

Report to Scrutiny Commission  
Neighbourhood Scrutiny & Community  
Involvement Commission



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***The City's Emergency Food Bank  
Briefing Report***

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Date of Commission meeting: 6 July 2016

Lead director: Alison Greenhill

## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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### 1. Purpose of the report

**1.1** The purpose of the report is to provide an overview and brief history of the Council funded Food Bank provision and forthcoming developments for the Emergency Food provision in the City for Neighbourhood Scrutiny & Community Involvement Commission (NSCIC).

### 2. Summary

**2.1** The Council's Food Bank was facilitated by Leicester Charity Link (LCL) under a waiver to procurement since April 2013. Action Homeless is now providing this service from 1 June 2016 following a recently concluded (27 April 2016) full market procurement process, whose main aim is to develop the current operation to a fully self-sustaining emergency food provision model over the next five years.

The Food Bank landscape across the city is quite unique to Leicester. It comprises currently 21 independently run Food Banks not including our own. A map showing their distribution across the city is Appendix C. These are mainly faith or charitable third sector organisations which are self-funded. Action Homeless facilitate and chairs the Leicester City Emergency Food Partnership formerly known as the Emergency Food Network group. The partnership is comprised of a number of the food banks and Terms of Reference is closely aligned to the objectives set out within the Council's Food Plan to ensure cohesion and monitoring in terms of wider strategic, and medium range objectives and aims. It is important to point out that the partners are self-funded. This report concerns itself with the City Council's Emergency Food provision only.

For more information on the wider emergency food provision in the City, the council has previously presented to the NSCIC two reports, they can be found here:  
<http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/documents/s62717/NISC%20Emergency%20food%20aid%20breifing%209APRIL14%20v4.pdf>

<http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/documents/s62718/Emergency%20food%20report%20%20Appendix%20A%20March14.pdf>

<http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/documents/s71490/Emergency%20Food%20Use%20in%20the%20City%20-%20Annual%20Update.pdf>

**2.2** Information is also provided regarding the newly formed Leicester City Emergency Food Partnership, highlighting current concerns and areas of development. The Partnership is in an early phase formative process (Appendix A).

**2.3** The updated Emergency Food Use Action Plan is detailed in (Appendix B).

### **3. Recommendations**

3.1 To note and comment on the impacts and trends highlighted in the report.

3.2 To note and comment on findings and the updated food action plan as appropriate.

### **4. Report and supporting information**

#### **Local Welfare Provision: background**

4.1 In April 2013, the Welfare Reform Act 2012 devolved funding previously within the central government Social Fund, paid as Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans, for administration by local government. The Council received £1.6m in a two year limited funding in respect of both 2013/14 and 2014/15, initially setting up a welfare assistance pilot named the Community Support Grant scheme (CSG). Early partners supporting this scheme were Leicester Charity Link (LCL), providing a five day a week emergency food provision, white goods, furniture, carpets, furnishing and Wilkinson's vouchers on referral from the CSG team, and from September 2013 the Pass-It-On (now The Furniture Bank) scheme run by Waste Management, providing recycled second-hand furniture and supplemented where needed by new furniture purchase through LCL. Access to food parcels is and continues to be solely through direct referral.

4.2 A procurement exercise later the same year was unsuccessful in identifying a successful bidder for the whole range of Welfare Provision services required. Leicester Charity Link therefore continued to provide these services on a waiver basis from inception of the Welfare Provision scheme in April 2013 to date. In December 2013, the Council were notified that after 2014/15, dedicated funding would not continue and would instead be absorbed into general funds, and subsequently cut.

#### **4.3 Key dates:**

1 June 2013 LCL food bank started on a price per food parcel basis.

31 August 2014 the administrative cost of £4.50 per parcel of food stopped and was replaced with a perceived more cost-effective fixed cost model. The fixed cost model was expected to be more cost-effective based on projected increases in demand from the impacts of Welfare Reform.

1 January 2015 LCC funded a co-ordinator post to deliver the objectives to move to greater stability and to act as the lead for the city-wide Emergency Food Network. (incepted as a Partnership in February 2016).

As the provision was rolled out it became apparent to the council that the demand in the City was unknown and we undertook an exercise to map provision, understand the gaps in provision and assist with mitigation. We refer to the two reports in 2.1.

