

Subject:	Response and Recovery Update: Food		
Date of Meeting:	3rd March 2021		
Report of:	Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Max Woodford	Tel: 01273 291666
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report updates members on the work that is being done around provision of food during COVID-19, in terms of emergency provision, an update on the winter covid-19 grant for families, and consideration of a longer-term strategic approach to food.
- 1.2 The report also responds to a request from members to consider the potential for paid positions at key food hubs around the city that are currently reliant on volunteers alone and outlines work that is taking place to consider the issues and implications surrounding longer term future of emergency food provision in the city.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Members of the committee note the work being done across the city around the emergency food response during the Covid19 pandemic, and the consideration of the implications surrounding the provision of emergency food in the longer term.
- 2.2 That Members agree that the Food Policy Officer continues to work with Brighton & Hove Food Partnership and the wider emergency food network on developing stronger analysis of options for moving to a more sustainable emergency food network, which builds upon the initial analysis outlined in paras 3.7 to 3.28 of this report.
- 2.3 That Members agree that the Food Policy Officer commences the longer term strategic food policy work outlined in paragraphs 3.49 to 3.55 of the report in partnership with city partners, the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership and the Greater Brighton Economic Board.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Accessing Emergency Food during the Covid-19 Pandemic

- 3.1 As part of the city's community response to supporting vulnerable households and those that were shielding during the Covid-19 Pandemic, a citywide network of 50 neighbourhood food hubs was established and co-ordinated by Brighton &

Hove Food Partnership. Some of these were food banks / shared meal settings that had been in existence before the crisis and some new temporary food hubs. A central 'Community hub' was established within the LDSF team to provide referrals to food banks and vouchers. Referrals are made based on post-code or client group.

- 3.2 The need for emergency food provision within the community has fluctuated over the last year. In April 2020, 3001 food parcels were being given out per week and 3966 meals. This reduced to 1991 weekly parcels in July 2020, once the wave 1 lockdown restrictions started to ease, but has then increased as a result of the second wave of the virus and the second and then third national lockdowns. Most food banks report being stable but with increasing numbers accessing food. The BHCC Community Hub reports having increased numbers seeking referrals for help.
- 3.3 As of Feb 2021, there are over 51 providers of Emergency Food across the city. These can be broadly divided into three types of provision:
- Traditional food banks or newly set up food 'hubs' who give out uncooked food parcels – 30
 - Community meal providers distributing cooked meals - 11
 - Food co-ops and other initiatives helping people access subsidised food, to prevent crisis – 10
- 3.4 Some are within established organisations providing food to their client group e.g., Brighton Women's Centre or specialist BAME, homeless support and older people projects, some are a combination of types. Each provider has a different referral system, most will take referrals from the BHCC Community Hub, many also take direct referrals from agencies and social care. At least 6 have an open access policy, where anyone can self-refer, in order to prevent people from having to go through any barriers to get food.
- 3.5 As most Emergency Food Providers have been set up by grass-roots organisations, there is a different offer across the city, producing a 'postcode lottery' as to whether households can receive emergency food delivered to the door, cooked meals 7 days a week, or access to an affordable food scheme / coop.
- 3.6 The council funded an initial £45,000 in March 20 and a further £124,500 for the period June – August 20 to cover Emergency Food provision. There has since been investment via the COVID19 Winter Grant money outlined in paras 3.30 – 3.38.

Consideration of Payment or Funding for Food Hub Volunteers

- 3.7 At the 3 December Policy & Resources Committee, it was agreed to ask officers for a further report that gives due consideration to paid positions at key food hubs around the city that are currently reliant on volunteers alone. The aim of this request was also to consider the implications and issues that arise from the longer term provision of emergency food across the city. As the need for emergency food provision has continued there has been concern that availability of volunteers may not be sufficient to adequately support the scale of food

provision required and that as a result some of the providers may struggle to sustain provision.

