

Food Insecurity in Leicestershire: Local Solutions, Shared Ambition

Introduction

Food insecurity is a complex issue that affects individuals, families and communities across Leicestershire. Addressing it requires a coordinated, collaborative approach that brings together local authorities, public sector organisations, voluntary and community sector partners, and other key stakeholders to understand local needs and develop sustainable solutions.

Through forums such as Leicestershire Food Insecurity Group and District Health Leads partners take a whole systems approach to food, nutrition and healthy weight. By sharing knowledge, intelligence and best practice, organisations work collectively to tackle both the immediate and long-term causes of food insecurity while supporting equitable access to affordable and nutritious food.

Through regular collaboration, local partnerships have strengthened, gaps in provision identified, community-led initiatives are supported, and innovative approaches developed that move people beyond emergency food support towards more sustainable outcomes. By sharing data, experiences and learning, partners have been able to build a more coordinated response to food insecurity across the county, whilst recognising the unique challenges and opportunities within individual communities.

This collection of case studies showcases the breadth and diversity of work taking place across Leicestershire's districts and boroughs. Whilst each area has developed solutions tailored to local needs, they are united by a shared commitment to partnership working, prevention, community empowerment and the vision of a county where everyone can access the food and support, they need to thrive.

Why Food Insecurity Matters in Leicestershire

Food insecurity is a complex issue that can affect anyone and is often driven by factors such as low income, rising living costs, poor health, unemployment, social isolation and unexpected changes in circumstances. The impacts extend beyond a lack of food, affecting physical health, mental wellbeing and overall quality of life.

Across Leicestershire, partners recognise that addressing food insecurity requires more than emergency food provision alone. A coordinated, whole-system approach is needed to tackle the underlying causes of hardship, improve access to support services and create opportunities for people to build long-term resilience. By working together, organisations can help ensure residents have access to affordable, nutritious food while supporting healthier, stronger and more resilient communities.

Blaby - Partnership, dignity and community support

The **Glenfield Community Food Hub** was established in 2020 in response to the immediate needs of local residents during the Covid-19 pandemic. What was initially expected to be a temporary response very quickly became an established community service, and sadly the need for that support has not gone away.

The Hub is very much a community partnership. Glenfield Parish Council works alongside volunteers, residents, local businesses and other organisations to provide food and essential items to individuals and families who are struggling. Over the years we have received support through organisations including Blaby District Council, Leicestershire County Council and the Leicestershire & Rutland Community Foundation, together with invaluable donations and practical assistance from local businesses and members of the community.

Our aim has always been to provide help with **dignity and respect and without judgement**. Demand has changed over the years, but pressures including the cost of living, housing costs, low incomes and unexpected changes in people's circumstances mean that the Hub continues to have an important role within Glenfield.

One of the greatest strengths of the Hub has been partnership working. No single organisation could have achieved the same result on its own. Bringing together local government, the voluntary and community sector, businesses, volunteers and residents has allowed us to draw upon different resources, experience and ideas and, most importantly, turn that support into practical help for people locally.

Quote:

“The Glenfield Community Food Hub began as an emergency response, but the need for it has not gone away. What has made it possible to continue is the extraordinary support of our residents, volunteers, local businesses and partner organisations. Working together means we can provide practical help to people in our community when they need it most, and do so with dignity.”



Charnwood – reducing reliance on food banks and rural access

Your Store is a social supermarket based at John Storer House in Loughborough. It is full of surplus food, local donations and purchased food, available for at a fraction of the cost of everyday supermarkets. This reduces food waste, saves members money every week and helps the environment. Your Store members come through referrals pathways.

John Storer also has a Mountsorrel Pop Up Shop and supports the Charnwood Community Food Network. Having all these services under centralised management has reduced duplication of support and allows for a clearer view of gaps in service and service development opportunities.

Mountsorrel Pop Up Shop Story

Since June 2024 John Storer Charnwood (JSC) has managed Your Store Mountsorrel pop-up shop, giving residents greater flexibility and ensures a 52 week a year service. JSC has worked in partnership with the Soar Valley Community Food Project which provides an outreach worker at each pop-up session in Mountsorrel.



Over the couple of years, we've had really solid success with Mountsorrel Your Store. We've introduced the bus and moved locations to Mountsorrel Memorial Centre. Happily, we've seen some customers able to move on from using the service, but equally we have welcomed new customers in need of support and overall, our weekly numbers have remained largely constant.

