



## THE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE TO TACKLING FOOD POVERTY AND INSECURITY

In

**NORTH LANARKSHIRE**



**version one : august 2020**

## TACKLING FOOD POVERTY AND INSECURITY IN NORTH LANARKSHIRE

### 1. Background

In 2014 foodbanks and the number of people using them was increasing across the UK, in North Lanarkshire, the vision was to eradicate foodbanks completely, however, following our research at this time it became apparent that a number of foodbanks had been around for a considerable period of time and were embedded into community supports and structures. The foodbanks ranged from cupboards in social work offices, to faith groups and also formal established foodbanks.

Following the research and work with both the food providers and the referrers it became apparent that everyone had the same goal which was that **"No one is left without food"**, One of our key joint outcomes was to make foodbanks the last possible avenue for individuals and families. We then worked together to produce our Tackling Poverty Strategy which would aim to reduce the need for emergency food provision outlets.

There were many findings from our research, however, some of the most important key findings came from people who had lived experience of using food banks. Many people told us of the embarrassment they felt, loss of dignity and the lack of choice in relation to accessing fresh food.

The food banks themselves were key players and instrumental in providing the final part of the jigsaw in the creation of the Strategy. Foodbank providers told us that they had created a referral system as they believed that all other support avenues had been exhausted and there was no alternative routes to signpost individuals or families onto. Having this vital information, a Welfare Rights Officer (WRO) was co-located within the foodbank to offer support to individuals and families.

Once the WRO began working with individuals and families, it became apparent-87% of people supported by the WRO did not need to be there. The WRO identified shortfalls in individuals and families income and supported them to claim additional benefit as well as access crisis grants.

From our research we recognised that to be without food was to be in a crisis situation, therefore rather than accessing a foodbank they should access "crisis grants".

### 2. Purpose of this Document

During the COVID 19 pandemic, the UK Government moved to "lockdown" in March 2020, as a result of this many people and families experienced food insecurity and more organisations formed to address the need for support in their local communities.

This Guide is intended to be a live document which will grow and develop with input from all organisations providing assistance to people experiencing food poverty and insecurity.

### 3. Recent Findings

#### Survey Monkey Findings

In July 2020 the food providers across North Lanarkshire were asked to take part in a survey (a list of all participating providers is available at appendix one).

**63% of providers stated that they would provide guidance on sources of support regarding income maximisation and advice.** The providers stated;

*"we refer people to Scottish welfare fund – through the gateway"*

*“we refer on to FIT etc but we could do more or have more guidance”*

**63% of organisations said they would welcome guidance on sources of support for income maximisation and money advice.**

*“happy to receive further guidance and any information available”*

*“we would like more guidance on other income support advice.”*

In our previous research we came across a number of people who had been referred to the foodbanks without the referrer checking to see if a food parcel was given, did the person have the ability to cook it. We therefore asked in this survey if the organisations checked if the person had money for fuel to cook the food. **47% of the organisations did this.** Of those who did they told us;

*“we refer to St Vincent de Paul!*

*“we received money from a just giving page set up in the community to pay for those who need it”.*

*“we would contact our local councillor.....who would then contact the person and see how best to help them.”*

**56% of the organisations in the survey stated that they referred on to other services for the person to receive longer term supports such as income maximisation and debt advice services.**

**90% of food providers told the survey that they would welcome guidance on these issues.**

#### **4. The National Picture – The British Red Cross Findings**

The British Red Cross recently produced a paper “Access to food in emergencies learning from COVID 19”, this paper states that meeting people’s practical and emotional needs in an emergency, particularly those in the most vulnerable situations should be central to any effective crisis response. Ensuring no one goes without essentials including food because of an emergency is a critical part of that. The COVID 19 pandemic has increased food insecurity in the UK, 16.2% of adults experienced food insecurity after lockdown, compared to 7.63% in 2018. There are two main reasons for this increase in need; more people are unable to afford food because of the financial impact of COVID 19 and more people have been unable to access food because they have been shielding, unable to leave their home and unable to order food online.

Increasing numbers of people cannot afford food due to the economic impact of COVID 19 in an April 2020 survey by the Office of National Statistics 23.6% of adults reported that COVID 19 was affecting their household finances. One of the recommendations that the British Red Cross put forward was to “put in measures to tackle the longer-term causes of food insecurity to help prevent people reaching crisis point in the future. “ The Referral Gateway that we have in North Lanarkshire has been recognised by the Scottish Government, Trussel Trust, Oxfam and other local authorities as doing this.

The Gateway provides a sustainable and longer term solution to food insecurity ensuring that people have access to the drivers to tackle poverty; income maximisation, reducing the cost of living through money and debt advice services as well as immediate financial solutions with applications to the Scottish welfare fund.

