



Cooking Up Connections: Sheffield's Community Kitchens

**Full Report
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Produced by ShefFood;
The Food Partnership for Sheffield

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community kitchens can provide opportunities for people to come together, enjoy good food, and can help to create a shared sense of space.

ShefFood's research into community kitchens began with on the ground conversations with community groups across Sheffield. These revealed a knowledge gap about the city's wealth of community kitchen spaces.

This report summarises a total of 23 interviews conducted between June 2024 and January 2025 with:

- 11 kitchen managers – who look after the physical kitchen space and the rest of the community building, often coordinating the timetables of kitchen hire.
- 12 community organisations – a combination of those already using a kitchen space and those looking to access one.

Insight from these interviews were used to:

- Collate information on where community kitchens are located across the city.
- Better understand what is currently working well, as well any gaps and barriers to usage.
- Suggest a number of recommended next steps, based on the above.

Recommended next steps:

1. Support peer learning

We recommend increasing opportunities for co-learning between community organisations and kitchen managers to share experiences, identify specific topics to develop knowledge on, and to collectively problem solve.

2. Improve access to kitchen equipment

We recommend the establishment of a library of communal kitchen equipment that is available to hire. Any such library should include equipment for people with different accessibility needs (e.g. equipment for easy opening of tins and jars).

3. Increased promotion of community kitchens and social eating spaces

As a first step, all community kitchens and social eating spaces should be included on the [ShefFood map of community food provision](#). ShefFood would also like to create a directory of community kitchen spaces available to hire in Sheffield, including information on the cost, contact details, and availability.

4. Explore opportunities to increase volunteer engagement and capacity

Community kitchens and groups can seek advice from Voluntary Action Sheffield ([VAS](#)) and [Sheffield's Volunteer Centre](#) who can help an organisation develop volunteering opportunities, recruitment, management and support.

5. Support community kitchens and groups to assess their financial health

VAS can provide the equivalent of an MOT for voluntary and community sector organisations, where they help an organisation become fit for funding. This can be done in partnership with South Yorkshire Funding Advice Bureau ([SYFAB](#)), who could support with finding grant funding to resource the projects and staff time.

6. Raise awareness what makes a community kitchen 'fully accessible'

Continue discussions with Burton Street Foundation and Sheffield Mencap and Gateway about making their fully accessible community kitchens available for hire. Provide opportunities for kitchen managers and community organisations to better understand what makes a community kitchen 'fully accessible'.

7. Explore opportunities to improve how food waste is managed

Organisations can register their interest in [Compost Connection](#); a new food waste composting service in Sheffield that is in the early stages of development. This report should also be discussed at a future ShefFood Growing and Composting working group, specifically to explore any opportunities to tackle community kitchen food waste.

INTRODUCTION

ShefFood's research into community kitchens began with on the ground conversations with community groups across Sheffield. These revealed a knowledge gap about the city's wealth of community kitchen spaces. It was identified that developing a picture of the community kitchens in Sheffield could help to:

- Understand any barriers to accessing these spaces.
- Share examples of good practice.
- Increase usage of community kitchens.
- Build upon previous work, led by ShefFood, to map out community food providers in the city.

This report aims to:

- Collate information on where community kitchens are located.
- Better understand any gaps and barriers to usage, as well as what is currently working well.
- Suggest a number of recommended next steps.

This report builds upon [Sheffield's Local Food Action Plan](#) (2023-2030), which was co-created by almost one hundred organisations across the city and details 73 actions that collectively aim to transform Sheffield's food system. Actions 60-62 specifically recommend 'assessing the potential of existing properties and infrastructure for social kitchens' (see Appendix for more details).

DEFINITIONS

Community Kitchen:

A kitchen available for voluntary and community sector organisations to use.

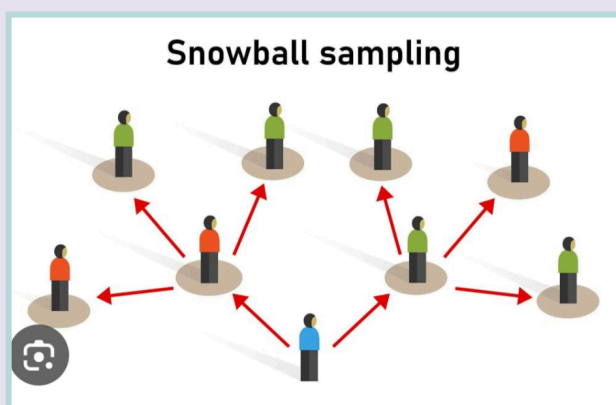
Social Eating:

The act of sharing a meal or drinks with others, primarily for the social aspect and enjoyment of companionship. For the purpose of this report, we are not looking at commercial activity.

