



Evaluation of the Food Roots 2 Programme

Final Report

September 2025

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Evaluation of the Food Roots 2 Programme

Final Report

A report submitted by [ICF Consulting Services Limited](#)

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Executive summary

Introduction and methodology

This report presents findings from an independent evaluation of the Food Roots 2 programme, commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA). Building on the success of the [Food Roots Incubator Programme](#), Food Roots 2 aimed to strengthen and expand local food partnerships to support more sustainable, resilient responses to food insecurity.

The programme had four key objectives:

1. Develop and strengthen relationships across the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and with local authorities to embed more strategic, collaborative approaches.
2. Increase the number of food aid providers offering support beyond food, including cash-first and wraparound approaches.
3. Improve the ability of food partnerships to access sustainable external funding.
4. Raise awareness and uptake of Healthy Start through better signposting and stronger links between statutory and voluntary sectors.

The second round of the Food Roots programme provided a total of **£1.26 million** in grant funding to **21 food partnerships**. Of this, **£821,000** was awarded during the first year and **£442,000** during the extension period.

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to assess delivery, outcomes and potential legacy of the Food Roots 2 programme. This included 117 semi-structured interviews, 'deep dives' in 12 partnerships (consisting of interviews, observations and desk review), observation of workshops and events, a survey of partnership members (84 responses) and a workshop with delivery partners.

Programme delivery

Grant funding to partnerships

- Food Roots 2 funding paid for coordinators (£25k part-time / £45k full-time) to develop and strengthen local food partnerships. Coordinators used their time and capacity to support a wide range of activities shaped around local priorities and emerging opportunities. However, because there were no clearly defined targets or deliverables, it was harder to measure and track the impact of this work consistently.
- Programme grants were managed by a single host organisation, which ensured clear responsibility for managing funds and delivering the programme. However, this sometimes reduced involvement of wider partners in Food Roots 2 activities.
- In some areas, delays in recruitment, staff turnover and short contracts limited progress. Coordinators who started late or lacked support from their host organisation often struggled to advance longer-term planning or partnership development.

Learning and support offers

Delivery partners provided a structured programme of training, peer learning, mentoring, and specialist advice to support capacity-building.

- **Learning curriculum:** Led by TSIC, Sustain, Food Matters and the First Love Foundation, this included workshops, site visits, online and in-person learning, and one-to-one support. The curriculum was co-designed with partnerships to address immediate priorities such as governance, partnership development, fundraising, and wraparound

support. Later, content was adapted for ‘beginner’ partnerships needing foundational skills and ‘mature’ partnerships ready for strategic development, making the training relevant to participants at different stages.

- **Tailored mentoring:** First Love Foundation helped some partnerships move towards adopting wraparound approaches, linking food provision with advice. Civil Society Consulting also provided mentoring to organisations to support long-term fundraising. Many organisations, however, lacked staffing, structures, or leadership support, to benefit from either mentoring offers. In these cases, mentors instead supported more basic organisational development activities, such as building robust governance models.
- **Healthy Start training:** Delivered by Citizens Advice to improve frontline staff knowledge of the scheme. Uptake was highest where sessions were centrally promoted (e.g., by GLA/OHID), but where promotion relied only on local coordinators or where boroughs already had some Healthy Start activity, engagement was patchier, and training was sometimes seen as duplicative. Some ‘Train the Trainer’ sessions were also delivered to enable staff to pass on knowledge within their organisations. However, without dedicated funding to maintain or update these sessions, long-term impact is uncertain.

Evaluation and reflective learning

- The built-in evaluation acted not only as accountability but as a reflective tool, giving coordinators valuable space to review progress and priorities.
- Practical morning and evaluation support and advice was accessed by partnerships to help evidence impact and strengthen their ability to pursue future funding.

Progress and achievements

Developing and strengthening relationships

- In many areas, Food Roots 2 funding helped develop and re-establish food partnerships, with coordinators playing a key role in building trust among partners, fostering inclusive membership, and strengthening governance. Progress was gradual, but evidence suggests that coordinators helped partnerships move towards more strategic impact.
- The programme created a platform for councils and community organisations to work together, overcoming historic mistrust and siloed working. Coordinators facilitated dialogue through meetings, one-to-one outreach, and clearer governance, helping councils understand local needs and offer resources such as data tools and funding.
- Partners worked on joint projects, sharing tools, co-designing strategies, and pursuing joint funding bids. In some areas, seed funding allowed local organisations to lead initiatives like community growing or support projects. Coordinators also created smaller working groups and networks to encourage collaboration.
- Funding gave partners space to plan long-term strategy beyond crisis food provision with the support of the Food Roots 2 coordinator, including exploring shared infrastructure projects (surplus food hubs). In most areas, much of this work was still at an early stage by the programme’s end with sustainability plans being explored.

Offering holistic support beyond food aid

- Partnerships were encouraged to develop “wraparound” support, linking food aid with advice and wellbeing programmes. Progress varied, as organisations faced capacity pressures, differing readiness, and inconsistent interpretations of wraparound support.
- Some partnerships focused on improving referral pathways and signposting, including training staff, embedding advice in community hubs, and testing digital referral tools.

These efforts marked a shift towards preventative, holistic support, but challenges remain around data sharing, resources, and consistent use of digital systems.

- A “cash-first” approach (providing direct financial support) was encouraged but not fully tested due to funding and other barriers.

Accessing sustainable external funding

- Several partnerships were supported to build their ability and capacity to secure long-term funding. This included making governance improvements as well as strengthening internal leadership, decision-making and grant management processes.
- Some explored social enterprises or income-generating initiatives, like community cafés and social supermarkets, to reduce reliance on grants.
- Partnerships faced challenges in capturing and evidencing their collective work due to limited evaluation capacity, inconsistent reporting, technological barriers, and data privacy concerns.

Increasing awareness and visibility of Healthy Start

- Feedback surveys suggest training for frontline staff and volunteers help increase understanding of Healthy Start eligibility and voucher use.
- Many partners integrated Healthy Start promotion into their work, translating training into outreach campaigns and targeted support. Partnerships tested diverse methods to improve uptake and overcome language or cultural barriers, including leaflets, posters, social media, bilingual advocates, and collaboration with local businesses and services.
- Despite local promotion efforts, the main barriers to uptake were perceived to be wider issues with the scheme (such as low voucher value, limited coverage, and a complex application process) which local efforts alone could not overcome.

Building sustainable food partnerships

Learning from Food Roots 2 shows that food partnerships can be an effective way to tackle food insecurity. The programme’s experience highlights practical approaches for success at different stages of partnership development:

Recommendations for new partnerships

- Establish a clear purpose and shared vision with simple governance arrangements.
- Secure dedicated coordination capacity from the start, ideally shared across roles.
- Build credibility early with quick wins (e.g., surplus food redistribution) and map existing services to avoid duplication.

Recommendations for emerging partnerships

- Show tangible added value, such as pooled resources and reduced duplication, to encourage engagement.
- Align with council strategies while keeping community-led approaches.
- Invest in visibility and trust-building through meetings, visits, and regular communications.

Recommendations for established partnerships

- Review membership regularly to maintain relevance and effectiveness.
- Diversify funding and hosting models to reduce dependence on short-term grants.
- Support staff and volunteer wellbeing, providing time for reflection and peer support.
- Adapt the model continuously to fit local context, needs, and opportunities.

Programme impact and legacy

Food Roots 2 demonstrates how well-supported local partnerships can deliver tangible community impact and provide a basis for sustainable, preventative approaches to food insecurity. While full systemic change was not possible in the timeframe, the programme has helped reframe food insecurity and demonstrated the value of moving beyond short-term emergency food provision by integrating advice services, testing cash-first approaches, and linking food aid to wider support networks.

At the end of the programme, many localised impacts were beginning to emerge. In several areas, partnerships engaged with local councils and gained authority to influence policy and planning. Local projects led by coordinators or partner organisations were shown to be helping to increase awareness of healthy and sustainable eating, improve access to affordable and culturally appropriate food, and strengthen social cohesion and overall wellbeing. There were also lasting impacts for coordinators themselves, who developed transferable skills in governance, systems thinking, monitoring, and partnership facilitation.

However, sustaining and scaling these impacts will require ongoing investment and strategic support, as local innovation (while powerful) is not sufficient on its own to tackle the deeper, structural causes of food insecurity.

Recommendations for funders

- Establish a clear purpose and shared vision, codified in simple governance arrangements.
- Invest in long-term coordination capacity (ideally five years+) to sustain partnerships and institutional memory.
- Support cross-borough collaboration through modest, strategic investment in networks like the London Sustainable Food Places (SFP) Network.
- Fund organisational development for smaller community organisations to strengthen governance, systems, and workforce capacity.
- Resource evaluation and monitoring to capture impact, guide investment, and support evidence-based approaches.
- Fund for strategy as well as delivery, enabling reflection, planning, and innovation beyond immediate crisis response.

Recommendations for local, regional and national actors

- Embed food insecurity into broader policy agendas (health, poverty, housing, climate) to address structural causes.
- Enable cross-borough coordination and shared guidance and promote cash-first and preventative approaches as standard practice.
- At the national level, address root causes of food insecurity, provide permanent crisis support funding, and issue clear frameworks to guide local action.

Recommendations for future programme design

- Plan for longer timescales to allow systemic and cultural change.
- Design flexible delivery models to accommodate local differences in capacity, infrastructure, and political context.
- Prioritise cultural change through training, facilitation, and leadership development.
- Build in succession planning to sustain progress despite staff turnover, using legacy toolkits, peer mentoring, and shared documentation.

1 Introduction

ICF Consulting Services Ltd. (ICF) was commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to undertake an independent evaluation of the second round of the Food Roots programme. This final report presents findings from the evaluation, which ran from October 2023 to July 2025.

1.1 The Food Roots 2 programme

1.1.1 Background and context

The Food Roots 2 programme was the second phase of the GLA's Food Roots initiative, building on the success of the original Food Roots Incubator programme (April 2021 – September 2022), which supported and invested in ten local food partnerships. The incubator programme had aimed to strengthen new relationships formed during the COVID-19 pandemic and to encourage more sustainable approaches to tackling food insecurity and to avoid reliance on emergency food aid.

The GLA launched the second round of the Food Roots programme to support 20-25 food partnerships to strengthen their sustainability, resilience, and capacity to respond to financial hardship across London. Running from 2023 to 2025, the programme comprised three main components: a grant-funding scheme, a structured learning and support offer, and an independent evaluation. The evaluation was designed to capture learning, highlight best practice, and equip partnerships to secure longer-term, sustainable funding.

This report presents the final findings from this evaluation.

1.1.2 Programme aims and objectives

The programme set deliberately ambitious and long-term objectives, recognising the complex, systemic changes necessary to tackle food insecurity in London and strengthen local food systems.

It was acknowledged from the outset that addressing and achieving all four aims within the programme's timeframe would be challenging, due in part to the considerable variation in borough contexts, capacities, and resources. To accommodate this, partnerships were given the flexibility to tailor the programme objectives to their local priorities and needs. This approach enabled them to focus their efforts where they could have the greatest impact. As a result, progress varied significantly across partnerships, influenced by differences in local context, starting points ('baseline'), and the relative emphasis placed on each objective in relation to other priorities and activities.

The four programme objectives are shown below.

Figure 1.1 Programme aim and objectives



1.2 Evaluation approach and methodology

1.2.1 Aims and scope of the evaluation

The evaluation examined the implementation and outcomes of the Food Roots 2 programme, focusing specifically on:

- The role of the learning and support offer, and overall funding mechanism – assessing how these elements enabled food partnerships to progress towards the programme’s objectives during the timeframe of the programme;
- The value of partnership working – understanding how Food Roots 2 facilitated the development and strengthening of relationships within the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and between local authorities and community food providers, and how collaboration contributed to more resilient, sustainable, and effective local food systems;
- Broader contextual factors influencing progress – identifying enablers (e.g., strong leadership, effective governance) and barriers (e.g., resource constraints, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis) affecting partnerships’ ability to achieve the programme objectives.

At the outset, a **programme theory of change** and **‘partnership sub-theory’** were developed to guide the evaluation (see Annex 1). This set out how Food Roots 2 activities were expected to lead to anticipated outcomes. Although delivery adapted over time to meet local needs, the theory of change continued to reflect the programme’s core assumptions.

Whilst originally scheduled to conclude in December 2024, the evaluation was extended in line with the revised programme end date of June 2025. This extension enabled a fuller assessment of emerging outcomes and allowed for the capture of later-stage impacts.

1.2.2 Data collection

The Food Roots 2 programme funded a diverse set of local food partnerships, each operating within its own socio-economic, political, and organisational context. To understand how the programme functioned and what it achieved, the evaluation employed a **mixed-methods design**. This was designed to:

- Capture system-level perspectives (e.g., from strategic stakeholders, programme coordinators, and delivery partners).
- Understand lived experience and operational realities at community and service-user level.
- Document partnership development processes and shifts in priorities over time.
- Test and corroborate insights by comparing perspectives from different stakeholders and evidence types.

The methodological approach was intentionally **iterative and longitudinal**, enabling the ICF evaluation team to capture change over time, test emerging findings across different datasets, and build a robust, triangulated understanding of the programme’s implementation, outcomes, and learning.

The main methods drawn on for this report include:

- Interviews – A total of 117 semi-structured interviews were conducted between January 2024 and June 2025. These included all 21 local coordinators (interviewed up to three times), strategic partners, delivery organisations, local authority representatives, and trained Healthy Start practitioners. Repeat interviews with the same respondents allowed for the assessment of change over time.
- Deep dives – Twelve in-depth case studies were undertaken, purposively selected to reflect variation in geography, partnership maturity, lead organisation type, and delivery model. Six sites were followed longitudinally, with two visits, while others were visited once. Over 80 interviews were conducted within these case studies, alongside site observations in settings such as food banks, community cafés, pantries, and governance meetings.
- Desk review – Programme documents, monitoring reports, toolkits, and local strategies were reviewed to provide contextual background and track progress against original objectives.
- Survey – A short online survey (10–15 minutes) ran from April to June 2024, mapping partnership composition, experiences of joint working, and satisfaction with coordination. Eighty-four responses were received, including partial responses, which were retained to capture a wider range of perspectives.
- Observation of events – Selected Food Roots 2 workshops, networking events, and the final celebration event at City Hall were observed using a standardised template to record delivery style, participant engagement, and peer learning.

All qualitative data were thematically coded, combining pre-defined evaluation topics with themes emerging from the data. Evidence from different sources was compared to test for consistency or divergence, with longitudinal elements analysed to track changes over time. A validation workshop with delivery partners in February 2025 validated emerging findings and informed the development of recommendations.

A detailed methodology can be found in Annex 2.

1.2.3 Limitations

The evaluation generated a substantial and diverse evidence base; however, several limitations should be noted:

- Awareness of Food Roots 2 funding among frontline staff and service users was often limited, requiring inferences to be made from strategic leads and documentation.
- Access to less-engaged partners was restricted in some sites, meaning perspectives may be weighted towards more active participants.
- In some cases, data collection took place earlier in the delivery process, limiting evidence of longer-term impacts.
- Survey response rates were affected by partners' capacity constraints, although partial responses were included to preserve the breadth of input.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods and triangulated approach taken throughout the evaluation provides a robust basis for assessing Food Roots 2's delivery, outcomes, and learning.

1.3 Structure of this report

The report is organised to reflect both the delivery and outcomes of Food Roots 2, as well as the wider lessons for practice and policy.

- **Chapter 2** provides an overview of programme delivery, including the grant scheme, learning and support offer, and monitoring and evaluation support.
- **Chapter 3** examines the specific achievements and outcomes related to each objective. It draws on detailed partnership-level evidence and ‘stories of change’ to critically assess the extent and nature of progress made throughout the programme. While meaningful steps have been taken, fully addressing the systemic challenges at hand will require continued effort and investment beyond the current programme period.
- **Chapter 4** explores the lessons from Food Roots 2 on building sustainable food partnerships, outlining what effective partnerships look like, the factors that influence their resilience, and practical recommendations to support their long-term sustainability.
- **Chapter 5** outlines the perceived impact and legacy of Food Roots 2 beyond the programme. It concludes with recommendations for building on progress made in the future.

2 Programme delivery

The GLA launched Food Roots 2 in 2023 to support food partnerships in improving their sustainability, resilience, and capacity to support Londoners experiencing financial hardship. The programme had three components:

- A grant giving programme for new or existing food partnerships to strengthen local responses to food insecurity and improve sustainability;
- A learning and support offer, including dedicated training and campaign support to help partnerships increase awareness and uptake of Healthy Start in their areas; and
- An independent evaluation to capture learning, demonstrate best practice, and equip partnerships to secure longer term sustainable funding.

2.1 Grant funding

The Food Roots 2 programme was designed around the principle that local food partnerships are a strategic mechanism for addressing food insecurity. Rather than funding isolated projects, the GLA's investment aimed to strengthen coordination, align resources, and shift from short-term emergency food provision towards preventative, systemic solutions.

2.1.1 Overview of grant allocation

In total, £1.26 million in grant funding was awarded to 21 food partnerships over 20 months (£821k in initial funding, £442k in extension funding).

A core feature of the Food Roots 2 programme was its investment in dedicated coordinator roles within local food partnerships, recognising that sustained collaboration and whole-systems change require ongoing, relational capacity. Two funding tiers were offered: £25,000 for part-time coordinators (Level 1) and £45,000 for full-time coordinators (Level 2). Coordinators were expected to lead partnership development, connect food provision with wider support services (such as advice and health), and take part in the programme's learning offer.

Although Food Roots 2 funding was intended to support partnership activity, grants were awarded to a single lead / host organisation within each partnership. This often concentrated responsibility, decision-making, and visibility in the funded lead. In some cases, stakeholders felt this reduced collective ownership of programme objectives and reinforced dependency on the lead organisation. Indeed, partner engagement throughout the programme was uneven and where project activities did not actively involve other members or provide onward funding (e.g., small delivery grants), some partners were not even aware of the Food Roots 2 programme.

Eligibility criteria for the lead / host organisations was intentionally broad. This flexibility contributed to the significant diversity across the grantee base, shaped how the programme was interpreted, and activities were delivered. Although partnerships were not required to operate at borough scale, many did so in practice, potentially reflecting the central role of local authorities in convening and coordinating activity.

Lead / host organisations represented a mix of local authorities, voluntary sector organisations, and community-led initiatives. More information on different types of host organisations is provided in Section 4.2.3.

Table 2.1 Lead / host organisations (high-level typology)

Type of organisation	Funded lead / host organisations
Individual charitable organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hackney Foodbank (Hackney) ■ The Hornbeam Centre (Waltham Forest) ■ Kingsley Hall (Barking and Dagenham) ■ Manor Gardens Centre (Islington) ■ Nourish Hub (Hammersmith and Fulham) ■ Spring Community Hub (Southwark) ■ Sufra NW (Brent)
Local infrastructure or support organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bexley Voluntary Service Council (Bexley) ■ Bridge Renewal Trust (Haringey) ■ Croydon Voluntary Action (Croydon) ■ Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency (Greenwich) ■ Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (Kensington) ■ Kingston Voluntary Action Kingston) ■ Lewisham Local (Lewisham)
National infrastructure or support organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Feast With Us (Camden and Redbridge) ■ Groundwork London (Barnet)
Local authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ London Borough of Ealing ■ London Borough of Enfield ■ London Borough of Lambeth ■ London Borough of Merton ■ London Borough of Newham

2.1.2 Recruitment of coordinators

The programme initially provided grants for either a full-time or part-time coordinator roles for a period of up to 12 months. In October 2024, the GLA confirmed costed grant extensions for up to an additional six months of additional work. Partnerships were expected to re-apply for this funding and show how they would use it to complete planned activities.

There were mixed views about the Food Roots 2 model of funding being restricted to a salaried coordinator post. On the one hand, the role was widely recognised as pivotal: coordinators were described as the “human infrastructure” of partnerships, maintaining momentum, building trust (particularly with statutory partners), and connecting grassroots delivery with strategic planning. Where coordinators were embedded in established organisations with senior backing, they became catalysts for collaboration, using their networks and relational skills to strengthen local systems. However, the funding model also created challenges:

- **Recruitment delays and lack of early involvement:** Many coordinators were hired externally, and in several cases, recruitment was delayed. One stakeholder felt delays related to the roles being short-term, part-time, and paid near the living wage, making them less attractive to experienced candidates. As a result, some coordinators only started months into the programme, leaving little time to build relationships, plan strategically, or engage with learning activities and to make use of the funding. Additionally, where coordinators joined after funding was awarded, they were often not involved in designing the project, which sometimes made it harder for them to ‘own’ project plans and align them with Food Roots 2 programme goals.

- **High staff turnover and instability:** A number of coordinators left midway through delivery. In some cases where the coordinator was already working within the host organisation, they often balanced Food Roots 2 work with existing duties. This created additional challenges related to competing responsibilities and made it difficult to assess the grant's true impact. While some organisations managed staff transitions well, others faced gaps and disruption. Some host organisations also noted that extension funding came too late to retain coordinators, affecting delivery and overall engagement with the learning offer.
- **Limited influence in some partnerships:** In some areas, coordinators lacked the authority or backing to lead strategic change within their host organisation or the partnership at large. Without this standing, their roles became more focused on day-to-day coordination and short-term delivery, rather than driving long-term, organisational and partnership-level impact.
- **Conflicting priorities and responsibilities:** In some cases, particularly where the coordinator was already working within the host organisation, they often had to balance Food Roots 2 work with existing duties. This created additional challenges related to competing responsibilities and made it difficult to assess the grant's true impact. Coordinators funded for full-time roles (including those who were co-funded) tended to have more time to focus on strategic work, take part in learning, and build wider networks.

2.1.3 Local project delivery

The programme's design allowed coordinators to work flexibly – adapting their role to fit the needs of their host organisation, partnership structure, and planned activities. While this flexibility supported local tailoring, the role itself was widely acknowledged to be complex and multifaceted. Coordinators were expected to span a wide range of responsibilities, from administrative support to high-level policy engagement. They served as key points of contact, building relationships across sectors, convening stakeholders, and, in some cases, facilitating cross-borough collaboration.

While the grant was not designed to fund direct project delivery, the capacity and time provided through the partnership coordinator role enabled coordinators to lead and support a wide range of activities. Key areas of planned activity included:

- **Gathering knowledge and identifying improvements:** Partnerships prioritised mapping existing food and wraparound provision, surveying residents to understand barriers (particularly to Healthy Start), and developing practical resources to share with partners.
- **Increasing awareness, engagement and participation:** Many sought to expand relationships with food providers and improve the food offer, alongside recruiting new and more diverse members. Others focused on strengthening communications and branding, improving attendance at partnership meetings, and increasing engagement through site visits.
- **Transforming governance, ways of working and strategy:** A significant emphasis was placed on building stronger governance and collective approaches. Partnerships planned to develop strategies and charters, facilitate more joint working and sharing of best practice, and in some cases lead or contribute to borough-wide food strategies.

- **Raising Healthy Start awareness and uptake:** A strong focus was on training and workshops for partners, producing tailored resources, and launching local campaigns to raise awareness. Some partnerships also aimed to explore direct engagement with market vendors, volunteers, and residents to promote uptake, supported by stronger links with Public Health teams.
- **Expanding wraparound and holistic support:** Partnerships aimed to move beyond food aid by collaborating more closely with advice and support services, testing more holistic models, and improving referral and data systems. They also sought to build staff and volunteer capacity for signposting, provide colocation support, and pilot food education workshops and resources.
- **Securing sustainable funding:** Coordinators expected to support partners with fundraising, bid-writing and joint proposals, while also promoting volunteering and shared recruitment approaches. A few partnerships intended to explore campaigns to increase donations and awareness, though this was less common.

In reality, planned activities often diverged from what was originally set out. This reflected several challenges: delays in mobilisation in some areas, shifting local priorities, and the difficulty of operationalising more ambitious or resource-intensive plans. In some cases, coordinators had not been directly involved in the development of the initial grant applications, which further weakened the connection between planned and delivered activities. Additionally, coordinators frequently needed to respond to emerging opportunities or urgent demands, which meant that intended activities were sometimes scaled back, adapted, or replaced altogether. This responsiveness was valued locally, but it also meant that reported progress against initial plans could appear uneven.

