

# ISLINGTON FOOD PARTNERSHIP

PRESENTS



## LEARNINGS AND INSIGHTS GUIDE

### Islington Food Cooperative Network Pilot

*October 2020 – April 2021*

PROJECT LED BY



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# INTRODUCTION

In late 2020, Islington Food Poverty Alliance (now [Islington Food Partnership](#)) began a pilot project, kindly funded by Food Power for Generation Covid funding. Our 7 pilot projects had £2,514 each to set up and develop their cooperatives.

The original aim of the Islington Food Cooperative Network was to support the setup of 20 self-sustaining local food cooperative buying clubs, for 400 families in Islington. However, given the ongoing lockdown over the duration of the pilot, residents were unable to come together to self-organise in this way. Therefore, we changed our approach to develop seven community organisation led pilot cooperatives, with the intention of providing a new and sustainable option for affordable food over the extended lockdown, whilst also introducing residents to the cooperative model. Our three shared outcomes of the pilot projects were:

- 1 To provide affordable food to families and residents within Islington through a cooperative model approach.**
- 2 To use this to pilot cooperative approaches to food access, to introduce families and residents to the concept of food cooperatives more broadly.**
- 3 To ensure every family and resident is aware of the self-sustaining buying club approach, and signposted to support on how to set one up if they feel it is something that could work for them.**

Our pilots were all set up and run during the Covid pandemic and through a number of weeks of lockdown, which should be kept in mind when reading our key learnings and insights.

We highly recommend reading [Sustain's Food Co-op Toolkit](#) alongside this guide, for more detailed information and advice on food cooperatives and how to set one up.

## Who is this for?

We have written this guide to provide our key learnings and insights to other Food Poverty Alliances, local food networks, local community organisations, or local groups and individuals interested in setting up local food cooperatives.

## What do we mean by a food cooperative?

Sustain provides the following definition:

Food co-ops, food buying groups, food clubs and food groups are terms that are used interchangeably to describe a food outlet that is run on a not-for-profit basis to give people access to good food at affordable prices. We have used the term 'co-op' because it implies co-operation which is all about people working together to achieve something they couldn't do on their own.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoops/>

The Islington Food Cooperative Network piloted a number of different approaches to cooperatives. The main different types of pilots were:

## RESIDENT-LED FOOD BUYING GROUP



**Resident-led food buying group** – the simplest type of food cooperative. A group of individuals come together to form a cooperative, agree on what they want to buy together (usually products that when bought wholesale are cheaper, better quality for similar prices, or not available locally), and then pool their money to purchase. Members make all the decisions themselves, and will need to arrange deliveries and packing of food to split into each household's portion. The cooperative should also be able to access free surplus food from a surplus food supplier, to receive more food for their money.

## BOX SCHEME



**Box scheme** – led by a community group or organisation. Wholesale and/or surplus food is ordered in, then split equally across members for a defined weekly/fortnightly membership fee. This model is relatively low cost and time efficient, but members may have less ownership of what they receive.

## POP UP SHOP



**Pop up shop** – led by a community group or organisation. Wholesale and/or surplus food is ordered in, then put out for display and purchase for members who attend the shop when it is open. A shop can be run as a pop up for certain times during the week, in a space that is used for other purposes at other times. This model may have higher start up and ongoing costs, but can offer more flexibility to members, and also has more opportunities to serve a wider audience, and recoup more costs, in particular by offering tiered pricing.

Some of our pilots ran their cooperatives with multiple approaches, incorporating two or all of the above into their projects. For more information on approaches and types of pilots, see [Sustain's Toolkit](#).





## SUMMARY LEARNINGS

Overall, we have found that each of the models of food cooperatives that we piloted have had degrees of success, of course with various challenges and considerations that come with each. Here we have summarised our main key learnings and recommendations, which are expanded upon in the full section later in the guide.

The most important thing to consider is the **goals and audience** for any food cooperative - there can be many different goals of food cooperatives, with many different target audiences. Overall we benefitted from having a network of cooperatives with shared goals, which allowed us to align and collaborate on aspects of delivery. However, overall the goals of a cooperative must be led by the members and local community it serves, and this will vary from town to town, neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and street to street. We think there is benefit in having a variety of cooperatives with differing goals in an area, or different approaches within a single cooperative, in order to best serve local communities.

Our experience was also that a food cooperative of any type cannot be expected to provide the majority of a household's weekly shopping needs at prices lower than they could find elsewhere. But, there are many benefits that make cooperatives worthwhile, as long as it's clear what your particular goals are.

Our pilot projects got their **food supply** in three main ways: through wholesale suppliers, through large surplus food suppliers, and through local food shops. Some also took donations from members of the public, and/or member food donations and swaps. We found that it was difficult to significantly undercut high street shops when it came to cupboard staples, and so all cooperatives relied on the provision of free surplus food by partners, and in many cases the surplus food was so plentiful that the wholesale bought food wasn't the central aspect of the cooperative. However, it is important to note that many staff and volunteers involved in the pilots were disheartened to see how much surplus food is produced, and reflected on not wanting to be part of an excess supply chain that then perpetuates this practice.

We were generously supported by Food Power for Generation Covid **funding** to set up these pilots. Each of the seven pilots had £2,514 through this grant, however we found that you don't need lots of funding to start a cooperative. In particular, a resident led buying club can definitely get started without any other funding apart from your ongoing membership fees, as you agree together. For an organisation-led cooperative there will be some costs, but some models will be cheaper than others, for example a box scheme will need less setup funds than a shop. Venue hire and staff time will inevitably be the highest costs. With a cheap or free venue space, and enough staff, volunteer or member time to run it, a food cooperative can easily operate with a self-sustaining funding model. The venue and storage you have available will be a key part of how you can design and run your cooperative, but it's very possible to run a cooperative without a huge amount of space.

One of the key benefits of having this joint funding was that it brought together the partnership of organisations, delivering at the same time, to the same objectives, and able to share learnings and insights. We had the opportunity to negotiate with wholesale suppliers as a group, develop a shared logo and marketing, and more.

We highly recommend developing cooperative networks across a partnership, and exploring funding opportunities together, as this will give additional leverage to your efforts.

The majority of our pilot projects offered **membership** at £3 per week / shop, sometimes offering two tiers of fee dependent on household size, for example £5 for a larger family. The membership approach and contribution is one of the core components of a cooperative model, and what sets it apart from a traditional food bank model. A cooperative should be owned and led by its members and the community, and so collaborative decisions should be made on what the membership fees are.

We needed to dedicate a good amount of time to **communications and engagement** with local residents, in order to ensure the new cooperative model was clear and well understood. Although the premise of a cooperative is simple, most people will not have been a part of one before, and it took us more time than expected to reach out and get buy in from communities. Once messages reached people, they were extremely enthusiastic about the concept.

Overall we have found that our local cooperatives supported us to achieve our original goals, alleviated food poverty in a way that felt empowering and accessible to communities, and introduced people to the concept of cooperatives more broadly.

**Moving forward**, as of the end of the funding period in May 2021, the majority of the food cooperative projects will be continuing on, aiming for models that are financially self-sustaining, however often still with venue and staff time offered for free. One key focus for us now will be to ensure we have a good balance of organisation-led and resident-led food cooperatives across the Borough. Beginning these organisation-led pilots has allowed us to introduce the concept of cooperatives to those who may not have considered being part of one before. However, we need to ensure residents feel able and willing to begin and run their own self-sustaining cooperatives, in order to make the network truly sustainable. Organisations also need to feel able and willing to allow members to take on and lead the future direction of these cooperatives, in order for them to be truly transformational in the local community.

With the success of our cooperative pilots, we have been able to make a strong case for the opening up of more community assets within Islington for use by community led cooperatives. We are in conversation with Islington Council about the possibility of opening up permanent high street cooperative shops, that could also serve as multi-functional spaces for the local community.

If you are interested in speaking further to the Islington Food Cooperative Network partnership, please contact Alex Britten, Operations Manager at Manor Gardens Welfare Trust, at [alex@manorgardenscentre.org](mailto:alex@manorgardenscentre.org).

We are very happy to support any other partnerships or groups interested in piloting similar approaches to food cooperatives, and are especially interested in opportunities for collaboration or funding, in order to expand and enhance food cooperatives across Islington and beyond.

## OUR PILOT PROJECTS

	Type of food cooperative	Number of families reached	Estimated number of meals provided
Choices	Cultural food pop up shop	31 families	90 meals
Elizabeth House	Box scheme	80 families	330 meals
Hilldrop Area Community Association	Box scheme	10 families	720 meals
Hornsey Lane Estate Community Association	Community food hub	56 families	3,000 meals
Mildmay Community Centre	Box scheme	110 families	1,100 meals
Manor Gardens Welfare Trust	Pop up shop	51 families	1,010 meals
Newington Green Action Group	Buying group and pay what you can shop	9 families	450 meals
<b>Total</b>		<b>347 families</b>	<b>6,700 meals</b>

**26%**

of members currently find it difficult or impossible to get to shops where they can buy healthy food

**54%**

of members experienced a drop in income in the past 6 months

**32%**

of members are single parent households

**28%**

of members do not have an internet connection at home that would allow them to shop online

**27%**

of member households with at least one person with a disability

**57%**

of members from Black, Asian or minority ethnic households

## CHOICES: CULTURAL FOOD POP-UP SHOP

We piloted and continue to run a cultural food cooperative “pop up shop” that is led by our volunteers. We purchase basic long life, non-perishable (tinned and dried) cultural foods such as pounded yam, cornmeal, stock fish, tinned vegetables such as callaloo and ackee and a variety of beans which we were able to sell to our members at cost price.