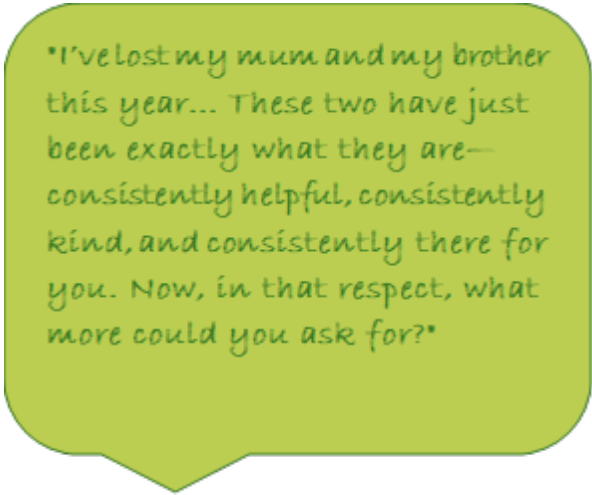
The introduction of the bus has given us several benefits, including allowing us to move to a more prominent location in the village. By increasing our visibility we've been able to attract interest from locals and visitors to the village, raising awareness of the support available and making it easier for new customers in the village to find us when they need to. We have recently had a visit from the Environmental Health Inspector, and they were

very impressed with the standards maintained in the vehicle and awarded us a level 5 rating.

We've also found that we've been able to have a much better consistency to our stock and this has allowed us to expand the range of items we've been able to offer, and to tailor the items in the shop to the needs of our customers. One such example is being able to offer continence wear alongside our sanitary wear selection. These items have been particularly in demand since we introduced them, and we feel that they offer a

great deal of dignity to our customers who may have previously been struggling to afford necessary items when dealing with light incontinence.

We can offer a consistent range of ambient products, we've also found that customers are branching out in the food items they are trying, as they can be confident, they will be able to purchase their 'old favourites' the following week. This has opened up conversations around cooking methods, new recipes and new ingredients. The reliability of the stock has also allowed many customers to 'shop smarter', building up a store cupboard supply of essential items on a week-by-week basis, so that they are able to consistently prepare meals at home. We now often see people come in with a list of the things they need to top up on each week, rather than reaching for the same items just in case they can't purchase them the following week.



"I've lost my mum and my brother this year... These two have just been exactly what they are—consistently helpful, consistently kind, and consistently there for you. Now, in that respect, what more could you ask for?"

Further to the shopping experience and the provision of food, many customers have commented on how coming to the shop also fulfils many social and support needs. Because we only have one to two customers in the bus at a time, we're able to have really meaningful chats with each customer, catching up on how they are, what's going on with them. We've also found that the environment is really conducive to people reaching out and identifying areas where they might be

needing further support. We've been able to signpost customers to employment support services, carers services for those caring for loved ones at home, community transport for those struggling to attend appointments outside of the village and share information about the support they can access through the Mountsorrel Community Support Fund, something which we know several of our customers have been able to make use of.

In this vein, the partnership with Soar Valley Outreach has been particularly beneficial to our customers. The support and services they offer naturally goes hand in hand with ours, and by having Rachel working with us in the shop each week, it gives us a friendly, low-pressure touchpoint for people needing support. Whether that is just a check-in to see how things are going, or identifying areas where customers may need more support. <https://yourstorecharnwood.org.uk/>

"Without this, I'd be using my credit card, and when you can't pay your credit card back, that puts added pressure on you."

"I've been surviving on just over £90 a week. When I look back on it, it upsets me because I think, 'However have I managed to do that?' If these people weren't here, we wouldn't eat—it's as simple as that."

Hinckley and Bosworth - Food growing, wellbeing and social connection

The St Francis Community Garden is a partnership between Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, voluntary and community organisations, and local residents. It provides an inclusive, accessible space where people can grow fresh produce, learn skills, volunteer and improve their physical and mental wellbeing. Produce is used by the Community Café, donated to Hinckley Area Foodbank, the Community Café and shared with residents, helping to increase access to healthy, locally grown food. Through composting, reusing materials and wildlife-friendly planting, the garden also reduces waste, supports biodiversity and contributes to a more sustainable local food system.