Notably, the programme employed a deliberately light-touch monitoring system, with no formal targets or milestones attached to funding. While this was welcomed by partnerships, who appreciated the freedom to adapt and “get on with things” without heavy reporting burdens, it created some challenges for accountability. Specifically, some interviewed stakeholders noted that the absence of specific deliverables made it harder to track progress consistently, demonstrate value for money, or ensure alignment with original objectives.

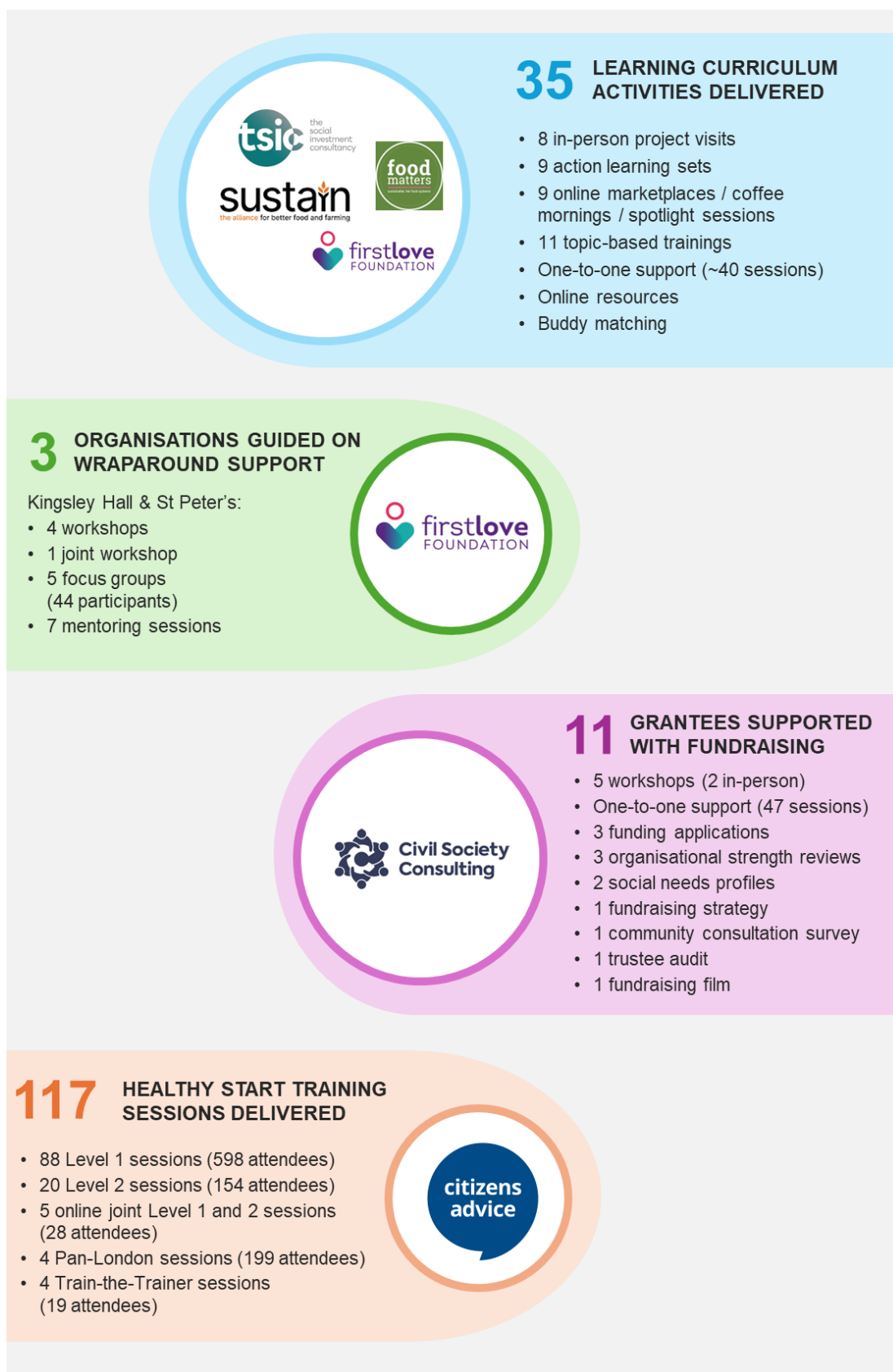
2.2 Learning and support offers

Delivery partners for the learning and support offers were appointed through a competitive tendering process, with each offer aligned to the programme’s objectives.

Overall, the management and implementation of the Food Roots 2 programme were described positively. The adaptability of delivery partners allowed them to respond to the evolving needs of grantees, tailoring support to maintain relevance and effectiveness throughout the programme. This flexibility was noted as important in managing challenges associated with compressed delivery timelines, which resulted from delays in recruitment and procurement. These delays impacted strategic planning, recruitment, outreach, and coordination across partners.

The collaborative approach, facilitated by the GLA, was recognised as contributing to positive working relationships among delivery partners and a coherent support offer for grantees. Some stakeholders suggested a more structured definition of roles and responsibilities at the outset could have further improved collaboration, including sequencing of support and management of grantees’ workloads.

Figure 2.1 Learning and support offers: delivery achievements



Data sourced from delivery partners and the GLA. Figures correct as of August 2025.

2.2.1 Delivery of the learning curriculum

The Food Roots 2 learning and support offer, delivered by TSIC, Sustain, Food Matters, and First Love Foundation, provided a structured programme of capacity building, peer learning, and specialist thematic support for London's food partnerships. Its delivery combined in-person and online formats, including workshops, site visits, action learning sets, one-to-one support, and buddying/mentoring.

The curriculum was co-designed with funded partnerships, which meant that topics reflected participants' priorities and felt directly relevant. This approach gave partnerships a sense of ownership and ensured useful focus areas such as governance, partnership structures, and wraparound support. Adjustments were also made during delivery in response to feedback, for example introducing separate "beginner" and "mature" action learning sets in Year 2.

The curriculum's primary goals included:

- Strengthening the skills of food partnership coordinators and stakeholders.
- Promoting collaboration, peer learning, and knowledge sharing.
- Providing tailored support to address the specific needs of partnerships at different stages of development.
- Enhancing the capacity of partnerships to address key issues such as food security, sustainability, and social equity.

Throughout delivery, a key focus was ensuring that learning opportunities were not only theoretically grounded but also practically applicable to the day-to-day work of food partnerships. The curriculum was also designed with flexibility in mind and adapted to the diverse needs and challenges faced by the partnerships.

Key learning points from delivery:

Design:

- The curriculum was developed together with participants (co-designed) to ensure that the topics covered were relevant to the needs and priorities of the partnerships. However, because the programme started on a tight schedule and procurement happened late, there was limited time to shape how the content was delivered. This meant that decisions mainly focused on what topics to cover rather than how the sessions were structured, the order in which topics were taught, or the pace of learning.
- The programme covered a wide range of topics to meet the diverse needs of participants. While this breadth was helpful for providing a broad understanding, it meant there was little time to explore any single topic in depth.
- Adjustments to make content more relevant to partnerships at different stages of development were introduced only halfway through the programme. This improved relevance for some participants, but starting this approach earlier could have allowed all partnerships to follow a learning path more tailored to their specific situation from the outset of the programme.

Delivery:

- The way sessions were delivered strongly affected how useful participants found them. In-person sessions (especially site visits and action learning sets) were considered the most valuable, as they allowed participants to learn practical skills, share experiences, and build relationships with peers from other areas.

Online sessions were useful for presenting information but were less effective for collaboration and interactive learning. Efforts to pair participants for peer support (buddying) had mixed success.

- A partnership's capacity (its experience, size, and resources) shaped how well learning could be put into practice. Established or better-resourced partnerships were generally able to act on what they learned, while smaller or newer partnerships often struggled to apply insights because of competing priorities, limited staff capacity, and fewer resources.

Engagement:

- Partnership coordinators were the most consistent participants across the learning sessions. Engagement from other partners and senior leaders was limited. As a result, much of the learning stayed at the individual coordinator level and was not always applied at the organisational or strategic level.
- The short-term nature of funding and turnover of partnership coordinators caused interruptions. Some new coordinators joined the programme partway through without formal onboarding or introduction, which made it harder for them to catch up on earlier learning. This also made it difficult to maintain continuity and ensure knowledge was retained within partnerships.

2.2.2 Mentoring and capacity-building support

The Food Roots 2 programme provided two main strands of mentoring and capacity-building support, designed to help food partnerships strengthen their organisational capacity and move towards more sustainable, community-led approaches.

- **Wraparound support:** First Love Foundation delivered intensive, tailored wraparound support to food partnerships seeking to move beyond emergency food aid towards integrated, community-based models. This support aimed to build strategic capacity, strengthen governance, develop leadership, and facilitate organisational transformation. First Love Foundation's approach included mentoring, co-production with volunteers and service users, and the development of a Theory of Change to guide strategic shifts. The focus was on enabling partnerships to deliver holistic services that combine food aid with broader community advice and support.
- **Fundraising mentoring support:** Civil Society Consulting (CSC) provided fundraising mentoring and capacity-building support, particularly for grassroots organisations and those led by marginalised communities. Their goal was to help organisations improve governance, develop robust fundraising strategies, strengthen internal capacity for grant applications, and connect with external funders. CSC aimed to support both short-term access to funding and long-term organisational sustainability by building the skills and systems needed for self-sufficient fundraising.

Both First Love Foundation and CSC faced a number of shared challenges in delivering mentoring and capacity-building support to food partnerships through the Food Roots 2 programme.

- A recurring theme was the variability in **organisational readiness**. Many partnerships lacked the foundational structures (such as stable governance, sufficient staffing, and robust operational systems) necessary to deliver

wraparound services or access external fundraising. For both First Love Foundation and CSC, this also created the need for significant upfront due diligence and assessment to understand if an organisation was suitable for the support offer.

- Another common challenge was the **limited time and capacity** of coordinators and partner organisations to engage fully in the support offer within the timescales of Food Roots 2. Staff often had multiple responsibilities and lacked dedicated time for mentoring, strategy development, co-production with volunteers and service users, and ongoing relationship-building with local networks. This constrained their ability to make the most of the support offered by First Love Foundation and CSC, slowed progress, and reduced the potential for embedding lasting organisational change.
- Both First Love Foundation and CSC also encountered difficulties related to **engagement and alignment**. Leadership commitment and active involvement from boards or trustees were crucial for driving organisational change, yet in some partnerships this was inconsistent. There were also instances of misaligned expectations between programme providers and local organisations, which sometimes complicated delivery.

As a result of the challenges described, First Love Foundation and CSC had to be highly adaptable in the delivery of their support. For example, CSC (who were initially recruited to assist selected grantees with funding applications and connect them with potential funders) moved to providing foundational support, such as improving governance, forming steering groups, and building internal fundraising capacity.

2.2.3 Healthy Start training

The Healthy Start training, delivered by five local Citizens Advice offices with Southwark as lead partner, sought to expand awareness and uptake of the Healthy Start scheme through targeted training of staff and volunteers across London's food partnerships. The design reflected two core aims:

- To increase capacity among frontline practitioners to identify eligible families and support applications.
- To strengthen voluntary–statutory links in promoting Healthy Start as part of a broader “support beyond food” agenda.

The Healthy Start training offer was structured in two tiers: Level 1 provided introductory content, while Level 2 (“Healthy Start+”) offered more advanced material. This design aimed to tailor learning to different audiences, from grassroots volunteers to professional practitioners. Whilst the Level 2 training offer was introduced relatively late into the programme, it proved more relevant for professional and pan-London audiences, offering holistic content on linked advice services, complex eligibility cases, and broader welfare entitlements. More information on the reach and outcomes of the Healthy Start training offer are provided in Section 3.4.

Several key lessons emerged from delivery:

- Engagement varied across boroughs, influenced by coordinators' understanding of the training's purpose and integration into local activity. Where coordinators actively promoted the sessions, uptake was stronger, whereas in areas with pre-

existing Healthy Start provision, the training was sometimes seen as duplicative or peripheral. In

- Delivery of the training was most successful when centralised and professionally coordinated. Pan-London sessions, promoted by GLA and OHID, attracted 189 attendees and waiting lists exceeded available spaces, demonstrating the effectiveness of central promotion and established professional networks.
- External operational challenges (including only being able to schedule sessions at short notice, competing participant demands, cancellations, and so on) further impacted attendance and ability to run the training sessions.
- Participants valued interactive elements such as case studies and breakout discussions, which translated policy into practical actions for identifying eligible clients and navigating referral routes.
- While “Train the Trainer” sessions offer a mechanism to sustain knowledge beyond the project, overall sustainability remains uncertain given the lack of ongoing resourcing to continue providing or updating the training sessions.

2.3 Monitoring and evaluation support

As part of Food Roots 2, the ICF evaluation team provided dedicated monitoring and evaluation (M&E) support to participating partnerships. This support aimed to strengthen the partnerships’ ability to capture and demonstrate impact, foster reflective learning, and contribute to the long-term legacy of the programme.

To support ongoing impact measurement, the ICF evaluation team developed an indicator library, providing a comprehensive set of pre-defined M&E indicators. Partnership coordinators could select indicators appropriate to their activities, helping them track progress and evidence the impact of partnership working. Feedback suggests that these tools were particularly useful for supporting future funding applications. As one partner reflected: *“I’m hoping it’s useful for... funding opportunities... for the partnerships to demonstrate their value”*. Full details of the M&E activities delivered are set out in Annex 3.

Learning from delivery highlighted several key points, described in Section 3.3.4. More broadly, it was highlighted by several stakeholders that:

- Embedding the evaluation function within the programme, rather than treating it as an external activity, allowed the team to act as an active learning partner. Regular engagement with coordinators and wider stakeholders, participation in programme events, and workshops focused on legacy and learning helped ensure that evaluation findings were shared in real time and could inform ongoing delivery decisions.
- The reflective and collaborative approach to evaluation provided partnerships with time and space to consider their progress, challenges, and priorities. This process demonstrated the value of evaluation not only as an accountability tool but also as a mechanism for learning and organisational development. One stakeholder noted the value of this reflective space: *“There has been a lot of like training and things to go to, but actually finding time for this [the interviews]... has at least given me some space to think about some of this... what’s worked, what hasn’t, and what we still might need to do... but I’ve actually found that quite helpful because you don’t often have that headspace”*.

3 Progress and achievements

This section reviews progress, achievements, and learning in relation to the programme's four core objectives. It draws on evidence from across the partnerships to assess what was delivered, what difference it made, and what insights were generated for future practice.

3.1 Developing and strengthening relationships

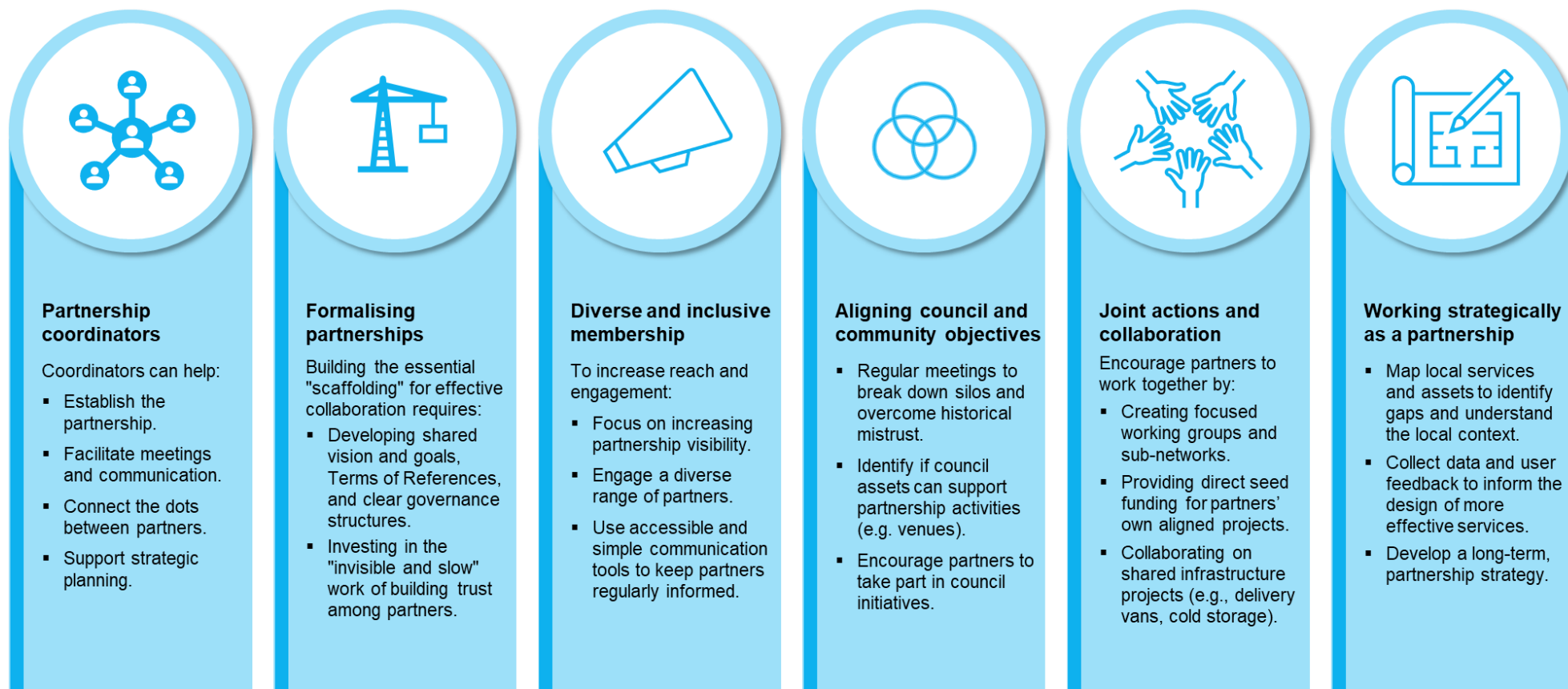
Objective: New and strengthened relationships across the VCS within an area, and between local authorities and local community food providers, helping to develop and embed strategic solutions to shorter-term delivery challenges arising from spikes in demand for emergency food aid.

The Food Roots 2 programme was designed in response to the fragmented and often unsustainable nature of London's food aid landscape, which became particularly evident during the initial COVID-19 lockdowns and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. It was recognised that a coordinated, multi-sector approach is far more effective and resilient than individual organisations working in isolation. This is because:

- Individual organisations, while dedicated, lack the collective power and resources to respond effectively to significant spikes in food insecurity. This often leads to duplication of effort and gaps in service provision.
- While informal networks naturally emerged during crises, they often lack the formal structures, trust, and shared vision needed to sustain long-term strategic solutions. Building these relationships takes time, dedicated effort, and specific support.
- Local government holds significant resources, data, and influence, but a lack of established communication channels and trust can prevent them from working effectively with community-level providers. Improving this relationship is essential for creating a cohesive local food system.
- By formalising relationships, partners can benefit from a wider range of skills, resources, and insights. This collective intelligence allows for more innovative and comprehensive solutions (such as connecting a food bank with an advice service or a local council with a food-growing project).

Partnerships used Food Roots 2 funding in various ways to build and strengthen their partnerships and networks, with activities tailored to their existing maturity and local context. The core of this work was driven by dedicated partnership coordinators, whose roles were funded by the programme (as set out in Section 2.1). These coordinators were central to every aspect of partnership development, from day-to-day engagement to long-term strategic planning. The key activities and their contributions to the programme's objectives are outlined below.

Figure 3.1 Developing and strengthening relationships: key insights for partnerships



3.1.1 Establishing and formalising partnerships

Food Roots 2 provided the critical seed funding to establish new partnerships where none had existed before, and to re-establish those that had faltered.

Box 3.1 Establishing a new partnership in Redbridge

In Redbridge, Feast with Us helped to establish the Redbridge Food Action Alliance. The partnership started from scratch, with no prior food partnership, alliance, or network in Redbridge before the Food Roots 2 coordinator's post began. **Membership grew from initial council and public health members to also include VCS organisations and other partners, with a total of 32 members at the time of data collection.**

The coordinator worked in a context where trust between some VCS organisations and statutory bodies had been strained. As the food partnership was sometimes assumed to be a council initiative, several organisations were initially hesitant to engage. Through consistent communication and reassurance, the coordinator gradually demonstrated the partnership's independence and built stronger relationships with local groups.

Overcoming these challenges required persistent outreach, in-person visits, and clear communication to demonstrate the partnership's independence from the council. Initial meetings were dominated by council and public health representatives, making it difficult to create an inclusive environment until more VCS and community partners joined. Now there is more varied representation, including many VCS organisations. The partnership coordinator also successfully co-designed a Terms of Reference and key principles with members, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration.

In the reflective template Feast with Us shared a key tip for establishing a new partnership: *"Start with people, not programmes. The most important resource we have is the community itself. Before launching initiatives, invest time in building one-on-one relationships with local groups and connectors, understanding their experiences and hopes. This early work is invisible and slow, but it's what builds the trust and energy that will carry the partnership forward. Be realistic about pace systems change takes time"*

The importance of the 'invisible and slow' relationship demonstrates the need for longer-term funding for coordinators so they can establish strong partnership foundations before moving on to specific collaborative projects.

Box 3.2 Re-establishing a partnership in Bexley

The Good Food Bexley Network was re-established using the crisis grant funding and the Food Roots 2 grant was used to support the development of the partnership. Despite being a partnership in its early stages, the network saw a 10% increase in membership by December 2024, with >40 organisations actively involved. The partnership coordinator worked to foster high levels of engagement and formalise the partnership, including convening a meeting to finalise the Terms of Reference and develop a collaborative action plan. There is now a more organised structure, with mailing lists, meeting notes, and clearer documentation to support continuity and handover. The partnerships helped to facilitate improved collaboration between partner organisations; the network now includes a broader range of services, such as mental health support and energy advice.

The coordinator's role evolved as the network developed. The coordinator explained that *"at the beginning it was more of a mapping process and going out to meet people... [and now] it has become more of a coordinating role"* working across the network.

There were several challenges in re-establishing the partnership. There was initial distrust and reluctance from organisations, partly due to previous failed attempts at partnership as well as concerns about resource sharing. Some organisations feared losing their limited food supplies or felt sceptical about the network's longevity. Partnership members also shared concerns with the coordinator about the short-term nature of their funded position, *"people would sit there and be like, this is all great, and like, talking's all great, but like you're only in here until September, so like what's going to happen when that's done"*.

Food Roots 2 partnerships varied considerably in their structure and how they were governed. The most effective models were those that balanced broad inclusivity with clear, efficient decision-making. Several partnership coordinators (particularly those working to re-establish engagement) also focused on foundational work, such as developing Terms of Reference and other guiding documents. This process involved bringing partners together to agree on shared goals, roles and responsibilities, and decision-making processes, as well as to strengthen governance processes.

This work built the essential scaffolding for collaboration. By creating clear governance frameworks, partnerships built trust and accountability – elements critical for moving to long-term strategic action. It also improved partnerships' external credibility for other organisations and funders. The “invisible and slow” work of building trust was seen as the most vital part of this early phase, demonstrating the need for sustained, long-term funding.

Box 3.3 Formalising a partnership in in Barnet and Lambeth

The Barnet Food Partnership evolved from its infancy at the start of the Food Roots 2 programme to becoming an established partnership with a formal committee and multiple working groups. As of 2024, membership had grown to around 50–60 members, including public health, food banks, and organisations like Volunteers on Wheels. The partnership now plays a stronger leadership role in the borough and has hosted its first major event, which was well attended. Establishing the formal committee has enabled Groundwork to move from a leading role to a support role. The partnership's progress is sometimes limited by the small size of the core committee and the fact that most members have other responsibilities or jobs, which makes time and capacity an ongoing issue.

Established in 2012 and chaired by a Lambeth councillor, the Lambeth Food Partnership has long operated within the Council. The Lambeth Food Partnership evolved through Food Roots 2: the project coordinator drafted a Terms of Reference, developed a permanent steering committee and established more structured decision-making processes. The new governance framework enabled the partnership to enhance networking opportunities, promote its activities more widely, and better position itself to secure future funding. CSC supported the Lambeth Food Partnership to explore options related to formalising the partnership and establishing an entity independent of the council. CSC provided tailored guidance on legal entity structures, presenting options at a Partnership meeting in October. While the Partnership ultimately decided against establishing a separate legal entity due to capacity constraints, CSC continued to offer strategic support (e.g., to develop a case of support for funding).

