

We Make Camden Missions: **Our Food Mission**



Our Food Mission

By 2030, everyone eats well every day with nutritious, affordable, sustainable food



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| Why is this a Mission?

The COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis severely intensified the issue of food insecurity. What was once a question of accessibility and affordability has now evolved into a systemic challenge. Environmental events driven by the climate crisis, geopolitical shifts, and volatile food prices have fundamentally altered the dynamics of food insecurity.

In Camden, 14.1% of the population was income-deprived in 2019, but we believe that food insecurity is not simply the case of people not having enough money to buy food—it's shaped by personal, systemic, and environmental factors beyond individual control that we call the food system. In globalised food systems, Camden doesn't have control over food production and processing, but we can influence demand and shape new markets to influence how food reaches our tables, is consumed and is disposed of.

Poor and inadequate nutrition contributes to a range of long-term conditions including heart attacks, strokes, diabetes and some cancers. These conditions have a major impact on the health and quality of life of our residents, as well as increasing pressures on health and social care services. Beyond this, for every £1 spent on food, there is an additional £1 of hidden social costs, including environmental damage and health-related expenses.¹

Food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste are all part of a food system that profoundly impacts the environment—and, in turn, impacts our ability to produce and supply food sustainably. These interconnected challenges are deeply intertwined, demanding a whole-system approach that can influence both supply and demand.

What are the key aims of the Food Mission?

By 2030, we want everyone in Camden to eat well every day, with nutritious, affordable, and sustainable food. To do this we have broken down our mission into the following outcomes:

- **Residents are food secure and no longer need to rely on crisis food provision.**
- **Residents eat a healthy and balanced diet**
- **Food is a foundation of children's and young peoples' flourishing lives**
- **Camden's food system drives climate action, contributing to solutions for the environmental crisis**

"We believe that through a strong and dynamic Camden Food Partnership, that brings together residents, businesses and the voluntary sector, we can share knowledge, resources, and innovation to drive local, national, and global food system transformation. Together, we can shift behaviours, policies, and practices to improve food quality, demand, access, and affordability for everyone."

◆ Good Life Camden – measuring progress

The table below sets out the mission's current thinking about relevant outcome measures to track progress. These reflect both where data is already available and our ambition to develop new measures to better understand mission progress.

We have aligned the outcome measures to our Good Life Camden wellbeing framework. Good Life Camden sets out a range of themes and signals to enable us to understand what it means to live a good life in the borough.

This data will help us understand change at a system level, but we recognise that Camden is only one actor within this system. The change we hope to see – and which the mission can contribute to – will be dependent on a range of factors including national policy, private and third sector partners, and, economic circumstances.

These outcomes cannot tell the whole story and will need to be complemented with qualitative data and project level learning over the life of the mission.

Outcome	Indicator	GLC Theme
Residents are food secure, and don't need to access crisis food provision	Number of low-income households (further breakdown available – households with children) (DWP)	Income and affordability
	Number of emergency food parcels distributed to people in crisis (The Trussell Trust)	Income and affordability
Residents eat a healthy and balanced diet	Percentage of adults who meet the 5-a-day guidelines in Camden	Health
	Share of adults and children who are overweight or obese	Health
	Healthy Life Expectancy	Health
Food is a foundation of children's and young people's flourishing lives	Percentage of children and young people who eat fresh fruit / vegetables on most days (HRBQ)	Health
	% children who are overweight or obese in Reception and Year 6	Health
	Number and percentage of children in Camden eligible for Free School Meals, who take up the offer (further breakdown available by ethnicity, postcode, age, gender) (School Census)	Health
Camden's food system contributes to tackling the climate crisis	CO2 emissions / Food and non-alcoholic drinks consumption-based CO2 emissions of households in Camden (University of Leeds and London Council)	Environment

Residents are food secure and no longer need to rely on crisis food provision

This Food Mission outcome aims to provide comprehensive, wraparound support for individuals accessing crisis food provision, ensuring they have greater choice and agency over the food they consume.

