



## Food at Home for disabled and older people: Local action mapping tool

Briefing prepared by Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford and Simon Shaw, June 2025

### 1. Background: Food at Home

This local action mapping tool comes out of [recently published research](#) on the opportunities and barriers experienced by disabled people and older people in accessing food. The research identified the varied practice around the UK, including examples of good practice led by local authorities. It also highlighted a number of key barriers (including income and extra costs faced by older and disabled people, challenges with food shopping and preparation and access to safe and appropriate foods for people living with health conditions).

These structural barriers, alongside individual challenges, point to a need for action to ensure disabled and older people can maintain food access and maximise their own agency, strengths, skills and assets to support their own access to food as well as peer support. However, given the complexity of the policy and practice context it has been hard to identify the key points of intervention at different scales, including crucially the local level - at which many services are commissioned and managed.

Food access is affected by a complex range of issues. We hope that the research and this tool can place greater focus on opportunities for action to help local authorities, health and care trusts and partners to ensure disabled and older people have dignified access to nutritional, appropriate and safe food in their own homes and prevent, reduce, delay poorer health and wellbeing.

### 2. Food at Home local action mapping tool

#### About the tool

The tool aims to help local authorities and stakeholders understand the key levers and range of actions that could be utilised to address barriers to ensure disabled and older people can access nutritional, safe and appropriate food. The focus of this mapping is on people living in their own homes, so it does not cover residential care. Actions include opportunities to better understand current practice, gaps and needs, as well as opportunities for specific interventions to address needs.

While the opportunities for action are weighted towards functions related to health and care, the tool highlights opportunities to take action from a wider range of functions. While we focus on the role of individual departments or services, it remains important to maintain overall leadership, strategy and coordination across the authority or trust.

Wherever possible the tool uses language that can be matched to responsibilities and functions across different councils and partners. Integration of health and care is at different stages across the UK, but we hope the tool can apply across areas where health and care are both more or less integrated. We also understand that local statutory bodies can have direct, arms-length or indirect responsibility for commissioning or delivery of services; again we hope the tool can apply across these different scenarios.

The Food at Home research phase included a number of examples of local authority action to support food access at home for disabled and older people. We have included these examples alongside other examples we have become aware of as we developed the tool. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list; we highlight just some of the actions that have been taken across different local authority functions.

### How to use the tool

The infographic (page 3 and text-only version on pages 9-10) aims to provide a visual prompt for the multiple opportunities to understand need and take action. The examples (pages 4-7) that follow aim to provide some real-life case studies of action in local areas.

The tool could be used and adapted in a number of ways to:

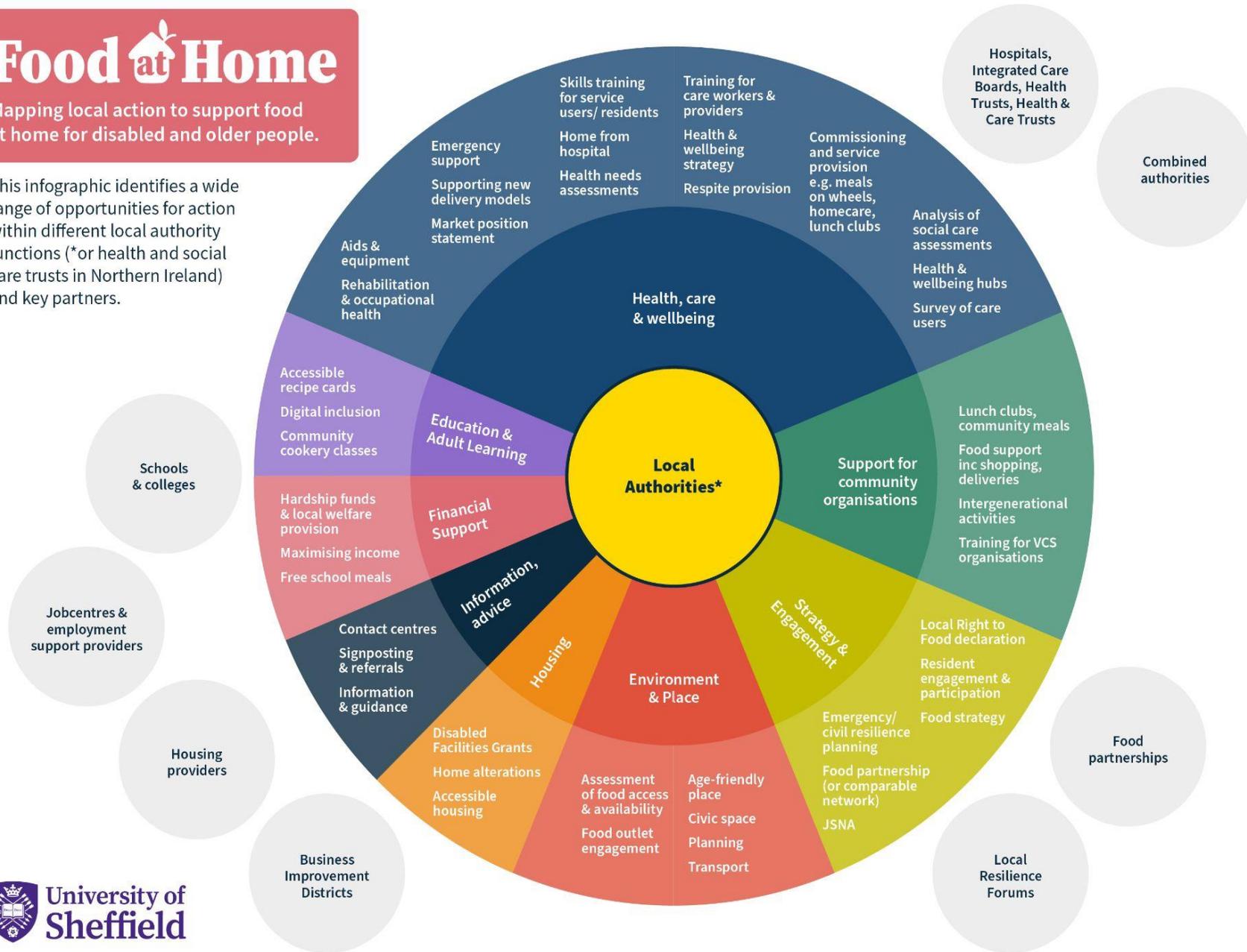
- Audit action across departments and services
- Identify gaps across departments and services
- Identify opportunities to better understand the food access needs of disabled people
- Work across departments and services to develop joined-up action across a local authority and/or health and care trust and partners

We understand that the tool will likely be adapted or used alongside other resources that localise it and pick up local intelligence. It is also crucial to take account of residents' views in a meaningful way. We know that each area has its specific populations, characteristics or geographies, including rurality and dispersed populations, which impact on how to go about understanding need and planning responses.

# Food at Home

Mapping local action to support food at home for disabled and older people.

This infographic identifies a wide range of opportunities for action within different local authority functions (\*or health and social care trusts in Northern Ireland) and key partners.



## 3. Examples of local action

### 3.1 Strategy and engagement

Local authorities can use a broader strategy process to understand the food needs of local disabled and older people beyond needs identified in social care assessments. Councils and partners can also ensure food security for disabled and older people is considered and built into local emergency and resilience planning. Local food strategies, food partnerships (or comparable networks) or local Right to Food declarations can also include disabled and older people and their needs. Local authorities can support genuine participation mechanisms for older and disabled people and their organisations over the long-term, learning from and adopting existing good practice.

- The recently-published [UK planning for emergencies: mitigating risks of household food insecurity during emergencies](#) briefing includes suggested actions to ensure specific groups including disabled and older people have access to food during times of emergency
- The [Food at Home](#) report includes examples of good practice in involving disabled and older people, though not food-specific examples.

### 3.2 Information and advice and financial advice and support

#### Information and advice

Local authorities can ensure residents have access to information, including hard copy formats for people who are not online/ digitally excluded. This should include ensuring contact centre staff have the knowledge of the wide range of food needs to ask appropriate questions about food access to be able to offer people support and offer appropriate signposting and referral.

