



FOOD VULNERABILITY
DURING **COVID-19**



PHASE ONE REPORT: MARCH TO JULY 2020



Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Rachel Loopstra, Katy Gordon

About this report

This report is the first output from a new UKRI funded project designed to map and monitor responses to concerns about food access during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the opening stage of the research, we have sought to identify responses implemented from the beginning of the UK lockdown, covering March to July 2020. In publishing this mapping, we provide a description of programmes and policies intended to enhance access to food for people at economic and physical risk of food insecurity across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales as well as the UK as a whole during this time. We hope that in setting out a detailed account of these interventions across the UK, this report will be a resource for anyone engaged in food access issues during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The report is a “living document”, providing the groundwork for the next stage of our research, which is looking at how these interventions worked in practice. This research, exploring the implementation and effectiveness of interventions, is currently underway and will be published as part of the monitoring phase of the project in the Autumn 2020. We welcome your feedback and any corrections on the contents of this report to inform the next stage of our research.

If you would like to get in touch with the project team, please email us at foodvulnerabilitycovid19@sheffield.ac.uk. For an overview of the project, please see <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/>

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Key interventions, comparisons and observations

This is the first report to be published from a UKRI funded COVID-19 project that is mapping and monitoring responses to threats to household food security in the UK during the COVID-19 crisis. It sets out findings from a scoping of national policies and programmes that were made available during the crisis. The mapping involved systematically searching and analysing publicly available information on responses to food insecurity during the crisis to date (March – July 2020). The next stage of the research will explore what these interventions look like in practice, their operations and impacts. This section of the report provides an overview of key points. Given the range of interventions and level of detail in later sections, we recommend reading this alongside the full report.

Mapping responses to threats to household food security

The COVID-19 crisis presented numerous threats to household food security, which covered all four dimensions of household food security as outlined by the Food and Agriculture Organisation. The accessibility of food was limited for both reasons of people being unable to go out for food and being unable to afford sufficient food; the availability and stability of food from retailers, charities, and institutions was reduced and individuals' ability to utilise food was threatened by a lack of availability. We focused on responses to concerns about the availability and accessibility of food from three sectors: government, the third sector, and the food industry. The report sets out the nature of these responses. For the initial mapping, we focused on threats to household food security arising from a lack of economic access to food and a lack of physical access to food. Groups identified to be at heightened risk included people deemed extremely clinically vulnerable to complications arising from COVID-19 who were advised to shield from 22nd March to end of July (mid-August in Wales); people deemed moderately clinically vulnerable who were guided to leave their home as little as possible; and people newly and already on low income who faced increased financial barriers to food access.

Several key interventions were identified for these groups and are briefly outlined in Table 1, however, there was variation in what was available and what was provided across each of the constituent countries. Tables 2-4 highlight some of the key differences and similarities in schemes between each of the four constituent countries for three major interventions: emergency payments schemes, free school meal replacements, and the food parcels for people who were shielding.

Table 1: Types of responses to address threats to household food security for at-risk groups during COVID-19.

Shielding population	Moderately clinically vulnerable	Low income
Government food grocery box scheme	Priority delivery slots	Government financial support
Priority delivery slots	Government financial support	Free School Meal replacement schemes
Government financial support	Retailers shopping hours for moderately vulnerable, increased supermarket delivery capacity	Charitable emergency assistance (food banks, meal projects)
Third sector provision (Salvation Army and Red Cross home delivery parcels, food bank support)	Third- sector provision (Salvation Army parcels and Red Cross hardship grants, food bank support, initiatives supported by FareShare)	

Table 2: Changes to or new national emergency payments schemes during COVID-19.

<p>England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No national emergency payments scheme • Local authorities administer Local Welfare Assistance schemes, but these are not required to be cash-based assistance 	<p>Northern Ireland</p> <p>Discretionary Support COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Short-term Living Expenses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announced 25th March • Grant to cover people from day of application to the date of their next income. • Amount calculated on individual circumstances (no upper limit) • People were eligible for the scheme if they (or an immediate family member) were diagnosed with COVID-19 or asked to self isolate and had income of less than £20,405 a year • Discretionary support was made available to full-time students (not eligible previously)
<p>Scotland</p> <p>Scottish Welfare Fund: Crisis Grants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides grant for people in crisis for essential living costs • People apply through their local authority • On the 18th March £45 million additional funding committed to the Fund during the COVID-19 crisis • More flexibility was given in how the funds could be administered during the crisis 	<p>Wales</p> <p>Discretionary Assistance Fund: Emergency Assistance Payments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From 18th March, COVID-19 related Emergency Assistance Payments were provided through the scheme • As of the 9th July, 37,459 payments had been made, (value £2,320,690) • Flexibilities in the system included ability for people to apply for up to five awards, which could be given consecutively (i.e. one a week for five weeks in a row).

Table 3: Provision of replacements for free school meals.

<p>England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme announced 31st March • Schools could choose to provide meals/food parcels to families, but nationwide FSM voucher scheme implemented from DfE in partnership with Edenred • Schools signed families up for eCode vouchers; redeemed for eGift card to national retailers • £15 per week per child • Continuation of scheme through summer announced on 16th June • Schemes extended to children with parents ineligible for public funds from mid-June 	<p>Northern Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme announced 26th March • Direct payments to families in receipt of FSM: into bank accounts or cheques posted, every two weeks • £13.50 per week per child • Summer Food Payment Scheme, announced on 30th June, continued the provision of these payments, throughout Summer: two payments over the summer
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<p>Scotland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for provision of free school meals announced with closure of schools on 19th March • Local Authorities chose to either provide meal replacements, cash replacements or food vouchers. • Value of substitution varied across local authorities (from £10 per week to £20 per week) • Continuation of scheme through summer announced on 16th June 	<p>Wales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme announced 21st March • Schools/local authorities most often provided substitutes through vouchers (retailer gift cards or vouchers); delivery of food items; or funds transferred to bank accounts • £19.50 per week per child • Continuation of scheme through summer announced on 22nd April • Welsh government encouraged local authorities to use discretion to include families with no recourse to public funds in scheme
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Table 4: Grocery box schemes for people who were extremely clinically vulnerable (i.e shielding)

<p>England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme ran 29th March to 31st July • 2.2 million people on shielding list • People had to fill out an online form to register for the service or call a hotline • Weekly box for single individual provided by Brakes and Bidfood wholesalers 	<p>Northern Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announced 6th April and ran until 31st July • Up to 95,000 on shielding list but also covered people in critical need of food and not shielding • People register for food box through the COVID-19 Community Helpline • Delivered by local authorities
<p>Scotland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme ran 3rd April – 31st July • 179,728 people on shielding list • Boxes ordered through the Scottish Government SMS Shielding Service • Weekly box for single individual provided by Brakes and Bidfood wholesalers 	<p>Wales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme ran 3rd April to 16th August • 130,000 people on shielding list • Boxes ordered by contacting the local authorities • Weekly box for single individual provided by Brakes and Bidfood wholesalers

Key observations

Responses to food insecurity have been on a scale and of a complexity not seen in recent times in the UK. The responses to risks of food insecurity during COVID-19 came from all sectors (government, private, voluntary) and at all levels (local, national, UK). They've been funded by new funds available from governments and the food industry and have targeted groups at risk of food insecurity in a way that hasn't been seen in recent times. The voluntary food aid sector has played a prominent role in responding to economic vulnerability to food insecurity throughout the crisis.

Whilst there have been major initiatives for people across the UK (e.g. the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme), responses have varied across constituent countries. The findings highlight that in order to understand responses to food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis, we need to pay close attention to the nuances of public policy making in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Differences in devolved responsibilities result in different responses between the four countries.

To fully understand responses to threats to household food security, systems mapping must be done at the local level. Though programmes and funding schemes have been announced by national government, it is local governments, schools and local charities that have often been the ones on the ground delivering responses, and as a result, the use of funds and responses vary across local areas. A next stage of this project will explore the nature and impacts of local-level responsibility and delivery of responses to risks to household food security during the crisis.

Different population groups have faced intersecting risks of compromised financial and physical access to food. More needs to be understood about how shielding and self-isolating have led to increased economic risks of food insecurity, but also how people already at heightened risk of economic food insecurity have then faced additional challenges of not being able to go out for food. Further, interventions for shielding individuals have not always taken into account how their household members' food access may also have been affected.

Whilst this report has documented the number and characteristics of schemes in place, how these have operated, been made available, been taken up by target groups, and what their outcomes have been, it is ongoing research that is crucial for fully understanding responses to threats to household food security. Though not the focus of this report, in mapping responses to food insecurity, we have come across numerous accounts of discrepancies in practice from how schemes were supposed to work, gaps in support, and unmet needs. There is a wide range of research and evaluation being done across various programmes exploring the effectiveness, appropriateness, and reach of these schemes. This is critical for understanding how well governments, the third sector and the food industry have responded to threats of food insecurity.

Next steps

The next phase of the national mapping and monitoring work will involve exploring questions of how interventions worked in practice (what was actually delivered, how it was delivered and what was its impact). We will work with those involved in these responses to explore these questions. Local-level research will also be conducted, exploring local area dynamics and the impact of different approaches.

Background

From pictures of empty supermarket shelves, to reports by food charities of surges in demand, it was apparent from the beginning of the UK-wide lockdown in mid-March that the COVID-19 crisis posed a threat to food insecurity in multiple ways. In response, charities, governments and food businesses mobilised to adapt working practices to accommodate social and physical distancing, worked to meet rising demand and developed new interventions to respond to the new and specific circumstances of people having to stay at home. The result has been a complex and dynamic system of responses to help people access food, which has looked different in different parts of the country and for different households and individuals.

