

BRIEFING	TO:	Health and Wellbeing Board
	DATE:	26 th November
	LEAD OFFICER:	Gilly Brenner Public Health Consultant Public Health Alex Hart Public Health practitioner Public Health
	TITLE:	Rotherham Food Network update

1. Background

1.1 History of the Rotherham Food Network

The food network was set up in April 2022 to support the implementation of national policies such as the National Food Strategy Plan (2021) and Rotherham's Full Council adoption of The Local Authority Declaration on Healthy Weight in January 2020. Rotherham Food Network was established to provide strategic oversight and collate an action plan to address local gaps on food-related issues, from a health and wellbeing and wider perspective. The group has broad membership of partner organisations across the voluntary and public sector.

The Rotherham food network became a member of Sustainable Food Places in April 2022 and achieved a bronze award in August 2024. This means Rotherham Food Network has demonstrated how communities, businesses and partner organisations can work together to make affordable good food a defining characteristic of Rotherham.

1.2 Wider relevance across Rotherham partners

Addressing access to sustainable, affordable and healthy food is relevant to a range of Council and Rotherham place-based plans and strategies, including through themes such as:

- Strength-based prevention approaches and thriving neighbourhoods – food is a means of bringing communities together, building cohesion and support
- Inclusive economy and cost-of-living – access to crisis food and healthy food at an affordable cost
- Healthy workplaces and anchor institutions addressing health inequalities – how workplaces can support their workforce and customers to access healthy affordable food
- Regeneration and commercial determinants of health – how local regeneration plans can help promote and support sustainable healthier food provision, and the impact of advertising and marketing
- Planning considerations -use of supplementary planning documents such as restrictions to takeaway applications within 800m of a school
- Climate change and net zero ambitions – the carbon implications in food production, distribution and plastic packaging

- Reducing the risks to health and exacerbation of ill health from poor diet and resulting risk factors such as excess weight, high blood glucose and high blood pressure.

1.3 Why good food matters

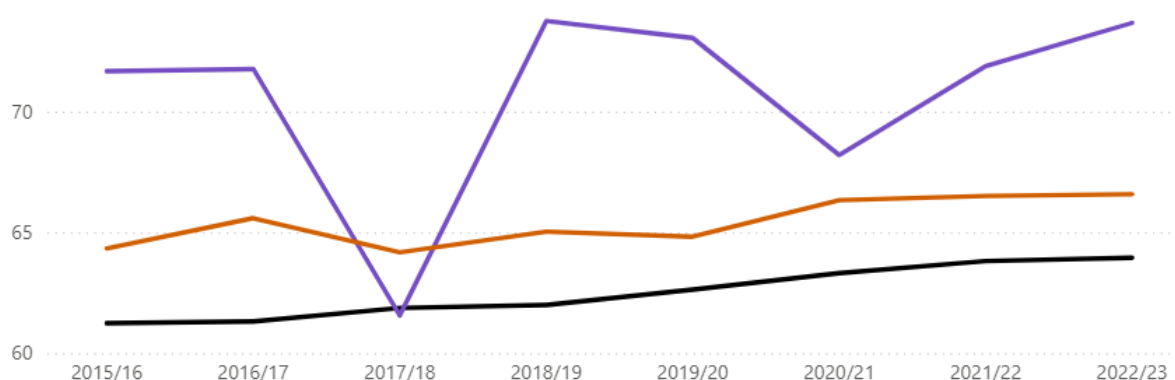
The breadth of relevance across themes shows that accessibility of healthy sustainable food impacts on many different and inter-related outcomes for the borough. With regards to health and wellbeing, the most direct impacts are obviously related to diet and those impacts are distributed inequitably across population demographics.

The Global Burden of Disease research estimates that of the top 5 risk factors for disability-adjusted life years (ie healthy life lost due to premature death, illness or disability) in Rotherham, only smoking doesn't relate to diet. Alongside the specific risk factor of diet, the risks of high BMI, high blood glucose and high blood pressure are all significantly influenced by diet.

In 2022/23, three-quarters of adults were overweight or obese in Rotherham (73.3%), highest amongst our CIPFA nearest neighbours and higher than the Y&H and England averages. QOF (23/24) data gives Rotherham adult obesity prevalence at 16.5%.

Percentage of adults (aged 18+) classified as overweight or obese, Rotherham compared to England (Fingertips).

