



Feeding Britain Toolkit

Creating and developing an Affordable Food Club



Introduction

Affordable Food Clubs can include social supermarkets, pantries, larders, mobile community shops and other community-led initiatives which provide access to nutritious food for a fraction of what these items would cost in a regular supermarket. They enable people on low incomes to stretch their budgets further each week, helping to prevent chronic situations from arising in household finances which can bring the need for food banks into play. They also offer wraparound support to address the wider issues with which people may be struggling.

The network of 350 Affordable Food Clubs supported by Feeding Britain to date has a collective membership of 75,000 households. Staff and volunteers cautiously estimate that millions of pounds each year is collectively being saved on food by households accessing these projects. Affordable Food Clubs vary in respect of their geographic context, venue, pricing structure and membership criteria, with enough flexibility built into the service to ensure it meets local needs and circumstances. This document outlines the key considerations and lessons to emerge so far from the Feeding Britain network.

We recognise that Affordable Food Clubs are not a panacea for the prevention of food insecurity. However, our experience has shown that they can offer a sustainable and dignified model of community food provision, while boosting resilience and preventing at least some of the need for food banks. For people on low incomes, the ability to choose the items that they and their family want to and can eat, make a financial contribution, and acquire goods in a setting as similar to a regular shop as possible has been found to create a more positive, dignified and less stigmatised experience. The funds raised from membership fees also enable each Affordable Food Club to reinvest in food supplies of sufficient quality and variety, and to pursue greater financial sustainability for the project, thereby reducing the need to rely heavily on grant funding.

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Support from Feeding Britain

Membership of the Feeding Britain network can provide access to:

- Funding towards set-up and ongoing costs of Affordable Food Clubs
- Access to the Feeding Britain Resource Library of template documents, policies and guides
- Ongoing support and guidance with fundraising, strategy and project planning
- The sharing of best practice from other regional partners
- Webinars and events
- Favourable rates on food and corporate donations
- Increased publicity via our website and social media channels

In addition to this guide, the following Feeding Britain resources may be of interest:

- Mobile Affordable Food Projects Toolkit: For those looking to develop a mobile model such as a food van, bus or pop-up pantries.
- Food Suppliers Guide: A list of the key food suppliers used across the Feeding Britain network.
- Case studies: Supportive arrangements with local businesses
- Webinar: Food banks establishing affordable food clubs:
https://youtu.be/AVQBHVH3f3o?si=_OiH4qSzC7fE6_z0
- Webinar: Financial sustainability for affordable food clubs: <https://youtu.be/MvfKehrUyV8>
- Webinar: Food bank to food club - using subsidies and vouchers to support people into food clubs https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IA_dqm0nDmw
- Webinar: Food supplies for community food projects:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcMcVZrul8w>

To find out more about joining the Feeding Britain network contact info@feedingbritain.org

Membership models for an Affordable Food Club

Membership criteria vary across the Feeding Britain network, depending on the local context. In some Affordable Food Clubs, particularly those operating in areas with high footfall, tighter membership criteria have been set to manage demand. In others, a universal open access membership has helped to reduce stigma and benefit a larger number of households - this universal approach can also increase income, helping with financial sustainability of the club. Some Affordable Food Clubs do not ask people to sign up as members, but instead keep track of the numbers of people accessing the service each day. While this approach can make it more challenging to provide relevant wider support services and to manage stock levels, it may also reduce barriers to access for households who might be reluctant to formally register.

Here are some different approaches to membership criteria within the Feeding Britain network:

- Location dependent membership: Open to all households, regardless of income, within a certain proximity or postcode area. For example, a service may be open to anyone who lives or works within a 15 minute walk. Works well in areas with particularly high levels of deprivation.
- Universal membership: Open to anyone - no criteria.
- Income-based membership: Open to households who have low incomes. New members would provide documentation indicating low income from employment or receipt of benefits. The threshold of £16,190 (used for means-tested support such as Healthy Start and free childcare) is often applied.

Membership length: An annual membership can give stability to the Affordable Food Club and its members. However, a six-month membership may enable you to support more people, and to move members on if they are no longer in need of food support. Some settings use a six-month or quarterly review process to meet with members, discuss their circumstances and needs, support them to access wrap-around services, and assess whether they still require membership of the Food Club. Some sites have a minimum attendance requirement, or may review membership for those who are not regularly accessing the project, for example, if they have not visited for a period of six weeks. This can then free up a membership space for someone potentially in greater need. Some clubs encourage members to access the project fortnightly if they are able to, in order to manage demand and allow them to take on new members.

