



## Creating and developing a Mobile Affordable Food Club

### Feeding Britain Toolkit August 2022



*The social supermarket onboard the double decker London Food Bus*

Across the Feeding Britain network, a fleet of Mobile Affordable Food Clubs is being developed - converted double decker buses serving inner-city estates and coastal communities; ex-mobile libraries, adapted ice cream vans and retired St John Ambulance vehicles covering urban areas and rural villages; and e-cargo bikes loaded with fruit and vegetables at school gates.

These projects vary hugely in terms of vehicle size and type, delivery model, and geographic context. They do, however, all aim to bring affordable, nutritious food directly into communities - tackling barriers of both affordability and accessibility. Some offer additional wraparound support services, cafes, community events and cooking demonstrations. Others link in with existing venues - making use of their facilities and programmes. This document does not aim to provide all the answers, but rather to outline some of the considerations when planning a Mobile Affordable Food Club. A clear understanding of the need you are trying to meet and what you want your project to achieve will help to guide decision making across the areas detailed below.

Typically, the food offered in these projects will consist of ambient and fresh produce, as well as potentially chilled and frozen goods. Members are generally able to browse the goods, select what they

wish to take home, and gain a discount of between one-quarter and two-thirds compared to a regular supermarket. See Feeding Britain's Affordable Food Club Toolkit for further information on membership, pricing structures and food supplies.

We would encourage anyone planning a Mobile Affordable Food Club to seek meaningful input from the local community throughout the planning and delivery stages - for example, connecting with local food networks and existing provision, and working with local people to co-design the service.

### **Support from Feeding Britain**

Feeding Britain has accumulated a wealth of experience and knowledge around the development of Mobile Affordable Food Clubs. Membership of the Feeding Britain network can provide access to:

- Funding to cover set-up costs
- 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:

- Affordable Food Clubs Toolkit: For those looking to establish an Affordable Food Club such as a pantry or social supermarket.
- Food Suppliers Guide: A list of the key food suppliers used across the Feeding Britain network.
- Webinar: Mobile Affordable Food Clubs: <https://youtu.be/BBJSdTsb7TY>
- 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)

### **Model of delivery and type of vehicle**

Each Mobile Affordable Food Club will look very different depending on local needs and circumstances. Here are some different models used across the Feeding Britain network:

#### Pop-up pantry model

A vehicle that travels to different locations (e.g. village halls, community centres) to run a pop-up pantry at each venue within a weekly timetable. Shelving and other pieces of equipment could be stored at each venue, with the vehicle used to transport the produce and staff. In other cases, the equipment can be stored on the vehicle itself and brought to each venue. The venues may offer other facilities including a cafe and space to host advice services and events. Existing projects are using ex-supermarket delivery

vans and Sprinter vans. If the van is refrigerated, chilled goods could be offered directly out of the van, or each site could have a refrigerator. Smaller models are also being developed such as an e-cargo bike that carries fruit and vegetables.



*Feeding Devon's Food Hubs are run in venues across Dartmoor, with produce transported in an ex-supermarket delivery vehicle*



*The Newcastle Pop Up Pantry uses bespoke stackable crates that are offloaded from the van and used to display produce at the pop up pantry venues*

In Bassetlaw, the Bassetlaw Food Insecurity Network and Rhubarb Farm CIC are rolling out a series of affordable food hubs, primarily in schools and community centres. Rhubarb Farm manage the initial logistics for the first few weeks, including food deliveries. They then support the school or community centre, over a period of weeks, to take over the running of the hub themselves. This then frees up Rhubarb Farm to move on to establishing new hubs.

#### Onboard pantry model

A vehicle with the capacity to display all the food itself, giving people the option of browsing and accessing goods onboard. This model does not rely on the use of space at existing venues, but could plan to stop at existing venues which have adequate parking facilities, cafes, space for wrap around services etc. This could be a larger, single-decker vehicle such as a Fiat Ducato ex-St John Ambulance, an ex-mobile library or an old ice cream van, for example.



*The Breckland Mobile Food Store uses an old mobile library. This has been fitted out with an on-board pantry.*



*The Warwickshire Mobile Community Store uses an ex-St John Ambulance vehicle.*

### Double decker food bus

A vehicle with space on board for an extensive food selection, as well as other facilities such as a cafe, social area and advice services. This is likely to require a double decker bus or other very large vehicle. This may be particularly suitable if the bus stops are not in areas with existing community venues that can be used. Existing food buses in the Feeding Britain network have the capacity to accommodate 250 members visiting regularly.