Area Name ● England ● Rotherham ● Yorkshire and the Humber region (statistical)



This trend starts early and increases quickly during childhood, with NCMP data for 21/22-23/24 three year combined) showing 24% of Rotherham YR (age 5-6) children were overweight or obese, increasing to 40.9% by Y6 (age 10-11).

Access to food underpins the inequality in outcomes for diet-related ill health. A significantly higher proportion of disposable income is spent on food for people with the lowest incomes.



	<p>The cost of food is rising, and the cost of healthier food is rising faster than unhealthier processed foods higher in fats, salts and sugars. National rates indicate that food insecurity has risen to almost 1 in 3 in the UK in the most deprived areas, with an average 14% of UK adults having experienced food insecurity.</p> <p>Data from Fare Share, shows that for 2024/25 Rotherham distributed 208 tonnes of crisis food for 34 organisations, from 519 sites which equates to 494,000 meals, worth £729K and feeding 4,370 people a week.</p>
2. Key Issues	
2.1	<p><u>Action Plan</u></p> <p>Over the last year, a new action plan has been developed by the network to align with progression towards the silver award for Sustainable Food Places. The action plan (Appendix 1) is broken down into six priorities, based upon Sustainable Food Places 6 key issues framework. Improving the diets of Rotherham people is an extremely complex system-wide challenge, based on a large range of inter-related factors and is influenced in particular by poverty and the international food industry.</p>
2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food governance and strategy - <i>To transform Rotherham's food culture and food system through a strategic and collaborative partnership approach to good food governance and action with a vision backed by a clear action plan.</i> <p>Whilst the Rotherham Food Network continues to meet and have broad partner representation, there is a difficulty in addressing issues at pace or scale due to prioritisation, capacity and resource. Unlike in some other areas in the country, Rotherham does not have strong representation of advocacy or voluntary/community sector groups with food as their focus remit. Many voluntary/community sector organisations support food initiatives, such as crisis food provision, but this has come about through necessity to support communities rather than as a focus of interest.</p> <p>A strength in this priority area is data and intelligence, as a broad range of data sources have been used to articulate risks to good food access across the borough, such as through takeaway density and food insecurity measures.</p>
2.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good food movement - <i>To build public awareness, active food citizenship, and a local good food movement within Rotherham.</i> <p>There are regular community events across the borough promoting healthy food and food growing. More prominent examples include the Made in Rotherham food growing competitions at Rotherham Show, allotment gardens at the RHS Flower Show at Wentworth, and Youth Cabinet being keen to promote healthy food to young people.</p> <p>These events are currently ad-hoc and are not generally coordinated through the Food Network. To create a 'movement' would require additional capacity and resource to step change the level of engagement and visibility of message.</p>
2.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy food for all - <i>To tackle food poverty, diet-related ill-health, and access to affordable healthy food, by addressing the underlying causes of food poverty, changing the local food environment, and increasing knowledge, skills, resources, and support for people to feed themselves well.</i> <p>There is a Food in Crisis network of voluntary/community sector organisations involved in supporting crisis food provision through food banks and social supermarkets. This network is very locally responsive and effective but doesn't yet have a single point of referral or access, which can make signposting in difficult for external partners. Food provision is often supported by wider support, such as benefits advice.</p>

The Holiday Activity Fund continues to provide free meals to children and young people on free school meals during the main longer holiday breaks. These sessions have also included healthy eating activities. Auto-enrolment to free school meals has also been successful locally in increasing the number of young people accessing meal support.

This year has seen the establishment of Food Works ready meal freezers in community venues to increase access to healthy and affordable meals, see 2.8.

Healthwave provides a 'tier 2' weight management service to support overweight and obese adults in Rotherham with advice and support around healthier food and sustainable behaviour changes to diet. This compassionate approach takes a holistic view and is person-centred so that the support is relevant and applicable to individual lives and circumstances. The service sees high demand and good outcomes.

There is an opportunity to consider wider support from healthcare professionals where diet-related risk factors are identified and where in pathways of care, diet can be further addressed and supported.

2.5

- **Sustainable food economy** - *To create a vibrant, prosperous, diverse, and sustainable food economy within Rotherham by putting good food entrepreneurs and enterprises at the heart of local economic development and promoting them to consumers.*

The regeneration of Rotherham town centre, including Forge Island, has seen independent and new food providers establishing a presence locally. However, there has been a desire to support food businesses regardless of the 'healthiness' or 'sustainability' of their food offer.

