up to 25	Good, about 10 years old
CFM10	Reasonable	Don't have any	Fairly new venue

Table 2: Storage capacity, kitchen facilities and their condition

## 5. FareShare delivery and purchasing of further ingredients

With regards to the participant organisations relationship with FareShare, the delivery frequency differed significantly. For five participants the delivery took place once a week or once every other week, with one further case receiving a delivery twice a week (CFM9). There did not appear to be any correlation between the proximity of the organisations to FareShare Nottingham and the frequency of delivery.

Six of the ten respondent organisations purchased additional ingredients. This included:

- Fresh meat
- Fruit and vegetables
- Dried goods such as herbs and spices
- Store cupboard ingredients such as flour, sugar and tinned goods
- Stock and oil
- Fresh bread

## 6. Kitchen facilities and equipment

Table 2 gives an overview of organisations responses on their storage and kitchen facilities as well as their condition.

The responses show a considerable range in storage capacity, from those with significant fridge and freezer space, such as

CFM8 to those with less such as CFM7 and CFM9. The overall access and condition of the kitchen facilities was generally to a high standard. Participants however noted that freezers were on the aging side in some cases such as CFM8.

In terms of access to further storage, six of the respondents stated that they have limited further space (CFM5 and CFM6). CFM8 and CFM 10 indicated they had no further access to storage.

## 7. Funding position and staffing

Nearly all the organisations indicated that grant funding represents the most significant contribution they receive. For example, CFM6 and CFM7 have a similar funding arrangement being in receipt of grant from the National Lottery as well as from the local authority. Participants also indicated that they undertook fund raising, such as in the case of CFM6 and also raised their own income, such as in the case of CFM9 where the income was generated via subsidised services and membership fees.

7 of the 10 organisations employed staff

Only one of the organisations indicated they were not concerned about funding challenges in the future. Concerns expressed related to:

- The ability to pay rent
- The difficulty in accessing new funding streams
- The lack of sales from café operations
- An overall lack of the availability or funding for relieving food poverty

### 7.1 The increasing cost of energy

In order to deal with the increasing cost of energy, respondents indicated that they were:

- Reaching out to work with others in the local community to find a solution (CFM6)
- Saving funds aside to access in the future (CFM7)
- Using alternative or more readily available fuels such as generating heat from a wood burner (CFM7)
- Introduced staff training on energy efficiency to ensure appliances are turned off when not in use (CFM9)

### 8. Factors influencing success

Respondent organisations indicated that the most important thing that helped their organisation keep going was:

- Commitment from volunteers and the local community (CFM1, CFM6)
- Funding to pay for staff, to overcome the volatility of relying on volunteers (CFM2)
- Regular access to surplus food (CFM3, CFM5)
- Ensuring good visibility to families in need (CFM4)
- Stable funding plan (CFM7)
- Funding to alleviate the increased costs associated with the energy crisis (CFM8)
- Funding that helps subsidise the cost of food, i.e. keeping meals at the cost of £3.50
- Raising awareness in the community of the potential change that can be achieved – working with adults with additional needs (CFM10)

When asked what the key to their success is, responses included:

- Charging a small amount for services to ensure that they can be accessed with dignity (CFM2)
- Ensuring an element of choice rather than providing a handout (CFM2)
- Keeping going in the face of adversity (CFM4)
- Relationships with FareShare and others that provide surplus food, access to funding and volunteers (CFM5)
- Well skills people, such as a chef that can cut costs (CFM7, CFM8)
- Being in a good location (accessible?)
- A high level of community engagement (CFM9)
- Connections to local and national networks (CFM9)
- Social media engagement (CFM9)

### 9. Current challenges

Challenges highlighted in the survey responses included:

- Food availability, access to surplus food (CFM1, CFM3)
- Paperwork such as food ratings, insurance, and risk assessments (CFM1)

- The increasing cost of vehicle maintenance and diesel costs (CFM2)
- The availability and stability of grant funding (CFM3, CFM7, CFM9)
- The availability and recruitment of volunteer help (CFM4, CFM6, CFM10)
- Space and food storage (CFM5)
- Rising costs (CFM8)
- The cost-of-living impact on service users (CFM8)

### 10. Interest in new FareShare products

#### 10.1 Stage 1 products

Stage 1 products were indicated as catering sized packs which are being broken down to be redistributed such as chilled or frozen processes peas, cooking sauces, frozen chicken breast or whole frozen duck, for 1kg of chopped mushrooms.

