



A Food Poverty Action Plan for Merton

2018 - 2020

Developed in partnership with:

SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON

sustain
the alliance for better food and farming

sustainable merton 

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1. Introduction

The 2016 edition of “Beyond the Foodbank: London Food Poverty Profile”, published by Sustain and supported by the Mayor of London, recommends a co-ordinated response to address food poverty issues in London. In December 2016, the GLA made funding available to support five London boroughs to develop a Food Poverty Action Plan, with the London Borough of Merton being successful in their application. Following this, the council's Public Health and Policy, Strategy and Partnerships teams contracted Sustainable Merton to help lead on developing the plan.

1.1 Aim of the Plan

This Food Poverty Action plan seeks to achieve a strong, coordinated and strategic partnership approach to tackle people’s inability to afford, or to have access to, quality food for a healthy diet. A key aim is to build on the existing work of the strong active community and voluntary sector in Merton working to tackle food poverty locally, including improving sign-posting and the joining up of existing assets as well as reduce and re-use surplus food in the borough.

It is recognised that food poverty is not a stand-alone issue, but is closely linked with, and a result of, a wide range of other forms of disadvantage including fuel poverty, low pay, unemployment, social deprivation and ill-health or disability. In recognition of this, the London Borough of Merton Welfare Reform Group will oversee the plan and there will be an emphasis on building efforts to tackle food poverty into existing strategies and initiatives tackling these wider forms of disadvantage. A key action within the existing Merton Child Healthy Weight Action Plan (2016-18) was to develop an approach to tackling food poverty, particularly among families and children, and so this plan will also report into the Child Healthy Weight Steering Group.

It is also recognised that there a range of wider benefits to tackling food poverty beyond improving people’s access to healthy and quality food. These include opportunities to reduce social isolation and poor mental health through community-based projects and encourage intergenerational relationships and community cohesion through food.

Despite Merton being relatively affluent and healthy on the whole, there exist significant social and health inequalities, especially between the east and west of the Borough (please see Section 3 for an overview). The east of Merton is more likely to face higher levels of unemployment, fuel poverty, premature mortality, poor access to healthy food and physical activity as well as food poverty itself. A key aim of this plan is to focus on reducing this inequality through reducing levels of food poverty in the east of Merton.

1.2 Developing the Plan

Two successful consultation workshops have informed the development of the plan. The first workshop aimed to gain a broader understanding of factors affecting food poverty, as well as map the needs of residents in the borough and the services currently on offer. The second workshop provided an opportunity for partners from a range of organisations to look at developing solutions and approaches to tackling food poverty. Attendees included both local stakeholders as well as Tesco Fare Share, the Mayor’s Fund for London, ‘Olio’ the food sharing App. and ‘Sustain, the Alliance for Better food and Farming’ to give their input and share their experiences.

The consultation process recognised the number of existing food-related projects but also highlighted the lack of a co-ordinated, joined up approach and a number of gaps in provision.

1.3 Vision

Following this development work, the diagram and three statements below represent the three aims of this plan. A detailed action plan to achieve this vision is set out in Section 2.



Aim 1: A consistent, joined-up and co-ordinated strategic approach across partners to tackling food poverty.

A more holistic and cohesive approach is needed to help tackle food poverty more effectively with commitment by a wide range of partners and stakeholders. There is a wide range of effective initiatives already available in the borough that often goes undetected. These could be better linked to each other to increase their impact, supported by a consistent approach across partners where 'every contact counts'. Food poverty should be a consideration in all relevant strategies and initiatives tackling disadvantage.

Aim 2: Make better use of surplus food across Merton and tackle the causes of food waste

There is an abundance of surplus food that could be put to better use across Merton. Business, organisations and individuals should be encouraged and supported to redistribute this food to tackle food poverty, as well as to address the root causes of food waste itself including through education on food preparation and healthy eating.

Aim 3: Strengthen, support and raise awareness of initiatives and volunteering opportunities in Merton working to tackle food poverty

Merton offers support to volunteers through 'The Merton Volunteer Services Council' (MVSC), and already has a strong core of active volunteers. However, some initiatives, such as free cooking and gardening sessions, are often undersubscribed, whilst some families find themselves unable to access fresh food.

Strengthening these networks, raising awareness of these initiatives and encouraging new people to join in, would help better support existing community projects, as well as offer the opportunity to widen reach to those who may benefit