Further work and resource would be required to develop a genuine partnership with food business owners in Rotherham and to encourage them to work together to promote the borough as a place to eat good food.

2.6

- **Catering and procurement** - *To support catering and procurement and revitalise local and sustainable food supply chains across a wide range of settings, such as nurseries, schools to create demand for healthy, sustainable, and local food.*

The Council is unusual in providing a substantial number of local schools with a school catering service through Riverside Catering. This service offers a quality healthy meal for children and young people, continuing to meet the bronze standard for Food for Life. With the academisation of schools, continuing to build the number of schools in the contract remains challenging and procuring good food also creates a challenge for keeping meal costs low.

Within current resource limitations, it has not been possible to further expand the work in this priority area to consider other anchor institutions and the role they could play in procuring healthier or more sustainable food or the potential role of social value for contracts around healthy and sustainable food provision. As significant providers of food for patients, there are opportunities to consider procurement and quality of food provision in hospital and care settings, as well as schools.

2.7

- **Sustainable food environment** - *To tackle the climate and nature emergency through sustainable food and farming and an end to food waste.*

The Council declared a Climate Change Emergency and is working towards net zero by 2030. The Rotherham Together Partnership with broad representation of partners also signed a Climate and Nature Charter. Within current resource limitations, it has not been

	<p>possible to engage with the wider businesses sector to consider how best to support more local sustainable procurement chains and providers.</p> <p>The local Food Works freezer provision is however all provided through food surplus, see 2.8, therefore reducing food waste and improving sustainability.</p>
2.8	<p><u>Food Works freezer project</u></p> <p>The Council's Neighbourhoods team secured £60k of funding over a 2-year period for a project with Food Works, a social enterprise based in Sheffield on the border with Rotherham. In this first year of the project, freezers will be installed in 10 community spaces within Rotherham, facilitating the supply of healthy frozen meals, sold as Just Meals for a donation of a minimum of £1. Food Works are providing the freezers, transport of the meals, and guidance and advice, including training such as food hygiene to staff or volunteers at the community sites. However, the community site is required to handle payments and stock inventory. Roll out of the freezers has begun and an evaluation will follow to determine their usage levels and community feedback to consider next steps.</p> <p>Proposed community sites hosting freezers are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cortonwood Comeback, Brampton • Dinnington Methodist Church, Dinnington • Full Life Church, Maltby • Kimberworth Park Community Partnership (Chislett Centre), Kimberworth • Kiveton Park Community Development Trust • Rotherham Hospital • Rotherham Minster, Town centre • St Margarets Church, Swinton • The Centre, Brinsworth • The Drop-In Centre, Rawmarsh
3. Key Actions and Relevant Timelines	
3.1	<p><u>Action plan ongoing</u></p> <p>The current Rotherham Food Network action plan in Appendix 1 continues to develop, with opportunities sought to further engage partners in delivering towards the priorities.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Food Works project</u></p> <p>As of the 10th November, four freezers have gone live, at Cortonwood Comeback, Kimberworth Park Community Partnership, Kiveton Park Community Development Trust and Rotherham Minister. By the end of November, it is expected that six of the ten freezers will be up and running. All ten freezers are expected to be fully open by the end of March 2026, with an evaluation of the first-year project starting once they are all in place. There is a second year of the project which will be informed by the evaluation and opportunities as to whether this is expansion of places hosting freezers, or a wider remit, such as hosting a wider food offer or cooking opportunities etc.</p>
4. Implications for Health Inequalities	
4.1	<p>As already described, poverty is a key driver of difference in diet, restricting options for residents. The Food Works project has enabled a quality 'home cooked' meals provision to be offered in key community locations at an affordable cost. Further engagement with users of the freezer meals and the community hub locations will help determine how best to expand this offer in year 2, to best meet needs and impact on inequalities.</p>

4.2	Wider implications for health inequalities are considered as part of the action plan. In particular, the Food in Crisis partnership food provision, auto-enrolment of free school meals and Holiday Activity Fund sessions to ensure children and young people can reliably access food in school and during the holidays.
5. Recommendations	
5.1	<p>For Health and Wellbeing Board Members to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the update from the Rotherham Food Network - Note the impact of a lack of access to healthy sustainable food in Rotherham on health outcomes - Note the challenges that arise from the tensions of poverty, regeneration, economic growth, climate change and the accessibility of healthy sustainable food. - Consider in what further ways Board Members could commit to driving forward any elements of the action plan.

