

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

COVID-19 FOOD FUND

REPORT BY DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise of the Scottish Government's Food Fund (Non-Shielding) scheme and for the Council Executive to approve the council's proposals for the delivery of food to the specific groups identified under the scheme.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council Executive:

1. Notes the update on the Scottish Government's Food Fund (Non-Shielding) scheme;
2. Notes the update on the support being provided by council and third sector food providers;
3. Approves the proposals set out in principle in Section D.7 of the report for the provision of support to the specific groups eligible under the Food Fund (Non-Shielding) scheme; and
4. Delegates authority to the Depute Chief Executive (Corporate, Housing and Operational Services) to conclude an agreement with the consortium or its members, subject to complying with procurement and public contracts regulations and Standing Orders for Contracts, to support the council in the delivery of support to the specific groups as identified by the Scottish Government and as proposed in principle in Section D.7.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; making best use of our resources; working in partnership
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	The Scottish Government have introduced the scheme as part of the wider package of support to communities affected by COVID-19. Integrated Impact Assessments will be carried out as discussions progress.
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	The Scheme shall be amended should the delegation in B.4 endure for more than 6 months.
IV	Impact on performance	COVID-19 will have a range of impacts on

	and performance Indicators	council performance.
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	Supporting most vulnerable members of West Lothian community.
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	The council has been allocated £1.045million from the £30million Scottish Government Food Fund.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	None.
VIII	Other consultations	Heads of Service. Engagement is also taking place with external partners.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

On 18 March 2020 the Scottish Government announced a £350million package to support communities affected by COVID-19. This includes a £70million Food Fund that has been established to put in place support for people who would otherwise be unable to access food through the usual routes.

There are three elements to the Food Fund:

- 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.
- £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 Scottish Government are coordinating the provision of direct food deliveries to the Shielded group, but are requiring local authorities to provide all other support to this group.

D.2 Food Fund (Shielding)

This group represents those persons deemed to be of the highest clinical risk due to existing medical conditions and there are an estimated 144,000 persons in the category within Scotland.

The Scottish Government are coordinating a national food delivery programme to provide weekly supplies of basic food items to each person within this group. Local authorities have been charged with providing key support to this programme and to be the local point of contact for the coordination and delivery of other all other food requirements, medication and other support for people within this group where they have no other forms of support.

The Scottish Government have issued individual letters to all persons identified as being within the Shielded group and to date the council has been provided with the names and home address details for 4,700 persons within West Lothian.

The council has put in place a dedicated contact number and online application process for anyone within the Shielded group to contact the council for support. This dedicated contact number has been provided to the Scottish Government and is being promoted in correspondence with Shielded persons. At the same time the council has been promoting the support on offer and ways to register via the council's website and social media channels.

In order to support requests for assistance the council has developed a Shielding Coordination Team to record all requests and to contact each applicant to discuss their specific requirements. Requests for basic food items that would be provided under the national food delivery programme but have not yet been delivered, and/or requests for medication deliveries are being undertaken by dedicated food and medication delivery teams within the council.

All other requests for other items are being forwarded via the council's Anti-Poverty Team and then to the local community food providers for provision. Requests for any other support are being provided by signposting the person to the appropriate services within the council or to other third sector organisations which can provide local support.

Whilst the contact number and online application form is aimed at those persons identified within the Shielded group it is open to all members of the public within West Lothian. The programme has been operating since the beginning of April 2020, and at the time of writing of the report 800 requests for support have been received. The majority of these requests have been from persons who are not on the Shielded group list and relate to support for food, the delivery of medication from local pharmacies or for other requests for information.

The council has received contact telephone numbers for the majority of this group and will now be proactively contacting each person to ask that they contact the Scottish Government's SMS text system to register and/or opt out for the national food delivery food, and at the same time to establish if they require any assistance from the council under the Shielding programme. The Scottish Government are also progressing a prioritised home delivery service to those persons in the Shielding group via a number of supermarket chains and councils are to support the promotion of this service to the Shielding group.

D.3 Other Council Support

The council has been providing a service for key workers who have no alternative child care in order to undertake their critical work. The service has been in operation since 23 March 2020 across the majority of Primary and Secondary schools and operates Monday - Friday between the hours of 8am and 6pm, with a hot lunch provided. At the same time the council has continued to provide all children entitled to free school meals with the choice of a packed lunch or a takeaway hot meal and a breakfast cereal bar/cereal. For those households which, for whatever reason, cannot collect their entitlement, third sector partners are providing a home delivery service.

D.4 Food Fund (Non-Shielding)

The council has been allocated £1.045million of funding to support households who may experience barriers in accessing food. The funding is intended to support those most in need including families with children who are eligible for free school meals, older people, those with long-term health conditions and pregnant women. Specific groups identified are:

- People with COVID-19 symptoms or living with someone with symptoms
- 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
- Financially at risk households
- Marginalised households

Councils will have flexibility to use this additional resource in ways that best meet emerging local needs and circumstances, working with community groups and businesses to support home delivery, provide financial help and meet dietary requirements.

The Scottish Government have also advised that for this group the response will likely need to involve a combination of support to access income and the provision of food. This is to be kept under review to ascertain whether additional resource is required.