With regards to stage one products Eight of the ten respondent organisations indicated that they were interested in the new FareShare products, just two indicated that they were unsure.

In terms of how stage 1 products might be used responses included:

- Made into meals
- Repackaged for freezing
- Broken down into smaller volume to provide as food parcels
- Used as ingredients at social eating events

The majority of respondents indicated that they would only like this type of product on request only (5 participants), with two organisations (CFM3 and CFM9) indicating that they would like this product with every delivery.

#### 10.2 Stage 2 products

Stage 2 products consist of pre-prepared ingredients such as diced squash, wilted spinach, chunky vegetable mixed, chopped onions, soup bases and mixed fruit.

Seven of the ten respondents indicated they would be interested in receiving this type of food.

In terms of how stage 2 products might be used responses included:

- Pass food items to service users directly without cooking them
- Made into meals – as part of catering activities
- In preparation for social eating events
- To make soups and crumbles as part of wider product activities
- Used within Healthy cooking sessions to teach others

4 of the participants indicated that they would only request stage 2 items

2 respondents indicated that they would request stage 2 items with every deliver

#### 10.3 Stage 3 products

Stage 3 products consisted of meal components and side dishes such as mashed potato, mashed vegetables, pasta sauces, sandwich fillings, jacket potatoes, cooked commodities like beans and rice and slow cooked meats.

All of the respondents with the exception of one organisation that was not sure (CFM1) were interested in receiving stage 3 products

In terms of how stage 3 products might be used responses included:

- Portioning out to service users
- Used for community lunches
- Used to create meal packages or bulk meals to share
- Used as part of a menu to provide jacket potatoes, stews and sandwich fillings
- Used as part of social eating events
- To make food bags or food parcels

5 of the respondents indicated they would only request stage 3 products. 3 indicated they would request stage 3 with every delivery.

### 10.4 Stage 4 products

Stage 4 products consist of products for individuals of multi-meal portions. These suit organisations with limited kitchen equipment or space – they help save time and energy.

There was less interest in this product type. 7 and the 10 groups indicated that they would be interested in these products.

In terms of how these products would be used:

- They would be used as portions for service users
- As something that could help the families of service users cook at home
- They would help expand our service to provide delivery or takeaway (CFM5 and CFM6)
- At social eating events
- In food bags or food parcels

3 respondents indicated they would like to receive stage 4 products with every delivery, with only a further 3 on request only

There was no clear preference for either single or multi portion sizes.

## 11. Benefits and barriers of new FareShare products

### 11.1 Benefits

When asked what the benefits might be to using these new FareShare products, responses were:

9 participants indicated that the products would provide convenience and make it easier to produce a meal

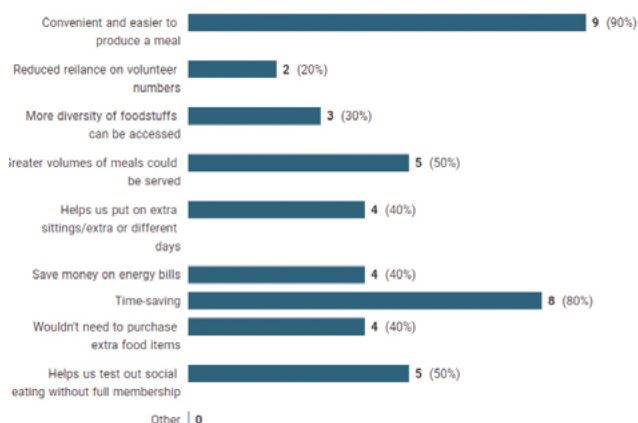
8 participants noted the time saving benefits

