

EVALUATION REPORT FOR THE JUST FACT PROGRAMME

FEBRUARY 2026



CAG
CONSULTANTS

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Key outcomes and impact	3
Learning and legacy	6
Introduction	7
Who was involved	7
Wen (Women Environmental Network)'s role	8
Evaluation of the Just FACT programme	14
What has been delivered over the 5 years?	15
What are the main successes of the Just FACT programme?	16
1. Increased access to healthy, sustainably-produced, culturally-appropriate, affordable food in the borough	17
2. Widened and deepened community engagement	24
3. Community Empowerment: new knowledge, skills, and employability	37
4. A stronger local movement	46
5. Trialled ways to reduce the impact of the food system in Tower Hamlets	52
6. More decision-making in the hands of the local community	62
7. Wellbeing, happiness, health, reduced isolation	67
8. Influenced and inspired wider change	74
Learnings about how the programme has been managed?	85
What has being part of the programme meant to partners?	92
Challenges and barriers to action	94
What next for the Just FACT partners?	101
Conclusion	104
Appendix 1: Theory of Change	106
Appendix 2: Evaluation framework summary	107

Executive Summary

The Just Food and Climate Transition Programme (Just FACT)

Just FACT was a five-year, place-based programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund, working to support a just food and climate transition in Tower Hamlets. Coordinated by Wen (Women's Environmental Network), the programme brought together a diverse partnership of grassroots organisations, community groups, and residents to address climate change through food, while tackling inequality and strengthening community power.

The programme was guided by a shared vision of *an environmentally sustainable and socially just food system in Tower Hamlets*, and had three overarching aims, to:

1. Reduce CO₂ emissions in Tower Hamlets.
2. Create a resilient food system designed by and for diverse communities.
3. Create a stronger local and national movement for a just food and climate transition.

Key outcomes and impact

1. Reduced CO₂ Emissions

The programme demonstrated practical, community-led ways to reduce the environmental impact of the food system, piloting approaches that can be scaled or adopted in local policy. Key outcomes include:

- Measurable emissions savings across projects that collected data, totalling 6.7 tonnes CO₂e, with the largest contribution coming from plastic reduction initiatives in local markets.
- 364,000 fewer plastic bags are used annually in three markets through the Plastic Free Markets pilot, demonstrating an effective model that reduces emissions while supporting traders.
- Increased local food production, with 13 growing projects enabling residents to grow culturally relevant, seasonal produce—reducing food miles, packaging, and refrigeration emissions.
- 6,175 kg of food waste composted, reducing emissions from incineration and creating locally produced compost for community gardens.

- 20,000 litres of rainwater harvested, reducing reliance on mains water and promoting sustainable garden management.
- Food redistribution models prevented surplus food from being wasted, improving access to fresh produce while avoiding associated emissions.

Overall carbon savings were modest relative to the scale of borough-wide emissions, but the programme successfully tested and evidenced scalable local interventions that can feed into Tower Hamlets' climate and food policy.

2. A resilient food system designed by and for diverse communities

Just FACT placed communities at the centre of decision-making and delivery, improving access to good food, strengthening local leadership, and developing community-led infrastructure that supports long-term resilience. Key outcomes include:

- Improved access to affordable, healthy, and culturally relevant food, including:
 - A growing network of community-run Food Coops, visited over 11,000 times and distributed more than 25 tonnes of fresh produce.
 - Pilots that reduced cost barriers to organic produce, enabling residents on low incomes to try organic food for the first time.
 - Local production of culturally important foods for Bangladeshi and other communities. Expanded community food growing spaces, many of which are in estates where residents have very limited access to green space.
- Deepened community engagement and leadership:
 - Over 21,000 participants and 4,500 volunteers were involved.
 - Co-design, participatory methods, and resident-led governance used across many projects.
 - Clear evidence of increased confidence, knowledge, and skills, e.g. young people becoming climate leaders; homeless clients gaining horticulture accreditation; volunteers progressing into paid green roles.
- Holistic wellbeing benefits, with multiple projects reporting reductions in isolation, improved mental health, and greater social connection—particularly among marginalised groups.
- Stronger community skills and employability, with training, placements, paid opportunities and new local roles in food, gardening, cultural and climate sectors.

The programme built people-centred resilience by creating long-term community assets, improving food security, and supporting local leaders to shape the food system.

3. A stronger local and national movement for a just food & climate transition

Just FACT has established a vibrant, collaborative movement in Tower Hamlets - linking grassroots action, community leadership and local policy influence in ways that did not previously exist at this scale. Key outcomes include:

- A strong cross-borough network of 26 funded projects, which is widely considered the programme's most enduring legacy.
- Meaningful engagement of communities under-represented in climate action, including Bangladeshi, Latin American, Somali, QTIBPOC*, refugee, migrant and homeless communities, as well as young people.
- Increased visibility and influence of community voices, with residents speaking at public events, contributing to strategic conversations, and helping shape local food policy.
- Policy influence, including:
 - Tower Hamlets Council drawing on Just FACT research and practice for its emerging *Transforming Food Systems Strategy*.
 - The Council signed the *Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration* following advocacy from Wen and partners.
 - Submissions to the London Assembly and wider recognition from national organisations.
- Replicable models created, such as:
 - Plastic-free market approaches.
 - Youth-led climate leadership models (e.g. "Our World Our Wellness").
 - Community-run Food Coop models.
 - Localised circular waste systems (e.g. R-Urban Poplar).
- Arts-based and cultural approaches enabled the programme to reach new audiences, from theatre and music, to community festivals, to the Blueprint Architects' arts trailer for land justice campaigning.

Collectively, these outcomes show that Just FACT has had a positive impact on the people and environment in Tower Hamlets, and that it has created the conditions for long term

movement building, shifting capacity, confidence and ownership into local hands and strengthening the borough's ability to take forward a just food and climate transition.

Learning and legacy

The evaluation highlights that delivering inclusive climate action requires long-term investment in trust, relationships, and community capacity. Food proved to be an effective entry point to climate engagement, particularly when linked to everyday concerns such as cost of living, health, culture, and wellbeing.

While community-led projects alone cannot deliver a just food and climate transition, Just FACT has demonstrated viable, people-centred models for change and generated learning that can inform future policy, funding, and programme design. And, importantly, the programme has left a strong partnership of individuals and groups organisations in the form of the Tower Hamlets Food Partnership, which will provide a lasting legacy for continued climate action in Tower Hamlets and beyond, and enable the partnership to influence future food policy in the borough.



Introduction

Just FACT is a five-year partnership programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF)'s [Climate Action Fund](#). Coordinated by the [Women's Environmental Network \(Wen\)](#), the partnership is made up of a network of people and projects in Tower Hamlets.

The vision for the programme is “an environmentally sustainable and socially just food system in Tower Hamlets”, and the three overarching aims of the programme were to:

1. Reduce CO2 emissions in Tower Hamlets.
2. Create a resilient food system designed by and for diverse communities.
3. Create a stronger local and national movement for a just food and climate transition.

This evaluation report has been prepared by Lucy Harbor (Partner at CAG Consultants), the evaluator for the Just FACT programme. The findings in this report are derived from an analysis of the end of project reports submitted by the project partners, annual progress updates, and notes from interviews with project leads. As well as evaluating what impact the programme has had, this report considers the challenges and barriers to action, how the partnership has functioned, and what project partners think should happen next.

Who was involved

The partnership

The Just FACT partnership was made up of organisations and groups funded through Just FACT including: Wen, Platform London, St Hilda's East Community Centre, Sunny Jar Eco Hub, Public Works, Limehouse Town Hall, Leaders in Community/ the Teviot Centre, Cranbrook Community Food Garden, Compost Mentis/ Mile End Community Garden, Maya Productions, Folx Farm, misery medicine, Community Food Growers Network, Burdett Foundation, Providence Row, Society Links, Boil & Bubble, Stepney City Farm, Society Links, Seeds for Growth, Oitij-jo Collective, Somos Semillas, Rice Marketing.

The sites for 3 of the projects - Limborough Hub (Wen), the Teviot Centre (Leaders in Community (LiC), R Urban Poplar (Public Works) - were provided by Poplar HARCA.

Wen (Women Environmental Network)'s role

Wen, as the lead partner, held overall responsibility for the planning, management and direction of the Just FACT programme, making sure the programme was developed and delivered to meet its aims and grant requirements.

This included: managing the partnership; providing direct project support; providing wider movement building opportunities; supporting with evaluation and learning; managing onwards grant-making; reporting and funder liaising; programme comms and identifying wider influencing opportunities.

The Blueprint Architects

Platform London coordinated a group of community leaders, organisations, activists and residents who were engaged in the food system of Tower Hamlet, to become the 'Blueprint Architects' (BA). They were tasked with creating a blueprint for a just food and climate transition in Tower Hamlets.

Tower Hamlets Food Partnership

Just FACT grew out of the [Tower Hamlets Food Partnership \(THFP\)](#), which Wen co-founded and has co-ordinated since 2017. THFP is a place-based partnership consisting of 299 members representing a wide range of cross-sector organisations including grassroots organisations, local charities, faith-based groups, NHS bodies, schools, housing associations, academic institutions, trade unions, and the Council, whose aim is to transform the local food system so that sustainable, good food is available to all.

Projects

A summary of each project is provided below, and case study reports can be found on the Just FACT website: [Resources - JUST FACT](#)

Community food and action hubs

[R-Urban Poplar](#) is an eco-civic hub that is developing resilience in the face of climate change. They delivered a public programme of events, workshops and infrastructures, including localised circular food systems.

[Teviot Peoples Kitchen](#), based at R-Urban, delivered growing and cooking education programmes, as well as training and business support for local people.

[Limborough Food Hub](#) is a 'grow, cook and eat' community food and action hub, that helped people build relationships, learn about issues, share ideas and take practical action to tackle climate change through food.



Community gardens and orchards

[Providence Row](#) trained people affected by homelessness in its rooftop garden giving them the skills, confidence and positive mental health from growing fresh produce and a horticulture accreditation.

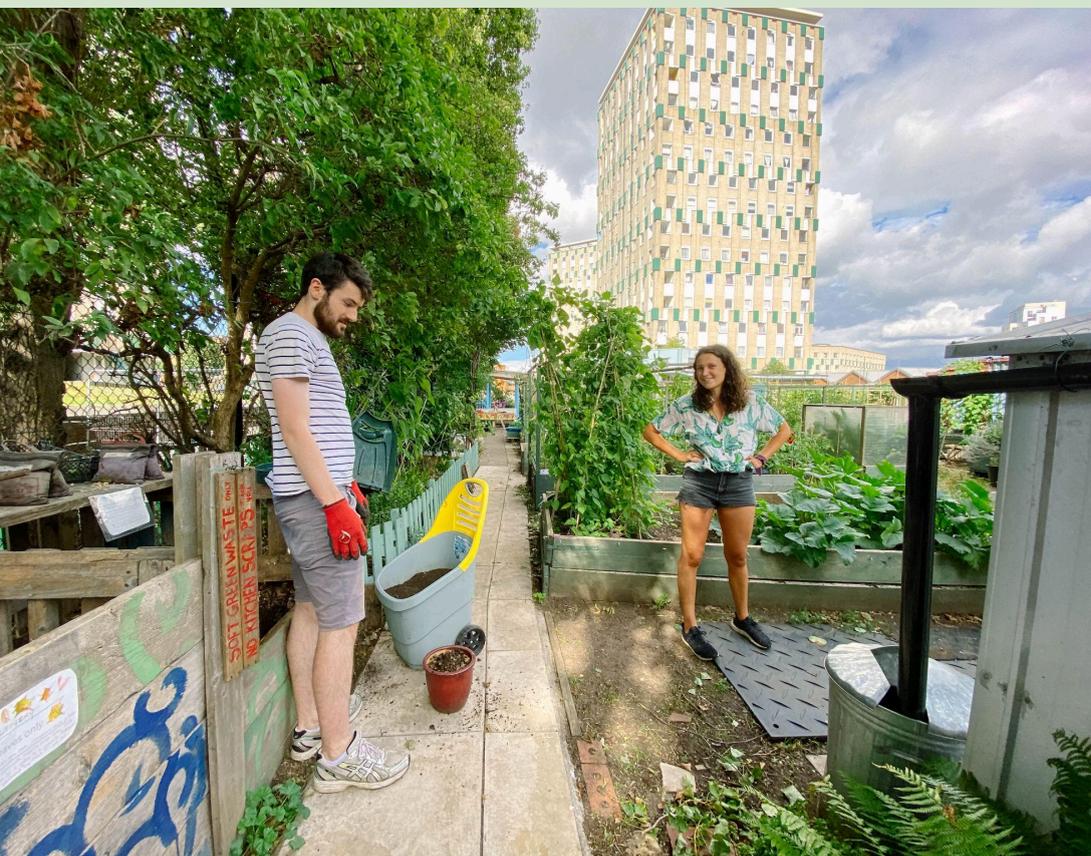
[Cranbrook Community Food Garden](#) is a community garden in the heart of Cranbrook Estate, in Bethnal Green. They installed a rainwater harvesting system and 'Berry Lane', an alleyway of fruit bushes to provide free fruit to estate residents.

[Mile End Community Garden](#) worked with [Compost Mentis](#) to co-design and construct a compost toilet, with the aim of enabling a wider range of groups and individuals to access the garden and stay for longer periods of time.

[Seeds for Growth](#) worked with community gardens, a local school, and housing estates to create new composting and growing spaces.

The [Maydwell Gardens](#) project saw the development of a community garden, stewarded by women from the local housing estate.

The 'Eat not waste not' project at [Swedenborg Orchard](#) re-used waste from the community for gardening projects and the community orchard - through composting, green waste and a wormery.



Food trading

A [Food Coop Network](#) was set up to support residents' access to fresh, affordable food while connecting people to their community. New Food Coops were set up at Limehouse

Town Hall and the Teviot Centre, with St Hilda's East Food Coop providing training and mentorship.

[Stepney City Farm](#) explored whether employing Sylheti-speaking food growers would increase the amount of fruit and veg grown to the point of financial viability, as well as better meeting the needs of the local Bangladeshi community.

[Folx Farm](#) explored how a commercial, small scale, regenerative farm could concentrate a percentage of its growing activity on foods that are predominantly imported, in a way that is sustainable and affordable.

[MAD LEAP](#) partnered with a local school to explore the viability of installing hydroponics towers, testing business model assumptions with crops grown and sold.

[Oitijo-Collective](#)'s Bottling Futures project explored traditional practices which are vanishing, particularly those of preserving, pickling and fermenting, with the aim of creating a new local enterprise.



Plastic reduction

[Plastic-free markets](#) was a research project led by Rice Marketing to explore how to work with market traders to reduce plastic bag use in Tower Hamlets markets.

[Plastic-free Poplar](#) run by Sunny Jar Eco Hub focused on reducing single use plastic, including supporting the community to take action and come together to create a planet-friendly action plan and find practical solutions for the day-to-day reduction of plastic waste.



Schools & young people

[Leaders in Community](#) developed a youth climate leadership programme - Be.Green - to educate and empower young people in Tower Hamlets.

[Boil & Bubble](#) worked with Bowden Primary school to build a community garden, run family harvesting sessions, run sensory cooking workshops and community cafe.

[Maya Productions](#) delivered a family-friendly musical 'Súper Chefs' to open up a wider conversation around food, food systems and sustainability, in particular among Latin American, Bangladeshi and Somali communities.

Community organising and networks

[Community Food Growers Network](#) created a Food and Land Justice Resource Centre, offering an accessible organising space in Tower Hamlets where resources, skills, support and learning could be shared.

[House of Anetta](#) brought people together through social eating activities and setting up local systems for food waste redistribution.

[Misery](#) provided spaces for Queer, Trans, Intersex, Black People and People of Colour (QTIBPOC*) community to come together, connect with themselves and their feelings, and learn collectively about health, the natural world and food.

[Somos Semillas](#) created spaces for the South American diaspora, to gather and learn about food system challenges through connecting with culture and ancestral knowledge.



Evaluation of the Just FACT programme

The evaluator was involved from the start of the five-year programme. Evaluation tasks included:

- Developing an evaluation framework with the project partners at the start of the programme.
- Delivering a series of workshops on evaluation.
- Delivering learning sessions at partnership meetings.
- Developing evaluation plans with partners and reviewing their progress each year.
- Reporting on impact and learnings in the annual reports to the Climate Action Fund.

A process evaluation was undertaken at the end of each year, whereby partners were surveyed about what they thought was working well with the programme, and how it could be improved. The survey also asked how the programme was progressing in terms of the five programme values that were agreed at its commencement. The annual learnings and findings from the process evaluation were used to improve the programme.

The five programme values were:

1. Communities in the lead
2. Diversity, equity and inclusion
3. Just transition
4. Care for the environment
5. Joy and friendship

The Theory of Change and summary of the evaluation framework can be found in [Appendix 1 and 2](#).

Mita Pujara also provided evaluation support in the programme, advising on creative approaches to evaluation in the form of workshops and a [toolkit](#).

What has been delivered over the 5 years?

Engagement and delivery:

- 26 grassroots projects funded.
- 21 partnership meet-ups.
- 1,342 events and workshops.
- 21,777 people engaged¹.
- 4,570 volunteers involved.
- 900 attendees at Just FACT's Power of Food festival in 2025.

