

Food for Life Walsall 2026

Embedding a whole
system approach



Walsall Council



A New Vision for Good Food in Walsall



Introduction

Laying the Foundations (2017-2022)

Food for Life (FFL) was first commissioned by Walsall Public Health in 2017. The programme initially focussed on embedding a whole school approach to food across Walsall primary schools and supporting Walsall early years providers to improve menus and food environments. The Walsall commission also had a focus on dental hygiene and dietary sugar reduction, particularly in the early years.

Expanding the focus

Following the schools and early years commission, Walsall Public Health's focus expanded to thinking about the impact these engaged education settings could have beyond the school gate.

Beyond the School Gates (2022-2024)

In 2022, Food for Life Walsall began working beyond the school gate as part of our campaigns and community hub work. We began by mapping potential stakeholders to provide targeted support and training aligned with the developing Walsall Food Plan. Following on from this approach, Walsall Council asked Food for Life to think about how we could bring more audiences into the scope of our work to improve local food environments. This work laid the foundations for a more integrated partnership approach to our work.

Diverse partners from community partnerships to local sports clubs saw the benefit of taking small actions that were aligned to their priorities. Forty-two organisations began working with Walsall residents through shared campaigning and amplifying a coordinated voice for an improved food system. Within this window, Walsall Council began working in earnest on their Local Food Strategy.

The 23-24 programme laid the foundations for a Local Food Partnership in Walsall. In January 2024 this work culminated in the Walsall Food Summit. Stakeholders from across the borough representing 23 organisations came together to take part in workshops, plan and discuss a way forward. The resounding take away was the need for partnership working. In April 2024, we began our work to bring that vision to life.



Embedding a whole system approach

At the end of 2023, Walsall Public Health tendered for a wider piece of work that reflected the ambition locally.

They sought a partner to deliver a three-year programme that:

- Increases the appeal of good food available in EYs, schools and communities
- Increases access to good food in settings where children and young people go
- Optimise local food production and sourcing
- Builds community advocacy

Food for Life was successful in winning this tender and set to co-designing a new approach for the Borough that followed Food for Life's Healthy and Sustainable Food Impact framework and built on our learnings from earlier phases of work in Walsall.

Healthy and Sustainable Food: Impact Framework



2024-2027 approach – laying cross-system foundations

Food for Life has to date:

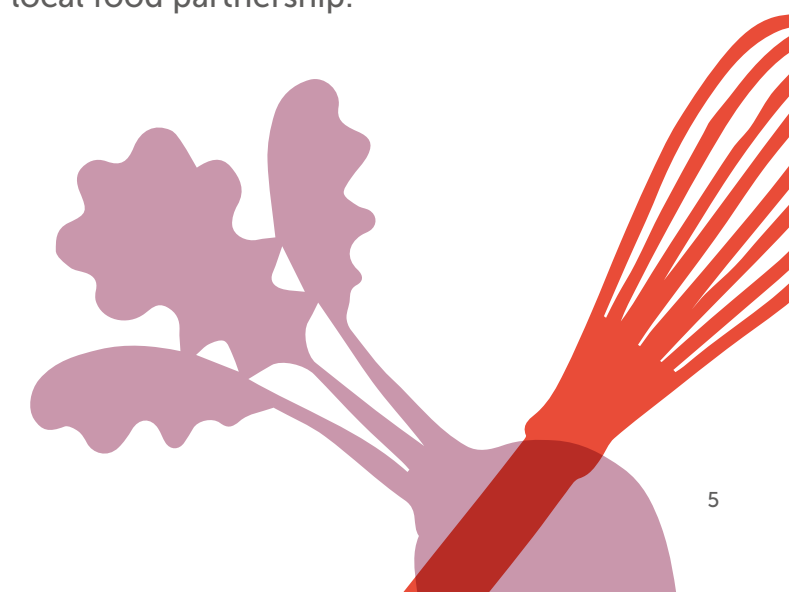
- Co-designed tools that work for early years, schools, and communities.
- Created incentives that celebrate local action and link it to a shared vision.
- Invested in local leadership because empowered changemakers sustain the system.
- Integrated our Healthy & Sustainable Food Team into the programme, bringing a unique combination of tools, standards, and on-the-ground experience to create healthier food environments.

