

COUNCIL

DATE	14/03/2024
REPORT OF	Portfolio Holder Safer and Stronger Communities
SUBJECT	Community Food Provision
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Facilitating the availability, affordability and safety of food provision in North East Lincolnshire supports the Council's stronger communities priority. Our vision for the health and wellbeing of residents includes wanting people to be informed, capable of living independent lives, self-supporting and resilient in maintaining/ improving their own health. This is in part underpinned by healthy eating.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following a council motion in March 2023 this report provides a progress update on local community food provision and associated issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is asked to note the information provided in the report regarding providers, the range of activity that is being undertaken across North East Lincolnshire in respect of community food on the future direction being taken to support affordable, accessible and healthy food provision within the borough.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

1.1 Following a motion to Full Council in March 2023 the following was resolved:

1. That the Council continue to:
 - Work with the appointed Cabinet Member to champion the reduction and prevention of food poverty throughout the borough.
 - Continue to deliver the successful food poverty action plan currently being delivered by North East Lincolnshire Council.
 - Request that the Cabinet continues to monitor the local food strategy for North East Lincolnshire, we will continue to work with manufacturing, farming, retail, hospitality, food service, voluntary sectors and local community groups within the greater Lincolnshire area. The object would be to continue the sterling work carried out by this authority and continue the strategic approach to local food supply in our area.
 - Where possible, investigate waste food prevention of commercial surplus food.
2. That the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities report back to Council every six months on progress.

1.2 In 2023, the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities has visited 13 food providers across North East Lincolnshire and participated in bi-monthly food forums where providers relevant partners come together.

1.3 Currently provision in NEL:

At least 10 Foodbanks – free food to the public - mostly means-tested:

- Rock Foundation
- We are One
- West Marsh Community Centre Food Larder
- Oasis Hub South Grimsby
- Feed the Community
- Clee and St Francis Food Larder
- St Peter's Food Pantry, Cleethorpes
- CARE Food Larder Immingham
- ECHO

1 Food Pantry – free membership for public in that area; £4 per visit – choose a certain number of items:

- Generations Church Food Pantry, Willows

3 Hot food kitchens aka soup kitchens – hot food to the public:

- Grimsby Food Kitchen
- We are One
- ECHO

At least 4 organisations (there are more) who provide either food parcels or hot food for their clients in the groups that they serve.

- Harbour Place
- Doorstep
- Women's Aid
- Staying Close project

At least 3 organisations providing meals on wheels or similar paid-for community food offerings:

- Age UK
- Nurtrio (formerly Care4All)
- Meals Fore You (formerly Fresh Start Meals)

2 social supermarket offering surplus food at discount prices for members who need that provision and qualify for their conditions:

- The Community Shop, Nunsthorpe (for registered resident members who fulfil benefit criteria)
- The Company Shop, Estate Road No. 8, Grimsby (Employees and pension recipients of the following sectors: – NHS, Care & Emergency Services – Prison Services – British Armed Forces – Charity – FMCG supply chain. People in receipt of means-tested benefits are also eligible).

1.4 Themes which emerged from the visits:

1.4.1 There are a range of models operating, with varying criteria for the giving of food, all of which offer free food except The Willows which requires a small payment for each visit, and The Community Shop which sells food and other household items at subsidised/reduced cost. They all offer varying levels of 'wrap around support' (e.g. budget/ benefit advice/ signposting/ Citizen's Advice or DWP).

1.4.2 All organisations are independent organisations and rely on volunteers.

1.4.3 Sustainable funding is an issue for most organisations, but there have been some notable successes in securing external funding e.g. Rock Foundation.

1.4.4 It is not possible to quantify the extent of any “misuse” of providers but there are issues which have been identified and are being worked on with the relevant agencies:

- People presenting as “No Fixed Abode”
- Attendees and parcels issued over time - figures are sometimes suppressed at holiday times because of vouchers and holiday activities
- Food surplus disposal/food hygiene

1.5 Public Health initiative on healthy eating

1.5.1 There is a healthy weight strategy group led by public health which primarily focuses on the healthy weight measurement in schools, physical activity and active travel and various management programmes, e.g. maternal obesity. The work of the food forum reports into this group. A resident survey closed at the end of January, findings and recommendations arising from the work will be reported in due course.

1.6 Food Forum – future direction

1.6.1 In principle we would rather not have food banks in North East Lincolnshire, but the reality is we do and considerable numbers are dependent upon them. There is a consensus that we need to reduce dependency. Where funds are available organisations will work to incentivise reducing the number of people seeking free/emergency food.

1.6.2 We need to ensure wrap around support and access to debt, benefit, housing and wellbeing advice services, wherever possible. The collective challenge is a lack of sustainable funding, but organisation, such as the Rock Foundation, our largest provider, have secured funding and currently have these services in place.

1.6.3 There are a myriad of factors which contribute to the circumstances people find themselves in, only some of which the Council has the wherewithal to influence. These include access to healthy food, ability to pay, affordability, a prevalence of low cost/fast food outlets in more deprived areas, limited cooking skills, appliance and energy costs to cook at home. To get underneath the drivers of need, the forum has agreed it need to undertake some research directly with people who present at foodbanks. These findings will shape a plan to reduce demand and remove some of the barriers to healthy eating and food bank dependency.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

There are no direct risks arising from the report. In the absence of further funding, there is a risk to food providers that they be unable to meet demand. The opportunity to reduce need and lessen dependency has no single answer, the public health challenge to inform and increase understanding of the importance of healthy food, together with the availability of affordable good quality food that people have the skills and facilities to cook, have to be tackled in the round.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

Communications will be issued to update food providers and residents if the funding position from April 2024 changes. The findings from survey work will be made available through partner networks and help inform future planning.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 Funding has been made available to the council which has been provided to food providers post Brexit, during COVID and the current cost of living period, which extends to a period of approximately 4 years.
- 4.2 There are two significant funds which are administered by the council during 2023/24 which include food. The holiday activities and food programme administered by children's services commissions activities for children over the holidays. The household support fund (Round 4) of 3.2m includes specific provision for food - 8000 Free School Meals vouchers, market vouchers for pensioners and new mums, direct grants to support warm spaces (25+ venues this winter), direct grants to alleviate energy and food costs.
- 4.3 The HAF programme is funded to the 31st March 2025 and currently, the Household Support Fund ends on the 31st March 2024.
- 4.4 Sector led collaborative bids are being submitted to funding bodies to continue the work in this area including continuity funding for the food coordinator post.

5 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

There will be continued support for children via the Holiday Activity Fund Activities but this does not give the same reach as there has been through the Household Support Fund. The vouchers issued in 2023/4 to up to 8000 young people eligible for Free School Meals for the main school holiday periods, Summer and Christmas, involved a grant allocation of £930,000 from the 3.2m fund administered by the Council.

6 CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no implications arising from the report.

7 MONITORING COMMENTS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

8 WARD IMPLICATIONS

All wards.

9 CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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