- 3.8 Of the 49 food providers that are currently operating in the city, 19 are volunteer run (of those 2 are supported by Church staff and 2 are coordinated by Councillors). Of the remaining providers, the staffing arrangements vary from paying one person one day a week to having several full-time staff.
- 3.9 A number of options have been considered to enable an assessment of the implications of commissioning the food network so that a some of the current volunteer positions became paid positions. All of these options require further work and research before a recommendation can be made to the committee on a way forward. The initial analysis to date is not complete and requires further work but has been summarised below:

Consideration of funding or paying all volunteers

- 3.10 In the latest annual Emergency Food Survey (July 20) from BHFP, there were 638 volunteers across the projects who volunteered in one-week 2111 hours. At the living wage (£9.30 an hour) this is £19,632.3 a week. This amount is likely to change given the sectors' fluctuating size.
- 3.11 Volunteering is unpaid work by definition but expenses can be covered. Covering costs of driving is particularly needed as the volunteers are often expected to use their own petrol. Parking costs have been negated by the use of a Council letter, but if this were discontinued for any reason, it would mean volunteer drivers would incur parking costs.
- 3.12 If a subsistence expenses rate were paid for a daily 3 - 4-hour shift (£9.30), this would be in the region of £6054 a week to cover 650 volunteers, the annual cost would be estimated to be £314,340. However, this would also require administration by officers within the council, which would add a further estimated c.£100k to the annual cost. If driving expenses were paid, this could be in the region of £40,000 (based on 2 drivers per organisation driving 15 miles each per week at a rate of 46.9p per mile). However, further research would be needed to find more accurate figures (some organisations do not deliver at all, some have multiple drivers every day).

Consideration of funding or paying key Coordinating posts / roles

- 3.13 Under this model, a paid BHCC staff member would support several food projects and would provide coordination, capacity building, and support with managing volunteers, budgeting, finance etc
- 3.14 It should be noted, that many of the current volunteer run food projects are grass roots independent community organisations that have emerged and operated effectively without the intervention of the city council. As a result, some of these organisations may not welcome either the city council or another commissioned organisation intervening to take on a coordinating role.

- 3.15 A basic principle of community development is to empower individuals to create sufficiency and sustainability within organisations. Creating a dependence on the Council would contradict this.

Consideration of funding each group to employ their own coordinator

- 3.16 Under this model, each group or organisation has someone already who acts in a coordinating role. Providing funding for them to continue in their role would create more capacity and enable them to concentrate on providing emergency food. The funding would need to be given out through a fair grants or tendering process. This would have further financial implications.
- 3.17 As organisations who already have staff members have to fundraise for this, then they should be eligible to receive the grants.
- 3.18 There is a risk small grass-roots groups may not have the structure or capability to manage staff. There is a risk that the grass-roots groups may be excluded from the procurement process, which is intended to support them.

Consideration of providing funding for community development organisations to train, support and empower volunteers or have a staff role supporting several food projects

- 3.19 The Trust for Developing Communities, Hangleton & Knoll Project and Brighton & Hove Food Partnership have existing relationships with the Emergency Food Providers.
- Some of this support is already funded through the Third Sector Investment Programme (TSIP)
 - Working with the volunteer run organisations to establish if they could employ staff is key
- 3.20 Consideration would need to be given about how this grant or commissioning process would exist alongside the current Community and Voluntary Sector, Council support, to ensure adequate and appropriate cover that was fair to all organisations and distributed evenly with due respect to need and equality.
- 3.21 For any council commissioning process: procurement, contracting and regulatory processes would apply. The organisations would need to have Health & Safety, Safeguarding, Equalities policies etc
- 3.22 There is no budget allocated for this work. All of the options above would need further research and consultation to define costs and need across the projects.

How do we move towards a more sustainable emergency food system, which has fair and inclusive access?

- 3.23 Best practice for Local Authorities is a 'cash-first' approach (reducing existing barriers to financial entitlements or offering shopping vouchers before food bank support). This reduces the need for Emergency Food.
- 3.24 Brighton & Hove Food Partnership is just about to undertake focus groups and evaluation of the work of the Emergency Food Network, community meal

providers and food cooperatives to provide a framework for moving forward sustainably. The BHCC Food Policy officer will work with the Food Partnership following the research to explore the various models for funding the network in more detail.

