



## **Creating and developing an Affordable Food Club**

### **Feeding Britain Toolkit August 2022**



#### **Introduction**

Affordable Food Clubs can include social supermarkets, pantries, larders, food buses 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 crisis 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 150 Affordable Food Clubs supported by Feeding Britain to date has a collective membership of 20,000 households. Staff and volunteers cautiously estimate that hundreds of thousands of pounds each month is collectively being saved on food by households accessing these clubs. 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 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.

#### **Support from Feeding Britain**

Membership of the Feeding Britain network can provide access to:

- Funding to cover set-up costs of Affordable Food Clubs
- Ongoing support and guidance with fundraising, financial and project planning
- The sharing of best practice from other regional partners
- Opportunities to attend informative webinars and events
- Favourable rates on food and corporate donations
- Increased publicity via our website and social media channels
- Forming connections for the acquisition of food

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.
- Webinar: Financial sustainability for affordable food clubs: <https://youtu.be/MvfKehrUyV8>
- Webinar: Food supplies for community food projects: <https://youtu.be/VZ9OJSTAEFo>

To find out more, please contact [rose.bray@feedingbritain.org](mailto:rose.bray@feedingbritain.org)

### **Membership of 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 busy town centres, 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.

The length of membership is also worth considering. 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 reassess membership and as an opportunity to offer the most appropriate form of wraparound support. 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.

Many Affordable Food Clubs have chosen to 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 - for example, initial membership fees may be used to purchase food. Crucially, GDPR and the secure storage of personal details must be considered when developing a membership sign up process.

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 or week. While this approach could potentially make it slightly more challenging to provide wider support services and to manage stock levels, it may also reduce barriers to access for households who might be reluctant to formally register at an Affordable Food Club.

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

#### Location dependent membership

Some Affordable Food Clubs, particularly those based in areas of relatively high deprivation, are 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 of the venue.

#### Universal membership

Other Affordable Food Clubs will offer a universal (open access) membership, free from criteria.

### Income-based membership

Some Affordable Food Clubs use income-based membership criteria. This requires the new member upon registration to 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.

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NAME: _____	
GENDER: <input type="checkbox"/> MALE <input type="checkbox"/> FEMALE	DATE OF BIRTH: _____
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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*

### 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.

### **Pricing structure**

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. A popular and effective way of putting surplus items to good use, while enhancing the overall offer, is to turn them into nutritious ready meals which members of each Affordable Food Club can either eat on site or heat up at home.

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 fee

Some Affordable Food Clubs charge a weekly set fee of between £3 and £6 for which the member can select a range of items to a value of between £15 and £20. 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.



*Item guidance at Foleshill Community Supermarket, Coventry*

Several venues will 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.

Among some Affordable Food Clubs, members are asked 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.

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.

#### Points-based membership system

In collaboration with FareShare, Feeding Britain has developed a membership fee and points system which is being trialled in a number of Affordable Food Club. Each time a member visits, a membership level is chosen, and a cash fee is exchanged for the corresponding number of points.

1 point is equivalent to 25p and all items within the shopping area are labelled between 1 and 5 points. The customer is then able to enter the shopping area and choose items to the value of the points purchased. This points-based system may be preferred by surplus food providers who are not able to provide food to projects who directly sell on that food at a discounted rate.

Membership Level	Points Awarded	Membership Fee
1	4 points	£1.00
2	10 points	£2.50
3	20 points	£5.00
4	30 points	£7.50
5	40 points	£10.00

By offering a points credit system, any unused points can be carried over to the next visit. Many members are utilising this system to purchase points in bulk upon receipt of income and returning to shop throughout the month when required.

One example of this model being put into action is the Number Seven Citizens' Supermarket, in Birkenhead. 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. The team member processes the transaction by checking the items and points receipt. Should any unused points require saving, they are recorded on an index card stored in a rolodex. The card contains the member's name and membership number and is signed by the member at the end of the visit to document the number of points available. This process will be replaced by an electronic swipe card once the till system has been upgraded.

#### Colour coded system

At the Building Bridges Social Supermarket in Redditch, items are labelled with one of four coloured stickers. Each sticker equates to a certain price (e.g. an orange 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

We would encourage all Affordable Food Clubs in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland to accept Healthy Start cards if possible. The Healthy Start Scheme entitles those who are receiving a qualifying benefit and are pregnant or have a child under the age of 4 to 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. 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. £4.50 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 (e.g. where each item is worth a certain number of points), 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 the scheme here: [www.healthystart.nhs.uk/](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/). In Scotland, the Best Start Food scheme offers similar support. Find out more here:

[www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods](http://www.mygov.scot/best-start-grant-best-start-foods)

### Crisis provision

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.

While it may be more straightforward to offer that help to longstanding members who have previously paid their fees, but have recently hit particularly difficult times, there are also ways of doing so to new members. Some Affordable Food Clubs have worked with their local food bank, council, or advice service to develop pathways (or stepping stones) to move people on from the food bank once the crisis situation has eased. For example, the food bank may give tokens to a customer using the food bank. These tokens can be exchanged, for free, for a certain number of shops at the Affordable Food Club. The food bank then reimburses the Affordable Food Club for the price of this shopping. Over time, the customer can then transition into being a member of the Affordable Food Club, and contributing for their weekly food shop. 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.

