

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



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 £140,000 to support the network over the period from April 2023 to September 2023.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Executive:

1. Agrees the application from the WLFN for £140,000 which covers the period April 2023 to September 2023 to continue to help households experiencing food insecurity to be paid to the WLFN in two quarterly instalments; and
2. Agrees the first quarterly instalment is paid to WLFN by the end of March 2023; and,
3. Agrees delegated authority to the Head of Finance and Property Services to authorise a further payment to a maximum amount of £70,000 for quarter 2 of 2023/24; and,
4. Notes the additional Shared Prosperity Funding of £100,000 secured by WLFN for 2023/24 and 2024/25;
5. Notes the current period of transition for the West Lothian Food Network; and,
6. Notes WLFN's transition action plan, as set out in Appendix 1

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)	<p>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.</p> <p>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</p>

improve the well-being of its area and persons within the area.

III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	The report proposes delegated authority to the Head of Finance and Property Services to authorise the second quarter payment of up to £70,000.
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 agreed funding of £600,000 for 2022/23 on 15 February 2022.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	None.
VIII	Other consultations	Economic Development and West Lothian Food Bank

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 to April 2023 to March 2024. A total budget provision of £1.8 Million from April 2021 to March 2024 has been provided or committed to the West Lothian Food Network from West Lothian Council.

In April 2022, the UK government launched the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The UKSPF is a central pillar of the UK government's Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment across the UK by March 2025. The UKSPF provides an opportunity to boost productivity, enhance employment opportunities, tackle inequalities and deliver change to local communities. Through support from the Anti-Poverty Service WLFN have successfully managed to secure £100,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Funding with £50,000 for 2023/2024 and £50,000 for 2024/25.

The majority of households accessing community food providers since October 2022 indicate it is because they are financially at risk, on a low income and/or unemployed. 4,634 people were provided with food by the 47 organisations in the last week in December 2022, compared to 4,536 people four weeks prior, representing a 2% overall upward trending shift. In comparison to this time last year, there is a 13% increase in the number of people accessing network services. It is expected that this demand for food support will remain for some time due to the

on-going pressure on household budgets, slow wage growth, real term cuts to social security benefits and the increase in living costs.

D.2 West Lothian Food Network (WLFN)

The West Lothian Food Network was formed in Spring 2020 with 24 organisations. Membership has now grown to 47 organisations the newest members being St. Johns Church in Linlithgow, the new Well in Linlithgow and West Lothian Bike Library from Crofthead Community Centre in Livingston. 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 2022, the West Lothian Food Network has provided a total of 4,007,661 meals (an average of seven meals per week to 4,157 people). 85% of recipients indicated they were financially at risk, on a low income and/or unemployed.

D.3 Food Waste

Successful development of a WLFN food hub has resulted in 144T of food being acquired by donation from 53 local food businesses, charities and Fare Share. This food has been saved from being disposed of as waste and instead re-directed to 41 of the 47 West Lothian Food Network member organisations for the benefit of local communities.

Research is regularly undertaken to update the contact database with details of local food companies in West Lothian who may have surplus stock. Local businesses have received a letter to outline the aims of WLFN and the benefits of donating surplus food to the WLFN food hub. This approach has been successful with over 50 businesses donating to the WLFN community food hub.

D.4 Supporting Local People

WLFN aims to support households not just with food but also to link people to local organisations which can offer further help. The network actively refers to advice agencies to ensure that all benefit entitlement is accessed, works with households to find solutions to debt and enable households to better manage finances. Working in partnership with West Lothian Council's Anti-Poverty Service an advisor worked with food network members to maximise income, deal with debt and offer practical help and tools to reduce expenditure. From April 2022 to Feb 2023, 138 food network users have benefited from this approach with total financial gains of £387,946.

The Food Network made a commitment to supporting community wealth building. Food orders are being placed with local businesses instead of larger, national companies. For example, meat is ordered from Campbells Meats in Linlithgow and bread from JJ Bakehouse in Broxburn. The network will look to maximise the amount of money that can be spent with West Lothian businesses, through the food network grant, whilst ensuring value for money.

The network also supports BAME communities within West Lothian. One of the network members, Fair Justice System Scotland (FJSS) have specifically requested Afro-Caribbean foods to support their community. Working together with FJSS, has resulted in orders for African style butcher meat being placed with Tailford Meats in

Broxburn. Tailford Meats have been based in West Lothian since 1975.

