The Meeting Place Project:
Learning and Guidance for Community Groups

Executive Summary

Meeting Place Principles

- Be Welcoming
- Utilise a Trusted Community Venue
- Be Relational
- Provide Accessible Advice
- Focus on Wellbeing
- Promote Dignity in Practices
- Share Food
- Adapt.

Key Achievements

- The development of a set of principles for community food provision
- Enabling people to access advice, specifically those who are less likely to seek advice outside community settings
- Creation of a broad partnership-led support network
- Greater engagement with the offers of community venues
- Impact on strategy development for partner organisations.

Challenges

- Managing conflicts and different cultures in close communities
- Developing a supportive relationship whilst encouraging self-reliance
- Support volunteers to change their behaviour to reflect principles
- Securing sustainable funding for staff
- Managing the COVID-19 pandemic and re-opening safely
- Supporting people with economic and wellbeing issues post COVID-19
- Capturing outcomes and collecting data
- Responding to a chronic crisis in a sustainable way.

Areas for Exploration

- Further fostering of dignified practices
- Supporting local farmers
- Meeting Places as social enterprises
- Implementing Meeting Places across the borough
- Partnering with community mental health support providers
- Options for supporting rural areas
- Developing campaigning infrastructure.

Transferability

Meeting Place principles that can be implemented across a broad spectrum of community food provision projects.

Guidance for Setting up a Meeting Place

1. Have gentle opening chats in communities
2. Visit other projects
3. Build up an appropriate network
4. Identify a trusted community venue
5. Secure necessary funding
6. Adapt continuously.

Tools to Evaluate and Monitor Progress and Impact, and Share Learning

- Meeting Places Progress Reporting tool
- Regular staff and volunteer meetings
- The Beans on Toast group as an advisory board
- Collaborative informative concise videos on each of the principles
- Collaborative webinars
- One-to-one conversations between people with lived experience and volunteers.