We are members of [Fareshare](#) and receive a large quantity of a local supermarket’s perishable food each week, which was free for our members and was used to supplement their shopping. We are also a member of [InKind](#) which enables us to give our clients essential goods such as toiletries, laundry supplies and dry goods like tea and biscuits free.

We also receive donations of food from other local businesses and clients who access our other services but are financially secure. These donations are also offered to our members.

The shop is run in addition to the free food bank one afternoon on a weekly basis, and our existing client’s foodbank clients, as well as those from our extensive network, have become our members.

## ELIZABETH HOUSE: BOX SCHEME

Following a year of providing weekly food support to local residents, our Food Hub changed to a Food Box Scheme in April 2021. The residents are now asked to pay £3 per week and receive around £20-25 worth of products. Our offer is comprised of surplus donations from [The Felix Project](#) and [City Harvest](#), as well as smaller ad hoc donations from local supermarkets and local residents. With additional grant funding and donations, Elizabeth House also purchases essentials like milk, bread, eggs, dry/tinned goods and fresh fruit and vegetables.

When residents registered for the scheme, they were able to list their food preferences on the sign up form which allowed us to tailor our shopping accordingly. However, the most popular items are basics like tuna, milk, bread, eggs and cleaning products - and fresh produce is essential too. We vary what we top up with and add in ‘specialist’ items such as cheese, herbs/spices, condiments once in a while to give the residents a broad selection.





Whilst most residents are able to afford the £3 per week subscription, we still support those who cannot pay by offering subsidised rates or even free support for those most in need. This is possible as we still have additional funding for the Food Hub.

A large proportion of our residents (approx. 60%) originally had their food parcels delivered directly to them. We tried to encourage residents to transfer from home deliveries to collection by explaining the benefits of making their own bag and the opportunity to socialise. This eased our reliance on volunteers and encourages residents to be more involved. We were able to convince some to come to the centre, however, a significant number cannot due to health/age/family reasons.

When residents come to the cooperative, we have given them the choice to pack their own bags, taking only what they would need and like. Whilst this offers a greater degree of freedom and choice for members, it has inevitably resulted in some taking more than if we were packing their bags for them.

Whilst most people only take what they need, there are a few residents who consistently take more than their fair share. We have tried different strategies to address this, for example putting up signs advising how much of each product they can take, but these tend to be ignored. We try and assist them as they pack and advise that in order to sustain the food hub, we need to everyone to behave fairly. We have tried to get understanding of their personal situations. One successful strategy has been to stagger the amount of produce we put out on display (particularly of high value products) to ensure that there is enough for everyone that 'shops' at Elizabeth House. We have had to take affirmative action with one family that would take large amount of food, not pay the full weekly contribution and not follow instructions. After 3 consecutive weeks of taking more than their fair share despite clear instructions, we had to come to the difficult decision that they could no longer benefit from the pop up shop or weekly food box scheme.

With more people coming to prepare their parcels, we used the Food Hub as a vehicle to drive community relations, especially since this was the first time we were meeting some of the residents (due to Covid). We started offering tea and coffee, particularly when persuading older residents to come to the centre to pack their bags – having a place to sit and rest before taking their bags home facilitated the process. Every week, the number of residents enjoying refreshments grew, so we expanded the area. It was a great way for us to connect with the community. People slowly started to open up.

We wanted to build on these community relations and started thinking about how we could encourage more community bonds and participation. We set up a community noticeboard which included information

**“My kids are eating better thanks to the food hub. I’m very grateful for the food hub.”**

Elizabeth House  
cooperative member



about the food hub and other activities at Elizabeth House. We hope to get people involved in bite size volunteering and we are launching a collective craft project making bunting for the hall.

Most recently one of our community organisers set up mini nail salon during the food hub which was a huge success. Many of our female residents enjoyed this service. We found that they really opened up during the process and for some it was a time for much needed self-care that they hadn't been getting. We now plan to offer board games in order to engage the male residents and offer a similar space for them to relax.

On the whole, feedback from the residents has been very good. They have very much appreciated the support from Elizabeth House over the past year and now they like being able to pack their own bags and choose what they need. They are also taking advantage of a social space we have created, and not only have we built connections with them, but residents are getting to know each other better too.

Residents are generally happy with the selection of food they receive but the amount of donations we receive has been decreasing and we are always looking for new suppliers and more donations from the local community. This also requires extra volunteers. As things return to normal, our volunteer numbers are reducing. Now that residents are paying a fee, there is an expectation of a certain level of service and, although we currently have funding to top up the selection with essentials, the amount of food we currently offer could not be sustained with the residents' subscription fees alone.

**"I just wanted to say how good the food coop deliveries have been and to thank you for setting it up"**

Elizabeth House  
cooperative member

## Chris's Story

Chris (name has been changed) started receiving food support from Elizabeth House during the first lockdown after hearing about the service through his neighbours. He says that the food parcels have been an enormous help and he's very happy with the quality of the food.

**"My feedback is very good. You have been very helpful, especially since I have a problem with my leg."**

He also likes chatting with the volunteer that delivers his weekly parcel. He has now become part of our food coop, paying £3 a week and getting more choice in what he receives. Money is tight for him, but this model allows to him budget whilst receiving quality food. As the centre opens up he's looking forward to attending events that bring the community together. Increased community relations were a positive outcome of the pandemic and he's keen to keep this going.

## HILLDROP AREA COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION: BOX SCHEME



In February 2021 we canvassed members and volunteers from our Emergency Food Hub regarding who would be interested in a 10-week food box scheme. None of them had ever used box schemes before and were worried about cost and waste. We had 10 households interested (25 individuals).

Many wanted fruit and veg that was produced locally so we built our boxes around this. Nourished Communities delivered 10 boxes of fruit and veg every week and we supplemented this with items that members had suggested and requested – store cupboard items such as oil, tinned vegetables, fish, and herbs and spices. Some of these items were sourced from My Society who produce ethical supplies with low carbon packaging. We also sourced some items from the local deli who gave us a good discount and it improved our networking with them for future opportunities at the centre

Some households found the box had too much for them, but they shared it with neighbours, made cakes and bottled items. Sometimes they donated items to our food hub or switched them with surplus items.

Feedback from the members demonstrated that the most important difference made to their cooking regimes over the 10 weeks were:

1. They ate much healthier dishes that contained more vegetables than previously. They also tuned into seasonal produce. Some rarely bought fruits but now found ways of including apples, pears and rhubarb in their diets.
2. They were more adventurous in trying out dishes and foods. Some changed their minds about cauliflower having previously thought they didn't like it. Some tried chard or celeriac for the first time.
3. All found that foods like potatoes and carrots tasted much better than shop bought.
4. Sharing of recipes and ideas through a WhatsApp group was very beneficial. Everyone tried a potato and leek soup at some point, and also crumbles!

"The boxes have reminded me to cook things I'd forgotten about. I'm making piccalilli and carrot cake today. It's great to know I have a big soup ready to go at any time."

Hilldrop cooperative member

"It's definitely saved us money and the whole family has got into planning meals based around our box."

Hilldrop cooperative member



As of May 2021, members do not feel confident to take on delivery of a resident led food co-op themselves at present. Until pandemic restrictions are lifted they felt this wouldn't be possible as it would really only work if they could all meet up in person to discuss, plan and order. However, they have all become more engaged with our food hub and surplus stall on a Tuesday, with some volunteering, and they have suggested that they continue to donate £3 a week to this and take items they would like. This is a very good outcome as previously some of these members felt they shouldn't benefit from the food surplus. The pilot has further helped us destigmatise the notion of a food hub and made it adaptable to different members of our community. One member accessed a bulk of very posh cheeses a few weeks ago and donated these to the food hub for everyone to share in!

## HORNSEY LANE ESTATE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION: COMMUNITY FOOD HUB

We ran an 18-week pilot food cooperative from a small hall on our local New Orleans Estate. Membership was open to local residents and included households we were previously supporting with our emergency food packages. For each shop members paid £3 with some choosing to pay more. Not all households came on a weekly basis.

The project ran every Saturday for 3 hours and was mainly volunteer and member led. As an organisation every Saturday was also a great opportunity to signpost members to any other services or support needed and strengthened our relationships with the wider community.

