Food Poverty Action Plan for Greater Manchester 2019-2022
About Greater Manchester Poverty Action

Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA) is a not-for-profit organisation based in Greater Manchester that works to address poverty across the city region. We convene and network organisations from across the public, private and VCSE sectors to foster collaboration and innovation and to maximise the impact of efforts to address hardship and deprivation across Greater Manchester. We carry out research and we campaign for changes in policy both locally and nationally so that the structural and systematic causes of poverty are addressed.

In 2018 GMPA convened the Greater Manchester Food Poverty Alliance, made up of over 100 organisations and individuals from across Greater Manchester to develop a Food Poverty Action Plan for the city region.

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This document is a summary of the plan – the full Food Poverty Action Plan for Greater Manchester can be found at gmpovertyaction.org/food-poverty-action-plan
The Greater Manchester Strategy; Our People Our Place, describes the importance of young people being equipped for life, of safe and strong communities, of healthy lives and a thriving economy. We must work together to tackle the barriers to these aims.

We know that in Greater Manchester, around 200,000 children experience poverty, and food bank use is higher than in most other areas. One in four parents across the country have skipped meals to make ends meet and for schoolchildren, “holiday hunger” is a growing concern.

We also know that access to nutritious food in sufficient quantities is crucial for good physical and mental health, for young people being able to learn and thrive at school and for success in the workplace.

It is for these reasons that I wholeheartedly support and endorse the Greater Manchester Food Poverty Action Plan, which enables a strategic and better-coordinated response to food poverty in our city region. I applaud the work of the many people and huge range of partner organisations involved in the Greater Manchester Food Poverty Alliance to reduce and prevent food poverty, support communities to plan and adapt to the challenge of food poverty and work with partners to address the structural and economic issues that underlie food poverty.

Greater Manchester is the first city region to come together and co-produce a Food Poverty Action Plan on this scale. The Action Plan also reinforces steps we are already taking, such as the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter, which will help tackle in-work poverty; and the development of a set of measures around Welfare Reform to support those facing out-of-work poverty.

Having a joined-up response to tackling food poverty across education, health and care, supplier and provider networks; supported by further actions to tackle the roots causes of food poverty will make a huge difference in our efforts to tackle poverty and disadvantage, as well as build a thriving and productive Greater Manchester.
Introduction

The Greater Manchester Food Poverty Alliance came out of a series of conversations, convened by Greater Manchester Poverty Action (GMPA) with partners from the private, public and VCSE sectors.

These conversations resulted, among other things, in GMPA’s map of food banks and other food support providers, which has been viewed and used over 20,000 times to help people access meals and support in a crisis. It was clear from these conversations that there was even more we could do together to tackle food poverty.

As Andy Burnham notes in his foreword the number of people experiencing food poverty, or at risk of it, is staggering. It far outweighs the VCSE sector’s ability to provide adequate support. The costs to society are immense, but are mostly not measured, which means that food poverty falls through the gaps in many existing strategies. Meanwhile £30bn per year has been cut from the welfare budget since 2010 and councils have lost 60% of central government funding.

Given this context, the Food Poverty Alliance was set up on the premise that only by opening up the conversation about how we tackle food poverty, to involve all stakeholders, could we develop a more strategic and better coordinated response to the issue in our city region.

With support from Food Power, the national network of Food Poverty Alliances, GMPA publicly launched the Alliance in May 2018. Since then more than 100 people and organisations, including many people who have lived experience of food poverty, have worked together to co-produce the Food Poverty Action Plan for Greater Manchester, setting actions to:

- Reduce and prevent food poverty;
- Build resilience and support communities to plan and adapt to the challenge of food poverty;
- Address the structural and economic issues that underlie food poverty, such as the benefits system and precarious and low-paid employment.

Defining food poverty broadly as “consistent access to adequate food being limited by a lack of money and other resources”, everyone involved in the Alliance was asked one key question: what could Greater Manchester – all leaders, systems, institutions, businesses, charities and communities working together – do to tackle food poverty in the next three years?

Ultimately the plan should be seen as a first step on the way towards ending food poverty in Greater Manchester. It is focused where possible on tackling the underlying causes of food poverty, which will take a long-term commitment due to their scale and complexity. Although we may be a long way off at the moment, working to end food poverty must be our aim.

I want to thank everyone who has supported the development of the plan, and invite you all to join us in making it a reality.

Tom Skinner
Director of Greater Manchester Poverty Action

Over 100 organisations have come together in the last year to set out how we’re going to end food poverty in Greater Manchester – the Food Poverty Action Plan.
Food Poverty Action Plan – The Vision

“Everyone in Greater Manchester enjoys good food and a better standard of living, and they look out for each other.”

This plan lays out a vision of a joined-up support system in each neighbourhood, of local people and organisations working together. Each neighbourhood and support scheme should be part of a “no wrong door” approach, meaning that no matter where someone turns to for help, they will be supported to find the help that they most need.

We also need to diversify the food support system, with more support for people and households going through a long-term squeeze on their finances. Ultimately all support activities should be geared towards prevention of food poverty, by helping people to find their way out of poverty.