Appendix 1 – DRAFT Rotherham Food Network Action Plan 2025-2030



Priority	Action/s	Timescale	Lead(s)	RAG	Progress
Food Governance and Strategy					
1.A. Establish a broad, representative, and dynamic local food partnership					
1.A.1	A diverse cross sector partnership is in place with regular Rotherham Food Network meetings	Ongoing	Public Health Practitioner		Quarterly network meetings ongoing
1.A.2	Update and agree on Terms of Reference annually to ensure open, transparent & democratic group	Annually	Public Health Practitioner		Next review due December 2025
1.A.3	Continue to grow the network of organisations within the Rotherham Food Network through regular stakeholder analysis	Annually	Public Health Practitioner		Next review due December 2025
1.A.4	Create and maintain a digital dashboard for the Rotherham Food Network and update annually	Annually (June)	Public Health Intelligence Analyst		Dashboard available and shared with the group at each annual update
1.B. Develop, deliver, and monitor a food action plan					
1.B.1	Develop and ongoing monitoring of Rotherham Food Network partnership action plan	Ongoing	Public Health Practitioner		Action plan reviewed as standard agenda item with actions flagged where necessary for review or progress.
1.B.2	Develop a branding logo for the Rotherham Food Network, to help promote the food vision and aims for Rotherham place and encourage individuals and organisations to get involved and contribute	June 2027	Programme Leader Graphic Design, University Centre Rotherham		RNN have offered some student capacity to progress this via degree projects.
1.B.3	Update the JSNA Rotherham Data Hub food section on a yearly basis	Ongoing (May)	Public Health Intelligence Analyst		Food pages included in the JSNA.
1.B.4	Embed health and sustainable food practices in local policies, strategies and plans and take opportunities to respond to local, regional and national consultations.	Ongoing	Public Health Practitioner		Ongoing identification of opportunities to influence local policies and strategies identified and discussed with Food Network or shared.
Good Food Movement					
2.A. Inspire and engage the public about good food – events and public engagement activity					
2.A.1	Develop awareness of the Food Works Just Meals freezer locations (see 3.A.7).	Ongoing 2026	Public Health Practitioner		As each freezer hub site launched, relevant comms shared.

2.A.2	Develop and deliver a set of commercial determinants of health training with a focus on food	March 2026	Public Health Practitioner		Training to be developed and target audience and opportunities to deliver planned
2.A.3	Increase the uptake of secondary school children in the Rotherham healthy holidays (HAF) programme to ensure children have good access to food during school holidays.	Ongoing	Senior Family Support Worker		Yearly report on the number of children within the HAF programme shared with Network. HAF promoted on extranet for partner awareness/engagement.
2.A.4	Ensure that the work of the Rotherham Food Network is in line with the Rotherham's compassionate approach, by using the communication toolkit.	Ongoing	Public Health Specialist		Toolkit has been developed and will be shared with partners via the extranet. Review of implementation annually with network members.
2.A.5	Collaborate with Youth Cabinet and its partners to produce a teenage specific campaign to support health eating.	September 2025	Public Health Practitioner		Some delay due to Youth Cabinet capacity; options are being explored to link to Bite Back campaign materials.
2.A.6	Identify leads of our local allotment/s and develop the relationship between them and the food network. This will enable the development of any future projects relating to allotments.	December 2025	Public Health Practitioner		Meetings arranged and on track.
2.A.7	Support network members to advocate for advertising restrictions on food with High Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS)	December 2026	Public Health Practitioner & Public Health Specialist		Toolkit to be developed and shared on the extranet site for partners and agenda item for discussion.
2.A.8	Support network members by showcasing good practice and ongoing projects via Council comms channels including neighbourhood newsletters	Ongoing	Communications and Marketing Account Manager		Process being discussed, but to use extranet site to share projects and case studies and link to comms.
2.B. Foster food citizenship and a local good food movement					
2.B.1	Work with local food providers to increase awareness of being able to buy locally sourced and more sustainable food. (Link with markets and town centre team)	2027	Public Health Practitioner		Discussion with Markets team to be aligned to markets redevelopment and opportunities for promotion relating to fresh and local food.
2.B.2	Develop opportunities to work together to identify future grant/funding opportunities for the network, such as creating small grant funds.	Ongoing	Public Health Practitioner		Grants/funding opportunities shared with the Food Network ongoing and via extranet. Currently no funding identified for additional small grants.