One volunteer joined the garden after experiencing poor mental health and significant social isolation, which had made it difficult for him to leave the house or take part in community activities. The welcoming volunteering opportunity helped him rebuild a routine, connect with others and regain a sense of purpose; he described it as the first time in three years that he had properly left the house for an activity. His experience demonstrates how accessible community food-growing projects can improve wellbeing, reduce isolation and provide a pathway into wider community support.

Melton - Reaching isolated communities and building resilience



The Rural Food Hub Network was developed by Melton Borough Council in response to growing evidence that residents in rural communities were experiencing significant financial hardship and food insecurity but faced barriers accessing support services based in Melton Mowbray.

Using Household Support Fund data, community intelligence and geographical mapping, the Council identified clear pockets of need across rural villages, challenging the perception that hardship did not exist in more affluent areas. In response, a sustainable hub-and-spoke model was created, establishing food hubs within village communities that provided not only access to food support, but also connections to wider services such as financial advice, mental health support, domestic abuse services and employment support. The project was built on strong partnerships with Leicester South Food Bank, village halls, parish councils and local volunteers, ensuring support was delivered close to home and focused on building long-term independence rather than dependency.

The project has had a significant impact across Melton's rural communities. A network of nine rural food hubs was established, generating more than 76 requests for food and wider support following launch. Through UK Government funding, the programme created 29 volunteering opportunities, supported local organisations, increased community engagement by up to 38%, and enabled many residents to access wider support services to address the underlying causes of hardship. The hubs have provided vital assistance to individuals and families facing temporary financial crises, helping some progress from requiring regular food support to achieving financial stability and independence.

Most importantly, the Rural Food Hub Network has evolved beyond emergency food provision into a wider programme of community resilience. As demand for food support reduced, the project successfully achieved its original aim of reducing dependency and strengthening local capacity. Several hubs are now transitioning into community-led spaces that will offer activities such as health and wellbeing support, digital inclusion, community cafés and social opportunities. This legacy will help ensure rural residents can continue to access support, reduce isolation and improve wellbeing within their own communities for years to come.

An attendee at one of the Rural Food Hubs communities, “After a delay in receiving my old age pension and having no income for several weeks, being able to access the Rural Food Hub was a lifesaver.”

Another commented “Without the rural food hub, I don't know how I would have managed after being off work for several weeks and only receiving statutory sick pay from my employer.”

North West Leicestershire - Accessible support and tackling inequalities

A community support shed was donated by North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) to Warren Hills Primary School in Agar Nook to create a practical and accessible resource for local families and residents. The initiative was developed in response to the increasing need for easily accessible information, support and emergency assistance within the community.

Located within the school grounds, the shed acts as a central hub where parents and local residents can access information on local services, community activities and support organisations. By providing signposting and practical resources in a familiar and trusted location, the project helps individuals and families connect with the right support more quickly and reduces barriers to accessing help.

The shed has also provided a valuable source of emergency assistance, housing food supplies and essential items for families experiencing short-term financial hardship. In addition, it has supported the school's sustainability and inclusion objectives by offering donated and pre-loved school uniforms, helping to reduce costs for families while encouraging the reuse of good-quality items that may otherwise go to waste.

The need for this initiative is highlighted by both local deprivation and public health data. Agar Nook is one of the most socioeconomically deprived areas in Leicestershire, containing neighbourhoods that fall within the most deprived 10% of areas nationally, with 52% of children living in low-income families compared with 25% across Leicestershire and 38% nationally.

These challenges are reflected in local health outcomes. Between 2022/23 and 2024/25, obesity prevalence among Reception-aged children in Agar Nook was 15.9%, compared with the England average of 9.8%.

The findings demonstrate the close relationship between deprivation, poverty and health inequalities and reinforce the importance of providing accessible, community-based support. By reducing some of the practical and financial pressures experienced by families, the project helps create the conditions that enable healthier and more resilient communities.

The project demonstrates the benefits of partnership working between the council, school and wider community, the facility is intended to provide short-term and emergency support rather than create dependency, empowering individuals and families to access the appropriate services and assistance needed to improve their circumstances.

The support shed shows how a relatively small intervention can have a meaningful impact by placing support within a trusted local setting, ensuring that families can access help at the point it is needed most helping to build a stronger, healthier and more connected community.

Food Bank usage

20,000 parcels
from February 2022
- February 2023

Reduced to
14,500 parcels
from February 2023 - February 2024

Reduced further down to
12,000 parcels
from February 2024 - February 2025



Cooking course



Target - 4 courses with
40 families



Achieved - 9 courses with over
50 families over 15 months

21

working partners visited the cooking courses to support and educate families.

