

This guidance is to assist local authorities to provide support to those otherwise unable to access food as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic using resources from the Food Fund, announced on 18th March 2020.

The guidance sets out background on key issues, people and communities at risk and the food funding package. It then provides guiding principles for putting responses in place and details reporting requirements. Annexes give further detail on individuals and communities at risk, community food infrastructure and public health advice.

Local authorities have flexibility in terms of how they choose to use the funding being provided – an initial £30m to support free school meal provision and people and communities at risk (non-shielded). This guidance is intended to support local partners in ensuring effective planning and delivery.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional barriers to accessing food for some households.

Food delivery is a key challenge. More people are relying on home delivery services in order to minimise social contact. This is particularly important for those who are at high risk and are required to stay at home. Demand has placed considerable pressure on these services. Some who live far from food retailers and do not have access to transport may be impacted by this too.

Many will have experienced worry about their income whilst non-essential sectors have needed to close. Most will be supported through UK-wide income protection programmes and social security entitlements, though some may need more immediate financial support. Some people who were already struggling with their income may have limited food reserved for longer periods of isolation.

Community food providers and food banks may be a source of food for some low income households, but these may not be able to operate a normal service at the current time.

Although there is no overall shortage of food and the sector has provided assurances that there will continue to be an equitable supply across Scotland, food is a key concern for households across the country.

The Food Fund

On 18 March, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government announced a £350 million package to support communities affected by COVID-19. <https://www.gov.scot/news/helping-communities-affected-by-covid-19/>

This includes a £70 million Food Fund to put in place support for those who would otherwise be unable to access food through the usual routes.

- £30m of the Food Fund is initially being made available to local authorities for structured public sector responses working with local resilience partnerships to support households who may experience barriers in accessing food. The response will likely need to involve a combination of support to access income and the provision of food. This will be kept under review to ascertain whether additional resource is required.
- Up to £30m has been set aside for a nationally procured programme to deliver food for those who are unable to leave their homes due to being at highest clinical risk, known as the shielded group.
- £10 million has been set aside for investment in third sector organisations that are responding to food insecurity both at a national and local level

Further investment has been made to complement this, including more than doubling the Scottish Welfare Fund and direct investment in community organisations. Further detail on funding for community groups is available at Annex B, and information on the Scottish Welfare Fund is available at: <https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund/apply-or-track-your-application/>

Allocation formulae for £30m of this investment, aimed at Free School Meal provision and non-shielded people at risk, have now been agreed with COSLA for distribution to local authorities.

Local partners

In order to reach the people most at risk, action will need to be coordinated by local authorities, usually via local resilience partnerships, and should involve people from all sectors, including community food organisations and local businesses. These sectors are collectively referred to as *local partners* in this guidance.

Households who may experience barriers in accessing food

Health barriers

- Those who are clinically at high risk and are required to stay at home, known as the shielded group.
- Those who have COVID-19 symptoms, or live with someone with symptoms, and are required to stay at home temporarily.
- Those who are vulnerable and are required to be particularly stringent in following social distancing. This includes people over 70 years old, those with a long-term health condition¹ (including chronic neurological conditions such as a learning disability), people who are pregnant and those who have a weakened immune system – including people who receive the flu jab for medical reasons.

Socio-economic barriers

- Those who are financially at risk, including families whose children are eligible for Free School Meals, low income households and those who have recently lost employment.
- Those who are marginalised, may have complex needs and may be less engaged with public services, including people who are homeless, those with substance dependencies, those with existing mental health problems, victims of domestic abuse, refugees, Asylum Seekers, those with No Recourse to Public Funds, Gypsy / Traveller Communities and minority ethnic communities. Thought should also be given to access to transport.

Some households may fall within multiple categories, further advice is provided in Annex A.