New infrastructure:

- 13 food growing projects.
- 6 new composting systems.
- 2 rainwater harvesting systems.

Impact data:

- 20,000l rainwater collected.
- 364,000 plastic bags avoided at markets.
- 1,362kg food redistributed (saved from incineration).
- 6,175kg food waste composted.
- 6,757kgCO₂e saved in total (from the 8 projects that collected data that can be used to calculate carbon savings).

Influencing wider change:

- 5 alternative trading models tested.
- 61 resources shared publicly.
- 6 knowledge exchange trips involving 9 project partners.

¹ 'Engaged' here means they attended a workshop, event, training that was arranged and funded by Just FACT.

What are the main successes of the Just FACT programme?

The Just FACT programme achieved numerous successes across its core aims of working towards a Just Food and Climate Transition in Tower Hamlets, which were to:

1. Reduce CO₂ emissions in Tower Hamlets.
2. Create a resilient food system designed by and for diverse communities.
3. Create a stronger local and national movement for a just food and climate transition.

Across its 26 projects, these successes span establishing resilient community infrastructure, tackling food insecurity through innovative distribution models, promoting environmental sustainability, and building significant community capacity and empowerment.

This report provides a summary of eight of the key achievements of the Just FACT programme, spanning across those three aims, which are:

1. **Increased access to healthy, sustainable, culturally-appropriate and affordable food in the borough.**
2. **Widened and deepened community engagement.**
3. **Empowered local community: new knowledge, skills, and employment.**
4. **Created a stronger local movement.**
5. **Trialled ways to reduce the environmental impact of the food system.**
6. **Put more decision-making in the hands of the local community.**
7. **Delivered holistic outcomes.**
8. **Influenced and inspired wider change.**

The remainder of this section contains more information under each of these eight headings.

There is more information about what each project has achieved in the [case studies on the Just FACT website](#).

1. Increased access to healthy, sustainably-produced, culturally-appropriate, affordable food in the borough

This has been achieved by establishing a network of Food Co-ops in Tower Hamlets, which focussed on reducing financial barriers to organic produce, establishing food growing projects that supplied culturally-appropriate food for communities, and producing fresh and healthy produce.

- 11,018 people visited the food coops that were established.
- 25,670kg of fresh fruit and vegetables were distributed by St Hilda's Food Coop over two years.
- Residents replaced £8 of non-organic produce with organic alternatives each week at the Food Coops, thanks to a subsidised 45% discount on organic food.
- Folx Farm grew and distributed 745kg of culturally-appropriate food ² over a period of 17 months.

Food Co-op network success

A major success of the programme was establishing and strengthening community-led food cooperatives and hubs, which directly addressed food insecurity in areas with high levels of child poverty and where many residents cannot afford nutritious food. The Food Co-ops operate as not-for-profit pop-up shops or 'social supermarkets', strategically located in one of the most prominent food deserts in the UK.

Just FACT funding supported the launch and long-term operation of the Tower Hamlets Food Co-op Network, including sites at St Hilda's East, Teviot Centre, and Limehouse Town Hall. St Hilda's East Food Co-op alone went on to have over 6,277 customer visits during their two years of funding, distributing 25,670 kilograms of fresh fruit and vegetables to local residents.

As a Wen member of staff noted, there was a 'ripple effect', with the network of Tower Hamlets food co-ops growing from two to 14 (although it should be noted that the other food coops are based on a groups/member only model, rather than pop-up shops).

Affordability pilots

Limehouse and Teviot Food Coops tested a model to reduce the cost barrier for healthy eating. The Bridging the Gap pilot with Sustain and Alexandra Rose Charity discounted

² Culturally-appropriate food means food that it aligns with a community's traditions, beliefs, and heritage.

organic fruit and veg to the price of non-organic produce, alongside the charity's 'Rose Vouchers for Fruit and Veg', which were given out each week to residents on low incomes with food-related health conditions³.



The report on the pilot⁴ said residents in Tower Hamlets replaced on average £8 of non-organic produce with organic alternatives each week at the Food Coops, thanks to the 45% discount on organic food combined with Rose Vouchers, allowing many households living on low incomes to try organic produce for the first time, according to the pilot report.

One customer at the Teviot Food Coop said: *"It's given me the opportunity to buy and use organic fruit and vegetables at an affordable price."* And another said: *"I never bought organic in supermarkets because I couldn't understand what was organic. I couldn't understand the packaging (because of the language). It's easy at the food co-op."*

³ <https://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/fruit-and-veg-on-prescription/>

⁴ <https://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/ARC-Bridging-the-Gap-report-LR.pdf>

The Teviot Food Coop reported that they *“could quickly see the positive impact this is having on our community where great quality organic food is mostly inaccessible. From the initial enquiry surveys carried out in August of 2023 - where residents had little faith in organic food ever being affordable - to just 3 weeks into this pilot, opinions started to shift, and the concept of class and wealth associated with ‘organic’ has in some way been diffused.”*

Teviot Food Co-op saw sales and intake rise steadily, with an increase of 65% in average basket value from approximately £4.50 to £7.10 after transitioning to organic produce.

The project has also strengthened local sustainable food supply chains, supporting 25 local and UK farms through the Better Food Shed, with farmers receiving 84% of the revenue from their produce sales.

The Limehouse Town Hall Food Co-op said it had also helped reduce customer reliance on supermarkets and increased awareness of seasonality and local food. A customer said: *“I have less trips to supermarkets now and don't overspend on other stuff”*.

The Limehouse Town Hall Food Co-op successfully pivoted to a member-only cooperative model after its original funding ended, demonstrating a viable pathway for self-sustaining community food provision. Thirty-three households signed up and became actively involved to continue ordering organic food from Better Food Shed and Folx Farm – another Just FACT partner project.

More culturally-appropriate produce is being grown locally

Tower Hamlets is one of the most culturally-diverse boroughs in the country, but much of the culturally-appropriate produce has to be imported, which means it isn't as 'fresh' as if it had been grown locally, and the importing of fruit and vegetables results in carbon emissions from transportation.

Folx Farm successfully grew and provided vegetables which are culturally-relevant to the Bengali users of the Tower Hamlets Food co-ops, like uri beans, khodu squash, and okra, which thrived in the UK climate. In total they grew and distributed over 745kg of vegetables, and 21 varieties of produce.

Stepney City Farm also grew culturally-appropriate vegetables. They recruited food growers from the local Bangladeshi community, who advised on the most in-demand Bangladeshi vegetables, and the farm saw an increase in market sales by £2,000 over the

year, which they say reflects the popularity of the wider range of Bangladeshi produce introduced and grown by their growers. A blog about their produce can be found here: [This Year's Deshi Veg - Stepney City Farm](#).



Society Links provided growing space for residents with no outdoor space. Some grew Khodu, a vegetable that is reportedly difficult to grow in the UK. When it grows to a large size, one vegetable can be shared between 3 to 4 families.

At Limborough hub and Maydwell Gardens, many gardeners grew vegetables and herbs central to their cultural diets, such as amaranth, bottle gourd, coriander, and Bangladeshi spinach. The project lead at Limborough said: ***“These crops are not only nutritious but carry deep emotional and ancestral value, allowing residents to keep traditions alive and share stories across generations.”*** The project lead at Maydwell Gardens said: ***“In a borough where most residents live in flats and allotments are oversubscribed, we create access to food growing for communities otherwise excluded.”***

More local food growing

The percentage of residents in Tower Hamlets who have access to garden space is lower than the UK and London averages⁵. Just FACT was successful in setting up some food growing projects in areas with low levels of access to outdoor space. The challenges extended beyond providing the space and inviting people to come and join. Significant time was needed to build up trust and relationships with local residents, and to create an inclusive and welcoming space. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

The 13 food growing projects in Just FACT have enabled residents – many of whom do not have a private garden - to grow and access more fresh fruit and vegetables, with many environmental benefits, such as reduced emissions from avoiding food transportation and refrigeration, and packaging waste ([see section 5](#)), as well as health and wellbeing benefits ([see section 7](#)).

The table below summarises each of the growing projects.

Project	Growing Space	About the space
Limborough Hub	18 raised beds	Located on an estate in Poplar, with raised beds, a large greenhouse, and a Chelsea flower garden. Enabled residents to grow fresh, culturally appropriate and seasonal produce while reconnecting with nature. The addition of a wildlife area with native and perennial plants has supported biodiversity and created a haven for pollinators.
R-Urban	13 growing beds for local residents	Included on-site composting for residents' food waste and garden waste from the site.
Cranbrook Community Food Garden	Area of 102m ²	Created a lane of over 15 berry bushes including currants, raspberries, blackberries and strawberries, that were picked by local residents on the Estate.
Stepney city Farm	1,264kg food grown	Two food growers, recruited from the local community, focussed on growing culturally-appropriate vegetables.

⁵ <https://www.cprelondon.org.uk/news/tower-hamlets-fails-on-green-space-say-campaigners/>

Maydwell Gardens	11 new plots	Women-only project on the Burdett Estate, where residents can grow fresh and culturally-appropriate produce.
Folx Farm	745+kg food grown	Grew 21 varieties of Bangladeshi vegetables (such as uri beans, khodu squash, and okra) at a farm in Sussex, for food co-ops in Tower Hamlets.
Providence Row	92kg food grown	Grew food in the roof-top Urban Gardening Programme, which contributed to approximately 1,000 meals for homeless clients in their day centre kitchen.
Boil & bubble	30m2 kitchen garden	Built a kitchen garden with raised beds, pond and composting for the school on a disused area of the playground.
Teviot People's Kitchen	No data provided	Grew some fresh produce, as part of their events and workshops programme
Somos Semillas	No data provided	Installed food growing beds and ran bi-weekly gardening sessions for one year in a private garden.
Society Links	No data provided	Created growing spaces for community growing amongst estates, and held weekly planting sessions over one year, encouraging residents to sow, propagate, and nurture a variety of fruits, vegetables, and herbs, including culturally-appropriate produce.
Seeds for Growth	No data provided	New growing area created at the Old Surgery.
Mad Leap	No data provided	Not yet started, due to high costs for the previous plan of building a roof garden on a school. Now intend to extend the growing space at R Urban instead, including a new polytunnel in 2026

The learnings around community food growing were summarised in the Just FACT learning report: [‘The potential of local growing in creating just and sustainable food systems’](#).

2. Widened and deepened community engagement

Just FACT has been effective at widening and deepening community participation in food and climate projects, and has successfully engaged groups new to climate change. This resulted from a range of approaches including listening to communities, meeting people where they already go, building trust and relationships, making activities practical and relevant, and ensuring inclusion across different groups. Spaces were created specifically for marginalised groups such as QTIBPOC*, youth, those in food poverty, refugees and people affected by homelessness. A range of co-design and participatory methods were used to increase community involvement and leadership.

“We’ve learned that change doesn’t happen overnight or through one-off interventions. It happens gradually, through consistency, trust building, and shared experiences.” - R Urban Poplar

- 21,777 people took part in project activities.
- 4,570 people volunteered.
- Approx. 900 people attended the Power of Food Festival.
- 6 estate-based projects.
- 4 different projects engaged children at 5 schools.

Groups engaged

- Communities of Tower Hamlets, including (but not limited to): Bangladeshi, Latin American, South Asian, Somali, Abya Yala.
- Market traders.
- Homeless.
- QTIBPOC*.
- Refugees and migrants.
- Women’s refuge.

Widening community participation

The programme widened participation in food and climate projects in Tower Hamlets by prioritising accessibility, providing spaces for marginalised groups, establishing local hubs and networks, and – importantly - meeting people ‘where they are’.

- Platform aimed to engage communities representative of Tower Hamlets to form the Blueprint Architect Group – prioritising those with lived experience of colonial, racial, gender and class violence. They brought together 36 local food organisers

and residents whose task was to reimagine the food system in Tower Hamlets. Platform used various inclusive, collaborative engagement strategies designed to overcome socioeconomic and cultural barriers. They recruited local community leaders, activists, food growers, and residents who were invested in and impacted by the food system in Tower Hamlets, and who reflected the borough's demographic makeup. They also engaged new people and groups beyond existing networks, by mapping community spaces online and by walking the streets of neighbourhoods, which resulted in them, for example, connecting with a Caribbean church community and Vietnamese gardening group.

- Limborough Hub, situated in an estate in a predominantly Bangladeshi area, used family-friendly events, community festivals (such as Eid parties), and coffee mornings to attract local residents, which were vital for building trust and relationships within the predominantly Bangladeshi locality.



- Limborough also widened its reach by dedicating its kitchen space to external groups, including: Quaker Social Action (who run Cook Up sessions for asylum seekers, refugees, and homeless people), Collective Joy Collective (a group that

organises parties for migrants), Deshi Shad (a local catering who are a catering company led by Bangladeshi women), and Eat Club (a youth food charity and Camp trans who used prepared food for a weekend-long festival).

- Sunny Jar adapted their activities to reach various demographics and communities, focusing on inclusion and accessibility. They were successful in working with 3 groups via English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Classes, engaging over 40 ESOL learners. Sunny Jar said that providing sessions for ESOL was key to reaching people that did not necessarily have prior knowledge or interest in the topics. They also worked with local schools, running 40 workshops across two primary schools, engaging 200 pupils and 15 teachers.
- The Plastic Free Markets project aimed to reduce plastic bag use at markets, and engagement involved research, consultation, and piloting initiatives, with the goal of supporting market traders as agents of change while protecting their livelihood. In-depth conversations were held with traders across all three markets, including two ambassador traders, Toklas Miah and Dilu Miah, in Chrisp Street market. These conversations were built up organically over multiple visits to develop trust and accommodate the traders' schedules. This helped them to understand what barriers there may be to reducing plastic bag use at the markets, which enabled them to work with market traders to develop a two-stage approach.



- Food Co-ops were strategically located in "food deserts" and aimed to provide residents with access to affordable, healthy, and culturally-relevant produce. Their approach focused on the specific needs of Tower Hamlets residents, considering

cultural diversity and language barriers, ensuring their food network services were accessible and inclusive to all residents, by for example, ensuring a lack of complicated packaging, which helped residents who do not speak English as a first language feel comfortable purchasing organic goods.

In the second half of the programme, new project partners joined Just FACT, through the grantee programme. Many of these projects helped to widen the reach of Just FACT further still.

- Providence Row was funded to engage homeless people, alongside local volunteers, to grow food onsite, which can be used to cook meals for homeless people, whilst also learning horticultural skills.
- Misery Medicine: Plant Magic specifically created safe spaces for the QTIBPOC* community, addressing eco-anxiety, isolation, and burnout.
- Maya Productions used theatre to engage Latin American, Bangladeshi/South Asian, and Somali communities in conversations about cultural cuisine and climate adaptation.
- Somos Semillas focused on supporting the Abya Yala (Latin American) migrant community. Their learning hub facilitated bi-weekly gardening sessions using Abya Yala ancestral knowledge and incorporating Body-Territory methodology to strengthen cultural identity and belonging within the migrant community.
- Society Links used an orchard to engage new groups, including running growing activities for refugee/migrant sessions at a local church. For some participants, this was their first activity since arriving in the UK. They also invited women from a local women's refuge to creative workshops at the orchard, which helped them integrate into the community and supported their mental wellbeing.
- Boil & Bubble, a community cooking social enterprise, used Just FACT funding to create a community hub for communal growing, cooking, eating, and skills sharing with the community around Bowden Primary School, a specialist setting for children with social, emotional, and mental health needs.
- Stepney City Farm successfully hired Sylheti-speaking Food Growers to overcome language barriers with their allotment holders, and ensure the largely Bangladeshi community felt more heard and catered to. They did this by advertising

opportunities in both English and Sylheti via posters on-site, in local shops, and in religious meeting places.



Reducing barriers to participation

Projects actively overcame barriers to participation, including financial and logistical challenges.

Financial barriers

- Blueprint Architects were resourced for their time (from year two onwards) to ensure crucial community members could participate without losing paid work. In the first year, Platform had found that some group members were not attending convenings as they had to prioritise paid work.
- Leaders in Community provided a £100 bursary to young people in the Be.Green programme to eliminate access barriers such as travel costs.

- Offering free tickets proved successful for Maya Productions, ensuring their shows were at maximum audience capacity, and free access to food/refreshments worked well for Society Links. Research undertaken with the food co-ops noted that subsidising organic food reduced that cost barrier to local residents being able to afford organic.

Accessibility and Location

- Projects prioritised being located and delivering services close to where people were. Workshops were held in accessible venues, and in some cases, childcare was arranged. For some groups, the mix of in-person and online activities increased accessibility, e.g. for the Community Food Growers Network (CFGN) programme. In some projects, initial engagement levels were low, so different tactics were employed.
- Seeds for Growth found that they had more success with their Farming on the Barkantine project when collaborating with trusted organisations: *“Although the project found it challenging to encourage individuals to join sessions at the growing area selected, there was more success when sessions were delivered in familiar surroundings. The collaboration with the local clinic, church, and social health practitioners has motivated these organisations to enhance their existing spaces for gardening and cultivation programs benefiting their users or patients.” – Project Lead*

Hyperlocal Outreach

- R-Urban staff actively engaged with the local community on the estate through door-knocking outreach (especially during the Covid lockdown) and being consistently present in the neighbourhood.
- Other projects used flyers, posters, and newsletters, often delivered directly to resident households, as an effective strategy for promoting activities.