3.1.2 Increasing awareness, engagement and participation

The programme assumed that to be truly effective, partnerships needed to be inclusive, active, and visible. Coordinators implemented multifaceted strategies to achieve this during Food Roots 2.

Box 3.4 Partnership visibility improvements in Lambeth

During Food Roots 2, Lambeth Food Partnership focused on enhancing its social media strategy and website to promote its work, which in turn has raised awareness and encouraged greater community involvement. In addition, the partnership coordinator's proactive approach in creating engaging newsletters and updates has helped strengthen ties with existing stakeholders. This focus on visibility not only informs stakeholders about the partnership's goals and activities but also invites broader participation, enabling local authorities, food providers, and other community organisations to better understand and align with the partnership's mission.

Box 3.5 Increasing opportunities for partner engagement in Hackney

Hackney's Food Partnership has focused on creating structured opportunities for partners to engage and share knowledge. This has included regular meetings and expert-led talks on topics such as energy vouchers and sustainable goods transport. Efforts have been made to clarify the partnership's direction and encourage involvement, though some partners prefer informal engagement.

Beyond focusing on increasing the number of active partnership members, partnerships aimed to diversify their membership base beyond traditional food aid groups. This included both:

- **Involving a greater variety of local organisations and representatives** such as more faith groups, food growing groups, early years organisations, advice providers, businesses, volunteers, academics, waste management organisations, food cooperatives and other groups. Several partnerships (e.g., Haringey) also engaged with NHS and health sector stakeholders.
- **Strengthening relationships with cross-borough or national organisations** such as the Felix Project or Feeding Britain. For example, in Barking and Dagenham, Kingsley Hall were working with the Felix project at the time of data collection to improve food redistribution across the borough.

This was seen to be a key enabler to better understanding and meeting local needs and challenges, as well as making progress against the other Food Roots 2 objectives. Several partnership coordinators focused on building connections by visiting partner organisations and building one-to-one in-person relationships with key stakeholders to increase engagement. Many partnerships also organised network meetings, events, working groups and sub-networks to foster collaboration, strengthen relationships, and create targeted responses to local needs.

Box 3.6 Enfield Food Summit

The Enfield partnership coordinator aimed to revive and re-establish the former Enfield Food Alliance, which had dissolved following the pandemic. A key step in this process was planning the Enfield Food Summit. This summit took place on 26 September 2024 and brought together over 50 participants, including food growers, co-ops, pantries, community organisations, local businesses, volunteers, academics, and representatives from Enfield's local authority. The event featured speakers from national organisations and facilitated group discussions on improving food system collaboration and representation.

As a direct result of the summit, two new member organisations were recruited and several existing alliance members reaffirmed their commitment to the partnership, bringing the total membership to 27. Additionally, five individuals joined the steering group, increasing its membership to 13. New members included wraparound support providers, food banks, community kitchens, and research organisations. Monthly partnership meetings were reinstated, fostering dialogue on food poverty and strategic planning.

The summit helped rebuild trust and visibility, positioning the partnership as a central point for food-related collaboration in Enfield. Through regular monthly meetings, the partnership has developed governance documents, mapped food support activities, and identified training needs. At the time of data collection, members had begun sharing resources, co-developing a food security report, and drafting a borough-wide Food Action Plan. A partnership website and newsletter were also developed to support communication efforts.

Box 3.7 Increasing and diversifying membership in Kingston

The Good Food Group at Kingston Voluntary Action has made significant strides in expanding its network and strengthening collaborations. The coordinator sent regular emails to partners with information about available grants, training, and opportunities. This helped to demonstrate value of the partnership. Membership has grown to include nine new organisations during the Food Roots 2 programme. Members have also become more active and there has been increase collaboration through regular and high-turnout meetings. The coordinator advertised the Good Food Group meetings, resulting in increased sign-ups and attendance. For example, at the time of data collection, the coordinator expected 24–40 participants to attend an upcoming meeting.

Partnerships also expanded their use of **communication channels** like newsletters, mailing lists, and WhatsApp groups to improve member communication and engagement. Partnerships, such as Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham, Lewisham, and Enfield, have used WhatsApp groups, which are effective due to the platform's familiarity and ease of use. Simple communication tools enabled partnerships to build awareness, encourage participation, and pass on information to partner organisations. Increased visibility also enabled partnerships to weave food into wider conversations around poverty, health and sustainability.

Box 3.8 Simple communication channels in Lewisham

Lewisham Local established and maintained various WhatsApp networks, such as the food network, and a newly formed young persons and healthy start network. This facilitated easy and quick communication among network members, allowing for the sharing of opportunities, training information, and other relevant updates. WhatsApp helped to maintain connections within the community and ensuring that information reached the relevant people promptly.

3.1.3 Strengthening relationships between local authorities and community organisations

Improving relationships between local authorities and local community organisations was a key objective of Food Roots 2. In many London boroughs, VCS organisations and local authorities operated in silos. Community organisations were considered to have deep, trusted relationships with residents and a frontline understanding of their needs, but often lacked the resources, data, and strategic influence to enact system-wide change. Conversely, local authorities were perceived to hold significant resources, data, and policy-making power, but could be disconnected from the day-to-day realities and trust of the communities they served. In some boroughs, this disconnect had led to a fragmented response, with duplicated efforts and gaps in service provision.

Additionally, in many areas, the relationship between local authorities and the VCS was often strained due to a history of funding cuts, short-term grants, and perceived power imbalances. As one coordinator noted, organisations were often wary of council-led initiatives, and this lack of trust acted as a significant barrier to effective collaboration.

Food Roots 2 provided the platform for local authorities and community organisations to align their goals and activities, which was a fundamental step in building trust and credibility. Regular partnership meetings facilitated direct engagement, helping council representatives better understand community-level challenges and priorities. One coordinator explained that that VCS members could

see the tangible benefits of engagement with partnership meetings, as council representatives came to the meetings with relevant offers of support.

There were multiple instances of increased collaboration between councils and community organisations throughout Food Roots 2:

- Newham Council made a pot of funding available for food aid organisations to apply for and required all applicants to be members of the food partnership. This created a strong incentive for organisations to work with the council.
- Some councils have also helped partnerships and partner organisations to access physical spaces, such as the council-owned leisure centre where the surplus food hub hosted by Kingston Voluntary Action is situated, or the council-owned space where the Nourish Hub (Hammersmith and Fulham) operates.
- Partnerships also worked with the council to access additional, specific resources for projects aligned with both Food Roots 2 and council objectives. This included resources like banners for promoting Healthy Start or access to data collection platforms to improve service delivery.

There are also examples of partnership coordinators investing in efforts to rebuild trust and improve communication, particularly in areas with a history of challenging relationships, by building one-to-one relationships with key stakeholders in both the council and the community. This persistent, in-person outreach was crucial for overcoming initial suspicion and demonstrating the partnership's independence and shared purpose. As one coordinator explained, the relationship was initially “*a little bit tricky*” but dedicated effort led to better communication and a stronger working relationship.

Box 3.9 Improvements in council engagement in Hackney

In Hackney, the relationship between the partnership and the council has strengthened through Food Roots 2, with more active and purposeful participation from council representatives in meetings. Council staff now attend regularly, present offers of support, and provide direct contact details, which makes it easier for partners to access council resources. Introducing more structured meetings with clear agendas and minutes has helped to increase council confidence to present and engage at meetings. The coordinator has helped to facilitate communication with the council and regularly nudges the council to participate and offer relevant support. The coordinator helps to set and maintain the tone in relation to the council involvement in the meetings.

3.1.4 Increasing joint working and cross-sector collaboration

Recognising that active involvement in partnership activities and projects helps deepen commitment and builds trust among members, a number of food partnerships established smaller, focused groups (such as working groups, communities of practice, or sub-networks) to deliver specific projects and engage more effectively with members. These groups brought together organisations with shared interests or missions, creating opportunities for closer collaboration, efficient project delivery, and targeted problem-solving.

Box 3.10 The value of working groups in Haringey

Haringey Food Partnership set up a small working group to design and implement a shared data framework. Working with a small and committed group facilitated the co-design of the data framework, helped to increase collaboration and support knowledge-sharing between working group members. The close working relationships also resulted in other spin-off

collaborative projects in Haringey. For example, the partnership also set up Community of Practice sessions which brought council members, advice providers, food aid providers and NHS stakeholders together.

Box 3.11 Building new sub-networks in Croydon and Lewisham

Croydon Voluntary Action set up a new food growing network within the borough. This has enabled them to engage with community organisations focused on more holistic and resilient approaches to tackling food insecurity. The food growing projects help educate people on how to grow their own food and convert it into meals, fostering community involvement and improving self-sufficiency.

In Lewisham, a new Early Years Network helped the food partnership connect with organisations not previously involved in the partnership to boost Healthy Start uptake and tackle challenges impacting children and young people.

Several partnerships also facilitated partner input to the design or implementation of local food strategies and funding bids. This sometimes involved working closely with local authorities (building on progress described in Section 3.1.3).

Box 3.12 Opportunities for closer working in Kingston

The Good Food Group in Kingston has enabled closer partnership working through the development of joint funding bids, including one with the British Heart Foundation. The partnership also launched a new food growing subgroup to help strengthen community resilience and offer new ways to engage with food security. These developments reflect a strong commitment to increasing the group's impact and sustainability.

In a few cases, Food Roots 2 funding was used to empower partner organisations directly, strengthening their ability to contribute to the wider partnership's goals and incentivising their engagement. For example, Croydon Voluntary Action reserved £2,100 to be distributed as seed funding. The funding was distributed to growing projects to restart growing projects, expand food-growing efforts and initiative new community garden projects. Another example is described below.

Box 3.13 Distributing funding to community hubs in Kensington and Chelsea

Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC) is an infrastructure support body that provides services to >400 VCS organisations in Kensington and Chelsea. Its main aim is to strengthen the VCS sector by offering training, funding, advice, and information, and by representing the sector at strategic levels.

- KCSC chairs the **Kensington and Chelsea Advice Partnership** (an alliance of key advice providers) facilitating collaboration among advice agencies and ensuring that local needs are considered by statutory bodies such as the local council. Through this partnership, KCSC helps coordinate outreach efforts, share information, and promote better integration of services, particularly around wraparound support for food provision and other community services.
- Additionally, as part of the Food Roots 2 initiative, **KCSC has been working with six well-established community hubs** to co-develop strategies for wraparound support. This partnership approach was designed to promote collaboration and improve services for those in need. By focusing on organisations with strong foundations, KCSC ensures that new strategies can be effectively tested and expanded across the borough.
- Each community hub received around £9000 for participating in the programme. This has helped to incentivise engagement with the network as the funded organisations have been more receptive to introducing new initiatives as part of Food Roots 2.

- However, given the current funding landscape, this approach may not be scalable or sustainable. Some organisations in Kensington and Chelsea also questioned why only certain groups received funding. To avoid alienating partners, funding decisions need to be transparent and accountable across the whole partnership.

3.1.5 Building strategic solutions to tackle food insecurity

The Food Roots 2 programme aimed to move partnerships beyond immediate food provision towards a more strategic and sustainable approach. A core element of this was to equip partnerships with the collective capacity to think and plan for both emergency responses in the short-term, a more cohesive, evidence-based response to food insecurity in the long-term. However, this work was still in its early stages for many partnerships (particularly newer partnerships) by the end of the programme.

Partnerships used Food Roots 2 funding and coordinator capacity to engage in a range of activities designed to build their strategic capacity. This involved moving beyond simply providing food to a more holistic, coordinated approach.

To create a more strategic response, several partnership coordinators focused on better understanding their local context, needs and gaps. Some conducted mapping activities, which included mapping organisations and services that offer food and wraparound support across the borough. This approach was highly valuable for new or developing partnerships to provide a foundation for targeted interventions and a more strategic and local tailored response to food insecurity.

Box 3.14 Mapping activities in Bexley and Merton

- In Bexley, the partnership coordinator conducted a detailed mapping exercise to understand existing services and unmet needs, such as limited support for refugees and inefficiencies in food aid distribution.
- Merton's Food Response Network also prioritised mapping food relief offers and integrating community growing initiatives to enhance its strategic capacity. A key priority in Merton going forward is strengthening the partnership's data collection and demonstrating the impact of food services.

Some partnerships also collected data and feedback to inform the development of existing or new services. In some cases, this included engaging with local residents or service users.

Box 3.15 Community consultation in Lambeth

Food Five Ways is a neighbourhood food project led by Lambeth Food Partnership (and facilitated by a lead coordinator from Incredible Edible Lambeth¹). Food Five Ways focused on tackling food insecurity and improving community food provision. There were two phases: (1) data was gathered on local food needs through community consultations and (2) insights were then used to enhance or create food services. Through the community consultation the project identified opportunities for new community food initiatives that respond to community needs. Following on from this, the project is organising proposal writing sessions to secure funding for these initiatives.

The coordinator explained that some residents *“said that like, you know, that was the first time that anyone's ever asked them about how they feel about food and kind of wanted to*

¹ <https://www.incredibleediblelambeth.org/>

know what they think and what they want to see in their borough, and yeah, that was quite like powerful”.

Food Five Ways fostered collaborative working, bringing together residents, partners, and different organisations to design and implement local food solutions. The focus on solutions identified by the community helped to create a strategic and locally tailored approach to addressing food insecurity.

Finally, a complex but important aspect of the partnerships' work was navigating how partners relied on and used surplus food. This led a few partnerships to consider the need for shared infrastructure to improve food redistribution. The closure of local distribution hubs after the pandemic highlighted a significant weakness in the system. The programme's emphasis on partnerships encouraged collective action on this front, with some boroughs exploring collective purchasing and logistics capacity.

The programme demonstrated that strategic investment in infrastructure, such as shared delivery vans in Croydon and large-scale cold storage (e.g., in Barking and Dagenham, described below), could improve efficiency and resilience for all partners.

Although many partnership coordinators and wider interviewed stakeholders recognised that institutionalisation of surplus food redistribution can be counterproductive as it risks entrenching the charitable food aid system, others saw it as a pragmatic and necessary tool to meet immediate need and engage people in wider support.

Box 3.16 Surplus food redistribution in Barking and Dagenham

Kingsley Hall has been leading on the development of a borough-wide surplus food redistribution hub. This initiative was intended to be delivered in partnership with the Felix Project, Food for All, and Barking and Dagenham Council and aims to transform food logistics and improve access to surplus food across the borough.

The hub aims to address longstanding logistical challenges such as limited freezer capacity, inconsistent surplus food distribution coverage, and inefficient food collection processes. Initially conceived as a small freezer unit, the project has evolved into a large warehouse-based operation with commercial freezer space. Once operational, the hub will enable direct delivery of surplus food (frozen, chilled, and ambient) into Barking and Dagenham, bypassing central Felix Project depots and allowing local organisations to collect food more efficiently.

The initiative is projected to redistribute £1.7–£2.4 million worth of food annually to over 6,000 residents, the hub is expected to significantly increase food access and reduce waste. It also has the potential to free up time for partner organisations to focus on wraparound support services, addressing root causes of food insecurity such as housing, debt, and mental health. The hub's phased rollout includes health and safety compliance, service-level agreements, and expansion to neighbouring boroughs. Challenges remain around food safety, timely distribution, and ensuring the food meets health, sustainability, and cultural standards.

Going forward, Kingsley Hall plan to embed wraparound support into the hub model and are applying for funding to support this. If successful, the initiative would aim to train 100 volunteers and support 15,000 residents annually. This integrated approach positions the hub not just as a logistical food redistribution solution, but as a catalyst for more holistic support.

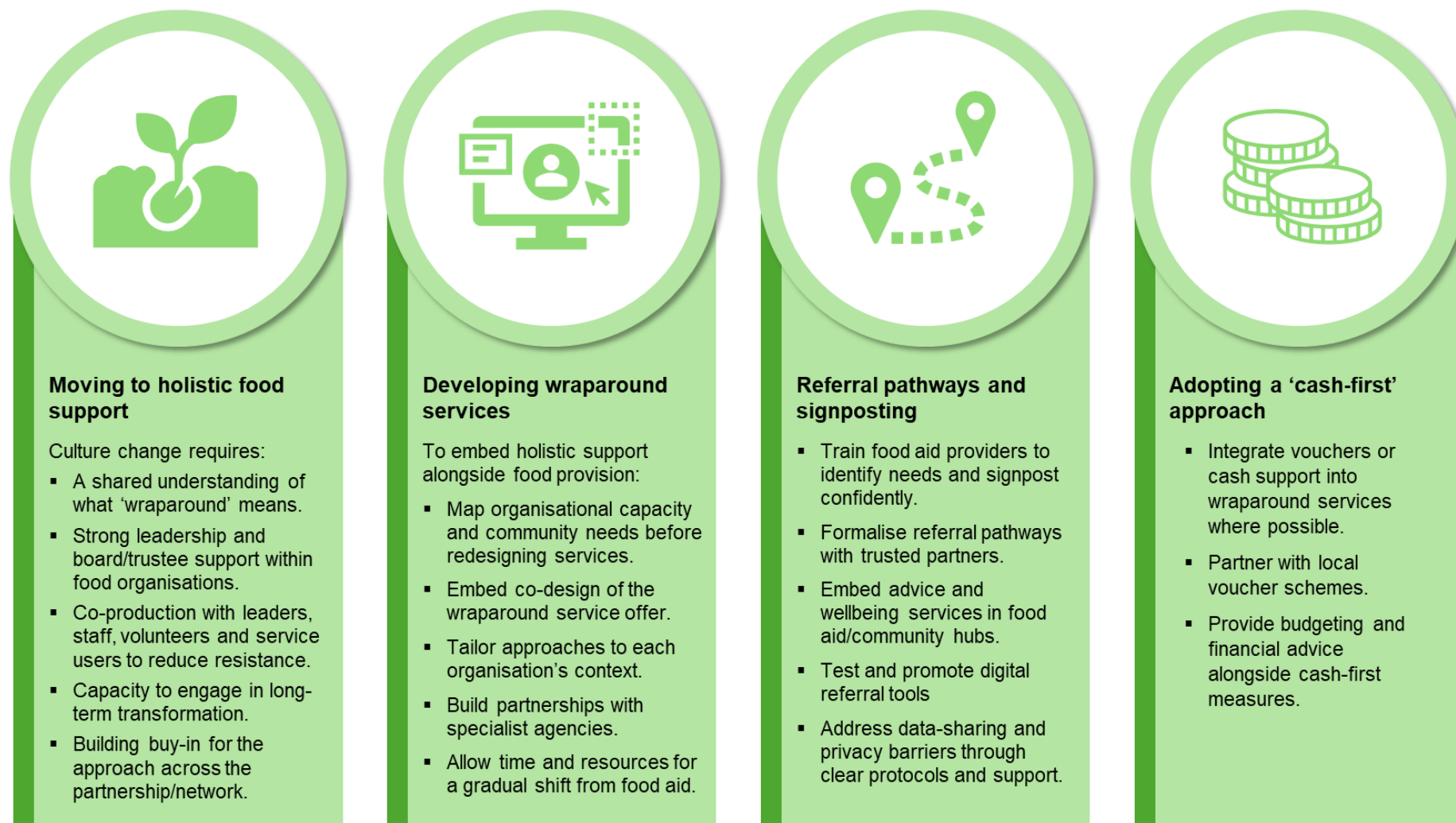
3.2 Offering holistic support beyond food aid

Objective: An increase in the number of food aid providers within partnerships that offer support beyond food – including cash-first and wraparound approaches, and referrals to advice services.

The Food Roots 2 programme was built on the principle that food insecurity is a symptom of wider issues, primarily financial hardship, and simply providing food does not solve the underlying problem. At the same time, emergency food aid can be a gateway to engagement – the moment someone seeks help from a food provider is a crucial opportunity to connect them to other, more comprehensive forms of support.

Importantly, most food providers do not have the in-house expertise to offer specialist services like debt advice or benefits support. However, a core assumption of the Food Roots 2 programme is that by working in partnership with organisations that do, they can create a seamless referral system that benefits the individual.

Figure 3.2 Offering holistic support beyond food aid: key insights for partnerships



3.2.1 Developing wraparound services

As part of Food Roots 2, a key ambition was for partnerships to create a system of “wraparound” support, ensuring that when someone received food, they are also offered and easily connected to advice on benefits, debt, and employment. One stakeholder overseeing food banks highlighted: *“you can’t do everything in-house. The most effective food banks are those that build strong local relationships—bringing in Citizens Advice, connecting with councils, working together rather than in silos”*.

Overall, there has been some progress in moving toward wraparound/long-term support models across several organisations.

As noted in Section 2.2, two organisations (Kingsley Hall and St Peters Brockley²) received direct mentoring support by First Love Foundation to develop their support models. First Love Foundation supported partnerships to understand their community needs and design wraparound support models to meet these needs.

Box 3.17 Kingsley Hall’s Journey to a wraparound support model

Kingsley Hall, a well-established community hub in Barking and Dagenham, was already providing emergency food and affordable groceries through its social supermarket. However, its leadership wanted to develop a more preventative, person-centred approach that would support long-term wellbeing and independence.

First Love Foundation worked with Kingsley Hall to help them design this shift towards a holistic wraparound model. Early engagement revealed that while Kingsley Hall had strong local authority links and an established space, it lacked wider network engagement, a clearly articulated strategy, and sufficient internal capacity to manage the change process.

Building insight through co-production

First Love Foundation facilitated a series of workshops and focus groups with staff, volunteers, service users, and local stakeholders. The aim was to map existing strengths, identify gaps, and co-create a shared vision for wraparound support.

Two focus groups with 17 community members revealed Kingsley Hall was widely valued as a “safe”, “uplifting,” and “non-judgmental” space – often described as a “second family”. One participant reflected: *“It’s somewhere where you can go and actually meet people of all backgrounds – it’s making people feel welcome”*. Participants saw Kingsley Hall not only as a place to access services, but as a trusted, inclusive space that builds connection, trust, and belonging. For some, it had been life-changing: one attendee, isolated at home for 12 years, described Kingsley Hall as the place where she “spoke to loads of people” for the first time in over a decade; another said they “gave me the care that no other company would have” after the loss of a spouse.

Alongside these strengths, the focus groups highlighted significant gaps including the desire for more regular, accessible support with benefits, housing, and navigating complex systems such as Universal Credit, as focus group participants found monthly Citizens Advice appointments insufficient. The borough was referred to as a “advice and credit desert”, with Citizens Advice unable to meet 60% of local demand. Barriers such as literacy challenges, digital exclusion, health conditions, and the absence of affordable skill-building opportunities compounded the difficulties.

² First Love Foundation initially began working with Spring Community Hub. However, as the programme evolved, it was agreed with the GLA that another partner would be better placed to test the wraparound support model. Work therefore continued with St Peter’s Brockley Anglican Church in Lewisham, alongside Kingsley Hall. Although St Peter’s was not a direct FR2 grantee, it was identified as having the capacity and context to test this approach most effectively.

Designing the wraparound model

Insights from the focus groups fed into workshops with First Love Foundation and partners such as BD Collective, Turn2us, and Community Solutions to design a three-tiered “Journey to Freedom” wraparound model:

- Primary Level – Triage and basic advice delivered by trained volunteers and sessional workers, including use of benefits calculators and signposting.
- Secondary Level – Ongoing support from a dedicated Community Advocate, working alongside individuals to navigate external services.
- Tertiary Level – Co-produced, specialist-led plans for those with complex needs, integrating healthcare, legal advocacy, housing, employability, and family support.