According to Citizens Advice cost-of-living data², rising energy and rent costs exacerbated the crisis at the start of 2024, leading to a record number of food bank referrals. Although these numbers have gradually declined throughout the year, they remain at historically high levels, with certain groups disproportionately affected.

While Camden-specific data is not available, broader trends indicate that the borough is not immune to these challenges. Analysis of Citizens Advice referral data highlights the following key findings:

- More **individuals with disabilities or long-term health conditions** have been referred to food banks compared to those without such conditions. Among disability types, individuals with multiple impairments and those with mental health conditions are among the highest users of crisis food support. In contrast, those with physical impairments are three times less likely to access food banks.
- **Single-person households and single-parent families** are more than twice as likely to require crisis food provision compared to other household types.
- **Social housing tenants** access food crisis support at significantly higher rates than private tenants and owner-occupiers.
- **Black/Black British residents** are among the highest users of crisis food support across all age groups.
- Age-wise, **individuals aged 35–44 access** crisis support at the highest rates, followed by those aged 45–54. The least likely to access these services are individuals under 25 and over 65.

Over the past year we have been working with partners to build a strong Camden Food Partnership that can mobilise residents, partners, and businesses to tackle food insecurity collaboratively, bringing together expertise and resources.

The key focus is on a money-first approach, which aims to empower residents to reduce their dependence on crisis food provision. Interventions in this area prioritise increasing residents' income by helping them access financial support they may be entitled to. Additionally, residents will benefit from integrated local crisis support, including provisions for individuals with no recourse to public funds. A money-first approach also involves reducing residents' core outgoings through targeted interventions. This includes:

- Budgeting support to help manage financial pressures effectively.
- Improving access and affordability of healthy food within local communities, ensuring people do not have to travel far to source healthy and culturally appropriate food.
- Strengthening connections between residents and community food projects, fostering local support networks and long-term resilience.

Residents eat a healthy and balanced diet

This outcome aims to ensure that all residents have easy access to healthy food options locally, with a particular focus on ensuring that Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities can access culturally appropriate food within their neighbourhoods.

Improving diets can enhance overall population health while reducing wider health inequalities. Unhealthy diets are responsible for 13% of all deaths in the UK, largely due to their role in increasing risk factors such as obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes—all of which are major contributors to heart attacks and strokes.

In Camden, from 2015 to 2022, there has been an upward trend in the

prevalence of overweight and obese adults, with the rate increasing from 44.1% to 52.8% in 2022/23 (this is lower than the England average of 64% but similar to other boroughs in London). We know obesity has a major impact on residents, communities, health & care services, and the economy. Reducing and reversing this impact will require concerted action on a range of factors, including enabling health behaviours, enhancing the local environment to support healthy behaviours, treatment where appropriate, and promoting mental wellbeing.

Consumption of five portions of fruit and vegetables per day is a key indicator of a healthy diet. In Camden, adult 5-a-day consumption is 33.5% of adults, slightly higher than both the London and England averages. However, this trend has declined between 2020 and 2022. The cost and access to fresh fruit and vegetables can be a barrier to eating healthy for some residents.