A key focus of our project was building local community agency and tackling food waste. Communication of these fundamental focuses were key to fostering a positive environment that ensured any households facing food insecurity did not feel a sense of stigma. It was regularly reiterated that the £3 membership fee helped the individual member as well as every other member. The communal tenets of the project were a key draw for many members who, especially in light of the pandemic were seeking community.

We relied heavily on [The Felix Project](#) for high quality surplus food. This varied from fruit and veg to meat and dairy. We also utilised [FareShare](#) for surplus supermarket items and [InKind Direct](#) mainly for household products. We were then able to survey members to understand where the membership fees should be spent.





Each week before opening a stock check was taken and we were able to work out maximum quantities that could be taken for each item. A regular comment from members was that they were eating very healthily as there £3 was allowing them access to a diverse range of quality, healthy food which would not have been the case in cut price supermarkets.

Our main issues whilst running the project were around space and storage. Being based in a small hall meant we were limited to amounts of what we could accept. We were however able to work with other local organisations to split large bulk surplus deliveries that we had access to, creating a localised surplus food eco-system. This is something that could be focused on and expanded moving forward.

Unfortunately, we no longer have access to our hall space, so our priority is finding alternative storage space. We plan to work with members to create smaller groups that are self-organised and our role as an organisation is to access the surplus food for these groups and give any help and advice.

## MILDMAY COMMUNITY CENTRE: BOX SCHEME

At the beginning of 2021 when supplies and funding becoming less available, we were concerned that we were no longer able to fully support our food bank beneficiaries. We began looking at ways of which we could continue to support our residents, in a way, whereby they themselves could effectively run a food hub, together with the support of Mildmay. We did a survey with all the foodbank beneficiaries, totalling 119 families. The survey response of 93% revealed that there was still very a high demand and need. We were lucky enough to become a part of this pilot project and receive Food Power funding to transition from a food bank into a food hub cooperative. We create parcels for our local community residents using fresh fruit and vegetables, ambient foods and hygiene products each week and charge £1 per person per parcel.



This scheme has enabled us to supply co-op parcels to 110 families to date. We are lucky enough to have an amazing bunch of community residents that come every week to create these parcels, using surplus food deliveries from [Edible London](#), [Islington Council](#), [The Felix Project](#), [City Harvest](#), [FareShare](#), and local businesses and community members, along with the ambient foods that we purchase using co-op money, using [Bestway Wholesale](#). All of this has enabled us to help and support, develop and sustain an essential food service, by supplying individuals, families and the most vulnerable people in the community with healthy and affordable food each week.

## MANOR GARDENS WELFARE TRUST: POP UP SHOP

At Manor Gardens, we chose to pilot a volunteer led pop up shop food cooperative. We purchased basic cupboard staples from our local wholesaler - rice, lentils, beans, oats and chickpeas, and also receive free surplus food from [The Felix Project](#) and other local businesses.

The pop up shop runs twice a week, on Wednesdays and Thursdays, for 3 hours over lunchtime each day. As Covid restrictions have eased, this has allowed us to run our cooperative shop alongside our other activities, for example our coffee mornings and wellbeing sessions.

Our original membership consisted of 51 local families, all of whom were already receiving services from Manor Gardens, whether this be crisis food support, or other services, such as advocacy or wellbeing support. All of these families are from our local refugee and migrant communities, all are on a low income, and some on a very low income, for example no recourse to public funds.

Each of these families were introduced to the concept of food cooperatives and our pop up shop by their dedicated staff caseworker. Already having a close relationship with our members meant we could fully introduce the concept of a cooperative, and give everyone the opportunity to get more involved in the running of it. The shop runs on a membership fee model, so each family pays a £3 fee in order to access the shop, only due when they attend, there's no regular payment required. For this membership fee, they have access to their proportion of the free surplus food, and are able to buy additional cupboard staples at wholesale cost price, which we ensure is always cheaper than they would find in a local supermarket store.

Some families choose to attend every week, some only fortnightly or monthly, when they are in need of additional supplies. As part of the model of the cooperative, each member is encouraged to support the running of the shop, for example through volunteering to run it each week, and/or contributing to the decision making, e.g. on products to be bought.



The feedback we have received on the shop is very positive, and all members were very happy to be part of a cooperative and pay a membership fee, which felt more empowering than going to a foodbank. Many members, even though on low income themselves, were very keen to support other members who were not able to afford their membership fee each week. We are continuing to run the cooperative shop beyond the funding, and are offering staff time and venue space in kind, in order to make the financial model sustainable.



## Mrs S.'s Story

Mrs. S is a Moroccan lady who lives in Islington with her disabled husband and 2 children. She has been a Manor Gardens client since 2018. Mrs. S was introduced to the Food Cooperative where she showed a huge interest in being a member, especially to take part in volunteering and helping in running the cooperative. She volunteered every Wednesday of the pilot, helped translate into Arabic for other members, explaining the shop and social distancing rules, and organising the shop's approaches with other members.

Mrs. S is now 4 months pregnant, but continues to be very active and loves volunteering and helping the community. She expressed her experience in the food cooperative as a great opportunity to be supportive and help most vulnerable families especially during the pandemic. Mrs S. said at the end of the project:

**"It's a good experience for me to participate in the Food co-operative shop as a member, it's helped me to find good things with low prices that helps in this hard situation. As well, volunteering! it's a good opportunity to learn new skills, build relationships with customers and improve my English speaking with the food cooperative shop team."**

## NEWINGTON GREEN ACTION GROUP: BUYING GROUP AND PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN SHOP

We have supported the setting up of a resident-led cooperative buying group, with an additional option of a pay-what-you-can shop for those who cannot or do not want to commit to the buying club model. We offered £3 a week membership for a single person and £5 a week for a family, with the idea that the model could be long term self-sustaining.

We are running the cooperative within a community space on a Council estate, so we have a small space without much storage, so our stock mostly has to go in and come out on the same day. We are receiving cupboard items through surplus food suppliers, then buying additional items as needed, including more fresh fruit and vegetables, and harder to source items.

At first there was some shyness around joining the cooperative, and making sure that the concept and format was well communicated and understood. During the pilot phase, we have taken the lead in a lot of the management of the cooperative, and we are now working with the members to look at how we can ensure they are able to take full ownership of the cooperative.

## RESIDENT-LED FOOD BUYING GROUPS

At the beginning of the project, we focused on developing a network of resident-led food buying groups, working in partnership with [Cooperation Town](#).

We developed a communications and outreach campaign to introduce residents to the concept of cooperatives, and focused on the simplest type of food cooperative – a food buying group.

A food buying group can be started by any group of households, for example a group from neighbours, a school, workplace, religious setting, or just a group of friends.

The way a food buying group works is simple – the group decides on what items the group wants to buy and how much each member should contribute. By pooling the money, groups can purchase large amounts of food at wholesale prices. As a co-op you can also register with local shops, supermarkets, restaurants and food suppliers to get deliveries of surplus food for free – food that is perfectly edible but is excess, on its sell-by date or out of season.

Each co-op is owned and run by its members, so they decide together how to manage themselves, how much the membership fee is, what they want to buy, and share the management responsibilities together. Cooperation Town have a number of very useful resources and guides with more information on their website.

### **This project supported the development of these buying groups by:**

- Providing guidance to residents interested in learning more, including running online and in person introduction sessions
- Offering space within local community centres for groups to receive deliveries and pack bulk food into household bags
- Connecting groups to free surplus food suppliers and bulk suppliers,
- Providing small amounts of start-up funding for equipment, e.g. stationery, PPE, money tins, printing for posters, etc.
- Supporting members to access any other support they may need, for example ensuring households had the cooking equipment they need, providing support with accessing benefits, or getting online

We began by reaching out to and hosting online introductory trainings for local organisations and community groups, to introduce them to the project and concept of cooperatives, and train staff in how to provide support to interested residents. We had three main asks of these organisations:

### **1. Spreading the word**

- Sharing our leaflets, posters and guides
- Encouraging residents to sign up to our introductory sessions, or hosting a session themselves
- Directing interested people to link up with us to receive further support
- Sending any useful feedback or requests from residents



## 2. Training frontline staff

- Encouraging as many frontline professionals and volunteers as possible to attend our 1.5 hour introductory trainings, so they could then introduce the concept of cooperatives to residents they work with in future – even beyond the length of this project

## 3. Become a host organisation

- Offering space for meetings, deliveries and to pack bags
- Hosting and providing ongoing support to food buying groups

In order to get local buying groups started, we and Cooperation Town have found that the best approach is to identify and support “community anchors” – those individuals who are well known in their communities, interested in community initiatives, and would be happy to be the person or people to recruit for a group and get them off the ground. We provided these individuals with guidance, leaflets and funding, as listed above, but ultimately they lead the start-up of a group, and decide the direction it goes in, along with their fellow members.

We have provided many of the resources we developed in the Appendix, in the hope this will support other areas and residents to develop local food cooperative networks.

We put on hold much of this work during the Covid lockdowns, as the nature of food cooperatives mean there always needs to be an element of in person interaction. This is something we will be refocusing on in the coming months, as we come out of lockdown, in 2021 and 2022.