Language and Communication

- In order to reduce language barriers, the Limehouse Town Hall Food Co-op held meetings with Bangladeshi translation to involve residents in the transition to a cooperative model. Similarly, a Bengali volunteer in Plastic Free Poplar assisted with engagement and translation, ensuring communications were appropriate for the community.

Deepening community participation

Participation was deepened by Just FACT projects, from developing community-led approaches, co-designing projects, transferring ownership to local people, fostering leadership, and centring community interests.



Consistency, Trust, and Relationship Building

A common finding across projects was that deep participation relies on long-term relationship-building, commitment and trust, which often took longer than projects had originally envisaged. The three approaches that worked well were:

1. To dedicate a lot of time and resources to trust and relationship-building in the early stages of the project, where the project lead was not already known to the community. E.g. R-Urban staff, who were not from the community themselves, recognised the importance of regular and consistent community engagement, including door knocking, to achieve buy-in from residents. Project lead: ***“We’ve learned that change doesn’t happen overnight or through one-off interventions. It happens gradually, through consistency, trust building, and shared experiences.”***

2. To recruit a project coordinator from within the community e.g. Stepney City Farm employed Sylheti-speaking growers, which dramatically improved communication and rapport with the Bangladeshi allotment holders. *“I can communicate a little bit but it’s great to have somebody Bengali, and if they’re not there then we have to continue struggling. When you guys weren’t there, I used small words and managed. If you’re there it’s better.” – A Plot Holder*
3. To work with a group or organisation that is trusted by the community e.g. Seeds for Growth were unknown to the local community and initially struggled to attract participants to their ‘Farming on the Barkantine’ project. They had more success engaging community members when they joined up with churches and schools.

A community-led approach

‘Communities in the lead’ was a core programme value agreed by all partners at the outset of Just FACT. This value is evident in many Just FACT projects and was embedded in projects in different ways.

Youth authorship

- The Be.Green Programme was designed around the thesis that if young people author the work, they will also author the outcomes. The cohorts determined the research and campaign direction, ensuring the programme fit their needs, not the other way around. *“Wen and Just FACT resourced us to keep authorship real - time to plan with young leaders, flexibility to test and pivot, and partnerships that made the ‘who decides’ question practical, not theoretical.” – Be.Green project lead*
- Young people in Be.Green later took on roles such as ‘peer recruiters’ and ‘session leads’. *“Appetite grew with responsibility: later cohorts expanded, with 20+ young people taking co-facilitation, logistics and first-draft budgets. Some stayed on as peer recruiters and session leads.” – Be.Green project lead*

Co-Design of community projects and collective decision making

- Compost Mentis used co-design and co-building methods to involve local people in creating compost toilet infrastructure in a community garden, and accepted donated materials as an additional way for people to get involved.
- Projects continuously gathered feedback from their communities, and adapted activities and programming. For example, Teviot People's Kitchen gauged

community interests through workshops, volunteering, and informal meals, then tailored activities accordingly, such as focusing on chutneys or using the tandoor based on demand. Boil & Bubble gathered ideas directly from children and families at the school.

- At R-Urban, highly engaged attendees were brought into informal project steering groups to discuss what to focus on in the coming year, although they noted that this will require ongoing funding to properly resource people's time.
- Cranbrook Community Food Garden actively solicited input on fruit tree and food crop plans to build excitement and engagement.
- Society Links developed their popular pickling workshop after a local Bangladeshi resident suggested addressing spare produce to avoid waste.



Making engagements relevant

- Many Just FACT projects found that the key to successfully engaging groups new to climate change was making the conversation meaningful to people's everyday lives, and non-overwhelming. Linking climate issues directly to immediate concerns like food cost, health, and local environment proved successful. Engaging through culture, art, storytelling and sharing meals together enabled projects to engage new people and groups. Some learnings are summarised in the Just FACT learning report: [‘Climate conversations that build community power’](#).
- With the cost-of-living crisis hitting shortly after this programme began, many groups found that climate change was not a priority for people in the community. Instead, food was used as a lens and was linked to being healthy, saving money, and improving social connections.
- Teviot People's Kitchen focussed conversations on local experience and positive action, which they say can help people be more empowered, rather than overwhelmed. ***“With the Teviot People's Kitchen, we've tried to focus conversations on composting, food waste, local food growing and resourceful cooking, in a way that opens the door to broader discussions about sustainability and wellbeing.”***

Practical, hands-on activities

- Many projects prioritised 'hands-on' and practical activities, as this proved to be engaging, and enabled people to 'learn by doing'. Be.Green and Plastic Free Poplar found that creative, energising, and interactive activities were more successful at engaging participants, and enabling them to learn through doing. This included up-cycling, litter picks, sewing lessons to repair clothes, and hands-on farm visits. ***“I enjoyed this (T-shirt bag-making) workshop. It was creative, relaxing and good for the planet! No need to buy Tesco plastic bags anymore!” - ESOL participant on Plastic Free Poplar project***
- OITIJ-JO Collective's Bottling Futures project delivered workshops on food preservation methods like powdering, fruit leather, and chilli in oil, driven by the community's priority of reducing food waste.
- However, some 'doing' projects sparked less interest, such as the rainwater harvesting at Cranbrook Community Food Garden, with the project lead wondering if it was perhaps too technical to interest local residents. You can read more about this in the [challenges and barriers section](#).



Field Trips and Exposure

- On experiential visits, the young people in the Be.Green programme turned their learning into action. At a farm, Organiclea (a workers' cooperative growing food in the Lea Valley), young people mapped the journey from field to basket, then used that insight to shape seasonal choices at the stall and in cook sessions. With Thames21, they learned sampling, safety and site stewarding, then designed micro-actions back on estates that made litter reduction visible and social.
- The Food Coops arranged a visit for local residents to Folx Farm, the Just FACT project that grows produce in Sussex for the food co-op. Visitors reported that it had opened their eyes to what organic meant for the first time. ***"When we saw the organic farmers, you could see the love they had for the food." And: "Once I learned about organic food from the farm trip, it has made everything so much better." - Participant***

Making engagements sociable

- Informal gatherings, such as community meals (Bangla feasts, Somali feasts for example), seasonal celebrations, and planting sessions, were recognised as more powerful than formal meetings for building relationships and trust. And they were noted as being particularly important for building relationships that are necessary for longer term engagement and real change. The social side of the Be.Green programme was mentioned as a major factor in retention and bonding. Shared meals and socialising were also central to the Just FACT partnership meetings, which helped partners to bond and network informally.

Using art and culture as entry points

- Creative methods were used to make climate discussions visual, accessible and impactful. For example, Maya Productions used an interactive and bilingual family musical, *Súper Chefs*, as a catalyst for conversations around cultural food, food systems, and sustainability, and how cuisines are adapting to climate change. It proved popular and both theatre events were sold out. They found that theatre successfully raised awareness and created an understanding of climate emergency issues, and attracted a different cohort of people than traditional climate events. ***“It was such a beautiful way to share just how food does bring families and cultures together” - Writer of Súper Chefs***
- In the second half of their multi-year project, Blueprint Architects were interested to learn about how they could use arts education to reach more local people (than they were able to do through the publications that they had produced in the first few years). They transitioned towards an arts approach using a collectively-owned trailer/arts installation to generate discussions about food and land justice, paying community members to be artists and practicing collective decision-making.
- Misery Medicine evolved its gatherings from herbalism walks to "nature-centred gatherings" featuring creative activities like communal cooking, eco-poetry, and painting with plant dyes, enhancing accessibility for disabled and chronically ill QTIBPOC community members. This also proved popular, and every gathering was sold out.
- Sunny Jar worked with 3 local schools, 200 school children and 80 community members to create an art installation for the Plastic Free Poplar project. They collected, cut and tied thousands of plastic pieces onto large nets to represent the amount of plastic choking the ocean. Pupils learned about the impact of single use

plastic on our environment and looked at solutions to reduce plastic consumption. The nets, along with posters raising awareness on plastic pollution, were exhibited in different community venues and in the local market for 12 months, engaging a wider audience. The exhibition brought people together creating a talking point. One of the business owners said: *"It is nice to see art in the street in Poplar, it makes us locals talk for sure. First, I thought, what is this? And then I looked closer and read the posters. The exhibition was good. It raised awareness. I was already aware of this issue but it created conversations with my customers."* - Extract from a chat with locals having coffee on the market square.



3. Community Empowerment: new knowledge, skills, and employability

Through accessible food activities, practical training, and formal accreditation, the Just FACT programme has been highly effective in increasing knowledge, skills, and awareness concerning food and climate issues across various projects and community demographics in Tower Hamlets.

The programme built individual capability, strengthened community networks and organisational resilience, and, for several residents, transformed volunteer energy into paid local leadership and long-term pathways for empowerment. The programme also empowered individual community members, by giving them confidence to speak publicly about climate issues for the first time, and helping to amplify their voices.

- 1,292 workshops and events were delivered where knowledge and skills were exchanged.
- 17 people affected by homelessness gained an OCN Horticulture Award.
- 100% of young people in Be.Green increased their confidence discussing climate issues.
- 13 students from Queen Mary's Micro Internship programme

Increased knowledge

Across multiple projects, participants - often starting with little or no prior engagement in climate issues - developed greater knowledge and confidence.

- At Be.Green, 100% of the young people involved in the pilot felt empowered to take positive climate action and more confident discussing climate issues with friends and family, as a result of being involved in the programme.
- On the Plastic Free Poplar project, confidence in taking climate action rose from 60% at the start to 75% by the end, for those who took part in their ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes.
- Boil and Bubble worked with children at a specialist school, embedding climate literacy in the curriculum by exploring the environmental benefits of growing food, composting, and reducing food waste in workshops and classroom learning. One interviewee noted that before the project, the children they worked with had no previous connection with climate issues.

- The Super Chefs interactive musical raised climate awareness by linking everyday foods (like avocados) to environmental impact. One parent noted their child had *"never thought about how the food gets here before."*
- At Teviot People's Kitchen, conversations about composting, food waste, and growing opened the door into broader sustainability discussions. Participants who once "weren't green-fingered" took pride in cooking with produce **they helped grow**. **Participants in Limehouse Town Hall Food Co-op reported being "more aware of the process of growing and seasonal food"** and thinking more about local produce.



Cultural, intergenerational, and inclusive learning

A few projects in the programme successfully leveraged the "abundance of wisdom and knowledge" that already exists within the communities of Tower Hamlets, ensuring that new education built upon sharing existing skills and knowledge, often peer-to-peer. This was one of the aims of the programme from the outset. A significant strength of the programme was also its ability to bridge cultures and generations.

- The Bottling Futures project engaged 246 participants in 16 intergenerational workshops focused on sharing skills on traditional practices like fermenting, pickling, and preserving to reduce food waste and revitalise heritage practices. An aim was also to be inclusive, and bring together the elderly, those with young children and those new to the UK, and they succeeded in engaging participants ranging in age from 30 to 85, plus some toddlers. Participants commented on how they enjoyed sharing ideas and recipes: *“Rahema is inclusive, allows us all to share our own ideas and experiences in the kitchen and we ate wonderful food together”* - Participant.
- Maydwell Gardens project reported that they had been successful in combining knowledge and skills from different communities in their female-led, residents’ community garden.

Practical skills

Many projects focused heavily on practical, hands-on learning that relate to everyday activities for local people, where people learned tangible skills that can benefit the environment and the individual. A significant proportion of these workshops and learning sessions involved sharing skills and knowledge between members of the community.

- Participants in Just FACT learned skills such as cooking, fermenting, pickling, foraging, upcycling / repairing, darning, dyeing, composting, hydroponics, horticultural / food growing skills, mushroom growing, and water sampling.
- The Be.Green programme focused on developing skills that could be used in the group’s environmental activities and campaigns, and skills that would be useful beyond Be.Green in their future careers. Young people developed digital skills by leading on digital communication, filming, and editing vlogs, exposing them to alternative careers in creative industries. They also participated in talks and panels, helping them gain confidence in public speaking. Training also focused on practical application of knowledge, such as learning sampling and safety on river clean-up trips. The Be.Green programme exposed youth to various careers, for example, food growers and zero-waste makers.

Changes in food consumption and purchasing habits

The increased knowledge and skills directly influenced how community members consume and understand food supply chains.

- Many of the Food co-op users reported cooking more diverse dishes and trying new vegetables, as a result of seeing a wider range of vegetables at the Food Co-op than they do at the supermarket.
- The Food Co-ops also helped to increase people’s understanding of organic produce. One customer, previously deterred by supermarket packaging, said: *“I never bought organic before Teviot opened. In supermarkets I couldn’t understand the packaging (because of the language). It’s easy at the food co-op”*, indicating that improved accessibility simplified the process of making healthier and more sustainable choices.
- 63% of Teviot Food Coop survey respondents said they had shifted some of their regular food shopping from supermarkets to the Food Co-op.
- The programme has helped to reduce plastic when purchasing food. For example, the Food Coops’ no-plastic policy encouraged customers to bring reusable bags, and the Climate Markets and Plastic Free Poplar projects worked with market traders to encourage more reusable bags to be used at markets.



Training

Several groups embedded formal training in their projects, to strengthen participants' professional prospects.

- R-Urban became an AQA UAS Centre⁶, offering Level 2 qualifications in sustainable food growing, demonstrating a commitment to formal, accredited learning. And Teviot People's Kitchen, based at R Urban, ensured all members completed Emergency First Aid and Food Hygiene training, enabling them to work independently on site.
- Providence Row's Garden Trainee Scheme enabled 17 homeless clients to gain an OCN Horticulture award, completing roughly 510 hours of work experience, which boosted their confidence and employability. One participant, who is now a qualified horticulturalist and gardener, said: *"This course through Providence Row and my time around the people here has been eye opening, it's opened up a doorway for me, and these are skills that I'll keep forever."*
- Wen co-ordinated student placements through Queen Mary University's Micro Internship Scheme. This offered practical experience for 13 students through a 5-week work placement. Students were partnered with projects according to their interests. This included placements with Sunny Jar Eco Hub, St Hildas, Limborough Hub, Platform, Leaders in Community, the Right to grow campaign group and Wen (supporting the Power of Food Festival).

"I gained many gardening skills. I also gained skills in communication during my internship. I met a lot of different people. I gained organisational skills and insight on how workshops are run." - Summer intern

"I gained knowledge about the food habits and interests of the customers at the food co-op after interacting with them. I also worked on marketing strategies for the co-op, which was informative and useful. - Summer intern

"I improved my skills with Word and Excel. Also, I learnt more about myself and my preferences at work, like what I like doing and it made me get a clearer image of what I want to do in the future. I learned more about food justice. Their prices and the qualities, I also learnt the big difference of the product and how supermarkets raise the prices." - Spring intern

⁶ Approved by AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) to deliver and certify short, flexible learning units

- Be.Green also introduced placement opportunities with partners in the green economy so young people could add them to their CVs and be exposed to alternative careers.
- Wen coordinated a programme of training sessions for Just FACT partners, which included nine training sessions to partners over two years, which were attended by 125 in total (not unique) attendees and included:
 - Creative evaluation workshops x 3.
 - Climate Literacy.
 - Facilitation and workshop design.
 - Smartphone video-making.
 - First Aid Training sessions x 2.
 - Active Bystander training.

'The workshops were really useful. I learnt not to be scared of evaluation but to build it into projects. It's been really enjoyable. You've made us not feel bad about things and made me feel confident to do my job and learn a lot. Main thing I've gained, is the shift that it about the journey and the learnings, not just about the results' - Maud, Sunny Jar Eco Hub



Skills and knowledge development through operational roles

Training was offered in some projects, as part of roles within co-ops, gardens, and workshops.

- Food Co-op Coordinators completed a 5–6 week shadowing programme with St Hilda's covering ordering, pricing, inventory, finance, and volunteer management. One coordinator said it gave her enough confidence to "run the co-op alone." Volunteers developed customer service, cashier, and social media skills, as well as key knowledge and experience in food hygiene and safety which helped progress their careers.
- A regular volunteer at St Hilda's East Food Co-op, said that, by volunteering at the Food Coop, she *"has been able to gain key knowledge and experience in areas such as food hygiene and safety that has helped progress my career as a kitchen assistant at numerous schools in the borough."*

Creating local green employment and supporting career progression

The programme funding helped to create paid roles, supported career transitions, and ensured local skills and knowledge were recognised and remunerated. New local roles included:

- A long-term volunteer with LiC, transitioned into full-time employment supporting the Food Co-op.
- Stepney City Farm recruited Sylheti-speaking growers on a fixed term contract (for the funded project duration), to better support Bangladeshi gardeners and broaden the range of culturally relevant produce.
- A Blueprint Architect became a paid employee at Platform (the organisation that set up the Blueprint Architects).
- A volunteer at R Urban transitioned into a paid Food Coordinator role. She said: *"For me, it means employment. I started out at R Urban as a volunteer. I now regularly manage the volunteer sessions, provide training as well. And it's meant that I can apply for further funding for the horticultural level 2 course I'm now doing. You can only do that if you're employed in a role where you are doing gardening / horticultural work."*

She has helped other volunteers progress their training and careers too. She said of another volunteer: *"During her traineeship and volunteering, she continued her work at Glengall Wharf Community Garden and Sauna. She passed her Level-1 in raised bed gardening, and went on to work and get experience on a farm. She is now pursuing and looking into enrolling for her Level-2 RHS Horticultural and keen to get involved in R-Urban's sauna when it's up and running, (and gardening of course)! Her goal is to advance in horticulture and be a community food grower and educator."*

- The connections established through the Blueprint Architect group led to employment opportunities, such as a Mushroom Farmer finding an opportunity to work with MAD LEAP.