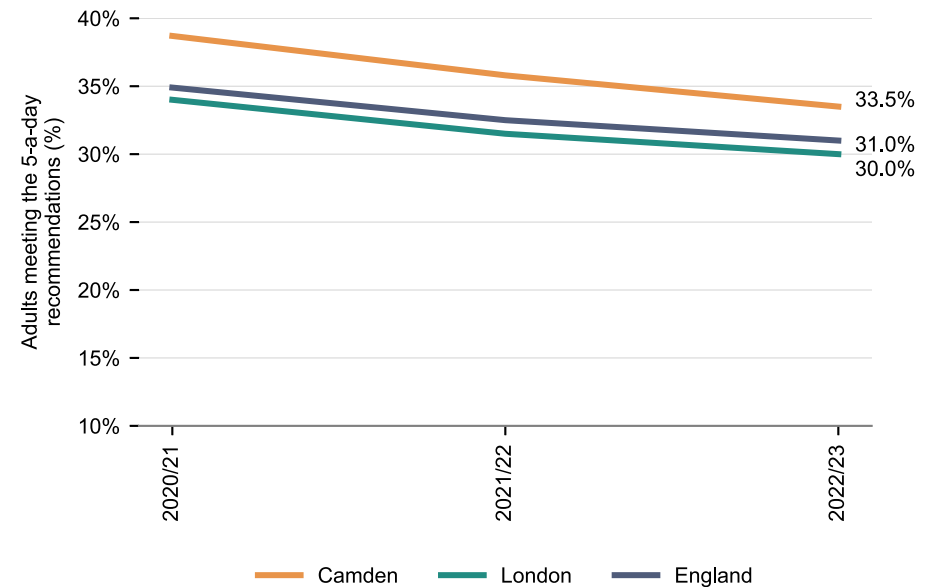
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We don't have a fruit and vegetable market like they do in other parts of Camden. Because of our location [Warren Street] the food is even more expensive, so we should be considered because of where we live in Central London. I understand the shopkeepers need to do that because the rent is higher in those areas, so it's like a vicious circle. It should be a full circle moment where there is a bit of help between each process, so everyone understands one another, and not a problem for everybody.

– Female, focus group discussion for mothers at Regent's Park Children's Centre.)

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Figure 12.1: Share of adults eating at least 5 fruits and veg a day



Source: OHID, based on Sport England data, 2022/2023

A key part of the Food Mission's approach to this outcome is supporting people with the necessary resources to store, prepare, and cook food, alongside ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to prepare healthy meals. In addition, this outcome seeks to create opportunities for residents to participate in food-growing initiatives that promote sustainable agricultural practices. These initiatives not only encourage environmentally responsible food production but also help people connect with nature and develop a deeper appreciation for fresh, natural food.

One place where residents can get involved in picking their own fruit and vegetables is, the Story Garden:

“*My kids always go to the Story Garden and do digging, picking fruits in summertime. They don't have this experience, so they like playing with soil, run around. It's nice. What I see in this country is that kids don't have those opportunities.*”

– Female, Regent's Park Children's Centre focus group

One mother, speaking at a focus group at Regent's Park Children's Centre, described how the cost of food influenced her choices at home:

“*I buy a lot of fruit, but my kids eat a lot of fruit, and then I find myself not eating it because the kids are going to eat it. And it's expensive—so even though I buy a lot, they eat a lot, and I want them to have the good stuff. So I find myself eating the not-healthy stuff.*”

Learning from: Rhyl Community Kitchen at Rhyl Community Primary School (funded by River of Hope)

Family Dinners at Rhyl Community Kitchen supports families through winter by providing healthy, hot meals. With rising living costs and some families in temporary housing without cooking facilities, this initiative ensures access to nutritious food while fostering community connections.

Parents and carers also have the chance to build skills and confidence. So far, two parents have earned a Level 2 Food and Hygiene certificate, with growing interest from others. The project aims to upskill as many parents as possible, empowering them to cook for themselves and support their community.

Food supports children and young people to thrive, laying a foundation for flourishing lives

This outcome aims to support the development of young people from early childhood through to adulthood, ensuring they have access to a healthy diet at every stage of life.

From birth, we aim to support parents who choose to breastfeed by providing guidance and resources to help them do so successfully.

“*...thank you for the support we received when he was born especially with establishing breastfeeding, with midwives and health workers coming to my home the day after we arrived back from hospital.*”

– Female, Regent's Park Children's Centre focus group

Encouraging a balanced diet for children that is low in sugar, salt, and saturated fat is essential, along with fostering a positive and healthy food environment at home. We support young people in building their knowledge and interest in healthy and sustainable food, equipping them with the skills to make informed dietary choices. By integrating these efforts across different stages of childhood and adolescence, we aim to create a healthier future for young people while fostering long-term positive eating habits.