¹ Further advice on long-term health conditions available at: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing>

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A series of guiding principles has been developed to support local thinking about how funding can best be targeted and deployed. These principles are as follows:

- **Local flexibility** – a single response is unlikely to meet the varied needs as set out above. Local partners should be flexible and consider multiple approaches. It is advised that local authorities provide a clear contact point so that members of the public are able to self-identify as being in need of assistance.
- **Partnership working** – collaborative working across all sectors will be needed to avoid the duplication of effort and to meet demand. This will be key to supporting people who may not have engaged with statutory or community services before. Further information on community food organisations is available at Annex B.
- **Home delivery** – those who are unable to physically access food retailers will need supplies delivered to them. Local partners should consider ways of boosting the capacity of retail home delivery services.
- **Financial support** – consider cash or vouchers where practical for those that are financially struggling. Providing cash or vouchers may reduce pressure on the wider local partner response. It will be for local authorities to decide the suitability or otherwise of this approach in their communities, and together with community organisations make crisis support payments and determine need, taking a pragmatic approach.

The Department for Work and Pensions has advised that local welfare provision - such as financial and in-kind payments made by the local authority to help meet an immediate short term need arising out of an exceptional event or exceptional circumstances, and that requires to be met to avoid a risk to the well-being of an individual - will be disregarded when it comes to benefits. This means that a crisis cash payment, voucher or card provided by a local authority should not affect social security entitlement under the current circumstances.

Financial or other support made by third sector organisations is unlikely to affect entitlement except in the very unlikely event that these were accumulated (i.e. in the form of capital sums).

- **Dietary needs** - when designing local food provision, care should be taken to consider nutritional value, dietary requirements and the cultural appropriateness of food provided. Food Standards Scotland can be contacted for advice on locally-designed food provision to ascertain that this is broadly in line with the Eatwell Guide recommendations: dietpolicy@fss.scot
- **Whole household, whole need responses** – rather than targeting support at individuals, the needs of the whole household should be considered. This should consider the other essentials that may be required and for which support is offered through existing schemes such as fuel cards, period products, or social contact that respects social distancing guidelines.

This is an emergency situation but local partners will wish to ensure as far as possible that decisions taken in the coming weeks promote the dignity and choice of everyone in affected households. This is a key mechanism for upholding high standards of care.

Bringing community food organisations in to delivery can provide a range of benefits and enhance reach. Community food organisations are often vital sources of social contact and can still provide virtual support. Nourish Scotland and the Dignity Peer Network have produced advice on how to maintain dignity in community food provision: www.nourishscotland.org/projects/dignity/

Reporting

Reporting will help the Scottish Government to monitor delivery across the country, understand the need and direct timely support to local areas. As noted, councils have flexibility in how they use the funding provided to meet essential food needs.

A short form to be completed monthly will be circulated separately. Local authorities are asked to provide information across the following 3 headings.

- Key activities delivered
- Estimated need and reach of these activities
- Key challenges

ANNEX A: Further detail by risk group

People who are clinically at high risk (shielded group)

People within this category are being asked to stringently self-isolate and, where they do not have support available from family or friends, will need a comprehensive package of care covering groceries and medicines.

A national programme is underway to deliver a weekly grocery box directly to people's homes, for 12 weeks initially. **It is therefore not intended that this group is the focus of a direct Food Fund allocation. However, some parcels will be supplied on request to local authorities to meet any missed need.**

There are estimated to be around 120,000 people in Scotland who are clinically at risk, including people who are actively undergoing chemotherapy and those with severe chest conditions. Further advice on people clinically at high risk is available: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding>

People with COVID-19 symptoms or living with someone with symptoms

People with symptoms will be required to self-isolate for at least 7 days, and those who live with someone with symptoms will be required to self-isolate for at least 14 days. Where they do not have support available from family or friends and are not able to access retail home delivery, they may need support to access food.

Local partners can use resource from their Food Fund allocation to put in place a structured approach to reach people in this group.