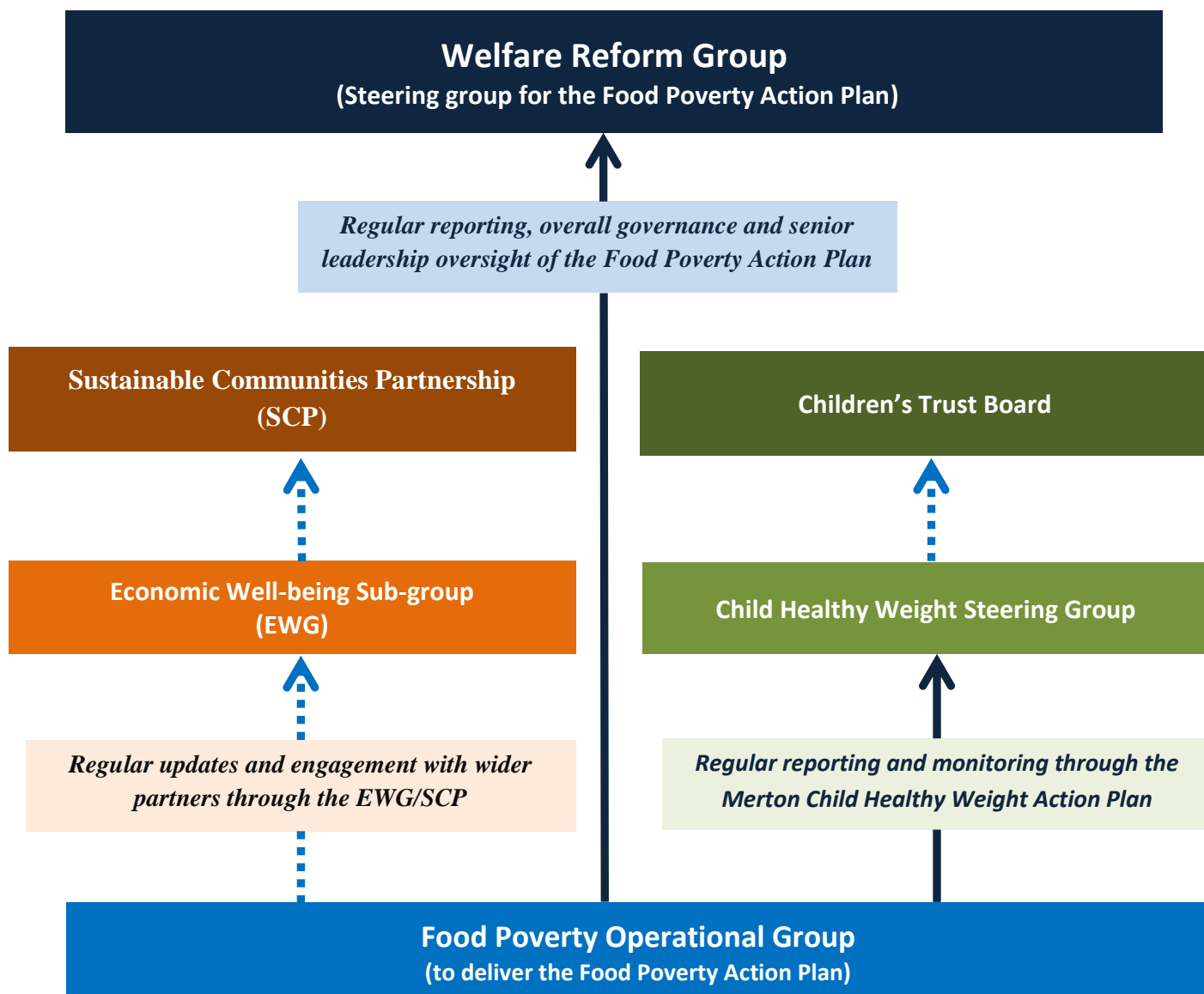
1.4 Governance

A Food Poverty Operational Group will be established with key partners in January 2018 to implement the action plan. In recognition of the broad range of disadvantage that impacts on food poverty, overall governance and strategic oversight for the delivery of the Food Poverty Action Plan will be through the Council’s Welfare Reform Group, chaired by London Borough of Merton’s Director of Community and Housing.

As tackling food poverty and poor nutrition is also a key aim of Merton’s Child Healthy Weight Action Plan, the Food Poverty Operational Group will report regularly into the Child Healthy Weight Steering Group overseeing the implementation of this plan.

To ensure a wide range of partners are engaged in the development and delivery of the plan, the Food Poverty Operational Group will also regularly engage and update the local Economic Well-being Subgroup and Sustainable Communities Partnership, both working to improve economic and environmental sustainability.

Fig. 1: Governance Arrangements for the Food Poverty Action Plan



2. Merton's Food Poverty Action Plan

Aim 1:

A consistent, joined-up and co-ordinated strategic approach across partners to tackling food poverty.

Objectives	Tasks	Lead	Monitoring	Timescale	Partners
1. Ensure strong governance arrangements to effectively deliver the Food Poverty Action Plan as it develops	Establish a food poverty operational for Merton (3-4 meetings per year)	Public Health, LBM Corporate Services	Steering Group established and meetings organised.	By Jan. 2018	Incl. Public Health, LBM Welfare Reform Group, Chartwells, Children's Centres
	Improve performance against the Beyond the Food Bank report. Complete monitoring survey annually.	Operational Group	Progress monitored through analysis of annual Beyond the Food Bank report	Annual	One You, Health Watch, New Horizon Centre, S. Mitcham Community Centre, School Cluster Coordinators,
	Register a Merton food poverty alliance for Sustain's Food Power Initiative	SM	Registration complete	By Jan. 2018	Age UK, Mencap, Local Councillors
2. Increase uptake of Healthy Start Voucher Scheme to 70% in line with other London	Raise awareness of current providers that accept Healthy Start vouchers completing and sharing mapping (i.e. Display poster, sticker or leaflets, internet resources)	Operational Group / PH	Mapping completed.	Jun. 2018	Children's Centres, Community Centres Food Banks,