Almost 1 in 5 children in Camden are overweight or obese by reception year (19.1%), which is similar to London (20%) and lower than England (21.3%). By the end of primary school (year 6) this figure rises to 1 in 3 (36%), following a similar pattern to London (38.8%) and England (36.6%). The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) data also shows that pupils living in the most deprived areas, or those from Asian and Black ethnic groups are more likely to be overweight or obese.

Camden School Breakfast Programme

Data from the Health-Related Behaviours Questionnaire (2021-2022) indicated that 11% of Camden primary school pupils and 29% of Camden secondary school pupils had nothing to eat or drink before lessons on the day of the survey. In 2022, qualitative feedback from school staff highlighted the issue of hunger before lessons in schools across Camden. School staff noticed hunger affecting concentration and behaviour among pupils, and several staff members reported keeping discretionary funds or stores of food to feed pupils who came to school hungry. In response to this the Council commissioned Magic Breakfast to deliver the Camden School Breakfast Programme in January 2023 to meet the needs of Camden's most deprived schools.

The Camden School Breakfast Programme has expanded over the past two years and engaged with schools to ensure that all schools across Camden offer breakfast for free to all pupils on Free School Meals at a minimum, with the aim of supporting schools to offer free breakfast to the entire school roll. The breakfast programme has supported the roll out of Magic Breakfast at 24 of our most deprived schools that have a Pupil Premium Eligibility of at least 30%, including 2 special schools and 1 Pupil Referral Unit. There was an initial step change in the number of schools that joined the Camden School Breakfast Programme, increasing from the original 9 Magic Breakfast schools in December 2022, to 22 schools by April 2023.

Uptake figures from Autumn 2024 indicate that this Council funded initiative implemented by our schools enables up to 3228 children to have a free breakfast every day - up from 587 children in 2022. The Magic Breakfast provision is highly valued by school staff, parents and pupils. Not only does providing school breakfast help to tackle the issue of hunger in children and young people, but qualitative feedback shows that the provision of school breakfast has had positive impacts on school attendance and concentration and has helped reduce some household costs during the cost-of-living crisis.

“ This has really helped motivate my daughter to get to school on time, having breakfast with her friends each day is a real incentive to get into school.”

– Parent, La Sainte Union

“ After I have my breakfast, my brain is better at concentrating and managing my distractions.”

– Year 3 pupil, Christ Church School

Free School Meals take up pilot

In response to low Free School Meal (FSM) uptake in Camden secondary schools the Council partnered with research agency Word on the Curb to explore barriers to FSM uptake in two schools (Haverstock and Regents High).

FSM uptake is measured twice a year through the School Census. As of Spring 2024, on average 61.5% of registered FSM pupils in Camden ate their meal on census day, similar to Spring 2023 (62.3%), with uptake varying across schools from 47.6% to 84.3%.

Key insights from the work include:

- Stigma wasn't a major issue, but pupils faced barriers like limited variety, inconsistent portions, and inaccessible menus.
- Many students reported feeling hungry at school, affecting focus and energy, with some resorting to unhealthy coping strategies.
- Parents lacked awareness of FSM benefits, faced language and digital literacy barriers, and had misconceptions about meal suitability.
- Schools needed better systems to capture and respond to pupil feedback on meals.

As a result, several changes were introduced:

- FSM Application Support – Extra staff now assist families year-round.

- Breaktime Fruit Offer – Free fruit provided in six secondary and two special schools.
- School Meal Improvements – The new meal contract (from April 2025) includes deeper pupil engagement and expanded dietary options.
- FSM Auto-Enrolment – A process using Camden benefits data to enrol eligible students automatically, reducing administrative barriers for parents. Launch is planned for 2025.

This strategic approach ensures FSM access and school meals are co-designed with pupils, making them more appealing and accessible.

Uptake of the Holiday Activities and Food programme

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is centred around providing essential support to children and young people through access to enriching activities and nutritious meals during school holidays. The Camden HAF continues to build on its successes and go above and beyond the provision funded through the national Department for Education (DfE) programme, enhancing the offer through collaborations with local partners and extended access for families.

