ACTION PLAN
Section One - The need for action in Luton

Luton has a vision of eradicating poverty by 2040 (Luton 2040). The need for action in Luton is evidenced by the fact that nearly half of children in the borough are growing up in poverty. The Council is now taking the opportunity to focus on a single ambitious long-term vision – of no-one living in poverty in 2040. The Council’s focus on eradicating poverty provides a means of bringing its work together across the Council for an overarching goal. Tackling food poverty locally is a key part of the wider vision of eradicating poverty and this action plan is focused on practical delivery over the next 3 years.

The vision for Luton

The Luton Food Poverty Alliance believe that the local community should have access to resources that help them in times of food poverty, so that they can adequately feed themselves and their families with nutritious food.
1. Luton residents feel confident to buy and cook low cost fresh food, through education and awareness.
2. Local residents are aware of food growing spaces that they can use for free.
3. Local residents are aware of where food banks are and how to access them.
4. Residents know how they can share fresh food that they have grown with others.
5. All schools engage pupils in learning how to grow and prepare fresh vegetables.

The need for action in Luton

Luton is currently ranked as the 70th most deprived out of 317 local authorities. In 2015 Luton was ranked 59th out of 326 local authorities. Therefore, Luton is less relatively deprived than in 2015. In 2010 Luton was ranked as the 69th most deprived local authority and in 2007 as the 87th (out of 354 authorities). The proportion of areas in Luton in the top 10 per cent most deprived parts of the country has fallen with Luton having four output areas in the top ten per cent most deprived. These are in Northwell, South and two in Farley. Previously Luton had nine areas in the top ten per cent (Luton Food Plan 2018-22)

Food poverty in Luton is still a growing concern.

Risk factors include diets high in sugar and trans-fats and low in fruit and vegetables. Poor diet contributes to around 50% of coronary heart disease and 30% of all cancer deaths, the two biggest causes of death in Luton.

Data for Luton show us that the average portions of fruit and vegetables that are consumed by adults is 2.4 (compared with England 2.5) which is less than half of the Public Health England (PHE) recommended target of a minimum five portions. 46.5% of the population of Luton adults consumes 5-a-day on a usual day. This is significantly lower than England (52.3%) although all but one of similar areas has a smaller proportion of the population meeting this target. (Luton Food Plan 2018-22)
Some key findings from focus groups and an on-line survey conducted by Luton Borough Council Public Health in 2017 include:

- There’s a big appetite for greening up the Borough and the possibility of a range of local growing spaces.
- People like the idea of community education around food.
- They feel that social media is a good communications tool for almost all communities, but many particularly like YouTube.

Who’s involved in the Alliance?

Groundwork East
Luton Food Bank
Healthwatch Luton
Flying Start Luton
Public Health, Luton Borough Council
Street Games
Active Luton Food Hacks
Edible High Town
NOAH Enterprise
Level Trust
My Healthy Lifestyle CIC
St. John the Baptist church
Strathmore Avenue Methodist church
The British Red Cross
The Salvation Army
Penrose Roots
Vauxhall Motors
Citizens Advice Luton (crisis action & support project)
The purpose of the Luton Food Poverty Alliance

To bring organisations and individuals together to collaborate on food poverty alleviation projects in order to make them more effective.

The alliance will join forces to:
1. Share knowledge of the problems being faced by the residents of Luton.
2. Build an action plan.
3. Combine staff and resources when delivering projects.
4. Work together to build a web resource that will signpost residents to helpful services.
5. To find ways to campaign for more ambitious change in Luton.

The Alliance is working within the Luton Food Plan, within the following area of operation:

**Greening the Borough / growing your own**
This priority seeks to increase access to green space and empower residents to grow their own fruit and vegetables as well as improving the visual impact of Luton.

We will:
- Create a network across the borough to connect the pockets of great work already happening to drive forward change.
- Increase the number of community food hubs (including using surplus food) and connect residents to available allotments.
- Work in partnership with housing to increase the amount of maintained greenspace for our housed residents.
- Develop food growing and greening activities as part of the Cultural strategy.
- Encourage the increase in edible green infrastructure as part of new and regeneration developments.
- Support the work of the Luton Food Poverty Network and connect grown produce with the Food Bank.
Section Two - the five actions

The alliance has collectively agreed on the five actions that can be taken to try and reduce the incidence of food poverty in Luton.