#### **The Leicester City Food Bank: current position**

4.4 Leicester Charity Link (to 30 May 2016) supplied approximately 800 one day supply food parcels and 2,200 3 day supply food parcels per year, at a cost of approximately £50,000 per annum, plus capital projects such as the Holiday Hunger

project of approximately £30,000. An informal audit conducted in late 2015 identified that 70% of food bank awards made, were referrals from organisations other than the Council and did not necessarily meet the CSG policy eligibility criteria. Consequently, we wrote to LCL and instructed that all referrals from this point were made through the Council's scheme only. Recognising the impact this decision would have on the sector, the Council ensured face-to-face access to the provision from key advice partners like Supporting Tenants and Residents (STAR), Community Law and Advice Services (CALs), The Bridge (From Homeless to Home Project) and Citizens Advice LeicesterShire (CA L).

**4.5** Partner organisations under Service Level Agreements (SLAs) had throughout the life of the scheme been able to refer under CSG policy for Food Vouchers. In January 2016 the Co-Op withdrew its offer to supply vouchers stamped 'no alcohol and tobacco'. As a result of these changes, an interim support mechanism was defined for these partner organisations (STAR, Community Advice and Law Service (CALs), Citizens Advice LeicesterShire (CA L) and The Bridge (From Homeless to Home Project) agreed to wind down their supply of existing food vouchers and ultimately cease distribution of vouchers in favour of referring directly to the City Food Bank operated by LCL utilising the CSG policy eligibility criteria. This decision is being monitored to ensure that referrals are being made and alternative support is straight forward to access and administer.

**4.6** Agreed changes in the CSG policy to allow those customers who have been adversely affected by the Department for Works and Pension (DWP) delays in the appeal process for Disability Living Allowance (DLA)/Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and the changes to the new immigration law around the Genuine Prospect of Work (GPOW) test shortcomings came into effect in 2015. GPOW greatly impacted European Union residents living in Leicester who suddenly lost their benefits if they had been unemployed for two years or more. In addition, these customers were greatly impacted by difficult and lengthy appeal processes. The CSG policy shortcomings for these vulnerable residents were addressed to prevent 'excluded persons' were being excluded from support where worker status had yet to be determined. Agreement was reached to provide for a one day food parcel to ease immediate need coupled with necessary advice and signposting.

**4.7** Through the latest annual update on emergency food use in the city, it was identified that in addition to meeting the immediate crisis for food or fuel, applicants face in a majority of cases, the need for financial and/or social welfare advice. A further Cooking and Skills survey highlighted that 50% of customers presenting at the food bank had been either sanctioned or affected by the GPOW test and it was recommended we test the gap analysis results. To prove proof of concept, a pilot was operated at the food bank to test the requirement for advice support. Recipients of a one day food parcel were offered an appointment with CA L. CA L sought to support those excluded through the GPOW test to appeal. This pilot has been hugely successful.

**4.8** Further training on immigration status has been provided to all CSG call handlers to ensure that anyone affected by these tests are fully supported.

**4.9** The pilot described in 4.7 has revealed 50% of customers offered a one day food parcel attend a mandatory advice appointment. Of those that attended, all have been supported fully and customers do not return for further assistance. Of those that fail to

attend, if re-approached for food, we do not give them a food parcel until they attend the support appointment. This is called a hard stop approach. 20% of people re-approach the scheme. Of those 20%, 18% are successfully supported and the need for a repeat return for support has been removed. The length of support given in all instances is decided on a case-by-case basis, to support the customer through their particular crisis. Customers were given support ranging from:

- signposting to the DWP for a Short Term Benefit Advance or Universal Advance of benefit while waiting for benefits to be assessed (most prevalent reason for crisis support (70% of customers);
- maximisation of benefit entitlement;
- personal budgeting support;
- financial capability assessment;
- support to apply to utility companies to access hardship grants;
- provision of extra food support and fuel voucher while a complex 'genuine prospect of work' case was awaiting appeal.
- complex debt advice resulting in specialist insolvency advice;
- mandatory reconsideration support for a refused DWP disability income benefit (ESA) and support with authorisation for the DWP to use his medical notes.