This is the first publication from a UKRI-funded COVID-19 project which aims to map and monitor responses to limited access to food during the COVID-19 crisis. Working collaboratively with partners and stakeholders including from governments, the third sector, and people with lived experience of these support systems, the aim of the project is to produce real-time monitoring and analysis of food access support systems to inform food access policy and practice during the COVID-19 outbreak.

This first report presents findings of the first stage of the project: mapping responses to risks of rising food insecurity since mid-March to the end of July 2020. It focuses on national level responses to food insecurity. Covering the whole of the UK, the report sets out the responses carried out across the UK and at the constituent country level, providing details of responses in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Threats of COVID-19 to household food security in the UK

The Food and Agriculture Organisation describes dimensions of food security as economic and physical access to food, food availability, food supply stability, and the ability of individuals to utilise food to meet nutritional needs.¹ Considering these at the individual and household level, all of these dimensions were threatened by the COVID-19 crisis, as shown in Figure 1.

¹ EC-FAO Household food security Programme. An introduction to the Basic Concepts of Household food security. Available from: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-al936e.pdf>

Figure 1 Threats of COVID-19 to household food security across the UK.

Impacts on household food access	Impacts on availability of food for individual/household consumption	Impacts on stability of household food supplies	Impacts on individuals' utilisation
<p>Economic Access: Income losses (employment, self-isolating, shielding)</p> <p>Physical Access: Extremely clinically vulnerable unable to go out to purchase food</p> <p>People at moderate risk but also general population avoiding going out to purchase food</p>	<p>Food shortages in shops</p> <p>Food project interruptions (supplies, social distancing requirements, volunteers)</p> <p>Closure of institutional food locations</p> <p>Closure of cafes/restaurants</p> <p>Closure of some food markets</p>	<p>Early weeks: interruptions in supplies in supermarkets; interruptions in operational hours of food projects (e.g. food banks).</p> <p>Changes in regularity of food acquisition</p>	<p>Diets potentially less diverse</p> <p>Access to specialist diets compromised</p> <p>Concerns for food safety in homes</p> <p>Altered food practices</p> <p>Overlaps of clinical risk to complications of COVID-19 with nutritional vulnerability</p>

Impacts on household food access. First, the lockdown measures imposed by the UK Government and devolved governments in March to prevent the spread of coronavirus threatened jobs and working hours, with consequences for household incomes, and ultimately, financial resources to purchase food. On the 20th of March, entertainment and hospitality premises were ordered to close. On the 23rd of March, the Prime Minister gave the population the instructions to stay at home: to only go shopping for basic necessities, as infrequently as possible; or for any medical need; or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person.² Though people were told they could go out for travelling to and from work, this was only where absolutely necessary, and work could not be done from home. Non-essential shops and services were closed. Schools, nurseries, and childminders were closed, other than for children of key workers. Though devolved governments could set their own guidelines,³ at the beginning of lockdown, guidelines and closures of businesses were generally consistent across all four nations.

Guidelines for people at heightened medical risk of COVID-19 posed challenges to economic and physical access to food. On the 22nd March 2020, the UK government advised that people identified as at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (“clinically extremely vulnerable”), totalling an initial estimate of 1.5 million people in England, do not leave their homes.⁴ This number was later revised to total 2.2 million people.⁵ In Wales, 130,000 were advised to shield;⁶ in Scotland, 179,728 individuals were on the shielding list

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-to-the-nation-on-coronavirus-23-march-2020>

³ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/coronavirus-and-devolution>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-22-march-2020>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-to-ease-guidance-for-over-2-million-shielding>

⁶ <https://gov.wales/shielding-continue-130000-people>

at the beginning of June;⁷ and in Northern Ireland, 80,000-95,000 were on the shielding list.⁸ “Shielding” instructed people to avoid going out for any reason, including food shopping or to collect prescriptions, for an initial period of 12 weeks, with guidance to continue to shield later extended to the end of July in England,⁹ Scotland,¹⁰ and Northern Ireland,¹¹ and 16 August in Wales.¹² Across the four nations, this guidance was eased in different ways to allow for more social interaction and time outdoors for this group through June and July, but guidelines still asked this group to avoid going out as much as possible.

People living with people who were shielding were not advised to shield themselves and were advised to go into work if absolutely necessary. However, evidence suggests many more people than those who identified as clinically extremely vulnerable were avoiding leaving home for any reason across the UK in early July, perhaps reflecting people choosing to shield alongside vulnerable members of their household.¹³

Others at risk of both compromises to physical and economic access to food include people instructed to self-isolate.¹⁴ People with symptoms of COVID-19 or those who have tested positive have been instructed to self-isolate, that is, not leave home for any reason for 7 days. People living with, or in a support bubble with, someone with symptoms or a positive test, or in contact with someone with a positive test identified through track and trace programmes, are instructed to self-isolate for 14 days. This means being unable to go out to work or to purchase food, raising concerns about food access for this group.

Lastly, although not instructed to shield, people at moderate risk of serious complications arising from COVID-19, covering a wide range of health conditions, including diabetes, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), as well as people 70 years of age and older and pregnant women, have been strongly advised to avoid going out as much as possible.¹⁵ Data from a YouGov poll in early July suggested a large proportion of people who fall into this category have been avoiding going out for any reason since March, with implications on their ability to physically access food and perhaps also to work for those unable to work from home.¹⁶

The COVID-19 outbreak also posed risks to household food security for people with low incomes who could not afford to access sufficient food during the pandemic. This included people who were at higher risk of food insecurity before the COVID-19 pandemic, including disabled people, people who are unemployed, younger age groups, ethnic minority groups,

⁷ <https://beta.isdscotland.org/find-publications-and-data/population-health/covid-19/covid-19-statistical-report/10-june-2020/>

⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-53070814>,
<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-ni-shielding-letters-warn-95000-people-theyre-still-at-risk-39342449.html>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-to-ease-guidance-for-over-2-million-shielding>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/>

¹¹ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/guidance-shielding-extremely-vulnerable-people>

¹² <https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html>

¹³ Loopstra, R; Lambie-Mumford, H. How has food insecurity changed for people who are shielding and self-isolating over the COVID-19 crisis in Great Britain? *Forthcoming*.

¹⁴ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/when-to-self-isolate-and-what-to-do/>

¹⁵ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>

¹⁶ Loopstra, R; Lambie-Mumford, H. How has food insecurity changed for people who are shielding and self-isolating over the COVID-19 crisis in Great Britain? *Forthcoming*.

and households with children.¹⁷ COVID-19 increased risks of food insecurity by further compromising food access due to a lack of food available and/or accessible from their usual sources (e.g. discount food retailers, food markets, food banks). The crisis also increased pressures on household finances due to reductions in already low wages, loss of employment, and/or increased household expenditures due to lack of access to lower cost food brands and more children and family members spending time at home. People newly economically vulnerable to food insecurity included people who newly lost jobs or experienced reductions in wages and who had little savings to fall back on.¹⁸

Impacts on the availability and stability of food to households in the UK. The public's reaction to the looming threat of a COVID-19 lockdown in the UK, as they watched lockdowns imposed across Europe, was to purchase larger quantities of food from supermarkets. This behaviour was in line with guidance to only go out when absolutely necessary and as infrequently as possible. Supermarket retail sales increased dramatically in March, to levels higher than seen in the Christmas purchasing period.¹⁹ The closure of workplaces, restaurants, and other food establishments shifted out-of-home food consumption (which usually makes up about 20-25% of food calories consumed) to at-home food consumption, also contributing to more food purchases from supermarket retailers.²⁰ These changes threatened the availability of food and interrupted the stability of food available for households to purchase. In many places, supermarkets simply did not have the food stocks (or restocking capacity) to keep up with demand, especially for essential, basic food items like pasta, rice, chopped tomatoes, flour, and eggs.²¹ Low-cost brands were more likely to be unavailable than higher-cost brands.

Food availability through non-retail channels, including food provision in schools, and from food banks and other food projects, was also threatened by COVID-19. The closure of schools meant that free school meal provision had to be restructured to provide support to children in their homes, rather than directly to children in school settings. Whilst food banks and other food charities were designated emergency services,²² the crisis threatened supply through these channels due to shortages in volunteers, disruptions to food donations and the need to shift towards different forms of provision (for example, through delivery rather than pick-up).²³

Impacts on the utilisation of food. COVID-19 threatens individuals' utilisation of food in several ways. Those at extreme clinical risk and moderate risk of complications from COVID-19 have medical conditions that often require them to follow special diets. Compromised access to foods to meet their dietary needs from shops and reliance on government food parcels and charity could thus have impacted on their ability to utilise the food being made available to them. Further, concerns about food safety were raised as households' food skills were tested by more at-home food preparation, people reported keeping food for longer due to less frequent food shops, and people reported accessing food from unregulated food

¹⁷ Loopstra R, Reeves A, Tarasuk V. The rise of hunger among low-income households: an analysis of the risks of food insecurity between 2004 and 2016 in a population-based study of UK adults. *J Epidemiol Community Health*. 2019;73:668-673.

