DATA LABEL: PUBLIC

West Lothian Council

COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

FOOD INSECURITY FUNDING UPDATE

REPORT BY HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROPERTY SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to update the Council Executive on the work of the West Lothian Food Network (WLFN) to support households facing food insecurity and to consider an application from the West Lothian Food Network for £296,773 to allow the network to continue over the period from April 2022 to September 2022.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Executive:

1. Agrees the application for £296,773 for the period April 2022 to September 2022 to enable West Lothian Food Network to continue to support households experiencing food insecurity; and,
2. Notes the work undertaken to meet the needs of low-income households, including two new pantries in under-represented areas, as well as some of the network members now opening at the weekend and evenings.

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)**	Reducing inequalities and poverty are key priorities set out in both the Corporate Plan 2018/19 to 2022/23 and in the Community Planning Partnership Anti-Poverty Strategy 2018 to 2023. The support for the food network is being delivered via the power to advance well-being, as set out in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, Section 20 (1), which states that a local authority has the power to do anything which it considers is likely to promote or improve the well-being of its area and persons within the area.
III	**Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers**	None.

IV	**Impact on performance and performance Indicators**	The funding to the Food Network assists in meeting targets in the Community Planning Partnership anti-poverty strategy.
V	**Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement**	We live longer, healthier lives; We have tackled significant inequalities in West Lothian society; We have improved the life chances for people at risk; We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive society.
VI	**Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)**	Budget provision of £1.2m for the Food Network from 1 April 2021 to March 2023 was agreed at the meeting of West Lothian Council on 25 February 2021. Council Executive agreed funding of £600,000 for 2022/23 on 15 February 2022.
VII	**Consideration at PDSP**	None.
VIII	**Other consultations**	None.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

West Lothian Council at its budget setting meeting on 15 February 2022, agreed the Revenue Budget for 2022/23 including time limited funding of £600,000 in 2022/23 to provide additional payments to the West Lothian Food Network. Council also agreed an additional £300,000 funding for the Food Network to extend the period the funding will cover.

The majority of households accessing community food providers since April 2021 indicate it is because they are financially at risk, on a low income and/or unemployed. Given the on-going pressure on household budgets, changes to Universal Credit and the increase in living costs, it is expected that this demand for food support will remain for some time.

D.2 West Lothian Food Network (WLFN)

The West Lothian Food Network was formed in Spring 2020 with 24 organisations. Its membership has grown to 40 organisations which ensures coverage across the whole of West Lothian. The network aims to support low income households who face on-going food insecurity over a period of time. The distribution includes a combination of cooked food, emergency food parcels, specific foods to meet the requirements of BAME groups, and access to fresh, frozen and ambient foods as well as providing toiletries, cleaning products, baby food and pet food.

From May 2020 to the end of December 2021, the West Lothian Food Network has provided a total of 2,434,488 meals (an average of seven meals per week to 4,044 people). 82% of recipients indicated they were financially at risk, on a low income and/or unemployed.

It should be noted that the figures from October to December 2021 show a steady increase in the numbers accessing food and are higher than the same period in 2020. In December 2021, 4,664 people were accessing the network weekly.

D.3 New Development within the Network

The network has undertaken activity to improve and extend its reach and to incorporate Food with Dignity principles into the delivery of community food providers:

Widening Provision

The West Lothian Foodbank has purchased a building in Armadale which will be operational in April 2022. It will provide:

- A food pantry that is open four hours every day, Monday to Friday.
- A furniture shop which will provide furniture items at low prices. Donations of furniture will be encouraged from the public, as well as working with Almond Housing to empty vacated flats. Funding has been secured to allow for a van lease and a part-time member of staff for one year to co-ordinate this project.
- The building will also operate as a food distribution centre in the afternoons.

Analysis of data has indicated that low income households within the Broxburn area often have to travel to access a food pantry. West Lothian Food Bank, in partnership with The Larder, has agreed to set up a pantry in Strathbrock Partnership Centre. The Larder, which operates the café within the partnership centre, will set aside part of their premises for shelving and fridges to stock and display the pantry food. They will also run the pantry. The Food Network will advertise the service together with the pop-up free dining at The Larder's Café in the partnership centre.

