

Hot Meal Provision Toolkit for Groups

Contents

Section 1: Introduction	2
1.1 Hot Meal Providers and Schemes	2
1.2 Cookery Projects	3
Section 2: Identifying the need.....	7
2.1 Area Research	7
2.2 Venue	8
Types of venues	9
Potential issues	9
2.3 Food Safety	10
2.4 Volunteers.....	10
Section 3: Resources	11
3.1 Funding	11
3.2 Food	11
Appendix	12

Section 1: Introduction

In the context of the increasing cost of living, we know that local communities are keen to develop arrangements to support residents to access food – whether by supporting food banks, community fridges, or the provision of hot meals.

This toolkit is designed to help local people to set up their own community-based hot food provision, covering some of the practical steps needed to consider when setting up a scheme and some examples of local community meal schemes in practice.

We hope this guide will help to support you with relevant information on what you need to consider when setting up a successful hot meal scheme.

The content draws on a range of emerging sources of guidance, including the ‘Cooking for your community’ Toolkit developed by the Active Wellbeing Society.

1.1 Hot Meal Providers and Schemes

There are many hot meal providers and schemes in Buckinghamshire including community cafes, pubs, supper clubs, Big Community Takeaway and school breakfast and lunch Clubs.

These providers already deliver hot meal support across the County including the utilisation of appropriate facilities and food health and safety policies/guidelines.

This guidance aims to guide and support organisations to set up their own hot meal provision, expanding the provision to reach more residents.

To find out about the schemes already operating, you can use the Buckinghamshire Online Directory to search for local providers and schemes:

[Find activities, groups, and services near you | Bucks Online Directory | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

Or speak with our Buckinghamshire Council Food Support Coordinator –

Hannah.Tomlin@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

1.2 Cookery Projects

Cookery projects aim to enable residents to cook healthy low-cost and budget friendly meals. This method encourages residents to help themselves and in turn could result in less reliance on our local food support providers (eg food banks).

There are already some great projects in operation across the County, here are a few examples:

- **Khepera and Feedback – Slo Plates Project**

One of the leading organisations in this project is Feedback Global. Feedback had run a similar project in Northern England and wanted to replicate this in Buckinghamshire.

Statistics show that following the pandemic a high percentage of the population of Buckinghamshire were experiencing food poverty, with pending fuel poverty issues –this project is supporting residents in need by helping to reduce household food and fuel costs in a friendly and positive way.

Feedback set up a partnership with a local community company, Khepera CIC, to deliver the Slo Plates project including delivering a number of community-based cooking workshops.

The project helped residents understand how to use the slow cooker and alternative fuel reducing “gadgets” including the Wonderbag and Wonderbox(Haybox). Slo’ Plates also gave local food support organisations a set of Wonderbags and boxes to loan out to those in immediate need.

This project was funded by Buckinghamshire Council’s Helping Hand Department’s Household grant. This project was successfully delivered from May to July 2022.



The pantry essentials pack contained 25 food items.



The entire Slo Plates pack – slow cooker; pantry essentials & a recipe cards. Each household received one pack.

- **One Can Trust – Cookery Programme** - [One Can Trust projects - Bringing communities together](#)

One Can Trust Food Bank have successfully delivered a number of cookery programmes to give families and individuals the confidence to cook healthy, easy, and budget friendly meals at home.

These courses ran weekly at a number of schools where a cooking tutor taught the parents and carers how to prepare a healthy, hot meal from scratch to enjoy and share with their family for dinner. For the final hour of the course the children then join the session and create something fun such as cakes and biscuits. Encouraging parents and their children to cook and eat together.

The first 4-week adult only course has just finished, which ran from a local community centre, The Hive Community centre. This course worked in partnership with clients from

Buckinghamshire Council and Wycombe Mind. The course was two hours in duration and the attendees learned basic cookery skills from using a knife correctly to preparing rice safely, along with preparing a healthy, hot meal from scratch.

The aim of this programme is to give families and individuals the confidence to cook healthy, easy, and budget friendly meals at home.



- **Grow It Cook It Eat It (Public Health) - [Grow It Cook It Eat It \(healthandwellbeingbucks.org\)](http://healthandwellbeingbucks.org) -**

Grow it Cook it Eat is a community food growing and cooking project, bringing communities together. The project has two main elements, growing and cooking that aims to bring together communities who may experience financial hardship or have challenges accessing fresh fruit and vegetables to provide spaces to use for your own growing, and provide opportunities to improve your cooking skills and knowledge.