¹⁸ Dumbleby, H. National Food Strategy: Part One. Available from: nationalfoodstrategy.org

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/03/23/14922/>

²³ Power M, Doherty B, Pybus K and Pickett K. How COVID-19 has exposed inequalities in the UK food system: The case of UK food and poverty [version 2; peer review: 5 approved]. *Emerald Open Res* 2020, 2:11 (<https://doi.org/10.35241/emeraldopenres.13539.2>)

sources, such as Facebook Marketplace.²⁴

Early evidence of heightened risk of food insecurity during COVID-19

Data from early in the UK's lockdown provided evidence that there was indeed heightened risk of food insecurity early in the pandemic. Figures from the Trussell Trust and the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) showed large increases in food bank use in early lockdown, which was sustained into April and May.^{25, 26} YouGov polling data (commissioned by the Food Foundation) showed that income losses and isolating (12-weeks & 7-14 days) were associated with heightened risk of food insecurity, after accounting for background risk factors.²⁷ Those at risk of food insecurity during this time also included families in receipt of free school meals, disabled people, ethnic minority groups, younger age groups, and people who were unemployed. In addition to economic factors, a lack of food in shops and an inability to go out for food were self-reported reasons for going without food.²⁸

Mapping responses to threats to household food security

Faced with these stark threats to the ability of individuals and families to feed themselves during an unprecedented public health emergency, protecting financial and physical access to food has been a key priority across UK, devolved, and local governments, as well as for the voluntary and community sector and the retail sector. This report aims to provide a comprehensive mapping of responses to concerns about food access under the COVID-19 lockdown including in-kind support to individuals and families, work to protect livelihoods, and adjustments to food retail and supply. Our mapping covers food parcel provision for medically and economically vulnerable groups, replacement provision for school food, supermarket activities, and activities to enhance delivery of food. In recognition of the major threats to household food security posed by the economic challenges of COVID-19, we also cover the number of financial interventions aimed at maintaining or substituting people's incomes, and thus, financial access to food.

Thus, the purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive description of programmes and policies intended to enhance access to food for people at economic and physical risk of food insecurity across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales as well as the UK as a whole. It provides the groundwork for monitoring these responses as a whole. Research exploring the implementation and effectiveness is currently underway and will be published as part of the monitoring phase of the project in the Autumn 2020.

²⁴ Food Standards Agency. Covid-19 Consumer Tracker Waves 1 and 2. June 2020. Available from: <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/covid-19-consumer-tracker-report.pdf>

²⁵ Dimpleby, H. National Food Strategy: Part One. Available from: nationalfoodstrategy.org

²⁶ <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-data-since-covid-19>

²⁷ Loopstra, R. Vulnerability to food insecurity since the COVID-19 lockdown. April 2020

²⁸ Ibid.

Methodology

Data collection and collation

Gathering evidence for the national mapping involved the collation of existing sources and data held by the research team and partners; systematic online searches; and a wider call for evidence through research, policy and practice networks.

The research team undertook a systematic search of key government and organisational websites to identify published information and existing data on responses to threats to food insecurity during COVID-19. The aim was to identify a full range of sources including policy documents, programme information, existing reviews of support schemes and any related data (for example amount of people supported or food provided).

In July 2020, key government websites were searched (including www.Gov.uk ; www.Gov.scot; www.Gov.wales ; www.nidirect.gov.uk ; www.niassembly.gov.uk) using key terms (including Food + COVID ; Food + coronavirus ; and other bespoke terms to ensure information relating to particular interventions was captured such as 'free school meals' , 'shielding + food', 'food parcels'). The websites of key third sector organisations providing support, either financial or in kind food provision, were searched using the terms 'COVID-19' and 'coronavirus'. 'News' sections of each of these websites were also reviewed for relevant content.

Project collaborators (partners, stakeholders and advisors) were also invited to share available sources and data with the research team for analysis. Finally, a call for evidence was circulated by email to wider networks through our research collaborators.

Sources selected for review met the following criteria: they related to food or financial support during the COVID-19 pandemic (this may include existing support systems which are supporting people during COVID-19); they are primary source material (from government, charities, NGOs, businesses); they contain primary data; or they are evidence-based research reports or briefings.

Analysis

A systems-based analysis framework was utilised to review the evidence in order to produce a mapping of interventions which captured what they set out to provide as well as the relationships between them (how they interacted with other provision, for example where funding or actors are involved in multiple interventions). As a starting point, the analytical framework categorised responses by two key vulnerabilities to food insecurity since the UK went into lockdown: compromised economic access to food and compromised physical access to food. Where responses sought to address both compromised physical and economic access to food, this was captured.

In order to capture the dynamics of these interventions, the data were analysed under the following themes: actors (who did what); operations (how it worked); inputs (money, food); resources (what/how resources flow through this intervention); use (who receives support and how); outputs / outcomes; connections to other schemes.

Presentation of findings to stakeholders

Prior to publication, the findings from this mapping exercise were presented to stakeholders at online workshops to sense-check our findings and fill any information gaps.

Parameters of this report

What follows is a scoping of the interventions which arose at both a UK-wide level and at the level of each constituent country of the UK – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Our descriptions set out what was supposed to have been made available by governments, charities and private businesses in responding to food access issues during the first few months of the COVID-19 crisis. The next stage of the research project will look at how these interventions worked in practice (what was actually delivered, how, and its impact).

Findings

A complex and multi-layered picture

In mapping responses to threats to food insecurity during the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK, the importance of different layers of government became immediately apparent. Devolution has meant that many key spheres of policymaking which relate to food access (including food, health and aspects of social policy) are made at the level of constituent countries of the UK, that is, by the Northern Ireland Executive, by the Welsh and Scottish Governments and by Whitehall departments overseeing policy in England including the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Department for Health and Social Care, the Department for Education (DfE), and the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. UK-wide interventions have also played a role, but care is required in understanding the nuances of implementation – for example, differences in the delivery of Universal Credit in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Activities at a local authority level form the focus of another stage of the project, but these were highlighted as a key pillar of responses in this mapping. It became clear that even where funding or policies were developed at devolved or UK levels, implementation may have involved local authorities. Understanding these activities, and how funding was distributed to and then by local authorities in their communities is a crucial next step for our research. In addition to the multiple levels of government responses, responses also came from across all sectors – not just government but also the third and private sectors. Figure 2 sets out different national interventions to address food access, availability, stability and utilisation by sector.

Figure 2: Interventions to address food access, availability, stability and utilisation, by sector.

Government	Third sector	Food industry
<p>UK government <u>Economic access policies:</u> Furlough and self-employment schemes; Universal Credit and Working Tax credits; Statutory Sick Pay <u>Availability of food:</u> Changes to competition laws and drivers' hours rules</p> <p>Constituent country government <u>Physical access:</u> funding and guidance for grocery boxes, volunteer networks, referral to online delivery. <u>Economic access:</u> funding and guidance for free school meal replacements and extension into summer holidays; funding, guidance and (for some countries) delivery of emergency grants <u>Funding to voluntary sector</u></p> <p>Local Authorities Local welfare assistance/ emergency payment schemes; free school meal replacements (some countries); delivery and co-ordination of grocery boxes</p>	<p>Provision of money/vouchers</p> <p>Provision of food parcels and prepared meal delivery</p> <p>Co-ordination efforts: co-ordinating efforts and joint working in provision</p>	<p>Food supply to shops</p> <p>Prioritising delivery slots, working with government</p> <p>Changing shopping practices: delivery expansion ; opening hours for the elderly and other groups</p> <p>Delivering government food parcels – Bidfood and Brakes</p> <p>Funding / donations / in kind support to voluntary sector projects</p>

March to July 2020: target groups in focus

A common theme across many of these interventions was concern for the key groups outlined in the earlier Background section who were particularly at risk of food insecurity by the COVID-19 crisis. These were extremely clinically vulnerable people, who were asked to 'shield' and moderately clinically vulnerable people, who were asked to limit contact outside their home. For both groups, access to food was threatened due to their inability to go out for food or to work, creating both physical and economic barriers to food acquisition. People who were self-isolating were another group of concern. Lastly, other interventions were intended to respond to increased economic vulnerability to food insecurity created by the crisis.

The findings presented below set out the responses and interventions which occurred across different national governmental layers (UK and each of the four nations of the UK). They go on to set out responses from the third sector as well as the actions taken by food retailers to respond to the threats to food insecurity posed by COVID-19.

National/devolved governmental responses

UK-wide: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of economic access to food

The UK Government quickly introduced measures to prevent job losses through the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme (i.e. furlough scheme) and to replace lost incomes for people who are self-employed. For people newly made unemployed or unable to work on account of coronavirus or shielding, the existing social security net has been relied on, with some measures introduced to increase its responsiveness and levels of support. These changes related to Universal Credit (UC), Employment Support Allowance (ESA), and Working Tax Credits. People unable to work for health reasons could either apply for New Style ESA (if eligible), UC, or Statutory Sick Pay (+ UC). People working reduced hours and newly on a low income could apply for UC. People made redundant or self-employed without work could apply for UC or new-style Jobseeker's Allowance if eligible. These new programmes and changes to existing programmes are outlined in detail below.

Coronavirus Job Retention scheme

On the 20th March, the Chancellor announced a workers' support package, which included outlining the Coronavirus Job Retention (CJR) scheme.²⁹ First guidance on the scheme was published on the 26th of March, and the online service enabling employers to claim compensation for furloughed employees' wages opened on the 20th of April.³⁰ Originally announced as a three-month programme, on the 12th of May, it was extended until the 31st of October.

The CJR scheme enables employers to submit a furlough claim online for a grant to cover 80% of the wages of their workforce who remain on payroll but unable to work due to coronavirus outbreak. The UK Government pays up to 80% of wages, up to a total of £2,500 per worker each month. Employers can choose to top up furloughed employees' wages to their full wage. After employers make a claim, the HMRC verifies the claim and payment is

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-announces-workers-support-package>

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wages-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

made within 6 working days.

Employers can claim before, during or after they process their payroll; can usually make a claim up to 14 days before the claim period end date and do not have to wait until the end of a claim period to make a next claim.

Eligible employees include employees with any type of contract including full-time, part-time, agency, flexible, and zero-hour contracts. Importantly, the scheme covers foreign nationals who do not normally have access to public funds.³¹ However, employees had to have been employed on 19 March 2020 and on PAYE payroll on or before 19 March. For employees made redundant on or after 28th Feb, employers were able to re-employ them and put on the furlough scheme as long as they did this by the 10th of June.