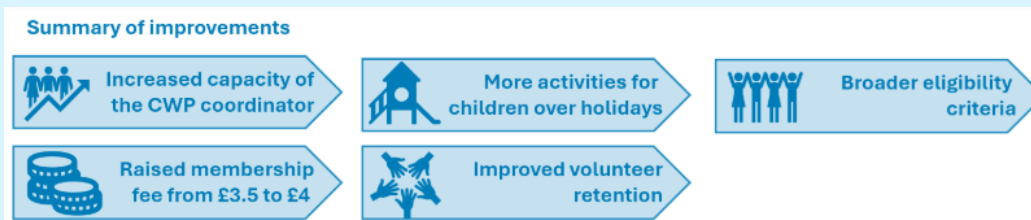
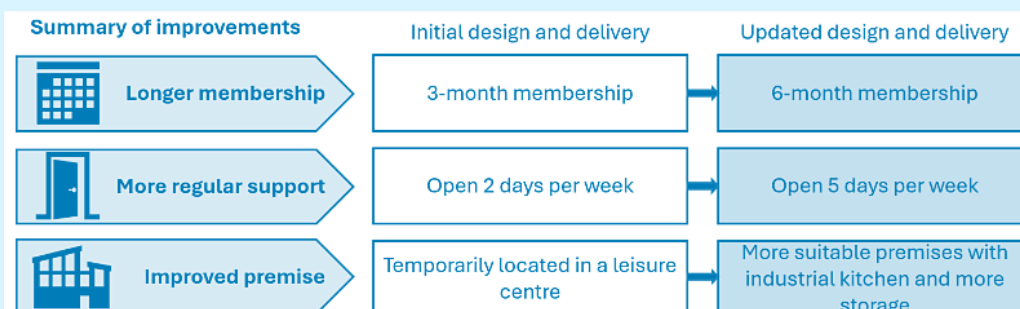
At the end of the programme, Kingsley Hall aimed to obtain funding to implement the wraparound model and extend it through partner organisations across the borough. At the time of data collection, future plans included hiring a wraparound coordinator, sessional workers, and expanding volunteer capacity.

Work with St Peter’s Church (Brockley) broadly followed the same three-phase process used with Kingsley Hall (e.g., organisational mapping, developing a Theory of Change, and engaging stakeholders) but different challenges were encountered. At St Peter’s, early resistance from long-standing volunteers to moving away from food distribution was addressed through support from the main leader (the vicar), inclusive workshops, and co-production with service users. By contrast, Kingsley Hall’s barriers were less about cultural resistance and more about limited strategic alignment within the organisation and with the external advice network. These differences illustrate the need for a tailored approach to starting work on wraparound support, adapted to each organisation’s starting point, capacity, and context.

Alongside those directly mentored by First Love Foundation, several other partnerships also advanced their wraparound offer during the programme. These included initiatives to introduce or strengthen embedded support services within food aid settings, often by co-locating advice, wellbeing, or other community services in a single hub. This approach enables residents to access wider help at the same time as receiving food aid, reducing the need to navigate multiple services. Partnerships emphasised that the effectiveness of wraparound provision depends on tailoring to local circumstances – recognising that each hub, community organisation, and borough has distinct needs, assets, and pre-existing support networks.

Box 3.18 Support provided beyond food aid in Brent

Sufra (a not-for-profit organisation in Brent) developed the Community Wellbeing Programme (CWP) with funding from Brent Council and their Food Roots 2 grant. The programme, designed to provide holistic support to individuals in need, includes services such as affordable food through a social supermarket, a free gym membership, health workshops, and access to advice on issues like benefits, employment, and housing. The CWP initially operated two days a week above a leisure centre in Brent and now operates 5 days a week in a more suitable premises. The CWP serves predominantly Somali and Arabic communities. Members pay £4 weekly to access £25 worth of food, which includes fresh produce, non-perishable items, and meals. They also benefit from a variety of health-related support, such as nutrition workshops, immunisations, and health screenings, as well as wraparound advice from external partners. Throughout Food Roots 2, Sufra has explored and implemented ways to improve the programme. The Food Roots 2 extension facilitated further improvements of the CWP scheme including a longer membership term and more regular support. The programme was iteratively developed and refined to better respond to community needs.

Key programme design and delivery changes up until August 2024:**Key programme design and delivery changes after August 2024:****Box 3.19 Support provided beyond food aid in Hammersmith and Fulham**

Nourish Hub (a community-driven food hub in Hammersmith and Fulham) provides services aimed at addressing food insecurity and social isolation. These services include a ‘pay as you feel’ café which serves meals to all residents, regardless of their financial situation, with volunteers preparing food from surplus ingredients. The model ensures that everyone can access nutritious meals, fosters social cohesion and provides a safe, open space where residents can interact with staff and volunteers. The café’s success is a result of the integration of social care, food provision, and community engagement, with feedback from residents indicating a stronger sense of belonging and connection to the local area.

Nourish Hub also runs the NourishEd programme, which includes multiple week courses, one-off sessions and bespoke sessions for residents aimed at improving cookery skills and knowledge of healthy eating. The NourishEd courses have been informed by resident feedback and iteratively developed in response to community feedback and community need. For example, NourishEd developed a five-week cooking course alongside Alexandra Rose, to support voucher recipients. This course is specifically focused on preparing fruit and vegetables and exemplifies how the NourishEd courses have been integrated with other wraparound support offers to support uptake and amplify impact.

Despite the progress mentioned above, a number of consistent themes emerged across delivery sites, highlighting important learning for future programme design. In particular:

- Across multiple sites, a recurring challenge was balancing the immediate demands of (and desire for) maintaining or expanding food aid with the strategic shift towards holistic, preventative support. One stakeholder remarked: *“Capacity is the biggest barrier. Food banks want to do more than hand out food – but when you’re struggling to meet today’s demand, there’s little space to think about tomorrow”*. In some cases, concurrent launches of new food initiatives to meet immediate need risked diluting focus and capacity for long-term transformation beyond food aid.
- Moving from food aid to wraparound support is a complex organisational shift. Progress was closely correlated with whether the lead individual was well-

positioned, supported by the board/trustees, and able to articulate a compelling case for change.

- The process of shifting from transactional food aid to a relational, wraparound support model is inherently complex and iterative. Resistance to change within some organisations and communities can slow progress. Some partner organisations had concerns about preserving traditional models of free food aid, fears of alienating clients, and scepticism about charging for services presented obstacles to adopting new approaches. Stakeholders noted that transitioning to integrated wraparound models is typically a gradual process, requiring sustained support, shared vision, and realistic timelines.
- Ongoing emergency need continued to pose a significant barrier to fully embedding wraparound support. Food aid providers often have to dedicate substantial time and resources to meeting immediate demand, which constrains their capacity to focus on developing and sustaining holistic, preventative services.
- Smaller organisations frequently faced specific capacity and resource constraints, including limited staff, unstable locations for confidential advice, and insufficient infrastructure to support innovations like digital referrals.

It was also noted that the term “wraparound” was interpreted differently across organisations. For some organisations, it referred to co-locating multiple advice and support services alongside food provision; for others, it meant building referral pathways into existing local services rather than directly hosting them. A few viewed it more narrowly as enhancing the quality of interactions at the point of food distribution, such as providing initial advice or signposting. This variation sometimes reflected differences in organisational scale, resources, and local context, but also underscored the importance of agreeing a common definition and set of core principles from the outset. Without this clarity, there was a risk that “wraparound” became a catch-all term – attractive to funders and stakeholders, but applied in ways that varied widely in scope, intensity, and sustainability.

More positively, even for partner organisations that are far from fully implementing wraparound support, there appears to be willingness to learn from others implementing this approach, and fundamentally, a recognition of why this type of model is needed. For instance, two interviewees reflected there was growing recognition among local partners that a broader approach was needed to address the complex needs of beneficiaries, particularly as the profile of those accessing food aid had shifted in the last few years (a result attributed to the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis). The shift in mindset is a positive step, laying the groundwork for future changes in service delivery. One coordinator said, *“probably a key outcome of the whole programme has been the level of buy in from organisations”* and explained *“how far the members of the pilot have come kind of psychologically in embracing the aims of the programme and understanding that it doesn’t mean that food banks are going to disappear anytime soon”*.

3.2.2 Improving referral pathways and signposting

A further area of focus was strengthening and formalising relationships and referral systems between food providers and other services. Even where organisations were not delivering a full wraparound model, many began integrating systematic signposting to advice and support agencies, marking a shift towards more sustainable, preventative approaches.

Several partnerships worked to upskill food aid providers so they could identify needs and connect people to the right services. For example, Kingston Voluntary Action promoted the Citizens Advice Level 2 Advice and Guidance course to members of its Good Food Group, viewing this as a way to strengthen signposting skills across the network. This focus on capacity-building meant more providers could confidently respond to a wider range of issues beyond food insecurity.

Partnerships also deepened collaborations to make referrals more effective and relevant. In Bexley, Southeast London Community Energy worked with libraries and community pantries to provide energy advice, while also partnering with Listening Ears (an organisation focusing on loneliness among the elderly) to explore tailored wraparound support for older residents. These initiatives reflect the importance of embedding advice and wellbeing services into community spaces where people already seek help.

Box 3.20 Improving signposting to advice services in Kensington and Chelsea

KCSC made significant progress by funding six community hubs to integrate advice services alongside food aid (Box 3.13). These hubs introduced initiatives such as improved signposting and in-house trained advisors to cater to local needs. Importantly, each community hub adopted different approaches to wraparound support based on the needs of their local communities. For instance, Bay20, a hub in the network, worked with Citizens Advice and other local services to offer a wide range of support, including benefits advice and social services.

Adding to this, the community hub teams often include staff and volunteers with relevant lived experience who offer appropriate support. A staff member at one of the community hubs explained that there are “a lot of volunteers with lived experience of addiction, homelessness, mental health” which means that “their teams have built around the same kinds of communities that they’re serving so then they’re really well positioned to offer the most appropriate and relevant support”.

KCSC supported hubs to introduce a layered approach to signposting where volunteers are supported by staff, and staff can escalate more complex cases to KCSC as and when needed. Staff and volunteers provided triage advice within the community setting 273 times during Q3 2024 and have supported people to apply for cash/voucher grant/schemes within the community setting 53 times during Q3 2024. In addition, 555 signposts and 166 referrals were made to regulated advice services during Q3 2024.

Several partnerships also explored how to improve referrals across organisations using digital tools and platforms. For example, KCSC supported advice network members to set up on Plinth, a platform for digital referrals between agencies. The aim was to streamline collaboration between advice organisations and community hubs. While there were some early implementation challenges related to limited referral acceptance by advice agencies via Plinth, the partnership was still trialling the platform and working closely with them to overcome these challenges. Other examples of digital tools tested by partnership included Simply Connect in Croydon and the Joy referral app in Newham.

These tools aimed to support better coordination between services and streamline referral processes, making it easier for food aid providers to better track referrals and outcomes. However, they required active promotion to encourage consistent use and engagement. For example, in Croydon, the coordinator reported that Simply Connect is promoted at every network meeting to help organisations find services like debt advice and other support for their clients. The use of Simply Connect has

increased because of these efforts. At least one partnership focused efforts on developing their own referral tracking system.

Box 3.21 Digital solutions for facilitating referrals in Barnet

Groundwork, on behalf of the Barnet Food Hub, led several initiatives to shift food banks from solely providing food to offering a broader range of support. This included designing and piloting a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to streamline referrals. This system identifies users' needs, such as financial or employment support, and enables direct referrals to relevant services. By improving coordination through digital tools, Barnet Food Hub aimed to enhance the support network for residents.

The Hub also focuses on building volunteer capacity, ensuring they provide more than just food distribution. Volunteers engage with residents to connect them to a variety of services, addressing issues like debt, housing, and health.

Alongside this, the Hub has set up a Digital Champions programme, which trains volunteers to help food bank users navigate digital services, such as setting up emails, applying for benefits and accessing job opportunities. This initiative expands food banks' role from emergency food providers to hubs that connect residents to essential services. By spring 2025, there were 20 Digital Champions embedded across six foodbanks and other foodbanks expressing interest in the scheme.

Despite challenges such as limited staff resources and "data fatigue" among food bank users, at the time of interview, there was optimism about how these changes would support a more holistic, sustainable support system for local residents. The CRM programme requires on going funding to support with platform fees, which had not been secured at the time of the follow up research. At the time of data collection, the partnership had planned on doing further research to understand the additional value that the CRM system brings when combined with the Digital Champions programme.

However, despite these advances, partnerships continue to report several data management and privacy challenges that impact the effectiveness of digital referral systems. For example, many organisations remain hesitant to share client information due to fears of breaching confidentiality or regulatory compliance, which limits collaboration and hinders integrated support systems.

Partner organisations also vary in their capacity and resources to collect, manage, and share data consistently, creating barriers to standardising processes and tracking referrals across partnerships. These challenges must be addressed alongside efforts to implement digital tools for referrals to realise their full potential in improving service coordination.

3.2.3 Adopting a 'cash-first' approach

A 'cash first' approach encourages partners to move from providing in-kind food parcels towards offering direct financial support where appropriate, such as supermarket vouchers or cash transfers. Partnerships engaged with cash-first models to varying degrees, but only a few actively implemented or tested this approach as part of Food Roots 2. Where implemented, vouchers or cash transfers were often integrated into a broader wraparound support offer, complementing advice services and other forms of food assistance. Below is an example of where a partner organisation trialled a cash-first approach by providing direct financial support to individuals and families.

Box 3.22 Cash first approach in Kensington and Chelsea

In Kensington and Chelsea, six community hubs supported 53 people to apply for cash or voucher grant schemes within the community setting. This provided direct financial support, demonstrating an approach that moves beyond traditional food aid. The model offered immediate relief for individuals and was considered a valuable component of the broader wraparound support offer. For example, one hub assisted a service user in accessing paid work and obtaining a cash advance to cover a gap in benefit payments.

Some partnerships also explored the use and promotion of vouchers to provide families with greater choice and autonomy over their food. The Nourish Hub in Hammersmith & Fulham worked closely with the Alexandra Rose programme, running cookery and vegetable preparation courses for recipients of Rose Vouchers³. These sessions not only supported families in making healthy food choices but also complemented broader wraparound support, including advice services and childcare provision to facilitate attendance. In Lambeth, Rose Vouchers were also promoted⁴ alongside the Healthy Start scheme, reinforcing the partnership's broader cash-first approach. One stakeholder involved in Food Roots 2 noted that *"a targeted fruit and veg voucher is powerful, people can only spend it on healthy food, but they still have dignity and choice"*.

Where it was not possible to provide cash or vouchers directly, several partnerships nonetheless supported the principles of a cash-first approach. For example:

- In Lewisham and Haringey, partnerships distributed 'Worrying About Money' leaflets, helping families access benefits, grants, and other forms of financial support to meet their needs independently.
- Some partnerships provided guidance on budgeting, debt advice, and accessing local financial schemes, empowering people to make informed choices about their resources.

There were multiple barriers to embedding a 'cash-first' approach, linked to available funding, capacity and established mindsets. One wider stakeholder noted that temporary funding streams often channel money through food banks for convenience rather than exploring cash-first models, which can reinforce dependency. There is also limited strategic capacity to drive a shift toward cash-first approaches, alongside insufficient frontline resources to support their delivery. Partnership coordinators faced additional challenges in encouraging a mindset change among food aid providers, who are often accustomed to traditional food redistribution models. It was felt that overcoming these barriers requires sustained investment, targeted support, and ongoing engagement to embed cash-first principles within local food partnerships.

³ Rose Vouchers support local communities in accessing high-quality, fresh fruit and vegetables. Vouchers are distributed through local community partners, with projects currently running in several London boroughs (Hammersmith & Fulham, Hackney, Lambeth, Southwark, and Tower Hamlets).

⁴ Families can use the vouchers at local retailers, including Brixton Market and independent stalls in West Norwood and Streatham, making healthy eating both convenient and affordable. Rose Vouchers are distributed through 14 children's centres across the borough, which register families in need and provide the vouchers to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables.

3.3 Accessing sustainable external funding

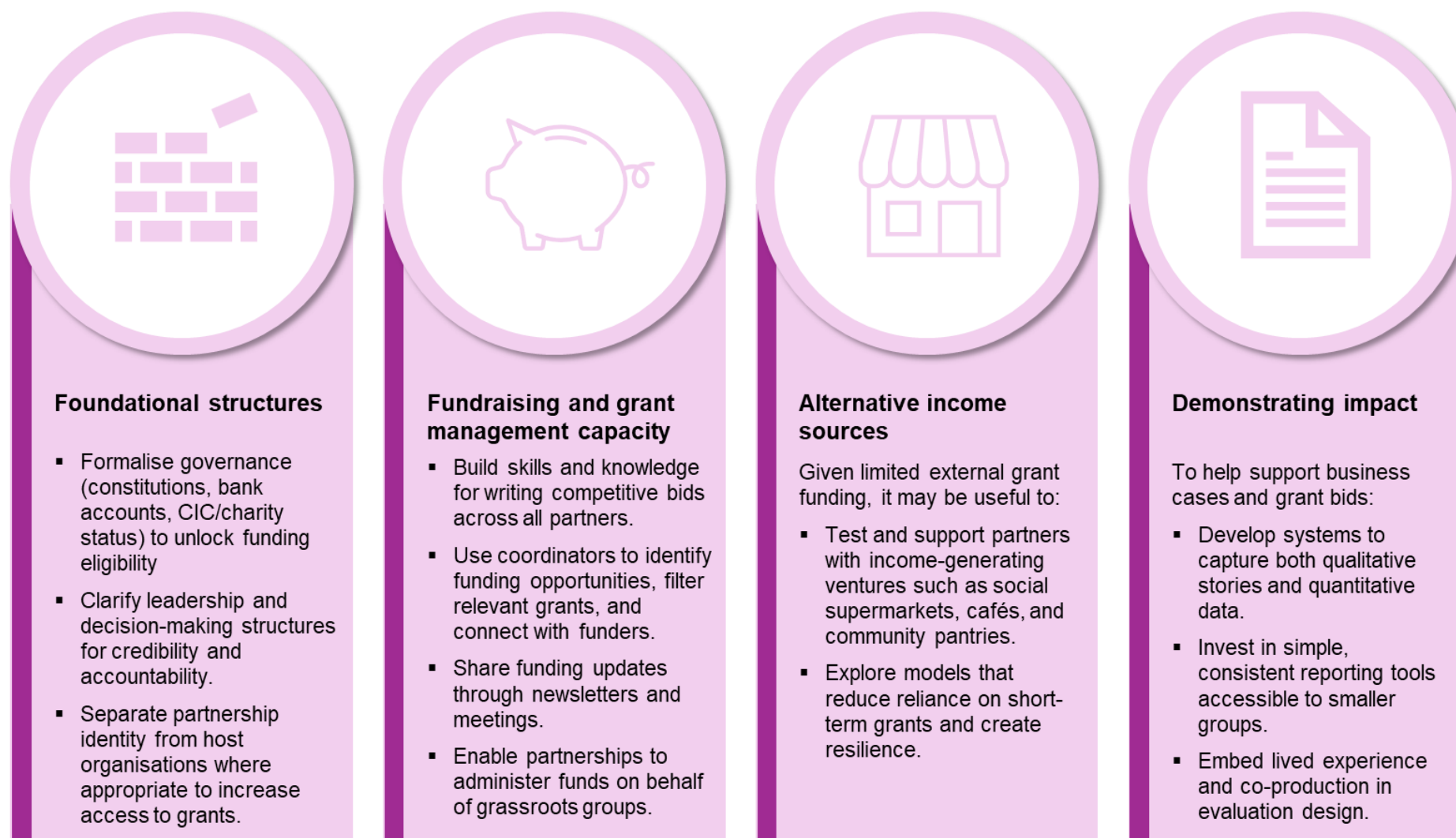
Objective: Improved ability of food partnerships to access sustainable external funding.

The GLA recognised that the funding it provided through the Food Roots 2 programme (and the previous Food Roots incubator) was short-term, and in practice, a resilient and sustainable local food system cannot rely on a series of short-term grants. A core objective was therefore for partnerships to develop their own capacity to secure long-term, stable funding from a variety of sources to continue their work beyond the programme's lifespan.

Underpinning this objective was the view that to attract sustainable funding from sources like councils, trusts, and foundations, partnerships must be able to clearly articulate their impact and show that they are a credible, coordinated entity. As a result, partnerships were encouraged and supported to evaluate and measure their own impact.

However, the external funding landscape posed significant challenges that hindered progress toward this objective. Over the programme period, many traditional funders either reduced their contributions, withdrew from funding organisations altogether or redefined their funding priorities and selection criteria (e.g., shifting funding away from London). This evolving environment also created a more competitive and uncertain funding climate, particularly for smaller, grassroots organisations that often lack the governance structures and resources needed to successfully navigate and manage diverse funding streams.

Figure 3.3 Accessing sustainable external funding: key insights for partnerships



3.3.1 Foundational work to enable access to sustainable funding

Many partnerships were not at a stage where they could confidently apply for external funding as a collective by the end of the programme. In recognition of this, CSC pivoted its support offer to help partnerships and organisations strengthen their structures and processes to support future fundraising efforts.

One critical area identified was formalising organisational structures. Many partnerships were still in the early phases of development, lacking the governance frameworks and independent legal status often required by funders. Partnerships embedded within local authorities faced particular challenges, as external funders typically prioritise VCS organisations. This structural mismatch restricted their eligibility for many funding streams and complicated efforts to secure sustainable, long-term funding. To address this, some groups took steps to formalise their status. For example, Good Food Greenwich established itself as an un-constituted group with a bank account, enabling independent grant applications – an important step because being formally separate from their host organisation (GCDA) increased their eligibility for funding and allowed them to manage funds directly, which many grant providers require.

Closely linked to governance, the development of clear and effective leadership and decision-making structures was necessary to support fundraising. Some partnerships needed to consider transferring ownership or responsibility for funding applications from large host organisations to dedicated steering groups or creating independent entities such as Community Interest Companies (CICs). This formality not only increased credibility with funders but also provided a clearer framework for managing grants and ensuring accountability.

CSC's tailored support helped several partnerships build these capabilities by developing strategic plans, conducting organisational audits, and creating social needs profiles to inform fundraising. Some partnerships (e.g., Sustainable Merton, Barnet Food Partnership and Kingsley Hall) made measurable progress through engaging with this support.

Box 3.23 Formalising the partnership in Barnet

Prior to Food Roots 2 funding, Barnet lacked a formal food partnership, and the Hub has now successfully helped establish a dedicated Food Partnership. The partnership now includes over 50 stakeholders and aims to improve Barnet's food system and reduce food insecurity. Food Roots 2 funding has enabled the formalisation of this partnership, which includes a structured committee which includes representatives from public health and two leading food banks.

The coordinator explained: *"I am excited about Barnet Food partnership being the legacy, to drive forward and keep driving forward the food agenda in the borough beyond Food Roots 2. They're solid, they're there, they've got their committee, they've got the drive, they've got the passion".*

The partnership now organises events, coordinates working groups, and is positioned to take the lead on future funding and strategic initiatives, ensuring continuity and legacy for food-related work in Barnet. Significant milestones to date include the first Food Summit in 2023, which showcased the Food Charter and Food Plan.

3.3.2 Building fundraising and grant management capacity

Skills, knowledge, and capacity for fundraising emerged as significant barriers across all partnerships, particularly among smaller organisations that often lacked

experience in preparing competitive grant applications. In response, coordinators within several partnerships played a crucial role in bridging this gap by identifying suitable funding opportunities, guiding partners through the application process, and fostering connections with funders. By filtering grants aligned with both the food charity sector and local borough priorities, coordinators saved partners considerable time and effort. They also strengthened overall fundraising capacity by sharing funding updates through newsletters, meetings, and one-to-one support. Where possible, coordinators collaborated with dedicated fundraisers within their wider teams or externally to enhance application success.

Box 3.24 Fundraising support for partners in Newham and Walthamstow

In Newham, the coordinator's proactive involvement went beyond sharing opportunities to actively reviewing and improving grant applications. For example, the coordinator reviewed grant applications for three partners and helped them refine their answers for a small council grant. This hands-on support helped multiple partners secure important funding, including a £15,000 grant and an offer of support which enables the partnership member to refer up to five families each month to a free legal aid service. Additionally, the coordinator facilitated successful bids for smaller grants like the Digital Inclusion Grant, by providing tailored support e.g., reviewing grant applications.

The Hornbeam Centre (Walthamstow) and its staff helped individual partner organisations to team up, draft applications, and connect with relevant partners (e.g., the Felix Project and London Food Insecurity Network). A notable success was a partner organisation securing a significant grant (~£80k) from the National Lottery Communities Fund which was attributed to support from the partnership. The coordinator also encouraged collaboration between partner organisations in applying for joint funding. At the time of writing, a group in the south of the borough had been supported to establish a collective, write Terms of Reference, and reach out to Peabody via the London Food Insecurity Network. This group was expected to receive support to develop a south Leytonstone hub. The coordinator explained that *"whilst I can't say that the Hornbeam or Food Roots 2 funded person, me, has done all this work we definitely catalysed it, supported it, facilitated it, you know, some of it, and created a landscape and environment in which people are really thinking about working that way"*.