<p>Boroughs, then in time to 80% in line with the government's target.</p>	<p>Develop a targeted plan to increase retailers engaged with the Healthy Start Programme (particularly in areas of high demand or gaps in provision)</p>	<p>Operational Group / PH</p>	<p>An increase in the number and variety of retailers engaged with the HS programme</p> <p>Increase % of those eligible accessing Healthy Start Scheme</p>	<p>Dec. 2018</p>	
<p>3. Increase uptake of Healthy Start Vitamins from 2% to 10%</p>	<p>Develop a targeted plan to increase the number of outlets where vouchers can be redeemed</p> <p>Pilot increasing number of sites from 1 to 5 (with Children's centres and health clinics)</p> <p>Undertake and evaluation of pilot scheme</p>	<p>Health Visiting & FNP, Public Health, Children's Centres, Health clinics.</p>	<p>An increase in the number of outlets where vouchers can be redeemed.</p> <p>Monitor increase in numbers of vouchers redeemed as part of pilot and increase in & uptake (using proxy data from Dept. of Health)</p>	<p>May 2018</p>	<p>Children's centres Community Centres Food Banks</p>
<p>4. Increase the number of babies being breastfed</p>	<p>Maintain Stage 3 BFI (Baby Friendly Initiative) Accreditation for Community Services</p> <p>Conduct a baseline audit detailing how many</p>	<p>PH/CLCH</p> <p>PH</p>	<p>Stage 3 maintained in community health services</p> <p>Audit conducted</p>	<p>Aug 2018</p> <p>Nov 2017</p>	<p>Children's Centres, Health-Visiting, Midwifery, GPs, Paediatrics</p>

	babies are currently breastfed at initiation, 2 weeks from birth and 6-8 weeks from birth and monitoring quarterly		and quarterly monitored.		
	Map the existing support for breastfeeding in Merton and develop a co-ordinated approach to improve sign-posting and consistency of support	PH/CLCH (Infant Feeding Operational Group)	Mapping undertaken and a list of support services developed to support signposting	May 2018	
5. Increase the uptake of free school meals by 5% by end of school year 2019 and increase of paid school meals by 10% by school year ending 2019.	Develop targeted approaches for parents and specific schools where uptake is lowest	Chartwells Emma Hookham, Lynne Hetherington, LBM Education Department.	TBC	By Mar 2019	The children's health fund, Chartwells,
	Continue the roll out of the "Eat Right, Stay Bright" scheme to more schools. This delivers a range of educational programmes to pupils and parents around healthy nutrition. Offer Family cooking sessions in 2 schools		An increase in the number of schools signed up to the "Eat Right, Stay Bright" scheme from 2016/17 baseline	TBC by Chartwells	
6. Reduce the number of children facing holiday hunger (365 food provision)	Develop and implement a discrete referral mechanism for schools, social services or other professionals to refer children at risk of holiday hunger during school holidays into projects tackling holiday hunger	May Project Gardens and Steering group members	Referral mechanism developed and implemented.	By July 2018	The Children's Health Fund Mayor's Fund for London Groundworks, , Chartwells MOAT Housing, Groundwork
	Explore developing a funding bid for a holiday hunger project through the Children's Health Fund (opens in September 2017) and the Mayor's Fund for London Explore giving families access to school gardens over the school holidays	Operational Group LBM Education Department.	Bid developed and submitted for consideration by funders	July 2018	
7. Actively review local	LBM Public Health and Corporate Services to actively review local policies and strategies to	Public Health/	Strategies and policies	Ongoing	

and national policies and strategies for opportunities to positively impact food poverty in Merton	positively influence those that would have an impact on food poverty, including looking at food access and health in all policies and waste reduction.	Corp. Services LBM	positively influenced.		
	Ensure that increased risk of food poverty is considered in Merton's strategies for supporting those with disabilities (through the Disabilities Health Needs Assessment and Disability Strategy)	Public Health	Consideration of impact of food poverty on those with disabilities to be included in disability strategies.	July 2018	
	Ensure that the planned review of Merton's Advice & Advocacy services considers support for those facing food poverty (i.e. through encouraging signposting to community initiatives and raising awareness of volunteering activities)	Corporate Services (Matthew Snelling)	Review of Advice & Advocacy services includes consideration of food poverty	July 2018	
	Review opportunities for the Local Welfare Support Scheme to support initiatives to tackle food poverty (i.e. through signposting and awareness raising)	Operational Group	Review complete	July 2018	
	Public Health to work with Adult Education to commission adult education courses based on healthy eating, nutrition and meal planning (in line with the findings of the Great Weight Debate Merton)	Public Health/Adult Education	Adult education courses commissioned and delivered.	May 2018	
	Work with Adult Education to consider how the re-tendering of contracts can include a focus on healthy eating, food preparation, meal planning and issues around food poverty.	Public Health/Adult Education	New Adult Education contracts include	July 2018	

			considerations of food poverty.		
8. Actively review seek external funding opportunities and partnerships	<p>Actively seek external funding opportunities and partnerships which will support the aims of the Food poverty Action plan, including opportunities to pool funding.</p> <p>Explore funding opportunities through London's New Food Scheme, Innocent Foundation, Morrison's Foundation, Tesco's 'Bags of Help'</p>	Operational Group	<p>Funding opportunities identified and shared. Applications submitted</p>	Ongoing	MOAT Housing Clarion Housing Groundwork
	<p>Engage with local businesses and organisations (including Chambers of Commerce) to explore opportunities to sponsor and support food poverty work in the borough, including through Corporate Social Responsibility policies.</p>	Operational Group / Cllr Katie Neep	<p>Local organisations supporting food poverty initiatives in the borough.</p> <p>Food poverty included as an element of local CSR policies.</p>	Ongoing	

Aim 2:

Make better use of surplus food across Merton and tackle the causes of food waste.