Shielding employees were eligible for furlough, but the scheme was not intended for people on sick leave as a result of coronavirus (i.e. due to self-isolation or illness resulting from COVID-19). Employees with caring responsibilities were also eligible for furlough.³²

For claims up to 30 June, employees working reduced hours or for reduced pay were not eligible. However, from 1st July, employers could bring furloughed employees back for any pattern of work/amount of time, whilst still claiming for hours not worked.³³

As of 19 July 2020, data from the HMRC indicated 9.5 million jobs had been furloughed and 1.2 businesses were using the scheme, and the total value of claims made was £29.8 billion.³⁴

Important changes to the scheme are being implemented from August. In August, employers will be asked to make National Insurance Contributions (ER NICS) and pension contributions, which were previously paid by the government. In September, the government will pay only 70% of wages up to a cap of £2,187.50, with employers paying a top up to ensure employees receive 80% of their wages, as well as ER NICS. In October, 60% of wages will be paid by government and again employers will pay a top up to ensure employees receive 80% of wages, as well as ER NICS.

Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)

Financial support for self-employed people affected by COVID-19 was not announced as part of the Chancellor's workers' support package on the 20th March, but instead was announced in a separate statement from the Chancellor on the 26th of March.³⁵ Guidance was published on this date, but the online tool enabling people to find out if they were eligible to make a claim was not available until the 4th of May, and claims could only be submitted from the 13th of May.³⁶ Applications were accepted for a first grant, covering March to June, but on the 28th of May, an extension to the scheme was announced, enabling self-employed people to make a claim for a second and final grant if their business was negatively impacted by COVID-19 on or after 14 July.

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

³² *ibid*

³³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme/changes-to-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-coronavirus-covid-19-statistics#coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

³⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-outlines-new-coronavirus-support-measures-for-the-self-employed#:~:text=The%20government%20will%20pay%20self,for%20longer%20if%20necessary.>

³⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme>

The target for this assistance is self-employed individuals or members of partnerships whose business has been adversely affected because they've been unable to work due to shielding or self-isolation or because they have had caring responsibilities because of coronavirus. It also covers people whose businesses have been scaled down, stopped trading, or incurred additional costs because of interruptions to the supply chain, fewer or no customers/clients, staff who are unable to come into work, contracts cancelled, or extra costs due to purchasing protective equipment.

However, to be eligible, self-employed individuals or members of a partnership had to have traded in the tax year 2018 to 2019 and submitted a Self-Assessment tax return on or before 23 April 2020. They also had to have traded in the 2019-20 tax year and be intending to trade in 2020-21. Trading profits in 2018-19 also had to be no more than £50,000 and at least equal to non-trading income. The scheme was available to people with "no recourse to public funds". The HMRC contacted customers believed to be eligible for SEISS, based on their existing information. If not contacted by HMRC, people could check if they were eligible online.

To be eligible for second grant, the self-employed had to show that business was adversely affected on or after 14 July 2020.

Claimants had to make a claim online and claims were checked and payments made into bank account within 6 working days. The value of the first grant was 80% of 3-months' worth of average trading profits based on the previous three years' earnings, up to maximum of £7,500. The value of the second grant was 70% of 3-months' worth of average trading profit, up to maximum of £6,570.

At the time of announcing this scheme, it was estimated that 95% of people who are majority self-employed would benefit from the scheme.³⁷ As of 30th June, 2.6 million individuals had claimed with claims totalling £7.4 billion.³⁸

Changes to Universal Credit and other social security benefits (for England, Scotland, and Wales)

Alongside announcements of income support for furloughed employees and the self-employed, the government also announced changes to UC and other social security benefits to lift the incomes of people receiving benefits and reduce conditions for benefit receipt, as well as penalties for not meeting them. The latter changes are important to highlight, as stoppages of benefit incomes as a result of not meeting benefit conditions have been associated with food bank use.³⁹ On the 8th of April, "Guidance for people who were employed and have lost their jobs due to coronavirus" was published, directing people to claim UC.⁴⁰

For both existing and new claimants of UC and of Working Tax Credits, the standard allowance was increased by £20 per week on the 6th of April.⁴¹ For a single UC claimant over the age of 25, this meant monthly incomes increased from £317.82 to £409.89. This increase is temporary for 12 months. However, in addition to this increase, all working-age benefit payments were also increased by 1.7% in April, in line with pre-COVID-19 budgetary

³⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-outlines-new-coronavirus-support-measures-for-the-self-employed>

³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/self-employment-income-support-scheme-statistics-july-2020/self-employment-income-support-scheme-statistics-july-2020>

³⁹ Loopstra, R., Fledderjohann, J., Reeves, A. and Stuckler, D. (2018) Impact of Welfare Benefit Sanctioning on Food Insecurity: A Dynamic Cross-Area Study of Food Bank Usage in the UK. *Journal of Social Policy*, 47(3), 437-457.

⁴⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-what-to-do-if-you-were-employed-and-have-lost-your-job>

⁴¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-what-to-do-if-youre-already-getting-benefits>

plans to lift the four-year benefit freeze in 2020.

For renters in private rented accommodation in receipt of help with rental costs through Housing Benefit or housing payments as part of UC, Local Housing Allowance rates were increased to the 30th percentile of market rents, also resulting in higher benefit incomes for recipients.

The last major change in income support through UC was for self-employed claimants. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, self-employed claimants' levels of support assumed a level of earnings ("minimum income floor"), which may or may not have been earned by claimants. From the 30th of March, self-employed claimant levels of support were based on their actual levels of earnings in their monthly assessment period, which, especially during COVID-19, may be no earnings at all.

In addition to monetary changes, it was announced that no claimants, whether new or existing claimants, were required to attend Jobcentre appointments to receive UC. Mandatory work search and work availability were also lifted for people staying home due to coronavirus, and sanctions for failure to comply with welfare conditions were not applied over March to the end of June.

For people claiming disability-related benefits (i.e. ESA, Personal Independent Payments, or UC) with reassessments booked, all were put on hold and payments of benefits continued until a time when reassessments could happen. ESA was also made payable from day one, whereas normally it has a 7-day waiting period. New claimants for new style ESA or its equivalent within UC were not required to produce medical evidence to start their claim. People unable to work on account of shielding were able to claim ESA.

Consistent with eligibility for UC before the COVID-19 crisis, people in work with low incomes are able to claim this benefit, so people furloughed and on low incomes have been eligible to claim. Self-employed people have also been able to claim, though anyone receiving a grant from the Self-Employment Income scheme would have to declare the grant as income and would likely see a decline in their UC payments as a result.

The number of people on Universal Credit across Great Britain has risen from 2,914,273 in February 2020 to 5,456,655 in June 2020.⁴²

Changes to Statutory Sick Pay

Under the COVID-19 crisis, people who are self-isolating because they or someone they live with have symptoms, because they've been notified through the Track and Trace programme that they've come into contact with someone with COVID-19, or because they are shielding, have all been made eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) as long as they met pre-existing earnings criteria.⁴³ From the 13th of March, changes were made to the programme to enable people to get SSP for every day they are off work if this was because they were self-isolating, as opposed to the fourth day they are off work as is usually the case for SSP. No increases in SSP have been made, so people claiming receive £95.85 per week, which is a rate lower than the National Living Wage. People self-isolating because they are entering or returning to the UK have also not been eligible for SSP.

⁴² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-11-june-2020>

⁴³ <https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay>

UK-wide: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of physical access to food

Responses to concerns about physical access to food– i.e. the ability of people to physically access food – occurred at devolved nation level; there was no UK-wide coordinated response.

England: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of economic access

Free school meal replacements

Before the COVID-19 crisis, free school meals in England have been provided to children whose families are entitled to particular benefits. Universal free school meals have been provided to children in Reception and Year 1. Children living with parents who have no recourse to public funds have not been eligible, and income thresholds for eligibility are in place for working families receiving UC.

Free meals have also been provided for students aged 16-18 in further education funded by Education and Skills Funding Agency who are claiming (or if their parents are claiming) qualifying benefits. Institutions must provide a free meal for each day the student attends the programme. Institutions can choose to provide a meal free of charge or to fund a free meal via a card or voucher which the student can then redeem (i.e. with food outlets nearby). Post-16 pupils in schools that have pre- and post-16 year pupils are required to provide free school meals to all eligible pupils.

The announcement of school closures across England from the 23rd of March, except for children of key workers and vulnerable children, had immediate impacts on children's access to free school meals. On the 31st of March, a scheme to replace free school meal provision in schools was announced. Although guidance for schools suggested that arranging food parcels was the preferred option for replacing free school meals, as it would give schools the option to provide healthy free meals and stay in contact with families, a voucher scheme was also devised to enable schools to provide this option if providing food was not possible.⁴⁴ The voucher scheme allowed schools to order eCode vouchers from Edenred for which parents were supposed to exchange for an eGift card from a selection of UK supermarket chains. If email addresses were unknown, schools could select and post eGift cards to parents.

The vouchers provided families with £15 per week per eligible child. Schools were encouraged to order vouchers to increase efficiency, for example, by ordering £45 worth of vouchers for one child over 3 weeks, or £90 worth of vouchers to cover three children for 2 weeks. Voucher amounts are a bit higher than rates paid to schools for free school meals in recognition that families will not be buying in bulk and therefore will require more money to replace the quantity of food children are usually able to access through free school meals.

Initially, eGift card options were only provided for Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrisons, Waitrose and M&S, but by June, supermarkets accepting vouchers also included Aldi, Company Shop Group, Iceland, The Food Warehouse Stores, and McColl's.

