

# Food For All

in **West Cheshire**  
The Vision and Plan

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In partnership with



University of  
Chester



Cheshire West  
and Chester

# Background

**There is a long history in the UK of social inequalities so extreme that some people experience food insecurity, but the economic crisis that began in 2008 and the ever deepening cost of living crisis have intensified the need for action.**

In July 2020 and July 2021 Henry Dimbleby published two separate parts of The National Food Strategy: The Plan, an independent review of the national food system. The UK government published a White Paper to respond to the recommendations.

One ambition of this review was to create a food strategy that “enables people to access safe, healthy and affordable food regardless of where they live or how much they earn”.

Locally, Cheshire West and Chester Council and the community sector have begun exploring initiatives for achieving this ambition at borough-level.



## In 2017

The Welcome Network project, supported by a grant from Cheshire West and Chester Council, was set up to offer practical operations support to address the issue of 'holiday hunger.' Over five years the project supported communities and other local charities to provide: 23,466 meals in school holidays; hygiene training for 96 community food volunteers or staff; school holidays grants for 26 groups; 6,491 people with fruit and vegetables during the pandemic; distribution of £130,000 of Household Support Fund and Winter Poverty Fund support funds. Key local influencers formed a steering group to make strategic decisions.

Also in 2017, the Local Authority led and administered the West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission, which provided a platform for people with lived experience of poverty in the borough to influence decision making and policies for tackling inequality and poverty. In the second commission, food was a key issue on the agenda and, with the support of the Welcome Network project, the Beans on Toast group was set up as a working group for people with lived experience of food insecurity in the borough. This helped make sure they were listened to and informed the borough of the ingredients needed for all in West Cheshire to have decent meals.

## In 2018

Feeding Britain, a national movement with a mission to end UK Hunger, hosted a Big Lottery funded project titled The Community Food Hubs: Piloting to Innovative Approaches to Moving Beyond Food Crises. West Cheshire became one of the Community Food Hubs, and West Cheshire Foodbank and Citizens Advice Cheshire West, supported by the Welcome Network project, piloted The Meeting Place project. The pilot, inspired by Nourish Scotland's Dignity Principles in Practice explored dignity-focused alternatives to a Foodbank model, to create comprehensive principles of positive community food provision.

In the same year, The Welcome Network, tasked by Feeding Britain, played a role in administering the Department of Education's (DfE) Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme in its pilot year. Building on established partnerships, five community groups were supported to deliver 90 days of holiday activities and food across the borough. This was a key step in infrastructure support and setting out a road map of community holiday provision for others to follow.

## In 2019

Reflecting the Welcome Network Project's achievements, the project secured continuation funding from the Local Authority and the project was written into the Council Plan (2020-2024). Building on the successful delivery of the programme in 2018, the Welcome Network Partnership Board was set up to administer the funding. Cheshire West and Chester was also chosen as one of five areas to pilot a larger DfE HAF Programme across the whole borough.

In 2020, The Welcome Network project played a fundamental role in supporting food security during the Covid-19 pandemic. The collaborative response built closer working relationships between the project and Local Authority officers. In June 2020, the Welcome Network project was tasked with developing practical operation support and leading on the creation of a longer term Food Plan for the borough.

## In 2021

Cheshire West Voluntary Action set up a specialist food infrastructure offer to lead on local strategic change, and to support community food provision, bringing people together to share skills, knowledge and connections.

## In 2022

This specialist food infrastructure offer and the Welcome Network merged to form the Food for All in West Cheshire project hosted by Cheshire West Voluntary Action. This merged the operational and strategic work whilst enabling: community food groups to access practical development support and training to improve resilience; improved communications and networking opportunities within and across sectors; improved opportunities to access funding; stronger strategic engagement with the public sector; and greater opportunities to advocate for change both locally and nationally. The Food for All project has written a Food Plan for the borough, which is supported by the Local Authority, key stakeholders in the West Cheshire community sector, and community inspirers. The project also supports the local authority's development of West Cheshire as a Sustainable Food Place.

# Informed by and consolidating learning across the borough, Food for All in West Cheshire: The Vision and Plan contributes a vision and plan for how, across West Cheshire:



People can “access safe, healthy and affordable food regardless of where they live or how much they earn”  
(Dimbleby, 2021)



People have “the power to make choices about what, where, when, how and with whom you eat”  
(Nourish Scotland, 2018)



“Cross-sector food partnerships can work to transform the local food system and solve some of today’s most pressing social, environmental and economic issues”  
(Sustainable Food Places, 2022).

## From 2022-2025, the Food For All project will collaborate with partners to provide strategic and operational support for:



People in West Cheshire to eat decent meals.



Communities in West Cheshire to deliver and pioneer socially, economically, and environmentally positive food initiatives.