The plan does not shy away from tackling the root causes of poverty, even though some of these causes may feel beyond our control at times. It makes a series of recommendations for action at a Greater Manchester level that will help to address some of the causes of poverty.

The plan is not a piece of research that sets out to identify and evidence every challenge and every solution (although there is a strong evidence base for much of it). Rather, it has come from a bottom-up process with the ideas and energy of participants guiding its development. This has produced an action plan that, if we continue working together, will be put into action, will deliver meaningful food system change, and will reduce and prevent food poverty for thousands of people in Greater Manchester.
The full Food Poverty Action Plan for Greater Manchester 2019-2022 can be found online – it is a live document that will evolve as it is put into action. This document is therefore just a summary that lays out some of the key themes and early actions that might make the biggest difference most quickly.

The full Action Plan can be found at gmpovertyaction.org/food-poverty-action-plan

The most important factor is a joined-up response across Greater Manchester – this means public services, businesses and VSCE groups working together to tackle food poverty.

Leadership
Food poverty should be identified as a priority for all public services and support services. A lead for poverty should be appointed in the GM Combined Authority (GMCA) and in each council, to work with the Food Poverty Alliance and neighbourhood teams in reducing food poverty. A lead for food at GMCA and councils is also recommended, working with Good Food Greater Manchester on all six Sustainable Food Cities key issues, and teaming up with the lead for poverty on food poverty actions.

Welfare Reform
Greater Manchester should argue for, and work towards, a system that provides adequate financial support to ensure a household’s basic needs are met, reducing use of sanctions and engaging with claimants to understand their needs and build support around them. The welfare system (including Local Welfare Assistance Schemes on which GMPA has published research and a series of recommendations) should be connected with other local support offers. The system should lead with a welfare rights and “cash first” approach, with additional support such as fuel vouchers and food bank/club referrals as secondary options.

Food Deserts and the Poverty Premium
Food deserts are areas that lack access to affordable healthy food. Research should be carried out to identify all such areas and assess their needs. Councils may be able to use planning, grants, business rates reductions, and other tools to encourage food businesses and charities to move into these areas and improve the range of food that is on offer. The same tools, as well as regulating bus services, could help to address the poverty premium (people on lower incomes paying more) in other goods and services – see also GMPA’s proposals on the poverty premium.

Food Support
There are many forms of food support, provided primarily by community and faith groups, most notably food banks, food clubs, and cooked meals. While cooked meals have been provided, often alongside other activities, for many years, the rise of food banks and food clubs is one of the largest social mobilisations in the last decade.

Food banks give food packages away for free to people in need, often with various eligibility criteria and limits on the number of visits. Food clubs (also known as food pantries, social supermarkets and community grocers) are membership schemes that provide a certain number of food items each visit for a set weekly
Food banks help people in moments of crisis while food clubs offer longer-term support through a membership scheme.

Our Action Plan calls for local partnerships to set up more food clubs, especially in areas that lack affordable healthy food.

BROADLY SPEAKING, FOOD BANKS HELP PEOPLE IN MOMENTS OF CRISIS WHILE FOOD CLUBS OFFER LONGER-TERM SUPPORT AND MORE CHOICE.

As tackling the underlying causes of food poverty is a long-term aim, Greater Manchester will need to offer both forms of support in the next few years. However, our food support sector currently has more crisis provision than long-term support so we need more food clubs, especially in food deserts. Where possible, all food support should be provided alongside other forms of support such as advice, to help people address the underlying issues that cause food poverty.

Two other things would help to bring out the best in Greater Manchester's food support sector — borough-wide networks or a GM-wide network of food support providers, such as the Salford Food Share Network, and a free online platform for providers, like the streetsupport.net site created for the homelessness sector. These would:

- Coordinate front line provision;
- Connect food providers with other forms of support;
- Provide mutual support, training and networking opportunities for frontline staff and volunteers;
- Set minimum standards and principles to ensure the provision of high quality services across GM;
- Encourage food support providers to collect and submit data;
- Help people (and their advisers) to find the support that they need;
- Help food support providers see how they fit into the bigger picture, and connect with each other;
- Facilitate conversations about reducing reliance on food support in the long-term.

The network(s) and the online platform are dependent on finding more funding, and will take time to set up. Right now we can support and promote the independent Greater Manchester Food Forum for all stakeholders to communicate, share ideas and seek support.

Our Action Plan calls for a coordinated cross-sector approach to increase uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers.

The Vouchers are given to parents on low incomes, for fruit, vegetables and milk for young children.

Uptake is lower than in other city regions, meaning £3.6m worth of food goes unclaimed every year.
Children and Young People
Schools, councils and children’s charities should work together to develop and implement a GM-wide framework for the provision of healthy and sustainable meals for children and young people, during term times and holidays, with reference to the school food standard. Schools should follow good practice to increase uptake of free school meals without exposing pupils to stigma. They should also work with local businesses and charities, with the help of neighbourhood teams, to provide breakfast clubs and affordable healthy cooking classes for families. All 10 boroughs should address holiday hunger by supporting and coordinating provision of activities with food during school holidays.