Most recently, the Winter HAF 2024 programme ran successfully for 900 children over December and January, with 19 providers delivering sessions across 22 venues. Children and young people participated in a wide range of activities. Looking ahead, the Easter programme is scheduled to run from 14th - 25th April 2025. 20% of the DfE funding will be dedicated to ensuring young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities have access to enriching activities during the Easter holidays and additional funding from Camden Council will further enhance provision to ensure that some of those who need the support but do not meet the DfE's strict criteria are still able to benefit.

Camden's food system drives climate action, contributing to solutions for the environmental crisis

This Food Mission outcome aims to support residents, businesses, and organisations in Camden to adopt sustainable food practices. This includes shifting consumer demand toward environmentally friendly-diets, ensuring easy access to locally and ethically produced food, promoting low-carbon cooking methods, minimising single-use plastics, and reducing food waste.

Food growing is at the heart of community engagement, sustainability, and social connection in Camden. To support this, Camden has invested £230,000 over two years in a borough-wide food-growing programme, removing barriers and making food growing more accessible.

A review of Camden's food-growing spaces identified at least 55 community sites, including gardens, orchards, and raised beds, with additional food growing happening in private and untracked spaces. Allotments remain in high demand, with 208 fully occupied plots and a waiting list under review to ensure fair access.

To streamline new food-growing projects, Camden Council has assessed internal processes and identified potential barriers to inform clearer guidance for residents and create defined roles within the Council to support food-growing initiatives.

Community-led approaches are central to this work. In partnership with Castlehaven Community Association, we launched the Camden grower's conversation to connect growers, share knowledge, and co-develop a sustainable food-growing strategy. A successful food-growing celebration in November 2024 reinforced the need for a coordinated network, which is now being established.

Beyond growing food, this initiative fosters cultural and social connections, particularly among Camden's diverse communities.

Maintaining engagement through events, workshops, and shared learning is crucial to long-term success. Future council support must be accessible, with clear guidance in multiple languages, ensuring food growing remains an integral part of Camden's communities

Learnings from: Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society

Lifeafterhummus is a key player in Camden's food partnership, rescuing five tonnes of surplus food per month, redistributing it to 80 households, 11 hostels, an after-school club, and a faith group. Their 50 local volunteers collect food from 45 stores weekly, ensuring that good food doesn't go to waste. In 2024, Lifeafterhummus concluded a study on food waste in and around Somers Town, bringing together insights from food businesses (such as restaurants, supermarkets, cinemas etc.) and VCS organisations providing food-related services (such as subsidised food, food vouchers, non-perishables to take away etc.) The majority of food waste is unavoidable waste such as plate scraps, vegetable peelings etc. which, if segregated properly, is sent to an anaerobic digestion site or a composting site by the North London Waste Authority. However, the 109 businesses surveyed also identified other types of food which could potentially be donated - edible fresh food within use-by date, imperfect/damaged but edible stock within use-by date, edible stock within use-by date and edible stock within the best-before date. The VCS organisations providing food related services noted that they often fell short of the demand. The residents they serve face challenges such as insufficient food, poor nutrition, having to choose between food and other essentials which often impacted their ability to study or work. Lifeafterhummus collect just over 1000kg of surplus food per week, around five tonnes of food a month. This is then repurposed, prepared as hot meals and other food for different outlets such as after-school clubs, hostels, surplus food cart and others, including selling the food at their café in 5 Pancras Square library.

Learning from: Food for Homeless – a We Make Camden Kit grantee

The Food for Homeless project is dedicated to supporting the homeless community in Camden. Driven by founder's personal experience and a deep commitment to community, this project has now expanded significantly, providing meals, essentials, and vital connections to those in need across the borough.

This initiative is focused on providing food and support for homeless individuals in Camden - offering not just meals, but also a space for connection, understanding, and dignity. The project began when the founder, as a refugee struggling with their own financial hardships, used their personal savings to provide food for rough sleepers and the homeless community.