# OVERALL KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## GOALS OF FOOD COOPERATIVES



Since the Islington Food Cooperative Network was established by the Islington Food Poverty Alliance (now [Islington Food Partnership](#)), the main shared primary aim was to provide wholesale and surplus food at affordable to those experiencing food poverty. Each pilot also had a number of secondary goals, varying across each.

**There can be many different goals of food cooperatives, with many different target audiences, for example:**

- To access wholesale and surplus food to provide more **affordable prices** than can be found at high street shops. In particular cooperatives can reduce the stigma around use of food banks, instead allowing people to own and be part of a cooperative that works for them.
- To buy **better quality food** at similar prices to lower quality food at high street shops
- To buy **culturally specific food** that cannot easily be found at local shops
- To use **surplus food** that would otherwise go to waste
- To buy more **local, ethical and sustainably produced food** from local and/or sustainable suppliers
- To establish and **strengthen community networks** by organising and sharing food together
- To introduce and strengthen the **concept of cooperatives and community organising** within communities

We found it helpful to have a series of shared goals for the network, which allowed us to align and collaborate on aspects of delivery. However, overall the goals of a cooperative must be led by the members and local community it serves, and this will vary from town to town, neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and street to street. We think there is benefit in having a variety of cooperatives with differing goals in an area, or different approaches within a single cooperative, in order to best serve local communities. For example, an affordably priced cooperative project could run alongside a higher priced project focused on high demand products that can generate more income to sustainably fund the network.

## Working with partners to gain surplus food is important for managing costs

As a whole, we found that it was difficult to significantly undercut high street shops when it came to cupboard staples – rice, pasta, beans, flour, lentils, oats, etc. Some products are

much cheaper when you buy wholesale, but many are not. The cost savings mainly came from the addition of surplus food provided by our partners, and in many cases the surplus food was so plentiful that the wholesale bought food wasn't the central aspect of the cooperative.

However, it is important to note that many staff and volunteers involved in the pilots were disheartened to see how much surplus food is produced, and reflected on not wanting to be part of an excess supply chain that then perpetuates this practice.

## Ensure your food cooperative goals are clear and transparent to all

Overall, our experience was that a food cooperative of any type cannot be expected to provide the majority of a household's weekly shopping needs at prices lower than they could find elsewhere. But, there are many benefits that make cooperatives worthwhile, as long as it's clear what your particular goals are. For example:

- **A resident led buying group** will be able to do their own research and decide what products they want to buy wholesale that will save them the most money across the group. By being a group, they could also access free surplus food through local suppliers and organisations, that will make the overall value of their cooperative produce much higher than the amount they pay. But if their main focus is saving money, many products of their weekly shop will still be better bought in local shops.
- **An organisation led cooperative** could introduce a cooperative alongside other activities and services, to reduce the stigma of using foodbanks, and encourage more people through the door. It will need to decide whether its focus is on providing a broader range of products, for example with its goals being to offer healthier, better quality and locally sourced food; or a narrower / less predictable range of products, for example with its goals being to offer surplus food that would otherwise go to waste, products that are more affordable when bought wholesale, or culturally specific food.

## Choosing your audience

When it comes to target audiences for an organisation led model, there are two general potential approaches:

- **Targeted audience** – for example those experiencing food poverty, or specific communities looking for better access to culturally appropriate food. With a targeted and limited audience
- **Broad audience** – with a wider audience, there is opportunity to have a tiered pricing approach, and allow those with more means to contribute more to the running of the cooperative, for example within a shop model. We had a number of local residents express interest in being part of a local, sustainable cooperative and paying higher relative prices. However of course the bigger the audience, the more staff/volunteer capacity needed to run it.

## Managing buying groups

With resident led buying groups, we recommend always keeping groups small, in order to make the running of them manageable, and you can buy products that are wanted by all in the group. Resident led buying groups can grow and expand through word of mouth, and can always split into two groups when numbers become too big. For example, if you have

20 households in a buying group, you could split into two groups by halal and non-halal households, by those with/without young children who want to buy nappies and baby products together, by those who live closest together, and so on.

We know that in order to be sustainable and successful, resident led buying groups should be led and owned by its members, and the role of organisations should only be to provide guidance and support. For most organisations involved in this cooperative project, many of the residents receiving food have multiple and complex needs and will need a high level of support to run their own local food group. As Covid restrictions ease, we hope to explore further how best we can support a wide variety of local residents to be part of resident led buying groups.



The main costs we had to consider were:

### Start-up costs

- **Equipment purchasing** – see Equipment section below.
- **Volunteer and/or staff training and development** – for example Food Safety Level 2 training.
- **Marketing and printing costs** – for example leaflets, membership cards.

### Ongoing costs

- **Venue hire and storage** – most of our pilots were run within our own organisations, which of course reduces venue costs. Most resident-led groups should be able to find free spaces to use – see Venue and Storage section below.
- **Staff time.**
- **Subsidised membership fees** – for those unable to pay the membership fee, for example those with no recourse to public funds. However, we found cooperative members were often actively keen to pay a little more on their membership fees in order to support others who couldn't afford theirs.
- **Stock purchasing** – this will vary considerably dependent on your cooperative model. See Food and Supplies section below.

We were generously supported by Food Power for Generation Covid funding to set up these pilots. Each of the seven pilots had £2,514 through this grant.

One of the key benefits of having this joint funding was that it brought together the partnership of organisations, delivering at the same time, to the same objectives, and able to share learnings and insights. We had the opportunity to negotiate with wholesale suppliers as a group, develop a shared logo and marketing, and more.

### Recommendations

Look at Sustain's current funding opportunities, and speak to other local grant funders, your local authority, or exploring a crowdfunding campaign.



You don't need lots of funding to start a cooperative. Although we were lucky enough to have Sustain's funding, a resident led buying club won't need to worry about many of the costs we've listed above, and can definitely get started without any other funding apart from your ongoing membership fees, as you agree together.

For an organisation-led cooperative there will be some costs, but some models will be cheaper than others, for example a box scheme will need less setup funds than a shop. Venue hire and staff time will inevitably be the highest costs.

We highly recommend developing cooperative networks across a partnership, and exploring funding opportunities together, as this will give additional leverage to your efforts. Larger organisations may have more capacity to dedicate to fundraising on behalf of the partnership, different sized organisations may be able to access funding that others can't, and across the partnership you may find one or two particularly passionate people who are willing to lead this on behalf of the group.

## Ms. O's Story

Ms. O is a single mother. She has 4 young children and moved to Islington from Westminster last year. She has physical and mental health issues, experiencing panic attacks and joint pain problems. When we introduced our food coop, she mentioned that she cannot cook and always buys ready meals for her children. We encouraged her to join one of our cooking sessions with Islington Council. After joining the cooking sessions, she had confidence to start cooking, and we ordered kitchen equipment for her using this fund.

**She said: "I didn't think that I can cook and bake for my children, but now I can thanks to Manor Gardens' food coop, where I can get my weekly shopping just for £3."**

## VENUE AND STORAGE



The venue and storage you have available will be a key part of how you can design and run your cooperative, but it's very possible to run a cooperative without a huge amount of space.

In general, you can make decisions on what you order based on the space you have available. If you don't have any storage space, you'll need to plan so that deliveries will arrive and be taken away by members on the same day. If you don't have a fridge but you have other storage available, you can make sure ambient goods are taken away on the same day of arrival, but store cupboard products for a longer time.

One pilot project with limited storage space found through this project that they ended up needing to store food in their main hall space, whilst other services were being delivered throughout the week. They ended up investing additional resources to repurpose a community room into a food pantry with fridges and freezers.

For resident led buying groups, if someone in your cooperative has some spare cupboard space, you can order a 50kg sack of rice and keep it there. If not, you can order a 10kg sack and split it between you all on the day the delivery arrives.

If you are looking for a space to receive, pack and/or store deliveries, we recommend going out to local community spaces and asking if they can provide you space, as long as you agree to take responsibility for food handling whilst you are there. For example, this could be a community room in a Council estate, a local library, community centre, business, or anywhere that offers space for hire.

## REGULATIONS AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The regulations and legal requirements relevant to a cooperative will depend on the model you are using, and who the cooperative is run by. The below gives an outline of the considerations we had as Manor Gardens, a registered charity setting up a cooperative shop. For more detailed advice, please refer to the [Legal Requirements and Regulations section in Sustain's Food Cooperative Toolkit](#).

- **Trading as a charity** - we are able to trade with the food cooperative as it is counted as primary purpose trading within our charitable purpose as an organisation. Any charity will need to check their ability to trade. See [NCVO's advice on trading and charities](#) for more details.
- **Registering a new food business with the local authority** - anyone starting a new food business must register with the local authority at least 28 days before doing so. Registration cannot be refused, and there is no charge. See p.73 of Sustain's [toolkit](#) for more details.
- **Food hygiene** - you will need to ensure your cooperative follows all food hygiene regulations that apply. See p.73 of Sustain's [toolkit](#) for more details.
- **Trading standard equipment** - you will need to comply with trading standards legislation, in particular ensuring you have legal trading standard equipment for measuring and weighing food. See p.74 of Sustain's [toolkit](#) for more details.
- **Insurance** - you may need additional insurance in order to cover your cooperative. See p.76 of Sustain's [toolkit](#) for more details.