There are currently 4 community growing sites across Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham that provide a free space for the local community to grow and harvest their own produce. No experience is needed to attend the growing site as each site is managed by an

Expert Gardener or a Community Champion Grower who can teach and support residents in successfully growing their own food.

The project has also trained up Volunteer Cooking Tutors who deliver free cooking sessions to groups of people within the community. The aim of the cooking sessions is to teach residents basic cooking skills and recipes for quick, low-cost, and nutritious meals over a 5-session course. The Volunteer Cooking Tutors set up and deliver the cooking sessions across Buckinghamshire using their existing and new links in the community.





Section 2: Identifying the need

It is important to make sure your service or scheme is complementary to other activities in your area so that local resources are not diluted (infinite surplus food available at a given time, volunteer pool, etc.) and your scheme adds value to the local community

It is important to consider the needs of the local community and understand services already operating in your area.

- Have you checked out the [Bucks Online Directory](#) to see what else is available in your area?
- Have you spoken with your [local Community Board Manager](#)
- Have you spoken with the [Buckinghamshire Council Food Support Coordinator](#)?
- Have you engaged in the Buckinghamshire Food Access Meeting Group? If you'd like to join the group, please contact Hannah Hannah.Tomlin@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

2.1 Area Research

It is useful to research your desired area to find out where your service would be best placed and who your guests are likely to be. This ensures you are set up in the right location and you know how to reach your audience. Furthermore, if you are applying for funding it is sometimes useful to evidence in your application an understanding of the level of need in the area and how your service will be adding value. Details of potential funding sources can be found in section 3.1.

Things to consider:

- **Where are the most deprived wards in the area?**

Using, for example, the [Indices of Multiple Deprivation Map](#)

- Where are the key spots to consider for engaging those who are the most socially isolated and vulnerable to loneliness?

Age UK have some great resources, including a [loneliness map](#)

- **Where and what is the existing provision to avoid duplication?**

Research this by speaking with your local Community Board Manager, speaking with the

Buckinghamshire Council Food Support Coordinator, or engaging in the Buckinghamshire Food Access Meeting Group. You can also check out the [Bucks Online Directory](#).

- **Where is the optimum area for travel**

Make sure the area is easily accessible for guests and volunteers. Are there local public transport links or transport schemes that residents could use to travel to your scheme?

- **How well connected is the area for surplus food?**

Consider where you will source surplus food from. Use Google maps to search for 'supermarkets' or 'grocery shops' and make sure you speak with local food support organisations to ensure that donations of surplus are distributed fairly.

You can find demographic information about local areas on the [council website](#) or using [census data](#). This will help inform you how to tailor your service to your local community. Consider:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- Religion
- Language
- Migration status (e.g., asylum seeker population)
- Household composition
- Health

2.2 Venue

Think about what you need in terms of a venue and equipment

- Semi-commercial kitchen?
- 6 hob cooker?
- Other appliances?
- Food storage (ambient/fresh)?
- Cooking equipment available?
- Dining space?
- Accessibility to the building?
- Tables/chairs?
- Storage for FOH items?
- Waste management?

It is also important to consider costs and responsibilities. Make sure you have these discussions early on and agree on who is responsible for what, who is contributing to which running costs and/or renting the space, and by how much.

Types of venues

Common venues include community centres and faith groups as they are in the heart of many communities and keen to have more free activities for their communities if there is a gap in their offer. You may also have suggestions from local connections you have made.

Potential issues

- Some venues might prefer a voucher/referral scheme as opposed to an 'open door' policy
- Limited surplus food nearby
- Small pool of volunteers nearby
- Reassuring partners that you are not just parachuting in and ignoring the hard work already being carried out in the area

2.3 Food Safety

Anyone preparing food to give out to the public must comply with certain regulations to ensure everyone's safety. Here we have included a list of things to consider and some resources that may help navigate this. Please note, this is not an exhaustive list, and regulations can change at any time. Always speak to your [local Environmental Health Office](#) to ensure you are doing everything you need to do correctly.