Membership fee: Many Affordable Food Clubs charge a small fee to sign up as a member - this may vary from £5 per year to £1 per month. This fee can create a sense of attachment among members, who may then decide to use the club more regularly having paid a membership fee. This income also contributes to the financial sustainability of the service.

Referrals: Many Affordable Food Clubs accept a mixture of referrals from external organisations along with the ability for individuals and families to self-refer. Some also offer the opportunity for crisis/fast track sign up. Organisations that refer to Affordable Food Clubs might include housing associations, advice services, local authorities, credit unions, GP surgeries, food banks, schools, faith groups and job centres.

TITLE: <input type="checkbox"/> MR <input type="checkbox"/> MRS <input type="checkbox"/> MISS	
NAME: _____	
GENDER: <input type="checkbox"/> MALE <input type="checkbox"/> FEMALE	DATE OF BIRTH: _____
ID VERIFIED BY: _____	
MARITAL STATUS: <input type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> SINGLE <input type="checkbox"/> SEPARATED <input type="checkbox"/> DIVORCED <input type="checkbox"/> WIDOWED <input type="checkbox"/> CIVIL PARTNERSHIP	
EMPLOYMENT STATUS: <input type="checkbox"/> UNEMPLOYED <input type="checkbox"/> FULL TIME <input type="checkbox"/> PART TIME <input type="checkbox"/> SELF-EMPLOYED	
ADDRESS: _____ _____ _____	
ADDRESS VERIFIED BY: <input type="checkbox"/> BANK STATEMENT <input type="checkbox"/> BENEFITS LETTER <input type="checkbox"/> COUNCIL LETTER <input type="checkbox"/> UNVERIFIED <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____	
BENEFITS (ONLY TICK IF SEEN PROOF): <input type="checkbox"/> CHILD BENEFIT <input type="checkbox"/> CHILD TAX CREDIT <input type="checkbox"/> COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION <input type="checkbox"/> DISABILITY ALLOWANCE <input type="checkbox"/> EMPLOYMENT AND SUPP ALLOWANCE <input type="checkbox"/> JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE <input type="checkbox"/> PENSION <input type="checkbox"/> UNIVERSAL CREDIT <input type="checkbox"/> NO BENEFITS <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER _____	
SIGN CRFB REP: _____	SIGN COLLECTOR: _____

Sample income-based membership form

Pricing structures

Across the Affordable Food Clubs in the Feeding Britain network, members gain a discount of between one-quarter and two-thirds on their chosen basket of goods, compared with what they would pay in regular supermarkets. Many Affordable Food Clubs choose to offer access to additional items free of charge, including fruit and vegetables, items of which there is an abundance, and any items nearing their expiry date.

Below are some of the pricing models used across our network. As noted above, there is often also a small membership fee to sign up.

Weekly set fee: Many Affordable Food Clubs charge a weekly set fee of between £4.50 and £7.50 for which the member can select a range of items to a value of between £15 and £25. This model often requires an element of guidance with regards to how many items of a certain kind can be chosen to ensure equal access for members shopping at different times of the day. There may be different fees, and food allowances, for single households, couples and larger households. Some clubs use a colour coded system. For example, your weekly fee may allow you to access 3x green items, 2x blue items and 6x purple items.



Item guidance at Foleshill Community Supermarket, Coventry

One thing to consider, in respect of the set weekly fee system, is that members might want greater flexibility at certain times to access a larger number of items from the Affordable Food Club. Equally, for members who would rather do smaller shops (for example, just accessing a couple of items as a top up), the set weekly fee system may need to be thought through so that it can give them this flexibility. One solution could be to offer small, medium and large shop options.

Some clubs ask members to pay in advance - for example, charging £26 per month, typically through online payment, which gives members access to one shop per week (at £6 per week). This approach is used by some members as a budgeting tool, reducing anxiety about that month's food shopping, and by the Affordable Food Club to manage their stock levels.

Points-based membership system: In collaboration with FareShare, Feeding Britain has developed a flexible points-based system which is now used in many Affordable Food Clubs. 1 point is equivalent to 25p and all items within the shopping area are labelled between 1 and 5 points. Items are labelled with the number of points they cost, and members purchase points each time they visit. They can then fill

their basket with as much or as little as they want, and this is then worth the corresponding number of points, and therefore money. The average spend per shop in these settings is around £10.

By offering a points credit system, any unused points can be carried over to the next visit. Many members purchase points in bulk when they receive their income and return to shop throughout the month when required.