Freelance opportunities and supporting micro-entrepreneurs

- Blueprint Architects were resourced for their time at convenings, and also for facilitation and creative tasks associated with the arts trailer project.
- Teviot People's Kitchen members said they had gained freelance gardening, catering, and speaking work thanks to training gained through Just FACT funding, such as First Aid and Food Hygiene.
- Limehouse Town Hall Food Co-op enabled a local family bakery to earn weekly income by renting a stall; OITIJ-JO explored branding and selling workshop products to stimulate local economic activity.



Organisational development and increased resilience

The Just FACT programme aided several organisations in improving their organisational resilience and future planning.

- The Community Food Growers' Network, which had previously become inactive due to prior funding loss, was resourced and revived through Just FACT funding. This allowed them to offer training and events, enabling the network to re-emerge and securing further funding and staff beyond the Just FACT project.
- The programme helped organisations such as Boil and Bubble, Cranbrook Community Food Garden, Stepney City Farm and Folx Farm plan future work. Stepney City Farm believed their Just FACT project was a catalyst for securing further funding from the National Lottery Community Fund: *"I've managed Stepney City Farm for nearly 9 years. The first 5 years we were scrambling to keep heads above water, running to stay still. This was the first project where it moved us forward significantly towards our community objectives. We've learned so much about Bangladeshi produce, and the new growers have got stuck in with building connections with the local community. We put in an application to the Lottery for core costs, and have now been awarded 5 years of funding. I don't think we would have got it without the Just FACT project. Now our 2 growers have now been funded for 5 years, as well as our lead grower, communities manager and farmyard manager" - Chief Executive, Stepney City Farm*
- Platform said: *"The Blueprint Architect group has profoundly changed as an organisation. We learn so much from this collective of people, and the future of our project and advocacy stems from them. We have gotten some other funding from the Arts Council partly because of the potential of our work with this group. We also thank Just FACT for introducing us to so many wonderful people and projects in Tower Hamlets, who we will now continue collaborating with in fruitful ways."*

4. A stronger local movement

The creation of a strong, highly collaborative network of people and projects was described by project partners as the "most powerful" and "biggest lasting impact" of Just FACT. This was achieved by focussing on deep network building at the quarterly partner meetings, empowering local leadership, actively resourcing grassroots action, and supporting collaboration across groups.

"That network will be the big lasting impact of Just FACT. I don't know of any other programmes where lots of projects are funded simultaneously and with lots of partner meetings." - Project partner

- 21 partner network meetings over 5 years.
- 26 grassroots organisations were resourced to deliver projects.
- 10 programme partners collaborated with others in the programme.
- 34 local organisations and groups participated in the Power of Food Festival.
- 7 seasonal gatherings organised by Wen.
- 280 individuals and groups are active members of Tower Hamlets Food Partnership.

Diverse range of projects

Programme partners believe that one of the big impacts of the programme has been simultaneously funding a lot of projects in a small geographical area. One partner said: *"There are projects all over Tower Hamlets, which is really nice to see, and all cohesive in what we're trying to achieve. The representation is lovely – really well represented by the local community."*

It was also noted that the programme had been successful in resourcing "a really wide variety of projects" tackling climate action through food in a variety of ways, many of which are run by under-resourced local groups. This included initiatives focused on circular waste systems (R-Urban, East Not Waste Not, Mile End Compost Toilet, Society Links), affordable food access (Food Co-ops), youth leadership (Be.Green), culturally specific growing/preservation (Folx Farm, OITIJ-JO Collective, Stepney City Farm), creating systems that are plastic-free (Climate Free Markets, Plastic Free Poplar), enabling residents to grow and / or eat locally grown food (Cranbrook Community Food Garden, Limborough, Farming on the Barkantine, Providence Row, Maydwell Gardens, Somos Semillas, as well as creative projects (misery medicine, Maya Productions, Blueprint Architects).

The impact of these projects on the climate and food system might be small (see next section), but, as one partner said: *“it feels like we are demonstrating what’s possible. Are any of them in themselves going to secure that transition? Probably not but demonstrating what’s possibly in a community is really powerful. They illustrate the different ways we can take action through food. For the communities we were working with, there wasn’t any connection with climate before.”*

Network building and collaboration

The creation of a robust and collaborative network of community leaders, partners, organisations, activists and residents was cited by project leads as one of the most powerful and significant successes of the Just FACT programme, and the element of the programme that partners would most like to continue into the future. One partner said: *“The network is the most powerful thing. It takes a lot to engage lots of different groups across a community on a single issue, and to support them to take action. It has brought together lots of people very committed to that issue. That network will be a big lasting impact on the just FACT programme.”*



Many partners said that the key to the success of the partnership was the quarterly network events convened by Wen. They were described by partners as "local and productive" and "low pressure," which facilitated the building of relationships that subsequently led to "greater things" and collaborations between groups.

An unexpected outcome of the programme is the high levels of trust and relationships that developed between partners, leading to more collaborative working and the building of friendships during – and beyond – the Just FACT programme. Examples include:

- R-Urban running composting workshops at Limborough Hub.
- Leaders in Community partnering with R-Urban to support the management of the Teviot Centre garden.
- Sunny Jar Eco Hub delivering Plastic-Free workshops at the Teviot Centre and occupying a studio space at R-Urban.
- LiC and Limehouse Town Hall Food Co-ops joining forces to persuade a local market trader to supply them, and sharing resources and ideas through the Tower Hamlets Food Network.
- Sunny Jar running a skin care workshop for the Maydwell Gardens group, and Maydwell Gardens growing produce that was used in cook sessions at Limborough Hub.
- Folx Farm supplying the Tower Hamlets Food Coops.
- The Blueprint Architect trailer having a residency at Stepney City Farm. They have plans to move on to more partner sites.

Community organising and movement building led by partners

- The Community Food Growers Network (CFGN) and Platform played a role in building a local movement. CFGN revived its London-wide network through the establishment of the "Food and Land Justice Resource Centre," which provided a dedicated physical space at Kingsley Hall in Tower Hamlets for over 230 participants to share skills and build solidarity. Their key achievements include the emergence of a Disability Justice Learning Circle and the creation of a DIY Soil Clinic, which successfully linked technical soil health education with broader social justice training alongside specialist partners like Solidarity Across Land Trades (SALT), and linked with other Just FACT partners including House of Annetta and Compost Mentis.
- Platform convened the Blueprint Architect Group, a representative network of residents and activists. Their publications, convenings and arts project fostered a collaborative group where they regularly shared knowledge, addressed power imbalances, and worked to transfer power and ownership of the food system directly to local communities.

Linking Just FACT with the wider Tower Hamlets food movement

Wen's seasonal gatherings, the Power of Food Festival and Tower Hamlets Food Partnership provided other opportunities for groups and organisations to come together (beyond those funded through Just FACT).

Seasonal gatherings

Wen organised seven seasonal gatherings across the five years, each attended by 70-100 people. The seasonal gatherings are popular events organised by the Wen team for the borough's food growers. Each had a different theme, and individuals and partner organisations delivered talks, tours, workshops and stalls. Themes included 'Growing wellness', 'Growing well with climate change', 'Embracing Autumn', 'Growing culturally diverse food and plants', 'Growing and biodiversity' and 'Grow and Sow'.

Power of Food Festival

To mark the end of Just FACT, Wen organised a 10-day borough-wide festival. 23 small grants (of up to £500) were given out to local groups and organisations to run events, with funding decisions being made by the festival working group (made up of 3 community partners). The festival had over 40 events over 10 days across the whole borough – including community meals, supper clubs, workshops, film screenings, photography exhibitions, kids' activities, panel discussions, and tours of gardens and food-growing spaces.

The festival enabled Wen to expand involvement in Just FACT to a wider network. 34 groups and organisations were involved in putting on events, including groups Wen had not worked with before.

The festival was opened by Apsana Begum MP. Approximately 900 people attended the festival events over the 10 days.

"We're grateful for the opportunity to take part in this festival and the project as a whole. It was apparent from the launch event, just how many individuals and organisations had benefitted from Just FACT. The organisation and delivery of the festival and wider project have been excellent and many valuable connections between community initiatives have been made – a critical part of nurturing the transition we're all working towards. Well done!"
- Mad Leap

'It was inspiring to see so many people come together around food justice, the right to grow, and to share skills, knowledge, and even worries about the times we're living in. The festival created a real sense of solidarity and possibility – showing that even in difficult moments, communities can come together to make things a little better.' - Boil & Bubble



Tower Hamlets Food Partnership

Just FACT grew out of the [Tower Hamlets Food Partnership \(THFP\)](#)'s aim is to transform our local food system so that sustainable, good food is available to all. The Food Partnership had a hiatus between 2022-2023 because of staffing issues, then relaunched in July 2024 with a new Manager (part funded by Just FACT).

Coordinated by Wen, the partnership emphasised inclusivity, capacity building, and strategic collaboration to address food insecurity, promote community empowerment, and champion sustainability.

Since the relaunch it has become a 'vibrant and growing network' of 299 members (individuals and groups), up from 188 members in October 2020 before Just FACT. It has been working to facilitate an interface between groups with varying types of power – including between the council and grassroots/citizen-led groups. It facilitates collaboration amongst different groups and organisations, supporting people to identify common interests across intersecting issues. There are currently 4 active workstreams:

1. Food Access and Insecurity
2. Land Access and Food Growing (currently working on a Right to Grow campaign)
3. Community Wealth Building
4. Community-led circular waste solutions

Tower Hamlets Food Partnership demonstrated strong strategic presence in 2025. It has achieved:

- Representation across 49 local events (23 of which THFP facilitated, co-facilitated, or coordinated, and 3 of which THFP presented at).
- Representation at 6 regional (London-wide) events (2 of which THFP facilitated, co-facilitated, or coordinated, and 2 of which THFP presented at).
- Representation at 13 national events (2 of which THFP co-facilitated, supported, facilitated or coordinated, and 1 of which THFP presented at).

The sold-out 2025 Food Partnership Summit in July drew full attendance, with all 75 places booked—demonstrating strong local appetite for meaningful engagement and collaborative action around food justice and sustainability, built on deep relational connections and meaningful inclusion over the last year.

The Food Partnership has supported the food coop network to grow and develop: working with Cooperation Town to establish food buying groups locally; facilitating increased connections with council teams eg. creating platforms for the coops online and in person in settings where council teams can learn about them and supporting a council team visit to Cooperation Town hub in Camden to learn about how they could emulate Camden's model of funding coops.

In summary, Just FACT has effectively served as an incubator of food and climate projects in Tower Hamlets, and a connector of projects in Tower Hamlets. It has been successful in mobilising a strong local movement for climate action on food by fostering an ecosystem of well-resourced, deeply connected, and community-led initiatives, and demonstrating what's possible, whilst also acknowledging the monumental scale of the systemic transformation required.

5. Trialled ways to reduce the impact of the food system in Tower Hamlets

Just FACT projects successfully demonstrated some of the practical steps that can be taken in the borough, to move towards more localised, regenerative, and waste-reducing food systems. They demonstrated other benefits that these types of projects can bring to local communities. The biggest reductions in emissions came from the Plastic Free Markets project, working with traders in three markets to reduce the number of plastic bags they use when selling fruit and vegetables to customers.

- 6,757kgCO₂e emissions were saved (from the projects that collected data).
- 364,000 fewer plastic bags per year at markets, which resulted in a reduction of just over 5 tonnesCO₂e/year.
- 6,175kg food waste was composted in 3 community projects, with emission savings of 76kgCO₂e.
- 29kgCO₂e emissions were saved by redistributing 1,362kg food which otherwise would have been wasted and incinerated.
- Folx Farm calculated emissions savings of 9.4kgCO₂e from growing produce that would otherwise be imported.

Ways that projects demonstrated reductions in CO₂ emissions

Some projects succeeded in collecting data to demonstrate their impact on CO₂ emissions, particularly around growing food, reducing plastic, composting and avoiding food waste (e.g. food re-distribution). Their data is shown in the table below.

Total emissions saved from projects that collected data are: **6,757kgCO₂e**. This understates the total, as more than half of projects did not collect data required for emissions savings calculations. Reasons for not collecting data included complications with having to weigh and record each type of vegetable grown, which was unrealistic for many community growing projects run by volunteers. And recording food waste composted was not always possible for projects where community members could drop-off food waste as and when, and asking them to record it may have put them off composting.

97% of the emissions savings were from the Plastic Free Markets project (estimated for one year), indicating that reducing plastic bags in markets should be an area of focus for the Council's net zero policy, and roll-out across other areas of Tower Hamlets.

Initiative	What impact does this have?	Emissions savings	Other data provided	% Projects that submitted data
More food grown locally	Fewer food miles, less fertiliser use, less refrigeration during transportation, less packaging	94.5kgCO ₂ e Emissions savings calculated by Providence Row and Folx Farm using Harvest-o-meter	Food grown 92kg - Providence Row 145kg – Folx Farm 1,264kg – Stepney City Farm Growing area created: Data from Stepney City Farm	15% Only 2 out of 13 food growing projects calculated emissions savings from produce that they grew.
More food waste composted, rather than put in general waste and incinerated	Fewer emissions, as incinerating food waste results in more emissions than composting	76kgCO ₂ e Calculated by evaluator from data provided on kg food waste composted	Food waste composted = 6,174kg Data from R Urban, Eat Not Waste Not, Limborough Hub	33% 3 out of 9 composting projects provide kg food waste composted data
Less plastic bags in markets	Fewer emissions from the production of the plastic bags	6,546kgCO ₂ e/year Calculated by evaluator from data provided on numbers of bags avoided	364,000 fewer bags used / year Data from Plastic Free Markets	50% 1 out of 2 projects collected data on plastic saved
More rainwater harvesting	Avoided emissions from not using mains water	3.3kgCO ₂ e Calculated by evaluator from data provided (litres rainwater collected)	20,000 litres rainwater collected Data from Providence Row	50% 1 out of 2 projects collected data on rainwater harvesting
More food redistributed	Avoided food incineration emissions	28kgCO ₂ e Calculated by evaluator from data provided (kg food redistributed)	1,362kg food redistributed Data from: St Hilda's Food Coop and Boil & Bubble	100% 2 out of 2 projects collected data

More food grown locally

Some projects recorded how much produce was grown, and used an online tool to calculate the carbon impact of growing their own food (such as the Capital Growth Harvestometer).

- Providence Row produced 92kg of food which they used to create 1,000 meals for their homeless clients. They used the tool to estimate carbon savings of around 85kgCO₂e from growing their own produce.
- Folx Farm grew 145kg food locally for the Food Coops, and estimated a saving of 9.5kgCO₂e from growing the produce. The calculated savings do not include emissions avoided from unmeasured varieties, such as Keera Cucumbers or 47.2kg of Mustard Greens, or emissions avoided by excluding plastic incineration from the calculation.
- Stepney City Farm grew 1,264kg of food, but did not use the Harvest-o-Meter to estimate emissions savings.



New areas created for food growing

Many of the informal community growing projects were not able to calculate how much, and of which types, of produce were produced, but they did provide an estimate of how much area was created or used to grow food.

- Cranbrook Community Food Garden – planted 102m² of fruit bushes with the aim of them being picked as and when by residents, so no data can be collected on the total amount produced.
- R Urban provided 13 growing beds for local families.
- Limborough provided 18 raised beds
- Boil & Bubble created 30m² of growing space for the children and families to use.
- Maydwell Gardens had a growing space measuring 75m x 15m.

Projects that grew food but did not collect data on amount grown include:

- Seeds for Growth's Farming on the Barkantine – growing sessions delivered at a few sites in the borough.
- Society Links – food growing at a community orchard with raised beds
- Somos Semillas's Learning Hub Semilla Sisay – growing area established in a private garden, and run for the one-year funding period.



Waste reduction and composting

Food waste is a particular challenge in Tower Hamlets, which is England's most densely populated borough, where more than 81% of residents live in high-rise flats (therefore food waste collection is challenging), and 30% of the rubbish thrown away is food waste⁷.

Composting projects and workshops in Just FACT have helped to increase the amount of compost created locally, reduced emissions, and proved popular with engaging residents.