Managing funds effectively once secured was another widespread challenge. Many food aid organisations lacked experience in charity management and grant administration, making complex reporting requirements and financial oversight difficult. To address this, some partnerships assumed an administrative role, distributing funding to grassroots organisations less able to manage large grants independently. For example, Kingston Voluntary Action coordinated the allocation of a £51,600 community cooking grant among groups working with carers, disabled adults, refugees, migrants, and individuals with long-term health conditions. By channelling funds through a locally embedded partnership host or committee, the grant was allocated fairly and effectively, supporting culturally appropriate and accessible food programmes tailored to community needs. This approach also fostered trust and accountability within the local network, bridging capacity gaps in financial management.

CSC also provided targeted support to enhance fundraising skills and capacity, further enabling progress in some areas.

Box 3.25 Developing fundraising capacity in Barking and Dagenham

Kingsley Hall's success in securing external funding was built on a strong foundation. Under an experienced fundraiser, the organisation had already secured £2 million in capital grants, which funded key facilities, including a café that serves as a community hub. Although not yet profitable, the café helps cover operational costs, allowing capital grants to

focus on funding community programmes. Kingsley Hall had also received £15,000 funding from the council to develop the café into a restaurant. This funding allows the Street Kitchen to expand its opening hours and improve their menu. This model shows how capital grants can pave the way for long-term financial sustainability.

Thus, by the time CSC began working with Kingsley Hall, much of the groundwork had already been laid. This allowed CSC to focus on mentoring the lead fundraiser to strengthen their bid-writing skills, further enhancing the organisation's ability to secure future funding. With CSC's support, Kingsley Hall focused on two key funding applications for £70,000 each, targeting the John Ellerman Foundation and the Sir Halley Stewart Trust. They also planned a phased approach, starting with smaller grants and eventually targeting a £300,000 application to the National Lottery. The process was iterative, with regular meetings to refine proposals, ensuring they met funders' expectations for community-led design and evidence of need.

CSC also promoted the incorporation of co-production and lived experience representation into funding proposals. Kingsley Hall adopted a co-production approach to design a funding proposal for a social supermarket. They worked closely with the community to identify how housing, immigration, and financial advice services could be integrated and tailored to the needs of the social supermarket's users. This built on a community consultation that Kingsley Hall had previously conducted which gathered valuable data on local needs.

Towards the end of the Food Roots 2 programme, Kingsley Hall was also applying for collective funding to fully implement a wraparound support programme. This programme aims to link food redistribution hubs with training and resources so that all partners providing food can also deliver wraparound support. Potential funders include the National Lottery's Solidarity Fund and the Reaching Communities grant, though it was noted that there was considerable competition for these grants.

3.3.3 Exploring alternative income sources

Across partnerships, there was widespread recognition of the urgent need to diversify income sources beyond traditional grant funding, particularly to support the development and sustainability of wraparound services. Many organisations noted that heavy reliance on short-term grants constrains long-term planning and limits the ability to build integrated support models that extend beyond immediate food aid. Exploring alternative funding streams, such as social enterprises and income-generating ventures, offers a promising pathway to establish more resilient financial foundations while enhancing holistic support for communities.

Several partnerships have implemented or piloted initiatives such as social supermarkets, community cafés, and social pantries. These models not only provide affordable food but also generate revenue, reducing dependency on grants and helping sustain wraparound support services. However, despite their potential, these ventures often face significant operational and financial challenges, particularly in the early stages when achieving profitability or covering costs can be difficult.

An in-person Food Roots 2 workshop focused on exploring alternative income sources highlighted additional barriers. Coordinators explained that partnerships without access to suitable physical spaces face particular difficulties in developing income-generating ventures. Alternative income sources were generally considered more feasible for partnership members with access to spaces that could support the setup and testing of income-generating projects. Additionally, it was noted that partnerships with informal governance structures (e.g., without a constitution, non-legal entities, etc.) or those hosted by councils, for example, have limited capacity to pilot such initiatives.

Box 3.26 Diversifying funding sources in Hammersmith and Fulham

Nourish Hub's community café, central to its mission of accessible food and wraparound support, has struggled to reach financial sustainability. While initially adopting a 'pay what you can' approach to ensure inclusivity, the café recently introduced a minimum donation to improve revenue. Efforts to attract a broader customer base, such as targeting local office workers for lunchtime meals and offering catering services, have helped increase income but are not yet sufficient to guarantee long-term financial independence.

In addition to earned income, Nourish Hub has pursued diverse funding avenues, including community donations, corporate partnerships, event space rental, and team-building activities for businesses. These proactive steps reflect an understanding that diversified funding is critical to sustain and expand wraparound support beyond food provision. Yet, despite these efforts, the hub remains dependent on grant funding and external support. The potential for match funding from a corporate partner represents a crucial opportunity that could significantly bolster the partnership's financial stability and capacity for continued progress.

3.3.4 Demonstrating impact

A critical factor in securing follow-on funding for food partnerships is the ability to demonstrate clear, measurable impact. However, partnerships often struggle with this, as their work is collective and multifaceted rather than confined to discrete projects with straightforward outputs. Challenges include inconsistent reporting from partners, limited capacity or expertise in evaluation, and difficulties in collecting and presenting tangible evidence of success.

Smaller partner organisations are particularly affected by capacity constraints, with day-to-day service delivery often taking priority over data collection. Technological barriers (such as lack of equipment, limited digital literacy among staff and volunteers, and the cost of data collection platforms) further impede consistent reporting. Concerns around data privacy and GDPR compliance can also limit willingness to share information across partnerships. These challenges highlight the need to balance grassroots flexibility with the standardisation required for robust impact reporting.

Despite these obstacles, partnerships have taken steps to strengthen evaluation. Many developed internal systems to capture achievements and challenges, often combining qualitative evidence such as case studies and beneficiary stories with quantitative data. By the end of the programme, there was also increasing recognition of the value of embedding lived experience and co-production in evaluation processes, reflecting funders' growing emphasis on community-led impact.

Box 3.27 Evaluation activities in Hammersmith and Fulham

The coordinator played a pivotal role in conducting the evaluation activities for Nourish Hub during Food Roots 2, particularly in the delivery of the Our Hub, Your Voice social impact report.⁵ The report combined questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups to capture the lived experiences of residents and volunteers. The report followed a clear ethical framework based around five principles. The coordinator helped to ensure that the research approach was community centred. The report examines the impact of the hub rather than the impact of the partnership. The report found that Nourish Hub had helped to improve access to food, promote a healthier diet, and improve social connection.

⁵ [Our Hub, Your Voice - Nourish Hub](#)

3.4 Increasing awareness and visibility of Healthy Start

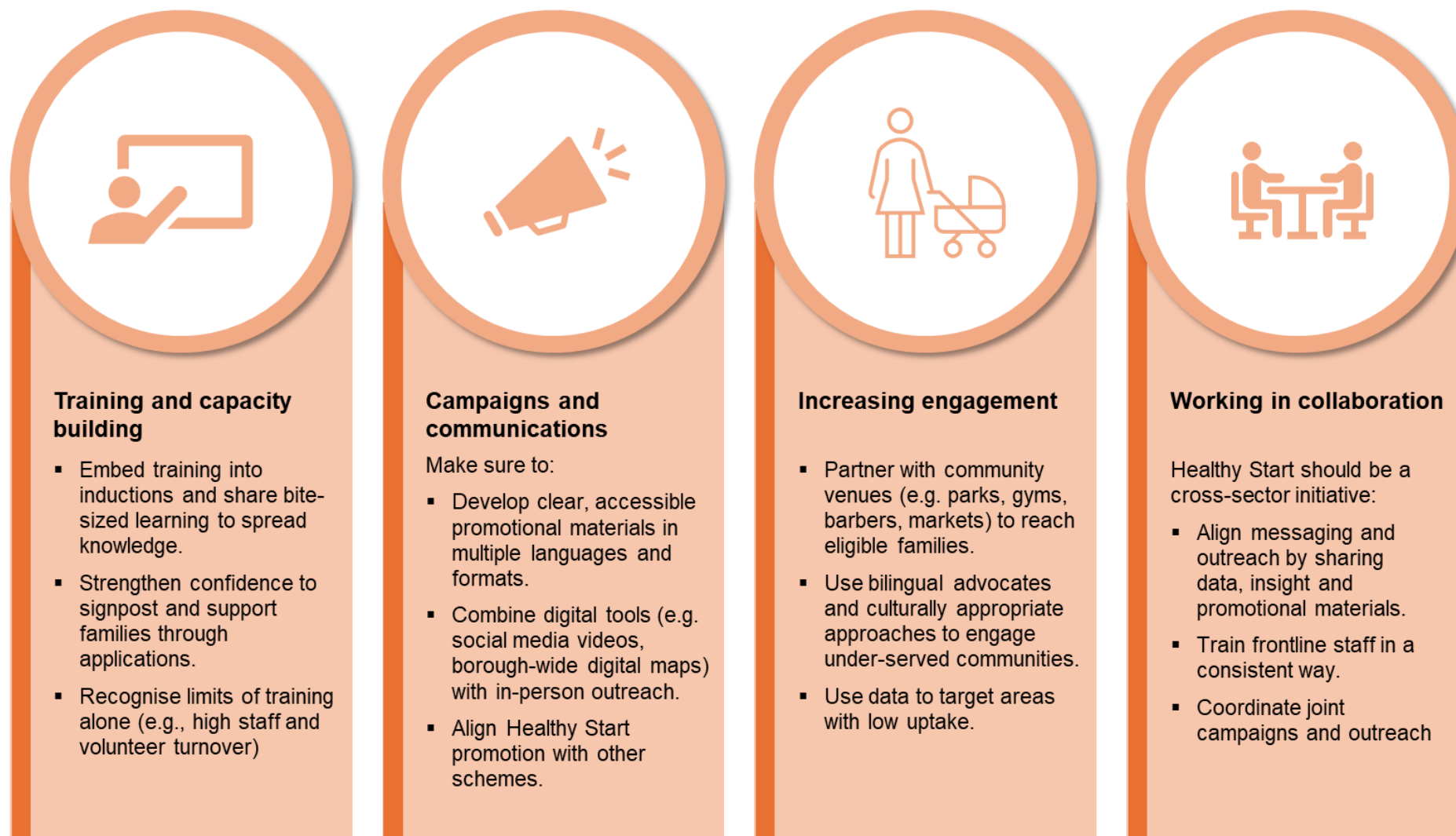
Objective: Increased awareness and visibility of Healthy Start across food partnerships and the Londoners who use their services, including newly trained staff and volunteers who can signpost and support applications and better links between statutory and voluntary sector work on Healthy Start.

The Food Roots 2 programme recognised that tackling food insecurity and specifically increasing uptake of critical benefits like the Healthy Start scheme, requires more than individual organisations working in isolation. The programme was built on the understanding that bringing together voluntary sector organisations, community food providers, local authorities, advice services, and statutory bodies could create a more effective and sustainable response to complex challenges faced by food insecure Londoners. This is because:

- Uptake of benefits and schemes like Healthy Start is hindered by multiple interconnected issues, including low awareness, confusing eligibility criteria, and complicated application processes. No single organisation holds all the expertise or resources needed to address all these issues comprehensively.
- Food aid providers and community organisations have established trust and direct relationships with individuals and families eligible for Healthy Start but who are currently not accessing it. These organisations can effectively raise awareness and support families through application processes in a way that statutory bodies alone may struggle to achieve.
- Historically, statutory services and voluntary organisations often work separately. Working together as a partnership provides an opportunity for better information sharing, aligned messaging and joint outreach.
- Working with other organisations to understand and map local need can also help to ensure the approach to promoting Healthy Start is data driven and targeted.

Overall, progress against this objective is challenging to measure. One key issue has been tracking changes in Healthy Start uptake due to unreliable and inconsistent data. The withdrawal of the NHSBSA's dataset in early 2023 has hindered the ability to gather quantitative data, leaving partnerships without a clear mechanism to assess their progress or to evaluate the effectiveness of promotion efforts. Historical underestimations of uptake also suggest that partnerships may have achieved more than initially perceived. One partnership coordinator explained that it was also “demotivating” not to be able to track the progress of their efforts.

Figure 3.4 Increasing awareness and visibility of Healthy Start: key insights for partnerships



3.4.1 Training and capacity building

The effectiveness of Healthy Start promotion and uptake is closely linked to the skills, confidence, and capacity of those delivering support. Although several boroughs already had existing Healthy Start training for some professionals, the Food Roots 2 programme introduced a dedicated central workstream focused on building capacity by training frontline staff and volunteers across multiple organisations to become Healthy Start experts. This training, led by Citizens Advice, focused on identifying eligible individuals, clearly explaining benefits, and assisting families with the application process.

Over the course of the programme, Citizens Advice delivered 117 Healthy Start training sessions, including four pan-London sessions. Of these, 55 training sessions and three pan-London session took place during the Food Roots 2 extension period. An additional 30 training sessions were planned but eventually cancelled due to low engagement. Overall, Citizens Advice reached 799 participants from local frontline networks, averaging seven attendees per session.

As shown in Figure 3.5, the number of sessions increased during the latter half of the programme, coinciding with an expansion of content to include more holistic elements and the introduction of Level 2 training. Feedback indicated that both the Level 2 and pan-London sessions were well received.

Figure 3.5 Number of Healthy Start training sessions delivered during the Food Roots 2 programme



There is evidence of increased awareness and understanding of Healthy Start among staff, volunteers, and service users following training. One interviewee, previously unaware of the broader goals of Healthy Start, described how their perspective shifted: *“It’s not just about vitamins and milk. It’s all about promoting there are ways you can get food and how you can stop food poverty (...) we never saw it as food poverty, we just saw it as healthy start or food bank, it’s made us start looking more at food poverty and how that can affect a family”*.

Others reported greater clarity on eligibility criteria and the differences in the application process for various groups, which improved the accuracy and specificity of the advice they provide.

Data from participant feedback throughout 2024 showed that 97% of respondents (n=93) intended to use their learning to promote Healthy Start, and 78% (n=75) planned to signpost families to additional support. Feedback collected during the

2025 extension period revealed that 95% (n=107) felt confident identifying eligible families and guiding them through the application process, while 94% felt confident supporting applications. Many also reported increased confidence in advising on eligibility and voucher use.

Positively, interviews and survey data demonstrate that training has translated into practical actions to boost uptake, including:

- Initiatives to inform families about Healthy Start through flyers, QR codes, posters, and social media campaigns. Some organisations incorporated Healthy Start into routine activities, such as children's centre snack times and nutrition workshops using the vouchers.
- Integration of training into staff induction programmes and sharing bite-sized information with partners and volunteers, creating a ripple effect within networks.
- Raising awareness of the link between poor nutrition and mental health, leading to more signposting for mental health support alongside food aid.
- Further promotion of the scheme e.g., a children's centre revamped its support model by introducing awareness workshops, collaborating on outreach events, and aligning Healthy Start promotion with broader initiatives like UNICEF accreditation and Healthy Early Years London.
- Improved collaboration between the council's children's team and voluntary sector partners, including training council staff to issue vouchers at food banks and joint outreach with community fridges.

Despite these successes, in the majority of cases training alone may be insufficient for sustained impact. Many voluntary sector partners are overstretched and there is also significant turnover, which risks knowledge loss. This also contributed to varied and often low attendance at training sessions (as discussed in Section 2.2).

It was also acknowledged that there remain structural, scheme-level barriers to improving uptake of Healthy Start which are not possible to resolve through training alone, including: the value of the vouchers compared to inflation; access by specific groups (e.g., those with No Recourse to Public Funds); the complexity of the application process including the lack of autoenrollment; and inaccurate data on eligible families which prevents targeted outreach efforts.

3.4.2 Targeted communications, campaigns and initiatives

Several partnerships developed targeted initiatives to overcome specific barriers to Healthy Start uptake within their communities. These included:

- Designing and distributing traditional promotional materials, such as leaflets, posters and postcards across a range of settings including GP practices, early years settings, parks, faith spaces, retailers, gyms, and barbers. Some partnerships selected settings based on data showing areas of need or areas with low uptake. A few partnerships explained that they have revised and translated Healthy Start promotion materials to improve accessibility.
- Exploring the use of digital tools and platforms. For example, one partnership produced TikTok and Instagram videos showing an example of a Healthy Start shopping basket and the process of redeeming a Healthy Start voucher. Another produced a digital map plotting Healthy Start partners across the borough.
- Building in-person connections with local businesses to promote voucher redemption (e.g., where they offer affordable, culturally appropriate produce).

- Working collaboratively with other services and organisations (e.g., universities and analytics companies) to identify areas of need or low uptake and increasing targeted promotion activity. For example, Hackney’s partnership has been collaborating with GP practices and social prescribers to identify eligible families and promote Healthy Start uptake.
- Combining promotion of Healthy Start with other relevant schemes, to streamline communications and reach relevant audiences. In Lambeth, for example, information on Healthy Start and Alexander Rose Vouchers have been combined into one leaflet.
- Employing bilingual advocates in Manor Garden to bridge language barriers and support applications. The partnership coordinator reported that this approach led to a 40% increase in Healthy Start uptake within underserved communities.

Box 3.28 Healthy Start promotion in Redbridge

FEAST With Us in Redbridge redesigned its Healthy Start scheme to better reach diverse and multilingual communities, after research revealed that traditional methods were ineffective for refugee and non-English-speaking populations. The refocused campaign targeted “men’s spaces” like gyms and barbershops, as research conducted by Southampton University revealed that fathers were more likely to complete the Healthy Start Applications.

The coordinator created a digital map which plotted Healthy Start partners across the borough. This was shared with partners and other services and will be embedded on the Redbridge Council Website and the family information services website.

The partnership also created a dedicated space for Healthy Start promotion in the newsletter, which was sent to 40 recipients each month. In addition, weekly messages and updates were sent out during Healthy Start month, focusing on eligibility and pathways.

Box 3.29 Healthy Start promotion in Lewisham

Good Food Lewisham (GFL) aimed to improve the uptake of the Healthy Start scheme in the borough by collaborating with other VCS partners, Children’s Centres and Family Hubs. Activities were coordinated by a dedicated Healthy Start working group.

In order to help increase awareness of Healthy Start, a key priority was ensuring that information about Healthy Start was displayed in central locations (such as Family Hub noticeboards). Promotional efforts included positioning banners in all 50 children’s parks, distributing leaflets, creating Instagram posts, and designing digital billboards, which helped to ensure broad community engagement. GFL also targeted market traders, providing card readers and building their understanding of the scheme, which improved access to culturally appropriate, fresh and affordable produce for beneficiaries. Additionally, GFL ensured that that communication channels (e.g. a dedicated WhatsApp group) were established to share updates and training across partners.

GFL used a ‘data-driven’ approach, working with Policy in Practice (a social policy software and analytics company) to implement this. GFL, Lewisham council, and Policy in Practice used the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) data to identify eligible families and areas with low uptake. Targeted outreach through letters and text messages has led to a measurable increase in participation, with 270 families joining across three boroughs.

The initiative is perceived by interviewed stakeholders in Lewisham to have been successful in increasing awareness of Healthy Start among families and organisations and also impacting uptake. There are indications that access to Healthy Start has improved access to fruit and vegetables. For example, one Healthy Start recipient explained that their child “loves fruit and veg now because they had it from an early age”. GFL’s approach has also strengthened local partnerships, creating a more connected and supportive community.

Despite the initiatives trialled over the course of the Food Roots 2 programme, some partnership coordinators continued to express the view that Healthy Start promotion fundamentally sits within the remit of local authority public health teams rather than voluntary sector-led food partnerships. One coordinator noted that councils have a statutory responsibility for Healthy Start promotion but questioned whether they are adequately resourced to sustain meaningful community engagement. There were also concerns that councils may not fully value or recognise the community-based promotional efforts led by partnerships under the Food Roots 2 programme. It is unclear how many promotional activities will be taken forward following the end of the programme.

4 Building sustainable food partnerships

The Food Roots 2 programme came to a close in summer 2025, when no further funding was secured for an additional round. From the outset, however, it was designed with sustainability in mind. This chapter reflects on the practical lessons from Food Roots 2, highlighting the factors that make food partnerships effective, the structures and roles that support their resilience, and the conditions needed to sustain momentum beyond time-limited funding.

While grounded in the experience of Food Roots 2, these lessons also hold relevance for food partnerships more widely, offering insights for funders, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to build stronger, more sustainable local responses to food insecurity.

4.1 Taking a food partnership approach

Food insecurity is a complex and multi-dimensional issue, influenced by factors including economic inequality, social vulnerability, supply chain limitations, and public policy. No single organisation or agency can address these challenges alone. Partnerships play a crucial role in creating coordinated, sustainable, and effective responses to food insecurity, enabling organisations to pool resources, share expertise, and reach the communities most in need.

4.1.1 What does a food partnership look like?

Importantly, partnerships do not follow a “one-size-fits-all” model – they can take many forms and function along a spectrum from informal networks to formalised structures.

- Informal partnerships are characterised by flexibility, rapid decision-making, and responsiveness to emerging challenges. They are particularly useful in contexts where agility is critical, such as during sudden spikes in food demand or in rapidly changing local environments. However, their informality can sometimes lead to unclear accountability, limited long-term planning, and difficulties in coordinating strategic action.
- Formal partnerships are structured with defined governance frameworks, such as steering committees, clearly articulated roles, or formal agreements. These structures provide accountability, transparency, and the ability to coordinate long-term initiatives across multiple organisations. However, they can be slower to adapt to changing circumstances, individual partner needs, or urgent local challenges.

Both ends of the spectrum present trade-offs. Informal networks, while agile, may struggle with accountability and consistency. Overly rigid formal structures, meanwhile, can impede responsiveness. In practice, coordinators often need to navigate a middle ground, managing risks when multiple networks operate in the same area without clear communication, which can lead to duplication of effort, confusion, and inefficiencies.

4.1.2 What are the benefits of a food partnership?

The learning from Food Roots 2 aligns with wider evidence on the value of local food partnerships in addressing food insecurity, improving public health, and

strengthening local food systems⁶. Food partnerships are increasingly recognised as a key mechanism for coordinating local action, bringing together diverse stakeholders, and creating a platform for sustainable, long-term change.

The remainder of this section summarises the key benefits reported by coordinators and partners (drawn from their experiences of participating in Food Roots 2 partnerships) as well as wider stakeholders.

Partners benefited from shared resources and assets

Food Roots 2 partnerships enabled organisations to pool tangible resources, including food, volunteer time, staff capacity, physical spaces, delivery vans, and funding opportunities. One coordinator explained “*Those that have [engaged] have gained from it - they've found different venues, they've formed partnerships, they're sharing food.*” Partnership members reported sharing food both informally between local organisations and formally through borough-wide food redistribution schemes. Members also shared delivery vans: in Lewisham, for example, one organisation offered its van to other members during a network meeting, while in Croydon, a group of organisations collectively managed a shared delivery van funded for the partnership. Food Roots 2 partnerships also facilitated sharing of funding opportunities and other in-kind resources. Partnerships have also explored collective funding opportunities, as discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.

Partners were able to share knowledge, learning and best practice

Food Roots 2 created a fertile environment for knowledge exchange. Through regular partnership meetings, training sessions, and informal networks, partners were able to share lessons on what worked and what did not. In Kensington and Chelsea and in Newham, community organisations visited other local partners to observe different approaches. The Newham coordinator explained that they “*arranged lots of visits for them to all kind of visit each other to see different models*” of support for those experiencing food insecurity. Partnership working supported peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, including the dissemination of information on funding offers and locally available support. Coordinators often facilitated this exchange, distributing information about external training opportunities and resources.

Partnership working improved the quality, relevance and accessibility of support

Food Roots 2 partnerships created spaces where members could consider long-term and strategic solutions to food insecurity, including wraparound support. While frontline organisations often focused on short-term delivery projects addressing immediate needs, partnerships enabled discussions on longer-term initiatives. The presence of funded coordinators boosted capacity for nurturing these strategic conversations.