- Sustainable Catering: supporting school caterers and local businesses to improve the quality and sustainability of the food they serve using Food for Life tools, standards, and on-the-ground experience.
- Community: Reaching beyond the school gate to encourage growing, cooking and good food advocacy. Training to create empowered changemakers and codesign of a community award.
- Food Partnership support: Supporting the development of Walsall's Food Partnership, utilising the expertise of Sustainable Food Places.

Key areas of the 2024-2027 programme:

- Early Years: working with early years providers to co-design, trial and deliver an evolved Food for Life Early Years Award introducing a bronze, silver and gold level and making it accessible to more early years providers.
- Schools: Continue our work with schools as they take part in the Food for Life School Awards at bronze, silver and gold levels encouraging and supporting their activity to reach beyond the school gate.

Each intervention plays an important role in improving food availability, literacy, and leadership. When connected through a partnership approach, these combined efforts create exponential impact, amplified by shared campaigns, leadership development, and a strong local food partnership.



Vision:

Everyone in Walsall can access and enjoy healthy and sustainable food every day.

Empower actors across Walsall to make lasting improvements to the local food system.



Food for Life Walsall Impact so far (2017 – 2026)

41 Early Years Settings enrolled



54 Schools enrolled

1,524 Number of residents accessing cooking or growing activity through Nourishing Communities groups

20,116 Children have benefitted from FFL activity in their setting

6 food providers accessing sustainable catering support



214 early years, school & community leaders trained

10,000+

over 10,000 daily Walsall meals improved through FFL Served Here support



35 Schools have achieved a FFL award

207 activities supported in 2025/26 Engagement in campaigns to reach beyond the school gate



24 Community groups engaged through Nourishing Communities award



25 Early years settings that achieved a FFL award

What is the Food for Life Early Years Award?



A Food for Life Early Years Award supports nurseries to show:

- That they are giving their children the best possible start. A Food for Life award shows that a setting is providing the nutritious food that plays a crucial role in a child's development as well as creating the foundations for a lifetime of good food choices.
- Helps to show parents that healthy food and healthy behaviours are important to them
- That they are meeting Voluntary Food & Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings, link to UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative standards and the government guidelines to nutrition in the first year of life.
- That they are meeting the Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework requirement to support children to keep themselves healthy.
- That settings enrich the curriculum providing opportunities to support wider learning through practical growing, cooking and tasting activities as well as food-related topics.
- How settings can create links 'beyond the nursery gate' engaging with parents, carers, schools and the wider community through food-related activities.

Walsall shaping the new Early Years Award

In 2024, as part of the 2024-27 Food for Life programme, a series of codesign sessions were completed with early years practitioners from Walsall settings. As Food for Life's biggest early years commission area, with 41 early years settings enrolled, Walsall provided a wealth of experience to help shape the evolution of the award. Following the codesign workshops a new tiered award with bronze, silver and gold levels was created ready to be trialled with settings, including childminders.

The new Food for Life Early Years Bronze Award was trialled in Walsall and West Northants in late 2025. Feedback was gathered at the end of the trial period before the final version of the award was made official and available to setting nationally.

- 16 early years settings took part in the bronze trial
- 8 achieved a FFL bronze award
- 8 are nearing completion of their award
- The new Food for Life Early Years Silver Award was trialled in Spring 2026
- 5 settings are actively taking part in the Silver Award trial
- 1 setting has achieved a FFL Silver Award

“

Food for Life has brought everything together. It's not just about educating the children; it's educating the team and the family as well. We involve the family. We are in a deprived area and not all our children have gardens, some live in flats.

Families that do have gardens often don't use them and the first time they spend time in a garden is when they start at nursery.

The children have to be shown how to access the outdoor space, what to do, what to wear. They haven't experienced any growing before. Sometimes the fruit we provide, at snack time, is the first time they have seen that fruit. ”

Sonia Aziz, Manager at Abu Bakr Nursery



“

Red group have enjoyed planting a number of vegetables in the allotment. They were very excited when the parents visited the allotment with them and planted potatoes.

Our children have begun to understand how to look after the plants and care for them. They have been learning new words along the way and have been sharing their thoughts and opinions on their favourite fruit and vegetables. ”

Staff at Alumwell Nursery



What is the Food for Life School Award?

A Food for Life Schools Award is a great way to demonstrate that a school is doing fantastic work to provide healthy school meals, great lunchtimes and food education that has a positive impact on both pupils and the wider community.

