

## INTRODUCTION

Many communities in the UK are unable to afford, or access, the food needed to make up a healthy diet. What we eat (and how we eat) affects not just our health, but the local economy, social cohesion and the wider physical environment. Despite national healthy eating information campaigns (e.g. 5-A-Day), and support for families on low incomes (Healthy Start), the UK diet fails to meet government recommendations. Only 20% of the UK population eat the recommended 5 daily portions of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Although the majority of UK population understand the importance of fresh fruit and veg (FV) for health, many lack the means to ensure that their diets include sufficient fresh FV. There are multiple causes as to why this is the case (poverty, lack of access, knowledge, food deserts, and heavy & pervasive 'cradle to grave' advertising for unhealthy food products).

There is evidence (from the Healthy Start programme) that vouchers for individual pregnant women and young children in receipt of income support are effective in increasing FV uptake (McFadden, 2014) but uptake is continuing to decline. Although there is evidence that supplier specific (i.e. fresh FV market stalls) vouchers for vulnerable young families in receipt of Healthy Start are feasible (Alexandra Rose Charity, 2015), it is not known if offering local supplier specific vouchers for fresh FV to **all households in geographically defined communities** in areas of high deprivation is effective. This study aimed to provide new information on a place based/ household level cash transfer based approach to improving diet and health and the wider environment.

## AIM

To develop and feasibility test a place based cash transfer scheme.

The purpose of the scheme is to: 1) reduce food insecurity, 2) increase daily consumption of fresh FV, 3) support healthy dietary habits, 4) increase exposure to healthy food prompts, and 5) increase social cohesion.

## MATERIAL & METHODS

The intervention was developed with local stakeholders in Athersley North in Barnsley, an area of high deprivation in the north of England during 2017-2018 (Relton, In preparation).

The intervention developed "FRESH Street" comprised weekly Rose vouchers for fresh fruit and vegetables (value £5) plus vegetable based recipes and nutritional information offered to every household. Vouchers were redeemable with local suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables (not supermarkets). Vouchers could be shared with others.

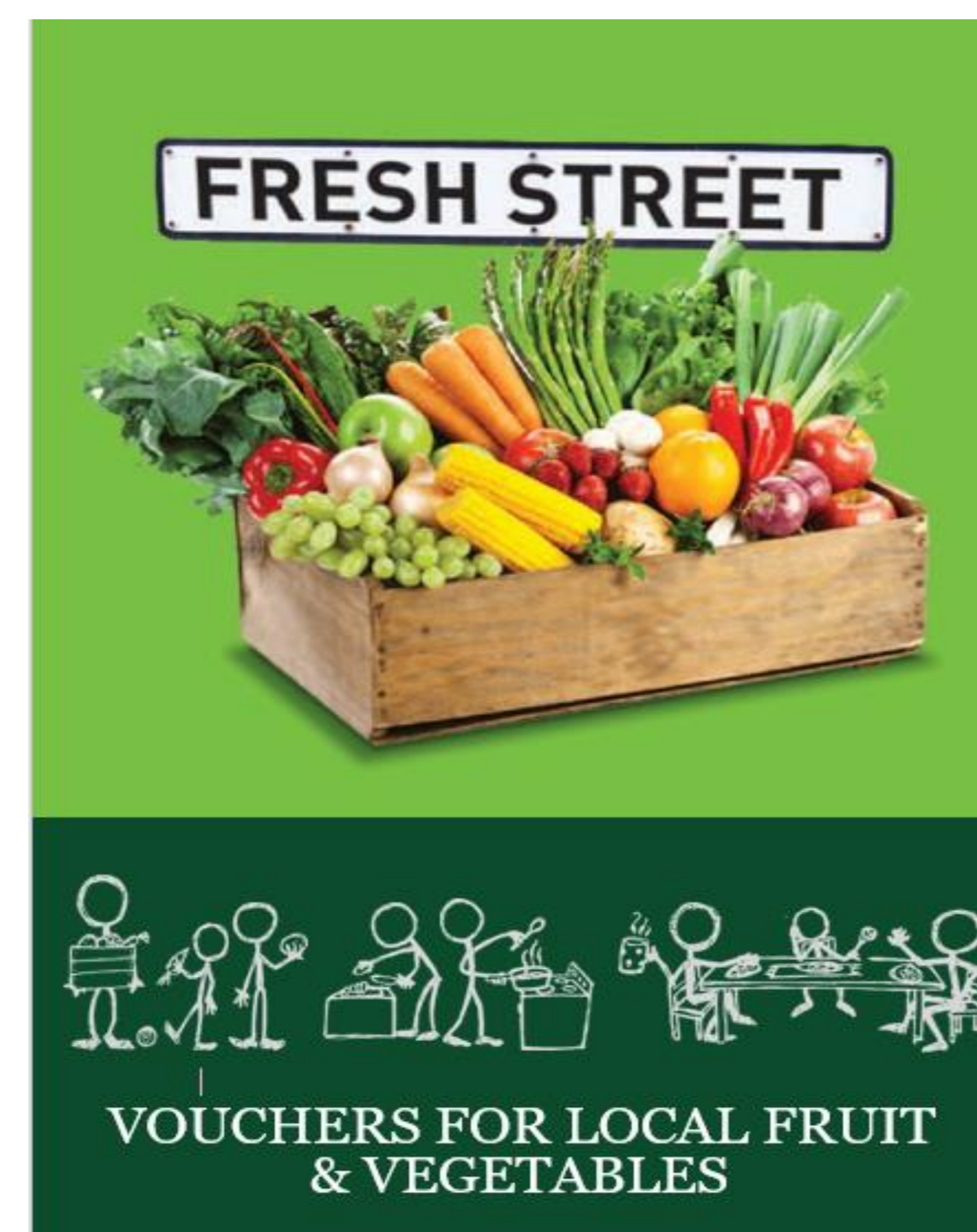
The feasibility of the FRESH Street scheme was then tested in four streets in Athersley North in Barnsley for 52 weeks (24.03.18 - 23.03.19). Every household was eligible, regardless of household type or income. To assess the feasibility of the scheme we collected and analysed voucher redemption data and conversations (door-step, text and phone) with households and stall holders.