*The London Food Bus has an Affordable Food Club on the lower deck, alongside a commercial kitchen. Upstairs, there is cafe seating as well as space for activities and advice services.*



*The Sheppey Support Bus has an Affordable Food Club on the lower deck. Upstairs, the seating is partitioned for advice services and group activities.*

There may be an opportunity with all of these options to have awnings and seating around the vehicle when it stops, to encourage social eating and community events.

If you would like to offer refrigerated or frozen items, your vehicle will need to have space and capacity for a refrigerator or freezer. Some vehicles are already fitted with these, whilst others will need to be fitted with a chiller fridge and freezer. This can increase the range of produce you can offer, but brings challenges around electricity supply and cost.

Other considerations include what budget is available, how the model will work in bad weather, the layout and condition of local roads (including low bridges), accessibility to all aspects of the service, and the environmental impact of different vehicles. When choosing your vehicle, it is worth considering the

age and condition of the vehicle. Whilst an older vehicle may cost less to purchase, it could cost more in the long run in maintenance and repairs.

It is a good idea to have your vehicle weighed to understand its existing weight before fitting any equipment. You can then see what equipment can be fitted and how much stock it can carry within the legal weight. One project ruled out a potential vehicle as it had a maximum legal weight of 5.5 tonnes but already weighed 4.9 tonnes. Once chiller fridges and shelving were fitted there would only have been capacity for 20kg of stock.

## Route

Typically, mobile projects within the Feeding Britain network visit one or two stops per day. For example, a food bus might spend the morning at one stop, before moving onto the second stop for the afternoon. It has proven important to have a regular route - this enables you to build up a membership base and offer consistency for members. Some factors to consider when planning your stops include:

- Levels of need, deprivation and food insecurity - are you reaching the communities where the need is greatest?
- Existing provision - where are the gaps in provision of affordable food and are you avoiding duplication?
- Footfall - will you attract enough people at these stops? Typically, schools and residential areas work well.
- Geography - is it feasible to cover all of your target areas with one vehicle?
- Existing venues - will you be stopping at or near existing venues that might complement your project?
- Topping up stock - do the locations of your morning and afternoon stops enable you to restock the vehicle in between?
- Safety - are these going to be safe spaces to stop, if people are getting on and off your vehicle or gathered outside?
- Parking - is there sufficient space, either on the street or with a partner venue, to park legally for the length of time required to run the service? Some services are using pub car parks or sports centre car parks which may not be heavily used during the day times and may be well located within a community.

Your planned route may also impact your vehicle choice as smaller roads, low bridges, and tight corners may not be suitable for a larger vehicle. It is also important to consider access to facilities for staff and volunteers, for example toilets and washrooms at stopping locations.

## Design and fit out

Depending on the scale and complexity of your project, you might choose to commission an architect to design your vehicle. Some architects may be open to doing this work on a pro-bono basis, or for a reduced rate. Feeding Britain can share details of architecture firms and fit-out companies who have worked on other mobile food projects.

Lessons from other mobile projects include:

- Get an engineer to look at the state of the vehicle before you purchase it. A full condition survey will help you understand the maintenance and repair condition at that time, and foresee any future issues and costs.
- Make sure the design allows easy access to the engine and that any emergency escape doors can open from the outside and inside.
- Air conditioning and heating can ensure the vehicle is comfortable all year round - both for customers and the staff or volunteer team.
- Depending on your location, you may need to consider retrofitting to meet Ultra Low Emission Zone standards.
- You will need to consider electricity including power to run refrigerators, sockets, till systems etc. Solar panels on the roof can be an environmentally friendly option.
- If you are having a cafe, you may need to include gas and running water.

## Wraparound support services and events

There may be opportunities to offer wraparound support services alongside the affordable food. This can attract more people to the project and help to address some of the wider issues people are experiencing. Services might include:

- Advisors to support with benefits issues
- Debt and budgeting advice
- Housing support
- Employment advice and support
- Credit Union services
- Fuel support or a Fuel Bank
- School uniform exchange schemes

These services could be located on the vehicle, for example with advisors in the upstairs of a bus or next to the driver's cab on the lower deck. You will need to consider this during design and fit out - for example, you may wish to include confidential pods or seating areas for discreet conversations (see photos from the Sheppey Support Bus above). Alternatively, you could plan your route to stop at places

with existing support services, or to arrange for these to be located in the venues along your route. For example, a pop-up pantry in a village hall may arrange for a benefits and debt advisor to be on site and offer appointments in a confidential room.