Cross-sector partners and people with lived experience of food insecurity in West Cheshire to collaborate to implement a strategic response to food security and advocate for necessary policy changes at local and national levels.

# The Vision and Plan

## Meet need so people in West Cheshire can eat decent meals.

From 2020 onwards, the Welcome Network project and West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission, and more recently Cheshire West Voluntary Action's, specialist food infrastructure project, have listened to people in the borough with lived experience of food insecurity to explore the key ingredients for all to have decent meals in West Cheshire.

A decent meal is defined using Nourish Scotland's (2018) dignity principle of have "the power to make choices about what, where, when, how and with whom you eat".

The below list of key ingredients was created for the community sector, local authority, health partners, and other key stakeholders to reflect on when making decisions and designing policies in order for them to be informed by the voices of local people with lived experience of food insecurity.

**For all in West Cheshire to eat decent meals, the following is needed:**

### Facilities, Knowledge and Equipment

Spaces, education and tools for growing, cooking and eating food

### Food

Nourishing and a wide choice of food from a reliable and sustainable source

### Money

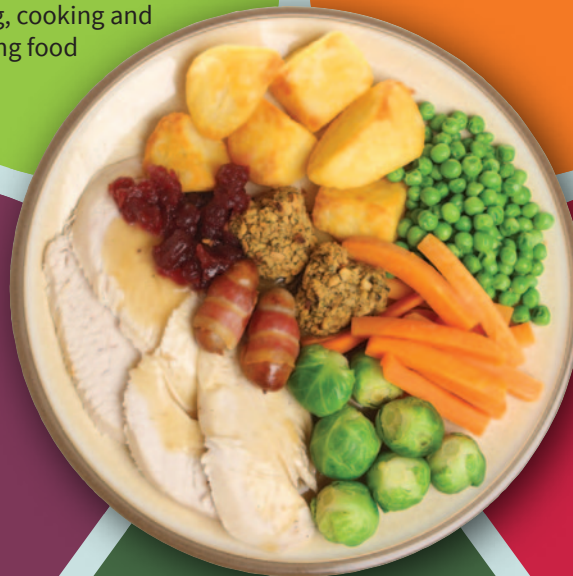
Incomes, jobs and financial support that make a wide choice of food affordable