For schools with families living in areas not serviced by shops in the voucher scheme, they could provide £15 worth of gift cards or vouchers to local shops and claim additional funding for the provision of these vouchers through the exceptional costs associated with coronavirus scheme.⁴⁵

Replacements for free school meals were to be provided through the Easter holidays, and just in time (28th May), were extended to cover the May half term.⁴⁶ On the 16th of June, in

⁴⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>

⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-school>

⁴⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>

response to growing pressure from within government and campaigning by third-sector groups, and notably, footballer Marcus Rashford, the government announced it would provide funding for free school meal vouchers for eligible children in England through the summer holidays.⁴⁷ The scheme is operated through Edenred's online portal as well, though again schools can choose to provide alternate provision as above. Schools were able to order vouchers for pupils eligible for benefits-related free school meals who have signed up for free school meals, totalling £90 per pupil, providing £15 per week over the 6-week holiday period. If holiday periods are 7 weeks, schools could increase the voucher amount to £105.

On the 24th of April, guidance was published outlining that further education institutions were also expected to continue to support students receiving free meals in further education, regardless of whether or not they were continuing to attend the provider or studying remotely.⁴⁸ Providers could provide support as they wished (i.e. providing vouchers for supermarkets/local shops, making payments by BACS). They were also able to apply to the National Voucher Scheme. The value of any vouchers claimed would be charged to providers' Further Education meals and/or 16 to 19 discretionary bursary allocations, not provided directly from the DfE. However, to access the voucher scheme, providers had to submit a business case to ESFA. Institutions were instructed to apply to the voucher scheme if they were having practical difficulties providing meals to students or providing payments/vouchers to students directly.

Though usually not able to access free school meals, from the middle of June, children with parents who are ineligible for public funds have been made eligible for free school meal vouchers and free school meals if their children are in school through the COVID-19 crisis. These groups include children of Zambrano carers; children of families with no recourse to public funds with a right to remain in the UK on grounds of private and family life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights; and children of families receiving support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 who are also subject to a no recourse to public funds restriction. All of these groups must also have incomes under the maximum household income threshold (£31,500 per year for London; £28,200 for areas outside of London). In addition, eligibility was extended to children of a subset of failed asylum seekers supported under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

England: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of physical access to food

Food boxes for clinically extremely vulnerable people

On the 21st of March, it was announced new measures would be put in place to protect people at highest risk of coronavirus, including plans to deliver groceries and medicines to 1.5 million people advised to shield (later 2.2 million).⁴⁹ This programme was established by the end of March, with first food boxes being delivered on the 29th of March. By 26th of April, 500,000 food boxes had been delivered,⁵⁰ and by the 22nd of June, over 3 million had been

⁴⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53065806>

⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>

⁴⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-new-measures-to-protect-people-at-highest-risk-from-coronavirus>

⁵⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-half-a-million-food-packages-delivered-to-those-at-risk>

delivered.⁵¹

To be eligible for this scheme, people had to be classed as having a medical condition that made them clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus as identified by the NHS; or people told by their GP or hospital clinician that they're clinically extremely vulnerable and need to 'shield'. Letters were sent out by the NHS to inform people they were in this group and to signpost them to support. To access the food box scheme, people in need of assistance had to fill out an online form to register for the service or call a hotline. To receive a food parcel, people had to indicate that they did not have a way of getting essential supplies delivered at the time.

In a government press release, it was stated that box contents were put together in consultation with nutritionists and industry groups (not named).⁵² Boxes could only contain items that could be stored at room temperature and provided about 20 kg worth of food, enough to last a single individual for one week. Items included in the boxes were; coffee, tea, biscuits, breakfast cereal, bread, two types of fruit (apples, pears), tinned fruit, milk, potatoes, pasta, pasta sauce, canned fish, canned vegetables, toilet rolls, and shower gel. Food boxes were delivered directly to the door of residents following safe delivery procedures. Two wholesale delivery companies, Bidfood and Brakes coordinated delivery, using their existing network of over 52 depots across the country.⁵³

In line with government guidance lifting shielding guidelines from the 1st of August in England, boxes will no longer be provided from this date. The last date for people to sign up for delivery was the 17th of July.

Priority supermarket delivery slots for people who are shielding

Alongside applications for food box delivery, people who were shielding could also sign up to have their details passed to supermarkets to enable them to obtain priority supermarket delivery slots. Supermarkets involved in this scheme were Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Waitrose, M&S, Morrisons and Iceland.

NHS Volunteer Responder Programme

In acknowledgement that many people in the moderate risk group may be choosing to avoid going out at all, the NHS volunteer responder programme was established to support people in this group. However, official guidance⁵⁴ for people not clinically extremely vulnerable or self-isolating or finding it difficult to go out because of disability, was to go out to shop for food.

Similarly, in acknowledgement that people instructed to self-isolate as a result of COVID-19 symptoms, a positive test or who have been contacted through 'Track and Trace' for 7-14 days may be at risk of not having essential food items, the NHS volunteer responder programme was intended to provide a source of support.

Other groups supported by the programme were people with caring responsibilities, frontline health and care workers, and people self-isolating ahead of planned hospital care.

The programme was announced on the 20th of March, when the government launched an appeal for volunteers to help the NHS. By the 29th March, 750,000 people had signed up to

⁵¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-to-ease-guidance-for-over-2-million-shielding>

⁵² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-half-a-million-food-packages-delivered-to-those-at-risk>

⁵³ <https://www.bidfood.co.uk/2020/03/29/bidfood-and-brakes-join-forces-to-support-the-vulnerable-in-isolation/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-accessing-food-and-essential-supplies>

volunteer and by 7th of April, volunteers had completed identity checks and training and were ready to start volunteering.⁵⁵ On the 29th of April, guidance on accessing food and essential supplies was published, pointing people to the NHS responder programme (and local authorities).⁵⁶

With regard to grocery deliveries, people with financial means to pay for food but physically unable to go out for food were able to make a request for help through the NHS Volunteer Responder hotline.⁵⁷ They were then supposed to be matched with volunteer support through the GoodSAM app, where volunteers working in their local vicinity could help with collecting and delivering food shopping and other essential supplies. This programme is expected to run until Autumn 2020.

Priority delivery slots for non-shielding but medically vulnerable

Through the spring, Defra worked on developing further support for people unable to go out for food but able to pay for food, referred to as the “Non-shielded food vulnerable program”.⁵⁸ In the middle of May, they launched a service that allowed local authorities to refer vulnerable people for reserved grocery delivery slots from Tesco or Iceland. Local authorities and other referral agents were granted access to the online portal and able to refer individuals. In the case of Tesco, individuals’ details were then passed to Tesco. Referrals were processed overnight, so if someone referred already had an account with Tesco, they could have a priority slot allocated on the next working day following their referral. The process was slower for people without an account already at Tesco, as they first had to set up an account into order to receive a prioritised access slot.

Referrers were given an allocated quota of online priority delivery slots ranging from 300 to 2,000.

To receive a priority access slot to Iceland, individuals referred were sent passphrases, which enabled them to place an order between 9 and 11 a.m. on Thursdays only and be allocated a priority delivery slot.

On Defra’s website, it was noted that these referral processes enable people to receive food deliveries within 3-7 days and therefore were not for people in urgent need of food.

The extent to which local authorities are using this scheme across England is not publicly available.

Signposting to Commercial Retail Options

In addition to being directly referred for priority delivery slots, Defra also developed a guide on commercial food retailers offering food boxes or grocery orders that were able to be ordered online or by phone, which was published in June 2020. It was produced in order to help local authorities and charities signpost people in their community to different ways to acquire food without leaving their homes. The list covered national supermarket retailers as well as ones operating regionally (e.g. Roys operating in Norfolk and Suffolk). This guide is available here <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SipvfywO2m3gKOutCL4BjoVw6bxyF0S/view>.

⁵⁵ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2020/04/nhs-volunteer-army-now-ready-to-support-even-more-people/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-accessing-food-and-essential-supplies>

⁵⁷ <https://volunteering.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/documents/vr-portal/nhsvr-faqs-self-referral-v5-160720-1159.pdf>

⁵⁸ <https://fooddeliveryreferrals.defra.gov.uk/help>

Northern Ireland: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of economic access to food

Support with household income

To help support people during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department for Communities put in place additional financial support from 25th March 2020.⁵⁹ This included:

- a non-repayable Discretionary Support grant payment to assist with short-term living expenses where a person, or any member of their immediate family, is diagnosed with COVID-19 or is advised to self-isolate in accordance with guidance published by the Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Well-being; and
- extending Discretionary Support to full-time students suffering financial hardship as a direct result of COVID-19.

Discretionary Support COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Short-term Living Expenses

This scheme, which includes covering the costs of a short-term supply of groceries, is normally payable from the date of application to the day before the person's next income is due to be received (for example the next benefit payment). Decision Makers have the discretion to make awards for longer periods if the person's next income would not be considered sufficient to meet their need for living expenses. There is no limit on the amount of an individual award, which is calculated based on individual circumstances.⁶⁰ Grants were available to people if they, or someone in the immediate family, was diagnosed with COVID-19, and to people if they, or someone in the immediate family, was advised to self-isolate. Eligibility criteria included having an extreme, exceptional or crisis situation which places an applicant or applicant's immediate family's health, safety or wellbeing at significant risk and having an annual household income that doesn't exceed the national living wage of £20,405 per year.⁶¹

Discretionary Support to full-time students

Previously benefits were available to students in exceptional circumstances only. However, as part of the changes to the Discretionary Support Eligibility access to discretionary support was extended to include full time students from 25th March.⁶²

Changes to Universal Credit and other social security benefits

As well as these additional sources of finance, a number of changes were made to existing support schemes.