Typically, the membership fee is processed through the till when the member arrives and exchanged for a receipt detailing the number of points purchased, the member's name and their membership number. This is retained by the member as proof of purchase and given to the team member at the counter once the items have been selected. Should any unused points require saving, these are recorded in a spreadsheet, till system or paper file.

Colour coded system: With this system, items are labelled with one of four coloured stickers (e.g. blue, green, red, yellow). Each sticker equates to a certain price (e.g. a blue sticker is 50p). Posters on the walls show shoppers what each sticker is worth. Members can place as many items as they want into their baskets, and the value is totted up at the till. This system has proven to be simple for members, including those who do not speak English.

“Market stall” system: In the Threehills larders in Glasgow, items are labelled with a number between 1 and 6. Each number represents the quantity of items in that section that can be accessed for one point (e.g. four tins for a point). A chosen membership fee of £1 on a particular visit equates to one point, £2 equates to two points, and so on. Members have fed back that this system feels familiar as it is like the system used at local markets (e.g. six apples for a pound). There is not a standard weekly fee here, so members are able to choose as many items as they wish.

Healthy Start

The Healthy Start Scheme entitles those on low incomes who are pregnant or have a child under the age of 4 to financial help with buying healthy food and milk. Healthy Start is issued on prepaid cards, which can be used in any venue that has a card reader that can accept Mastercard, so long as they provide access to the eligible items. We would encourage all Affordable Food Clubs in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland to accept Healthy Start cards if possible, and to promote the scheme through posters and conversations. You do not need to register in order to accept Healthy Start in your Affordable Food Club. Accepting Healthy Start in an Affordable Food Club can help families to stretch their Healthy Start allowance further, as well as helping the club to bring in new members and additional revenue.

For Affordable Food Clubs with a ‘fixed fee’ model (e.g. £5.50 for X items), it can work well to charge 50% of the fee to the Healthy Start card. Those Affordable Food Clubs that provide access to each item for an individual price, or run a points based system might work out at the till how much should be charged to the Healthy Start card for each shop, or ask members how much they would like to charge to their Healthy Start card.

You can find out more about Healthy Start here: www.healthystart.nhs.uk/.

In Scotland, the Best Start Food scheme offers similar support:

www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods

Supporting people from food banks into food clubs

Affordable Food Clubs can provide a crucial next step for people who have been accessing emergency support through a food bank. Many Affordable Food Clubs have formalised this role, through schemes which can actively support people to make the transition from food bank into Affordable Food Club membership. This can include vouchers for people who have been accessing the food bank, to have free membership and access to the Affordable Food Club for a certain number of shops, or a certain period of time. For example, a food bank could provide people with a voucher after their first food bank parcel, which gives them a month of free access to the Affordable Food Club. This helps people into Affordable Food Club membership, gives them access to the wraparound support and services available through the Club, with an expectation that after their free month they would become paying members of the Club. These schemes could be funded through the local authority or by the food bank. Some councils have used discretionary funding to provide a number of free shops at an Affordable Food Club to households that are struggling. This gives these households a broader range of food than is typically available at a food bank, means they can choose the items that their family will eat from the shelves of the Affordable Food Club, and gives them the option to stay on as longer term members once they have moved out of a crisis.

In addition, many Affordable Food Clubs will exercise some discretion for members in emergency situations. This may include offering a free shop or a number of free shops for those who need this level of support.

Promotion

Promotion and marketing of the Affordable Food Club is an essential way of ensuring all households who stand to benefit most from this service are able to do so. The approach will vary depending on the geographic and demographic context. You might want to consider:

- Word of mouth - this is often the most effective means of spreading the word and building trust. You could encourage members to tell others about the service and give them flyers to pass on.
- Posters and flyers, including actively distributing flyers in the local area.
- Social media, including promotion on active community social media pages.
- Promotion through other organisations such as housing associations or schools. Some housing associations and schools have sent out letters to all of their residents or families to promote the Affordable Food Club, occasionally with vouchers to subsidise a first week's membership fee.
- Dovetailing this service with existing offers such as meals and activities for families during school holidays, or lunch clubs for older people.
- Attending events, or planning your own events (e.g. a formal launch) to raise awareness.
- Asking your local MP to contact residents and tell them about the provision.
- Press coverage.
- A website.

Accessing food supplies

Typically, Affordable Food Clubs are able to offer a broad range of nutritious foods including fresh, chilled, frozen and ambient items as well as household, cleaning, personal care, and baby items. Of course, the selection is dependent on supplies, equipment and storage space, as well as members' needs and requirements. This breadth of produce available furthers the feeling of dignity and choice in these settings, and ensures cultural and dietary requirements can be met.