## RESULTS

Most (84%, 80/95) eligible households joined the scheme and 89% of the vouchers were redeemed. 43% of participating households had children under 18.

Many householders reported that the scheme made them think more about what they were eating, and prompted them to buy and eat more FV. The local FV shop and market stalls reported new customers and existing customers buying more.

People frequently talked (unasked) about their health (some reported that the scheme motivated them to lose weight) Householders also talked about shopping together, eating together, and sharing vouchers. When asked what they would do when the scheme stopped, some said they would reduce the amount of FV they bought, but many said they would continue to buy the same amount.



Vouchers make you think - reminder to get/have fruit and veg (Female, age 31)

Used to cheat a lot at cooking (e.g. convenience/takeaway) - less so now. It helps that there is always fruit and veg in fridge. - cooking more than used to. (Male, 34)

## Vouchers for fresh fruit and veg



- ❖ Redeemed with local independent suppliers (not supermarkets)
- ❖ Offered to households (not individuals)
- ❖ All households eligible (regardless of size/ income)
- ❖ Households encouraged to share vouchers

+ veg based recipe, nutritional information, healthy eating messages

## SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

The scheme was popular. Offering vouchers to all households regardless of size, type or income avoided the stigma associated with interventions targeted at individuals. The combination of weekly (not monthly) vouchers with a weekly recipe, nutritional information, and healthy eating messages, increased household exposure to healthy food prompts and potentially reduced exposure to supermarket environments and subtle prompts to buy processed food. Preparing fresh FV encouraged people to share food (which facilitates social bonding and people with strong social connections are less isolated and live longer (Blake 2019).

Further research is required to fully evaluate the effectiveness of this place-based approach to creating both healthy eating behaviours and economically sustainable food systems.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Funding sources

- 1) MRC MR/R002630/1 Developing an area (street) based cash transfer scheme to promote healthy eating communities in areas of high deprivation (the FRESH Street Project), 2) Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and 3) Barnsley North Area Council.



**Additional thanks** to Barnsley Public Health Team and also Alexandra Rose Charity for their efficient operation of the voucher reimbursement scheme.



## REFERENCES

Blake MK (2019) More than Just Food: Food Insecurity and Resilient Place Making through Community Self-Organising. Sustainability, 11, 2942.

McFadden A, Green JM, Williams V, et al. (2014) Can food vouchers improve nutrition and reduce health inequalities in low-income mothers and young children: a multi-method evaluation of the experiences of beneficiaries and practitioners of the Healthy Start programme in England. BMC Public Health 14:148

Relton C, Blake M, Crowder M, Strong M. FRESH Street: A feasibility study of a household cash transfer scheme for fresh fruit and vegetables in the North of England. (In preparation)

Alexandra Rose Charity Rose Vouchers Impact <https://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/impact>, accessed 17.7.19.