### **CASE STUDY**

*A customer called CSG Service to request crisis support for food and gas/electricity. The crisis that has presented itself to Customer A was that her partner had moved in with her and her main income benefit: Employment Support Allowance (ESA) had ceased.*

*It could not be established whether the customer had been sanctioned or benefit actually ceased. The customer was not sure if they had applied for a hardship or Short Term Benefit Advance (STBA) payment from the DWP.*

*A Citizens Advice (CA) appointment was booked for 4 April 2016 and a initial one day food parcel was awarded. The customer was seen at an outreach appointment for 20 minutes to establish their circumstances. It was established that the customer's partner had moved into the property and benefits had ceased. This resulted in the customer not being eligible able to claim for STBA. It was also established that both the customer and her partner had severe debt issues with a gas bill from a previously shared accommodation resulting in a £1933 debt. To alleviate the current crisis, CA awarded the customer a 14 days food parcel.*

*The customer was then referred to Tier 2 advice with casework at CA. The customer was fully supported in challenging the decision from EON to pay the fuel bill in full. Support was given to gain funding to remove the debt from EON's hardship fund for vulnerable customers. As the couple's main income (ESA) had ceased, the customer was also given Tier 2 advice with casework support for their joint ESA application. A reconsideration of the decision to cease benefit was also submitted due to complications with their joint ESA claim. The customer and partner received an award notification within 10 days of the reconsideration request. Thereafter, CA supported Customer A in successfully applying for STBA, followed by further debt advice. The customer received 16 days of crisis food support in total, their main income has been re-established, their immediate debt crisis is over and they have a programme in place to repay their other debts in an affordable and fully managed manner.*

### **Procurement and future options**

**4.10** A successful 2016/17 procurement exercise to tender the emergency food provision from 1 June 2016 resulted in Action Homeless winning this contract.

**4.11** The procurement is expected to deliver best value for the Council along with a stipulated number of SMART objectives aimed at total sustainability for the emergency food provision over a five year period. This safeguards emergency provision for vulnerable customers in need in the future and meets the Council's Food Plan objectives of alleviating food poverty whilst seeking to influence the underlying causes.

**4.12** The Council will through the City's newly established Emergency Food Partnership consider best practice across the City. Through the Emergency Food Partnership we are beginning to shape food sharing and distribution issues, eligibility and coming together to shape a future sustainable emergency food model.

**4.13** With regard to provision, tenders were encouraged from charitable and third sector organisations, with interest being shown from a variety of local organisations.

**4.14** The longer term vision for total self-sustainability will be based on national market trends and developments in the food bank arena (of which we are a member of the National Emergency Food Partnership).

A full feasibility study towards how we meet the Council's objective towards a fully sustainable scheme will be undertaken by Action Homeless in liaison with MBA students at Loughborough University.

Action Homeless will also investigate Big lottery and other funding streams to provide capital for this 5-year aim.

A new scheme that has been hugely successful in Sheffield and London is the 'Community Shop' model and we have been closely watching their development.

This 100% sustainable option is work in progress; however, we favour initiatives such as community supermarkets/cafés with an advice provision operated in the community by volunteers and run by their own board of trustees.

This vision would involve the partnership agreeing to change the landscape of emergency food banks in the City to one of sustainable community supermarket/cafés with advice being central to their provision and the council supporting this initiative from concept to fruition.

It is a key element of the Action Plan that food banks move away from dependency into community involvement. Funding for future projects could therefore be based on potentially initial capital investment (through funding bids or combined with council support) with a self-sustaining business model.

**4.15** The image below shows Britain's first Community Supermarket, Lambeth, London.



An extract from the launch publicity for the Community Supermarket, Lambeth, London:

*Britain's first "community supermarket" opens for business today in Lambeth, London, allowing hundreds of struggling families to buy surplus food donated by shops including Marks & Spencer and Ocado at 70 per cent discount – with 20 more planned across the country.*

*The Community Shop, in Lambeth, south London, will sell low-cost, high-quality surplus food to residents on income support while helping them back into work.*

*The store will work on a membership basis, with 750 members who must live locally and be on income support. They must also enrol on a tailored professional development programme – called The Success Plan – which aims to improve their confidence and help them find jobs.*

*The scheme, the first of its kind in the UK, was backed by the former Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. The food donated by supermarkets – which may have been over-ordered, mislabelled, or come in damaged packaging – may otherwise have gone to landfill or been fed to animals.*

**4.16** The Council hosted an Emergency Food Network to Partnership event on 22 February 2016, and will continue to engage as an emergency food stakeholder.

The Network agreed to become a Partnership and the first meeting took place in May 2016.

Sustainable food collection remains a major issue, and three food banks are due to close in the new financial year due to lack of funding.