Evidence gathered from those with lived experience of food insecurity, indicates that access during the evening and weekends would be welcomed particularly for those working shifts and/or in crisis. The network is working towards seven day access particularly to minimise food insecurity for people in employment, as two thirds of people living below the poverty line live in a household where at least one person is in employment. The Barn Café is providing a Sunday afternoon service and several of the food network partners are now operating on a Saturday. Three of the partners are providing evening hours service provision. The West Lothian Food Network has developed an online access to food map which provides details about community food providers and their opening times and can be found using the following link www.westlothian.gov.uk/article/48304/Access-to-Food

Embedding Money Advice

One off funding from the Scottish Government's Winter Financial Insecurity Funding was agreed by the Council Executive on 21 December 2021. A money advisor will be employed and work with the network to provide integrated money advice with food aiming to help those who repeatedly face food insecurity over the long term to become financially more resilient. Evidence shows that integrating money advice with food helps customers to gain entitlement to benefits and to access other help and support.

Community Food Hub

West Lothian Foodbank was appointed as the West Lothian Food Network Coordinator in May 2020. On behalf of the network, West Lothian Foodbank has developed and operates the community food hub. The community food hub is the centralised location where all foodstuff is delivered, stored and redistributed across West Lothian. A total of 135T of food has been acquired for free from sixty sources

across the private, public and third sector. A further 265T of food has been purchased through the funding from West Lothian Council. A total of 399T of food has been has been dispersed to food charities to meet the needs of low income households throughout West Lothian.

As part of the network's annual action plan, it aims to forge stronger links with local businesses. The network has been supported by Business Gateway to contact the major food businesses in West Lothian. It is proposed to develop a practical, working relationship whereby the network is an outlet for food businesses to dispose of food that is close to expiry and would have gone to landfill. To date the network has been successful in setting up such an arrangement with several companies and work is underway to continue to expand this activity.

Supporting Local People

WLFN aims to support households to reduce food insecurity through linking people to local organisations which can offer further help. The network actively refers to advice agencies to ensure that all benefit entitlement is accessed, households are supported to find solutions to debt and to better manage finances.

At a recent WLFN meeting, there was a presentation on the Kickstart scheme by Access2employment. Seven young people have been employed on the Kickstart scheme within the food network and a further eight people are due to be employed through the long-term unemployment scheme. West Lothian Food Bank, as co-ordinator of WLFN, now employs a total of 23 staff, 21 of whom live locally.

Funding Application

The funding bid is for a total of £296,773 from April 2022 to September 2022. The funding application seeks to enable community food providers to continue to address food insecurity, whilst enabling the organisations to ensure Food with Dignity principles are being embedded into all delivery and this includes paying for food.

Due to reduced public donations network members can incur extra costs to purchase specific items for example fresh foods. The Food Network members have requested that a contingency fund be built into the funding application to legislate for unforeseen circumstances and demand due to the increase in food and fuel prices as well as changes to Universal Credit.

The bid comprises the following elements:

Food Supplies	£203,365
Training/logistics/van hire/staff/equipment	£ 18,408
Contingency Fund(to be utilised for unexpected emergencies usually additional food)	£ 75,000
Total	£296,773

As part of the network's on-going development, community food providers will participate in poverty awareness training to ensure there is a better understanding of Food with Dignity approaches, providers are confident to undertake active referrals to support agencies and there are opportunities to share best practice. All community food providers have committed to signing up to the FORT referral and tracking platform and using the FORT system to refer service users to for further appropriate support.

Future Funding

D.4

The network will continue to support partners to transition to more sustainable delivery models, for example, from free provision of meals or food to introducing a modest price plan.

Preliminary discussions have started with the National Lottery who have expressed an interest in the work of the West Lothian Food Network. The Network has agreed to set up a funding work group to explore and pursue funding from major funders as appropriate. WLFN has engaged the services of P4P Consultancy (P4P is funded by the Scottish Government to provide practical advice and guidance to individuals and groups of organisations who are considering partnership working or collaboration) to help formulate a strategy for future joint bids for funding.

E. CONCLUSION

The West Lothian Food Network has grown in membership and covers the whole of West Lothian. It is providing a valuable service in reducing food waste and supporting low-income households to be able to access good quality, nutritious food on an on-going basis.

The network's application for funding until September 2022 will enable community providers to work on plans to become more sustainable whilst providing a continued service to those facing food insecurity. Embedding money advice within food provision will help people to become financially more resilient.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Revenue Budget 2022/23 – report by Head of Finance and Property Services to West Lothian Council 15 February 2022

Appendices/Attachments: none

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