METHODS

We interviewed 11 kitchen managers and 12 community organisations between June 2024 and January 2025. Kitchen managers look after the physical kitchen space and the rest of the building, often coordinating the timetables of kitchen hire. The community organisations were a combination of those already using a kitchen space and those looking to access one.

To recruit community organisations, we started by reaching out to organisations listed on ShefFood's map of Community Food Providers ([Community Food Provision | ShefFood](#)). To recruit kitchen managers, we put a call out in the ShefFood newsletter, blog, and social media. We then asked research participants to recommend further people to interview (known as 'snowball sampling').



Snowball sampling is opportunistic and risks being unrepresentative. As such, we actively looked to recruit participants from:

- Kitchens and community organisations that supported and/or were led by people representing a range of demographics (e.g. women, elderly people, global majority communities).
- Different types of community kitchens and organisations, which were also spread geographically across the city.

See Appendix for the full list of participating community organisations and kitchens.

The following questions were used for interviews with kitchen managers and community organisations:

<p>Kitchen Managers</p> <p>Is Your Kitchen Available to Hire?</p>	<p>Yes/No/ Open to Change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who currently uses your kitchen? • Are there any criteria for groups looking to hire your kitchen? • What is the availability of your kitchen? • What is the cost of your kitchen? • Are the availability and cost of your kitchen publicly advertised? • What is the physical accessibility of the kitchen? • What are the challenges and barriers experienced by groups using the kitchen? • Is there anything you would like to see the kitchen used for that isn't currently? • Is there anyone you would like to see the kitchen help who isn't yet? • What support would help you change or expand your kitchen use? • Are there any local issues affecting kitchen use?
<p>Community Organisations</p> <p>Do You Rent a Kitchen?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who does your service currently support? • What is the cost of the kitchen? How manageable do you find this cost? • What is the availability of the kitchen you use? • How easy is it for you to secure the time you need in the kitchen? • What is the physical accessibility of the kitchen? • What are the challenges and barriers experienced in using the space? • Are you aware of any other groups using the same kitchen and do you have any interaction with them? • What support would help you rent out kitchen space? • Are there any local issues affecting kitchen use?
	<p>No</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who does your service currently support? • How are you currently accessing kitchen facilities? • What have the barriers been to renting a kitchen so far? • In what location would you like to rent a kitchen? • What support would most benefit you in renting a kitchen space?

KEY FINDINGS

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY KITCHENS

We recognise that this is not an exhaustive list of all community kitchens in Sheffield, rather a summary of those identified through this research.

Name	Cost	Availability	Organisations using this kitchen at the point of interview
Aspiring Communities Together	Case by case basis	Weekdays 4pm onwards, weekends.	HAF (Holiday Activities and Food Programme), Sheffield College, ACT, ESOL classes
Blend Culinary Foundation	Case by case basis	Mondays and Tuesdays	The Furnival, Family Time, Causeway, Theo's Cooking Classes (Sheffield Children's Hospital), Pop Up Pop Out Lunches, Blend Culinary Foundation, Corporate groups
Common Ground Community Centre	£15 p/h for regular weekly booking £20 p/h for small one-off events £30 p/h for large one-off events	7 days a week 8am-9pm, subject to availability	Ammi's Kitchen
Dore and Totley United Reform Church	Case by case basis	Friday Morning	Lunch Club, Coffee Morning, Art Group, Rock Choir
Hadfield Institute	£40-45 per hour	Weekdays and Weekends in holiday time (not term time)	Woman Collab, HAF (Holiday Activities and Food Programme), MADpro
Heeley Green Community Centre	Free	Tuesdays, Fridays, Saturdays	Heeley Trust, A church (unnamed)
Hillsborough Trinity Church	Case by case basis	Saturdays and fortnightly on Fridays.	Hillsborough Trinity Lunch Club, Polly's Community Cafe, Karen Christian Fellowship, Toddler group, Other church groups
Longley 4 Greens	£25 per hour	Mondays and Fridays	Food Works Social Cafe, Sheffield Inclusion Unit
Mum's United	No set cost. Around £20-£25 per hour.	10am-4pm Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays.	Mum's United, Sheffield Radical Mutual Aid
The Archer Project	Case by case donation basis.	In the evening, 7 days a week. All day Sunday.	The Archer Project, Revive Cafe
Victoria Hall	- £28 p/h - Half a day: £80 - Full day: £125 - Evening: £150 - 20% discount for charities	Monday-Friday. Weekend availability depends on the budget, as staff are needed to ensure the building is supervised.	Food Squad, Sunday Centre

WHAT'S WORKING WELL

Variable costs/tiered pricing for kitchen use:

A number of kitchen managers reported making their kitchens available to both corporate organisations and community groups. This enabled them to waive or subsidise hiring costs for charities and community organisations. Many also determined their hiring costs on a case-by-case basis, depending on the need of the organisation and the alignment of values between the kitchen manager and community organisation.