Key points raised at the recent event for resolution were:

- Most food providers asked for or would like a list of other food providers to be in contact with. There were suggestions on setting up a social media group so that the food providers could be in contact;
- Many believed a central resource would be incredibly useful, particularly to reduce competitiveness between foodbanks. This would also help prevent the situation where one foodbank has a surplus of a particular food and another has a shortage;
- Volunteer retention was a worry for some groups;
- Lack of provision of other items such as toiletries, sanitary items etc. available to foodbanks;
- For those organisations dealing with referrals, the referral process could be potentially streamlined and/or the eligibility criteria equalised;
- Fraud/misuse an issue, but this is balanced against the need to reduce stigma and thus provide access to those that need it;
- Over-regulation is not preferable and the foodbanks were keen to preserve their individual identity however were keen to work to greater sustainability;
- Advice seen as an integral part of foodbank operation for many attendees;
- Need for nutritious foods, and the potential of collective power of foodbanks to ask for specific items rather than be given unwanted items.
- Need for greater central sharing and distribution of food.

The council will continue to work with Action Homeless who chaired the first Partnership meeting to support key emergency food partners to resolve these issues.

**4.17** The Food Plan Project Manager is developing a Food Strategy for the city that links the above to the Food Plan and the Poverty agenda.

## **5. Financial, legal and other implications**

### 5.1 Financial implications

There are no financial implications for the City Council arising directly from this report.



However, any specific proposed initiatives that might arise would need to be properly costed and resourced.

Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext. 37 4081

## 5.2 Legal implications

Although, the provision of food bank and furniture re-use programme is not a statutory obligation, the client department conducted a successful pilot of the food bank and furniture re-use programme.

Section 1 (1) of the Localism Act 2011 gives a general power of competence for the Council to provide these services.

The provision of services will in need to be in keeping with any other applicable statutory legislation. The client department will need to procure the services in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. It is also pertinent to note that there could be potential TUPE transfer of service provider's staff engaged in the provision of the pilot schemes to the new provider. Legal advice has been sought for the provision of Food Bank Services.

Padma Srinivasan, Principal Solicitor (Commercial), ext. 37 1442

## 5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

Where food is landfilled, the decomposition process leads to methane being generated – which is a powerful 'greenhouse gas'. Therefore, where the goal of alleviating food poverty is successfully combined with reducing food waste, there could be positive implications for preventing climate change. An example of this is the use of surplus food supplied by supermarkets to food banks that would otherwise have been sent to landfill. Support to develop the partnership and expand the provision of surplus food will therefore reduce emissions and benefit the environment.

Louise Buckley, Senior Environmental Consultant, 37 2293

## 5.4 Equalities Implications

The 2015 index of multiple deprivation states that Leicester is the 21st most deprived local authority in the country, and that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of its population live in the what are considered to be some of the most deprived areas in England. The ongoing impact of the recession of a low wage economy and the impact of the Government's welfare reforms have resulted in substantial financial pressures for many struggling households with the resulting demand on the city's food banks. Need for emergency food supplies will likely be a constant one as there is no indication of the current economic climate improving. The council's support of the establishment of the Leicester City Emergency Food Partnership enables a strategic view to be taken of

how best to support and distribute this invaluable resource. The aims of the action plan are in keeping with our Public Sector Equality Duty. Understanding the supply and demand for emergency food enables us to determine equity of provision and assurance that there is no discrimination in its access. The provision of emergency food relief promotes equality of opportunity in providing nutrition, one of the core basic needs facing all of us, particularly important for young children in their development. Access to food banks in community venues and the community's support of the work of food banks through donations and volunteering, are excellent examples of how activities can, in and of themselves, foster good relations between different groups.

Irene Kszyk, Corporate Equalities Lead, ext. 374147

### 5.5 Other Implications

None

### **6. Background information and other papers:**

Food Banks & Food Poverty, Parliamentary Working Group, April 2014

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06657/SN06657.pdf>

Building a Strong Future for our City: Labour's Manifesto for Leicester 2015

<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/180397/labour-manifesto-2015.pdf>

Community Support Grant Policy

<http://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/89672/community-support-grant-policy-2015-18.pdf>

### **7. Summary of appendices:**

Appendix A: Emergency Food Action Plan

Appendix B: Event notes and feedback report from 22 February 2016 Emergency Food Forum

Appendix C: Emergency food mapping versus areas of deprivation

### **8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?**

No

### **9. Is this a "key decision"?**

No