2.B.3	Work with local food banks and social supermarkets to provide support on how to eat well on a budget.	To be confirmed	Public Health Practitioner		Discussion to be had with Food in Crisis Partnership about opportunities to support healthy eating for those with food poverty related issues.
2.B.4	Expand Rotherhive's food section to include baby food and weaning information	March 2026	Public Health Specialist		Link to pages to be shared once complete.
2.B.5	Check and update Rotherhive's food pages annually, to enable current information and service to be included where appropriate	Annually (January)	Public Health Practitioner		To be reviewed annually

3. Healthy Food for all

3.A. Tackle Food Poverty

3.A.1	Support the auto enrolment process of free school meals to ensure uptake is maximised to reduce impact of food poverty on children's diets	Ongoing	Public Health Practitioner		Annual update on the number of children receiving free school meals (including opt outs) included in data dashboard and update to be shared with members.
3.A.2	Consider how the network can work with schools to maximise free school meal enrolment and ensure access to quality and healthy school meal provision	Ongoing	Public Health Specialist		Discussions occurring to determine how best to work with schools not currently accessing Riverside Catering meals.
3.A.3	Continue to ensure all food banks and social supermarkets offer services linked to food poverty such as debt or housing support.	Ongoing	Head of Partnerships, VAR		Update to be provided annually to food network on the food in crisis partnership.
3.A.4	Continue to increase the awareness between diet and oral health and inequalities	March 2026	Public Health Specialist		Update to be shared with food network on the oral health action plan and progress and issues in March 2026
3.A.5	Update the RMBC money matters page food section, to make sure information and services are up to date.	Annually (January)	Public Health Practitioner & Communications Account Manager		To be reviewed every year
3.A.6	Implement the Rotherham Food Works project, by collaborating with RMBC Neighbourhoods and vol sector organisations to establish 10 freezer sales points for Just Meals across the borough	March 2026	Public Health Practitioner & Head of partnership, VAR		Progress on track for all 10 freezer locations to be running by March.

3.A.7	Evaluate the implementation of Just Meals freezers	June 2026	Public Health Practitioner		Evaluation plan being drawn up.
3.A.8	Develop a plan for Food Works project for year 2, to consider expansion or wider delivery options.	June 2026	Public Health Practitioner		Plan to be shared with network members for wider awareness and involvement.
3.A.9	Links to be maintained between the Rotherham Food in Crisis group and the Rotherham Food Network	Ongoing	Head of Partnerships, VAR		Standard agenda items on both groups.
3.B. Promote healthy eating					
3.B.1	Maintain a Breastfeeding Friendly borough webpage, adding new businesses and promote through Rotherham Voice and other channels	Ongoing	Public Health Specialist		Attended Voice session in April. Ongoing promotion to businesses required.
3.B.2	Explore opportunities to embed healthy food knowledge and support in social prescribing and related community-based services	November 2027	Public Health Practitioner		Consideration is being given to hosting training or a workshop at Social Prescribing Network event or via VAR
3.B.3	Promote and monitor uptake and impact of Simply Veg and other campaigns supported by school catering.	September 2026	Catering Manager		Annual update to be provided by Riverside Catering to the network to reflect on success and challenges.
3.B.4	Collaborate with the 0-19 oral health teams in incorporating both general and targeted messaging around sugar reduction and nutrition	March 2026	Public Health Specialist		Update to be shared with network around successes and challenges of this work.
3.B.5	The oral health needs assessment has been completed; the recommendations will be brought to the food network to identify any recommendations which the network we can support on	December 2025	Public Health Specialist		The oral health needs assessment will be shared with the group in December 2025.
3.B.6	Share progress on the expansion of the supervised tooth brushing clubs in early years settings.	March 2026	Public Health Specialist		Update to be shared with the network on the number of tooth brushing clubs within Rotherham and successes and challenges.
4. Sustainable Food Economy					
4.A. Put good food enterprise at the heart of local economic development					
4.A.1	Integrate the food risk index within the Rotherham Council planning process.	June 2026	Health Improvement Principal		Network has been shown the risk index and work is ongoing to adopt fully into processes. Next update to network will share further progress.