- Composting was central to R-Urban Poplar's model for developing localised circular waste systems, demonstrating the potential to reduce emissions whilst also producing nutrient-rich fertilisers. R-Urban composted over 4 tonnes of food waste over the 4 years of their project, saving 52kgCO₂e compared to if it had been put in the general waste and incinerated.
- Limborough Hub collected and composted an estimated around 70l food waste per week, which is equivalent to around 30kg food waste. This would have added up to around 1,560kg food waste.
- Society Links' Eat Not Waste Not initiative aimed to create a circular food system on the St George's Estate, and composted 403kg of vegetable peelings in their one-year project, saving 4kgCO₂e.
- Cranbrook Community Garden's composting bin for local residents was very popular, and they significantly increased their hot bin composting capacity from 300L to 2,000L with Just FACT funding.
- Stepney City Farm ran a Sylheti-language composting workshop for allotment holders. The majority of participants said in the feedback that they had learned how to compost properly, and the importance of layering with browns.
- The Boil & Bubble project helped children to explore the environmental benefits of growing food, composting, and reducing food waste in both the workshops and their classroom learning. Together they created a closed-loop food system on site, by composting food waste, growing produce on-site, and preparing meals for their community café.
- Similarly, Providence Row reported they had used a closed-loop system, with their use of organic growing methods (no dig, natural fertilisers, and lots of home-made

⁷ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/community_and_living/borough_statistics/diversity.aspx

compost from their food and garden waste) which promotes good soil health. They reported they had used around 1m³ (roughly 500kg) of homemade compost on their garden, and produced a further 1m³ (around 500kg) of new compost that will gradually rot down. They also produced around 50L of super nutritious worm casting compost to use as a soil conditioner/fertiliser.

- Mile End community garden co-created a compost toilet on-site, as a cost-effective way of providing a toilet at the site so users can stay at the site for longer.
- House of Anetta set up a new composting system in the back garden of their site, and they ran knowledge-sharing sessions about how to reduce food waste in their local area.



Plastic Reduction Campaigns

- The biggest reductions in carbon emissions came from the Plastic Free Markets project, working with traders in three markets to reduce the number of plastic bags they use when selling fruit and vegetables to customers in £1 pre-packaged bags, and which they give out as carrier bags. Research was conducted and then solutions were developed together with some market traders, and changes implemented resulted in a 33% reduction in bags across the three markets, according to the bag supplier. If maintained over a year, that would result in 364,000 fewer bags, with carbon savings of 6,546kgCO₂e/year. One market trader said: *“Now I use 500 bags per week compared to 7000 bags before. This has helped me reduce costs and that’s really important right now as all other costs are going up”*. Plastic Free Poplar project did follow up surveys the following year, and continued to see a significant reduction for most of the stalls.
- The Food Co-ops minimised plastic use by adopting a "no plastic" policy, encouraging customers to bring their own bags, and transitioned towards working with suppliers like The Better Food Shed, making the operations "almost a Zero Plastic operation". It was not possible to collect data on plastic saved from this.
- Over 80% of Plastic Free Poplar’s workshop participants who completed their surveys thought that the workshops helped them to reduce their plastic waste. 90% also said it had improved health and wellbeing and 75% to save money.

Rainwater Harvesting

- Water-use accounts for 6% of UK greenhouse gas emissions, and 1% is from the treatment and transport of water and wastewater. Installing rainwater storage can reduce the emissions from water use, reduce water bills, and promote healthier plant growth⁸. Heavy rainfall can lead to water logging and soil erosion, so collecting rainwater can help to mitigate these issues.
- Cranbrook Community Food Garden increased its rainwater storage capacity from 767 litres to 2,284 litres through its Project Raindrop. The quantity of mains water

8

https://www.rainwater-terrace.com/blogs/blog/the-benefits-of-owning-and-using-a-water-butt-in-the-uk-sustainable-gardening-with-rainwater-terrace?srsId=AfmBOort1AXA88wQjG-Dbu10N6guuO6DOHxVez72j8B3MeEx91_18ZWP

this will save each year depends on the weather, but each full water butt has the capacity to save 0.23kgCO₂e.

- Providence Row gathered around 20,000L of water through water butts, saving an estimated 3kgCO₂e compared to if mains water had been used.

Food redistribution

Food redistribution offers significant environmental, social, and economic benefits by diverting edible surplus food from disposal to people in need.

Some Just FACT projects redistributed food that otherwise would have been put in the general waste, and sent to incineration / landfill, and collected data on this.

- Boil and Bubble intercepted surplus fruit and vegetables from Streetbox London, and prevented at least 24kg of food from going to waste. One of the children in the project said: *"We're literally saving good food from being wasted when there's people going hungry!"*
- Hilda's East Food Co-op partnered with Tower Hamlets Food Hub and they received and re-distributed 1,338 kilograms of donated food to the community, the majority of which would have otherwise gone to waste. They reported that, on average, 45% of their customer base (around 26 different households) retrieved donated items during their weekly shop, which equates to about 1.74Kg of food per person per session.
- Limborough's Weekly Lunch Club proved effective at reducing food waste and improving wellbeing. Participants brought surplus or 'nearly out-of-date' ingredients to cook and share meals together. These sessions have reduced food waste, and the project lead believes they have helped to strengthen community ties.

An inclusive, meat-free kitchen

- Limborough Hub's kitchen was intentionally designed as a meat-free space, promoting low-carbon diets while ensuring inclusivity for those with dietary restrictions such as halal, kosher, and pork/beef-free requirements. Used by many different groups, this approach allowed participants to cook with confidence, knowing the space is safe and respectful of cultural and religious needs. It was not possible to estimate the impact of this, as it is not known what would have been

cooked if users could choose to cook either meat or vegetarian food. Examples of dishes cooked & cultural significance:

- Bangladeshi Khodu Curry– Celebrating heritage and seasonal produce grown at Limborough.
- Kimchi & Fermented Foods – Linking global food traditions with sustainability practices.
- Plant-Based Meals; Amaranth stir-fry, lentil dishes – Promoting low-carbon diets while respecting cultural tastes.



6. More decision-making in the hands of the local community

Just FACT enabled local groups and individuals to step into leadership roles, co-design projects, and establish self-governing structures. Through the participatory grants programme, community representatives were able to decide where funding should go. Putting local people in the driving seat is crucial because, as one project lead noted, the answers to a just transition are often already present within communities.

- 15 projects used participatory methods.
- 4 projects established new, self-governing structures.
- 51 people participated in collective voting for Just FACT grants.
- 8 community representatives participated in a Just FACT grants panel.

Strategic goals and programme design

The programme was intended to be guided by the vision of the local community it aimed to benefit, and putting communities in the lead was central to the programme's overall vision, of enabling a just food and climate transition. This was put into practice in several different ways.

In the first year of Just FACT, Wen worked with partners to grow a common agenda, co-create the theory of change and the evaluation framework, develop shared values, and build collaboration across groups. This meant that partners involved at the start of the programme felt confident talking about Just FACT and had a strong sense of ownership, as evidenced in the evaluator's annual process evaluation surveys.

Wen onboarded new people and projects through meetings and workshops, but overall there was a sense that those who were funded later felt less connected to the wider programme, with less of a sense of ownership, although feedback from grantees said they valued the quarterly partner meetings as a time to network and connect with other partners.

Participatory grant-making

Once the programme had been established, Wen ensured that funding decisions were community-led. They worked with the Lottery to enter a legal agreement whereby Wen could award grants from the Just FACT programme budget (an External Delegation Agreement). Unallocated funds for new projects were in the original programme budget, so the programme could support new ideas and new groups emerging from the community.

Wen decided that the foundation of the process needed to be about inclusivity and accessibility, and about shifting power to local people. Local people and groups were involved in shaping the grant process itself. For example, Just FACT partners and Blueprint Architects were consulted on the types of grants, grant criteria and process for assessing, awarding and monitoring grants.

There were then two rounds of grants – in Spring and Autumn of Year 3. Grants between £10-40k were decided by a community-led panel, made up of 4 community representatives and 3 other partners (e.g. representatives from the Council, local housing associations, Sustain – the alliance for food and farming). Grants between £1-£10k were decided by an anonymous collective voting process, which 51 people participated in.

“The diversity of people in the room helped to really reflect the community and where money should go, instead of decisions being made in a vacuum” - Panel member

“It was useful to see a wide variety of opinions, which showed the range of perspectives of the people in the panel which made the assessment even richer. It was good to find out what some organisations are doing and what exciting ideas they have.” - Panel member



Some learnings from the participatory grants process [can be found here.](#)

Embracing community wisdom

Wen also set out to ensure the programme embraced community wisdom. A key learning shared by partners was the need to ground change in community-led action, with the Blueprint Architects stating that the answers for a just food transition are already present within local communities. Platform said: ***“Local communities already have the answers. They’re already performing mutual aids. They already have the wisdom. When charities come into these spaces we can come in with moralistic /top-down approaches. And that’s not the way to do it. Centre local voices as much as you can. Invest in what’s already here.”***

A hyper-local approach was taken. Some project leads said that community action needs to be rooted in ***“digging out who the communities are, what are their needs and what are the resources in each place”*** rather than implementing a one-size-fits-all model.

“The context influences the action. Talking about the food justice system in London is very different from, say, Newcastle. It’s about digging out who the communities are, what are their needs and what are the resources in each place. We need to be having those conversations early on, rather than just implementing a one-size fits all model that’s worked somewhere elsewhere.” – Maya Productions

Developing community-led governance models

Several projects transitioned towards cooperative or self-sustaining models, placing operational and strategic power directly with community members.

The Blueprint Architects group was convened to become researchers and create a blueprint for what an alternative socially just food system could look like in Tower Hamlets. However, that project relied on Platform to recruit community members to become the researchers and author the blueprint. Once recruited, it became clear over the following years that the Blueprint Architects, if they were to be truly community-led, should be able to determine what they would like to focus on, and how they would like to influence the community. After producing two research papers, they decided to transition away from creating a blueprint, and instead focus on an arts-based project, which they believed would be more effective at reaching their communities than a policy paper.

The Blueprint Architects group actively experimented with collective decision-making and flat structure over the five years. They reported that sharing decision-making can come with some challenges, as well as benefits, and emphasised the importance of visibility and talking openly about power and privilege within the group to increase trust.

Platform found that the most enjoyable part of the Blueprint Architects project was when the group came together to work on an arts installation project - a trailer which could travel to different locations in the borough. *"It's quite hard to measure the impact of the policy work and our publications. Which is why we transitioned to an arts-based approach. In the making of the trailer itself, we could pay people to be artists who had never been paid before. We built the trailer together, and we became closer when we had a shared project. It helped us to practice what it means to own collectively. We learned skills, painted it together and practiced collective decision-making."*

The group paid people for their time working on the arts project, and mobilised as a collective, which provided fruitful learnings for the future structure of the group. Platform handed over more power and decision-making to the group as the project progressed, and one member of the group became a paid member of staff at Platform in the final year.

Collective decision making

The Teviot People's Kitchen model was established to share decision-making and develop leadership among the core group of workshop hosts at R-Urban, shifting the approach from "delivering for" to "doing with" the community.

Community participation in project design and delivery

Just FACT projects sought input from local communities, ensuring activities and infrastructure reflect their needs and desires.

- At R-Urban, staff gauged community interests through workshops, volunteering, and informal community meals to determine what they want to see more of, such as using the tandoor or making chutneys. They encouraged wider participation by asking regular attendees what they would like to see and tailoring activities accordingly
- Cranbrook Community Food Garden sought public involvement in planning, including inviting the public to vote on planter designs for the Berry Lane project.
- The Compost Mentis project employed co-design as a method to involve local people in the creation of infrastructure, resulting in design solutions that respond directly to local needs and places.

- Society Links developed their pickling workshop idea after a local Bangladeshi resident mentioned having spare produce and wanting to avoid waste.

Empowering marginalised voices

- Boil & Bubble engaged children and families at the SEND (Specialist Educational Needs and Disabilities) school in conversations about desired workshops to ensure the project met their needs and aspirations. The children involved stepped into leadership roles as hosts for the community cafés.
- Stepney City Farm hired Sylheti-speaking Food Growers who helped resolve issues and built rapport with allotment plot holders, allowing the largely Bangladeshi community to feel more heard and catered to. One plot holder noted, "***You being there meant I was able to express what I wanted to say***".



7. Wellbeing, happiness, health, reduced isolation

Many projects in the Just FACT programme demonstrated a positive impact on the happiness, wellbeing, and reduction of isolation among participants, volunteers, and the wider community in Tower Hamlets. "Wellbeing and community cohesion benefits" were intended outcomes of the programme, and valued as a vital part of building a food system that works for people as well as the planet. Joy and friendship, as mentioned earlier, were one of the core values of the programme.

"I feel much better (after being outside in the orchard), and relaxed. It all improves my circulation, lungs, and wellbeing." - Local resident

- 13 projects reported increased wellbeing outcomes, sharing quotes and stories.
- 90% of volunteers at St Hilda's Food Coop experienced improvements in their mental wellbeing and level of involvement in the community.

Promoting wellbeing and mental health

Projects across the programme aimed to improve mental health and overall wellbeing by encouraging connection to nature, practical activity, and access to safe, supportive social spaces. Across several projects, participants spoke about the positive impact that being outdoors and gardening had on their mental health.

- At Limborough, one workshop participant shared that gardening was *"good for my mental health because it gets me out of the house,"* while another highlighted the garden's *"huge potential for accessing and nurturing nature."* A further participant reflected: *"I get so much enjoyment and happiness from the garden. It refreshes my mental health."*
- Misery Medicine: Plant Magic, which centred QTIBPOC* communities, focused on reducing eco-anxiety, isolation, and burnout. Participants described the value of learning about reciprocal care within ecosystems and reconnecting with land, with one person describing it as an *"amazing opportunity"* that supported both health and wellbeing.
- At Somos Semillas, the programme contributed to improved community wellbeing, particularly mental health, by offering a safe, inclusive, and nurturing environment where participants could relax, find emotional support, and reconnect.

- Cranbrook Community Food Garden found that connecting residents to nature and to one another through the Berry Lane project was both a key aim and the most significant impact to date. Survey data showed that 88% of participants felt the changes helped them feel more connected to nature. One participant valued the physical work, describing it as *“a relief almost to do something physical”* after having a stationary job.
- At Maydwell Gardens, 30 volunteers helped to manage the gardens over the two years of the project, and 90% of volunteers reported that they have experienced improvements in their wellbeing and level of involvement in the community by supporting the project alongside being able to make new social connections with people during sessions. One volunteer at the garden said: *“I live in a council flat with no garden of my own. I really enjoy gardening but do not have a balcony, but I do grow chilli plants on my windowsill. I attend the garden regularly and I have found this therapeutic and enjoyable.”* Another said: *“For me there are many benefits from this project. It has helped my mental wellbeing especially after the COVID pandemic.”*



Therapeutic benefits for vulnerable groups

Some projects delivered clear therapeutic benefits for people facing multiple challenges.

- Providence Row's Urban Garden Programme supported the mental health and recovery journeys of homeless clients. One participant shared that attending the sessions was *"really helping them not to 'use'"* substances while working towards recovery.
- Inviting women from a local refuge to the Society Links Orchard also proved beneficial for mental wellbeing. Participants enjoyed being around others and taking part in creative workshops, which offered a supportive and restorative experience.

Physical health and wellbeing

Physical activity in green spaces contributed to improved physical health.

- One resident involved in composting and mowing at the Society Links Orchard reported that it had significantly improved his fitness. Following lung cancer surgery in November 2023, his consultant told him that his lung capacity had improved, which surprised him. He reflected: *"I feel much better after exercise and being outside in the orchard, and feel much better afterwards and relaxed. It all improves my circulation, lungs, and wellbeing."*

Reducing isolation and fostering community connection

Many projects aimed to reduce isolation and strengthen community connections, particularly for marginalised groups. Several were able to gather evidence and stories demonstrating the impact this had on residents.

- One participant from Limborough said: *"We have really enjoyed coming to these workshops and gardening is good for my mental health because it gets me out of the house"*.

Building strong networks

- Participants at the Limehouse Town Hall Food Co-op reported an increased sense of community and wider social networks. They enjoyed the *"buzz it brings to the building"* and some shared that they had met new friends through attending.

- The Compost Mentis project successfully welcomed new participants while also strengthening connections among existing gardeners, contributing to a more connected community overall.
- The CFGN Food and Land Justice Resource Centre similarly observed a reduction in isolation, both through social interaction such as shared meals and gatherings, and through the creation of opportunities for future collaboration and alliances between groups.
- At Limborough Hub, staff actively encouraged residents experiencing depression, trauma, and stress to take time away from their own pressures and engage with others. One resident described how much they enjoyed the workshops, again noting that gardening supported their mental health by helping them leave the house. Another attendee of the coffee mornings explained how beneficial they were, particularly for women who had previously been isolated at home while dealing with trauma and stress.



Creating welcoming spaces

Several projects focused on creating environments that felt welcoming, safe, and inclusive.