Of course this is not a comprehensive list, and those establishing their own cooperatives will need to research their local and national up to date requirements. If you are a group of individuals setting up a cooperative, your requirements may be very different, and we recommend speaking to [Cooperation Town](#) to get further advice. A cooperative is meant to be as simple and easy as

possible, and as a group of individuals, you won't necessarily need to set up as a legal entity or commit to a lot of administration in order to run a local cooperative.

## FOOD AND SUPPLIES



Our pilot projects sourced food in three main ways: through wholesale suppliers, through large surplus food suppliers, and through local food shops. Some also took donations from members of the public, and/or member food donations and swaps.

The wholesale suppliers we used included [Michaels Wholefoods](#), [Albion Fine Foods](#) and [Booker](#). Often, our wholesalers were able to offer us products in individual household sizes at the same price as buying a larger sack. This hugely reduces the time

needed to pack up food for each member household, but of course increases the amount of packaging, often plastic and non-recyclable.

For surplus food suppliers, in London, we are mainly served by [The Felix Project](#), [Fareshare](#) and [City Harvest](#). What you will receive from a surplus food supplier will change week to week, and you won't know what you are going to receive until it arrives. You can expect to receive a good amount of fresh and seasonal fruit and vegetables, as well as less healthy and often very random products! You can of course talk to your supplier to agree on what deliveries you will receive, and make requests for more or less of something, but this can't be guaranteed. Because of its unpredictable nature, surplus food can only supplement a weekly shop.

Our experience has been that many local food shops, whether national chains or locally owned, are very willing to donate free food when asked. Spending an afternoon asking around your local food shops will often secure any cooperative a good supply of free surplus food, but they will most likely need it to be picked up from the shop directly, and what you receive will probably vary week to week.

For those that took public and member donations, we found that the amount of donations received decreased as the pilot went on and lockdown began easing. It takes time and therefore additional volunteers to source new donations and supplies, so this will need to be factored into roles and planning.

## EQUIPMENT



The main equipment purchases to consider were:

- Weighing scales (legal trading standard) – these can be quite expensive, but you may be able to source free or low cost ones from local shops that replace their own scales often.
- Dispensers – many of the pilots chose to distribute food straight from the wholesale sacks, so saving the need to buy

dispensers. However, this carries more hygiene risks if open sacks and scoops are being used by members of the public, so appropriate hygiene procedures need to be put in place. Dispensers such as those found in zero waste shops can be quite expensive.

- Storage containers – if you are storing stock and need it to be stored airtight and safely.
- Scoops – we found different sized scoops available from [The Restaurant Store](#) for £2.77 each.
- Reusable containers – we bought different sized glass jars from [Jars and Bottles](#) for £1.04 (large) and £0.72 (small) each. We gave these to members that didn't already have containers to bring back to the shop to refill.
- Carrier bags – cotton or another sustainable material was preferable for us
- Money tin
- Payment processor – such as offered by [SumUp](#)
- Mobile phone and SIM – so the shop is contactable and can contact members
- Cash and receipt book – for record keeping
- PPE – face masks, gloves and hand sanitiser

## PRICING AND MEMBERSHIP

The majority of our pilot projects offered membership at £3 per week / shop, sometimes offering two tiers of fee dependent on household size, for example £5 for a larger family.

The membership approach and contribution is one of the core components of a cooperative model, and what sets it apart from a traditional food bank model. A cooperative should be owned and led by its members and the community, and so collaborative decisions should be made on what the membership fees are.

At a basic level, within a buying group or box scheme, the membership fee can simply be the amount paid for products and other costs, divided equally across members. This could vary by week, depending on what the members want to purchase.

At Manor Gardens Welfare Trust's pop up shop, we charged a £3 membership fee, essentially an "entry fee", as members were not charged on weeks they didn't come to the shop. They then were able to take an allocated amount of the surplus food (taking the amount of surplus we had that week, dividing it by the amount of members expected to attend), and could also buy additional cupboard staples at cost price as we'd purchased them from our wholesaler. We found the surplus food to be much more popular than the wholesale priced cupboard staples with this model.

Others such as Newington Green Action Group operated their shop on a pay-what-you-can basis, which allowed members to decide what prices felt affordable to them.



## Hannah's Story

Hannah (name has been changed) is a young, single mum with a nursery-aged child. She moved to the area last year, she's not working and is on Universal Credit. Her Family Support worker referred her to Elizabeth House as she was struggling to afford groceries for her and her child. She is really happy with the quality of the service and the food. She finds the staff extremely professional and kind, always helpful with her requests and she is extremely grateful for the support of the Food Coop during this challenging time for her young family. Her happy little daughter lights up the room whenever visits so the staff at Elizabeth House love to welcome them too.

## COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT



We needed to dedicate a good amount of time to communications and engagement with local residents, in order to ensure the new cooperative model was clear and well understood. Many residents are not connected online, and letters were not read by all, so we needed to speak individually over the phone with most people to make the pilots successful.

## DAY TO DAY RUNNING



Each of our pilot projects delivered their cooperatives through existing staff, members, and other volunteers. At Manor Gardens pop up cooperative shop, we produced a running guide, which is found in the Appendix, alongside other resources we developed or found useful.

### Project Leads

We looked to recruit members as Project Leads, who would receive training (for example Food Safety Level 2) and be equipped to act as the Shop Coordinator. This role would however often be led by staff, if members were not available to take this on.

In particular, we were inspired by [FoodCycle's](#) model, where Project Leads, Cooking and Serving Volunteers come together once a week in community settings to cook a 3 course vegetarian meal from surplus food. FoodCycle provides all the training, guidance and support, but each

weekly session is fully led by volunteers, within community spaces that offer their kitchen and dining rooms for free or very low prices. This model balances well the empowering of volunteers and community members to design and lead the sessions, within the framework and guidance provided nationally to all volunteers.

## Payments

For those who operated with a shop model, payments were taken on the door, and IOUs or waiving of fees were offered on a case by case basis.

For those operating on a delivery model, payments have been more challenging. One pilot project gives the option to pay by bank transfer or come directly to the centre to pay, but most still pay weekly to the delivery drivers. However, this is a big responsibility for the volunteer drivers, and some understandably do not feel comfortable chasing payment. Often residents are not at home, sometimes they don't have cash, and some still have not agreed to pay. It can take a lot of staff time to follow this up.

## NEXT STEPS

As of the end of the funding period in May 2021, the majority of the food cooperative projects will be continuing on, aiming for models that are financially self-sustaining, however often still with venue and staff time offered for free.

As one of our key aims as cooperative pilot projects was to introduce residents to the concept of cooperatives more broadly, we will now be able to support the set-up of more resident led buying groups, as lockdown restrictions ease.

One key focus for us now will be to ensure we have a good balance of organisation-led and resident-led food cooperatives across the Borough. Beginning these organisation-led pilots has allowed us to introduce the concept of cooperatives to those who may not have considered being part of one before. However, we need to ensure residents feel able and willing to begin and run their own self-sustaining cooperatives, in order to make the network truly sustainable. Organisations also need to feel able and willing to allow members to take on and lead the future direction of these cooperatives, in order for them to be truly transformational in the local community.

With the success of our cooperative pilots, we have been able to make a strong case for the opening up of more community assets within Islington for use by community led cooperatives. We are in conversation with Islington Council about the possibility of opening up permanent high street cooperative shops, that could also serve as multi-functional spaces for the local community. The goals of community led cooperatives align well with many key objectives within our and other local councils, for example environmental targets, inclusive economy, social value, and community development goals.

If you are interested in speaking further to the Islington Food Cooperative Network partnership, please contact Alex Britten, Operations Manager at Manor Gardens Welfare Trust, at [alex@manorgardenscentre.org](mailto:alex@manorgardenscentre.org).

We are very happy to support any other partnerships or groups interested in piloting similar approaches to food cooperatives, and are especially interested in opportunities for collaboration or funding, in order to expand and enhance food cooperatives across Islington and beyond.

**“Having food and extra bits provided through time of Covid allowing us not to be out as much as helped relieve a lot of stress and anxiety. Thank you so much.”**

Mildmay cooperative member

# APPENDIX: USEFUL RESOURCES AND TEMPLATES

## 1. Resident-led buying groups

- a. Leaflet
- b. [Manor Gardens webpage](#)
- c. [Cooperation Town's Starter Pack](#) and [resources page](#)
- d. [Eventbrite session pages](#)
- e. [Register your interest form](#)
- f. [Request for support form](#)
- g. [Catalogue for support](#)
- h. Template emails
  - To partners
  - To colleagues and volunteers

## 2. Organisation led cooperatives

- a. Hornsey Lane Leaflet
- b. MGWT Pop Up Shop Running Guide
- c. MGWT Pop Up Shop Volunteer Agreement
- d. MGWT Pop Up Shop Hygiene Guidance
- e. MGWT Pop Up Shop Allergen Sheet

**If you would like these resources in editable format, you can download them from our website at**

**<https://manorgardenscentre.org/our-services/food-co-operatives/>**

View some of these resources on the following pages or click on the online resources!