Partnerships also increased awareness of each other’s services, improving signposting and support for service users. They enhanced efficiency by identifying gaps in provision and reducing duplication of similar services. Collaboration ensured that new services were strategically placed to address unmet needs and helped manage the proliferation of food aid organisations by encouraging groups to demonstrate local need before establishing additional provision. This supported a

⁶ For example: Maximising impact: the vital role of food partnerships in public health
<https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration/maximising-impact-vital-role-food-partnerships-public>

collective shift beyond emergency food aid, while maintaining food safety and standards in redistribution and service delivery. The Food Roots 2 funded individual within Southwark explained that partnership working has enabled them to develop a more “*holistic service*” which signposts to partners with relevant expertise in immigration or benefits or other areas. The coordinator in Haringey explained that partnership working led to improved relationships between voluntary sector groups, statutory services, and NHS staff, which facilitated better wraparound support and information sharing.

Food Roots 2 partnerships tailored approaches to local needs by designing targeted activities and partnering with relevant organisations. Local partners were able to recognise their respective strengths and deliver more appropriate support. In Kensington and Chelsea, organisations reported that collaborative working helped them identify which services were best suited to families and children versus adults with complex needs, allowing residents to access support in the most appropriate settings.

Some Food Roots 2 partnerships developed initiatives to standardise and improve data collection across partner organisations. This data was used to enhance service delivery, track impact, and improve reporting, which supported funding applications.

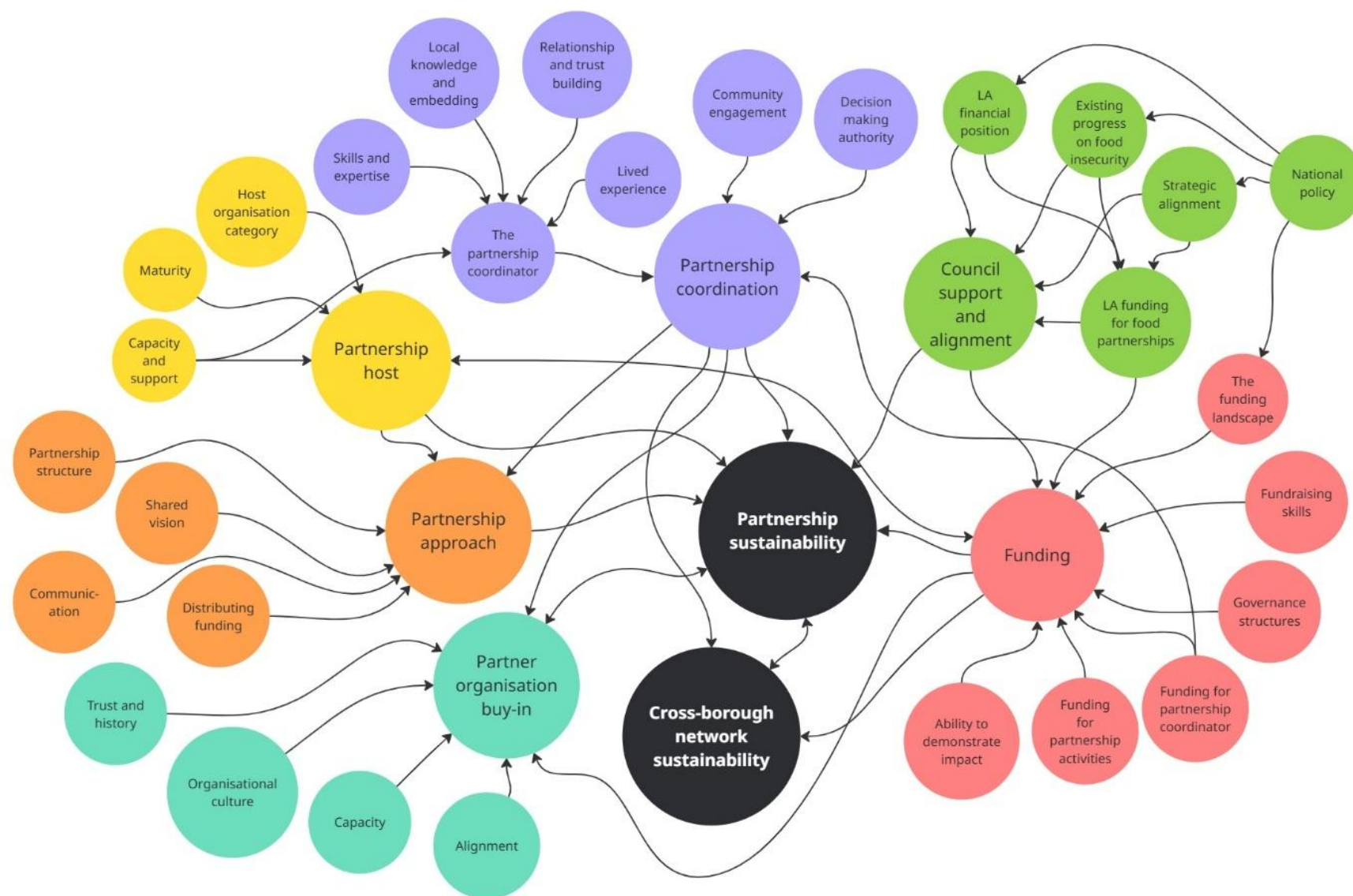
Partnership working improved visibility, representation and strategic influence

Through Food Roots 2, partnership working helped raise the profile of food aid providers within councils and communities and created opportunities for strategic engagement with policymakers. In Lambeth, the partnership has improved the visibility of food-related work in the borough, with a recognisable brand, newsletters, and a central point of contact for information and collaboration. Local partnerships undertook ground-up action and contributed to campaigns for systemic reform. They played a key role in distilling the challenges of addressing local food insecurity and advocating collectively for change, ensuring that grassroots knowledge informed policymaking. Food Roots 2 partnerships contributed to local food strategies and strengthened relationships with council members.

4.2 Factors influencing food partnership sustainability

The sustainability and resilience of Food Roots 2 partnerships, and of the wider cross-borough network, are shaped by a set of key interlinked factors (see Figure 4.1). Many of these align with themes discussed earlier in the report.

Figure 4.1 Map of factors influencing sustainability



4.2.1 Long-term funding

Coordinators consistently described funding as the most critical determinant of long-term viability. Securing longer-term investment is essential not only to maintain coordinator roles and ongoing initiatives, but also to ensure partnerships can continue maintain momentum.

As noted in Section 3.3, the existing external landscape significantly influenced progress with identifying further funding during the timeframe of Food Roots 2. Partnerships were operating within a particularly challenging funding environment shaped by years of austerity, which had left many local authorities with limited resources and reduced capacity to support community initiatives. This wider context contributed to instability across the voluntary and community sector, with many partnerships struggling to secure long-term, sustainable resources.

Stakeholders highlighted that funding bodies were simultaneously reducing or withdrawing support, with several shifting priorities away from London and towards areas with higher deprivation scores. This change in allocation criteria created additional pressures in boroughs perceived as relatively more affluent, where fewer resources were now available. For smaller grassroots organisations, which often depend on traditional grant-based funding, this resulted in a more competitive and, as some described, “hostile” environment. The uncertainty in this landscape made it difficult for partnerships to plan proactively or develop long-term fundraising strategies.

Funding for partnership coordinator

The Food Roots 2 programme highlighted the critical importance of continuity in coordination. In Food Roots 2, the time-limited funding combined with recruitment delay meant some coordinators left their role, disrupting continuity and losing the relational capital built over months of engagement.

However, securing funding specifically for partnership coordination was considered to be highly challenging. As one stakeholder observed, *“the current grant-making environment is highly competitive, particularly in London, where funders often prioritise frontline delivery over coordination roles”*.

As of June 2025, only two VCS host organisations had secured funding for a full-time coordinator role, one for approximately a year and one for two years. Four host organisations had secured part-time funding, enabling, for example, two coordinators to continue working two days per week. Two additional organisations planned to maintain coordination on a voluntary basis, with the Food Roots 2-funded individual continuing to lead alongside other responsibilities.

Funding for partnership activities

By the end of the programme only a small number of Food Roots 2 partnerships had secured short- to medium-term funding for sustaining projects and follow-on work. Partnerships without follow-on investment risked scaling back activities and terminating projects/services. Learning from Food Roots 2 shows that several factors shape a partnership’s ability to access sustainable funding, in particular:

- Availability of appropriate funding streams
- The competitiveness of the funding environment
- Fundraising skills within partner organisations
- The ability to collect and present evidence of impact.

Additionally, partnerships with formal legal structures, such as CICs, may be better positioned to attract funding due to established governance and perceived sustainability. However, partnerships can still face difficulties accessing funding, especially if they are hosted by organisations not directly involved in service delivery.

4.2.2 Effective partnership coordination

The sustainability of food partnerships is closely tied to the effectiveness of their coordination. A skilled and well-supported coordinator acts as the central driver of partnership activity, maintaining momentum, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that initiatives extend beyond immediate emergency responses to address long-term food insecurity. Coordinators are pivotal in sustaining engagement, facilitating communication, and nurturing the trust and relationships that underpin successful cross-sector collaboration.

Effective coordination can support sustainability through:

- **Maintaining momentum:** Coordinators ensure regular, structured engagement between partners, through meetings, newsletters, and shared reporting. This consistent communication keeps partners informed, encourages participation, and helps partnerships to sustain progress even when individual organisations face capacity pressures. Without a funded coordinator in post, partnerships must adapt to functioning without a central convening role – though partner organisations may not always want to pick up additional coordinator activities.
- **Protecting relational capital:** Coordinators build and maintain trust among partner organisations, which is fundamental for collaboration. Trust encourages openness, willingness to share resources, and long-term commitment. In contexts where organisations are over-stretched or sceptical due to short-term funding, a trusted coordinator can reassure partners and maintain active involvement.
- **Enabling continuity:** The presence of a coordinator mitigates the risks associated with staff turnover and short-term projects. Partnerships where coordinators remained in post beyond Food Roots 2, or were successfully transitioned into new roles, maintained institutional knowledge and ensured that relationships, lessons learned, and ongoing initiatives were preserved. Without this central role, partnerships risk reduced engagement, loss of momentum, and diminished ability to advocate for resources or influence systemic change.
- **Supporting strategic alignment:** Coordinators help to define clear roles, objectives, and structures within the partnership, balancing inclusivity with efficiency. They facilitate joint planning and problem-solving, ensuring that resources (both human and financial) are deployed effectively, reducing duplication and improving overall impact.

Based on learning from Food Roots 2, key characteristics of an effective coordinator include:

- **Skills and expertise:** Effective coordinators combine strong communication and relationship management skills with a foundational understanding of food insecurity, local food systems, and relevant policy frameworks. Additional skills in digital content creation, data management, and event organisation can also support engagement and visibility.

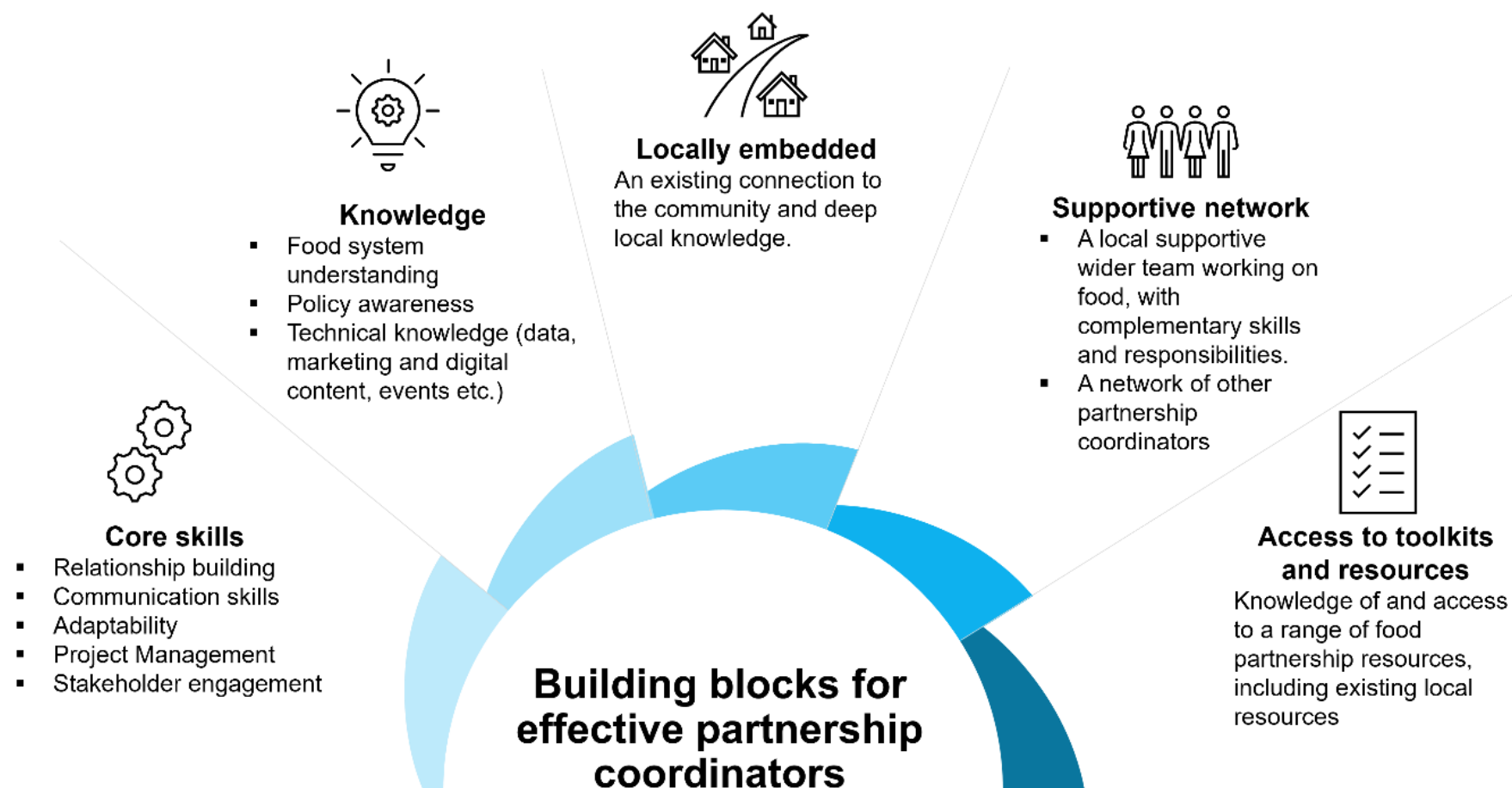
- **Local knowledge and embedding:** Coordinators drawn from existing networks or local organisations can mobilise activity more quickly. Their prior relationships and understanding of the local context foster trust, credibility, and responsiveness to emerging needs.
- **Relationship and trust-building:** Coordinators must actively cultivate trust among partners, especially in contexts where previous collaboration has been limited or short-term funding has caused scepticism. Transparent communication about resources, decisions, and progress is central to sustaining long-term commitment.
- **Experience with lived experience or community engagement:** Coordinators who understand and reflect the experiences of the communities they serve are better able to facilitate co-production, ensure proposals and initiatives meet real needs, and strengthen credibility with both partners and funders.

In addition, other conditions underpin effective coordination:

- **Capacity and support:** In some partnerships, coordinators benefited from additional staff capacity for relationship-building and coordination activities (including to meet other Food Roots 2 objectives⁷), supported through other funding or in-kind contributions. Being part of a larger team with complementary skills allowed for joint problem-solving, clear division of responsibilities, and targeted specialisation, enabling coordinators to dedicate more time to fostering relationships between VCS partners, local authorities, and food providers.
- **Decision-making authority:** Coordinators require clearly defined roles and decision-making authority to act efficiently and avoid confusion, particularly in areas with multiple overlapping networks or where more than one coordinator is in place. Clear remits prevent duplication, maintain accountability, and ensure consistent partner engagement.
- **Access to training and resources:** Coordinators require opportunities for ongoing professional development, mentoring, and access to relevant tools or guidance to build confidence, develop skills, and stay up to date with best practice in food partnership coordination. The Food Roots 2 programme demonstrated the value of such support, as coordinators who engaged with training, cross-borough learning, and peer networks felt better able to progress activities within their partnership.

⁷ For example, in Haringey a project coordinator focused on embedding Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), whilst in Lewisham a community development worker focused on promoting Healthy Start.

Figure 4.2 Building blocks for effective partnership coordination



4.2.3 Hosting arrangements

Decisions about who takes responsibility for the partnership are central to its future. By the end of Food Roots 2, all but one borough had identified an organisation to continue hosting the food partnership after the programme. As shown below (Table 4.1), there has been a noticeable shift towards council-hosted models. At the start of the programme only five partnerships sat within a local authority; by the end this had doubled to ten. This may reflect the limited capacity within many VCS organisations to continue hosting and funding coordination roles.

Table 4.1 Plans for ongoing partnership hosts and coordination activities⁸

Host organisation	# Partnerships
Council - The partnership was already or will be hosted by the council after Food Roots 2 ends.	10
Combined – The council plays a key role in the partnership, but partner organisation (or existing host organisation) may host elements of the partnership, such as a sub-network	2
Existing VCS host organisation – The Food Roots 2 funded organisation will continue to host the partnership. Some host organisations have secured for this role, but most will continue part-funded or unfunded.	Funded: 2
	Part-funded: 4
	Unfunded: 2
New or distributed VCS host organisation – Other individuals within partner organisations or related sub-networks will host the partnership. In one case it is not clear how this will work. In another case there will be a much reduced capacity.	2

The type of host organisation has a great deal of influence on shaping the way food partnerships operate, as demonstrated through Food Roots 2:

- Long-established VCS organisations with a strong local presence, such as those in Lewisham or Greenwich, were generally well placed to sustain coordination. Their deep community connections and credibility helped maintain trust and ensure that partnerships reflected local priorities. In contrast, newer or less embedded VCS hosts, such as Kingsley Hall in Barking and Dagenham or Feast with Us in Redbridge, often struggled to establish their role within borough networks and to secure long-term recognition.
- Partnerships hosted by infrastructure or support organisations, such as Kensington and Chelsea Social Council or Croydon Voluntary Action, often provided tailored support to a broad range of partners. These organisations were able to connect groups across the borough, share opportunities, and offer strategic representation for the VCS, which helped to distribute the benefits of Food Roots 2 funding more evenly and strengthen collaboration.
- Council-hosted partnerships presented a different set of opportunities and risks. In some areas, integration with local authorities gave partnerships greater stability, closer alignment with statutory services, and access to policy levers. However, several coordinators reflected that these arrangements risked

⁸ This table includes 22 boroughs (Camden and Redbridge listed separately). The information used to complete this table draws on evidence provided by coordinators during the exit interviews and during the closing workshop session. The table is a static snapshot of future plans and may present outdated information. The process for deciding how to host the partnership is dynamic and ongoing, some partnerships were still seeking additional funding or confirming future plans.

becoming more council-led than partnership-led, limiting independence and undermining trust with VCS partners. For example, one coordinator said, “*I feel like if we were hosted by the local authority I wouldn't have been able to engage with anybody*”. Historic funding cuts and perceptions of unequal power also made engagement more challenging in some boroughs. It was also noted that partnerships embedded within local authorities may mean they are ineligible for certain grant funding.

The learning from Food Roots 2 suggests that no hosting model is inherently better than another. As summarised in Table 4.2 below, VCS delivery partners bring strong community links, infrastructure organisations provide borough-wide coordination and support, and councils offer influence and resources. What matters most is that hosting arrangements are transparent, capacity is sufficient, and trust between partners is actively nurtured. Without these conditions, partnerships risk becoming fragile regardless of where they are hosted.

Table 4.2 Partnership host organisation categories

	VCS delivery partners	VCS infrastructure or support partners	Council partners
Description	Organisations that directly provide services to residents, such as food aid, wraparound support, or social initiatives. Levels of prior involvement in partnership work vary: some have collaborated with other partners, while others have experience chairing or leading a partnership.	Organisations that support other VCS groups across the borough, fostering collaboration, sharing training and funding opportunities, and representing VCS interests at a strategic level. Some may also provide direct services to residents.	Local authorities that engage with VCS organisations via the partnership, providing policy oversight, statutory alignment, and access to council resources.
Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct experience delivering frontline services Deep understanding of challenges facing residents and food aid providers Close connections to local communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise in supporting and connecting VCS organisations Broad networks across the borough Ability to coordinate, provide guidance, and build capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy influence and strategic decision-making Access to statutory resources, data, and funding streams Ability to align partnership initiatives with wider local authority priorities
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balancing frontline service delivery with strategic coordination responsibilities Limited capacity for broader partnership engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk of being perceived as “detached” from frontline realities Dependence on relationships with delivery partners for effective influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building trust with VCS and community stakeholders, especially where historic funding cuts and power imbalances exist Risk of partnerships becoming council-led rather than community-led Potential slow decision-making due to bureaucratic processes

4.2.4 Council support and alignment

During Food Roots 2, strategic alignment between local authority priorities and partnership objectives was a key enabler of progress. Even where partnerships were not hosted by councils, securing council support proved important for legitimacy, access to resources, and long-term sustainability. In Lewisham, for example, the partnership's focus on improving uptake of Healthy Start matched council priorities. This alignment unlocked additional resources, including funding for promotional materials and council support for a data-led approach to outreach. In contrast, in some boroughs the council and the Food Roots 2 funded partnership worked largely in parallel, which led to duplication and missed opportunities for collaboration. In one case, the council was leading a borough-wide food partnership registered with the Sustainable Food Places programme, while the Food Roots 2 grantee led a smaller food aid network, creating confusion about remit and ownership.

The extent of council engagement was heavily shaped by financial context. Local authorities were operating in a climate of severe budget cuts, rising demand, and increasing costs. In some areas, councils were able to provide funding for food partnership roles, dedicate officer time, or integrate partnership work into wider strategies. Lewisham, for instance, secured two years of public health funding to sustain partnership coordination. However, in many boroughs, council financial support was not available, leaving partnerships with uncertain futures. Even when councils did fund partnership roles, this could create tensions: coordinators sometimes felt obliged to comply with council preferences, undermining independence and raising concerns among VCS partners about power imbalances.

Box 4.1 Balancing council involvement with wider partnership priorities

In one borough, the partnership coordinator was positioned within a VCS organisation but funded by the council. The coordinator explained that this structure created tensions and challenges. The council was a member of the partnership and sat on the steering group, while also acting as the funding body. This dual role meant the coordinator felt obliged to report to and comply with the council's views, even when these conflicted with wider partnership perspectives. There was also a perception that the council's public health team could be overly controlling and paternalistic in decision-making, which risked undermining the partnership's independence.

The degree to which councils had already embedded food insecurity within local strategies also influenced partnership progress. In boroughs with up-to-date, action-oriented food poverty action plans, partnerships were able to build on existing momentum and position themselves within a broader policy framework. Where councils were less engaged, partnerships often had to focus first on building credibility and trust with local authority stakeholders before meaningful collaboration could develop.

Learning from Food Roots 2 suggests that council alignment is critical regardless of hosting arrangements. Even where VCS or infrastructure organisations act as hosts, council support helps partnerships gain visibility, secure resources, and link into wider statutory systems. Councils can provide funding, policy influence, and strategic reach. However, partnerships may work best when council involvement is balanced with strong VCS leadership, ensuring they remain community-led and independent. An ideal model is one where councils act as supportive allies, offering resources and alignment, without dominating decision-making. Achieving this balance enables partnerships to benefit from council support while maintaining the trust and autonomy needed to represent community voices effectively.

4.2.5 Partner buy-in and commitment

The level of partner buy-in and commitment underpins whether collaborative working is prioritised and maintained over time. Across Food Roots 2, the strength and durability of partnerships were directly shaped by the willingness and capacity of members to engage with activities, contribute resources, and align with a shared vision.

Given the pressures on frontline services, full engagement from all partners is often unrealistic. Adopting a “coalition of the willing” approach (working with those ready to collaborate) can be more productive, allowing partnerships to test new approaches and deliver initiatives through a dedicated, engaged subset of organisations.