On 21st April the level of income below which a person is eligible for Discretionary Support was increased to £20,405 to provide increased access to emergency financial support for claimants in difficulty.⁶³

⁵⁹ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-announces-further-support-those-affected-by-covid-19>

⁶⁰ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-announces-further-support-those-affected-by-covid-19>

⁶¹ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/extra-financial-support>

⁶² <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2020-04-21.3.43&s=poverty>

⁶³ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-22-april-2020>

The recovery of benefit overpayments and loan repayments from a number of social security benefits was paused for three months during the COVID-19 outbreak.⁶⁴ From July 2020, the Department for Communities restarted the recovery of overpayments and over a period of months are reinstating repayment arrangements that were previously agreed.⁶⁵

Face-to-face appointments for the Access to Work scheme at jobs and benefits offices were suspended. For people already receiving benefits, payments were continued and processed in the same way. Carers continued to be paid Carer's Allowance even if they had temporarily ceased to care for a severely disabled person due to either of them self-isolating or being infected with coronavirus. During the COVID-19 pandemic, emotional support has been counted towards the 35 hours a week spent caring for someone who is ill or has a disability. Consistent with changes across the rest of the UK, a temporary removal of the seven waiting days if making a New Style ESA claim was implemented. People needing to self-isolate were treated as being ill and did not need to go to a GP.^{66,67}

Like the rest of the UK, existing Universal Credit claimants did not need to attend any assessments during the COVID-19 outbreak and for three months from 30 March, work search and work availability requirements were removed for new and existing claims to UC and Jobseeker's Allowance. The standard allowance for Universal Credit was increased in line with changes across the rest of the UK. From 15 July 2020, claimant commitments were introduced for all UC new claims only. New reviews and reassessments for Personal Independence Payment were suspended for a period of three months from 24 March.^{68,69}

Free school meal replacements

On 26th March, the Communities Minister and Education Minister announced families of children on free school meals would receive direct payments of £2.70 per child per day, paid every two weeks, to the families of children for each day their school is closed. This was expected to reach 51,000 families covering 93,000 children. Where possible this was to be paid directly to a bank account or, if bank details were not known, families would be contacted by text message early the following week, urging them to immediately complete an online form on the Education Authority website.^{70,71} Nearly 55,000 families, representing almost 99,000 children, received payments into bank accounts on 13th May. As more bank details were received, families were added to the system and figures were updated. In addition, a further 1663 payees representing 2549 children had cheques posted to them.⁷² The scheme ran from 23 March until the end of the school term on 30 June. The expected cost of the scheme, at the outset, was £19 million.⁷³

⁶⁴ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-13-may-2020-0>

⁶⁵ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/covid-19-benefits>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-and-benefits>

⁶⁸ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/covid-19-benefits>

⁶⁹ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-and-benefits>

⁷⁰

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-26-march-2020>

⁷¹ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-1-april-2020>

⁷² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/free-school-meals-payment-scheme>

⁷³ Ibid.

On the 30th June, the Executive announced £12 million funding for a summer food scheme for children who have received free school meal replacement support during term time. The Summer Food Payment Scheme is making payments to families of over 102,000 children, who were entitled to free school meals on 30 June 2020. The payment is being made in two instalments to cover the months of July and August, when schools are closed for summer. Households will receive £2.70 for 5 days per week for each eligible child. Payments are being made automatically and households receiving a free school meal direct payment already did not need to apply.⁷⁴ A further £12 million funding was available for summer activities.⁷⁵

In addition to the Summer Food Scheme, the Eat Well, Live Well programme was extended to cover July and August launched by the Education Authority Youth Service and described as a safety net for the provision of free school meals to children and young people during COVID-19.^{76,77} Anyone aged 4-25 years can access a five-day food box providing breakfast and lunch, Monday to Friday, after registering for a food box using an online form. The food boxes have been located at over 40 Education Authority Youth Centres across Northern Ireland. “Grab & go” boxes were available from the centre and food boxes could also be delivered.⁷⁸ At the start of July, it was reported that this programme was running for a number of months and was providing healthy breakfasts and lunches to over 3,000 vulnerable young people.⁷⁹

Northern Ireland: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of physical access to food

Food boxes for clinically extremely vulnerable people

On 6th April the Communities Minister announced a new weekly food box delivery service for the most vulnerable in society during the COVID-19 lockdown. The weekly box of mainly non-perishable goods was delivered directly to the doors of vulnerable people who had been notified to shield by their GPs and who could not access food through online shopping, family, friends or local support networks. The boxes were also available to those not shielding, but in critical need of food. The Department for Communities has been leading the initiative in collaboration with Health Trusts, local councils, the Voluntary and Community sector and the private sector. Food suppliers provided the boxes to local councils, which included items such as tinned food, dried food and soap alongside some fresh fruit and bread.⁸⁰

Twenty-four food distribution centres were established by local councils to run the scheme. Packages have been delivered to these Council hubs and, from there, distributed by council

⁷⁴ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/faqs-summer-food-payment-scheme-9-july-2020>

⁷⁵ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-30-june-2020>

⁷⁶ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-18-june-2020>

⁷⁷ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-1-july-2020>

⁷⁸ <https://www.serc.ac.uk/news/article/Eat-Well-Live-Well>

⁷⁹ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-1-july-2020>

⁸⁰ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-6-april-2020>

employees, often working with local voluntary and community organisations.⁸¹ Referrals for the scheme came from a number of sources including the Department's COVID-19 Community Helpline, the Health and Social Care Trust Triage service and the local community and voluntary sector.⁸²

Initial volumes for food provision were 10,000 packages per week, however, there was ability to change this number up or down as required based on data from the COVID-19 Community Helpline, local partnership groups and councils.⁸³ On the 24th April, it was announced that the current suppliers of the food boxes would be unable to exceed a supply capacity ceiling of 18,000 food boxes per week. This was due to the sourcing of food, the capacity of suppliers to pack, prepare and distribute at volume – and additional limitations such as the need for social and physical distancing requirements.⁸⁴

By 17th June, over 150,000 food boxes had been delivered at a reported cost of £6.3 million. On the same day, it was announced that the scheme would be extended beyond June, at a cost of £1.5 million.⁸⁵ Those people who were shielding and who had previously registered their need for a food box through the COVID-19 Community Helpline automatically continued to receive a food box until 31 July. Anyone shielding who had not previously registered through the COVID-19 Community Helpline was instructed to contact the helpline to register.⁸⁶

Food boxes for those who were not shielding but were in critical need of help ended on 26 June. People who still needed help to access food after this date were advised to contact the COVID-19 Community Helpline for direction to other available supports.⁸⁷

Priority Supermarket Delivery Slots

People who were shielding could get priority access to home delivery slots from four of the major supermarkets: Asda, Iceland, Sainsbury's and Tesco. Those impacted were able to register by filling in an online form available on NI Direct to be considered for the priority delivery slots. Once eligibility was checked, the person's details were shared with the four retailers. Retailers then contacted them directly to advise what delivery slots were available.⁸⁸

COVID-19 Community Helpline

The COVID-19 Community Helpline was run by Advice NI. The advice line sought to match people to the right local help that best meets their needs. Initiatives included:

- Priority online shopping deliveries for those shielding with the large supermarkets
- Delivery services from a range of local shops

⁸¹ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-23-april-2020>

⁸² <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-praises-multi-agency-approach-over-23000-food-packages-are-delivered-vulnerable>

⁸³ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/hargey-announces-thousands-benefit-food-parcels-service>

⁸⁴ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/update-covid-19-food-parcel-service>

⁸⁵ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-17-june-2020>

⁸⁶ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/food-parcel-service-be-extended-those-medically-shielding>

⁸⁷ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-pausing-shielding-extremely-vulnerable-people>

⁸⁸ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-5-may-2020-0>

- Volunteers to assist with delivering shopping
- Local support through voluntary and community sector organisations

Scotland: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of economic access to food

Scottish Welfare Fund and Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Scottish Welfare Fund provides crisis and community care grants to those on low incomes in Scotland. Crisis Grant are for people in crisis because of a disaster (such as fire or flood) or income emergency (for example sudden loss of income or awaiting social security payments).⁸⁹ These grants are designed to help pay for the most urgent living costs including food and heating. Community Care Grants are designed to support independent living, for example to assist people leaving domestic violence or the care system.⁹⁰ Grants are accessed by applying through local authorities in Scotland.⁹¹

£45 million of additional funding was committed for the Scottish Welfare Fund in March 2020, with £22 million being distributed immediately and the remaining being kept under review. This has increased the fund significantly from an original £35.5 million and was intended for the direct provision of awards, not administration. As part of this funding settlement, local authorities were also given more flexibility in how the funds could be administered in order to ‘ensure they can fully support people in financial crisis, including workers in the ‘gig economy’’.⁹² An additional £50 million was also announced towards social security, including additional funding for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to meet a projected demand in need for the support.⁹³

Free school meal replacements

With the announcement of school closures in Scotland on the 19th March, a replacement scheme for free school meals was also announced.⁹⁴ The Scottish Government ring fenced £15 million in March 2020 to fund this,⁹⁵ which was followed by £27.6 million in June to cover replacement free school meal support over the summer holidays.⁹⁶ The Scottish Government reported in April that local authorities were providing support through vouchers, direct payments or home deliveries.⁹⁷ Meals were also being provided through around 400 education-early years hubs, designed to ensure continuity of education and pastoral care for vulnerable young people including those with additional support needs, as well as children of key workers.⁹⁸

As of the 12th May, analysis by Treanor (2020) found that the initial response to replacement free school meals was the provision of food to families rather than cash, with only 10 out of 32 local authorities providing cash replacement support.⁹⁹ Initial analysis showed that the

⁸⁹ <https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund/crisis-grants/>

⁹⁰ <https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund/community-care-grants/>

⁹¹ <https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund/apply-or-track-your-application/>

⁹² <https://www.gov.scot/news/helping-communities-affected-by-covid-19/>

⁹³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-communities-funding-statement/>

⁹⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/news/update-on-school-closures-and-exams/>

⁹⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/news/supporting-families-through-covid-19/>