The five actions are:
1. Support Skills from ‘fork 2 fork’ through horticulture skills and meal planning.
2. Increasing ‘holiday food’ provision across Luton.
3. Increasing the uptake of the Healthy Start voucher scheme.
4. Increase the number of community food growing spaces and fresh produce grown to enrich food bank supplies.
5. Increase the number of volunteers supporting the LFPA.

Action One

Support Skills development for vulnerable residents through employment skills, horticulture training, and meal planning.

To provide opportunities across Luton for residents to join open community gardening sessions or courses that teach the basics of employment skills such as professionalism and communication as well as food growing and how to prepare one pot meals on a budget.

Existing activity

Organisations delivering existing training include: Groundwork East, Penrose Roots, Luton Adult Learning, My Healthy Lifestyle, Edible High Town, TOKKO food kitchen and NOAH.

Training currently on offer includes:
1. Food hygiene certificates
2. Cooking on a budget
3. Basic cookery skills, including budgeting and shopping
4. Horticultural skills that lead towards employment
5. Horticultural skills for food growing
Opportunities

• The alliance will help to direct people to courses that will provide them with skills to support their diet.
• Linking Children’s Centres to the Food Hubs to provide opportunities to grow, harvest and prepare food as a family.
• Working with the local church to deliver simple cookery sessions to local school children, community groups, residents, etc.
• Develop lunch clubs that offer guidance on obtaining and cooking with fresh food.
• School gardening clubs, including food preparation and cookery.
• Community café: fork to table, gardening, preparation and cooking. Profits to be ploughed back into the scheme.

Action Two

Increasing ‘holiday food’ provision across Luton.

To work collaboratively to provide a Luton-wide service of providing hot meals to children as part of holiday clubs during the school holidays. This will involve bringing together organisations that can provide venues, catering, promotion and booking, liaison with schools and staffing.

Existing activity

There is no fully co-ordinated approach to providing meals for children during the holidays, however some organisations have their own holiday programmes that include a meal such as the Level Trust’s SMASH programme and Kids Can Cook programmes. There is a strong feeling that the alliance wants to improve this provision and are in discussions with each other about how this might be possible for 2020.

Opportunity

All children who are eligible for free school meals or who have been identified by their schools are requiring a meal during the day would be able to access holiday food provision. This could take place in community halls and kids club venues across the town, with a central catering service. Parents will be able to easily sign up to receive the holiday meals and should have access to a local venue. Venues could include schools, church halls, community centres, children’s centres, holiday club venues, garden spaces (for picnic provision), pop-up stalls. The Safeguarding lead in each school could help with referrals to the service.
Action Three

Wider roll-out of Healthy Start vouchers

To increase the uptake of Healthy Start vouchers by making them visible, accessible and easy to claim. To see an increase in the number of families benefitting from the milk, fruit, vegetables and vitamins that are available to improve their diet.

Over £100,000 worth of Healthy Start vouchers are not claimed in Luton each year.

The alliance aims to help the lead Healthy Start Co-ordinator to:

- Map out retailers that accept the vouchers and make this known.
- Identify areas within the town without sufficient retailers.
- Encourage retailers to more visibly promote the scheme through posters or stickers.
- Train retail staff in how to process the vouchers.
- Encourage health professionals to promote the scheme via clinics and home visits.
- Make obtaining vouchers easier by finding solutions for getting forms signed off.
- Give application forms for Healthy Start to food banks to share with potential beneficiaries.

What is a Healthy Start voucher?

With Healthy Start, you get free vouchers every week to spend on milk, plain fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables, and infant formula milk. You can also get free vitamins. You could qualify if you’re on benefits, or if you’re pregnant and under 18. Pregnant women and children over one and under four years old can get one £3.10 voucher per week. Children under one year old can get two £3.10 vouchers (£6.20) per week.

Further information can be found here: https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/
Action Four

Increase the number of community food growing spaces and fresh produce grown to enrich food bank supplies.