- Misery Medicine: Plant Magic provided nature-centred gatherings for QTIBPOC* participants, offering peer support and space to address mental health challenges. One participant commented on how welcoming the space felt, appreciating both the shared knowledge and the chance to be outdoors and learn about the natural environment.
- Somos Semillas fostered deeper connections with nature and improvements in mental health. The project lead reflected that the most significant impact was the improvement in community wellbeing, achieved by creating a space for relaxation, emotional support, and reconnection, which helped reduce stress, combat isolation, and build resilience.
- Boil & Bubble worked with children, empowering them to become climate leaders and hosts of their space, and helping to reduce isolation and build trust. Visitors were introduced gradually, supporting children who often felt marginalised to see themselves as confident hosts. One child shared: *“When I’m in the garden I feel at peace. I feel happy. That’s been my best bit.”* The project lead noted that children’s pride and participation exceeded expectations, with many taking ownership of the garden and café and speaking confidently about food, climate, and inclusion.
- The Teviot People’s Kitchen created a space described as welcoming and homely, contributing to improved mental health, nutrition, and stronger community connections. The project lead explained that people who previously did not want to leave their homes were now calling on one another to attend, and that the space had become a community garden for everyone.
- Providence Row also promoted community cohesion by bringing corporate and local volunteers together with homeless clients. This helped break down prejudices and stereotypes, while supporting clients to build friendships and social networks.
- Community engagement also has helped to build confidence, trust, and a sense of ownership that transforms how people view their local area, and their role within it. Residents near the Society Links Orchard developed a growing sense of ownership over the space, viewing it as their back garden. *“There’s a growing sense of*

ownership. It's like their back garden. Everyone will drop in and pick up apples, for example." - Project Lead

Wellbeing benefits of healthier food access and skills

There is evidence that access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food supported participants' wellbeing. Food Co-ops collected survey data showing that customers were eating a wider range of vegetables, cooking more confidently, and trying new foods. One customer said that trying to be healthy had *"just been made easier,"* while another shared they were cooking more fresh food rather than relying on takeaways.

Tower Hamlets faces some of the highest levels of food insecurity and housing precarity in London. Many families live in temporary accommodation without access to basic cooking facilities, while others struggle to afford fresh, healthy food. Limborough Hub offered its kitchen space to groups such as Quaker Social Action, creating a vital space for asylum seekers to cook culturally appropriate food, many of whom otherwise rely on ready-made meals due to lack of facilities. As one participant from Quaker Social Action shared: *"This kitchen feels like home. It's the only place where I can cook a hot meal for my children. It's priceless."*

Food Co-ops avoided the stigma often associated with food aid by allowing low-income customers to purchase affordable organic produce. At the Teviot Food Co-op, the quality and affordability of the organic produce also encouraged customers to experiment with new ingredients and eat more seasonally. Participants reported eating more vegetables and enjoying a greater variety, with one customer commenting that *"organic is what food is meant to taste like."*

Personal growth and confidence

Structured roles and supportive networks across the programme helped participants build confidence and a sense of purpose. Regular activities such as sharing food, growing together, and creating space for conversation contributed to trust, confidence, and ownership.

- Volunteers at St Hilda's East Food Co-op reported improvements in both mental wellbeing and community involvement. As a volunteer-led project, the Food Co-op enabled people, many of whom face disadvantage or marginalisation, to learn new skills, connect with others, and become part of a supportive team. In the end-of-year survey, 90% of volunteers reported improved mental wellbeing and community involvement. Every response to the question about what they liked best

highlighted social benefits, from team camaraderie and talking to strangers to sharing food stories and enjoying regular customers' humour.

- Young people in the Be.Green programme also experienced increased confidence, with several participants who initially struggled with anxiety becoming vocal and active members of the group.
- At Providence Row, one client who had previously been rough sleeping shared that the gardening sessions *“gave him purpose and helped him to keep going.”*



In summary, the Just FACT programme has addressed social issues in Tower Hamlets through food and climate action projects that centre joy, friendship, and inclusion. By creating welcoming spaces, facilitating hands-on activities in community-led settings, and consciously amplifying marginalised voices, the programme has reduced isolation and supported meaningful improvements in mental health and community wellbeing across a wide range of projects.

8. Influenced and inspired wider change

This has been achieved to a certain extent through influencing local government strategy (ongoing), demonstrating replicable community-led models, building a strong local network, and establishing a reputation for community-led climate action on food that extends far beyond Tower Hamlets.

- 5 alternative trading and engagement models tested and lessons shared.
- 61 resources shared publicly (21 project case studies, 7 toolkits and zines, 2 research publications, 6 programme learning reports, 3 films, 1 podcast series, 21 blogs).
- 6 knowledge exchange trips involving 9 project partners.
- 35 council officers and councillors are part of Tower Hamlets Food Partnership, and have engaged with Just FACT learnings.
- 3 new grassroots policy mobilisers recruited to advocate for wider change beyond the programme.

Influencing local policy and governance

Just FACT successfully positioned itself to influence local food policy in Tower Hamlets by providing community-led evidence and advocating for systemic change.

- The programme directly influenced Tower Hamlets Council's Public Health Team's five-year *Transforming Food Systems strategy*. The Council stated that their commitment to deep systemic transformation is building upon the research produced by the Just FACT programme, and the council will be meeting with the Wen team and the food partnership when drafting this strategy. This was a key impact of the Just FACT programme.
- Wen, as the lead partner, successfully lobbied Tower Hamlets Council to sign the *Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration 2021*, committing them to sustainable food policies and promoting mechanisms for joined-up action. The Mayor of Tower Hamlets at the time, John Biggs, said: ***"We welcome the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration – fair, affordable, and sustainable food through the creation of resilient food systems is an important part of driving down carbon emissions. Food production and processes have a large impact on the climate, and this needs to be addressed both locally and on a global scale."*** He also said: ***"In Tower Hamlets, we are working with our partners to be a net zero carbon council by 2025 and a net zero carbon borough by 2045. This means supporting local community organisations and working closely with partners across the voluntary sector, businesses, housing,***

education, and beyond, to deliver a community-led and fair food system that is healthier for both people and the planet.”

- The current Mayor of Tower Hamlets, Lutfur Rahman, has also voiced his support for Just FACT and a fairer food system. In response to a press release put out by Wen about the Just FACT programme, he said, in 2024: *'Ensuring every resident has enough healthy food to eat is one of the most important goals of the council. It's the reason that we rolled out free school meals across the borough. We know there is always more to do, which is why we want to support this innovative project that aims to bring affordable, locally-grown food to residents.'*
- Wen submitted evidence from Just FACT to the London Assembly's Environment Committee [Resources - JUST FACT](#). The response was referenced in the panel discussion at City Hall and can be read [here](#).
- The community-led research from the Blueprint Architects was acknowledged by the Council's Public Health Team who referenced the report in a presentation to the food partnership; specifically, their publication, *Recipes for a Revolution*.

The role of Tower Hamlets Food Partnership

Tower Hamlets Food Partnership (THFP)⁹ has supported relationship building between policy makers, council teams and local Just FACT projects - through hosting a council tour of seven Just FACT projects, holding networking events, and ensuring both community groups and council teams are present in all THFP meetings and workshops.

THFP supported the establishment of [Tower Hamlets Right to Grow campaign](#), carrying forward many of the learnings of Just FACT and involving many Just FACT network members, as well as residents and community gardens not involved in Just FACT. Since its inception in May 2025, this local campaign has grown. It has monthly meetups, has run stalls at many local events, has set up its own website, and has successfully managed to petition the council to discuss the Right to Grow. This campaign continues to grow with support from THFP.

The ongoing Food Partnership is intended to serve as a lasting legacy that will continue to drive and resource strategic policy engagement beyond the project funding period.

⁹ <https://www.wen.org.uk/foodpartnership/>

As part of the Just FACT grant extension, Wen are recruiting 'Grassroots Food Policy Advocates' (1 day per week in 2026) who will advocate for Just FACT learnings and policy recommendations to be integrated across multiple policies at local authority level, amongst other local organisations networked through THFP, and at London-wide and national levels where appropriate. Their role would be to attend steering groups, policy making workshops, and meetings, identified with support from THFP Manager, in which there is the opportunity for Borough-wide (and larger) systemic and structural interventions in the food system. These roles will also be an accessible route to upskilling through employment/ work experience in community-driven policy change, diversifying who gets to be in policy making spaces.

Wen have said that the focus of the three Grassroots Food Policy Advocacy roles will link to Just FACT themes and the THFP strategy: community-led circular waste solutions, increased access to land and food growing and building up a Tower Hamlets model of Community Wealth Building.

Creating replicable models and blueprints

The programme emphasised learning and testing models for Tower Hamlets, which were also designed to be shared and replicated elsewhere.

- The Plastic Free Markets project successfully explored solutions to reduce plastic use in local markets, proving that policy enforcement works. This pilot demonstrated a successful approach, and provided clear recommendations to the Council on how this could be rolled out, including the steps that need to be taken to eliminate plastic bags from the market without putting the livelihoods of market traders at risk, and the need for consistent enforcement of the 10p carrier bag charge through Trading Standards.
- The Be.Green youth programme developed an operating model named Our World Our Wellness, which is framed as a youth-led model for a just food and climate transition that future young people can continue to shape and allies can join. This model links youth leadership, affordable food access via the Food Co-op, and community culture.
- The established St Hilda's Food Co-op model successfully acted as a learning lab, providing training and resources to quickly launch two new long-term Food Co-ops at Leaders in Community and Limehouse Town Hall.

- Folx Farm developed the F.A.F. (Food Access Fund) model, which aims to be a blueprint for how small-scale regenerative farms can concentrate growing efforts on staples of marginalised communities and sell them at lower prices. This model addresses wealth redistribution by generating grower wages through commercial food partners.
- R Urban's site, which demonstrates prototype closed-loop food systems including anaerobic digestion and composting for food waste from residents in estates with no food composting provision, was included in a GLA report, according to R Urban. They received visits from external groups like the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, and HS2 (a major transport project), indicating an interest in replicating its circular material cycle approach in other urban environments.
- Sunny Jar produced a [toolkit for communities](#), based on the learnings from their Plastic Free Poplar project, which serves as a guide for communities, groups and organisations to reduce single-use plastic in their local area.

The models described here focused on empowering young people and local residents with tangible skills, translating into leadership roles and increased confidence. Volunteers progressed into paid roles at organisations like Leaders in Community, demonstrating a pathway from community involvement to green employment.



Just FACT established a reputation for Tower Hamlets, which is now “constantly contacted for learning, visits, and sharing findings”. Organisations nationwide are looking to the programme for inspiration and ideas, with Wen receiving positive responses from other grantees working on similar food and climate proposals.

Sustain has also praised Just FACT’s work, saying: *“I’m so pleased that the National Lottery’s Climate Action Fund invested in the Just FACT programme as the insights and learnings – and replicability – are invaluable. There are some very useful learnings around membership-led models blending coops and food access based on support programmes (e.g. Alexandra Rose vouchers), and the link with a farm that can grow and develop alongside a community is brilliant.” - Vera, Sustain*

Sharing of stories and learning to inspire wider change

The programme has centred storytelling and learning, to amplify the work through sharing within the borough and beyond - so it can become part of the conversation on how to create more sustainable and socially just urban food systems not just in Tower Hamlets but across the UK.

Wen did this in several ways:

- During the programme 21 blogs were published. Some shared practical learnings (e.g. [‘what’s in a low carbon lunch?’](#)), some showcased particular projects (e.g. [‘a cafe with food justice at its heart’](#)), and others delved into specific topics (e.g. [‘behaviour change: to do or not to do’](#)).
- Wen worked with Really Bright Media to produce 2 films that showcase the work in Just FACT. The [first film](#) has received approximately 700 views, the second will be published at the end of the programme.
- Wen also launched a [podcast series](#), to experiment with audio as a way of sharing stories and learnings. Episodes were played 166 times in total.

Learning reports

In 2025 Wen produced a series of reports which collated learnings from the programme and its partners around the following themes:

1. [Participatory grant making learnings](#)
2. [The potential of local growing in creating just and sustainable food systems](#)

3. [Community participation and leadership in food and climate action](#)
4. [How to create more resilient community-led local food systems](#)
5. [The potential of circular food waste systems in tackling the climate crisis](#)
6. [Climate conversations that build community power](#)

- The learning briefs have been shared with teams within the council - including teams developing the transforming food system strategy, local housing partners, Tower Hamlets Climate Partnership members, Academic partners, local and national food groups, Climate Action Fund (CAF) grantees and learning partners.
- Wen and Sunny Jar Eco Hub (partner) have presented learnings on evaluation methods to other CAF grantees in a session organised by CAF's L&S team.
- Learnings on the participatory grant making approach were shared with 45 organisations including 20 funders. The following organisations shared the learnings with their respective networks: sustainable food places and sustain, the soil association, and the participatory grant making network.
- Wen presented learnings on Participatory Grant Making back to interested funders including the UK Portfolio Team at TNLCF, Wakefield Tetley Trust and Tower Hill Trust and Thrive LDN.
- Wen will be hosting a webinar at the end of February 2026 to share learnings and case studies, following the publication of the final Just FACT report.



Other opportunities for sharing learning

Wen has also participated in:

- A 'Fair Food Futures UK' session, sharing insights into research creating a fairer food system based on learnings in Tower Hamlets and Bradford (to present to Defra).
- A co-design process about short food supply chains with National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE).
- A workshop on the future strategy of EU-wide funding project- FoodPathS Partnership on Sustainable Food Systems.
- A roundtable hosted by Involve, an organisation working with local authorities nationwide to reach their net zero targets by engaging their communities in decision-making.
- Interviews with researchers from LSE, University of Manchester and University of Brussels.
- A Tower Hamlets Public Health Community Keeping Well workshop, bringing Just FACT principles around community led design to the table.
- A multi-sector stakeholder workshop on the development and integration of social welfare advice in Tower Hamlets, contributing insights around food, particularly food aid.
- The development of Nourish and Flourish (a London based circular economy project aiming to create better local procurement policies).
- 'Redesign' - a European wide circular cities project in which Tower Hamlets Food Partnership is a local partner member, bringing JustFACT learnings to this consortium.
- The Teviot Living Labs project - a hyper local project building on Just FACT circular waste solutions to be able to hopefully process the food waste of the entire Teviot estate. It is supported by THFP to link to local policy makers and other community groups in the borough.

THFP is involved in the following steering groups, and regularly brings Just FACT learnings and partner organisations in:

- Tower Hamlets HAF steering group (Holiday Activities and Food).
- Alliance for Dignified Food Support's steering group about Moral Exploitation of volunteers in food banks.
- Tower Hamlets Climate Partnership: Greening and Growing subgroup.
- Tower Hamlets Food Poverty Steering Group.

Shifting organisational focus

For many groups, being part of Just FACT resulted in a pivot toward explicit climate action and social justice.

- Maya Productions (a theatre company) used the project to demonstrate how arts and culture can contribute to conversations around food justice and climate change, a first for their organisation.
- For the Community Food Growers Network (CFGN), the funding revived the network and allowed it to resource trainings and activities it had previously lacked the capacity to pursue.



Events organised by Wen to amplify the voices of Tower Hamlets residents on food justice

- **Wen Forum: 'What does climate justice look like for our food system'**: Wen organised an event at Amnesty International titled 'What does Food Justice look like in our food system' attended by over 100 guests. Local food projects and the Blueprint Architects showcased their work, and speakers included Vandana Shiva (Indian food activist), Dee Woods (Food Justice Policy Co-ordinator) and Sarah Williams (Head of Programmes at Sustain).
- **Autograph Art Gallery event: 'Unravelling the links between environmental disaster and our daily lives, cultural heritage and diasporic histories'**: This event connected art and local communities to ask the questions about how we build a different world together, focusing on the connection between people rather than individual accumulation. There was a screening of the Just FACT, Blueprint Architect and Climate Sisters short films, followed by an in-conversation chaired by Just FACT mobiliser Hussina Raja with guest speakers. The discussion addressed food justice issues in Tower Hamlets, and the need to amplify women's voices in the climate arena, as well as how climate change is a global and political issue rooted in capitalism and colonialism. *"It was the best event I've run here at Autograph to date. Really important, inspiring conversation and also a space to connect with new people. Let's definitely keep the conversation going". - Jolie, Autograph Gallery*
- **Human Rights Iftar**: This iftar, organised by Amnesty International UK and the Inclusive Mosque Initiative brought together speakers including anti-racist campaigner Shaista Aziz from the Three Hijabis, Sarah Al Sarraj, a trustee of the Inclusive Mosque initiative, Nabila Hanson, China Country Coordinator at Amnesty and Blueprint Architect and Tower Hamlets resident, Sumayyah Zannath to celebrate the power of community work in demanding universal Human Rights, from local organising to freedom for Palestine. The Just FACT team were invited to have a Just FACT stall at the Tower Hamlets based event to link the audience into local food initiatives and campaigns. You can read what Blueprint Architect Summayyah said at the event [here](#).

- **Aam Khataller Utshob fruit festival:** The Just FACT team supported women’s collective Mohila Ongon to fundraise for and run their annual fruit festival, celebrating Sylheti cultural heritage in Tower Hamlets. The festival, held in July, featured traditional Sylheti food, games, and an interactive map of local food growing projects. Engaging over 300 community members with Bengali culture, Mohila Ongon were also supported by the Just FACT team to collect compostable materials for local gardens, adding an environmental aspect to the event. The festival was mentioned by Apsana Begum MP [here](#).
- **Power of Food Festival launch event:** To launch the Power of Food festival, the Just FACT team organised a launch event spotlight inspiring grassroots initiatives across the borough and spark important conversations about how to build a fairer, more sustainable local food system. This was done through stalls, a photo exhibition, and a sit-down meal with speeches. Dishes had been cooked by a range of women-led Tower Hamlets catering enterprises, and each spoke to share their food stories.