- Southwark Council has produced a physical signposting directory [Healthy ageing in Southwark](#) which provides information about services to support older adults in the borough, including support with food and financial advice. This directory has been distributed to public settings such as libraries and other organisations that work with older adults in Southwark. The directory is available in English and Spanish.
- Newham Council created a [webpage and leaflet](#) in partnership between Public Health and Adult Social Care mapping food support available to older and disabled people in the borough.

#### Financial advice and support

Local authorities can maximise people's income through benefits advice and support services to address food access needs, including additional costs they may face. Local welfare or hardship schemes can also recognise and provide for additional costs faced by disabled and older people, for example additional transport, delivery costs or additional costs of special diets. Emergency responses can include cash-first responses or vouchers for food shopping.

### 3.3 Health, care and wellbeing

Local authorities can better understand disabled and older people's food needs, barriers and the effectiveness of responses through food-focused analysis of social care needs assessments, care packages, surveys of adult social care users and quality assurance processes. Key strategic documents such as social care needs assessments, health and wellbeing strategies and market position statements can be used to help plan for the food access needs of disabled and older people.

- Southwark Council completed a Food security in older people needs assessment.
- Lambeth Council's [2023-28 Market Position Statement](#) includes how health and wellbeing hubs can support access to food.
- Coventry Council's [2024-29 Market Position Statement](#) highlights the challenge of preparing food within the limitations of short homecare visits.

Local authorities (and partners where relevant) can commission specific interventions such as meals on wheels, or ensure food needs are met within home care, rehabilitation and occupational health, aids and adaptations, respite support, home from hospital support and health & wellbeing hubs.

- [Fife Council](#) subsidises the service by about 30% to support service reach, foster viability and to prevent higher level needs. The Council values that the service provides people with nutritious meals, allows for regular welfare checks and supports people to remain in their own homes. The subsidy ensures the service is affordable for more people which helps to maintain the overall viability of the service. This also reduces the pressure on social care budgets, especially the need for residential care.
- Hammersmith & Fulham Council funds the Nourish Hub to provide a '[Meals and a chat](#)' service which is similar to a meals on wheels service, but includes a social element to support older people who might be experiencing loneliness. Sustain has also published a [case study](#) of this.
- Bexley Council delivered [Bexley Boxes](#) to older people's doors in winter 2024. These boxes are designed to support older people to stay warm, and are filled with items such as hot water bottles, as well as food items such as porridge, soup and cereals, and tea and coffee.
- Local authorities and partners across the country have taken diverse action to ensure food is included within [Home from Hospital](#) support.

Local authorities can also support local providers to prepare food for service users, through food preparation training and advice, as well as offer food preparation skills training for disabled people and their PAs.

- [Monmouthshire Council](#) developed a booklet and provided training to domiciliary care workers to provide effective food support. This work also aimed to promote the importance of food and drink among care providers. It has proved much easier to reach in-house care workers and much harder to reach care workers working for providers independent of the council. The Council has also worked with a newly built

local care home which has its own kitchens. Staff and residents have Sunday lunch all together. Care staff were training to prepare and cook food. Residents can see and smell the food being cooked, which helps with their appetite.

- [Newham Council](#) has included a specific requirement around food in their recent tender for adult social care homecare contracts.

### 3.4 Public health

Public health teams can ensure that professionals in contact with older and disabled people share information on easy-to-prepare, nutritious and enjoyable meals and snacks.

- The Lambeth Council Public Health team has developed a comprehensive nutritional toolkit to support communities, organisations, care settings and residents. This provides information on healthy nutrition and food support for older residents to ensure that food is nutritious, balanced and appropriate for their needs. This toolkit has been shared across the borough and includes a package of training support, practical cooking sessions, such as: a training module that covers, guidelines for healthy nutrition, understanding and combating malnutrition, the importance of bone health, understanding the changing dietary needs of older adults and where to access local support and help; recipes and weekly meal plans, preparation guidelines and suggestions; and information and guidance on identifying those who may be vulnerable and where to signpost or to go locally to access food support.
- Several initiatives have created accessible recipes, for example for [people with learning disabilities](#) or [people living with dementia](#).