Drawing on learning from partnerships participating in the Food Roots 2 programme, sustained partner engagement is influenced by:

- **Partnership structure:** Successful models balance breadth with depth: broad membership networks provide inclusivity and legitimacy, while smaller, focused working groups or sub-networks enable a committed core to deliver projects efficiently. This approach is particularly effective in boroughs where many members are volunteer-led organisations with limited capacity, as it reduces the burden on the wider network while sustaining progress. As one stakeholder noted, *“smaller working groups really helped. It was easier for smaller organisations to join a half-hour Teams meeting than to attend big, in-person sessions”*. Early attention to balancing inclusivity with efficiency was critical to sustaining momentum and ensuring partner commitment.
- **Developing a shared vision:** Partnerships that establish a unified vision and clear objectives at the outset are better aligned and more collaborative. Even informal networks benefit from participating in structured processes to define their roles and goals, as this creates clarity and focus, enabling progress towards long-term, sustainable solutions to food insecurity.
- **Communication:** Transparent and consistent communication also proved vital. Regular updates on progress, activities, and impact helped build trust in the partnership’s credibility and demonstrated the value of collaboration. Partnerships that articulated clear objectives and a unified vision at the outset were better able to sustain alignment, even when membership changed over time.
- **Distributing funding:** In some cases, dispersing small amounts of funding to partners improved engagement by compensating organisations for their contributions and supporting more consistent participation in partnership activities. Providing resources in this way also created accountability, as funded organisations could be held to agreed outputs. However, this approach required careful management to ensure scalability and sustainability, and to avoid perceptions of unfairness or competition. A clear and transparent process was essential, particularly where only some partners received funding, so that the rationale and criteria for allocation were well understood across the partnership.
- **Coordinator role:** Coordinators played a pivotal role in sustaining buy-in, acting as convenors, communicators, and relationship-builders. Regular meetings facilitated by coordinators created spaces for sharing challenges and solutions, and visible leadership helped maintain momentum. The most effective coordinators combined skills, local knowledge, and lived experience, and those

drawn from within the local VCS were often able to mobilise more quickly due to pre-existing trust.

However, Food Roots 2 also highlighted several challenges that could impede ongoing partner buy-in and commitment:

- **Trust and history:** In areas where previous partnership efforts had faltered, or where power imbalances were perceived, distrust slowed progress. Coordinators needed to invest considerable time in building relationships, fostering openness, and demonstrating fairness.
- **Organisational culture and priorities:** Some partners were reluctant to adapt entrenched practices, such as reliance on food aid models, and questioned the added value of collaborative working. Fear of competition for scarce resources also limited willingness to share or compromise.
- **Capacity:** Many organisations, particularly smaller community-led groups, were overstretched and unable to participate consistently. This limited diversity of input and reduced the inclusivity of decision-making. Where the value of partnership working was unclear, attendance at meetings often declined.
- **Alignment:** In some boroughs, multiple uncoordinated networks operated in parallel, creating confusion and reducing clarity about purpose and roles. Without alignment, momentum was difficult to maintain.
- **Funding uncertainty:** The short duration of Food Roots 2, coupled with the absence of clear continuation funding, created uncertainty. Some partners hesitated to commit fully, doubting the sustainability of the initiative beyond the initial grant period.

4.3 Recommendations for food partnerships

The Food Roots 2 programme demonstrates that strong, well-coordinated partnerships are a crucial mechanism for addressing food insecurity in a strategic, locally responsive way. While the specific context and scale of partnerships may differ, there are clear lessons about the roles, structures, and approaches that enable partnerships to thrive over time.

The recommendations below are organised according to partnership maturity, recognising that different stages require distinct focus areas and resources.

4.3.1 Recommendations for new partnerships

Focus: Establish the foundation and credibility of the partnership by building relationships, identifying quick wins, and creating visibility in the local community.

- **Define purpose and scope clearly:** Partnerships should be formed with a clear purpose: what are you trying to achieve, and why? Avoid creating new partnerships if one already exists unless it serves a distinct and complementary purpose.
- **Establish a shared vision and principles:** Priority should be given to establishing what the partnership is aiming for and how it will get there. Use Terms of Reference or governance documents to codify shared principles and clarify expectations.
- **Secure dedicated coordination capacity from the outset:** A partnership cannot form or expand without a driving force. A coordinator role is essential in

the early stages to invest the time in building relationships, convening partners, and creating visibility in the community. This work is often slow and invisible but lays the foundation for sustainability.

- **Distribute coordination across multiple roles where possible:** Avoid over-reliance on a single individual. Coordination can be embedded across roles in different organisations with complementary skills (e.g., community engagement, strategy, data). This strengthens networks, reduces risk if one person leaves, and enables broader reach.
- **Recognise and value the coordinator ‘movement builder’ role:** Coordinators provide vision, build credibility, and act as catalysts for systemic change. Funders and host organisations should acknowledge the complexity of this role and ensure coordinators have the authority, support, and resources to convene effectively.
- **Build on existing activity and identify quick wins:** Map existing services and connect with organisations already delivering food support. Focus on small, visible wins to build momentum, credibility, and partner buy-in. For example, focusing on improving distribution of surplus food can bring partners together initially, creating a base for wider strategy and advocacy work.
- **Draw on existing resources:** There is considerable guidance, frameworks, and examples that exist online of how to set up a partnership (e.g., from Sustainable Food Places⁹). Use these to inform governance, coordination, and activity planning.

4.3.2 Recommendations for emerging partnerships

Focus: Strengthen collaboration, build trust and visibility, and demonstrate clear added value to partners to encourage active participation.

- **Frame the partnership as offering clear added value:** Approach partners with a tangible value proposition (e.g., reducing duplication, pooling resources, sharing storage). Emphasise that collaboration makes their work easier and more impactful, rather than adding burden.
- **Maintain the right involvement of partners:** Partnerships should be open and inclusive but also not everyone needs to be involved in every decision or meeting. Focus on “coalitions of the willing” and work with partners who are committed to change.
- **Align with local authority priorities and strategies:** Engage proactively with councils, contribute to strategy development, and demonstrate how partnership work delivers on local priorities. Alignment increases credibility and opens doors for longer-term collaboration and funding.
- **Invest in credibility, visibility, and relationship-building:** Use social media, local events, and regular communications to raise awareness. Organise regular meetings, site visits, and peer exchanges to build trust and understanding between partners.
- **Incentivise participation:** Attract partners by involving funders, council representatives, or organisations offering practical resources. Recognise

⁹ For example: Stories from Sustainable Food Places (2017).
https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/files/SFP_Toolkit/Food_Partnership_Structures.pdf

volunteers and smaller organisations with small gestures (e.g., food at meetings, covering travel costs).

- **Co-design partnership arrangements:** Ensure partners are involved in deciding meeting frequency, format, and content. Overloading partners with meetings can reduce engagement; aim for a sustainable cadence (e.g., every 2–3 months).

4.3.3 Recommendations for established partnerships

Focus: Maintain long-term effectiveness by diversifying resources, supporting wellbeing, and adapting the model to changing local contexts.

- **Regularly review membership:** Regularly review who is around the table, their objectives, and how this affects the partnership's work – this includes assessing how new partners or changes in participation affect group dynamics and the direction of the partnership. This ensures the partnership remains effective and harmonious over time.
- **Diversify funding and hosting models:** Explore hosting across multiple organisations and pursue a mix of funding sources, including collective bids, to ensure continuity beyond short-term programmes.
- **Centre wellbeing and sustainability of staff and volunteers:** Acknowledge the emotional and mental strain of frontline roles. Build spaces for peer support, reflection, and shared problem-solving.
- **Adapt the partnership model to local context:** Reflect on local history, scale, leadership structures, and community needs. Continuously review what the partnership does best, where gaps exist, and how it can adapt to remain relevant and effective.

5 Programme impact and legacy

The Food Roots 2 programme delivered a range of immediate impacts and laid important foundations for longer-term change. Whilst systemic change was not possible in the timeframe of the programme, Food Roots 2 helped reframe how food insecurity is understood, facilitating the piloting of more sustainable and preventative models of support, and strengthened the capacity of food partnerships. The programme also created important legacies which provide a platform for future action.

The sections that follow examine perceived impacts of Food Roots 2 for partnerships and London residents, legacy effects, as well as remaining opportunities and challenges, with recommendations for next steps.

5.1 Programme impacts

5.1.1 Impacts on food insecurity in London

The Food Roots 2 programme encouraged a reframing of food insecurity: away from charitable food aid as an inevitable or sufficient response, and towards cash-first, preventative, and dignity-centred models. While the programme did not fully realise the ambition of moving “beyond food aid” to tackle food insecurity within the programme’s short timeframe, Food Roots 2 supported local food partnerships to test novel approaches, strengthen relationships, and begin shifting practice towards more systemic and preventative models of support.

Coordinators agreed that Food Roots 2 helped embed the concept of sustainable food systems within local partnerships and showed that change is both possible and valued at a local level. It encouraged local areas to think strategically about food, moving beyond emergency aid and considering long-term models such as food pantries, social supermarkets and other more holistic forms of support. Specifically:

- Partnerships experimented with embedding advice on benefits, debt, housing, and employment in community hubs, testing small-scale cash-first pilots, and aligning food support with local health and wellbeing initiatives (as discussed in Section 3.2). Whilst most activity was conducted at a pilot scale; this offered a visible demonstration of how to connect food aid with wider support. For example, in Barnet, the Digital Champions scheme connected residents with advice and digital skills alongside food support. In Kensington and Chelsea, the Food and Advice Network Champion programme created trusted referral routes between food aid providers and advice services.
- Food Roots 2 also supported long-term initiatives that aimed to strength local food systems. In Kingston, foodbanks collaborated to share a donated electric van, enhancing the sustainability of food distribution. In Redbridge and Havering, Food for All secured a warehouse lease, enabling storage and redistribution of £1.7–2.4 million of frozen food annually. Collective buying schemes advocated by Newham led to cost savings and improved efficiency, and partnerships successfully attracted additional funding for community cooking and wraparound projects. In several boroughs, food growing projects received seed funding and were able to expand, restart, or establish new community gardens, helping to embed food education and local production.

- In some areas, voluntary organisations began to re-articulate their missions, shifting from a focus on “feeding people” to supporting community resilience, reducing poverty, or promoting food justice.

Despite the progress noted above, the short-term nature of the funding meant many partnerships and organisations often felt unable to plan beyond the programme’s timeframe. Coordinators and staff often focused on immediate delivery and managing existing projects, rather than developing longer-term strategies or securing sustainable infrastructure. As a result, there remained uncertainty over whether gains made during the programme would be maintained or scaled once funding ended. Some initiatives, such as new distribution hubs or wraparound support models, also will require ongoing financial and operational support, and partners expressed concern about the continuity of services, the retention of staff roles, and the ability to sustain community engagement over time.

The experience of Food Roots 2 highlights several important lessons for tackling food insecurity:

- **Systemic change takes time:** Moving from food aid to more strategic, sustainable solutions cannot be achieved in a 12-24 month timeframe. It is a gradual process requiring time, patience, long-term investment, and cultural change.
- **Partnerships are key drivers:** Local food partnerships are well placed to lead cultural and systemic change, but their ability to do so depends on adequate resources. Smaller organisations in particular need investment in staffing, infrastructure, and governance if they are to move beyond crisis response.
- **Small steps matter:** Even incremental progress, such as introducing referral systems or shared signposting, represents meaningful milestones when judged against a borough’s starting point.
- **Strong, stable leadership and effective governance are essential:** Partnerships with engaged boards and committed leaders were better able to co-produce integrated services, develop clear Theories of Change, and move from reactive food aid towards holistic support. Where governance capacity was weaker, embedding change proved far more difficult.

5.1.2 Impacts on London residents

Coordinators highlighted a range of impacts on London residents. However, while the programme may have contributed to these outcomes, attributing changes solely to Food Roots 2 is challenging, as some benefits may also reflect residents’ prior engagement with existing local services.

- **Awareness and knowledge:** Food Roots 2 contributed to increased awareness of healthy and sustainable eating practices, local food resources, and Healthy Start schemes. For instance, in Redbridge, partnership members who had previously been unaware of Healthy Start were able to share clear guidance with children’s centres and community groups, directly benefiting children’s access to fruit and vegetables.
- **Access to affordable and culturally appropriate food:** Food Roots 2 supported initiatives that expanded access to affordable, ethically sourced, and culturally relevant food. The Solidarity Supermarket at the Hornbeam Centre offered subsidised Whole Foods on a tiered pricing system and accepted Healthy Start vouchers, enabling families experiencing food insecurity to access

nutritious food without stigma. In Brent, the Alexandra Rose partnership enabled community cooking courses where participants could learn to cook using fresh ingredients, supported by AR vouchers and onsite childcare. These initiatives not only provided material support but also reduced the stigma often associated with accessing food aid.

- **Practical support and navigation of services:** The programme facilitated the creation of practical tools such as digital food maps, newsletters, and borough-wide food support directories. For example, in Merton, the coordinator developed a borough-wide food support map that identified food distribution points, wraparound support, and community initiatives, now published on the Council's Cost of Living webpage for residents. In Redbridge, an unofficial foodbank list was shared widely, including by a local church, helping homeless people and other residents locate support quickly. In Islington, an interactive mapping tool for food provision was developed, which supported residents in locating affordable food and informed food choices. These resources enabled residents, social workers, and prescribers to locate free and subsidised food offers efficiently. Such tools were particularly valuable for homeless populations and other vulnerable groups, improving their ability to access appropriate support.
- **Community cohesion and social impact:** Food Roots 2 strengthened community connections and social interaction among residents, fostering both social and mental wellbeing. For example, the Nourish Hub reported that running regular NourishEd cooking courses and other projects encouraged more people to attend, creating opportunities for residents to meet, interact, and build relationships. Similarly, Sufra's Community Wellbeing Project, highlighted cases where participants experienced reduced isolation and improved mental health; one mother described feeling she "found her personality again" through meeting others, joining a WhatsApp group, and forming friendships that positively impacted her family life. Elsewhere, workshops, volunteer-led initiatives, and collaborative activities also provided informal spaces for social engagement, enabling peer support and mutual aid.

5.2 Programme legacy

The Food Roots 2 programme demonstrated that sustained, well-supported and funded local food partnerships can generate meaningful impacts in reducing food insecurity across London. This section describes the main legacies

5.2.1 Strengthened partnerships and networks

A recurring theme was that Food Roots 2 provided the structure and momentum for food partnerships to grow. Food aid providers, advice services, and wraparound support organisations were able to connect, share resources, and coordinate more effectively. For example, in Enfield, local organisations collaborated with a GP to deliver emotional intelligence and food poverty education for young people, demonstrating cross-sector engagement.

Food Roots 2 coordinators played a pivotal role in convening groups, building trust, and developing systems that otherwise "may be gone in the blink of an eye" once funding ends. For example, in Lambeth, Food Roots 2 funding enabled the partnership coordinator to take a lead role in developing a three-year strategy and begin the process of becoming an independent organisation. However, without continued support, the partnership coordinator feared the work "*just won't go*

anywhere” and much of the progress could be lost. Similarly, in Lewisham, the Food Roots 2 programme helped grow a dedicated team working on food, but gaps in funding for coordinator roles were seen as a real threat to sustaining momentum.

5.2.2 Knowledge and skills from capacity building

A significant legacy of Food Roots 2 lies in the knowledge and skills developed. Through the programme’s capacity-building offer, coordinators reported increased confidence in areas such as monitoring and evaluation, partnership facilitation, and systems thinking. Many gained practical tools for governance, planning, and leadership, which enhanced their ability to convene diverse stakeholders and sustain collaborative work.

The programme’s learning curriculum, peer support structures, and action learning sets helped coordinators strengthen their professional networks. This, in turn, enabled coordinators to share learning and strategies with each other, for example around setting up food pantries. For instance, Hackney Food Bank reported adopting “Food Ladders” and improving wraparound support models through learning from other boroughs. Partnerships such as Newham Food Alliance created associate membership offers for neighbouring boroughs, facilitating shared training and monthly meetings.

However, skills development was not always embedded institutionally. High turnover meant that, in some areas, knowledge remained with individuals rather than organisations, creating a risk of loss when staff moved on. This highlights the importance of pairing individual capacity-building with organisational development and succession planning, so that skills and learning are retained within partnerships. Nonetheless, many coordinators also suggested they would carry their expertise into other organisations or roles, ensuring that Food Roots 2’s knowledge and ways of working remained within the wider system.

5.2.3 Increased local visibility and credibility

Another key outcome was Food Roots 2’s influence on councils and policy agendas. In several boroughs, coordinators reported that the programme gave them both the mandate and the credibility to engage in strategic conversations about food insecurity that might previously have been out of reach.

Partnerships reported increased engagement from local authorities, expanded membership (including council departments), and greater visibility within decision-making structures. In some cases, councils began to take more responsibility for supporting and hosting food partnerships in a consistent way. For instance, Redbridge was able to showcase its work in Sustains Good Food Local Report, an opportunity that would not have existed without Food Roots 2. Another partnership coordinator noted that Food Roots 2 had significantly raised the profile of her borough’s food partnership and expanded its membership by over a dozen organisations, including council teams.

As one participant reflected, *“having Food Roots as an overall structure has stretched out the ability and influence of food partnerships for a very long time”*.

5.3 Looking ahead

The progress achieved during the programme provides a strong platform for future action. There is a clear opportunity to consolidate the successes of Food Roots 2,

address the gaps identified, and sustain momentum towards more systemic, preventative responses to food insecurity across London. In the absence of a further Food Roots 2 funding, two important mechanisms have been established for carrying this forward.

5.3.1 London Sustainable Food Places

Food Roots 2 created strong networks across boroughs, giving coordinators access to peer support, shared learning, and opportunities for joint problem solving. These connections were highly valued.

One of the most significant legacies of Food Roots 2 has been the establishment of the London Sustainable Food Places (SFP) Network. Prior to Food Roots 2, there was no London-wide structure for food partnerships to collaborate, share learning, or collectively influence policy. The programme created the relationships, trust, and momentum needed to make this possible.

The network began to take shape towards the end of the Food Roots 2 extension period, with three food partnerships (Southwark, GCDA and Bexley) connecting and initiating discussions with Sustain and Food Matters. A first meeting was held in June 2025, with early sessions focusing on developing Terms of Reference, shared goals, and mapping member priorities.

The London SFP Network is characterised by three features:

- **Inclusivity** – it is open to all food partnerships in London, regardless of formal SFP membership, provided they share similar values and ethos.
- **Co-development** – activities and aims are determined collectively by members, rather than imposed externally.
- **Whole-systems focus** – adopts a systems approach, addressing food insecurity within wider contexts such as health, climate, biodiversity, and community well-being. This encourages joined-up working and cross-sector collaboration.

At the time of data collection, the network was supported by a small SFP grant and in-kind staff time from Sustain, alongside members contributing hosting and administrative capacity.

Even at this early stage, the network has provided:

- A trusted forum for peer learning, knowledge exchange, and mutual support.
- Opportunities for cross-borough collaboration, including the potential for joint funding bids.
- A collective voice for engagement with regional bodies such as the GLA and London Food Board.

Momentum for the network reflects both the appetite for ongoing collaboration and the strength of the relationships built through Food Roots 2. Although coordinator turnover has affected some boroughs, many partnerships remain engaged, demonstrating demand for a shared platform.

Longer-term ambitions for the London SFP Network include:

- Acting as a recognised strategic actor in London food policy.
- Strengthening the resilience of the food system through coordinated action across health, climate, biodiversity, and community well-being agendas.
- Serving as a prototype for other regional SFP networks across the UK, where similar activity emerging (e.g., Greater Manchester and the North East).

It was highlighted that continued investment would be important to secure the sustainability and impact of the network. While the lightweight, member-led model is viewed as a strength, its ability to expand and influence at a strategic level will likely depend on more stable resources.

Overall, the creation of the London SFP Network represents a clear legacy of Food Roots 2. It consolidates the relationships, systems thinking, and collaborative ethos fostered by the programme, and provides a mechanism through which food partnerships can sustain momentum beyond the funded period.

5.3.2 Legacy Toolkit

As part of its legacy planning, the Food Roots 2 programme developed a legacy toolkit to document learning, practice, and outputs generated during delivery. The toolkit was co-produced by delivery partners, partnership coordinators, and wider collaborators, and was intended to support both current and future food partnership coordinators. Its primary purpose was to help partnerships retain institutional memory, manage transitions, and embed sustainable and resilient approaches to addressing food insecurity beyond the funded period.

The process of developing the toolkit involved collating both programme-level resources (applicable to any London borough) and **borough-specific materials** prepared by each partnership.

Programme-level resources include:

- A curated index of best-practice guides and tools aligned with Food Roots 2's four key objectives, covering topics such as:
 - Monitoring, evaluation and impact
 - Effective food partnership coordination
 - Community food support
 - Cash-first approaches
 - Asset-based community development
 - Tackling food waste
 - Food growing
 - General food system resources
- Slides and recordings from online learning sessions delivered during the programme.
- Templates and planning tools developed collaboratively through the learning curriculum.

Partnership-specific resources include:

- A **reflective template**, completed by each coordinator, which summarises:
 - Governance structure (e.g. existence and operation of a steering group)
 - Strategic priorities (past, current, and future), and how they evolved
 - Key achievements and milestones during Food Roots 2
 - Case studies of significant projects or interventions
 - Enablers, challenges, and key learning points
 - Recommendations for future coordinators (e.g. what worked well, what to avoid)
- A **technical audit** of outputs, plans, and templates produced during the programme.

- Supporting documentation and evidence, such as funding applications, event materials, and meeting notes.

Collating this information created a tangible legacy of the Food Roots 2 programme¹⁰. The toolkit was intended to provide a live resource that enables future coordinators to understand what was achieved, what challenges were encountered, and how partnerships evolved. In boroughs where the coordinator role has ended, or where no dedicated post is currently in place, the toolkit functions as a “time capsule” to support potential re-engagement.

By combining structured reflection with practical tools, the legacy toolkit offers a mechanism for embedding learning and sustaining practice beyond the life of the programme. It reflects Food Roots 2’s emphasis on knowledge sharing, systems thinking, and long-term capacity building across London’s food partnerships.

5.4 Recommendations and next steps

Food Roots 2 demonstrated that local food partnerships can deliver real progress when given the right conditions. To consolidate and scale this, ongoing investment, strategic support, and capacity-building are essential. Equally, coordinators, delivery partners and wider stakeholder stressed that food insecurity cannot be solved by local-level innovation alone – the challenge is structural, requiring national change and long-term commitment.

5.4.1 Recommendations for funders

- **Invest in coordination capacity:** Funders should provide secure, multi-year investment in borough food partnership coordinators. Coordinators are the backbone of partnership working, holding relationships, facilitating collaboration, and driving forward local strategies. Without stability, partnerships risk losing institutional memory and reverting to fragmented, short-term projects. At least five years of sustained support would allow partnerships to embed systemic change and build trust across sectors.
- **Resource cross-borough collaboration:** A modest but strategic investment in the London SFP Network could unlock significant value. The network has emerged as a central platform for peer learning, joint action, and shared advocacy, enabling boroughs to learn from one another and amplify local voices in regional and national debates. Dedicated funding would help consolidate its role, reduce duplication, and increase collective impact.
- **Support organisational development:** Smaller community organisations often operate with limited infrastructure and are vulnerable to funding shocks. Funders should provide resources for governance, systems, and workforce development so that these groups can engage effectively in partnership structures and deliver work sustainably. This is particularly important where community-led organisations are central to trusted, grassroots provision.
- **Support realistic and proportionate evaluation and monitoring:** Local partnerships need resourcing to collect, analyse, and share data on food insecurity and their wider impacts. This not only strengthens accountability but also provides the evidence base to guide investment decisions, shape advocacy, and demonstrate the value of cash first and preventative approaches.

¹⁰ At the time of writing this report, not all partnerships had submitted completed toolkits.

- **Fund for strategy, not just delivery:** Short-term, reactive funding cycles trap frontline organisations in crisis response. Funders should explicitly resource time and capacity for reflection, planning, and innovation. This enables partners to look beyond immediate pressures, develop long-term strategies, and avoid inadvertently reinforcing charitable food aid systems.

5.4.2 Recommendations for local, regional and national actors

- **Local authorities:** Councils should embed action on food insecurity within broader agendas such as health inequalities, poverty reduction, housing, and climate policy. This ensures that food insecurity is addressed as a structural issue. Clear local objectives, backed by aligned resources, can prevent duplication and give frontline actors greater clarity.
- **GLA and regional bodies:** The GLA should work closely with the London SFP Network to facilitate coordination across boroughs, promote shared standards, and provide consistent guidance. Learning generated in London must not remain siloed; it should be shared nationally as a resource for other regions. The GLA should also use its influence to embed cash support and advice as the default model of local authority crisis provision, ensuring dignity and accessibility.
- **National government:** The national government must address the underlying drivers of food insecurity, including low wages, inadequate welfare, and high housing costs. In addition, it should:
 - Define and promote ‘cash first’ approaches: provide clear guidance to local authorities that direct support should prioritise cash and income maximisation, coupled with advice services.
 - Create a permanent local crisis support fund: similar to the Scottish Welfare Fund¹¹, this would provide predictable, dignified crisis support as part of the social security system rather than temporary, ad hoc schemes.