Vulnerable: People over 70 years old, those with a long-term health condition (including chronic neurological conditions), pregnant people, and those with a weakened immune system – including people who receive the flu jab

People within these categories are required to be particularly stringent in following public health guidance on social distancing but are permitted to leave home in limited circumstances. Some people will be unable to leave home, and may not have support available from family or friends and may need a comprehensive package of care covering not just medicines and in some cases wider social care, but also food.

Local partners can use resource from their Food Fund allocation to put in place a structured approach to reach people in this group to ensure food is part of the wider package of care that has been put in place.

Partners will be able to identify people through existing systems, including health and social care, and housing data. For effective reach it is advised that this is supplemented by intelligence from community organisations, for example using befriending networks to help identify older people who may be socially isolated.

Further advice on vulnerable people is available:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing>

Financially at risk households

This includes families whose children are eligible for Free School Meals, low income households, those who have recently lost employment, people who are less engaged with services and those with complex needs.

Local partners may use resource from their Food Fund allocation to support households that are financially at risk, including to ensure continued provision of Free School Meals to all eligible children and young people.

The priority for people in this category is to increase income so that they are able to purchase food through the normal routes, although some will also need assistance in obtaining food.

One way of reaching at risk households will be through families whose children are eligible for Free School Meals. This should include children eligible for free school meals in P1-3 based on financial measures, it is not intended to include the universal P1-P3 cohort. To identify eligible families local authorities can consider using school clothing grant data. A number of options for adapting Free School Meal provision have been suggested in Guidance on Supporting Vulnerable Children. This includes but is not limited to providing food vouchers or cash payments, continuing to use school catering facilities, and delivery of food items. A whole household approach to support should be considered.

In a number of local authorities, the eligibility criteria for school clothing grants matches or exceeds free school meals, grants are issued to bank accounts and could provide a ready-made system to distribute cash payments effectively.

Marginalised households

It is advised that local authorities assess what action is needed to maintain the wellbeing of people who are less engaged with services and those with complex needs, bearing in mind that needs will vary significantly across communities. For example, some communities may be less able to order online food deliveries for a variety of reasons including having no wifi or limited data, no access to smart phones or tablets, and less confidence in using digital solutions.

Other barriers overlap with those living in poverty for example people who do not have banking facilities and so are unable to buy online, and those with limited income who cannot afford the minimum basket cost and delivery charges. Some people may also experience barriers in receiving food deliveries, for example Gypsy/Travellers, who report that some businesses are reluctant to make deliveries onto a site.

Local partners may use resource from their Food Fund allocation to support households that are marginalised. Community organisations that already provide support to people in this category may be well placed to provide support as part of a coordinated approach.

ANNEX B: Community Food Infrastructure

There is a well-established network of over 1000 community food organisations across Scotland. Through No Deal Brexit mitigation work we know that local authorities have worked closely with community food organisations and national stakeholders like FareShare to ensure a coordinated approach to food provision and links to wider support.

Local partners will be aware of community organisations providing food in their area, including food banks and other parcel providers, and those providing shared meals. Many have already adapted their approach to focus on home delivery or collection.

FareShare

FareShare is a charity and strategic national partner that distributes surplus and donated food from the food industry to community organisations. They operate from four regional depots and have considerable reach, supporting organisations in every local authority area. Contact details are provided below. The Scottish Government has provided FareShare with additional funding to purchase and distribute additional food to organisations responding to food insecurity without membership charge. This provision can complement but should not replace structured public sector responses.

Other national investments to support specific groups:

The Food Train

The Food Train aims to prevent older people from becoming malnourished, including through the delivery of groceries. This is a paid service and the people receiving the food deliveries pay a subscription to cover the cost of the food and its delivery. The Food Train may also be well placed to provide advice on reaching older people.

Social Bite

Social Bite is a social business with cafes in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen which supports people experiencing homelessness, they are providing lunch bags to people in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Independent Funders

- Provision for of up to £1 million of funding initially from the Food Fund to support the community food network via a coalition of independent funders led by SCVO to ensure reach across the country. Details will be accessible via <https://scvo.org.uk/support/coronavirus/funding/for-organisations/scottish-government> in due course.
- Cash for Kids provide funding to community organisations that work with children and families facing disadvantage. SG funding will support Cash for Kids to provide vouchers for families struggling to cover costs of food and fuel.