The vehicle could also host sessions such as cooking demonstrations, physical activities and community events. Again, this should be considered during the fit out - for example, additional electricity sockets may be needed for plug-in equipment for cookery demonstrations.

### Cafe

A cafe can attract people to the project and provide a space for socialising. Many members of Affordable Food Clubs might be isolated and lonely, so this can be an important service. In addition, the cafe space can help people to engage with advice services and events. It can also be an important revenue stream, in addition to members' fees from the affordable food element of the service. Some cafes may only offer hot drinks and perhaps a selection of cold food, whilst others may have a full kitchen and capacity to offer hot meals. A hatch could be built into the design to serve people outside of the vehicle.



*The commercial kitchen on the lower deck of the London Food Bus.*

### Driver's licenses, insurance, MOT and tax

You will need to consider the costs and requirements around driver's licences, insurance, MOT and tax for your chosen vehicle, and to factor these into timelines and budgets. As mobile food projects are still fairly uncommon, it may be beneficial to seek expert advice around vehicle classification for MOT and tax early in your project. The classification of the vehicle may change after the fit-out, depending on the number of seats on board and whether you will be carrying passengers or goods for sale.

If a larger vehicle such as a double decker bus is refitted with fewer seats, and is not going to be carrying passengers, drivers may technically be permitted to drive this on a standard licence, so long as they passed their test before 1998. However, insurance companies still may require the driver to have a HGV or PSV licence. Your organisation may also choose to require a HGV or PSV license in order to reduce risk for the project.

Here are some insurance companies and brokers that our partners have used:

- Association of Mobile Projects have a group policy with Zurich. Joining the Association of Mobile Projects (approx £30 p/a) can give you access to a heavily discounted insurance policy - [www.associationofmobileprojects.co.uk](http://www.associationofmobileprojects.co.uk)
- Double decker food buses:
  - Insurers: Markerstudy Insurance Services Ltd - [www.markerstudy.com](http://www.markerstudy.com)
  - Brokers: Mobilers Insurance Services - [www.mobilers.co.uk](http://www.mobilers.co.uk)
- Vans:
  - Insurers: Zurich - [www.zurich.co.uk](http://www.zurich.co.uk)
- Bicycles:
  - Insurers: Laka - [www.laka.co/gb](http://www.laka.co/gb)
  - Insurers: Bikmo - [www.bikmo.com/uk/business](http://www.bikmo.com/uk/business) or email [ben.frith@bikmo.com](mailto:ben.frith@bikmo.com)

### Street trading license

You may require a street trading license for the project. Your local authority will be able to advise you on this. Find out more [here](#).

### Staffing and volunteers

Team structures for mobile food projects vary across the network. Typically, our partners have employed a manager to oversee the planning and day-to-day running of the project. Some larger mobile food projects have also chosen to have a paid driver due to the responsibility of this role and the need for consistency and reliability. Volunteers can play a key role in communications, community engagement, stocking the vehicle, managing the food displays and serving customers. A high-quality induction and training programme for volunteers has been crucial in the success of projects elsewhere.

### Storage and logistics

As well as the vehicle itself, you are likely to need a site to receive and store food and other items. If you are offering refrigerated and frozen items you will need capacity to store these items safely. Sharing warehousing with other food projects can lower costs and help with stock rotation.

You will also need a safe place to park the vehicle overnight. Ideally this would be off the road and protected from damage or theft. For some projects, the local council have offered secure parking for free. Depending on your vehicle, you may need to consider where you will fill the static water tanks via an external nozzle, where you will charge the batteries and where you will re-fuel as not all petrol stations can accommodate the height of a larger vehicle such as a double decker bus.

An additional van may be required to collect surplus from suppliers and to restock larger mobile food projects when out on the route. This can also be a helpful back-up if the main vehicle is off the road for maintenance.