Emergency food provision has been developed and held centrally for circumstances where the individuals affected have little or no access to food. There are 200 boxes each containing enough ambient food for two people for one week. The provision was there to help those who needed to self-isolate as part of the Track and Trace scheme and to support when there is an emergency such as the flash floods experienced in Broxburn or if there are house fires etc. However more recently this provision has been used to support Ukrainian guests arriving in West Lothian.

D.5 Contingency Funding Spend

Due to reduced public donations, network members can incur extra costs to purchase specific items for example fresh foods. The Food Network funding has a contingency fund built into the funding application to legislate for unforeseen circumstances and demand due to the increase in food and fuel prices as well as real term cuts to social security benefits. Of the £75,000 contingency fund awarded for April 2022 to September 2022 the spend was as follows:

Contingency Fund	Spend £ (April 2022 to September 2022)
Fresh Food	£40,606
Ambient Food	£29,814
Volunteer Expenses	£2,400
Toiletries, cleaning materials & Baby Products	£680
Grants	£1,500
Total	£75,000

Due to the cost of living increase and donations of food to the network decreasing from the public and businesses, the cost of purchasing goods for the network and the cost of distributing food within the network is also increasing. This is proving to be a challenge for the network as they try to move towards sustainability.

D.6 Future of West Lothian's Food Network

The West Lothian Food Network members have had focused discussion on the future of the West Lothian Food Network given the increased costs and reduction in donations. During this time, the management team and trustees at West Lothian Foodbank undertook internal analysis and discussions regarding coordination of the network. The foodbank's internal review concluded that due to increasing management time and other internal costs dedicated to delivering coordination and logistics support within the food network it was no longer sustainable for them. In early November 2022 the Foodbank served a four month notice period confirming they will no longer provide co-ordination to the WLFN from 1 April 2023.

From December 2022, West Lothian Food Network agreed to the establishment of a dedicated Steering Group of members to lead discussion and actions required towards a new look Food Network from April 2023. The steering group will act as the executive of the WLFN, until a governance model has been set up and more permanent arrangements are in place. The steering group meetings are minuted and shared with the wider Food Network members at monthly network meetings. The steering group agreed that the CEO of the Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian (VSGWL) would act as the independent interim chair during this transition period.

The aims of the Steering Group are:

- Lead on creating a vision and strategy for a new-look Food Network
- Lead on securing a sustainable future for the Food Network
- Devise a governance and delivery structure for the network
- Liaise with external and internal partners towards the above
- Ensure that all of the tasks required to achieve the above are carried out timeously

The West Lothian Food Network are receiving support from the Anti-Poverty Service, Economic Development and Community Enterprise through this period of transition, WLFN's transition plan is attached in Appendix 1.

A graduate has also been recruited by the council to further support and work alongside the WLFN. They will research the requirements for West Lothian to become a sustainable food place. This will include researching what is already exists within West Lothian including the work of the Food Network and the Foodbank. In addition, they will undertake a mapping exercise of local food producers and food manufacturers focusing on supply chains as this work will then inform options around food sustainability.

D.7 Funding Application

As previously stated West Lothian Council is providing a total of £280,000 to support the Food Network from April 2023 to March 2024 and there is additional funding totalling £100,000 from the Shared Prosperity Fund Overall there is a £380,000 budget for the distribution of food from April 2023 to March 2025.

The funding bid is for a total of £140,000 covering the period April 2023 to September 2023 and to be paid to the WLFN in two quarterly instalments. This funding application seeks to enable 14 community food providers to continue to address food insecurity from April through to September 2023, whilst enabling the organisations to ensure Food with Dignity principles are being embedded into the delivery of all community food provision.

Community food providers will continue their transition to more sustainable models of service. For example, from the provision of meal or food parcel delivery for free or donation, to a modest price plan; and from a community fridge and pantry model that offers all food for free or small donation, to a modest but more robust structured price arrangement.

A number of network members decided not to apply for funding within quarter one of 2023/24 however will continue with food provision by other means. The reduction in the number of community providers accessing funding is due to the criteria set in the application requiring all community food providers to give basic limited data to enable both the food network and the council to better understand the scale of food insecurity and where there is most need. Some food providers did not wish to provide this basic level of data or decided they did not have the means to collect it at this stage.