- 3.25 There is a need for the council to lobby government to ensure that the welfare, employment and skills systems are addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged in our communities so that they are not reliant upon emergency food provision.
- 3.26 There has been some research about the idea of a single referral system/shared centralised database across the food banks and referring agencies, which could be GDPR secure, decide allocation on post-code, would avoid duplication and would provide knowledge about what other financial support the client had received. This idea is controversial within the Emergency Food Network. Some banks/hubs would not sign up to such a scheme (mainly through GDPR and access concerns, also digital access is an issue amongst food bank volunteers), others already have systems in place (such as Trussell Trust) which might not integrate with other systems, some banks are keen to adopt a scheme. Creating a database would need significant research, investment and training for providers. Any investment in such a scheme would first need confirmation of a high-percentage take-up of the database across providers. Further investigation will take place.
- 3.27 Independent food banks could sign-up to be part of the Trussell Trust network. However, many of the current volunteer run food projects are grass roots independent community organisations that have emerged and operated effectively without the support of another organisation and might not welcome this. Also, Trussell Trust needs to see that it's visions and values are aligned with the project. Trussell Trust is a franchise which has an initial cost for the organisation of £1250 and yearly payments of £150. They provide support, data systems, grants and partnership opportunities.
- 3.28 Emergency Food Providers will need continued financial and organisational support as food insecurity is expected to increase. However, providing small grants through the Communities fund to cover volunteer expenses, staff and food costs would be a fairer way to support them, whilst continuing to work with the Community and Voluntary sector to provide organisational support.

COVID-19 Winter Grant

- 3.29 The government outlined that the grant was awarded to give vulnerable households peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the winter months during the pandemic by helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, so every child will be warm and well fed this winter.
- 3.30 During the Christmas holidays a £25 supermarket food voucher was given to families per child, per week. This was provided to all those entitled to free school meals, children who qualify for free childcare places for two-year olds, Early Years Pupil Premium and using the children centres' food bank as well as those in similar circumstances. This included families who electively home education

their children and those attending college. The same arrangement was also in place for the February half term.

3.31 It was determined to direct the remaining funding for the support of families with children and young people, including pregnant parents who find themselves at the edge of other sources of support such as Free School Meals. This has been undertaken using a combination of funding to support discretionary allocations of assistance and funding to support other organisations working in the city to support these families, while aiming to link family members to other supportive initiatives.

3.32 £90k has been allocated to support groups with protected characteristics. £40k was granted to support young people via the following providers, as detailed below:

- £10k for the east and north of the city (Trust for Developing Communities)
- £5k for the west of the city (Hangleton and Knoll project)
- £5k for central areas of the city (Brighton Youth Centre)
- £5k for LGBTQ+ young people (Allsorts)
- £5k for BME young people (Black and Minority Ethnic Young People's Project)
- £5k for disabled children and young people (Extratime)
- £5k for families with a child/dren with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (Amaze)

3.33 The Communities, Equalities and Third Sector team ran a small grants scheme (£5,000 per award) for community and voluntary organisations in the city. The criteria were projects working in Brighton and Hove to help ensure that vulnerable people and families are warm and well fed this winter. This might, for example, include the provision of warm clothing, help paying heating bills or helping families to cook nutritiously on a limited budget.

3.34 In total the following amounts have been allocated:

Stream	School holidays	Other times	Total
Early years - Children Centre food bank & vouchers Jan – March 2021	£98,675	£11,000	£109,675
Schools and college – vouchers	£579,325	£84,000	£663,325
Community and voluntary sector outreach and support Jan-March 2021	N/A	£90,000	£90,000
Administrative costs	N/A	N/A	£2,000
Total	£678,000	£185,000	£865,000

3.35 It was a significant challenge to find a suitable system for the distribution of the COVID-19 winter grant that was straight forward for families to use this system and could gain the confidence of schools to use after the issues experienced using the national system prior to and over the summer break.