Objectives	Tasks	Lead	Monitoring	Timescale	Partners
9. Make better use of food waste	Develop clear and practical mechanisms for individuals, groups, organisations and businesses to redistribute food that would otherwise go to waste, as well as address the root causes of food waste.	Operational Group			Allotment associations Community gardens

	<p>Encourage businesses to work with intermediary organisations such as Fareshare, Plan Zheroes, and Day Old.</p> <p>Produce guidance for individuals, organisations and businesses who wish to redistribute surplus food to ensure that it is healthy, dignified and reliable as well as address the root causes of food waste</p> <p>Implement the TRIFOCAL European funded project in Merton (Phase 1 pilot site) which aims to encourage sustainable food systems through communicating key messages related to improving food waste recycling, increasing food waste prevention and supporting healthy sustainable eating. Ensure projects are linked in to local partner work and aspects of the action plan.</p> <p>Explore how to support Groundwork in delivering their ‘Small Change Big Difference’ programme over 4 workshops to community groups in Merton, through discussion, cooking and growing</p> <p>Review the ongoing work of the Merton Environment and Regen Waste team to ensure it aligns with and delivers the objectives of the action plan (for example through the cascade training on reduction of food waste and reuse being delivered by the team across two schools per term)</p>	<p>Environment and Regen Waste Team</p> <p>Groundwork</p> <p>Environment and Regen Waste Team</p>	<p>Community Groups identified and 4 workshops delivered</p>	<p>By Jan 2018</p> <p>By Dec. 2018</p> <p>By Jan 2018</p>	<p>Chartwells, Olio, PlanZheroes, Tesco Fareshare, Day Old Groundwork</p>
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Aim 3:***Strengthen, support and raise awareness of initiatives and volunteering opportunities in Merton working to tackle food poverty***

Objectives	Tasks	Lead	Monitoring	Timescale	Partners
10. Increase the number of people volunteering/ offering other forms of help to tackle food poverty and improve access to healthy foods	Ensure clear routes into volunteering are available to assist community gardens, lunch clubs and cooking workshops.	MVSC	Audit current volunteer numbers and then again in 12 and 24 months to monitor increase	Ongoing	Including: Schools Local advertising Children's Centres Libraries Social Media
	Offer other clear 'calls to action' for residents and businesses to get involved (donate money, skills, refer, pass on the message)				
	Register volunteer opportunities at https://www.handsonlondon.org.uk				
	Explore demand for food coops or other food buying schemes for example in children's centres and schools with parents taking an active role, and funding routes to do so.	Steering Group Joanne Etchart United Living	Demand/interest explored and decision on feasibility of setting up a scheme established	July 2018	United Living
	Explore issues of accessibility with community	Operational	Increased	Sept 2018	

	initiatives to ensure those with disabilities can access community gardens and projects.	Group	accessibility in community gardens.		
11. Increase the use of growing spaces to tackle food poverty to help people learn more about the food system, where food comes from, how to grow their own, feel more connected, and therefore improve well-being	Create referral list of community gardens that can support social prescribing referrals.	SM / MVSC	List created and embedded in borough's social prescribing processes	Mar. 2018	Mitcam Community Orchard and Gardens (MCOG) Nelson Gardens, Phipps Bridge Community Garden, Capital Growth, Growing Health, Social Prescribing, Sutton Community Farm Ground work (have funding) Sustain's Growing Health, local community spaces such as de Burgh Rd
	Establish links with schools and faith groups to promote food growing spaces via Capital Growth online map and Sustainable Merton's network.	SM/ Dr Sekeram/ Ray Hautot	Partnerships and links established and increase in use of growing spaces	Mar. 2018	
	Explore how fresh fruit and vegetables can be made available to community kitchens and other community food facilities	Food sharing apps Operational group		April 2018	
	Use school gardens to teach children and families about growing fruit and vegetables Explore ways to work together with Food Growing Schools London in up to ten Merton schools as part of Project Learning Garden	Chartwells / Groundwork Garden Organic	Schools identified and project commenced	By July 2018	
	Explore opportunities to improve links and support Mencap's "Giving Back" project for young people with learning difficulties to volunteer at community gardens	Operational Group/MVSC	Opportunity explored and feasibility established	By Mar. 2018	

<p>12. Increase engagement with cooking and lunch clubs to encourage more people of all ages and backgrounds to cook and eat together</p>	<p>Offer Food Hygiene courses to wider community at more locations</p>	<p>May Garden Project Groundwork</p>	<p>Food Hygiene Courses Delivered</p>	<p>By June 2019</p>	<p>YMCA May Project Garden MVSC young people Mencap Saturday cooking Chartwells cooking skills Moat – William Morris WI – NHC Children’s Centres Clarion Housing</p>
	<p>Explore opportunities to support the following initiatives further (i.e. through signposting, referrals and awareness raising):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support MSVC to deliver at least five free weekly cooking skills sessions at Vestry Hall for up to 5 young people aged 14-18 with various support needs - Support Home start to deliver at least eight free “Healthy eating on a Budget” cooking sessions for parents and children - Support NHC to deliver at least eight primary school age term time cooking sessions - Support Mitcham Town Community Trust (MCTC) to run 30 Cooking sessions across 3 school terms. 	<p>MVSC Home Start New Horizon Centre Shine Project</p>	<p>Number of planned sessions delivered to the required number of participants</p>	<p>By July 2018</p>	
	<p>Explore opportunities to support and expand existing lunch clubs (i.e. expanding clubs to other social groups not just the elderly, and opportunities to develop community meals on wheels opportunities)</p>	<p>Operational Group</p>	<p>Opportunity explored and feasibility established</p>	<p>By August 2018</p>	

