

## POVERTY



## London Borough of Lewisham

### Tackling Food Injustice through Co-operation: The Lewisham Food Justice Alliance

In response to rising food insecurity—intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis—Lewisham Council launched its Food Justice Action Plan, delivered collectively through the Lewisham Food Justice Alliance (FJA). This unified, systemic response addresses the root causes of hunger while building long-term community resilience. Lewisham is among the 20% most deprived local authorities in England, with 35% of residents living in poverty and one in five earning below the London Living Wage. Structural inequalities, compounded by rising food, housing, and energy costs, have led to growing reliance on emergency food aid—even among working families. Research from The Food Foundation shows the pandemic further deepened disparities in food access and nutrition, especially for minoritised groups, disabled adults, clinically vulnerable people, and food sector workers.

At the heart of the borough's response is the Lewisham Food Justice Alliance, a co-operative network of over 30 organisations from the voluntary, community, faith, and public sectors. Its aim is to go beyond emergency food support, promoting long-term, dignified solutions through collaborative action. This partnership is coordinated by Lewisham Local and supported by a dedicated Food Justice Programme Manager funded by the Council. Crucially, the alliance is co-produced with partners working within communities to address food injustice, ensuring interventions are locally driven, culturally appropriate, and rooted in lived experience.

The Food Justice Action Plan's vision that was co produced with members is:

- All Lewisham residents can enjoy reliable and fair access to food that is sufficiently nutritious, sustainable, culturally appropriate and affordable.
- All Lewisham residents have the knowledge, skills, resources and opportunity to grow, prepare, cook, eat and share food with their families and communities.
- All Lewisham stakeholders support collective action to end chronic hunger, promote food resilience and reduce the need for emergency food aid.
- All members of the Lewisham Food Justice Alliance and other key stakeholders have access to data to monitor the scale of the issue of food injustice and to determine whether the actions taken are having a positive impact on lived experience, health and wellbeing.



Stall holder at Lewisham Market

An important feature of Lewisham’s strategy is its emphasis on “money first” responses. These include benefit maximisation, emergency cash grants, and income-based support—measures grounded in evidence that financial assistance offers greater dignity and autonomy than food parcels. The plan aligns with the Independent Food Aid Network’s (IFAN) model, which identifies income security as the most effective, sustainable solution to food poverty. Lewisham is among the first boroughs to formally embed this principle into policy.

Complementing this is the Community Food Justice Grant Programme, launched in 2023 which funded frontline organisations delivering community meals, culturally appropriate food projects, and cooking skills workshops. This enhances local capacity while promoting dignity, choice, and community-led innovation—core to Lewisham’s right-to-food ethos.

Implementation of the action plan is supported by Task and Finish Groups, each aligned with one of the Plan’s four priority areas. These time-bound, goal-focused groups reflect cooperative values

by bringing together sector experts, service providers, and people with lived experience to co-design and deliver targeted interventions. Their collaborative, accountable structure ensures the alliance remains agile and responsive, translating strategy into action and lived outcomes.

Priority areas:

1. Take preventative action to reduce the risk of Lewisham residents experiencing food injustices;
2. Ensure babies, children and young people have access to nutritious, sustainable and culturally appropriate sources of food throughout the year;
3. Co-ordinate resources, capacity and expertise to maximise the support available to those in crisis;
4. Promote and develop “Money First” approaches, where appropriate, to crisis prevention and support.



Attendees of the Lewisham Food Justice Alliance Event, April 2025

The Council’s leadership is further reinforced by a robust governance framework. The Food Justice Alliance reports through Lewisham Local to the Council’s Public Health Directorate, while each Task and Finish Group feeds into quarterly coordination meetings and feeds up to a strategic Steering Group. Monitoring includes both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights gathered from community engagement and direct testimony. This participatory approach ensures the Plan remains accountable and adaptive.



Lewisham's work embodies several CCIN cooperative principles:

- **Co-production:** Community groups co-designed the Action Plan, and continue to shape delivery through the Task and Finish Groups.
- **Social partnership:** Local authorities, the NHS, faith groups and voluntary organisations work in concert to coordinate responses.
- **Maximising social value:** Resources are allocated in a way that enhances dignity, autonomy and local resilience.
- **Innovation:** The borough is piloting approaches rarely attempted at a local government level
- **Learning:** Through the Alliance's inclusive structure, lessons are captured and shared across the network for continuous improvement.

Lewisham's Food Justice Alliance stands as a replicable model of civic leadership, demonstrating how local government can work cooperatively to tackle entrenched social challenges. By combining immediate support with structural interventions, and embedding collaboration at every stage—from strategic planning to frontline delivery—Lewisham is building not only a more food-secure future but a fairer, more resilient one for all its residents.

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