**Would you like to reduce the cost of your weekly food shop?**

# **JOIN A LOCAL FOOD CO-OPERATIVE!**

**We're supporting residents across Islington to set up food co-ops with their neighbours. You decide what to buy and how much to charge. By pooling your money you can purchase food at wholesale prices and access free surplus food.**

**Find out more by visiting [www.manorgardenscentre.org/our-services/food-co-operatives](http://www.manorgardenscentre.org/our-services/food-co-operatives)**





## What is a food co-operative?

A food co-operative is a group that comes together to give people access to food (and other household items) at affordable prices. A food co-op describes different types of approaches but in Islington we are encouraging local residents to join or start up their own food buying groups.

The way a food buying group works is simple – the group decides on what items the group wants to buy and how much each member should contribute. By pooling the money, co-ops can purchase large amounts of food at wholesale prices. As a co-op you can also register with local shops, supermarkets, restaurants and food suppliers to get deliveries of surplus food – food that is perfectly edible but is excess, on its sell-by date or out of season.

Each co-op is owned and run by its members, so you decide together how to manage yourselves, how much your membership fee is, what you want to buy, and you share the management responsibilities together.

We're working with [Cooperation Town](#), who have a great online [Starter Pack](#) and [Resources](#) with more information.

## How are organisations available to support?

Many charities and organisations across Islington are supporting food co-operatives to set up, for example by:

- Providing guidance to residents and support and equipment to get set up
- Offering space for your co-op to receive deliveries and pack
- Connecting your co-op to free surplus food and bulk suppliers
- Providing co-op members with other support, e.g. kitchen equipment, benefits support and other advice

If you're an organisation interested in getting involved, please email [alex@manorgardenscentre.org](mailto:alex@manorgardenscentre.org) for more details.

## How can I get involved?

Anyone can start or join a co-op with their neighbours, school network, workplace or anyone local to you.

Co-ops are led by their members, but we're here to support in any way we can, by providing guidance to get started, and any resources you need.

Please fill in [this short form](#) to register your interest, and we'll put you in touch with your most local organisation who can support you.

Or you can email [MGAssistance@manorgardenscentre.org](mailto:MGAssistance@manorgardenscentre.org) or call 07483 149 519.

Please do also join our [Islington Local Food Cooperatives Network Facebook group](#) to start chatting to others in Islington who might be interested in starting or joining a local co-operative.

## Email to Partners

Hello,

The coalition of organisations that make up Islington Food Poverty Alliance are very excited to share that we have received funding to support a network of local food cooperatives to set up, so that residents can organise their own food buying groups and access affordable bulk and free surplus food for them and their neighbours.

There are lots of opportunities and ways organisations and residents can get involved, so please have a look at the below and attached, and get in contact if you are interested. We're working with [Cooperation Town](#), who have a great online [Starter Pack](#) and [Resources](#) with more information on the idea.

### **How Organisations Can Get Involved**

- 1. Share the opportunity with residents** – first and foremost we want people to hear about how they can join or start a local food cooperative. Please find attached a leaflet to share with your residents. We can also support with offering details in other languages or over the phone – please get in contact if you'd like to talk about this further.  
We're running a **series of free sessions for residents** (online, and hopefully some in person in the coming weeks and months). All the dates and sign up details can be found on our [Eventbrite page](#) – please do share this with anyone you think would be interested.
- 2. Free training for frontline staff and volunteers on the cooperative model** - the model of food buying clubs is very simple, and we'll be offering a series of free trainings to frontline staff across the Borough so they can easily support residents to join or set up a local food cooperative. All the dates and sign up details can be found on our [Eventbrite page](#) – please do share this with anyone you think would be interested.
- 3. Become a food cooperative host organisation** – if you have space to offer local food cooperatives to use to receive deliveries and pack their food, we'd love to hear from you. Even if you don't have space, we're interested in working with any organisations that would like to support residents in joining a co-op and receiving funding support for this. We have funding to be able to provide initial food supplies and equipment that groups need to run, and a pot of funding to buy kitchen and cooking equipment for families in need, or subsidise membership fees. If you have residents you support that could benefit from this, please let us know.

### **How Residents Can Get Involved**

Anyone can start or join a co-op with their neighbours, school network, workplace or anyone local to you. Co-ops are led by their members, but we're here to provide guidance on getting started.

Please fill in [this short form](#) to register your interest, and the organisation nearest you will get in touch to support you. If you are unable to fill in the form you can ask someone else to do this for you, or you can email [MGAssistance@manorgardenscentre.org](mailto:MGAssistance@manorgardenscentre.org) or call 07483 149 519 to speak to someone further.

We are running regular introduction sessions over the coming weeks, so please visit our [Eventbrite page](#) to book a free space on a date that suits you.

Please do also join our [Islington Local Food Cooperatives Network Facebook group](#) to start chatting to others in Islington who might be interested in starting or joining a local cooperative.

### **What is a food cooperative (co-op for short)?**

A food co-operative is a group that comes together to give people access to food (and other household items) at affordable prices. A food co-op describes different types of approaches but in Islington we are encouraging local residents to join or start up their own food buying groups.

The way a food buying group works is simple – the group decides on what items the group wants to buy and how much each member should contribute. By pooling the money, co-ops can purchase large amounts of food at wholesale prices. As a co-op you can also register with local shops, supermarkets, restaurants and food suppliers to get deliveries of surplus food – food that is perfectly edible but is excess, on its sell-by date or out of season.

Each co-op is owned and run by its members, so you decide together how to manage yourselves, how much your membership fee is, what you want to buy, and you share the management responsibilities together. We're also here to help you set up in any way we can.

We're working with [Cooperation Town](#), who have a great online [Starter Pack](#) and [Resources](#) with more information.

### **How are different organisations involved?**

A number of charities and organisations across Islington are signed up to support food cooperatives to set up, for example by:

- Provide support and guidance to residents interested in learning more, and starting or joining a local co-op, including online and in person introduction sessions
- Offering their space for you to receive deliveries and pack bulk food into household bags
- Connecting you to free surplus food and bulk suppliers so you can access the best and most affordable food
- Supporting your co-op to access anything else you may need to make your co-op successful, for example equipment and stationery, PPE, money tins, printing, etc.
- Supporting you and your co-op members to access any other support you may need, for example ensuring households have the cooking equipment they need, or support with accessing benefits, or getting online

## **Email to Colleagues and Volunteers**

Hi everyone,

We are part of the coalition of organisations that make up Islington Food Poverty Alliance, and we very excitingly have recently received funding to support a network of local food cooperatives to set up, so that residents can organise their own food buying groups and access affordable bulk and free surplus food for them and their neighbours.

There's lots of opportunities for our staff, volunteers and residents we support to get involved in this, so please take a look through the below and attached leaflet, for you to share with your networks.

The model of food buying clubs is very simple, and so through offering resources and free training sessions, we are wanting as many frontline staff as possible to be trained in the model, so that you can all introduce your clients to the opportunity. Food buying groups like this find that they can get around £18 worth of food for a £3 a week membership fee, so it's a really valuable opportunity for anyone who wants to reduce their household costs.

We are hosting a series of free trainings, some for frontline staff who are interested in learning the food cooperative, and some for residents themselves. I'd really encourage as many of you as possible to sign up to the session for staff, and please do encourage your clients to sign up to the residents' session if they are interested.

Sessions for frontline staff (all online)	Sessions for residents
<a href="#">Monday 30th November – 10am-11.30am</a>	<a href="#">Friday 11th December (online) – 6pm-7.30pm</a>
<a href="#">Friday 11th December – 2pm-3.30pm</a>	<a href="#">Monday 14th December (online and in person TBC) – 1pm-2.30pm</a>
<a href="#">Monday 21st December – 2pm-3.30pm</a>	<a href="#">Friday 15th January (online and in person TBC) – 6pm-7.30pm</a>
<a href="#">Friday 8th January – 10am-11.30am</a>	<a href="#">Friday 22nd January (online and in person TBC) – 1pm-2.30pm</a>
<a href="#">Monday 11th January – 4pm-5.30pm</a>	

### What is a food cooperative (co-op for short)?

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Each co-op is owned and run by its members, so you decide together how to manage yourselves, how much your membership fee is, what you want to buy, and you share the management responsibilities together. We're also here to help you set up in any way we can.

We're working with [Cooperation Town](#), who have a great online [Starter Pack](#) and [Resources](#) with more information.