- [Register](#) as a food business with your local authority. You should do this at least 28 days before you start giving out food to the public.
- [FSA Guidance on Community Food Provision](#)
- [Safer Food, Better Business for Caterers](#) pack has been designed for small businesses and contains information on personal hygiene, pest control, cross contamination, cleaning, chilling, and cooking, among other areas. It also includes templates of records you need to keep proving you are taking the necessary steps to ensure food is safe
- At least the lead cook of each session needs to have Level 3 Food Hygiene training and will be responsible for ensuring all others helping are sticking to food hygiene practices.
- Allergen control is important, and you must have a list of allergen information available for anyone who is consuming the food. The FSA provides a FREE [online allergy training](#). It's recommended that all food handlers take this course. They also provide a [template allergen chart](#), and an online tool to help with [food labelling](#).
- [WRAP](#) have put together useful guidance for the labelling of surplus food for redistribution
- Risk assessments are important to work out how to deliver your session safely. You will need one for the session, and the venue manager needs to provide one for the venue too. [Templates](#) and guidance is available from the Health and Safety Executive.
- It is important to not forget Public Liability Insurance

2.4 Volunteers

While most organisations will have volunteer policies in place, it is important that they are [supported and trained](#) properly as they may well encounter higher numbers of vulnerable people. You should always avoid having staff working alone in your space.

If you would like help finding volunteers for your organisation, you can register with the [Buckinghamshire Volunteer Matching Service](#) which matches volunteers with roles where they are most needed in the county. You can also find advice on developing and advertising roles, together with key resources on managing volunteers – from developing a volunteering strategy, writing a volunteering agreement to supporting your volunteer's mental wellbeing on the [Community Impact Bucks Website](#)

Taking care of staff and volunteers is also vital because they themselves may be facing financial hardship. You could look at creating a peer support or buddy scheme where team members can discuss issues that arise, air concerns and even just vent if needed. You may also have team members who may be more vulnerable to Covid and the [National Joint Council agreed guidance](#) with employers about how they should be supported.

It is important to make sure that your staff and volunteers have the confidence to interact with a wide range of people and to [manage problem behaviour](#) if it arises, and they must be given clear instructions on how to call in extra support if necessary. You should also carry out an assessment of each staff and volunteer role to see if it requires [a police check](#).

-This is where a [thorough risk assessment](#) is useful to highlight potential issues and try to prepare for them in advance. You will also need to double check to make sure that your insurance covers any new activity you take on.

Section 3: Resources

You may need funding to support the costs of running your project, so we have included some databases and ongoing funding pots. Many will have some eligibility requirements. We have also included some suggestions for food sources.

3.1 Funding

Example Funding includes:

- [Buckinghamshire Funding Search](#) - Database of local and national funding opportunities
- Community Board Funding - funding may be available from your local Community Board, please speak to your local [Community Board Manager](#) to discuss your potential project
- [My Funding Central](#) - for small organisations with an annual income of less than £1M (free to those with an annual income of less than £30K)
- [Charity Excellence](#) – free
- [Grants Online](#) - paid service

3.2 Food

Where you source food from will depend on the amount of produce you can use and the

sources local to you. We have included some ideas below:

Larger Scale:

- [FareShare Community Food Membership](#) – regular supply of surplus food, intercepted at the source, before reaching a retailer. Fee to cover operational costs (depending on region)
- [FareShare Go](#) – app that provides direct access to surplus food from supermarkets. Free of charge.
- [Neighbourly](#) – collect surplus directly from partner supermarkets. Free of charge.

Smaller Scale:

- [Lidl Waste Not boxes](#) – pick up a 5kg box of fruit and veg for £1.50
- [Company Shop](#) – membership-based shops with highly discounted prices (paid)
- [Olio](#) – share with neighbours and others in your local area (free)
- [Too Good To Go](#) – rescue food from shops and restaurants (paid)
- Reach out to other local groups or schemes to share resources
- Reach out to local food businesses to ask if they could donate surplus

Appendix

- One Can Trust Cookery Programme - [One Can Trust projects - Bringing communities together](#)
- Public Health - [Grow It Cook It Eat It \(healthandwellbeingbucks.org\)](#) -
- Buckinghamshire Food Access Group – This meeting group is chaired by Hannah Tomlin, Food Coordinator, Helping Hand Team, Buckinghamshire Council. The group brings together local food banks and food support VCS organisations to share updates, raise any issues/concerns, discuss upcoming projects and share best practice. If you'd like to join the group, please contact Hannah – Hannah.Tomlin@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
- [Find your local community board](#)
- To discuss any ideas you may have or for further information please contact the Helping Hand Team helpinghands@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
- To Publicising your Offer – put it on Bucks online Directory?

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