The project operates through a mobile model, delivering food and essentials to people in need across Camden. The founder walks through the streets, bringing food in a trolley to multiple areas in the borough.

The impact of the project comes from using food as a foundation to create a human connection that many rough sleepers and homeless people lack. The founder emphasised the importance of interacting with those they help,

“ I remember what one guy told me; I said hello. How are you? And he said “Oh, how am I?” You know, that is the sentence I haven't heard for two years.”

The project has grown with the funding received from the kit as explains the founder,

“ I started to feed 5 people maximum weekly... now 50 people come weekly.”

Food for Homeless highlights the power of individual commitment and the importance of community-driven initiatives. The founder reflects,

“If I [see someone] especially with the hunger and hardship, absolutely, I try to help.”

The project has also underscored the importance of addressing both immediate and long-term needs, with plans to expand in the future to incorporate additional support services, such as mental health and housing advice.

“The first mission I have is to tackle the poverty, to understand people and recognise their need and provide [for] their needs, and move them from the street, to give them a roof.”

| Our priorities for the coming year

The current Food Partnership has been instrumental in bringing us to where we are today. In 2025, we will focus on building new partnerships while strengthening existing ones to drive the systemic changes we aim to create. Key initiatives will include:

- School of Food: with a focus on the potential for enhancing curriculum learning through cooking lessons as well as empowering communities through education and skill-building, Camden is exploring what a Camden School of Food could look like, working with schools and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations.
- Camden Council is partnering with Lifeafterhummus to run a six-month experiment with Waste Café in a local library, serving affordable meals made from surplus food. Prepared and sold by young people, the café will reduce food waste while creating employment pathways. If successful, we aim to expand the Waste Café model across Camden.
- The Food Mission is launching its first Challenge Prize this year to drive innovation and collaboration in addressing delivery gaps and shaping market solutions. We identified surplus food in the business sector as a key challenge for our goal to make Camden's

food system more sustainable. We are now in the discovery phase, engaging with restaurants, supermarkets, and food waste suppliers to refine the problem statement.

- Local Food Hub: Supporting partners with food distribution and enhancing local supply chains. Camden is also engaging with local landlords, including those managing shopping centres, to reimagine these spaces as community hubs. The vision is to transform them into active environments where residents can cook, learn about food, and connect with others, advancing both the healthy eating and sustainability agendas.
- Camden is exploring a Right to Grow policy to strengthen food resilience and sustainability. We are also piloting projects to support family hubs, nurseries, and schools in food growing, helping children develop food literacy and connect with nature. Following the success of our first seed bank at Camden Town Library, we plan to expand to more libraries, offering educational sessions and resources.
- Following the completion of the Camden Food Buying Standards as a regulatory lever, we are now working to implement them across Camden and encourage our partners to adopt them. These standards aim to promote healthy, sustainable, and environmentally friendly catering across all council services where food catering is purchased or commissioned.
- In partnership with UCL and a local community organisation the food mission is experimenting with Mobile Community Kitchen initiative. The planned project entails the collaborative design and build of a communal mobile food space, together with asylum seekers and long-term residents of the borough.

Through these ambitious initiatives, Camden is not only addressing immediate food needs but also laying the groundwork for long-term, community-led food system transformation where food is grown locally, connects our diverse communities, and nourishes us to lead long, healthy, and happy lives, all while caring for the planet.

Endnotes

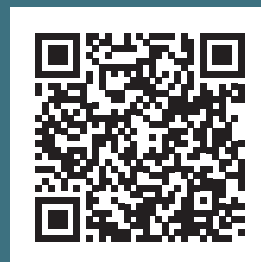
- 1 The Hidden Cost of UK Food, <https://sustainablefoodtrust.org/our-work/true-cost-accounting/#:~:text=The%20Hidden%20Cost%20of%20UK,a%20further%20%C2%A3116%20billion.>
- 2 Source - CA cost-of-living data dashboard | Flourish

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Our Food Mission

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Scan the QR code to find out more about the mission



We Make Camden:
State of the Borough 2025

We Make Camden Missions:
Our Food Mission