### **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.

Case study: Feeding Gainsborough have opened a market stall in the town square offering a selection of the goods that are available at their Bread and Roses Pantry. Through this, they are reaching more people and raising awareness of the Pantry.



### Accessing food supplies

Typically, Affordable Food Clubs are able to offer a broad range of nutritious food items. This can include fresh, chilled, frozen and ambient goods. A number of venues also stock 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.

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 if you have kitchen facilities. 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 incredibly popular, 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.





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

#### Surplus and discount suppliers:

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 food from surplus and discount suppliers, including:

- FareShare Community Food Membership and FareShare Go: [www.fareshare.org.uk](http://www.fareshare.org.uk)
- Neighbourly: [www.neighbourly.com](http://www.neighbourly.com)
- His Church: [www.hischurch.org.uk](http://www.hischurch.org.uk)
- Bankuet: [www.bankuet.co.uk](http://www.bankuet.co.uk)
- The Xcess Network: [www.xcess.org.uk](http://www.xcess.org.uk)
- In Kind Direct: [www.inkinddirect.org](http://www.inkinddirect.org)

#### Wholesalers and retailers:

Many projects purchase some items in order to offer consistent supplies for members. Feeding Britain have developed relationships with the following retailers to access favourable rates:

- Morrisons (wholesale pricing)
- Iceland (wholesale pricing)
- Brakes (catering quantities)
- Relationships formed at a local level: B&M, Iceland, M&S, Aldi, Greggs, Lidl, CostCo & Asda.

#### Local supermarkets and other food businesses

Either through direct connections or via FareShare Go or Neighbourly, many partners access food donations from their local supermarkets as well as from retailers such as local markets, greengrocers, butchers and bakers. This will often require projects to collect food from the store at the start or end of the day.

#### Manufacturers and distribution centres

Some Affordable Food Clubs have built relationships with local manufacturers and distribution centres to access significant volumes of surplus or very low cost items. Examples include bread factories offering a weekly supply of fresh loaves, and local docks offering fresh fruit when they have surplus.



### Schools

Some local schools have been very supportive in collecting food donations from families, and in offering surplus foods from their canteens.

### Other food projects

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.

### Growing networks

Local growing networks may provide low-cost and high-quality fruit and vegetables. Networks include:

- Gleaning networks who harvest surplus crops from farms, and redistribute these to food projects. Some areas may already have an active gleaning network in place.
- Allotment sharing projects, to share any abundance of produce. You can see a 'how to' guide from Bath & North East Somerset's CropDrop initiative [here](#).
- Community gardens
- Community and city farms

Food projects with outdoor or garden space have launched community growing schemes allowing fruits, vegetables, herbs and fresh flowers to be grown and offered to members.

### **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. This can increase cost.

A till/EPOS system can be very 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). You could purchase just a card reader which connects with an app on your phone, or you may opt for a fully integrated till system.

Item	Approx. cost
Display fridge (glass fronted)	£1,000 per unit
Display freezer (glass fronted)	£1200 per unit

Portable shelving	£150 per unit
Wire racking shelving	£90 per unit
Food storage units (with doors)	£200 each
Till / EPOS system	£200 minimum (for a simple EPOS system such as <a href="#">this</a> ) up to £850 (for <a href="#">Zettle Retail kit</a> )
Card reader	£30 minimum (consider integration with till/EPOS system)
Label printer	£90 ( <a href="#">Phomemo</a> ink-free label printer is recommended)
Shopping basket	£5 each
Re-usable shopping bag	£1.90 each
Pricing gun	£10
Safe	£35

It is worth noting that 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.

### **Additional services**

The provision of wraparound support and services, alongside food, is an essential part of Affordable Food Clubs. This may include benefits, debt, housing, life skills and employment support. Some projects will deliver their own in-house services and others will invite local services to have a presence at the Affordable Food Club.

Some projects also act as a drop-off point for other initiatives, for example, to receive donations for a baby baskets scheme. Many projects are also 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.

### **Cooking and recipes**

Many Affordable Food Clubs have incorporated cooking 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.

#### Recipe inspiration:

- [Feeding Bristol](#) produced recipes and materials representing best value for money for £15 and translated them into 16 languages.
- [FareShare Yorkshire's Full Crumb Kitchen](#) makes use of surplus food to create delicious recipes and interact with families through cooking tips, live sessions, and videos.
- [Oasis Hub Bath](#) produced the store cupboard staples recipe book "Let's Cook Together"
- [Hubbub](#) produce a variety of resources covering tips on reducing food waste and meal planning

#### Credit Union

A growing number of Affordable Food Clubs are working with their local Credit Union to offer savings schemes.

In Feeding Bradford and Keighley, the Affordable Food Clubs are working closely with the Credit Union on the [FoodSavers](#) initiative. In this model, 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.

### **Policies & procedures**

#### 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. The most user friendly is Safer Food, Better Business and further information can be found [here](#).

#### 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. A 12 point plan adapted from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) guidance, 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](#)

### **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.

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. Projects may offer opportunities for work experience and participate in schemes for those facing barriers to employment.

### **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**

Feeding Britain webinar recordings:

- Financial sustainability for affordable food clubs: <https://youtu.be/MvfKehrUyV8>
- Food supplies for community food projects: <https://youtu.be/VZ9OJSTAEFo>

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