4.A.2	Consider ways of improving access to drinking water in Rotherham's towns and villages. Consider Refill scheme and relevance to new town centre and towns and villages fund redevelopment opportunities. Relevant to climate change mitigation measures.	June 2026	Public Health Practitioner		Update to be provided to network on opportunities and challenges and discussion to be held on network involvement to take forwards.
4.B. Promote healthy, sustainable, and independent food businesses to consumers					
4.B.1	New town market development currently ongoing, explore opportunities for future projects to investigate ways to promote current and upcoming events within the markets	Ongoing	Public Health Practitioner		Ongoing discussions about use of future market events and work with businesses to support promotion of healthy and sustainable produce / food.
4.B.2	Explore what is grown within Rotherham, including at local allotments, and identify what is done with surplus produce	December 2025	Public Health Practitioner		Growing subgroup created and update scheduled to the food network.
4.B.3	Use extranet site with members to continue to promote and share relevant activities and events and opportunities to link to local businesses	December 2025	Public Health Practitioner		Plan to be shared with the group by December 2025.
4.B.4	Explore opportunities to engage with food businesses across the borough and scope for working together to promote sustainability and good food offers	December 2027	Public Health Practitioner		To be undertaken as part of later phase of the action plan.
5. Catering and Procurement					
5.A. Change policy and practice to put good food on people's plates					
5.A.1	Compassionate approach training offered to catering staff on a yearly basis for new starters	June 2026	Public Health Specialist & Public Health Practitioner		Ongoing discussions with catering at regular meetings on the best dates for these sessions or the applicability of an online recorded session
5.A.2	Work with anchor institutions to explore food sustainability as part of their procurement processes	September 2026	Public Health Specialist & Catering Manager		Ongoing discussion with catering procurement about sustainability of food procured.
5.A.3	Identify case studies within RMBC catering which can be used to showcase best practice.	December 2026	Catering Manager		Quarterly meetings with catering which discussions about identified case studies based on their achievements can be gained
5.A.4	Identify priority areas within catering that are emerging public health issues and provide tailored training to help overcome issues which they may face.	Ongoing	Public Health Practitioner		Quarterly meetings with catering which discussions about identified issues within catering.

5.A.5	School Catering to continue to achieve annual bronze level accreditation with Food for Life	June 2026	Catering Manager		To be shared with group by June 2026
5.B. Improving connections and collaboration across the local supply chain					
5.B.1	Work with anchor institutions to consider their commitments to local, healthy, and sustainable food offers	November 2027	Public Health Practitioner		To be undertaken as part of later phase of the action plan.
5.B.2	Awareness of the skills gaps in the borough's hospitality sector, and meeting those needs through offering relevant RMBC training	Ongoing	Catering Manager		Discussions with catering about the issue of gaps within the sector are ongoing
6. Sustainable Food Environment					
6.A. Promote sustainable food production and consumption and resource efficiency					
6.A.1	Rotherham previously declared a climate change emergency and is working towards the council being Net Zero by 2030 and the borough by 2040. Rotherham food network will collaborate with the Climate team to input food related actions into the strategy as appropriate.	November 2026	Climate Change Manager		Policy to be shared once completed, and workshop invite has been shared with group members
6.A.2	Climate team to develop a tailored short version of climate training focused on food to members of the network	September 2026	Climate Change Manager		Training to be developed and delivered by September 2026
6.A.3	Rotherham in Bloom – Showcasing local gardens in Rotherham to increase awareness of gardening. Rotherham Food Network to share the promotion materials across all members to increase awareness.	Ongoing (May-June)	Tenant Involvement Officer		Materials to be received by March 2026, and shared among the group by June 2026
6.B. Reduce, redirect and recycle food, packaging and related waste					
6.B.1	Continue to offer the carbon literacy training to all RMBC staff	March 2026	Climate Change Manager		To be shared among the group about availability on the extranet site
6.B.2	Rotherham is currently part of the Barnsley, Rotherham, Doncaster Waste partnership (BDR). 2025/26 BDR action plan to be shared to identify actions which the Rotherham Food Network can then support which align	June 2026	Public Health Practitioner		Action plan to be shared in April 2026 with the group, and comments to be made by June 2026 for any areas which the network could support