Challenges with influencing and inspiring wider change

There have been some significant successes for Just FACT in terms of influencing and inspiring wider change. However, the impact of the influencing and inspiring wider change work was more difficult to evaluate, as some impacts will not be realised for years to come.

The Just FACT programme also faced several complex challenges in achieving this aim, stemming from internal partnership dynamics, structural limitations of funding, and the ambition of achieving systemic change through grassroots action alone. These are discussed in more detail in the [challenges](#) section.



Learnings about how the programme has been managed

A generous leadership approach

Wen's lead role in the programme tried to model a 'generous leadership' approach, sharing time, knowledge and resources to support the network and actively empower others.

"Within feminist organizations, leaders work from a vision of shared power, providing opportunities for all members to develop and use their leadership skills." DAWN Ontario framework (p.33).

The Just FACT programme lead said that Wen believed that successful working relationships operated from a place of trust and open dialogue, and many interviewees praised Wen's supportive and collaborative management style.

Partnership meetings

Wen regularly reflected on the structure of the quarterly partners meetings, exploring how the spaces could feel more inclusive and empowering. Actions taken early on include: opening up the meeting so community members in the Blueprint Architect group could also attend (and provided some financial support to people who couldn't attend in paid work time); always giving space for people to check in and share updates on their projects, and any 'needs and offers' they may have from their project (examples of this included a mushroom farmer looking for local buyers, a project in need of pickaxes, and request for volunteer bike-riders who can support with food delivery); and creating time for more informal networking over a shared meal. Ongoing needs/offers and opportunities could also be shared by the partnership on a shared WhatsApp group (60 members) or via Wen's monthly local food newsletter.

Often the meeting agenda was decided based on partner suggestions, and occasionally members of the network co-led the meetings. They also provided an opportunity for people to reflect and learn together, troubleshoot shared challenges, provide feedback, and input into programme-wide decisions. *"We tried to be as responsive to partner preferences as possible, however there were often differences of opinion. Some preferred maximal consultation on programme decisions, and others wanted Wen to take more of a leadership role. We tried to strike a balance, also respecting the limited time and capacity of the partners" - Programme Lead*

Wen also worked towards developing the leadership skills of project partners by providing training, learning opportunities and support. This included ad hoc opportunities as well as ones that were more planned.

Direct partner support

Wen worked to ensure partners were well supported and resourced to achieve their goals, being responsive to different needs. Support included co-designing community engagement strategies, codeveloping delivery plans, making connections between different projects, organising training and workshops, and supporting with evaluation.

Time to provide one-to-one support to partners was reduced when there was an increase in projects coming through the grant scheme, combined with less capacity from the Just FACT team (who were a staff member down).

“We’re very happy with the support from Wen, in particular the support we have received from Josh [programme mobiliser]. He has helped us create a more engaging programme and his experience, knowledge and skills have been super helpful.” - Sunny Jar



Providing opportunities for learning exchange

Wen supported six learning exchange trips, where partners visited other food projects. This included trips to Glasgow, Birmingham, Dudley, Lambeth, Hackney, and the Land Skills Fair. The purpose was to learn, to inspire, and be inspired from others who are actively making progress in the food and climate sector in other areas.

Participants of the Glasgow Knowledge exchange said that they valued the opportunity to share their own work and gain insights from others' experiences. They appreciated visiting various projects and seeing innovative ideas in action, such as Lauriston Farm's culturally appropriate crops and urban composting solutions. The Just FACT team also were inspired by the work done with faith space in Scotland. It resulted in the team reaching out to more of the Gurdwaras, Mosques and churches in Tower Hamlets on their return.

"I found the faith spaces and food work to be interesting. It's a bit of a blind spot for Just FACT" - Just FACT Mobiliser at Wen

"Seeing small pockets of community gardening pop up and troubleshooting with similar farms has been incredibly motivating." –Blueprint Architect

"It was so lovely to meet you all. The trip was a wonderful learning opportunity for me too and I was very encouraged to hear about the work you all do. I would love to chat more about how we can continue to link projects and would be especially keen to learn more about Just FACT's programme and 'experiments' with resilient cultural crops." - Lauriston Farm, Edinburgh

Platforming projects and their learnings

Opportunities for partners to present their projects to new audiences included:

- R-Urban presenting on community engagement and Sunny Jar sharing their journey of evaluation to other CAF grantees.
- Mad Leap and Sunny Jar speaking to the Tower Hamlets Climate Partnership about their work.
- THFP hosting a council tour of seven Just FACT projects
- Every THFP meeting provides community members (including Just FACT partners) with the opportunity to present their projects to new audiences. Partners are also regularly invited to network events and other steering groups.
- Folx Farm, R Urban and the Food Coops will present back their learnings at the end of programme webinar.

Feedback received from partners

Lucy Harbor interviewed all partners at the end of their projects. Interviewees provided detailed feedback on the management and administration of the Just FACT programme, emphasising its supportive nature, flexibility, and success in building a strong network, while also offering suggestions regarding logistics.

A supportive and flexible approach to programme management

The Wen team was frequently described by different partners as friendly and approachable, supportive, and communicative.

- One partner said *“There has been an amazing, supportive element that’s come from Wen. The team has felt really friendly and approachable. It felt like a real partnership as opposed to a funding relationship.”*
- Several project leads, such as Folx Farm, mentioned that they appreciated the flexibility and adaptability of the programme.
- R-Urban noted that it was good that targets were able to move: *“By having that flexibility built in, it has allowed a more tailored community-focussed response”*.
- Stepney City Farm said: *“It’s been collaborative and supportive, and about learning, rather than putting in numbers. And that’s been really great and has helped us to explore unexpected outcomes, like the relationship with the allotment holders”*.

Networking and collaboration

A key success highlighted by interviewees was the Just FACT network. The network events which were coordinated by Wen were described as very productive, and low pressure, which helped build relationships that led to greater things. The network meetings helped to create a sense of community, leading to a successful network and a culture of activism around food being seeded.

- R Urban and Platform talked about how the network has been instrumental in connecting different people and groups doing fantastic work within the borough. *“Those networks are what will really outlast the project and will continue to bear fruits with groups but also with people.”*

- One partner said: *“The energy that has come with the Just FACT partnership has really created a community and I feel very tapped into in a borough that has a lot going on around food justice... It’s important we don’t lose that momentum over the last 5 years.”*



A culture of learning

Wen and the evaluator encouraged a culture of learning from the outset. Evaluation plans set out ‘learning questions’ that partners wanted to learn about through their work, and Wen’s quarterly partner meeting focussed on sharing project learnings, but also discussing programme-wide learnings, such as ‘what does community-led mean’. The evaluation also involved an annual ‘process evaluation’ survey with partners, which evaluated what was working well and what could be improved in the programme, and how the programme was working in line with the programme values.

- Following the creative evaluation workshop one partner said *“If you make the learning part of the evaluation, in itself it can be conducive to wellbeing. People can talk about what they’ve done, how they felt, and take something away from it (a new learning, or a new craft). We can incorporate evaluation in a way that’s meaningful to everyone.”*
- Sunny Jar said: *“When you focus the evaluation on learning it has a different quality. It’s more open, about going on a journey together”.*

Accessible and community-led project selection process

The application process for the grantees was perceived as easier and more accessible than other more traditional funding routes, and was praised for having a panel who selected the projects that was made up of people from the community. One grantee said:

“The access point that we could come in at was great, being able to come in part way through the programme. The application process was easier [than other funding programmes] and the projects were chosen with the community board – all those things made it more accessible and more likely we’ve got it.” And another said: *“When it’s the community that’s deciding on choosing which projects will get funding, it’s really special.”*

One of the most impactful adjustments Wen made to the application process was that their eligibility criteria included non-constituted groups and offered the potential for a host organisation to host funds. Three unconstituted groups were supported to enter a hosting agreement with a constituted charity of their choice who they had a prior relationship with. Wen provided a template agreement and hosting guidance to help this process.

Wen has produced a learning report on participatory grant making, which includes more detail on how the grant programme was made accessible, [downloadable here](#).

Challenges and areas for improvement

Interviewees provided constructive feedback on logistics, visibility, and planning of the network.

- One interviewee felt there were too many things they were invited to take part in, finding it overwhelming as they lacked the capacity to pick up on a lot of it. And Stepney City Farm noted that due to staffing requirements, they lacked the capacity to attend many of the events and gatherings.

- One partner noted that a downside of taking a friendly and community-led approach is that sometimes it led to decisions not being made efficiently. In one instance, regarding how to use underspend money, it was felt that, by asking for so much input for the groups, that decisions were being made less effectively.
- One partner said it might have been beneficial to start planning for legacy work (what happens after the funding ends) a bit earlier on in the programme, and another partner wished for more opportunities to link up with the local council and community food organisations.



What has being part of the programme meant to partners?

Being part of the Just FACT programme has been a transformative and enabling experience for the project partners, providing them with crucial resources, training, network support, and a collective platform to deepen their mission for a socially just and environmentally sustainable food system in Tower Hamlets.

Just FACT provided direct support, training and resources that significantly boosted the organisational and personal capacity of partners, volunteers, and staff. Funding also enabled critical staffing. Stepney City Farm was able to recruit two Sylheti-speaking Food Growers. Platform London was able to hire a second staff member, which increased their capacity.

The programme supported new organisational forms, such as the Teviot People's Kitchen, which was established as a cooperative with Just FACT support to design and deliver food programming, offering training and business support for its members.

Just FACT also enabled some grassroots groups to work in the food systems sector for the first time. Burdett Foundation, who led the Maydwell Gardens project, said: *"It made sense for us at the grassroots level, as we are equipped to deliver work in this area and are already operating on the ground on a day to day basis. The grant allowed us to directly make meaningful change, led by the residents."*

It also enabled partners to gain access to, and actively participate in, research projects that validated their work and informed future strategies. This included collaborations with Dr. Marta Lopez Cifuentes (Food Democracy research), Dr. Elaine Swan (Food Lives Matter), and Dr. Rachel Benckekroun (Fair Food Futures UK).

Validation and influence for systemic change

Participation in Just FACT provided partners with a platform to advocate for their community-led visions and influence wider policy. As well as helping to amplify community voices, being part of the programme provided proof of the need to invest in working with the local community to create a fairer food system. Being part of Just FACT also raised the profile of the partners' work.

- R-Urban Poplar's co-ordinator noted that participation enabled the project to reach more people.

- TPK members were invited to speak about their group at external events, such as a Hubbub gathering for other food projects in the city.

Financial and operational sustainability

The programme offered direct financial support and facilitated innovative models that will continue into the future.

- The funding helped LiC extend and expand their Teviot Food Co-op project to run twice a week until October 2025, thanks to partnerships like the Bridging the Gap pilot and the Alexandra Rose Charity. Folx Farm successfully raised over £9,000 to continue its F.A.F (Food Access Fund) project into a third season after the initial funding ended.
- Limehouse Town Hall Food Co-op successfully transitioned to a member-only Cooperation Town model after its Just FACT funding ended, which was described as the best way forward to continue ordering affordable organic food and promoting sustainable living.
- The food co-ops transitioned to working with The Better Food Shed (BFS) and Folx Farm, ensuring they supported small organic farms and reduced carbon footprints through seasonal, local sourcing, and shared local deliveries. BFS, in turn, recognised that co-op orders were helping organic produce enter Tower Hamlets, an area often overlooked by organic suppliers.



Challenges and barriers to action

The Just FACT programme projects encountered several significant challenges and instances where activities did not proceed exactly as originally planned. These difficulties spanned issues related to funding sustainability, bureaucratic hurdles, difficulties in community engagement, conflicts within the partnership, and unexpected logistical and staffing disruptions.

Sustaining projects and maintaining momentum proved difficult for several projects, due to resource limitations and the inherent demands of grassroots work.

Staff and volunteer capacity

As is common with many grassroots projects and programmes, staff working on the projects often felt stretched and overburdened, and many projects had staff leave and be replaced during the life of the projects, and some going on long-term sick leave, resulting in projects being understaffed. The loss of key staff members on projects and in the Wen core team created major setbacks, as this often resulted in historic knowledge being lost and required extra time to bring new people up to speed, draining resources needed for delivery. Multiple projects reported issues with limited capacity and staff/volunteer burnout or overload, making it difficult to sustain momentum or test new models.

- For the Teviot Food Coop, staff capacity constraints involved an additional burden related to admin, logistics, and communications on top of coordinating and operating the co-op itself.
- Platform London noted it was challenging to balance ongoing delivery, maintaining community relationships, and securing alternative multi-year funding, especially as the project was under-staffed relative to its ambitions. And the Community Food Growers' Network identified preventing burnout as key to the effectiveness of their work, recognising that the fast pace of work in growing spaces puts pressure on capacity.
- Providence Row's project was set back when the previous Garden Coordinator left early in the grant period due to a bad back, leading to an eight-week recruitment gap that delayed planting and caused the project to miss some targets for produce grown and client participation.
- Seeds for Growth found that the loss of two employees during the project affected implementation efficiency and networking efforts.

- Boil & Bubble faced an unexpected staffing challenge when the school's site manager went on long-term sick leave, forcing school staff and volunteers to manage the entire garden build themselves.
- Limborough faced sustained staffing pressures, with turnover and periods of understaffing due to long term sick leave affecting continuity, delivery and placing additional strain on the project team.
- Wen's core team also had staffing pressures, due to a member of the team being on long term sick leave, which affected their ability to support projects in the way the programme had originally intended to do.

Finally, there was a noted disconnect between the professional Monday–Friday working sector (including Wen staff and external partners) and the volunteer/community sector, which often operated on weekends. This limited the presence of the lead partner at some community grassroots sessions that took place at weekends.

The uncertain future of projects due to funding challenges and limited capacity was a common issue. St Hilda's East faced precarious funding towards the end of its involvement, noting that in the current climate, it is difficult to find funders willing to support non-emergency food provision.



Bureaucracy and permissions

Projects involving physical infrastructure or relying on external institutional agreements often faced major delays and necessary adaptations. Securing the necessary permissions for even simple adaptations was a major barrier.

- For the Cranbrook Community Food Garden, obtaining council and community centre agreement for the Project Raindrop rainwater tank installation became a protracted process. It involved waiting a long time (sometimes weeks or months) for responses, needing multiple prompts for replies, and facing a lack of clear processes for non-traditional projects like rainwater harvesting on public buildings. The original proposal of harvesting rainwater from the roof of the community centre was ultimately abandoned due to deteriorating relations between the garden and the community centre coordinator, and a system of shelters and water butts was installed instead. The project coordinator noted it was surprising and disconcerting how difficult it was to make a *"simple change to local infrastructure for the sake of sustainability"*.
- At Mad Leap, their project was significantly delayed due to changes in school leadership and the resulting need to re-establish contacts and resubmit information for approval. Planning permission took 2.5 months to obtain, and the structural engineer appointed required further investigatory works to be undertaken, which introduced further delays. In the end, the costs exceeded the budget for the project, and an alternative approach has needed to be taken.

Community engagement and social barriers

Some projects struggled to translate local support and awareness into sustained, active participation, especially among certain demographics.

- CCFG found that while the public response to the Berry Lane project was overwhelmingly positive, this interest did not translate into a significant increase in new membership or ongoing involvement from estate residents. The project lead reflected that, for some residents, gardening might simply not be a priority interest, necessitating a focus on valued services like food waste collection instead of relying on gardening activism for engagement.
- Seeds for Growth faced minimal attendance at community planting sessions, and a gardening club had no resident participants. Parents and residents cited inability to commit to sessions due to work or family constraints. They also found that issues

like anti-social behaviour and a lack of social cohesion hindered their ability to establish communal gardening in a public area on the Barkantine Estate.

- OITIJ-JO Collective found engaging with organisations and community groups difficult, partly because many were volunteers or part-time workers who found it hard to commit time beyond their essential duties. OITIJ-JO also encountered resistance from local people who initially expressed interest in facilitating workshops (despite being offered payment), potentially due to concerns about sharing recipes or insufficient knowledge about the project in advance.



Supply chain and logistical issues

- The cost of producing food increased during the programme, making it difficult for the food co-ops to sell produce at costs that could be perceived as low. The supply chain was volatile and the Limehouse Town Hall Food Co-op lost their primary wholesale contact suddenly, forcing them and the Teviot Food Co-op to find alternatives very quickly. Procuring wholesale fruit and vegetables proved to be a "rollercoaster journey", a big challenge being the general inaccessibility of

wholesale markets like New Spitalfields Market in London, to non-industry parties and the necessity of finding affordable transport solutions.