3.36 The avoidance of poor-quality food hampers as described in the national press ensured that families could access food quickly, easily and with dignity.

3.37 It took significant effort from the small Schools Meals Team to ensure that all of those families eligible for free school meals were processed quickly, schools advised and provision of vouchers/free school meals where appropriate. They also fielded a significant increase in calls and queries from those not eligible for their service and directed them towards other services for help such as the Local Discretionary Social Fund, Food Partnership and Community Hub. This demonstrated the close links with the Food Working Group and all partners involved in supporting families with food.

Free School Meals

3.38 Since schools have been open only to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers from early January 2021, families entitled to free school meals have been supported through a supermarket food voucher distributed by schools. The voucher is £15 per child, per week. Schools can either use the national Edenred scheme or the Hugg scheme used to distribute Covid Winter Grant vouchers.

3.39 Since the start of the spring term 2021 any adult or child attending school has been able to receive a meal at no charge. This arrangement will run until February half term and will then be reviewed. On average 12,000 meals per week are being served. This initiative has sought to increase the sense of community during a difficult time, promoted the well-being of staff and children in school, reduced the requirement of school staff and critical worker parents or parents of vulnerable children to visit supermarkets and minimised the furlough requirements of Caterlink, the school meals provider. Therefore, enabling the full service to be expanded more quickly when required.

3.40 The offer of a meal at no charge was offered during the response to the first lockdown and was part of the supplier relief arrangement with Caterlink. It is important to note that these arrangements apply to schools that are part of the council's school meals contract which includes the city's primary and special schools only. Secondary schools and academy/free schools are not part of these arrangements.

3.41 Where possible the meal will be hot food however it is worth noting that during the first lockdown the original offer was for families to receive a packed lunch.

3.42 During the school summer holidays 2020, the government arranged for a national scheme of food vouchers to be offered to families in receipt of free school meals. This equated to a £15 supermarket food voucher.

3.43 During the disruption of the last academic year the provision of school meals was maintained and the numbers of meals served in the table below indicate the way schools gradually re-opened.



- 3.44 The start of the academic year 2020-21 saw more normality in the way schools were running and meal numbers increased as a result.

September Meal Numbers	October Meal Numbers	November Meal Numbers	December Meal Numbers
132616	120104	163890	136101

- 3.45 In the 2019/20 financial year there were approximately 1200 applications/enquiries from guardians. In the first 10 months of 2020/21 there has been 2600 applications/enquiries. In January 2020 the school census recorded 5372 eligible children and this year the census recorded over 6500 pupils.

Longer Term Strategic Food Policy Work

- 3.46 In order to continue to drive the food agenda, the city council has recently appointed a new Food Policy Officer. This role will provide strategic leadership on food policy and food economy matters within the council; developing and leading policy, strategies, programmes and funding bids to support the development of a secure, resilient and sustainable local food economy.
- 3.47 The postholder will also work collaboratively with the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership and relevant community and voluntary sector organisations, social enterprises, businesses, public sector organisations and academic institutions in the city to achieve the food goals for the city, including those set out by the city's Gold Sustainable Food Status.
- 3.48 The new post holder will start work in May 2021. In the meantime, an interim officer is supporting the council with the more immediate work around co-ordinating the council's response to the impact Covid is having on the city's food sector, in partnership with the various food banks and food co-operatives. This will involve:
- Being the Council Lead for food on the Food Working Group and responsible for administration of that group
 - Taking responsibility on the reports on the work the Food Working Group is doing to the Covid Recovery & Renewal Programme this committee.
 - Being the contact point for all food enquiries
 - Leading on new challenges related to food

Moving to a Strategic Approach to City Food Policy

Working with Brighton & Hove Food Partnership

- 3.49 On 30th Nov 2020, national awards body Sustainable Food Places announced that Brighton & Hove had become the first in the UK to win a Gold Sustainable Food Place Award. The award recognises the city's outstanding achievements on a range of key food issues. The council should work with Brighton & Hove Food Partnership to build upon the achievements of the award.
- 3.50 There is an opportunity to develop a city and city region wide strategy approach to food – including working with the Food Partnership on the review of the

Brighton & Hove Food Strategy 2018-23. The funding for Brighton & Hove Food Partnership to work on the Food Strategy comes to an end in June 21. The council will work with BHFP to recommend and find resource for this work.