## 3.5 Housing, environment, place, planning

### Housing

Housing departments can ensure disabled and older people's housing supports their access to food at home, for example by maximising uptake of the Disabled Facilities Grants, facilitating property alterations and building sufficient housing with accessible kitchens.

### Environment, place and planning

Local authorities can work with local food outlets to maintain and expand provision of ready-to-eat nutritious and enjoyable food, particularly for older and disabled people. Local authorities developing an [age-friendly community](#) can include actions to ensure access to food at home for older people.

## 3.6 Support for community organisations

Local authorities can provide sustainable support for community, disabled people's and older people's organisations that work on food access issues. Councils can fund outside of the home services e.g. lunch clubs, community meals, cooking classes, food shopping support or other food support. Councils can also provide nutrition training for community organisations.

- Following an election commitment, Wandsworth Council is supporting establishing [a lunch club in every community](#). The term 'lunch club' was interpreted flexibly to reflect any initiative that provides access to a substantial meal and social interaction to combat loneliness.
- [Southwark Council](#) is providing training on older adults nutrition support for community organisations to support the identification of residents who may be at risk of malnutrition and develop a community services signposting and referral pathway.

## Further resources

BDA (2023) [Eating, drinking and ageing well](#) resource (printable and available in Welsh and easy read)

Food Foundation (2023) [Food insecurity and inequalities experienced by disabled people](#)

[Malnutrition Task Force](#)

[Meals on Wheels UK](#) directory of providers

NACC (2023) [National Association of Care Catering Meals on Wheels Report 2023](#)

Sustain, [Good Food Local](#)

## References

1. Lambie-Mumford, H., Shaw, S. (2024) [Food at home: A knowledge exchange project exploring disabled and older people's access to food in their own homes](#)
2. Parsons K. (2020) [Who makes food policy in England? A map of government actors and activities/](#)
3. Kidd, R. & Reynolds, C. (2024) [Food policy coherence in local government: Who does what and why?](#)
4. Sustain [Good Food Local](#)
5. The Food Foundation (2018) [Smart Nutrition Cities Building on what's gone before](#)

## Acknowledgements

Our approach to the tool builds on the work of others who have mapped national and local government roles and responsibilities on food. We are very grateful to those who have generously taken the time to shape the tool over the last few months.

## Contact details

We are keen to add further real-life examples into the tool and to hear about any experiences of using the tool to develop action. Please contact Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford, [h.lambie-mumford@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:h.lambie-mumford@sheffield.ac.uk).

## Text-only version: Food at Home: Mapping local action to support food at home for disabled and older people

This infographic identifies a wide range of opportunities for action within different local authority functions (\*or health and care trusts in Northern Ireland) and key partners.

### Health, care & wellbeing

- Rehabilitation and occupational health
- Aids & equipment
- Emergency support
- Supporting new delivery models
- Market position statement
- Skills training for service users/ residents
- Home from hospital
- Health needs assessments
- Training for care workers and providers
- Health and wellbeing strategy
- Respite provision
- Commissioning and service provision e.g. meals on wheels, homecare, lunch clubs
- Analysis of social care assessments
- Health and wellbeing hubs
- Survey of care users

Partners: Hospitals, Integrated Care Boards, Health Trusts, Health and Care Trusts, Combined authorities

### Support for community organisations

- Lunch clubs, community meals
- Food support, inc. shopping deliveries
- Intergenerational activities
- Training for VCS organisations

### Strategy and engagement

- Local Right to Food declaration
- Resident engagement and participation
- Emergency/ civil resilience planning
- Food partnership (or comparable network)
- JSNA

Partners: Food partnerships, Local Resilience Forums

## Environment and place

- Assessment of food access & availability
- Food outlet engagement
- Age-friendly place
- Civic space
- Planning
- Transport

Partners: Business Improvement Districts

## Housing

- Disabled Facilities Grants
- Home alterations
- Accessible housing

Partners: Housing providers

## Information & advice

- Contact centres
- Signposting and referrals
- Information & guidance

## Financial support

- Hardship funds and local welfare provision
- Maximising income
- Free school meals

Partners: Jobcentres & employment support providers

## Education and adult learning

- Accessible recipe cards
- Digital inclusion
- Community cookery classes

Partners: Schools and colleges