<p>13. Develop a communications plan to increase community involvement in tackling food poverty, increase knowledge of healthy eating and ensure effective signposting to local services.</p>	<p>Communications plan developed, to include actions to deliver the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore clear and varied avenues for residents, groups and businesses to help tackle food poverty. (“Calls to action”). • Support existing cooking clubs through awareness raising (MSVC) • Increase community involvement in projects around growing skills and healthy food through local campaign advertising projects/sessions • Use ward notice boards • Use PH slot in My Merton (quarterly) to highlight Merton’s FPAP and ways for people to get involved if they would like to help. Follow up in next issue with update. • Local Partners to communicate messages related to the FPAP through their mail outs, networks, events and social media. • Encourage schools / parents to sign up to National campaigns such as Growing Health, Growing Schools London, and other support. • Use of local media, including: Article(s) in Wimbledon Guardian, LBM Social Media, My Merton, Merton-I, local partner communications, Services Directory. LBM Social Media Coverage 	<p>Public Health LBM Comms Steering group</p>	<p>February 2018</p>		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore ways to work in line with London’s New Food Strategy (to be launched by the Mayor of London’s New Food Assembly in 2018) • Create a library reading list of useful books/e-books to borrow regarding good food and nutrition • Explore funding routes for posters and leaflets and hard copies of produced guidance • Use OLIO’s free marketing materials, which they are happy to tailor to our needs and print <p>Use Merton-i as a central resources for promoting activities and projects</p>				
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3 Food Poverty in Merton

3.1 Local Context

As noted in Oxfam's 2014 report "Walking the Breadline", food poverty is the result of a range of related factors, including the impact of unemployment, underemployment, declining incomes, increasing food, fuel and housing prices and changes to the benefits systems.¹ Other forms of disadvantage such as social isolation, ill-health and disability and poor mental health can also negatively affect individuals and families ability to access healthy food.

Overall, Merton is a relatively healthy and affluent borough, with overall levels of deprivation and poverty lower than the London average. Despite this, there exist substantial inequalities within the borough and significant pockets of deprivation, particularly in the east.

While the median household income in Merton is £34,461 per annum, 27% of those employed living in the east of the borough earn under £20,000 and 63% of all benefit claimants live in the east of the borough.²

Overall unemployment claimant rates are 1.5% across Merton, however rates of unemployment are substantially higher in the east of the borough (2.1%) compared to West Merton (0.8%).

Unemployment in East Merton is also higher than London average (1.8%) and England as a whole (1.8%).³

Quality of housing and access to appropriate cooking equipment are also key factors in food poverty. 16% of households are overcrowded in Merton, at substantially higher levels in the East (20.4%) than the West of the borough (11.1%).⁴

Levels of food poverty are closely linked to fuel poverty, with some foodbanks in areas of England now offering vouchers for pre-paid gas and electricity meters, and food parcels that do not require cooking equipment.⁵ An estimated 10.6% of all households (representing 8,384 households) face fuel poverty across Merton, as a result of a range of complex factors including low income, high energy costs, unemployment and other pressures. This is a similar level to that seen across London and England (11%) as a whole.⁶

As of 2015, approximately 15.8% of children (7,240 children) under the age of 16 years were living in poverty. This is less than the London average (23.5%) and England as a whole (18.6%) but remains a

¹ Oxfam, "Walking the Breadline – Food Poverty in 21st Century Britain", 2013. (Accessible online at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/walking-the-breadline-the-scandal-of-food-poverty-in-21st-century-britain-292978>)

² *Joint Strategic Needs Analysis*, Merton Public Health team, 2015 (Accessible online at: <http://www2.merton.gov.uk/health-social-care/publichealth/jsna/social-determinants/employment-economic-wellbeing.htm>)

³ "Local Health", Public Health England, November 2016. (Accessible online at: <http://www.localhealth.org.uk>)

⁴ "Local Health", Public Health England, November 2016. (Accessible online at: <http://www.localhealth.org.uk>)

⁵ For example, see Trussell Trust's Foodbank 'npower fuelbanks' initiative:

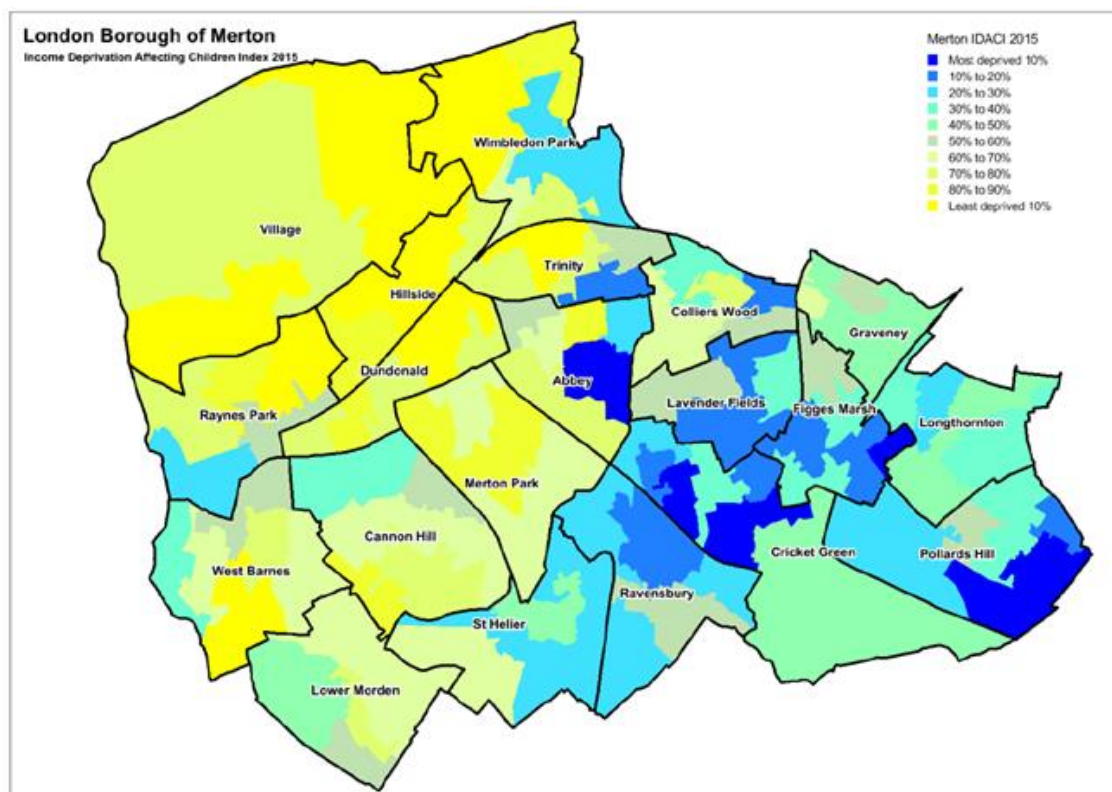
<https://www.trusselltrust.org/2016/02/26/as-the-cold-bites-foodbanks-bite-back/>