5 participants noted that greater volume of meals could be served

5 participants noted that these new products would help test out social eating without full membership

Other responses selected by 4 participants included:

- Helping to put on extra sittings
- Save money on energy bills
- They would not need to purchase extra food items



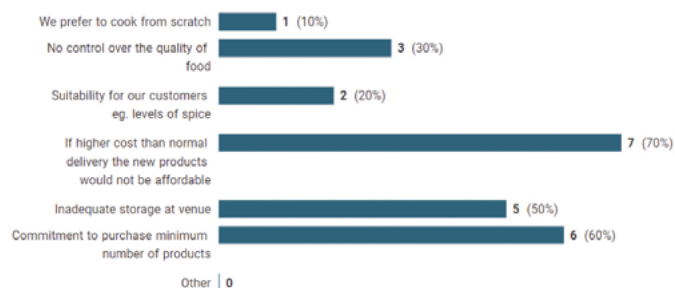
### 11.2 Barriers

7 participants noted the barrier was the higher-than-normal cost of delivery and that this would not be affordable

6 participants commented on the commitment to purchase a minimum number of products

5 indicated that they had inadequate storage

Further answers included the lack of control over the quality of food (3), being unsure over the suitability of products for their customers (2), and the preference to cook from scratch.



## Appendix v - Network webinar participants

Hosts- Dr Marsha Smith and Dr Jordon Lazell, Centre for Business in Society, Coventry University.

Participants from: Meet, Greet & Eat, Metropolitan Housing, Clipstone Family Action, Feel Good Gardens, Newark College.

# The Centre for Business in Society

## Our research

The behaviours of organisations and policy makers impact on individuals, groups and communities, businesses and organisations, nations and global relations. These effects and consequences can be beneficial and enable enhanced social, economic and environmental well-being. However, negative consequences can also arise from business practices and policy makers paying insufficient attention to their corporate responsibilities or their impact on society. Our research aims to understand the role of business in society, to share these emerging insights and to seek a fairer outcome for all.

CBiS's team of researchers has long-established multiple industry and institutional collaborations on a global scale, sharing the benefits of impact-led research. We embrace research methods that are considerate and sensitive to the constantly changing business environment, behaviours, practices and society.

Our core funding stems from EU and government bodies, charities, research councils and local businesses. CBiS has a clearly defined focus within each research cluster as detailed in our Research Brochure.

## Core themes

Our mission is to deliver effective solutions to policy makers, businesses and industries that reflect responsible practice. Through understanding the impact of organisations' activities, behaviours and policies, our research seeks to promote responsibility and to change behaviours so as to achieve better outcomes for economies and societies.

CBiS's research themes have now formed the basis of our four research teams which are centred around the following themes:

Sustainable Production and Consumption  
Economic Transformation, Inclusion and Entrepreneurship  
Sector, Economic Equality and Responsible Finance Studies  
Data, Organisations and Society



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 @CBiS\_CovUni

## The Sustainable Production and Consumption Cluster

This research team focuses on the ultimate goals of living within environmental limits and the attainment of social justice, through the delivery of responsible business and ethical consumption practices.

Our research is aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 12: 'Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns'. The cluster frames its research around a holistic approach to sustainability, whereby true sustainability requires the alignment of social, economic and environmental goals. Our research takes a 'whole supply chain' approach, examining activities, attitudes and behaviours at different points in the life cycle of products.

Our projects cover areas such as waste reduction, resource and energy efficiency, sustainable community and consumer behaviours, ethical certifications and supply chain governance.

Food futures is a pivotal part of our strategy going forward. Our work spans the issue of food waste at different nodes in the supply chain, to food provisioning for the food insecure in the UK and internationally. This competitive research space is a hot topic nationally (and globally) and is one in which CBiS has a growing presence, impressive networks of practitioners and policy bodies, and success with seeking funding.

Our work is global in nature, reaching out in particular to South Africa, Indonesia and China. The interdisciplinary cluster team generates a dynamic environment for cutting-edge research.