A Food for Life Bronze School Award supports schools to show:

- 1 That schools, the wider school community, and caterers have the opportunity, confidence, and know-how to access healthy and sustainable food.
- 2 That the school community has the skills and knowledge to make informed food choices leading to healthy and sustainable food behaviours.
- 3 That school settings are equipped to change their food culture through a whole school approach.
- 4 That the wider health, education, and school meal systems are equipped for food culture change, by influencing stakeholders and strategy at local and national levels to adopt the Food for Life framework and ethos.

The Food for Life Award outcomes are mapped by submitting evidence against criteria in four areas of activity:

As part of the 2024 – 2027 Food for Life Walsall programme, we are continuing to offer the school awards package to all Walsall primaries. We are engaging with and supporting the 54 schools enrolled in the programme through awards, training, campaigns and free resources.



The Food for Life awards programme gives schools training, links to campaigns and free resources to support practical growing and cooking activities with pupils.



The year 5 pupils designed and made their own seasonal vegetable soup. Pupils explored the appearance, smell and taste of different herb and vegetable ingredients and then got creating. The cooked soup and recipes were shared with families, for them to make at home. The children really enjoyed making soup in school and said they had never done anything like this before. ”

Delves Juniors



The grant has enabled me to effectively plan and prepare for the remainder of the year, it will support hands-on, experiential learning for our students, providing opportunities to strengthen their understanding of science, sustainability, and healthy food choices. The grant has supported our work towards the Food for Life Schools Award by strengthening our food education provision. Pupils are learning about where food comes from, how it is grown, and the importance of seasonal and sustainable food through hands-on experiences such as planting garlic and onions and preparing potatoes for planting. ”

Delves Juniors on receiving an Earthsong grant through FFL



Sustainable catering

As part of the 2024-2027 programme, Food for Life has expanded the support we offer around sustainable catering.

Now, we are working with caterers, businesses and education settings to support healthy and sustainable changes, offering one-to-one support and training to reduce food waste, source locally and reduce their carbon footprint.

Food for Life Served Here

Food for Life Served Here is an integral part of the Food for Life Walsall programme. Served Here certification recognises providers who are taking steps to improve the food they serve. The aim of the scheme is to encourage and reward caterers who:

- serve fresh food
- source environmentally sustainable and ethical food
- make healthy eating easy, and
- champion local food producers.

Food for Life are working with caterers operating across schools in Walsall to achieve or maintain Served Here certification at bronze or above. This includes Walsall Council Catering Services, Shire Catering Services, Chartwells and Sodexo. For a school to progress to Silver or Gold Food for Life School Award their caterer must have Food for Life Served Here certification at bronze level or above.

Walsall Council Caterers are also going to be working with our sustainable catering team to utilise Cool Food Pro, a free online environmental calculator, to reduce carbon output by managing food waste across schools.



It was interesting to see ladies from different backgrounds and age groups come together and connect over food, personal stories, and cooking techniques. They learnt new skills and recipes throughout the sessions. In their first session, one lady led the cooking activity and made stir-fry noodles with broccoli, a dish she enjoyed making at home. Most of the group loved the noodles and kept asking for the recipe.”

Aaina Community Hub (through their action grant funded recipe exchange sessions)



Support for organisations and businesses

We have been working with Walsall Football Club to improve their sustainable catering offer across their restaurants and make small changes to match day food. They will be utilising the Cool Food Pro tools to set targets and measure their reductions in carbon output.

Walsall College have also signed up to Cool Food Pro with a target to show the environmental impact of reducing beef in a cottage pie in their canteen, showcase seasonal produce on their Littleton Restaurant menu and ensure that their onsite Food for Life awarded nursery,

Little Professors, are involved in their whole setting approach to improving their food environment. Sustainability workshops have been delivered with hospitality students at the college to support their understanding as they enter the food industry.

We have also engaged local businesses to offer sustainable catering support and develop a recognition scheme for businesses that are making sustainable changes. Arboretum Café, Wilson's Tea Room, Wheat & Son Garden Centre, The Table and A Taste of Home have all expressed interest in being involved.



The workshop was well structured for the level of student. I will get all students to take the Cool Food challenge and training on CFP will be included in personal development. Very engaging sessions, interactive and very discussion based. Lots of accessible facts, took the time to personalise to the college. Very good session, I would love to work with the SA in their work in Walsall.”