Other Scottish Government Funds

- The Third Sector Resilience Fund to support organisations that already deliver services and find themselves in financial difficulty as a result of COVID-19: <https://scvo.org.uk/support/coronavirus/funding/for-organisations/third-sector-resilience-fund>
- The Supporting Communities Fund will support small scale community resilience activity. The Wellbeing Fund will enable national and local action. Details will be accessible via <https://scvo.org.uk/support/coronavirus/funding/for-organisations/scottish-government> in due course.

Other resources

Local partners may want to consider wider assets in designing structured responses, including employees in the transport sector, Community Learning and Development staff with significant reach in to communities, and cleaning staff.

FareShare contact

Depot	Contacts	Email	Address	Local Authority area covered
Tayside and Fife (Transform)	Simon Laidlaw, David Nicholl	Slaidlaw@transformcd.org ; Dnicol@transformcd.org	95-99 Douglas Street, Dundee, DD1 5AG Tel. 01382 224 966	Fife, Dundee, Angus, Clackmannanshire, Perth and Kinross
Central and Edinburgh (Cyrenians)	Neil Hay	NeilHay@cyrenians.scot ;	84 - 86 Jane Street, Edinburgh EH6 5HG Tel. 0131 554 3900	Edinburgh, Scottish Borders, Midlothian, East Lothian, Falkirk, West Lothian, Stirling
Glasgow (MoveOn)	Jim Burns	Jim@moveon.org.uk ;	1070 South Street, Glasgow, G14 0AP Tel. 0141 958 1133	Glasgow, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire, Dumfries and Galloway
Grampian (CFINE)	Graeme Robbie, Dave Kilgour	GRobbie@cfine.org ; Dkilgour@cfine.org	4 Poynerook Road, Aberdeen, AB11 5RW Tel. 01224 596 156	Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Western Isles, Orkney, Shetland, Highland, Moray

ANNEX C: Public health advice and resources

For the most up to date health advice please visit NHS Inform at www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

Further guidance is available from Health Protection Scotland at: www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/covid-19

A coronavirus communication toolkit, including posters and social media posts for organisations to print and share, is available to download: www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19#information-for-professionals

Staff, volunteer and service user safety

Local Authorities should ensure the organisations they work with have appropriate processes for safeguarding and data protection in relation to employees, volunteers and the people they are supporting.

To lower the risk of transmission and protect us all, social distancing advice should be followed at all times. This includes when working from premises:

- Provision of protective equipment and hygiene kits, including disposable gloves, fluid repellent surgical face masks, alcohol-based hand sanitisers and anti-bacteria wipes is recommended if available
- Ensuring a distance of 2 metres between staff and customers
- Letting people enter only in numbers that do not lead to crowding
- Putting in place queue control outside

When delivering food orders to people at home, advice is to leave the shopping on the door step. If this is not possible, then try to minimise the contact required to get the food into the home. For example, ask the recipient to stay in another room whilst the food is put away in the kitchen and remind everyone to regularly wash hands.

Food safety

Consider the use of food safety advice in food parcels or in delivery notices. Useful practical information that could be included within advice:

- Follow good hygiene practice at all times when handling food
- Wash hands thoroughly throughout the preparation of food, in particular after coughing or sneezing, after going to the toilet, before eating and drinking
- Hand sanitiser gels can be used in addition to hand washing but only work on clean hands. They should never be used as a substitute for hand washing.
- Try to minimise direct hand contact with food by using tongs and utensils. Disposable gloves can be used to minimise direct contact with food. However, gloves can become contaminated in the same way as hands so are not a substitute for good personal hygiene and hand washing.

Further information and guidance is available at: www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumers/food-safety/coronavirus