A growing number of Affordable Food Clubs are offering pre-cooked/prepared nutritious meals such as soups or lasagne, which have been cooked by a local cafe or on-site. These ready meals can help you to use up any surplus food, whilst ensuring that members have access to good quality, healthy meals. They have been popular options, particularly with members who are trying to limit the fuel they are using at home for cooking, as well as for members who may not have the equipment or time to cook from scratch at home.

Having a network of local food projects is hugely beneficial in managing food supplies. Larger donations of food can be accepted and distributed between the projects, and food swaps can enable each organisation to have a good variety of stock. Community cafes and cooking projects can often use up surplus foods that are not being accessed at an Affordable Food Club. In many areas, clusters of food projects have come together to purchase in bulk for discounted rates.



Produce available at a pantry in Liverpool (Church Urban Fund/Together Liverpool)

Surplus and donated items

Please see Feeding Britain's Food Suppliers guide for a full list of suppliers used across the network. Many Affordable Food Clubs source at least some of their stock from surplus and discount suppliers, including:

- FareShare Community Food Membership and FareShare Go: www.fareshare.org.uk
- Neighbourly: www.neighbourly.com
- His Church: www.hischurch.org.uk
- Bankuet: www.bankuet.co.uk
- The Xcess Network: www.xcess.org.uk
- In Kind Direct: www.inkinddirect.org
- Local allotments, farms and gleaning networks

Purchasing food

Many projects purchase some items in order to offer consistent supplies for members. This includes buying from supermarkets and wholesalers. It is worth speaking with any local food businesses, manufacturers and distribution centres to see if they would be open to donating stock, or offering discounted rates. Increasingly, projects are building relationships with local food producers and retailers and brokering discounted rates, particularly for bulk collective purchasing. This includes relationships with fruit and vegetable markets, butchers, bakers, farmers and growers, and wholesalers. Feeding Britain

has a list of case studies of how local food businesses have supported food projects - email info@feedingbritain.org for more information.

Wraparound services

The provision of wraparound support and services, alongside food, is an essential part of Affordable Food Clubs. These services can help to address the wider issues that people are facing, which can reduce or remove the need for food support in the long term. This may include benefits, debt, housing, life skills, fuel, mental health and employment support. Some projects deliver their own in-house services and others invite or commission local services to have a presence at the Affordable Food Club. Many projects are involved in school holiday programmes, providing activities and food for children and families, thereby representing a year-round bulwark against hunger and the need to use food banks.

Advice services

Co-locating advice workers on-site at Food Clubs has proven to be a hugely effective way to address issues people are facing, maximise household incomes, and reduce expenditure. Advice workers may be from a local independent advice agency, or Officers from the council. Typically, they may provide support on debt, benefits and welfare, disability and housing issues

Cooking and recipes

Many Affordable Food Clubs have incorporated cooking courses, demonstrations, tasting sessions and recipe cards to inspire the members to try items that are in stock that week, to build confidence and skills around cooking from scratch, and to provide social eating opportunities. Slow cooker sessions, and schemes to give slow cookers to members, have become increasingly popular. These can be energy efficient, and can help people to use a different range of vegetables or cuts of meat.

Credit Union

A growing number of Affordable Food Clubs are working with their local Credit Union to offer safe credit and savings schemes. This can include having a Credit Union representative attending Food Club sessions, or having a more formal arrangement whereby members can pay into their Credit Union savings account through the Food Club.

The [FoodSavers](#) Network, developed by Inn Churches and Bradford District Credit Union, ties the Food Club and Credit Union services together. Members of the Affordable Food Club pay their membership fee (approximately £6 per week) and a pound of this goes into their savings account at the Credit Union. In this way, as well as saving money through the Affordable Food Club, members are able to build up a regular savings pattern with the Credit Union.

Staffing

The majority of Affordable Food Clubs operate with a mixture of paid and voluntary positions, depending on the scale of the operation. Some venues, particularly those operating shorter, fixed session times are run entirely by local volunteers. Projects may offer opportunities for work experience and participate in schemes for those facing barriers to employment.

Feeding Britain's regional and local partnerships are often co-ordinated by a dedicated staff member or a local organisation, and through regular steering group meetings and networking, offer the opportunity for like-minded projects to share resources and best practice.