## 5. The Way Forward - The Good Practice Model

The foodbanks together with the financial inclusion team, NHS Lanarkshire and other council officers produced the Food Referral Gateway in 2015. The model was quickly recognised by Oxfam – Menu For Change and the Scottish Government as good practice and Trussel Trust have recently adopted it as a model they wish to roll out across the country.

Based on the outcomes of the Survey it is apparent that there is still good practice in North Lanarkshire but we need to strengthen the model with the referrers and the providers.

The model ensures that the foodbank is the last resort for the person – this ensures that the person’s income is fully maximised, that they have had access to the Scottish welfare fund crisis grant and any debt/budgeting issues are being dealt with. The model ensures that there is no long term reliance upon foodbanks. Ultimately, this ensures that stocks of food are going to those most in need in our communities.

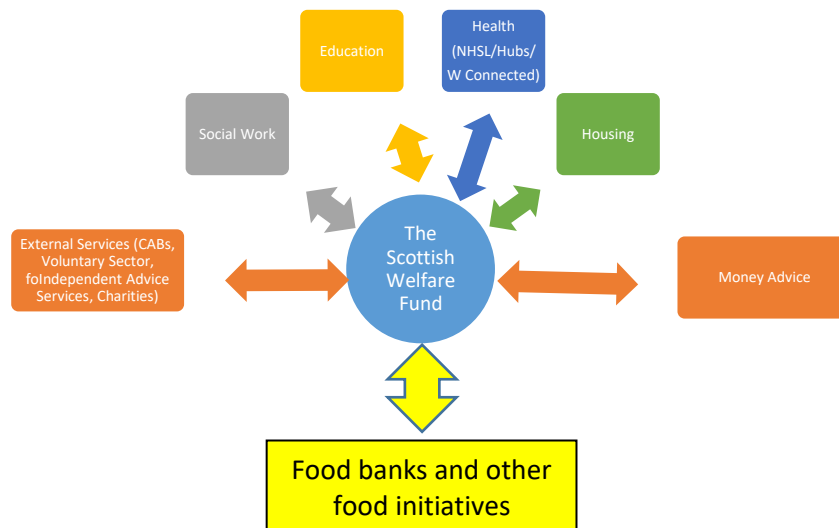
The model recognises that not all referrers will have the ability to provide the information and advice needed, therefore the Hub of the gateway is the Scottish Welfare Fund.

## 6. How To Refer Using The Model

People should be referred to the Scottish Welfare Fund by calling **(0300 555 0405)** they will be assessed for eligibility for crisis grants but they will also refer on to the necessary information and advice services.

The Scottish welfare fund will make a decision on the crisis grant award – if they are not able to award they will then refer on to the foodbank ensuring **“no one is left without food”**.

The model gives foodbanks the assurance that they are the last point of call for the person and any benefit or debt issues are being dealt with.



The model recognises, that particularly during COVID that food providers will receive self referrals and therefore builds in the ability for the food providers themselves to refer to SWF.

## 7. Making A Difference

During the COVID 19 pandemic the financial inclusion team together with the community assistance hubs, foodbanks, Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership and VANL ensured that we had put this model in place, below is just one of the examples of the people we helped during this time, but illustrates the difference using the gateway can make;

***The financial inclusion team received a referral for a 52 year old woman who hadn't received her shielding food pack and was struggling to get food. She agreed to having a benefit check as she hadn't had one before. The woman was in receipt of personal independence payment and employment and support allowance, the income maximiser identified that she had been missing a premium from her ESA which meant she had a shortfall of £66.95 per week. The income maximiser not only helped her with this but also got this backdated to when she should have been receiving this, this amounted to over £10,000.***

Since the Community Assistance Hub Help Line opened in March 2020, the team has generated over £120,000 in additional income for people phoning up for assistance with food during this pandemic.

The referral gateway ensures that people are given long term sustainable answers to food poverty and insecurity, where income cannot be maximised via social security benefits, reducing the cost of living or assistance with debt advice, the gateway ensures that ***"no one is left without food"***.

## 8. Foodbank Forum

To help maintain the Food Referral Gateway and to discuss issues relating to the provision of food, we started the Foodbank Forum, members come together to discuss issues they are having with the Gateway, issues in relation to sourcing food, transport etc.

We welcome all food providers to these meetings. During COVID we need to be creative in how we continue to engage with members of the Foodbank Forum and this is currently being worked on. All ideas are welcome.

## 9. Future Steps

The food referral gateway ensures that people have access to advice and information services which are going to be vital as we move forward. Food insecurity due to financial hardship will likely continue to be a critical issue as we move from the immediate response to the COVID 19 emergency towards recovery, with most economic scenarios predicting a more severe financial impact than the recession in 2008.

The stability of the food referral gateway also allows for any localised or national outbreaks which may mean we return to lockdown, whilst ensuring that ***"no one is left without food"***.

Members of the Financial Inclusion Team are available to come and speak to your group and answer any questions you should have about the Referral Gateway, we can do this in person, via Microsoft teams or on our 01698 332551 number.