

Deeper Roots, Stronger Futures: Unlocking the potential of Local Food Partnerships with young people

Parliamentary briefing – July 2025

Summary

- Food is vitally important for young people, supporting their growth, health and wellbeing. Despite this, **1 in 5 young people in the UK are in families that have struggled to access or pay for food.**
- New research from Co-op's and Barnardo's partnership reveals the impact of food partnerships across the UK and how they can support young people.
- This builds on our 2024 report '[A Recipe for Success](#)' which heard from 45,000 young people — 23% of whom said they couldn't access healthy food in their community.
- Over 95% of local authorities in the UK responded to our FOI request on their involvement with their food partnership. Only **28% confirmed they were involved in a food partnership that directly benefits young people** and only 13% involve young people in their strategic design or delivery.
- We interviewed seven Local Food Partnerships and conducted focus groups with 22 young people. Transport costs, scheduling conflicts and rigid structures were identified as barriers to young people's involvement in Food Partnership.
- Co-op and Barnardo's are calling on The **UK Government to use its forthcoming National Food Strategy** to set out plans to ensure there is **a food partnership in every area by 2030**

1. What is a food partnership?

Food partnerships carry out a range of activity to help local communities access healthy food.

- **Tackling food insecurity** – Supporting food banks, community pantries, and holiday food programs to ensure access to affordable, nutritious food.
- **Promoting food education** – Running workshops on cooking, nutrition, and food growing in schools and communities.
- **Strengthening local food economies** – Supporting local farmers, food producers, and retailers to build sustainable supply chains.
- **Reducing environment impact of food, including waste** – Partnering with businesses and community organisations to redistribute surplus food.
- **Shaping local food policy** – Working with councils to integrate food strategies into public health, climate action, and economic development plans.

2. New Data on Local Food Partnerships

We sent a Freedom of Information requests to all local authorities in the UK to find out if they were involved in a food partnership, what this involvement looked like and if they supported young people. Of the 383 councils:

- **Only half (54%) reported being involved** in their food partnership.
- Local authorities in the **most deprived areas were 17% more likely to be involved** in their food partnership than those in the least deprived areas.
- 19% of Local Authorities support their food partnership financially, **£11,507.93 on average per year.**
- **Just 28% of councils reported that their food partnership benefitted young people**, with a wide variation in the number reached—from 2 individuals to over 200,000.

Explore our interactive map online:

Look for a specific local authority and check their status by scanning this QR code below.



- **Only 13% of councils confirmed that their food partnership were involving young people** in the strategic design or delivery of projects.

2. Who we spoke to

We engaged with young people to hear their views on food in their local areas and how they would like to be more involved in local food systems. We also spoke with Food Partnerships and community fridges across the UK to understand the challenges of involving young people. We did this through:

3. Our recommendations

To ensure the meaningful participation of young people in local food partnerships the UK government, local authorities, businesses and charities should do the following:

What UK Government can do:

1. Set out plans in its forthcoming **National Food Strategy to ensure there is a food partnership in every area by 2030** and that young people's are fully included in all food partnerships. This should articulate how local delivery through councils will be supported.
2. Ensure the Government's forthcoming **Youth Strategy reflects the important role food partnerships** can play in supporting and involving young people, including how this can be embedded through existing local government activity.
3. Work with the **Local Government Association, Sustainable Food Places, Feeding Britain** and other organisations to promote best practice on food partnerships
4. Review how the **Welsh funding model** for food partnerships could be emulated across the UK to support the role out of FPs at low cost
5. Assess whether **legislative changes**, such as those set out in the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act, could be emulated across the UK to drive devolved leadership on improving local food systems.

What local authorities can do:

1. Support the establishment of a **food partnership in every local authority area**, bringing together local government, businesses, charities and community groups to promote access to nutritious and sustainable food.
2. Support food partnerships to **directly involve young people** in their food partnership, embedding the 10 tips set out in the report and utilising existing youth voice mechanisms that already exist.

What businesses and charities can do:

1. **Get involved** in their food partnerships, starting with establishing links with local business networks or existing voluntary and community sector forums.
2. **Make the case for involving young people** in their food partnerships.

Action you can take

Write to your local authority, share the report and ask what they can do to promote access to healthy food for young people.

You can consider tabling one or more of the following Parliamentary Questions:

1. Will the Government's forthcoming Food Strategy include a commitment to establish a Food Partnership in every local authority area by 2030, with meaningful opportunities for young people to be involved from the outset?
2. Following the recent Barnardo's and Co-op report, does the Government recognise the important role Food Partnerships can play in supporting young people, and will this be reflected in the upcoming Youth Strategy?

About Barnardo's and Co-op

In May 2023, Barnardo's and Co-op launched an ambitious partnership to bring local communities together to support the positive futures of 750,000 10–25-year-olds across the UK. Through 20 local services and online via social channels that young people go to for information and advice, we are helping young people to access food, improve mental wellbeing, and enable opportunities for their future. For more information contact Ali Cooper, Senior Policy Advisor on Child Poverty, Alistair.cooper@barnardos.org.uk