Suggested retail equipment & approximate costings

Affordable Food Clubs generally seek a level of in-kind support in the form of donated equipment, shelving, furniture and other essentials. In Kind Direct can often help with sourcing donated items. Local auctions may also be an effective way to find low-cost items.

For refrigerators and freezers, glass-fronted display equipment allows members to view the available items without frequently opening the doors and creating a temperature control risk. Some settings, for example those that share the space with others, may need portable equipment so this can be packed away when the service is not running.

A till/EPOS system can be useful for stock management and usage reporting, but will increase costs. A card reader allows members to choose to pay by card or cash, and also means projects can accept the [Healthy Start](#) cards (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and [Best Start](#) cards (Scotland). Clubs could purchase a card reader which connects with an app on a phone, or may opt for a fully integrated till system.

Item	Approx. cost
Display fridge (glass fronted)	£1,000 per unit
Display freezer (glass fronted)	£1,200 per unit
Shelving	£150 per unit
Wire racking shelving	£90 per unit
Till / EPOS system	£200 minimum (for a simple EPOS system such as this) up to £850 (for Zettle Retail kit)
Card reader	£30 minimum (consider integration with till/EPOS system)
Label printer	£90 (Phomemo label printer recommended)
Shopping basket	£5 each
Re-usable shopping bag	£1.90 each
Pricing gun	£10
Safe	£35

You should be able to apply to your local authority for a business rates relief of 80%. You could also speak to the local authority to see if they can offer a greater discount for your project.

Policies & procedures

Feeding Britain's Resource Library has example policies and procedures. This is available to all members of the Feeding Britain network. Contact info@feedingbritain.org to find out more.

Food hygiene and handling

Each Affordable Food Club must hold a minimum of Level 2 Food Safety training, be registered with Environmental Health and show evidence of a satisfactory EHO inspection. Employees and volunteers must be trained to follow the standard processes for storing and distributing food supplies and ensure enhanced measures are in place for chilled and frozen food, including equipment temperature checks and ensuring members are equipped with appropriate freezer/chiller bags and instructions for transporting and the storage of food at home.

Numerous resources are available online, including templates and checklists to aid with meeting the legal requirements for food safety. Safer Food, Better Business and further information can be found [here](#). New projects should speak with their local authority Environmental Health Team as soon as possible.

Data Protection

Personal details of members must be collected for a suitable purpose and stored securely. Members must be informed in a clear and easy way of how you intend to use their personal information, and if you intend to share it with a third party. Guidance on GDPR can be found [here](#).

Safeguarding

The [Ann Craft Trust](#) offers a free checklist tool covering safeguarding and the Recognition, Reporting, Recording and Reviewing processes. A short online questionnaire will provide tailored resources and materials to ensure safeguarding procedures for young people and adults at risk are in place. NSPCC also provides [resources and auditing tools](#) for child safeguarding policies and procedures.

Health & Safety

If more than five individuals are employed, you will need a written statement (signed and dated) confirming the person responsible for health & safety (Chief Exec, director etc.) and how the following issues, for example, are managed:

- Slips and trips – accident procedures and recording
- Fire safety – equipment, alarm testing, drills and call point
- Cleaning chemical control
- PAT testing
- Risk assessments
- Manual handling

All volunteers and employees should be provided with a copy of the policy and should sign to confirm they have read and understood its contents. Copies should also be displayed for view in shared areas or notice boards and be included as part of an induction process, with content revisited regularly.

Useful resources for policies & procedures:

- [NCVO Know How](#)
- [Small Charity Support](#)
- [Charity Commission guidance](#)

Supplementary activities – revenue generation

Depending on the amount of space within each venue, many projects pursue supplementary revenue streams to facilitate further investment into the setting. These include:

- Hall or kitchen hire for local groups
- Advertising space
- A café (often accessible to non-members) and catering service
- Take away prepared meals
- Meeting rooms/spaces for complimentary services or local businesses

Additional resources

In addition to this guide, the following Feeding Britain resources may be of interest:

- Mobile Affordable Food Projects Toolkit: For those looking to develop a mobile model such as a food van, bus or pop-up pantries.
- Food Suppliers Guide: A list of the key food suppliers used across the Feeding Britain network.
- Case studies: Supportive arrangements with local businesses
- Webinar: Food banks establishing affordable food clubs: https://youtu.be/AVOBHVH3f3o?si=_OiH4qSzC7fE6_z0
- Webinar: Financial sustainability for affordable food clubs: <https://youtu.be/MvfKehrUyV8>
- Webinar: Food bank to food club - using subsidies and vouchers to support people into food clubs https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IA_dqm0nDmw
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