⁶ From local estimates of regional food poverty in England, produced by the Department of Energy & Climate Change, 2014; Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report 2017, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2017 (Accessible online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-fuel-poverty-statistics-report-2017>)

substantial figure . Despite being relatively affluent Merton also contains six of the top 10% most deprived Lower Super Output Areas in England, which are largely part of the Pollards Hill, Figges Marsh, Cricket Green and Abbey wards in the East of the Borough.⁷ Since 2010, there has been a 31% increase in the numbers of children eligible for free school meals (2281 eligible children in 2010 compared to 3796 in 2015).⁸

Figure 3.11 below shows the distribution of income deprivation affecting children by ward and highlights the significant inequalities that exist across the borough.

Figure 3.11 – Income Deprivation Affecting Children by Merton Ward, 2015.



3.2 Food Assistance in Merton

Wimbledon Food Bank has three centres in the borough: Elim Church SW19, The New Horizon Centre and Love Lane, Mitcham. Access is available four days a week across these three centres, and from Love Lane on a Saturday. Vouchers for the food bank are available from healthcare professionals, GPs, Citizen Advice Bureaus (CABs), community centres and charities. Previously, some community centres have accepted donated fresh produce from local supermarkets, however handling and storing fresh produce was challenging to manage so this service is no longer available.

⁷ English Index of Deprivation Affecting Children, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015. (Accessible online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>)

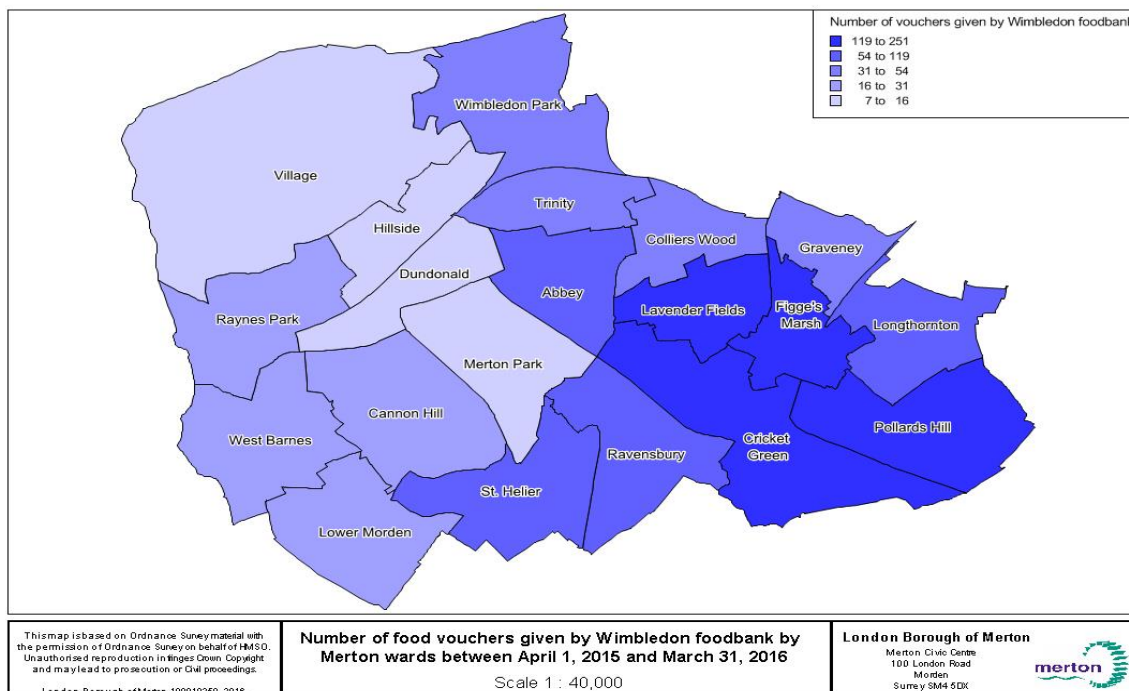
⁸ Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals by Borough, Department of Education, 2015 (Accessible online at: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/pupils-eligible-free-school-meals-borough>)

Anecdotally, according to the Project Co-ordinator of Wimbledon Foodbank, Corrine Marshall, food donations to the bank come predominantly from church congregations (approx. 70%) with the remaining donations from supermarket shoppers (approx. 30%). Food items that make up food parcels are exclusively non-perishable, high calorie products.