5.4.3 Recommendations for future programme design

- **Embed longer timescales:** Systemic and cultural change requires time. Future programmes should run on five-year horizons or longer, providing the stability to plan strategically and build genuine partnership capacity.
- **Design flexible delivery models:** Each partnership and borough will have a different starting point, with varying levels of capacity, infrastructure, and political support. Programmes must allow flexibility in design and delivery.
- **Prioritise cultural change:** Effective partnership working depends not only on funding but on shifts in practice and mindset. Programmes should invest in training, facilitation, and leadership development to help achieve this.
- **Build in succession planning:** Staff turnover is inevitable. Programmes should therefore include mechanisms to sustain progress when key staff (e.g., coordinators) move on – for example, legacy toolkits, peer mentoring, or shared documentation practices. This ensures continuity and reduces the risk of partnerships losing momentum.

¹¹ Scottish Welfare Fund: <https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund>

Annexes

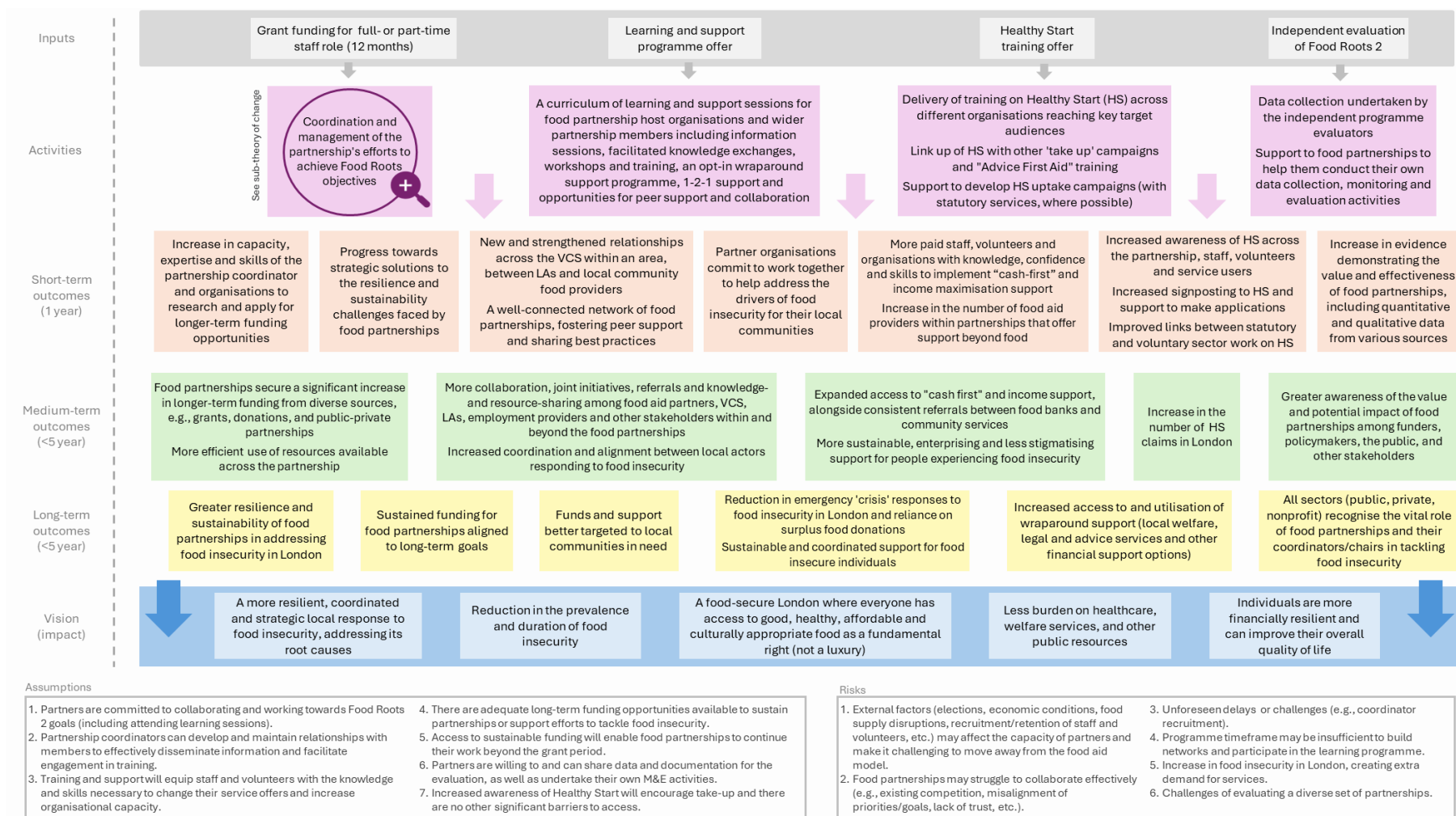
Annex 1: Theory of Change

Annex 2: Detailed evaluation methodology

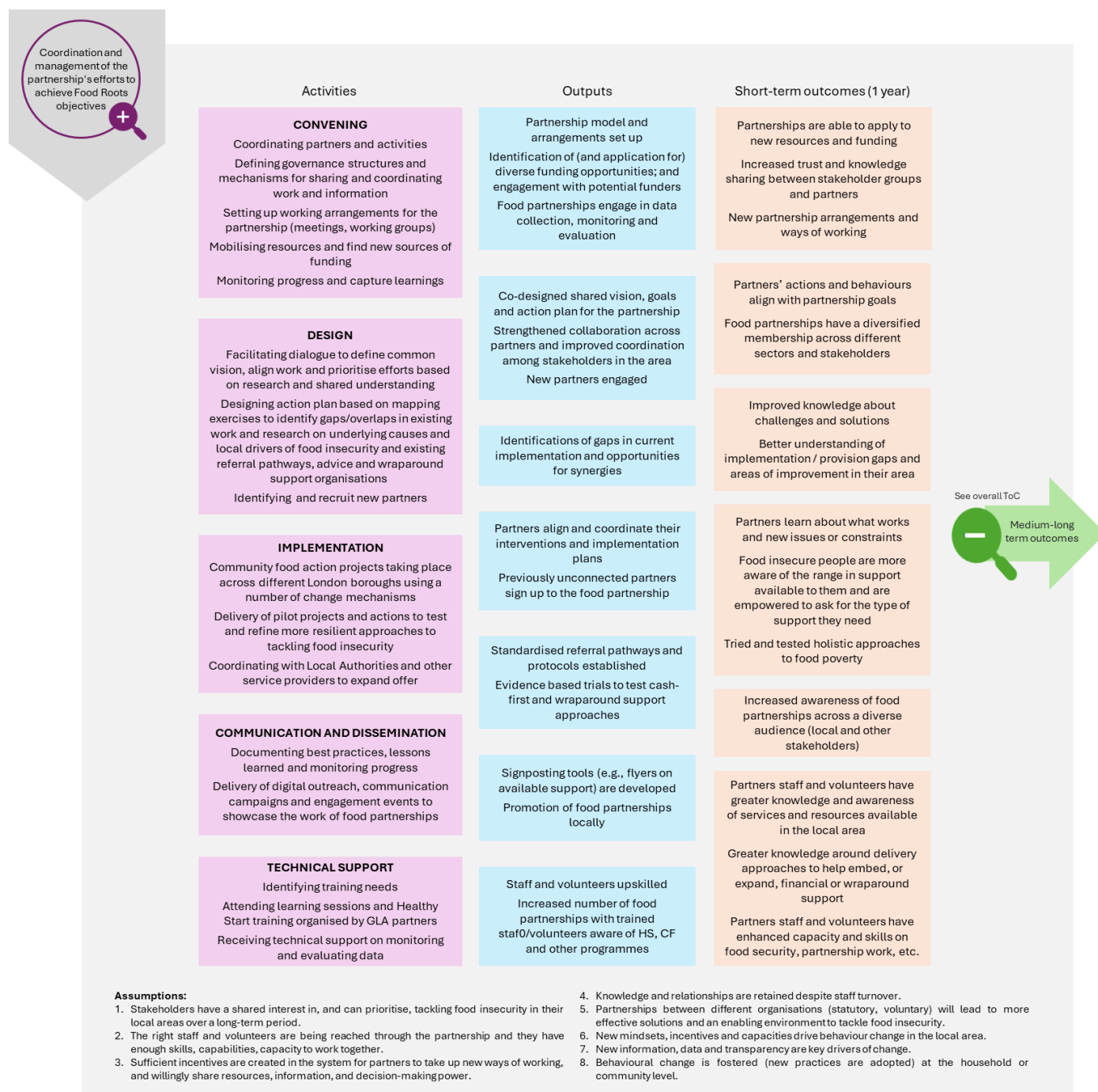
Annex 3: Monitoring and evaluation support

Annex 1 Programme Theory of Change (ToC)

The Food Roots 2 ToC was developed to set out how the programme's activities and support were expected to contribute to its overarching aim: enabling local food partnerships to move beyond emergency food aid towards more systemic, preventative and sustainable responses to food insecurity. The ToC provides a framework for understanding the programme logic, underpinning assumptions, and the expected pathways of change.



The more detailed partnership ‘sub-theory’ below focuses on how strengthening local partnerships contributes to systemic change.



Annex 2 Detailed evaluation methodology

A2.1 Introduction

This annex provides further detail on the methods used to deliver and support the evaluation of the Food Roots 2 programme.

The evaluation was designed to be both rigorous and collaborative, with priority given to qualitative approaches to capture outcomes, challenges, and learning across the programme. As the evaluation progressed, the overall approach was adapted in response to emerging needs and opportunities. This included the introduction of more in-depth, focused work such as additional thematic deep dives and further rounds of interviews with coordinators, which helped to capture the nuances of delivery and provide a richer understanding of partnership experiences over time.

A2.2 Qualitative interviews

Interviews formed the core qualitative strand, designed to provide deep, narrative evidence from multiple vantage points. Approximately 117 semi-structured interviews were conducted between January 2024 and June 2025, covering:

- **A longitudinal programme of interviews with the cohort of 21 local coordinators (n=62):** This was structured into three waves:
 - Initial “orientation” interviews at programme inception (January-February 2024, n=21) to establish baseline context, aims, and anticipated challenges;
 - Mid-point interviews (June-July 2024, n=20) tracking progress, emerging successes, and barriers; and
 - Final “exit” interviews at the end of the funding period (April-June 2025, n=21) capturing end-of-funding reflections on achievements, impact, and sustainability.
- **Strategic interviews (~n=26):** Mid-point and final interviews were undertaken with strategic/wider stakeholders to explore programme design, support delivery, and policy relevance of the Food Roots 2 programme.
 - At the mid-point, 10 in-depth interviews were undertaken with delivery partners from seven organisations, including Citizens Advice, Civil Society Consulting, First Love Foundation, Sustain, Food Matters, TSIC, and the GLA. These interviews provided detailed insights into programme delivery, challenges, and areas for improvement.
 - At the final point, 16 stakeholders were interviewed. This included repeat interviews with delivery partners (n=5), stakeholders involved in the programme outside of the funded food partnership (e.g., Feast with Us, PECAN, St Peters Brockley) (n=7) and wider stakeholders (from the Felix Project, the Trussel Trust, IFAN and Alexndra Rose Charity, n=4).
- **Supported organisations (n=29):** A further 16 interviews were held with local partners, many of them operational leads from organisations delivering services funded wholly or partly through Food Roots 2. For the Healthy Start workstream, the ICF team also conducted 13 targeted interviews with delivery staff and trained practitioners, supplemented by feedback from individuals who had attended Level 1 Healthy Start training.

Topic guides were tailored to each respondent group but aligned with core evaluation questions, ensuring both comparability and the ability to probe site-specific detail.

A2.3 Deep dives

A core component of the evaluation was the series of 12 in-depth “deep dive” case studies, conducted between mid-2024 and mid-2025.

The 12 case studies were selected purposively to ensure coverage across several dimensions: geographical spread across London boroughs; variation in partnership maturity (from newly-established alliances to well-embedded networks); diversity of lead organisation type (including voluntary sector, local authority, and social enterprise leads); and range of delivery models (for example, centralised food distribution hubs, food banks with wraparound advice services, and community cafés). Selection also considered thematic focus to ensure that the deep dives could showcase the breadth of activities and actions delivered as part of Food Roots 2.

Each deep dive combined multiple qualitative methods to build a detailed, multi-layered account of the partnership’s work.

- **Site visits:** Across the 12 deep dives, the ICF team conducted more than 15 site visits, timed to coincide with active delivery wherever possible. The ICF team observed a number of diverse settings, including food banks, social supermarkets, community kitchens and cafés, food clubs and pantries, central distribution hubs, and partnership governance meetings such as food alliance summits or working group sessions. The purpose of observation was not only to record what services were being delivered, but also to capture the relational and organisational dynamics underpinning them e.g., how staff and volunteers interacted with service users, the extent to which wraparound advice was embedded into food provision, and how decision-making occurred in partnership meetings.
- **Semi-structured interviews:** In total, the ICF team conducted approximately 87 interviews across the 12 sites. This included:
 - c.40 interviews with senior leads, project coordinators, and strategic managers, providing insight into programme design, partnership governance, and strategic planning.
 - 15 interviews with frontline staff and volunteers, focusing on operational delivery, day-to-day challenges, and perceptions of impact.
 - 20 interviews with service users and community members, enabling us to understand personal experiences of food insecurity, service use, and any wider changes (such as improved access to advice or employment opportunities).
 - The remainder of interviews were with key external stakeholders, including local authority officers, public health representatives, and partner organisations, to explore how Food Roots 2 activities aligned with wider local strategies.

Ultimately, practical factors such as availability on the day and willingness to participate meant that numbers and types of stakeholders interviewed in each setting varied. In some cases, unrecorded, informal conversations were held with volunteers, service users and residents; with their consent, detailed field notes were taken to ensure these perspectives were still captured.

- **Focus groups:** The ICF team facilitated four formal focus groups with service users and/or volunteers across the 12 case studies, which were valuable for generating interactive discussion about service quality, accessibility, and perceived community benefits. In addition, two focus groups hosted independently by a partner foundation were also observed, using the same note-taking and thematic coding procedures as for our own sessions.
- **Desk review:** For each site, relevant local documentation was reviewed to provide background context and corroborate interview and observational findings. This included grant applications, internal reports, meeting minutes, promotional materials, and, where available, strategic toolkits or local food strategy documents. These materials were logged in a central evidence register to ensure traceability and consistency in analysis.

All data from the deep dives were integrated into the wider qualitative dataset and analysed thematically, both at the level of the individual case and across cases. Analysis began with within-case coding to identify themes specific to that partnership's context, challenges, and successes. This was followed by cross-case analysis to identify patterns and contrasts across sites — for example, similarities in governance challenges faced by newer partnerships, or differences in volunteer recruitment strategies between community-led and local authority-led models.

Six of the 12 deep dives also included a longitudinal component, with two distinct phases of data collection: an initial visit in late 2024 to capture early or mid-stage delivery, followed by a second follow-up in early to mid-2025 to explore progress, adaptations, and sustainability planning. The longitudinal sites allowed for an additional layer of analysis, tracking shifts between the first and second visits. This enabled us to examine how partnerships adapted their delivery in response to emerging needs, resource constraints, or opportunities for collaboration, and to assess whether initial ambitions translated into sustained practices.

While the deep dives generated a rich qualitative dataset, they were subject to several limitations. Awareness of Food Roots 2 funding among frontline staff and service users was often low, meaning that the grant's specific contribution had to be inferred from conversations with those holding strategic oversight and from project documentation. In some sites, access to less-engaged partners was limited, meaning that perspectives may be weighted toward those most active in the partnership. Finally, because some visits took place while projects were in early or pilot stages, the data often reflect processes and intended outcomes rather than longer-term impacts.

A2.4 Partnership survey

A partnership survey was launched early into the programme. This was designed to map the breadth and diversity of organisations within the Food Roots 2 network and to provide an early measure of how partnerships were functioning. It covered:

- Partnership composition and roles (organisation type, target communities, contribution to partnership aims).
- Experiences of partnership working (engagement levels, types of interactions, support received).
- Expectations and satisfaction with partnership organisation and management.

The ICF team selected a short, 10–15 minute format to maximise response rates given the known time constraints on partner organisations. No personal data was collected to encourage participation and reduce ethical barriers. The survey was open for six weeks (29 April – 10 June 2024) and distributed via coordinators,

supported by direct communications, drop-in briefing sessions, and repeated reminders to address low initial uptake.

A total of 84 responses were received (65 complete, 19 partial). Partial responses were retained in the analysis to avoid excluding perspectives from partners experiencing capacity challenges.

A2.5 Observation of learning sessions and events

To assess the central learning and support offer, the ICF team attended and observed a purposive sample of events, activities and other sessions between February 2024 and May 2025:

- Online thematic workshops (e.g., governance, financial sustainability, data and evidence).
- Cohort-specific Action Learning Sets.
- Informal networking and “marketplace” events.
- In-person events, including the final celebration at City Hall.

Notes and feedback relating to event content, delivery style, participant engagement, and peer-to-peer interactions etc. were recorded using a standardised observation template. The main analytical value of these observations came from **triangulating them with coordinator interviews**, as well as feedback forms designed by the ICF team¹², allowing us to explore how support was applied in local contexts.

A2.6 Desk review

The desk review was integrated into all phases of the evaluation, both to establish baselines and to contextualise and corroborate primary data. The review covered:

- **Application and planning documents:** Expressions of Interest, grant applications, funding agreements.
- **Monitoring reports:** Mid-term progress submissions, reflections on challenges and achievements.
- **Delivery partner outputs:** Progress and end of programme reports, curriculum and learning materials, feedback surveys.
- **Programme outputs:** Legacy toolkits, training resources, local strategies, and learning artefacts.

A structured evidence matrix allowed consistent extraction of key information across all 21 partnerships and the programme as a whole.

A2.7 Analysis, triangulation and validation

Analysis and triangulation

Data from all strands were integrated through a systematic, multi-stage analytical process designed to maximise validity and depth of insight. All qualitative data, including interview transcripts, focus group records, observation notes, and informal conversation summaries, were thematically coded. This coding combined deductive codes derived from the evaluation questions and the evaluation framework, with

¹² The ICF team created feedback questions for the Healthy Start training and learning sessions. These were periodically analysed, with learning directly shared with delivery partners to improve training content and format throughout the programme.

inductive codes that emerged directly from the data (thereby allowing unanticipated themes and locally specific issues to be captured).

For longitudinal elements (such as the repeated coordinator interviews and two-stage deep dives) data were analysed not only at each time point but also in sequence to track change over time. This allowed us to identify shifts in priorities, activities, and partnership dynamics; assess how challenges evolved; and understand whether early ambitions translated into sustained outcomes.

Triangulation was central to the analysis. Findings from different datasets were systematically compared to test consistency, explore divergence, and add nuance. Instances where data sources aligned provided confidence in the robustness of findings, while areas of divergence prompted deeper inquiry into contextual or perceptual differences.

Validation

As part of the evaluation, a workshop with delivery partners was held on 13 February 2025 to review and validate the interim findings. The workshop focused on reflecting what worked well in Food Roots 2, identifying challenges, and exploring opportunities for improvement to inform future GLA food support programmes. Delivery partners shared their experiences and helped shape practical recommendations through activities such as the “Rose, Bud, Thorn” exercise.

The workshop also concentrated on how partnerships could sustain their work and embed learning after the programme ends. This included discussions on ongoing support needs, funding options, and ways to maintain momentum. By involving delivery partners directly, the evaluation ensured that findings were accurate, relevant, and grounded in real-world experience.

Annex 3 Monitoring and evaluation support

A3.1 Introduction

The ICF team worked closely with coordinators, delivery partners and the GLA to ensure that the evaluation process was not only about collecting evidence but also about building capacity in monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

The M&E support provided was intentionally light-touch, responsive, and flexible, adapting to the emerging needs of partnerships rather than following a rigid framework. While core tools were developed (as outlined below), support was tailored to the capacity, readiness, and priorities of each partnership. This approach ensured that evaluation activities added value without creating additional burdens, while still strengthening the ability of partnerships to reflect on progress, capture learning, and evidence impact in ways most relevant to their local context.

A3.2 Partnership indicator library

The ICF team developed an accessible “library” to assist partners in selecting relevant indicators for their specific activities, considering resourcing and capacity issues. This comprehensive resource supports partnership coordinators managing Food Roots 2 partnerships and can also benefit the partners themselves. It serves as a starting point for selecting and applying relevant indicators to monitor and evaluate partnership progress effectively.

The library is structured around five key sections aligned with the core focus areas of the Food Roots 2 programme and planned partnership activities:

- Partnership development
- Partner coordination
- Delivery
- Financial sustainability
- Influencing

The ICF team initially shared the indicator library via email, accompanied by written guidance, and organised two drop-in sessions in May for partnership coordinators to ask questions about using the library. The first drop-in session was attended by nine partnership coordinators, and the second by five. The resources used during these sessions, including the indicator library, the slide deck explaining it, and a recording of the session, were then uploaded to the Food Roots 2 Google Drive.

The ICF team encouraged coordinators to review the library, select their indicators, and begin data collection, recording, and analysis as soon as possible.

Following the dissemination of the library, the ICF team responded to ad-hoc questions on the best use of the indicator library, as well as concerns about monitoring and evaluation capacity.

A3.3 Workshops and drop-in support sessions

- An initial 1-hour workshop was held on 22nd May 2024, which focused on the purpose and process of developing a partnership-specific ToC. The aim of the workshop was to communicate how a ToC could allow partners to better articulate their aims and outcomes so they can identify what is possible to measure within the timeframe of the programme. The workshop was attended by eleven partnership coordinators, with slides and recording shared with all

coordinators following the workshop. A 30-minute drop-in was hosted in the subsequent week (27th May 2024) to allow partners continue the discussion and ask any questions on developing their ToC, defining evaluation indicators, or other evaluation queries. This was attended by five partnership coordinators.

- A workshop on “Influencing and amplification: making your evaluation findings useful” was held on 17th July 2024. The aim of the workshop was to provide partnership coordinators with an overview of how evaluation findings can be used in a variety of ways, including improving internal processes, supporting funding applications, and sharing success stories more widely. The session also introduced how to draft messages for different audiences, why audience-specific communication is important, and resources to support better dissemination of findings. Coordinators were encouraged to think creatively about using their data and to share ideas on communicating impact to different stakeholders. Slides and a recording of the session were subsequently shared with participants.
- A 45-minute drop-in session was held on 7th August 2024, 13:00–13:45, as an open forum for partnership coordinators to ask questions about monitoring and evaluation processes, including data collection, interpretation, and use of findings to support partnership activities and funding opportunities.
- The ICF team also contributed to the ‘Making the Case’ training session run by Food Matters as part of the wider learning curriculum.

A3.4 Targeted support to Nourish Hub

The ICF team had the opportunity to work more closely with one partnership, Nourish Hub, to support the development of their M&E approach.

As part of this process, ICF ran a Theory of Change workshop to help lay the groundwork for a practical M&E framework that could strengthen evaluation, improve how outcomes are communicated, and support a more strategic approach to development and fundraising.

The process included:

- Reviewing background documentation, monitoring data and previous research (including Nourish Hub’s “Your Voice” community report)
- Drawing on insights gathered through ICF’s earlier ‘deep dive’ fieldwork as part of the Food Roots evaluation
- Developing draft “strawman” logic models to articulate collective understanding of what Nourish Hub was trying to achieve – as a starting point for group discussion.
- Facilitating an in-person interactive workshop with key Nourish Hub staff to test, refine, and build on the initial draft logic models. The workshop took place on Monday 23rd June with staff involved in frontline delivery, programme design and partnership coordination. The session was designed to be collaborative, reflective, and grounded in lived experience. Through a mix of visioning exercises, group discussions, and pathway mapping, the team worked together to clarify their intended outcomes, key assumptions, and how different workstreams contribute to the wider mission.
- Producing a summary output to support further internal development of Nourish Hub’s ToC and a useful M&E framework. This was not intended to be a final product but should continue to be shaped by conversations with staff, volunteers, and residents who use the Hub.