Hiring costs ranged from free to £45 per hour, with some kitchens taking donations only. The majority of kitchens gave discounts for charities and the Holiday Activities and Food programme.

Volunteer recruitment:

[Voluntary Action Sheffield \(VAS\)](#) and both universities were commended for their volunteer recruitment platforms, particularly given the importance of volunteers within the community organisations interviewed.

Pathways into employment:

A number of community organisations and kitchen managers reported they were able to support volunteers to develop catering skills, working alongside professional cooks. This provided volunteers with experience and increased their confidence looking for paid roles in the future.

Food education for young people:

A significant number of kitchen managers reported that they hired their space out to private companies who provide Alternative Provision for young people excluded from traditional education. This provided opportunities for kitchens to bring in revenue, as well as supporting young people to access food education.

Community groups managing their own kitchens:

A number of community groups that ran social eating spaces also owned and managed their own kitchens (e.g. they were part of a church). This overcame almost all access barriers for the community group.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY KITCHEN USE

Staff and volunteer capacity:

Kitchen managers reported staffing capacity being a large barrier to kitchen hire. For most kitchens, a staff member from the building needs to be present to supervise when the kitchen is being hired. Many reporting struggling with this due to not having enough staff members or staff time to cover these shifts.

Community organisations reported that the people who access their meals often need additional support beyond a low cost or free meal. They highlighted that their volunteers are usually not trained to provide this support, and that signposting is of limited impact. They would like to see more wrap around or other support systems integrated alongside their community meals.

Peer learning and information exchange:

Kitchen managers highlighted the financial challenges of maintaining a community kitchen. Many were keen to learn from other community kitchens about how to upkeep the building at a reasonable price. Kitchen managers also asked for advice around documents such as risk assessments or food hygiene certificates, suggesting an opportunity for capacity and capability building on this topic.

Both community organisations and kitchen managers reported that increased awareness of the availability of other kitchen spaces, and opportunities for information exchange, would help them.

Access to kitchen equipment:

In many kitchens, there was a lack of storage for regular groups to store their equipment or food. It was highlighted that this lack of storage made running social eating spaces more expensive as the community organisations are not able to bulk buy food.

Additionally, some community kitchens did not provide cooking equipment, presenting a financial barrier for community organisations wanting to provide a social eating space or one-off catering events.

Physical accessibility:

None of the kitchens that we interviewed were fully accessible. Many were in small spaces with limited turning space for wheelchairs. None of the kitchens that we interviewed had low worktops for wheelchair users. However, many kitchens were still deemed as 'accessible' by interviewees, suggesting an opportunity to increase awareness of what a fully accessible kitchen looks like.

Promotion and advertisement

Both kitchen managers and community organisations asked for help with advertisement and communications, reporting that they struggled to get the word out about hiring the space and social eating sessions/groups. For example, only one community kitchen actively advertised availability for hire.

Food waste and recycling

Community organisations reported that they would like to do more around waste and recycling. Sheffield does not have food waste disposal, and most community organisations reported they were unable to compost on site. This is particularly hard for community organisations whose mission is to fight food waste. One interviewee said that in their previous job, the council sponsored a food waste company to deal with their food waste – this was straightforward for the organisation and a huge help.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Support peer learning

We recommend increasing opportunities for learning between community organisations and kitchen managers. As a starting point, this could be a follow up session with participants involved in this research to discuss the recommendations and next steps. This group may then want to identify specific topics to share/develop knowledge on. Example topics identified through this research include:

- Support available relating to food hygiene and risk assessments.
- Expanding community kitchen use for specific communities such as people seeking asylum, experiencing homelessness, and those in recovery from drug and alcohol use.

We also recommend that opportunities for support and information exchange beyond Sheffield are explored. For example, FareShare run their Fullcrumb Kitchen which includes cooking classes focusing on employability skills, cooking healthy food on a budget, and cooking with surplus food.

2. Improve access to kitchen equipment

We recommend the establishment of a library of communal kitchen equipment that is available to hire. [Hull Vault](#) run a library of communal items and could provide some advice on how to set up a similar library in Sheffield. VAS are currently looking for storage space to house and distribute previously used items such as office furniture. ShefFood could expand this conversation and find out whether this could also be used as the base for shared kitchen equipment. Any such library should include equipment for people with different accessibility needs. For example, equipment for easy opening of tins and jars, special stools for resting in kitchens.

ShefFood's Fridge Bank WhatsApp group chat already exists, and provides a space to redistribute food, and ask for fridges, freezers, kitchen appliances and equipment. Interested community partners can email info@sheffood to be added to this group.