In 2016/17, a total of 4,094 three day emergency food parcels provided 2,453 adults and 1,641 child emergency food supplies. This is the twelfth highest in London for the total number of parcels supplied (including adults and children) out of 29 boroughs. From 2015/16 to 2016/17 there has been a 33% increase in the number of emergency food supplies provided. In 2013/14, over 2,000 separate clients had access support from food banks in Merton, with 78% living in the East of the borough, mirroring the distribution of deprivation.⁹

The wards with highest number of recipients include Cricket Green, Figge’s Marsh, Pollards Hill and Lavender Fields. Figure 3.21 below shows the number of food vouchers given by Wimbledon Foodbank by ward in 2015/16.

Figure 3.21 – Number of food vouchers given by Wimbledon foodbank by Merton wards between April 1st 2015 and March 31st 2016 by Merton Ward.



In terms of operation, the Food Banks are at capacity for volunteers, who have been recruited from local churches and through Merton’s Voluntary Service Council. During the scoping process for the Food Poverty Action Plan, Sustainable Merton identified that food banks across Merton were in an excellent position to help signpost users to other support services for food poverty in the borough, such as community food growing spaces and charitable and voluntary organisations. This has already started to happen.

⁹ Joint Strategic Needs Analysis, Merton Public Health team, 2015 (Accessible online at: <http://www2.merton.gov.uk/health-social-care/publichealth/jsna/social-determinants/employment-economic-wellbeing.htm>)

3.3 School Dinners

Chartwells Catering supply schools meals in Merton since September 2016. All meals are cooked on site and are of an exemplary standard. A dedicated Pupil and Parent Engagement Manager is employed to encourage uptake. Chartwells has piloted a Lead Association for Catering in Education (LACA) award winning programme called 'Eat Right, Stay Bright', a whole school approach to healthy eating. This educational programme encompasses a range of pupil and parent activities, ranging from classroom nutrition workshops to parent taster evenings.

3.4 Lunch Clubs in Merton

Studies from elsewhere in the UK have shown that lunch clubs can play a key role in not just increasing access to healthy, nutritious food but also in contributing to substantial reductions in social isolation and provide essential opportunities for people to develop food skills and knowledge.¹⁰ There are numerous lunch clubs in the borough, predominantly for the elderly, ranging from £4-10 for two courses or freshly cooked food. These run anything from daily, to once a month, across community centres, faith groups and churches and various guilds in the borough, and are rarely at capacity.



Surplus vegetables donated by the Hindu Centre for use in lunch clubs

The New Horizon Centre

Lunch club funding at The New Horizon Centre is only available for another two years, so other ways must be sought to keep it going

Friends in St Helier (FISH)

offer two lunch clubs a week

Age UK

offers a weekly lunch club in Merton

Wimbledon Guild & Merton and Morden Guild

both offer a weekly programme of activities and lunch clubs

The South London Refugee Association

offers a lunch club once a week.

Faith in Action Homeless Drop-in Centre

feeds clients breakfast and lunch twice a week in SW19.

Martin Way Methodist Church

runs a fortnightly lunch club for all.

¹⁰ For example, see Bright & Hove Food Partnerships "Eating Together: Exploring the role of Lunch Clubs", 2015. (Accessible online at: <http://bhfood.org.uk/reports-publications/bhfp-reports/16-eating-together-report-final/file>)

3.5 Healthy Start Food and Vitamin Vouchers

What is healthy start?

Healthy Start is a UK-wide, government scheme to improve the health of low-income pregnant women and families on benefits and tax credits.

Families who qualify for Healthy Start get vouchers to spend on milk, plain fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables and infant formula milk. Pregnant women, women with a child under 12 months and children aged from six months to four years who are receiving Healthy Start vouchers are also entitled to free Healthy Start vitamins.

Information about Healthy Start food vouchers is provided to women and families who may receive, or be eligible for them and is provided through Health Visiting service, commissioned by Health Merton, and being delivered by Central London Community Health (CLCH).



Surplus chicken donated by Nando's for Faith in Action's Homeless Drop-in Days

In Merton, the uptake of healthy start vitamins could be greatly improved. In 2016, only 65% of those eligible for the scheme were receiving vouchers for food and vitamins, and only 2-11% of the vouchers issued for vitamins were exchanged. Vouchers for food are being exchanged in higher numbers.

The Merton Public Health team is currently running a pilot to increase the number of venues in which people exchange vouchers to try and increase this low take-up. Currently, there is only one outlet in Merton where people can exchange their vouchers for vitamins (Patrick Doody clinic). This pilot aims to increase the number of outlets stocking healthy start vitamins to enable more low-income pregnant women and families to receive free vitamins.

The pilot will increase the number of venues accepting vouchers to five across the borough:

- The Patrick Doody clinic
- The Wideway clinic
- The Cricket Green clinic
- The Acacia children's centre
- The Lavender Steers Mead children's centre.

3.6 Example of Existing Surplus Food Sharing and Redistribution Initiatives

There are already a number of initiatives working Merton to reduce the amount of food wasted and where possible to connect surplus food with those facing food poverty and hunger. The examples given below are just some of the initiatives that this plan will seek to support and build on.

Nando's, Wimbledon

for the last two years has donated (frozen) chicken weekly to Faith in Action Homeless Drop-in Centre.

The Hindu Centre, Merton

donates vegetables to the Faith in Action Homeless Drop-in Centre.

Morrison's, Mitcham

donate surplus stock to the community organisation St Marks Family Centre

Marks and Spencers, Merton

donate non-perishable goods to Age UK in Merton. They would like to see an avenue for fresh fruit and vegetables, which is not currently collected (logistics of fresh produce)

Donations of food to neighbours by community organisations

including donations of food and supplies around Eid and Christmas by Merton faith organisations

Shine on Saturday, Merton

is an education charity that works with disadvantaged young people. Tesco and the FareShare, the food surplus charity, are already providing surplus food for Saturday cooking classes.