- 3.51 The city's Food Strategy Action Plan takes a preventative approach to food insecurity, addressing the underlying causes of food poverty and looking beyond food to issues such as employment, benefits, and housing and fuel costs. The recommendations in it are to:
- Take action on low wages, insecure employment and housing crisis
 - Help maximise the income of those at risk of Food Poverty
 - Involve people with first-hand experience of food poverty in designing responses to it
 - Ensure the limited support available is targeted at the most vulnerable

Supporting the development of the City Downland Whole Estate Plan

- 3.52 The Council owns 11,000 acres of land of which 4400 acres is farmland (most of this is within the South Downs National Park). There may be scope to move land into sustainable food production or have mixed use i.e., food production and housing or recreation.

The Council is currently developing a new City Downland Estate Plan which should consider food production and security, public access, biodiversity and action to enhance ecosystems services.

Developing a secure resilient and sustainable food economy across the Greater Brighton city region

- 3.52 The city cannot look on its food economy in isolation as the city's boundaries make little sense when you consider food production and distribution. Working across the Greater Brighton City Region will include working more closely with our neighbouring councils, other local Food Partnerships the South Downs National Park, The Living Coast UNESCO Biosphere and national food policy organisations.
- 3.53 It is proposed that work commence on scoping a Greater Brighton / city region approach to food economy, security and resilience by creating a Greater Brighton Food Strategy following the tenets of the city's Food Strategy:
- Promote and celebrate good food
 - Increase the visibility and accessibility of healthy and sustainable food in the city
 - Foster a vibrant independent food sector.
 - Put good food at the heart of the city's tourism offer
 - Food industry employers commit to the Living Wage and fair working conditions.
 - Promote food as a career
 - Mainstream food businesses maintain healthy, sustainable and fair practices
- 3.54 This work will also include crisis planning and city-wide food security and resilience planning. For example, Brexit impacts, Climate Change, epidemics, flooding and other extreme weather events.

- 3.55 Look at land and environment management to:
- Take a holistic approach to improve sustainability and security in food production across the urban, rural and marine environments.
 - Consider food, agriculture and land use as part of the plan to transition the city to carbon neutral by 2030

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Further research and work are required to consider the most sustainable model for supporting the Emergency Food providers in the short-term whilst ensuring we are working on viable solutions to household poverty and financial inclusion in the long-term.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The information provided in this report is devised in partnership with Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (BHFP). BHFP hold monthly Emergency Food Network meetings (usually attended by between 15 - 28 people) and monthly affordable food pilot meetings (usually attended by between 8 - 16 people) where organisations bring ideas, issues and concerns to the attention of the group. This information is fed back into the monthly Food Cell meetings, who aim to address some of the issues and feedback to the networks.
- 5.2 Brighton & Hove Food Partnership undertake an annual survey of the Emergency Food Providers, this was completed in July 2020. Additionally, in August 2020 BHFP surveyed 230 people who self-identified as struggling to afford food. This survey went out through the Community Hub, Food Banks and via social media. <https://bhfood.org.uk/resources-archive/reports/>

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 A significant and complex voluntary network of emergency food providers has emerged over the last 10 years. The number of providers and demands upon this network have increased significantly as result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. They will need ongoing support and resources whilst the demand is high.
- 6.2 There are a number of models which might support the emergency food network to operate on a more sustainable footing in the short term. All these of come at significant financial cost to the council. There is need for further work before conclusions as to the best operating model can be recommended to the committee. The Brighton & Hove Food Partnership are undertaking some research which will support this further work which will be undertaken by the Food Policy Officer and reported back to committee.
- 6.3 Whilst there is a need to support the food network in the short term, the medium and long-term aim should be to reach a position whereby emergency food provision is not needed in the city. We therefore need to be careful about not creating a system that embeds emergency provision in the city when in the longer term the approach should be a more preventative approach to tackling poverty and financial exclusion. Key to this is supporting economic and community recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and lobbying government to

ensure that the provision of welfare, employment and skills is sufficient to prevent the need for emergency food provision