⁹⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/news/free-school-meals-extended/>

⁹⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/news/supporting-families-through-covid-19/>

⁹⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/news/supporting-families-through-covid-19/>

⁹⁹ Treanor, M. (2020) ‘COVID-19 crisis measures, poverty and free school meals’, I-Sphere, June, 2020
<https://www.i-sphere.hw.ac.uk/covid-19-crisis-measures-poverty-and-free-school-meals/>

value of free school meals replacement also varied across local authorities with Glasgow City providing £2.00 daily allowance compared to £4.00 in North Lanarkshire.¹⁰⁰

On the 16th June, the Scottish Government reported that 175,000 children and young people were receiving free school meal replacements (meals, vouchers or cash payments).¹⁰¹ The number of children receiving free school meal replacement support was reported to have risen by 53,000 since the start of the pandemic. At the same time, the Scottish government announced the free school meal replacements would continue over the summer holiday, funded through a wider funding package of £27.5 million to local authorities in Scotland to help assist people struggling to access to food in their communities.¹⁰²

Scotland: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of physical access to food

Grocery Boxes and Supermarket Delivery Priority Access

Weekly Grocery Box¹⁰³ and Supermarket Delivery Priority Access¹⁰⁴ schemes were put in place to help individuals who were shielding in Scotland access food. An SMS Shielding Service was set up, through which registered individuals could order boxes or secure online delivery slots. People were referred to their local authority to discuss particular needs.¹⁰⁵

The Grocery Box scheme began on 3rd April 2020 and stopped when shielding was paused on the 1st August.¹⁰⁶ The last deliveries of boxes were between 27th and 31st July.¹⁰⁷ The boxes provided food and essential supplies, designed to last one adult for one week (and thereby not supporting others in the household). As elsewhere, Brakes and Bidfood provided the food boxes. They contained 'weekly deliveries of essential food items including soup, pasta, rice, fruit, vegetables, tea, coffee and biscuits, as well as toiletries such as shower gel and toilet roll'.¹⁰⁸

The Scottish Government also facilitated supermarket delivery Priority Access.¹⁰⁹ People signed up for Priority Access through the SMS Shielding Service or by calling their local authority through a national helpline. Priority access slots were for six retailers: Asda, Tesco, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Iceland, Waitrose.

Local authority referrals to volunteer groups.

The Scottish Government helpline opened on the 14th April.¹¹⁰ Individuals who are unable to access or afford food and cannot get the help they need from family, friends or neighbours are encouraged to call the national assistance helpline, which operates Monday to Friday,

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.i-sphere.hw.ac.uk/covid-19-crisis-measures-poverty-and-free-school-meals/>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/free-school-meals-extended/>

¹⁰² <https://www.gov.scot/news/free-school-meals-extended/>

¹⁰³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/pages/food-and-essential-supplies/>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/pages/supermarket-delivery-priority-access/>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/pages/contacts/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/news/deliveries-for-high-risk-groups/>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/pages/supermarket-delivery-priority-access/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/news/deliveries-for-high-risk-groups/>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/pages/supermarket-delivery-priority-access/>

¹¹⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/news/support-for-those-at-high-covid-19-risk/>

from 9am to 5pm. Callers were put through to speak to someone at their local council for advice on what types of help are available. This might include:

- food, if someone is unable get the day-to-day food they need
- medication, if they're not able to pick up needed prescriptions
- access to local social work services
- emotional support
- contact with local volunteer groups¹¹¹

People were also signposted to Ready Scotland as a further source of advice and support.¹¹²

¹¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/support-for-those-at-high-covid-19-risk/>

¹¹² <https://www.readyscotland.org/coronavirus/>

Wales: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of economic access to food

COVID-19-related Emergency Assistance Payments

The Welsh Government runs a Discretionary Assistance Fund, which provides Emergency Assistance Payments to pay for essential costs in an emergency and Individual Assistance Payments to help people live independently (mirroring crisis and community care grants in Scotland).¹¹³ Emergency Assistance Payments can be applied for when someone has lost a job, is experiencing financial hardship, is awaiting benefit payments or has had a fire or flood and can be used to pay for food, fuel, clothing and emergency travel.¹¹⁴

COVID-19 related Emergency Assistance Payments were provided through this scheme from 18th March. As of the 9th July, 37,459 COVID-19 related Emergency Assistance Payments had been made, with a total paid value of £2,320,690.¹¹⁵

From the 1st May until the 31st July, COVID-19 related emergency assistance applications were 'treated with greater flexibility and discretion'. Applications for Emergency Assistance Payments are made to the Welsh Government.¹¹⁶ The usual conditions of emergency cash awards include not receiving more than one payment in 28 days and no more than three in a 12-month period.¹¹⁷ Included in the COVID-19 flexibilities was the ability for people to apply for up to five awards, which could be given consecutively (i.e. one a week for five weeks in a row).

Free school meal replacements

When schools closed on 18th March, the Welsh Government announced £7 million in funding for free school meal replacements.¹¹⁸ The replacement provision was for £19.50 a week (5 day week - £3.90 per day).¹¹⁹ The daily free school meal allowance in Wales was calculated at £3.90, on the basis of £2.90 as an upper local authority rate for free school lunch and £1 to cover loss of breakfast and milk provision.¹²⁰

When the replacement scheme was announced in March, reference was made to a range of modes of provision including food collection from schools/community hubs, deliveries to homes, or provision of gift cards/vouchers.¹²¹ Revised guidance outlined three key methods

¹¹³ <https://gov.wales/discretionary-assistance-fund-daf>

¹¹⁴ <https://gov.wales/discretionary-assistance-fund-daf>

¹¹⁵ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-07/summary-data-about-coronavirus-covid-19-and-the-response-to-it-13-july-2020-294.pdf>

¹¹⁶ https://www.northgate-nes.co.uk/pls/pwswall/f?p=NSFFQ:10:16191096482489::NO:SESSION:APP_LA_CODE,APP_TEXT_LANGUAGE:WALES,ENG&cs=3Nm3gngaRj6VCmF1BIXRX9DQ4ndv3vrnuB_dfLhGwj5VNcyskWcE8HpilfZt8ZZ-UehHe_5IM5p26rvMe4fRsuA

¹¹⁷ https://www.northgate-nes.co.uk/pls/pwswall/f?p=NSFFQ:10:16191096482489::NO:SESSION:APP_LA_CODE,APP_TEXT_LANGUAGE:WALES,ENG&cs=3Nm3gngaRj6VCmF1BIXRX9DQ4ndv3vrnuB_dfLhGwj5VNcyskWcE8HpilfZt8ZZ-UehHe_5IM5p26rvMe4fRsuA

¹¹⁸ <https://gov.wales/welsh-government-makes-7-million-available-support-pupils-while-schools-are-closed>

¹¹⁹ <https://gov.wales/wales-has-become-first-country-uk-guarantee-ongoing-funding-children-continue-receive-free-school>

¹²⁰ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-05/ATISN%2013904.pdf>

¹²¹ <https://gov.wales/welsh-government-makes-7-million-available-support-pupils-while-schools-are-closed>

of provision: vouchers (retailer gift cards or vouchers); delivery of food items to families; funds transferred to bank accounts.¹²²

- Vouchers. The Welsh Government guidance advised schools and local authorities to buy vouchers or gift cards directly from retailers and that the choice of retailer should reflect those that operate in the local area.
- Food delivery to families. The option was suggested in particular for families who are in isolation due to coronavirus or do not have a supermarket accessible to them. Guidance suggested this could be provided in collaboration with charities or other local organisations and that parcels could contain recipe cards or provision to last a longer time. Where delivery options were used, the guidance stipulated that allergies and special diets should be met.
- The Welsh Government runs a Pupil Development Grant scheme, to provide grants to low income families for help with school costs and equipment;¹²³ for this group it was suggested free school meal replacement funding could be added to this grant for families.¹²⁴

A response to a freedom of information request on the number of children receiving free school meal replacements stated:

*'14 January there were 90,662 pupils eligible for free school meals, of which 66,012 pupils actually had a free meal. A survey of local authorities conducted over the week commencing 20 April 2020 showed that over 60,000 pupils had been provided with a free meal that week.'*¹²⁵

Free school meal replacements continued through the Easter holidays, spring half term and summer holidays.¹²⁶ On the 22nd April, the Welsh Government announced £33 million in extra funding to provide free school meal replacement provision until the end of August.¹²⁷ The Welsh Government encouraged local authorities to use their discretion to allow children of families with no recourse to public funds to be provided free school meal replacements during school closures.¹²⁸

Wales: Responses to threats to household food security arising from a lack of physical access to food

Food boxes for clinically extremely vulnerable people

¹²² <https://gov.wales/free-school-meals-coronavirus-guidance-schools> ; <https://gov.wales/wales-has-become-first-country-uk-guarantee-ongoing-funding-children-continue-receive-free-school>

¹²³

<https://www.npt.gov.uk/1316#:~:text=Welsh%20Government%20has%20introduced%20a,uniform%20including%20coats%20and%20shoes%3B&text=Equipment%20for%20out%20of%20school,as%20outdoor%20learning%20e.g.%20waterproofs.>

¹²⁴ <https://gov.wales/free-school-meals-coronavirus-guidance-schools>

¹²⁵ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-06/ATISN%2013953.pdf>

¹²⁶ <https://gov.wales/free-school-meals-coronavirus-guidance-schools>

¹²⁷ <https://gov.wales/wales-has-become-first-country-uk-guarantee-ongoing-funding-children-continue-receive-free-school>