### How can residents get involved?

Anyone can start or join a co-op with their neighbours, school network, workplace or anyone local to you. Co-ops are led by their members, but we're here to provide guidance on getting started.

Please fill in [this short form](#) to register your interest, and the organisation nearest you will get in touch to support you. If you are unable to fill in the form you can ask someone else to do this for

you, or you can email [MGAssistance@manorgardenscentre.org](mailto:MGAssistance@manorgardenscentre.org) or call 07483 149 519 to speak to someone further.

We are running regular introduction sessions over the coming weeks, so please visit our [Eventbrite page](#) to book a free space on a date that suits you.

Please do also join our [Islington Local Food Cooperatives Network Facebook group](#) to start chatting to others in Islington who might be interested in starting or joining a local cooperative.

### How you can support residents

Once you begin to speak to residents who may be interested, the next steps are:

1. **Ask them to fill in the [Register Your Interest Form](#)**, or fill it in on their behalf. **Please ask anyone interested to fill in this form**, this is the most important thing we need! Don't worry if they're not 100% certain yet, they can sign up just if they're interested in hearing more. Do also encourage them to join the [Facebook group](#).
2. **Will you be able to continue to support them?** If not, you can take a look at our [Google Map](#) above to link them in with their nearest community centre, or you can contact me to find them support from elsewhere.
3. **Support them to recruit others** from their local area, using the [Starter Pack](#) and [Resources](#) provided by Cooperation Town. It's recommended to have about 10 households involved to get going.
4. **Once the group is ready to get going they will need to organise an initial meeting** between themselves, either online or in person. We can come along to support if they like – have a look at the Starter Pack for more guidance on how to run this meeting.
5. **Co-ops or household can request additional support from us** using the [Requests for Support Form](#) – we can provide initial materials (e.g. stock food, stationary, weighing scales, money tins etc.), cooking equipment up to £50 for households in need (e.g. pots and pans), and/or support with paying membership fees (up to £10 per week per household, for a maximum of 12 weeks). Full details and guidance can be found on the form.
6. **Additional funding for organisations** – once you have a cooperative with at least 10 households signed up, we can provide your organisation with £250 to purchase initial stock to get them started, in addition to the start-up support they can request themselves.

I'm always here for any questions or feedback of course.

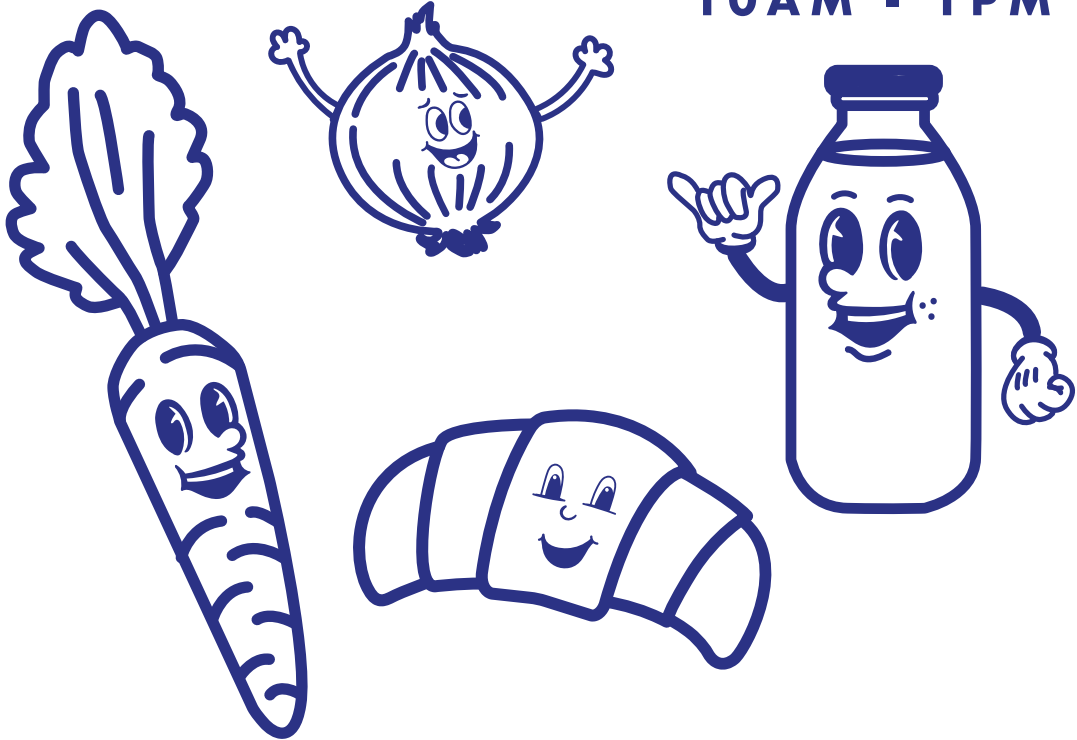
Thanks,





# NEW ORLEANS HALL

SATURDAYS  
10AM - 1PM



## JOIN US

MEMBERSHIP FREE  
THEN PAY £3  
PER SHOP FOR  
QUALITY FOOD  
BRING YOUR OWN BAGS



# BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH FOOD

## HOW IT WORKS

**HILLRISE COMMUNITY FOOD HUB** works on co-operative principles, it's only £3 per shop and membership is free.

That £3 goes back into buying bulk/wholesale items, meaning together members can get more for less. Alongside this we work with our food partners to access good quality surplus food.

Working together we can ensure access to affordable food for all in our community. Come along to find out more.

## HOW TO FIND US



## CONTACT

☎ 0207 272 5938

✉ [community@hleca.org.uk](mailto:community@hleca.org.uk)

📷 [community.foodhub\\_hillrise](https://www.instagram.com/community.foodhub_hillrise)

This is a Hornsey Lane Estate Community Association food initiative.



# **Manor Gardens Pop Up Cooperative Shop**

## **Guide to Running the Shop**

### **1. Ahead of the day**

#### Shop coordinator duties

- The Shop Coordinator is responsible for maintaining up to date personal knowledge and understanding of all MGWT, government and FSA policies and procedures that need to be followed at all times, including:
  - [FSA guidelines for food handling](#)
  - [FSA food business guidelines](#)
  - Ensuring an individual with Food Safety Level 2 Certificate is present and supervising at all times, if not the Centre Coordinator themselves
  - Appropriate allergens procedures, as below
  - MGWT Distribution Hub Roles Overview and Procedures
  - Manual handling
- Ensure you have been provided all of the details you'll need from the MGWT team, including:
  - Any prices that are changing
  - Any deliveries that are expected
  - An up to date members list, and any new members to be served this week
  - Any updates or information to be provided to members

### **2. Setting up on arrival**

#### Shop coordinator duties

- Count cash in cash tin and write starting amount in cash book. Ensure this correlates with end amount last written in the cash book.
- Hold volunteer briefing, and induct any new volunteers. Allocate roles for the day.
- Ensure hygiene requirements document is available and all volunteers are familiar with this. Ask volunteers to confirm they meet the requirements listed here

#### Food and supplies

- Receive any deliveries that are arriving today. Check all foods received are in date, and throw away any food past their sell by date.
- Check fridge and storage cupboards for available stock, and ensure all are within their use by dates. If using any ambient food that has been stored, ensure fridge temperature is under 8 degrees, and freezer temperature is under 18 degrees.
- Put out products on display, ensuring high risk and allergens food are stored separately, with little risk for cross contamination.
- Based on the stock available for the day, agree on a maximum allowance for each of the products, and a suggested weight or bag size per member of the surplus food.
- Write out details of the produce available for the day on the white board and put up outside the shop, with prices per kg. Ensure allergen information is available for anything that will not be provided with allergen information with it.

## Equipment

- Put up all signs, including:
  - Direction signs from MGWT reception
  - Shop name and logo
  - Cash only sign
  - Any other information signs provided
- Put out a side table away from the serving door, and lay out anything else available to members this week, for example free books
- Put out chairs along the pathway at a 2m distance
- Put out serving table across the DGH access door, with the cash book, receipt book, membership list and any new membership cards, weighing scales, PPE, donation tin, an example of each jar size and bags available.
- Put out waste bins.

## Health and safety

- Conduct start of shift clean, including wiping down surfaces and equipment.
- Ensure all volunteers are washing their hands every 20 minutes, and following all regulations within the hygiene requirements document.

### **3. Serving members**

The following is the process for serving a member, whilst they are currently not able to access the inside shop, due to Covid-19 restrictions. Please see frequently asked questions below for additional guidance on questions members may have.

1. If member is not wearing a mask, ask them to put one on, or provide one from our supply. If they are exempt, make sure conversation happens at a distance of at least 2 metres.
2. Ask to see their membership card, or check their name on the members list if they don't have it.
3. Ask and write down their full order in the cash book, including their membership number. Calculate the total amount due and take payment before packing. Put payment in the cash tin and provide any change needed.
4. Ask if they have brought any of their own tupperware or bags. If so, ask them to take a wipe and clean them before you handle them. Make sure to wash your hands and/or change your gloves in between every customer that brings their own tupperware.
5. Weigh out the paid for foods, ensuring the member is able to see the confirmed weight you are providing on the scales. Bag up and weigh out where necessary the surplus food they will be receiving.
6. Ask if they would like a receipt, and write one out in the receipt book if so.
7. Let them know any updates or information for future visits. Remind them that we're always happy to hear any suggestions or feedback they may have, including any requests for additional products.