At this stage it is unclear as to whether additional monies will be made available to councils and/or if the eligible groups will be amended. Council's will be submitting returns to the Scottish Government and it is envisaged that further information on both future funding, eligibility and duration of the programme will be provided in the coming weeks.

D.5 Hardship Fund assistance to the Third Sector/Community Groups

In addition to the resources available via the Food Fund, the council has allocated £1.687million to provide a Hardship Fund over nine programmes to support individuals and families, the Third Sector, Community Groups and Community Councils.

The Hardship Fund includes a £150,000 allocation to provide for a Community Food Grant, which will provide a grant of up to £5,000 to 28 groups related to community food provision. The total amount to be allocated is £120,000, and this will assist in covering increased costs incurred over the next three months. The Larder and West Lothian Food Bank have both been allocated a further £15,000 each in recognition of the coordinating role undertaken in the support of groups across West Lothian.

At the same time funding of £327,000 has been identified for a Third Sector Hardship Fund to enable third sector organisations to provide additional support to vulnerable groups, including the elderly and people with disabilities. Applications have been received from 51 groups and following a review of the submissions, removing any bids which are met elsewhere or are not compatible with the target group, 25 applications have been assessed as meeting the criteria. Funding totalling £94,000 will therefore be allocated to these bids. It is also proposed that a further £56,000 will be reserved for future bids at this stage from third sector organisations, leaving a balance of £177,000.

D.6 West Lothian Food Fund Bid

The council has received a bid from a consortium of Third Sector organisations to work together and deliver appropriate responses to food insecurity. The bid is seeking £415,943 from the £1.045million Food Fund and the consortium advise that the funding would enable 12 groups to deliver the services required for 5 months to meet the needs of every ward in West Lothian.

The bid seeks funding support for food and non-food related costs. Officers have reviewed the submission and have identified a number of points of clarification that will need to be discussed with the consortium leads before any decision can be made on the allocation of any funds.

The Scottish Government have also announced the Wellbeing Fund to assist Third Sector organisations through the provision of emergency funding to help cope with the effects of COVID-19. Organisations are being invited to submit expressions of interest against a £33million fund which may provide an opportunity for the West Lothian Food Fund consortium to seek funding for the non-food related costs set out in their submission.

D.7 Food Fund (Non-Shielding) Proposal

The Scottish Government are unable to provide local authorities with details of the persons within these specific groups. The council will therefore seek to identify the number of persons who may be eligible from information held at a local level, subject to required data sharing and data protection requirements, however it is unlikely that this will provide a complete list of all persons who may be eligible for support.

Through an analysis of households entitled to free school meals the council is able to provide direct support to a significant section of low-income families and/or families where a member of the household has become recently unemployed.

It is proposed that households entitled to Free School Meals would be provided with a payment of £10 per week, per eligible child. School Clothing Grants are paid direct into bank accounts and the council will be able to make payment direct to the bank account of the nominated parent or guardian. At the same time the council would continue to provide the packed lunch or hot meal service for eligible children.

It is also assumed that the current uptake levels for the packed lunch or hot meal service will not increase, however payment will be made to all eligible households, subject to no detrimental impact on other income benefits such as Universal Credit.

Based on current Primary School (P1 – P3) School Clothing Grant eligibility, and all Free School Meal and Clothing Grant eligibility for Primary School (P4 – P7), Secondary Schools and ASN Schools, the number of children qualifying for the payment would be circa 5,800 children. The proposal would be to make a weekly payment of £58,000 for the 8-week period starting in May 2020 until the current academic year at the end of June 2020, which would equate to a total cost of £464,000. A further £406,000 would be reserved at this stage to enable payment over the 7-week school holiday period and a decision on this period would be taken prior to the end of the current academic year.

A balance of £175,000 would remain available and it is proposed that these resources are augmented with the £177,000 unallocated from the Third Sector Hardship Fund to provide a revised budget of £352,000 to provide support to the other Food Fund specific groups as specified by the Scottish Government.

Community organisations that already provide support to people may be well placed to provide direct support as part of a coordinated approach, and it is acknowledged that the West Lothian Food Fund consortium could have a key role to play in supporting the delivery of the Scottish Government's objectives and desired outcomes for those most in need.

It is therefore proposed that officers engage with the consortium leads in order to establish the extent to which the West Lothian Food Bid is compatible with the Food Fund requirements and how each group with the consortium can support the specific groups identified. Authority is sought to allow officers to conclude an agreement with the consortium or its members to support the council in the delivery of support to the specific groups as identified by the Scottish Government and as proposed in this section of the report. Officers will have regard to the effect of procurement and public contracts regulations and will ensure compliance with those and the council's Standing Orders for Contracts in concluding agreements.

E CONCLUSION

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.

At the same time there are many people within the community who 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.

In order to reach the people most at risk, the Scottish Government has provided the council with £1.045million of funding under the Food Fund (Non-Shielding) to support the more vulnerable groups within the community.

The council has identified proposals to provide support to these groups, and by building upon the existing arrangements and networks the council is well placed to meet emerging local needs and circumstances.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Scottish Government, Food Fund: Guidance to Local Authorities (April 2020)

None

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