The alliance will improve the existing growing spaces for food production and increase the number of growing hubs over the next three years (2019 – 2021). Sites of waste ground and abandoned growing projects will be investigated and assessed as possible food growing sites. Options for distributing fresh produce will be improved.

Alliance members are investigating ‘licence to occupy’, hopefully making it easier for residents or groups to take on and care for abandoned green spaces.

Existing provision: food growing projects

• St. John the Baptist Community food growing hub, Farley Hill
• Strathmore Avenue Methodist church food growing hub, Park Town
• Memorial Park community garden, New Town
• Edible High Town plots, High Town
• Penrose Bide-a-While roots to recovery garden

Potential areas for food growing expansion

• Un-used areas that have previously been developed, such as Marsh Farm Outreach garden (un-used).
• Allotments that can be accessed on a shared basis or as part of a group, or may be able to donate surplus food to those in need.
• School growing spaces – a number of schools have growing spaces but lack the staffing and time to manage them. Alliance members offer teacher CPD in the use of outdoor spaces for food growing.
• Businesses in the town with green space that may wish to turn it over to growing space, such as Vauxhall Motors.
Opportunities for action in getting fresh produce to those in need

Food grown can be offered for use by:
• Local church lunch clubs
• Community cafes
• The food bank as part of the ‘choice’ table.
• Community fridges
• Community drop in at the Salvation Army: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.
• Food sharing events
• The homeless service

Food Banks

Food banks distribute food in outreach settings within the community and provide a bag of food for those in possession of a food bank voucher. Currently the food provided is non-perishable. Challenges include the difficulties in getting fresh produce distributed within 24 hours of harvest. Food banks currently don’t deal with fresh produce due to the problems of packaging and storage. One possibility is to give fresh produce as an option on the ‘choice’ table at the food bank outreach distribution points. ‘Choice items’ are items of food that are not routinely included in the food parcel, but may sit on a table and can be added to the food bag by those who choose it. This prevents waste as it is chosen by people who feel they want to eat it.

Case Study: Food growing hubs in Luton

During the growing season April – October 2019, three community food growing hubs in Luton produced over 400kg of fresh produce, equating to 4,800 portions of fruit and vegetables. Whilst in operation the gardens provided much more than just a growing space. They became a space for learning, sharing, socialising and for improving the look and use of an area. Families learned to sow, tend and harvest in their local area whilst other groups came to support their own learning for life or mental well-being. The food produced was distributed to other families, individuals and local networks such as the British Red Cross drop in centre and the NOAH homeless shelter.
Action Five

Increase the number of volunteers supporting the LFPA

To deliver action across Luton the alliance needs to work together to provide services to residents in all stages of food poverty, from those who need a little help now and again, to those in crisis. More structure is needed to provide a stable network of volunteers and to record the input provided in hours.

To empower residents with the skills they need to source, buy, prepare, cook or share food a large number of volunteers are needed.

Volunteers can help to:
• Set up and run community gardens
• Distribute fresh food to those in need
• Help those in need to complete paperwork to obtain vouchers
• Teach the basics of preparing fresh food
• Raise awareness of food poverty issues in the town

Action

• Pool information about volunteers already working within our alliance organisations and share the voluntary workforce across projects.
• Signpost volunteers to new food projects they might like to support.
• Retain volunteers and ensure they are never left ‘out of work’.
• Support volunteers and provide incentives and rewards such as qualifications, progression and variety.
• Engage more frequently with Community Action Bedfordshire and Voluntary Works to recruit more volunteers.

Community organisations are in a strong position to encourage their service users to join projects and become volunteers.
Section Three - Next Steps

1. Meet quarterly to ensure actions are being undertaken and to review the progress of the plan.
2. Build evaluation into our actions to understand effectiveness.
3. Work closely with the Luton Food Plan to meet targets for the Borough in relation to ‘Greening the Borough and Growing Your Own’.
4. Develop the alliance structure and role of each organisation within it.
5. Develop the website and mapping resource for use by those in need of support.
6. Find ways to campaign for change in Luton.
7. Reduce food waste by facilitating connections between local providers and those organisations supporting people suffering homelessness and/or food poverty by providing meals.

Thanks to funding from:

Food Power

Community Fund