The bid comprises the following elements:

Food Supplies	£66,338
Contingency Fund (to be utilised for unexpected emergencies usually additional food during Q1 2023/24)	£3,662
Total	£70,000

It is proposed that the payment of the first quarter of £70,000 is paid by the end of March 2023 and that delegated authority is approved for the Head of Finance and

Property Services to authorise a further payment for quarter 2 of 2023/24 (up to a maximum of £70,000). This will allow community providers to focus on this period of transition and time will be given to support other providers to apply for a share of this funding. It is proposed that a further paper is brought back to Council Executive in September 2023 to give an update on progress made and a further bid for the remaining funds.

Providing community food provision across West Lothian remains a key action of the network. The organisations who have applied for funding will ensure that support is available within all council wards. Given the extent and volume of the activities being delivered by the Food Network, it is recommended that the application is approved.

D.8 Future Funding

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

The WLFN will continue to seek additional funding from a range of sources including the Robertson Trust and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation who have previously supported initiatives bringing together third-sector partners.

E CONCLUSION

The council, partners and the network members acknowledge and recognise the good work that the West Lothian Food Bank have undertaken in providing the co-ordination of the network since May 2020 through the challenges presented by Covid19.

The West Lothian Food Network continues to grow in membership and covers the whole of West Lothian. It is providing a valuable service in reducing food waste and, with the ongoing cost of living crisis, it is supporting low-income households to be able to access good quality, nutritious food on an on-going basis.

If approved, the network's application for funding until September 2023 will enable network members work on their transition plans as well as working towards becoming more sustainable whilst providing a continued service to those facing food insecurity.

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

Contact Person: Nahid Hanif, Anti-Poverty Manager,
Nahid.Hanif@westlothian.gov.uk

Donald Forrest
Head of Finance and Property Services
21 March 2023

Appendix 1: West Lothian Food Network Transition Action Plan February 2023 – July 2023

Actions	Responsible	Deadline date :
Key terms of funding for member organisations in Q1 defined and communicated to members.	Steering Group	9 February (Complete)
All Expressions of Interest submitted by members seeking funding in Q1 2023-24	Members to send Eols to Steven Turnbull	9 February (complete)
Allocation of funds for Q1 2023/24	Steering Group CEO of VSGWL in role as independent chair of Steering Group	9 February (Complete)
Transition plan submitted to West Lothian Council.	Steering Group	16 February (Complete)
Council approval and transfer of first quarter funds	West Lothian Council	Before 31 March
Final grant documentation confirmed and funds for Q1 2023-24 paid out	VSGWL (in role of temporary financial host)	31 March
Handover of all Food Network data and systems from Food Bank to temporary financial host	Steven Turnbull (Outgoing Food Network Coordinator) VSGWL	31 March
Transfer of web domain, Wordpress login, support@westlothianfood.org mailbox and social media account login to VSGWL	Steven Turnbull (Outgoing Food Network Coordinator) VSGWL	31 March
Training in use of FORT as required	Steering Group/ Active Members	30 April

Appendix 1: West Lothian Food Network Transition Action Plan February 2023 – July 2023

	West Lothian Council Anti-Poverty Manager	
Confirm scope of Development Worker role and prepare application for Shared Prosperity Fund	Steering Group	30 April
Outline for further nine months spend (Q2-4 2023/24)	Steering Group	30 April
SCIO registration: membership structure confirmed, office bearers nominated, constitution written, all documents submitted to OSCR	Steering Group & Development Worker	31 May
Set up Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) Bank Account and confirm financial procedures	Food Network SCIO Board	Once SCIO registration is complete
Key expectations and standards agreed – e.g. definition of ‘healthy’ food provision at Members’ Development Day	Steering Group & Development Worker	31 May
Identify other potential funding sources, including grant funders, crowdfunding ‘match’ platforms (as used in some English Local Authority areas), corporate partners.	Steering Group & Development Worker	30 June
Consultation with users on future support.	Steering Group & Development Worker	31 July
Develop brand resources for members to display (NB some members may not be able to do this, e.g. Women’s Aid at refuges)	Steering Group & Development Worker	31 July
Confirm vision and update action plan	Steering Group & Development Worker	31 July