Walsall College following their sustainable catering workshop



This session was very enlightening. I have been aware of the effect of CO2 emissions on our environment, but I was shocked to find out just how much is produced. We took part in a couple of quizzes that were fun and interesting. I will definitely be trying harder to not waste food in order to protect our future and reduce climate change.”

Walsall college hospitality student following sustainable food workshop



Community: Reaching beyond the school gate

My Food Community

The objective of the six session My Food Community (MFC) course is to inspire, enable and support food citizenship skills, activities and leadership within communities. They work within housing associations, community pantries, allotments, faith organisations and health improvement programmes across Walsall.

The MFC alumni went on to receive leadership action grants providing them with a chance to grow their impact in their community and take practical, collective action that contributes to good health, in balance with nature and a safe climate.

As part of their MFC programme the group took part in codesign workshops to support the creation of a new community Food for Life award.

Food for Life Nourishing Communities Award

The Food for Life Nourishing Communities Award was officially launched in April 2025. It recognises organisations in Walsall that are helping the community to access good food through growing, cooking and sharing knowledge.

- 24 community groups engaged in the award
- 12 achieved a Nourishing Communities Award
- 1524 community members and 68 families reported to be benefiting from growing or cooking activity through Nourishing Communities groups



Food Partnership Support

Leading on from the food summit we held in 2024 and aligning with Public Health's Walsall Food Plan, Food for Life have supported the development of Walsall Food Partnership.

Bringing together a steering group to establish the aims and objectives of the group and what the next steps should be.

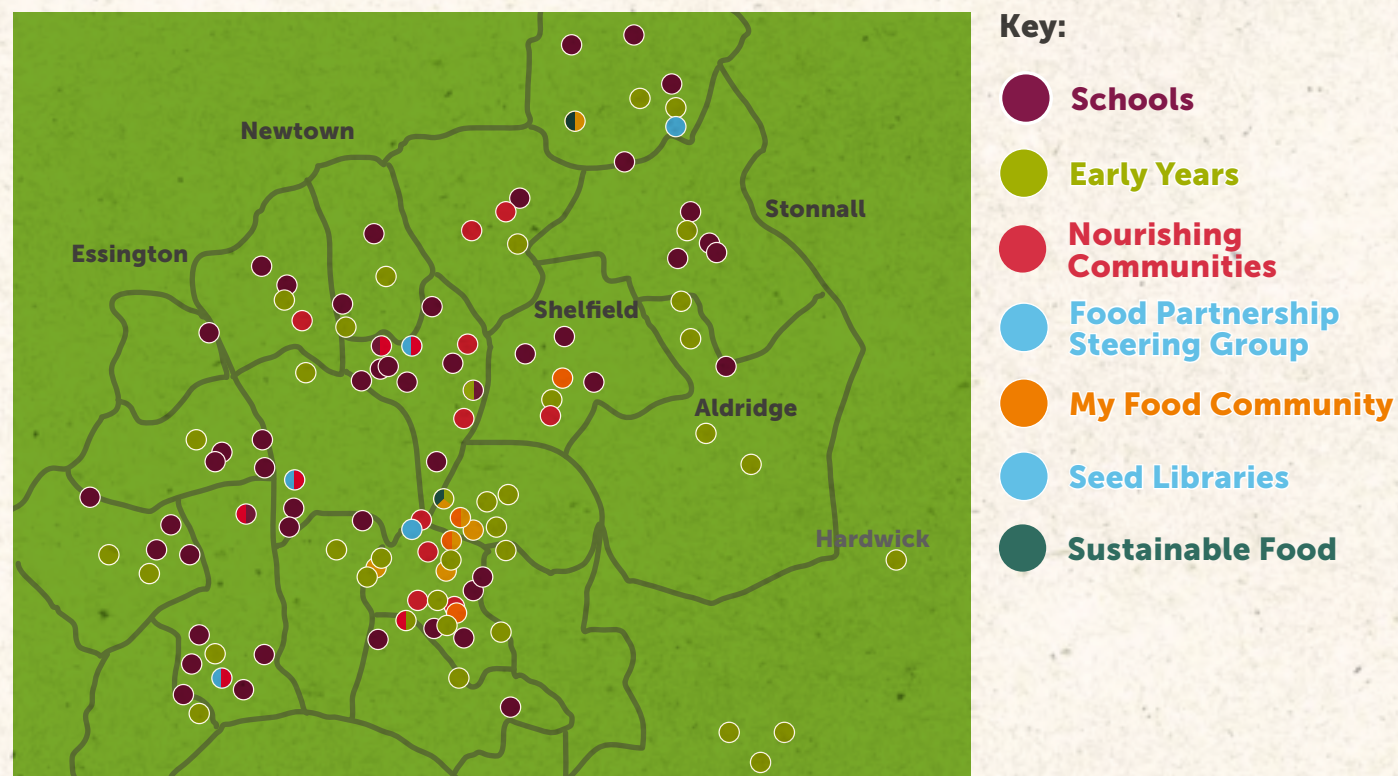
Using our expertise within Soil Association we have been able to share information about Sustainable Food Places to support the groups ambitions to become members and work towards an award.