3. Increased promotion of community kitchens and social eating spaces

We recommend that community kitchens and social eating spaces are included on the ShefFood map of community food provision. [Community Food Provision | ShefFood](#). ShefFood would also like to create a directory of community kitchen spaces available to hire in Sheffield, including information on the cost, contact details, and availability.

All community kitchens and community organisations should also be encouraged to sign up as a ShefFood partner. ShefFood provides free comms support to its network of over 100 cross-sector partners. [Partner Organisations | ShefFood: Sheffield's Food Partnership](#). We have previously advertised kitchen spaces available to hire in our newsletter, blog and social media.

4. Explore opportunities to increase volunteer engagement and capacity

We recommend that community kitchens and groups seek advice from VAS and [Sheffield's Volunteer Centre](#) who can help an organisation develop volunteering opportunities, recruitment, management and support. This may be something that ShefFood can help facilitate.

5. Support community kitchens and groups to assess their financial health

Accessing funding and increasing capacity go hand in hand. VAS can provide the equivalent of an MOT for voluntary and community sector organisations, where they help an organisation become fit for funding. This can be done in partnership with South Yorkshire Funding Advice Bureau ([SYFAB](#)) who could support with finding grant funding to resource the projects and staff time.

6. Raise awareness of what makes a community kitchen 'fully accessible' means in a community kitchen

Whilst writing this report, we realised we had not interviewed any kitchen managers or community groups who offer or use a fully accessible kitchen. We contacted and subsequently arranged visits to two local organisations which support Sheffield's disabled community: [Burton Street Foundation](#) and [Sheffield Mencap & Gateway](#). Both organisations have fully accessible kitchens, though these are not available for hire. They would, however, consider doing so moving forward. ShefFood recommends continuing this discussion.

We also recommend that these organisations are supported share their expertise about what is needed to make a fully accessible kitchen– both to address the knowledge gap in this area and to gauge interest in opening their accessible kitchens for community hire.

7. Explore opportunities to improve how food waste is managed

Organisations can register their interest in [Compost Connection](#); a new food waste composting service in Sheffield that is in the early stages of development.

ShefFood recommends bringing this report to the Growing and Composting Working Group (which bring together experienced growers to tackle topics such as composting and food waste) to promote conversations about community kitchens and food waste.

CONCLUSION

This report highlights the wealth of activity taking place in community kitchens across the city. There are clear opportunities to increase awareness of community kitchen spaces and social eating groups, promote peer learning and increase connections across the city.

We hope that the recommendations in this report will both strengthen existing activity and open up more opportunities for connection, creativity and nourishment through social eating in Sheffield.

APPENDIX

1. Actions 60-62 from Sheffield’s Local Food Action Plan

5. Leverage spaces for food initiatives.				
Aim	#	Actions	Organisations Involved	WG
Assess the potential of existing properties and infrastructure for social kitchens.	60	Develop an up-to-date map of kitchens (and their specifications e.g. size, condition) where communities in the city could take ownership.	Food Cycle, Lunch Clubs, Open Kitchen, Sheffield City Council, Sheffield Community Land Trust, Sheffood, Voluntary Action Sheffield	 
	61	Overlay potential community kitchens map with the Sheffield Food Provision Map of existing social eating spaces to identify gaps in provision.		
	62	Raise awareness to find those that want access to kitchens and support them with accessing kitchen spaces.		

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2. Interview participants

Community Organisations Interviewed	Community Kitchens Interviewed
Ammi’s Kitchen, Cafe Valentine Food Cycle Food Squad Food Works Herdings Social Cafe Sheffield Community Church/ Manor House CIO Sheffield Food Chain Sheffield Radical Mutual Aid UWA (United Women’s Affiliation) Wellbeing Cafe Wesley Hall Lunch Club	ACT (Aspiring Communities Together) Blend Culinary Foundation Common Ground Community Centre Dore and Totley United Reform Church Hadfield Institute Heeley Green Community Centre Hillsborough Trinity Methodist Church Longley 4 Greens Mum’s United The Archer Project Victoria Hall

The community kitchens and community organisations interviewed covered these postcodes: S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S9, S10, S11, S14, S17. These spanned the following areas of the city: Central, North, North East, North West, South, South East, South West, West.

The community organisations interviewed used the kitchen spaces for a variety of purposes and activities. Although most offered social eating, the delivery of this ranged from a community cafe, to free meals, to lunch clubs for the elderly. Kitchens were also used to prepare ready meals to deliver to the community, to host cooking lessons, and to provide migrant women with a place to cook and gain employability skills.

The interviews are a snapshot of a wider picture. Although multiple organisations can often share a community kitchen, we only interviewed one community group per kitchen. This way, we could obtain a spread of feedback from different kitchens across the city, within the capacity we had.