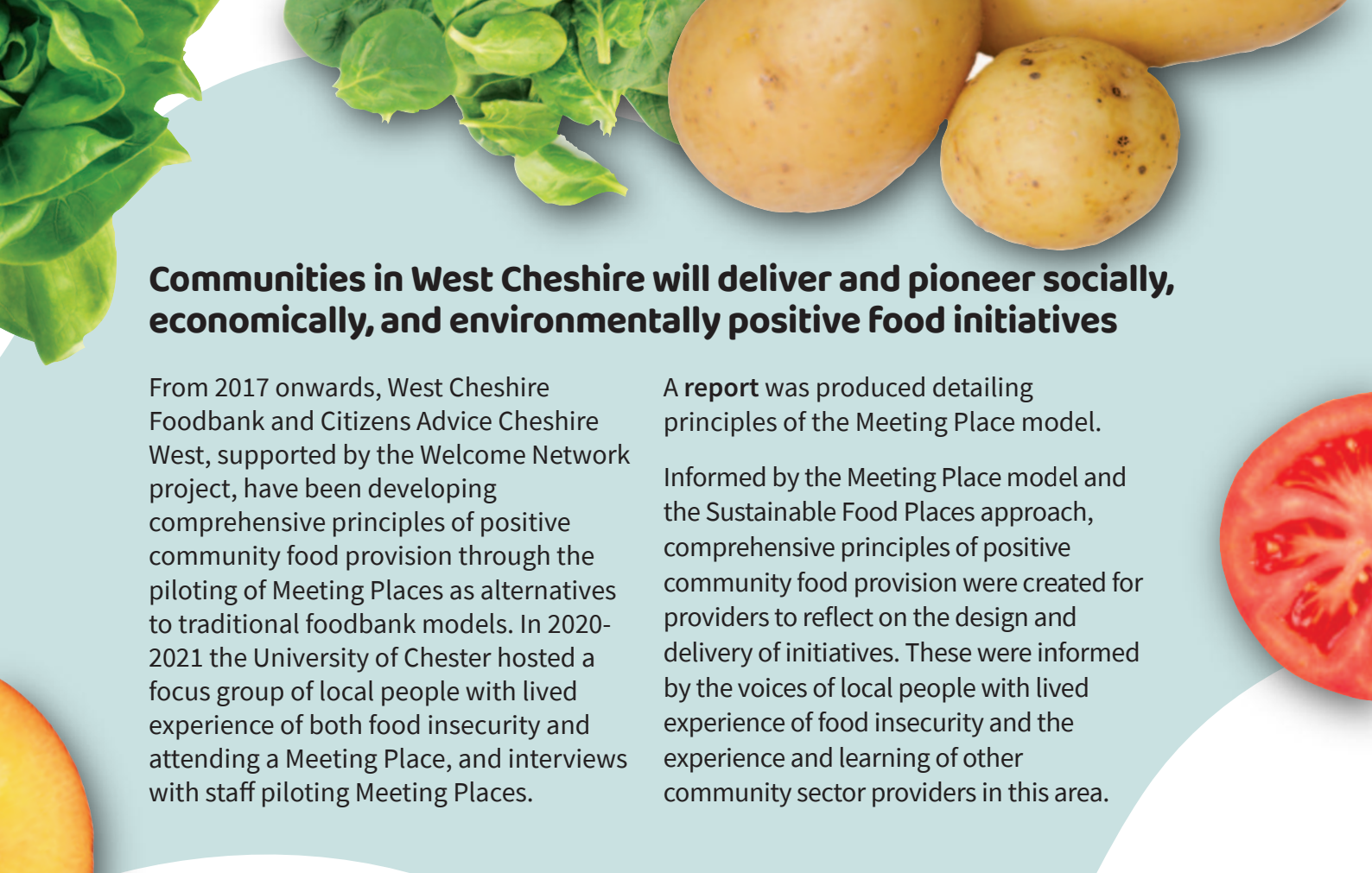
### Local Provision

All of the above necessities must be available to people in their local area

### Support with Mental Health and Wellbeing

Feeling mentally and emotionally able to access the practical provision of food, money, facilities, knowledge and equipment






## Communities in West Cheshire will deliver and pioneer socially, economically, and environmentally positive food initiatives

From 2017 onwards, West Cheshire Foodbank and Citizens Advice Cheshire West, supported by the Welcome Network project, have been developing comprehensive principles of positive community food provision through the piloting of Meeting Places as alternatives to traditional foodbank models. In 2020-2021 the University of Chester hosted a focus group of local people with lived experience of both food insecurity and attending a Meeting Place, and interviews with staff piloting Meeting Places.

A report was produced detailing principles of the Meeting Place model.

Informed by the Meeting Place model and the Sustainable Food Places approach, comprehensive principles of positive community food provision were created for providers to reflect on the design and delivery of initiatives. These were informed by the voices of local people with lived experience of food insecurity and the experience and learning of other community sector providers in this area.



# Comprehensive Principles of Positive Community Food Initiatives

## Provide Accessible Advice

Ensure specialist advisors are available in the community venue

## Utilise a Trusted Community Venue

Set up in a local space where all community members feel they belong

## Be Relational

Recognise the value of reliable relationships between communities and services for people's livelihoods and wellbeing

## Promote Sustainability in Practice

Provide a sustainable source of support for people and develop environmentally sustainable provision

## Support Sustainable Livelihoods

Make a positive impact on the local economy and people's ability to afford their own food

## Be Welcoming

Provide a comfortable space for people to access and stay for a while



## Innovate

Be mindful of changing needs and pioneer alternative initiatives

## Focus on Wellbeing and Co-learning

Develop activities that positively impact wellbeing and support learning from one another

## Share Food

Meet immediate food needs and recognise food as an enabler for relationships and learning

## Promote Dignity in Practices

Place the dignity of people accessing support at the centre of design and delivery

## Cross-sector partners and people with lived experience of food insecurity in West Cheshire will collaborate to implement a strategic response to food security and advocate for necessary policy changes at local and national levels.

To support all to have decent meals in West Cheshire and communities in West Cheshire to deliver and pioneer socially, economically, and environmentally positive food initiatives, there is a need for change in local and national strategies, policies, and practices.

**In order to achieve this, it is necessary to:**



### Listen and Learn

Create, sustain, and strengthen platforms for cross-sector partners to listen to people with lived experience of food insecurity in order to develop evidence informed action.

Learn from local, national and international pilots to inform practice in West Cheshire.



### Collaborate

Create, sustain, and strengthen food partnerships that are highly participatory and inclusive, reflecting the need for people with lived experience of food insecurity, community sector stakeholders, the local authority, health partners, and other key stakeholders to collaborate for change.



### Pioneer

Design and pilot socially, economically, and environmentally positive initiatives that seek to achieve food for all in West Cheshire.



### Affect Change

Influence strategy makers in West Cheshire to ensure that the goal of Food for All is considered and reflected in all relevant strategies across the borough.

Propose to government and national community sector partners locally tried and tested, evidence-informed alternative strategies, policies and practices that reduce social inequality and prevent people experiencing food insecurity in order to support Food for All in the UK.

To get in contact and follow updates, please visit:  
[www.chesterva.org.uk/foodforall](http://www.chesterva.org.uk/foodforall)