- Some growing projects experienced lower-than-expected yields. At CCFG's Berry Lane, many fruit plants struggled to flourish and fruit in the first summer, attributed to being transplanted too late. Subsequently, fruit yield remained low and what did grow was quickly picked off by squirrels, preventing the installation of the intended 'berry tally' board.
- Similarly, at Stepney City Farm, the ambition to increase productivity was hampered by unpredictable weather and parasites, specifically an "abnormally wet spring in 2024," leading to a late start and reduced total output. The naga chili crop was a "disaster," suffering extensive damage from slugs and snails, and the wet spring prevented the remaining chillies from reaching full maturity.
- Some projects experienced unfulfilled demand. Stepney City Farm realised they underestimated the high demand for certain Bangladeshi vegetables (like Chichinga and Uri beans) and did not sow or plant enough to keep up, limiting their sales potential. Similarly, Folx Farm noted they had underestimated the high demand for buying the plants they grew, and could not fulfil some orders. Folx Farm also noted that growing culturally relevant foods (like gourds and okra) can be temperamental in the UK climate, taking up more space and not guaranteeing the commercial returns needed for small farms.
- Delivery Costs proved to be a challenge for Folx Farm, especially as community spaces could not always accommodate early morning drop-offs typical for restaurants. Food distribution projects, such as the Teviot Food Co-op, found that school holidays and poor weather significantly impacted footfall and sales.

Internal conflicts and movement building dynamics

The partnership encountered some hurdles with movement building, including conflicts and differing philosophies about leadership.

Throughout the programme, partners navigated a range of perspectives on how best to work together. At times, the grassroots Blueprint Architects and Wen, as programme coordinator, approached aspects of the collaboration differently. The Blueprint Architects placed strong value on community autonomy and sometimes preferred to work independently, which opened up useful discussions about roles, responsibilities, and different ways of working within a partnership.

These conversations encouraged honest reflection on how to create inclusive processes and highlighted the importance of ongoing dialogue in multipartner initiatives. They also supported a deeper shared understanding of how community-led approaches can be embedded within large multi-partner programmes.

As the programme evolved, the Blueprint Architects concluded that traditional research outputs, such as producing a written “blueprint” for a just food and climate transition—did not fully align with their preferred ways of working. Because the blueprint concept had been developed before the Blueprint Architects joined the programme, they chose instead to focus on community-driven action and creative forms of engagement.



This shift required the wider partnership to adapt, which was sometimes challenging, and it illustrated the complexity of coordinating diverse approaches within a single programme.

Wen's coordinating role involved managing multiple partners and expectations, which at times placed significant responsibility on individual staff members.

A key takeaway was that additional support from the Climate Action Fund – such as conflict management or partnership building training – could be beneficial for organisations leading these large, multi-stakeholder programmes.

When the Blueprint Architects moved away from developing the blueprint, some community project partners found it harder to understand how their own work was intended to connect with the original concept. One partner noted that they would have valued more structured opportunities to collaborate directly with the Blueprint Architects and to understand how learning across the programme might be shared.

Several project leads reflected that the original ambition of creating a comprehensive blueprint for transforming the borough's food system may have been more challenging than anticipated. Nonetheless, they emphasised that the programme generated a significant amount of valuable work, learning, and community activity, even as the overall vision evolved.

Barriers to policy and systemic influence

Achieving systemic change at the borough level proved difficult due to the scale of the challenges and limitations on advocacy. The programme lacked dedicated "capacity for policy influencing work" within the core team, due to staffing challenges. Furthermore, interacting with the Council sometimes felt like "just meetings rather than action". Although it should be noted there were some significant successes regarding influencing policy for the programme as mentioned in [the section above](#).

The consensus among some partners was that bringing about the necessary just food and climate transition would ultimately require "transformational policy" at the national level, arguing that it is "impossible to bring about from a bottom-up" grassroots structure alone.

What next for the Just FACT partners?

Continuation of the network and collaboration

The partners all believe that the future of the Just FACT partnership centres on sustaining the powerful network that has been built, leveraging the momentum built during the programme.

All partners expressed an interest in remaining involved in the partnership post-Just FACT. The ability to stay in touch and collaborate is seen as invaluable, with many partners hoping it continues as a hub for communication and facilitation, and sharing knowledge and skills. One partner said: *“Trying to find an opportunity to bring as many groups together to share learnings and generate a plan together feels fitting for the network.”*

A grant extension from the Climate Action Fund will support partner meetings to continue until 2027, hosted by different partners in turn.

Partners emphasised the need to collectively move beyond individual project outcomes to drive systemic change in Tower Hamlets. Many felt that the network should focus in future on land justice and community ownership, which they believe is key to enabling a just food and climate transition in Tower Hamlets. Platform and the Blueprint Architects are keen to take this forward, with a major planned focus for the next stage on campaigning for community-owned land in Tower Hamlets. Platform said: *“We want to do a 3-year project with the trailer, in collaboration with lots of groups we’ve met in Tower Hamlets, to empower ourselves and learn about what the land issue is in Tower Hamlets, what we want as community and community-owned land. We want to learn, and make it people-centred.”*

Platform, House of Annetta, Community Food Growers Network collaboration

A grant extension from CAF was provided to three of the partners (who have a focus on networking building) to continue to work with the network to build ‘Political Education, Practical Skills and Community Infrastructure’ throughout 2026.

Blueprint Architects' evolution

The Blueprint Architects aim to transition into a self-organised entity separate from Platform, reflecting the philosophy that the group itself will outlive any specific project or funding.

Engaging the Council

Partners want to improve engagement with the local authority, seeking a stronger partnership. One partner suggested 'Public common partnerships', a model of community ownership where communities form partnerships with local authorities, could be explored in Tower Hamlets.

Resource and funding needs

Sustainable funding remains the biggest challenge for the partnership moving forward, and there is a consensus around the need to overcome challenges related to securing long-term funding. This is seen as the main obstacle to continuing or scaling up work. Furthermore, the reliance on short-term funding threatens the long-term sustainability of the food system efforts, highlighting the need for consistent, robust resourcing, potentially from a governmental level.

Future plans for projects

Individual projects plan to build on the foundations laid during the Just FACT period, including:

- R-Urban plans to continue fundraising, expand its site, and potentially build a sauna powered by the anaerobic digester (AD). They are also working to secure a long-term home in the neighbourhood.
- Food Co-ops (Limehouse and Teviot) are continuing to operate beyond the Just FACT-funded pilot phase.
- Boil and Bubble intends to continue its work at Bowden, focusing on expanding the school cafe to be outward-facing, allowing cooking and gardening activities to roll on.
- Compost Mentis/CFGN has secured further funding from "Farming the Future" to continue learning and work on anti-depression and urban-rural connections.
- Misery Medicine is seeking funding to restart its programme in an updated iteration.
- Providence Row plans to restore and continue its rooftop garden program after necessary roofing maintenance is completed.

Most projects in Just FACT will require funding in order to continue their work, highlighting this is a major challenge to building a self-sustaining, cohesive movement to achieve a just food and climate transition.

Future plans for Wen

- Wen will continue to co-ordinate the Tower Hamlets Food Partnership, though funding is not yet secured beyond 2026.
- Wen is committed to sustaining Limborough Hub and evolving it into a long-term community asset. Their vision is to transform the hub into a space that not only meets immediate needs but also drives systemic change in food justice and climate action.



Conclusion

Over its five years, the Just FACT programme has demonstrated the transformative potential of community-led action in shaping a fairer, more sustainable local food system.

By resourcing grassroots organisations, centring the knowledge and leadership of diverse communities, and investing in long-term relationship-building, the programme has delivered wide-ranging social and environmental benefits for Tower Hamlets. While the overall carbon savings captured through project level data are modest in the context of the borough's total emissions, the programme has successfully tested practical, replicable models that illustrate how localised food systems, waste reduction initiatives, and community designed infrastructure can meaningfully contribute to climate action.

The programme's impact extended far beyond emissions reduction. It created new, and strengthened existing, community food assets, from gardens and food co-ops, to composting systems and rainwater harvesting facilities. And, importantly for an area with a higher-than-average percentage of households experiencing food poverty, it improved access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally relevant food.

Through hands-on learning, accredited training, and volunteering, residents gained knowledge, skills and confidence, with several progressing into paid work or leadership roles. Many projects also delivered significant wellbeing benefits, helping reduce isolation, build social connections, and create safe, welcoming spaces for communities who are often excluded from climate initiatives.

One of the most significant achievements of Just FACT has been the creation of a strong, collaborative local movement for food and climate justice. Through regular partnership convenings, cross-project collaboration, and community-led decision-making, the programme has built trust, solidarity, and shared purpose across dozens of organisations and hundreds of community members. This network is widely recognised by partners as one of the programme's most important and enduring legacies, providing a foundation for continued collective action in Tower Hamlets. And Wen's collaborative and 'generous leadership' approach are widely credited by partners as being instrumental in making the network a success.

The programme also contributed to shaping local policy and wider public understanding of food and climate issues. Its community-generated evidence and practice have informed the development of Tower Hamlets Council's emerging food systems strategy, strengthened the borough's national profile on food and climate action, and provided replicable models for other localities across the UK. While the programme faced

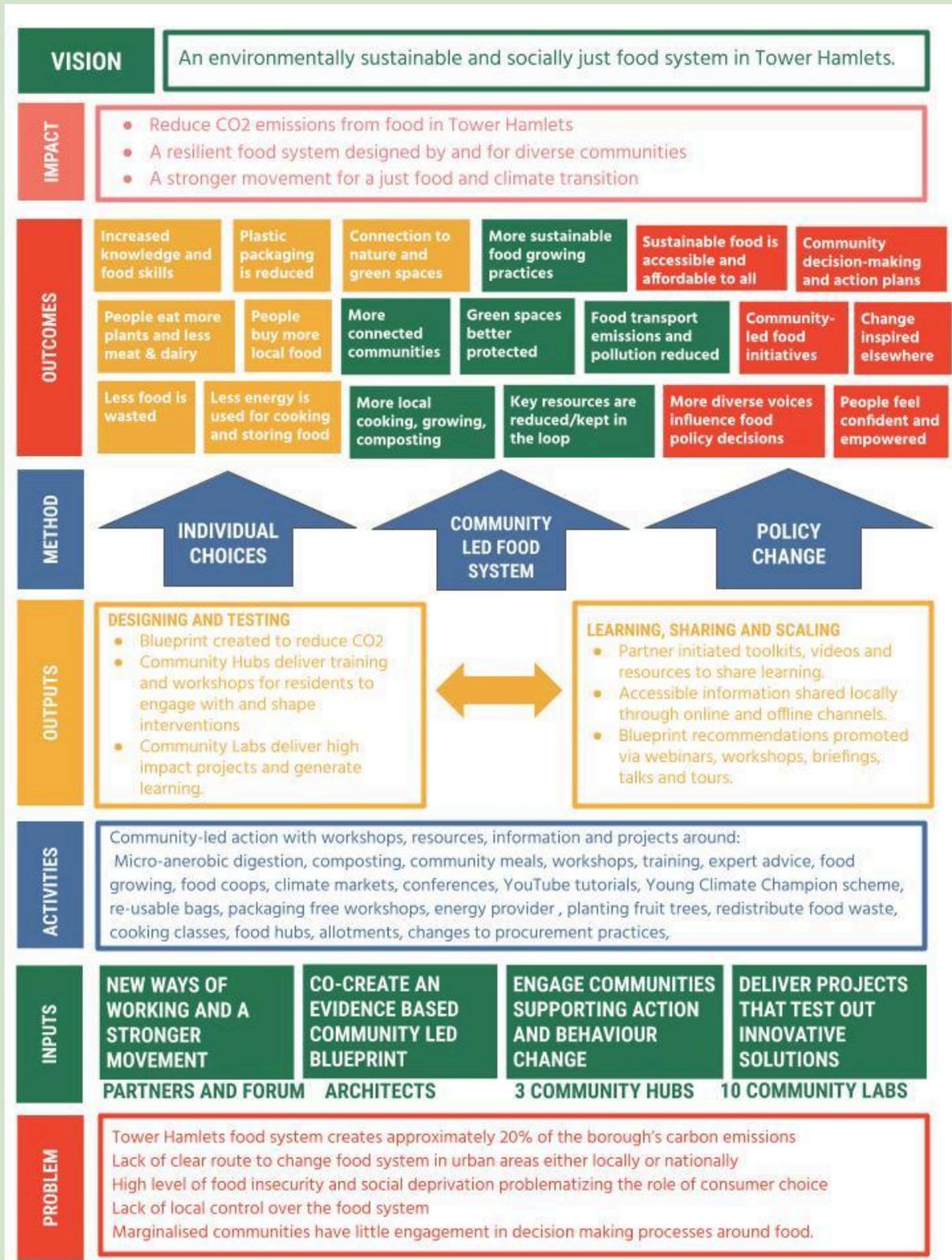
challenges – including capacity pressures, complexity of partnership working, bureaucratic barriers, and the sheer ambition of systemic change – these experiences generated valuable learning for future initiatives, particularly regarding resourcing coordination roles, supporting community leadership, and enabling long-term sustainability. Wen has published a series of learning reports on the programme website, to ensure these learnings are shared.

As the funding period concludes, partners are united in their desire to sustain the momentum built through Just FACT. The Tower Hamlets Food Partnership provides a strong platform for this continuing work, and many projects have secured new or extended funding, developed longer term plans, or strengthened their organisational foundations. Looking ahead, partners expressed a desire to explore themes such as land justice, community ownership, and deepened collaboration with the local authority, which are areas that could form the next chapter of collective action.

In summary, Just FACT has shown what is possible when communities are supported to lead change: a more connected, resilient, and empowered borough; innovative approaches to climate action rooted in everyday life; and a growing movement capable of advocating for a just food and climate transition. The learning, relationships, and community assets developed through this programme will continue to benefit Tower Hamlets for years to come, offering a strong foundation for the systemic transformation still required.



Appendix 1: Theory of Change



Appendix 2: Evaluation framework summary

Overarching goals - impact	Programme Aims	Programme Outputs (Examples)	Programme Outcomes (Examples)
To reduce CO₂ emissions from food in Tower Hamlets	To reduce carbon emissions at an individual, household or community level	Workshops, courses, events, trainings, resource-sharing (e.g. cooking classes, food growing workshops, community meals, school workshops, upcycling sessions, action days, online tutorials, knowledge shares, talks and screenings, campaigns, kid's kitchen, food sharing)	People have increased awareness /knowledge of key issues around food and climate, and understanding of how to bring about change; People feel empowered to make changes due to increased confidence, skills and capabilities; There's a reduction in emissions, due to people adopted more CO ₂ reducing behaviours
	To reduce carbon emissions through new innovative systems	Carbon reducing infrastructure, processes and practices (e.g. micro-anaerobic digestion, orchards and allotments, cargo bikes, water harvesting, food coops, good food social enterprises, bulk/refill schemes, new routes to market)	Key resources reduced/ kept in the loop; food transport emissions and pollution are reduced; green spaces are better protected; strengthened local economy; greater supply of healthy sustainable and affordable food; improved biodiversity
To create a resilient food system designed by and for diverse communities	To put more power in the hands of the local communities	Codesigned activities; Resident-led events and workshops; Community members in positions of responsibility and involved in decision making; Community Action Plans; Community-led blueprint	People feel able to shape and lead projects; People feel more confident and empowered; People feel able to influence decision-making; people feel their needs and visions are centred; a greater sense of ownership
	To redirect wealth and resources back into communities	Community enterprises; community ownership of physical spaces; new local food assets; paid and voluntary opportunities; new jobs in sustainable food businesses	Increased skills and employability; economically buoyant high streets and communities
	To deliver holistic outcomes that improve happiness, health and wellbeing	Workshops, courses, events, trainings, resource-sharing (e.g. cooking and eating healthy good, connecting to nature; creating opportunities for joy, friendship and sense of purpose)	People report better mental and physical health as a result of participation, e.g. less stressed, less anxious, physically stronger, better connected (and less isolated); People feel more positive and hopeful about the future

To create a stronger local and national movement for a just food and climate transition	To create more connected and better networked communities	Workshops, courses, events, trainings, resource-sharing	Knowledge is being shared among peers; Increased sense of community; people have developed trust and relationships
	To build wider community participation	Mobilisers deliver workshops, events, training; wider community participation in activities; Local food newsletter; social media activity	Reach and engagement online, number of newsletter subscriptions, people attending events and training report increased knowledge, confidence, skills
	To amplify community voices calling for a Just Food and Climate Transition	Local voices and perspectives are amplified through content created by Wen and partners; social media/media opportunities; Architects become spokespeople for the blueprint	People feel able to share their views; increased public speaking and interview skills; increased feelings of confidence
	To influence and inform local action	The Just FACT Blueprint; Toolkits, videos and resources produced to share learnings; promotional events and activities (inside track, outside track)	Key local organisations are inspired by the programme and its ambitions, and reach out to connect with the team; Key decision makers consider Just FACT in strategic planning, including how it could play a role in local carbon reduction plans and community engagement processes
	To influence and inspire change beyond Tower Hamlets		Key national organisations are inspired by the programme and its ambitions, and reach out to connect with the team

Wen
20 Club Row
London
E2 7EY

wen.org.uk
justfact.org.uk
info@wen.org.uk
@wen_UK

Just FACT (Just Food and Climate Transition) was a programme coordinated by Wen and funded by The National Lottery's Climate Action Fund between 2021-2025. It brought together communities and partners across Tower Hamlets to create the building blocks for an environmentally sustainable and socially just local food system.



Wen.



**COMMUNITY
FUND**