Olio, the food sharing App

facilitates the exchange of surplus food, with approximately 240 Merton residents already signed up.



Deputy Mayor of London, Matthew Ryder, visits May Project Gardens school holiday cooking sessions at the New Horizon Centre in Pollards Hill on 15th August 2017.

*(Photo used by permission from The May Project Garden's Facebook page.
<https://www.facebook.com/mayprojectgardens/posts/1551628508249247>)*

4. Case Studies

The following case studies have been collected by verbal interview between 1st May and 31st July 2017. Interviewees were identified by lunch club workers, teachers and food bank volunteers as good and representative examples of service users. Interviews were carried out by Sustainable Merton staff (Michelle Kolattek and Tom Walsh). They provide a picture of the experiences and challenges of a range of different people living in Merton and some of the positive impacts of existing projects working to tackle food poverty.

Lily, Aged 90 (as told by her neighbour Jean, aged 75)

“Lily lives alone and is virtually house bound since a fall in 2015. She has no family in the area, and although she has savings in the bank, she relies wholly on her neighbours to buy her food shopping for her. She no longer cooks from scratch. Instead she eats the odd ready meal, but in the most part, she eats bread based meals like sandwiches or toast. She does like to eat fruit, if we have bought any in for her.

The only time she has a hot home cooked meal is when I, or one of the other neighbours cook and bring it round for her. I regularly drop a hot dinner round for her. Another neighbour brings two portions for them to eat together. This is also the only time Lily has company when she eats.

Our other neighbour took Lily to the lunch club at The New Horizon Centre in Pollards Hill, where she enjoyed a two course meal for £5. Also accompanying them was Mercedes, aged nine, another neighbour’s child, from a low income family. She was on half term and was keen to go along to help at lunch club. Mercedes also received a meal, and is keen to volunteer again.”



Weekly lunch Club at the New Horizon Centre

Janet, elderly lunch club user at The New Horizon Centre

“I come to lunch club three times a week. It is the only time I get a hot meal, because I no longer cook at home. I would come every day if I could, but my budget does not let me. I really enjoy some of the activities they put on after lunch too.”

“I am lucky because I know how to cook. Many parents do not have this knowledge these days. Some don’t even know how to make scrambled eggs. Another mum and I started family cooking classes at school, to help others get some basic skills. We bought equipment and ingredients from our own money, but the sessions did not carry on, which was really a shame. I would love to help with something like that again.

I have not had to use a food bank, because I am lucky to have family close by who I can go to for help if I’m struggling to make ends meet. They give me food or money to buy food when we are short. Many people don’t have this kind of support at hand if they need it.”

Janet, elderly lunch club user at The New Horizon Centre

“I come to lunch club three times a week. It is the only time I get a hot meal, because I no longer cook at home. I would come every day if I could, but my budget does not let me. I really enjoy some of the activities they put on after lunch too.”

5. Additional actions dependent upon securing funding

The following projects and actions have been identified as having a potentially positive impact on food poverty in Merton but will require additional funding to implement. If external or additional funding is successfully secured (as per Action 13 of the plan above), it is recommended that the following be considered below. Please note: this is not an exhaustive list and includes initiatives identified during the development of the FPAP.

St Mark's Family Centre (SMFC) in Mitcham Town – contact Angela Martin

The St Mark's centre have developed and delivered an 'East Cook' Programme for over ten years for parents with children in schools in the Mitcham Cluster.

Funding ceased about a year ago. The 8 week programme for 9 parents per cohort was split into two parts. The first part was theory, and covered topics such as '5 a day' or 'obesity', the second part of the programme was cooking things the parents were interested in.

The sessions would end at school finishing times when the children then joined the parents and they all then ate the food together. This model can easily be reinstated with new funding, and could be rolled out to other areas of the borough.

Toddler Tuck Time

Is a one year programme delivered with South Mitcham Community Centre (SMCC), involving parents and children cooking and eating together. Funding has now stopped for the programme but, if additional resources were identified, the programme could be reinstated.

The Big Cook Up

was a food initiative run by the centre at St Mark's Church, focusing on encouraging healthy cooking and eating for all ages. Funding has now stopped for the programme but, if additional resources were identified, the programme could be reinstated.

Further promoting the Living Wage across Merton

London Borough of Merton is a Living Wage council and champions the Living Wage through its communications. Further support for championing the Living Wage with employers across London could help tackle the underlying causes of food poverty.

Support for Gardening and Allotments in Merton

There are approximately 20 allotments in the borough, many with plots available, and more than 15 food growing spaces in the borough either actively in use, or with the infrastructure in place to set up easily.

Casserole Club

A volunteer based programme that shares extra portions of home-cooked food with people in the local community that aren't always able to cook for themselves.

Spice Volunteer bonus scheme

A time-banking community service focused on encouraging community capacity locally and providing opportunities for volunteers to take part in activities to improve health and wellbeing.

People's Fridge

First developed in Brixton as "London's First Community Fridge" – a community organisation run public fridge where people can give spare food and those who need food can take it.

Support Increasing the reach of Merton Food Charter

The Merton Food Charter sets out a vision for a healthy sustainable food culture in the borough, based on priorities identified at the Merton Food Summit in April 2015.

Support increasing the reach of Merton's Healthy Catering Commitment

The Healthier Catering Commitment is a voluntary scheme which allows food business to apply for an award if they can demonstrate a commitment to offering healthier options.