The course has been taken on by Multiply who continue to run the courses across the district.

Cooking videos



Created **four**
different take away
meal options for
under £5
that can be cooked
at home



Target - **150 views**
in six months)

Achieved - around
625 views
on each video

School uniform swap shop

2023

18 venues with **20** rails full of uniform being accessed

90.7kg of school uniform diverted from
landfill to a Nottingham school uniform project

Across the whole district all schools were covered

2024

14 venues with **18** rails full of uniform being accessed

442kg of school uniform was diverted from
landfill and given to Leicestershire Children's Holidays



Support Tour

27 partners visited with
the Food Poverty Officer
to all **10** district food
provisions

352 people visited
the food provisions

Food Poverty Officer interacted
with **289** of them and there were
336 partner engagements

27 partner referrals and
advice continued after
these events

Partner relationships with
the food provisions was
strengthened and continues



Oadby and Wigston - Holistic support and reducing reliance on food banks

The **Food Pantry Nook** offers food and household items at affordable prices. Alongside this, a variety of partners attend weekly, adopting a holistic approach to understand how services can better support residents using this service.

Also the Council supported the Nook with funding cooking lessons for their users for a period of time.

The **Community Hub** hosts the South Leicestershire food bank, a multi-agency approach is adopted to support their users. Partners attend the Hub to offer further support to those who utilise the service in order to provide additional help can be taking a holistic approach and encouraging a reduced reliance on foodbanks.

Key Themes Across Leicestershire

- **Partnership Working** - Every project demonstrates the value of collaboration between councils, community organisations, volunteers and residents.
- **Beyond Emergency Food** - Many initiatives are focused on addressing root causes through advice, social support, employability and financial resilience.
- **Health and Wellbeing** - Projects improve more than food access, supporting physical health, mental wellbeing and social connectedness.
- **Sustainability** - Projects seek to develop long-term solutions rather than ongoing crisis intervention.

Looking Ahead

While food insecurity continues to affect residents across Leicestershire, the examples featured within this report demonstrate the positive impact of collaborative action. By continuing to strengthen partnerships, share learning and invest in community-led solutions, organisations across the county are working towards a future where everyone has equitable access to nutritious food and the opportunity to live healthy, independent and fulfilling lives.

Harborough – long term community owned provision

The Well in Kibworth is a valued community hub providing a range of services that support residents experiencing financial hardship and food insecurity. Located in the heart of the village, the busy café provides a welcoming and inclusive space where residents can access support in a non-judgemental environment. Alongside the café, The Well operates a charity shop offering affordable, good-quality pre-loved clothing, shoes and accessories, and hosts a foodbank in partnership with the Trussell Trust, which has been operating since the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020.

A range of local services utilise The Well for drop-in sessions, enabling warm referrals between organisations and ensuring residents can access wider support when needed. This collaborative approach helps to provide a more holistic support network, addressing not only immediate food needs but also the wider factors that can contribute to financial insecurity and social isolation.

More recently, the Pavilion Pantry has opened at Houghton Pavilion in Houghton on the Hill, helping to address a recognised gap in provision in the rural north of the district. In partnership with the Trussell Trust, it offers emergency food support through its foodbank service. The Pavilion Pantry Table further enhances local support by providing food, household and personal hygiene items that are freely available to the community on a 'take what you need, leave what you can' basis. These initiatives operate alongside a community café, creating opportunities for residents to connect, access information and support, enjoy affordable refreshments and participate in community activities, including talks from guest speakers and visiting support services.

Harborough District is also home to two thriving community fridges, helping to reduce food waste while increasing access to free food. The Village in Market Harborough is a community hub with sustainability at its core, supporting residents to reduce plastic waste, promoting independent ethical businesses and stocking locally produced food and drink. Its community fridge operates from Tuesday to Saturday, working in partnership with Jubilee Foodbank and local growers to redistribute surplus food that would otherwise go to waste. Residents can collect food free of charge, with no referral required.

In Lutterworth, the community fridge operates from the Family Hub on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. As well as reducing food waste and improving access to food, the location enables residents to access additional support services where appropriate, providing another valuable entry point into wider community support. Together, these initiatives demonstrate the district's commitment to addressing food poverty, reducing food waste and creating welcoming community spaces that support residents' wellbeing and resilience.