#### **Serving a new member**

When someone comes to the co-op for the first time, give them an overview of how it works, including:

- We have a mixture of paid for and free produce available. The paid for products we source from a wholesaler and sell at lower prices than your local supermarket. The free products are surplus food that is perfectly good but excess, and so would have gone to waste. We don't know what we're going to get each week, and we may have more or less surplus available each week.
- There is a minimum spend of £3 per week in order to support the ongoing running of the co-op. If people are ever struggling on a particular week they can speak to the person that referred them, to see if we can support them.
- We're cash only!
- We try and reduce packaging waste, so encourage members to bring their own tupperware and bags. We'll have these available at the shop too, for you to re-use each week.
- If your membership card isn't here for you this week, it'll be here the next week you come. Make sure to bring this every time you shop.
- Please give us feedback! The co-op is here for its members, so please tell us if there's other things you would like to see in the shop, if you have a suggestion for how we run it, or if you have seen cheaper prices for our products elsewhere.

#### **4. Frequently asked questions**

- Where's the nearest cashpoint?

There are a number of banks and ATMs if you walk south on Holloway Road, a few mins walk away.

- How do you set your prices?

We set our prices according to the wholesale prices we buy our products from, so sometimes these prices can change. We do not make a profit on what we sell, and we set our prices as low as possible for our members.

- What if I don't have money to pay one week?

If you aren't able to pay this week, we can offer you credit of up to £5, to be paid back the next time you shop. You can speak to the Manor Gardens staff member who referred you in order to get support and advice if you are struggling financially.

- Can I donate to the co-op?

Yes, a cooperative is about community support, and so you are very welcome to donate any amount you can afford, "paying it forward" to support us to keep our prices low for all members. There is a donation tin on the table at the shop, and you can also donate online at our website.

- Do I have to come every week, or pay every week?

No, you don't have to come every week, and we don't charge a membership fee, we just have a minimum spend.

- Can I / someone I know become a member?



If you or someone you know would like to join the cooperative, we ask you to speak to a member of staff in order to get your membership set up. You can do this on the day, or by ringing 07483 149 519. We are just a small shop, and need to manage our demand, so we prioritise local community members who will most benefit from accessing our low prices.

- Can I volunteer?

Yes, we want this cooperative to be led and run by its members, so we'd love for you to volunteer. There's a few different ways you could do this, so we'll get Zeesham, our Volunteer Coordinator, to give you a call to talk you through how you can be a part of the running of the shop, and answer any questions you may have.

## **5. End of the day**

### Shop coordinator duties

- Count cash in cash tin and ensure this correlates with amount expected from cash book. Write in any further additions or removals if instructed by staff.
- Send end of day email to MGWT team outlining:
  - Picture of cash book for the day, with confirmed final totals sold, and any discrepancies.
  - Any customer feedback, including any requests for additional products
  - Any stock that needs to be ordered for next week
  - If more change is required for the next opening
  - Any other equipment that might need to be ordered
  - Any new membership or volunteer requests

### Food and supplies

- Ensure all remaining non ambient food stock is securely closed and put into storage.
- Any remaining ambient food should be placed in the fridge for the next day. On the last opening day of the week, all ambient food should be distributed, amongst volunteers and final customers of the day, to avoid food waste. If use by date allows, ambient food can be stored in the fridge for the week.

### Health and safety

- Conduct end of shift clean, including wiping down surfaces and equipment.

## Pop-Up Co-operative Shop Volunteer Role Overview and Procedures

This document outlines the health and safety requirements which each volunteer in Manor Gardens Welfare Trust's pop-up co-operative shop must adhere to. You are responsible for familiarising yourselves with all of our procedures, and following them at all times.

### Food Safety

All those volunteering in the pop up cooperative shop or handling food must familiarise themselves with the up to date [FSA guidance on food handling](#).

You must:

- Inform MGWT of any health conditions or access requirements that we should be aware of, so that reasonable adjustments can be made, whenever possible, in order for you to fulfil your role.

You must not enter the centre if:

- You, or anyone in your household, has been displaying symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, high temperature, loss of taste or smell or a persistent cough. If you display these symptoms, you must inform your co-ordinator and self-isolate for 14 days after you first displayed symptoms.
- You are suffering from or carrying a disease likely to be transmitted through food
- You have infected wounds, skin infections or sores
- You have had/have diarrhoea

If any of these apply to you, you must inform the Co-ordinator immediately and stay at home.

### Hygiene when handling food

- Wear clothing that is suitable, clean and protective, including suitable shoes.
- Wear a face mask at all times in the Co-op space.
- Keep hair tied back.
- Don't wear watches or jewellery (except a wedding ring).
- Don't touch your face and hair, or smoke, spit, sneeze, eat or chew gum.
- Wash your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds regularly, especially on entry and leaving, before and after handling fresh food, after handling food waste or emptying a bin, after cleaning, after blowing your nose and after touching phones, light switches, and door handles.
- Dry your hands on a disposable towel, and use a disposable towel to turn off the tap.
- Observe 2 metre physical distancing at all times.

### Allergens

Please familiarise yourself with the 14 key allergens. Information is displayed in the Co-op. Allergens must be handled separately and preferably last, to avoid possibility of cross contamination.

- |                             |            |                   |
|-----------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| • Celery                    | • Lupin    | • Peanuts         |
| • Cereals containing gluten | • Milk     | • Sesame seeds    |
| • Crustaceans               | • Molluscs | • Soya            |
| • Eggs                      | • Mustard  | • Sulphur dioxide |
| • Fish                      | • Nuts     |                   |

## Volunteer Agreement

I declare that I have read the documents provided in order to volunteer, and agree to abide by its contents and procedures in my role as a Manor Gardens Welfare Trust Volunteer.

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Role** Pop-up Food Co-op Volunteer

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Postcode** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this signed form to the MGWT Volunteer Co-ordinator or MGWT Manager.

## POP UP COOPERATIVE SHOP HYGIENE REQUIREMENTS

All those working in the distribution hub or handling food must familiarise themselves with the up to date FSA guidance on food handling at <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-hygiene>.

### They must:

- ✓ Inform MGWT of any health conditions or access requirements that we should be aware of, so that reasonable adjustments can be made in order for you to fulfil your role.
- ✓ Wear clothing that is suitable, clean and protective
- ✓ When handling food:
  - Keep hair tied back
  - Not wear watches or jewellery (except a wedding band)
  - Not touch their face and hair, smoke, spit, sneeze, eat or chew gum
- ✓ Wash hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds regularly, including:
  - On entry and exit
  - Before and after handling food
  - After touching raw food
  - After handling food waste or emptying a bin
  - After cleaning
  - After blowing their nose
  - After touching phones, light switches, door handles and cash registers
- ✓ Dry hands on a disposable towel, and use a disposable towel to turn off the tap.
- ✓ Observe 2 metre physical distancing at all times, by following the visual markers on the floor

### They must not enter the centre if:

- × They, or anyone in their household, has been displaying symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, high temperature or cough symptoms. If you do display these symptoms, you must self-isolate and not re-enter the centre until 14 days after you first displayed symptoms.
- × Are suffering from or carrying a disease likely to be transmitted through food
- × Have infected wounds, skin infections or sores
- × Have diarrhoea

**If any of these apply to any individual, they must tell the Shop Coordinator immediately.**

### Allergens

Please familiarise yourself with the 14 key allergens that need to be declared when using as ingredients. These are:

- |                             |            |                   |
|-----------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| • Celery                    | • Fish     | • Nuts            |
| • Cereals containing gluten | • Lupin    | • Peanuts         |
| • Crustaceans               | • Milk     | • Sesame seeds    |
| • Eggs                      | • Molluscs | • Soya            |
|                             | • Mustard  | • Sulphur dioxide |

All bags must contain an allergen sheet with the allergens present in each product. Allergens must be handled separately to other food, and should be handled last, to avoid possibility of cross contamination. Please talk to the Shop Coordinator before handling any allergen products.

## **POP UP SHOP – RECEIVING DELIVERIES**

For each day you are volunteering, you will be led by the day's Shop Coordinator, who will provide an initial meeting with and volunteers, and individual guidance on roles. You will be given the Shop Coordinator's contact number, and they will be available in person or over the phone to speak to at all times during the day.

- You will be asked to help with the transport and storage of deliveries received. Dry and tinned goods will be immediately set up according to their packing station allocation, provided by the Shop Coordinator.
- Any refrigerated goods will need to be stored as directed by the Shop Coordinator, and you will need to keep a log of which fridges each good has been stored in.