- 6.4 There is also a longer-term opportunity to develop a strategic approach to Food policy across the city and city region which builds upon city's recent award as a Gold Sustainable Food Place. There is an opportunity to consider this strategy approach to sustainable food economy, security and resilience through the Greater Brighton Economic Board, the work taking place to promote a circular economy and transition the city to Carbon Neutral, and the emerging work on the City's Downland Estate Plan.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The report sets out a range of options for paying or funding food hub volunteers which requires further analysis. There is no budget provision for any of the options considered and therefore if any proposals were to be taken forward, resources would need to be identified and approved through Policy & resources Committee.

Finance Officer Consulted: James Hengeveld

Date: 19/02/21

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 As set out in the report, any future proposals which involved commissioning of services would need to be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Contract Standing Orders and Public Procurement Regulations.

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert

Date: 19/02/21

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 All people should have access to food that provides sufficient calories and nutrients to promote good health. Food poverty is a key symptom of inequality and key groups affected are those in low income work, single parent households. Funding food for the emergency food network provides a short-term solution to food poverty exacerbated by COVID19 while longer term community recovery plans are developed and while the risk of COVID remains.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 None identified directly from this report. The work of the Food Policy Coordinator into the future will consider significant sustainability issues around food growing and agriculture.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.5 None directly identified, though the impacts of Covid-19 and any potential impacts arising from Brexit on the food economy need to be considered together very closely when planning for ensuring supply to all of the city's communities.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. List of Emergency Food providers

Appendix 1: List of Emergency Food providers

List of Food Banks and Food Hubs (30)

- Brighton Food Bank
- Salvation Army Food Bank – Hove
- Salvation Army Food Bank – Central (new 20)
- The Purple People Kitchen Food Bank – Portslade
- Hangleton Food Bank
- Craven Vale Food Bank
- Whitehawk Food Bank (Trussell Trust)
- Bevendean Food Bank
- Mutual Aid Vegan Food Bank
- Voices in Exile Food Bank - migrants and refugees
- Brighton Women's Centre (closed & reopened in 21)
- Cornerstone Community Centre (new 21 pop-up)
- Fresh Start Community Association
- Brighton Table Tennis Club (new 20)
- Phoenix Community Centre (new 20 moving to a food coop model)
- Saltdean Community Hall (new 20)
- Coldean St Mary Magdalen Church Hall Coldean (new 20)
- The Carers Centre - unpaid family carers
- BMECP Centre (new 20)
- Brighton Cauldron (new 20)
- Sussex Homeless Support (meals as well)
- Woodingdean Food bank (new 20)
- St Matthias Church Hollingdean (Trussell Trust new 21)
- Weald Community Fridge (new 20)
- Balfour Mutual Aid Food Bank (new 20)
- Holland Road Food Bank
- Emmanuel Church – setting up at the Clarendon Centre (new Feb/Mar 21)
- BHCC Children's centres Food banks x 3

Food Co-op or other model (10)

- Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project (BUCFP)
- The Gathering Place (Hollingbury) (also parcels)
- Pankhurst Community Pantry
- Old Boat Community Centre (Community Fridge – Hollingbury)
- Moulsecoomb Community Market
- Brighton Grub Hub (Delivers)
- BrightStore – Hollingdean
- BrightStore – Hove
- Very Local Food Hubs
- Chomp (families across city)

Community Meals (11)

- Real Junk Food Project - food parcels and meals
- East Brighton Food Coop

- Hove Luncheon Club - Food and Friendship
- Feedback Kitchen at - Bristol Estate
- The Bevy and the Food Factory based at BACA
- Hollingdean - World Food Project
- Momma Cherri working with the Starr Project
- Edd Heller
- Lunch Positive - people living with HIV and their carers
- St Anne's Centre
- Exeter Street Hall