Healthy Start Vouchers, funded by central government, are worth £3.10 per week for parents on low incomes to buy healthy food for their young children. Uptake of these vouchers was lower in Greater Manchester between 2016-2018 than in other city regions. Health services should therefore work with schools, children’s charities and other VCSE groups to increase uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers.

Homes and Housing
Soaring housing costs are a major factor in the rise of UK poverty, and many actions can be taken, including:

- Social and affordable housing in all neighbourhoods should be prioritised in planning and budgeting decisions;
- Landlord licensing and other tools can be used to improve standards, and push for longer tenancies;
- While significant action to reduce homelessness and eradicate rough sleeping is already underway, all temporary accommodation should be fitted with cooking equipment and other white goods necessary for a basic standard of living.

Health and Care
Health services should expand social prescribing for healthy food-related activities such as cooking classes and food growing, and should work with charities and businesses to promote healthy food, with positive messaging and campaigns. Food in hospitals and care homes must be healthy and suited to people’s diets including cultural and religious observance. Meanwhile disabled people and older people should be given enough support to access healthy affordable food.

Anchor institutions are established organisations like local authorities, schools and universities, which are rooted to their local communities.

Businesses, Charities and Anchor Institutions
All employers should show leadership in tackling in-work poverty by providing good quality employment opportunities that offer security and decent pay to employees. A good first step for these organisations would be to become accredited Real Living Wage employers.

Those that handle food should prevent unnecessary food wastage and ensure that
high quality, healthy surplus food is sorted and put to good use. Support should be given to building capacity for food acquisition, supply and redistribution.

Larger organisations should develop and implement local procurement policies to source supplies locally, including but not limited to food. This would support the development of more local supply chains, working with short supply chains and local labour markets. This in turn would keep money within the local economy, jobs would be supported and created, and the “multiplier effect” would see this money boost the local economy.

Measuring Food Poverty
Currently, while fuel poverty, child poverty and other aspects of poverty are measured, food poverty is not. This presents many problems as it leads to food poverty not being adequately prioritised or understood. We would like to work with GMCA, with support from local universities, councils and other public sector bodies, to measure food poverty across GM, and do more focused research in specific neighbourhoods.

We would also like the ten boroughs in Greater Manchester to work with us to monitor preventative policy and action, applying Sustain’s Beyond the Food Bank survey approach across Greater Manchester.

Raising Funds and Public Awareness
GMPA is committed to continuing this work. In order to do this the first requirement is funding for a full-time Food Poverty Alliance Coordinator, to support and coordinate the actions in this plan over the next three years. In addition to this a public fundraising campaign could raise funds for:

- Creating and supporting a network of food support providers;
- Developing and maintaining a free online platform for food support providers;
- Seed funding and, where necessary, subsidies to ensure adequate provision of affordable, no-cost or subsidised healthy food, and food training and education.

The campaign should have positive messaging about what we can achieve together, while highlighting stories of lived experience. Social impact bonds for health benefits related to food poverty reduction could also release additional funding for action on food poverty.

The Place-based Approach
Finally, the plan calls for focused work in specific neighbourhoods to tackle food poverty at the local level. We want to work with four at first, and then ten, neighbourhood teams to develop a joined-up response at the local level, while learning lessons and developing tools that can be applied in every borough in Greater Manchester. The diagram opposite shows how we think it will work, and you can find much more detail in the full Action Plan online.

gmpovertyaction.org/food-poverty-action-plan
The Place-based Approach

1. Develop a way to measure food poverty in a neighbourhood, and for Greater Manchester – set an aim for each neighbourhood

2. Identify four neighbourhoods in which to pilot place-based approaches

3. Develop a joined up local response in these neighbourhoods, develop tools and pathways

4. Focused work with specific groups of people, and community-specific agencies

5. Ensure adequate provision of affordable, no-cost or subsidised healthy food, and training

6. Raise funds to support coordination and adequate food provision in each neighbourhood, as well as expansion to six more neighbourhoods

The neighbourhoods should have areas within them that have:

- Low incomes
- Poor diet-related health outcomes
- Food deserts
- Agencies and residents ready to work with us

Neighbourhood teams should be at the heart of this, with support from the Food Poverty Alliance, convening a working group in each neighbourhood. They should:

- Foster working relationships between all agencies, and a “No wrong door” approach
- Provide training for all agencies
- Develop tools to help people navigate support systems
- Gear all agencies and responses towards prevention of food poverty, develop pathways to help people out of food poverty

During the pilot project, each working group should work with one specific “cohort” of people in each neighbourhood:

- Children and young people
- Older people
- BME people
- Disabled people

Expand to a total of 10 neighbourhoods after initial reports from each pilot

Share learning and make resources available for all neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester
Please join us in making this Action Plan a reality.

Read the full plan and sign up to get involved at gmfoodpovertyaction.org/food-poverty-action-plan or email food@gmfoodpovertyaction.org to find out more.