Food for life continues to play a big role within the partnership, chairing meetings, working towards Walsall Food Plan actions through sub-groups and supporting new members to join through our community engagement work.



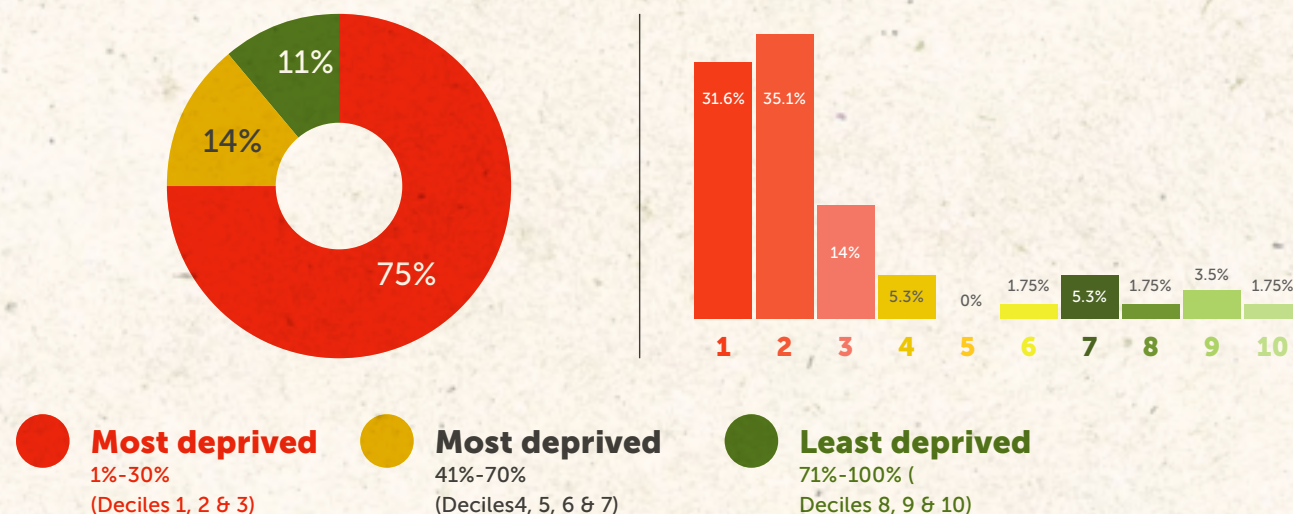
Food for Life reach in Walsall

Activity happening across Walsall as part of our whole system approach.



Enrolled settings

IMD data shows that 75% of enrolled settings are from the most deprived areas of Walsall. Our reach is spread across the whole of the borough but the majority of enagement and award activity is reaching the most deprived areas of Walsall.



What's next?

Over the last eight years, Food for Life has worked alongside Walsall Council and local partners to test, learn, and build practical solutions. We are delivering small, connected changes that add up to something bigger.

Together, we've built a foundation for change by developing practical tools, strengthening networks, and supporting local champions. This enables continued action on diet-related ill health, while embedding healthier food habits and driving positive environmental impact.

- We will continue to support early years settings and schools to work through their Food for Life Awards and reach beyond their gates.
- We will engage and support new community groups through the Nourishing Communities Award.
- We will maintain our presence on the Walsall Food Partnership using our expertise within Soil Association to support the partnerships bid to gain Sustainable Food Places Bronze.
- We will build upon the links made to support sustainable catering.
- We will offer training, campaigns and resources to support cooking and growing activities across the borough.

Jenine Hadley at
jhadley@soilassociation.org

Find out more about Food for Life
www.foodforlife.org.uk

in  