### **Promotion and marketing**

Promotion and marketing of the service will be essential to ensure the Mobile Affordable Food Club is accessed by those households who stand to benefit most from membership. 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 at each of the planned stops and in popular venues such as community centres and libraries.
- 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 service, sometimes offering a voucher which subsidises a first week's membership fee.
- Attending events, or planning your own events (e.g. a launch party) to raise awareness.
- Asking your local MP to contact residents and tell them about the provision.
- Press coverage.
- A website

### **Partners**

Projects across our network have benefitted from having a broad range of partners involved from the start. This might include:

- Bus companies, bike shops or garages (depending on your chosen vehicle) - they may be able to support with sourcing a vehicle, classification, maintenance, parking, servicing and even drivers.
- Other food projects in the area - to enable joined-up working and sharing of resources and to avoid competition or duplication
- Representatives from the communities the project will be serving
- Food providers - this might include surplus redistributors, local manufacturers, shops, markets and growers
- Potential funders

- The Local Authority including around Environmental Health, traders' licenses and connection to other initiatives.
- The local university - they may be interested in funding or capturing the impact of your project
- Wraparound services that may be offered through the project
- Local campaign groups relating to your project for example cycling groups for bicycle projects.

Offering advertising space for partners on the vehicle can be an additional income stream. Some projects within our network aim to cover the fuel costs of their vehicle with monies raised by advertising space.

### **Additional resources**

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### **Example costings**

This section details example capital costs for different models of delivery. These are based on existing projects within the Feeding Britain network but are purely indicative and will vary significantly. The costs outlined here are only the capital costs to purchase and set up the vehicle, they do not cover revenue costs for the running of the project.

Revenue costs for all models might include:

- Staff costs
- Volunteer expenses
- Parking and warehouse space
- Servicing and maintenance
- Insurance and tax
- Fuel
- Utilities (water, electricity, internet)
- Food supplies

## Double decker food bus

### Premium option

These costings are an illustrative example for a double decker bus with a full cafe and refrigeration. The upstairs may be converted into seating or space for advice services.

Item	Cost
Pre project planning and initial designs	£4,000
Purchase of second hand double decker bus	£15,000
Adaptations, equipment and fit out (tables, fridges, awnings, accessibility equipment, kitchen equipment etc.)	£48,100
Design fees (architects, electrical engineers)	£8,000
Legal and surveys	£5,000
VAT on design and build costs @20%	£18,700
Computers, phones and other equipment	£7,500
Refrigerated van to supply the bus	£10,000
Contingency	£10,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£126,300</b>

### Alternative option

These costings are for a double decker bus without a cafe. Refrigerated goods are provided by a refrigerated van that follows the bus route, rather than refrigeration on-board. The upstairs may have confidential booths, seating and/or storage.

Item	Cost
Double decker bus	£0 - source for free
Adaptations, equipment and fit out (tables, shelving etc.)	£20,000
Design fees (architects, electrical engineers)	£8,000 (may source pro bono)
VAT on design and build costs @20%	£5,600
Internet / digital connectivity	£1,500
Refrigerated van to supply the bus	£10,000
Contingency	£10,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£55,100</b>

We would suggest working to a twelve-month timetable for planning, developing, and launching a double-decker food bus project. Here is an indicative timeline for this work.

Month	Activity
Month 1 - 4	Partnership development; community engagement; planning; fundraising
Month 5 - 6	Recruit project manager; ongoing fundraising; purchase bus; technical design;
Month 7 - 9	Conversion and fit out works
Month 10 - 12	Develop warehouse and source stock; recruit driver and volunteers; community engagement and raising awareness
Month 12	Launch pilot phase

### Mobile pantry

These costings are for a mobile pantry vehicle. People are able to browse goods but there is no space on board for a cafe or wraparound services. There is refrigeration and a freezer on board.

Item	Cost
Vehicle (e.g. ex-mobile library)	£7,500
Design fees	£2,000
Adaptations, equipment and fit out (display stands, structural changes, refrigeration and freezer).	£8,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£17,500</b>

### Pop-up pantry model

These costings are for a vehicle that travels to different locations (e.g. village halls, community centres) to run a pop-up pantry at each site. The shelving will be in-situ at each venue. Refrigerated goods can be served directly from the van.

Item	Cost
Vehicle - refrigerated van	£10,000
Shelving for 5x pop-up pantry sites	£2,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>£12,500</b>