¹²⁸ <https://gov.wales/free-school-meals-coronavirus-guidance-schools>

In Wales, 130,000 people were classified as extremely medically vulnerable to serious complications from COVID-19 and asked to shield.¹²⁹ From the 3rd April, free weekly food boxes were provided to people who have been shielding and could not shop online or receive support from friends, family or their local community.¹³⁰ The Welsh Government provided £15 million of funding for the 'direct delivery food scheme'.¹³¹ Everyone identified as extremely high risk from COVID-19 received a letter from the Chief Medical Officer in Wales, explaining the support available to them, including details of support available.¹³² People were given a phone number to contact their local authority to request food parcels.¹³³ The food was in packages and tins, with a limited amount of fresh food. Boxes contained produce including UHT long life milk, tinned produce, pasta, toilet roll, breakfast cereal, some fruit and vegetables and bread.¹³⁴ Boxes were for shielding individuals, not households.¹³⁵ In July, the webpage noted explicitly:

*'We are **not** able at the moment to meet people's dietary needs including allergies. All the contents will be labelled so will need to be checked very carefully. We are looking to see if we can meet people's dietary needs, including allergies, in the future, and hope to improve the variety.'*¹³⁶

The grocery box scheme is due to finish on the 16th August.¹³⁷ By 23rd May weekly deliveries were for around 13,000 boxes, which remained relatively stable through until mid-July.¹³⁸ Total figures on number of parcels distributed are available on the Welsh Government website.¹³⁹

Priority Supermarket Delivery Slots

The Welsh Government also sent details of people on the shielding list to all supermarkets who offer home delivery in Wales (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Morrisons, Asda, Co-op, Co-op (Deliveroo), Waitrose, Marks and Spencer (Deliveroo), Iceland, Ocado).¹⁴⁰ Welsh government webpages also refer to local convenience stores and corner shops offering deliveries, referring to social media or local websites for more information.¹⁴¹ The website also points to supermarkets selling essential boxes.¹⁴² The priority shopping slots scheme will continue following the closure of the box scheme.¹⁴³

¹²⁹ <https://gov.wales/shielding-continue-130000-people>

¹³⁰ <https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html#section-40103>; <https://gov.wales/first-food-boxes-delivered-homes-people-shielding-coronavirus>

¹³¹ <https://gov.wales/first-food-boxes-delivered-homes-people-shielding-coronavirus>

¹³² <https://gov.wales/cmo-letter-extremely-vulnerable-people-support-explained>

¹³³ <https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html#section-40103>

¹³⁴ <https://gov.wales/first-food-boxes-delivered-homes-people-shielding-coronavirus>

¹³⁵ <https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html#section-40103>

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-07/summary-data-about-coronavirus-covid-19-and-the-response-to-it-13-july-2020-294.pdf>

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ <https://gov.wales/getting-food-and-essential-supplies-during-coronavirus-pandemic#section-42913>

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ Ibid

Supermarket access for non-shielding vulnerable

The Welsh Government highlighted the work done by supermarkets to facilitate access to food for those who are not shielding but at heightened risk, for example, opening hours reserved for those who are 70+ and/or at moderate risk of serious complications.¹⁴⁴ No explicit support was outlined for this group.

¹⁴⁴ <https://gov.wales/getting-food-and-essential-supplies-during-coronavirus-pandemic#section-42914>

Funding and signposting to local authorities

This mapping exercise looked at national level responses to food vulnerability during the COVID-19 outbreak to date. The next phase of the research project will scope local authority-level interventions. However, this national scoping did highlight several tranches of funding which went to local authorities to help support people with access to food which we set out in this section. National government websites across the UK also signposted to local authorities for where people could find further information on support and access certain financial assistance (for example Scottish Welfare Fund applications). This national level mapping served to highlight the critical role that local authorities have played in responding to risks and experiences of food insecurity during COVID-19, and this will be explored in detail in the next stage of the research through in depth case studies and secondary analyses of local datasets.

Of note is that this section covers funding explicitly outlined for local authorities to provide food or financial assistance. The absence of funding for local authorities in some of the devolved nations may reflect differences in local authority roles and policymaking.

England: funding for local authorities

In order to support the work local authorities have been doing to support their communities through the COVID-19 crisis, local authorities have received the following funding.

£5 billion COVID-19 fund: £1.6 billion to local authorities

First announced in the 11th March Budget, local authorities in England received £1.6 billion to help them respond to coronavirus pressures across all the services they deliver, including support for vulnerable people.¹⁴⁵ Funding could be used to increasing support for the adult social care workforce and for services helping the most vulnerable, including homeless people. Information on allocations of this funding across local authorities is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-emergency-funding-for-local-government>. Analyses of how local authorities used these funds will be explored in our case study research.

Additional £1.6 billion and £500 million for local authorities

On 18th April, an additional £1.6 billion was announced for local authorities to provide essential services and support to those who needed it most in their communities.¹⁴⁶ This included providing support for rough sleepers, supporting new shielding programmes for clinically extremely vulnerable, and assistance for public health workforce, fire and rescue services.¹⁴⁷ The money was not ring-fenced, reflecting that the central government felt local authorities were best placed to decide how funding will be spent. As above, detail on how this funding was allocated out to local authorities is available in the link above, but how local authorities spent these funds will be explored in our case study research.

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-9-billion-funding-to-strengthen-care-for-the-vulnerable>

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-letter-from-the-local-government-minister-to-councils-setting-out-further-details-of-additional-funding>

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

On the 2nd of July, an additional £500 million of un-ringfenced funding was announced for local authorities.¹⁴⁸

£63 million for local authorities to assist those struggling to afford food

On the 11th of June, an additional £63 million of funding was announced for local authorities, specifically intended to provide support for food access.¹⁴⁹ It was outlined that this funding should be used to help local authorities support more families and individuals that are struggling. It can be used to allow local authorities to step in and provide discretionary financial help to those facing severe hardship; pay for food and other necessities; and use existing approaches to provide funding in ways which suits the needs of their local community. This could include provision of cash payments, food vouchers, or alternative support.

Data on how these funds were allocated to local authorities are not yet available. We will also explore in our case study research how local authorities distributed these funds to people in their communities.

Council Tax COVID-19 hardship fund 2020 to 2021: £500 million

On the 11th of March, the government announced they would provide £500 million to local authorities in England to enable them to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area. In guidance published on 24th March,¹⁵⁰ it was stipulated that this funding must be used to provide additional council tax relief alongside existing local council tax support schemes (LCTS), providing recipients with an additional reduction of £150 from their council tax bill. Having allocated funding to reduce council tax bills for LCTS recipients by £150, it was suggested local councils could use remaining funds to set up:

- Council tax relief using existing discretionary discount/hardship policies (adapted where necessary in order to capture those most likely to be affected by COVID-19);
- Additional support outside the council tax system through Local Welfare or similar schemes;
- A higher level of council tax reduction for those working age LCTS recipients whose annual liability exceeds £150.

Funding was allocated to billing authorities on the basis of their share of working age LCTS recipients using data from 2019-20, Q3 and allocations are available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874867/COVID-19_Council_Tax_Hardship_Fund_Guidance.pdf

Northern Ireland: Funding for local government

On the 8th April the Communities Minister allocated *£1.5 million to local councils to help those most in need during the COVID-19 emergency*. The initial tranche of funding, which comes from the COVID-19 Community Support Fund, will be directed at members of the public who are most at risk from financial stress, for access to food and for those living alone or in rural and border communities where access to services is especially challenging. The £1.5 million will

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-emergency-funding-for-local-government>

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/63-million-for-local-authorities-to-assist-those-struggling-to-afford-food-and-other-essentials>

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax-covid-19-hardship-fund-2020-to-2021-guidance>

be distributed among the 11 councils on the basis of population size and deprivation statistics.¹⁵¹

Later reports state that *£4.5 million has been provided for the Community Support Fund* which is distributed to councils to continue to support the ongoing efforts of grassroots community groups to help vulnerable and isolated people in their areas, as well as providing access to food.¹⁵²

Scotland: Funding for local government

Local authorities received funding from Scottish Government to support them to respond to local need during the COVID-19 outbreak, and help people impacted economically or through reduced social contact, including those struggling to access food. Scottish Government guidance was provided to local authorities to assist them in utilising the resource provided, including detail on households or individuals most likely to be at risk, guiding principles to support local thinking on how resources can be targeted or deployed, approaches to support those at risk and tools available to support local authorities.¹⁵³

Local authorities appear to implement several of the Scottish Government policies and programmes. Including providing a point of contact and referral to the Shielding SMS service for weekly grocery boxes and administering applications to the Scottish Welfare Fund.¹⁵⁴

On the 18th March it was announced that *£50 million in Barnett consequentials from the UK Government's hardship fund* was passed to local authorities in Scotland to support their own local resilience and hardship plans. It was stipulated that as the Scottish Welfare Fund and council tax relief was supported by other funding schemes, this pot was to be used by local councils 'to directly address their local needs in the best way they see fit.'¹⁵⁵

The Scottish Government provided local authority partners with *£30 million of new investment to support families unable to access food as a result of COVID-19*, with £15 million nominally for free school meals.¹⁵⁶ On 18 June *a further £27.6 million* was committed to local authorities to fund an extension of support over the summer holidays, as well as to support a range of people who may be facing new or continuing barriers to accessing food, including due to reduced income caused if they are asked to self-isolate through contact tracing, until the end of September.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-8-april-2020>

¹⁵² <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-1-july-2020>

¹⁵³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-food-fund-guidance-to-local-authorities/> ; <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-food-and-other-essentials-guidance-to-local-authorities/pages/introduction/>

¹⁵⁴ E.g. <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/coronavirus-covid-19/help-food> ; <https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund/apply-or-track-your-application/>

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-communities-funding-statement/>

¹⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/news/supporting-families-through-covid-19/>

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/news/free-school-meals-extended/>

National voluntary and community-sector (VCS) responses

From the outset of the COVID-19 outbreak, the voluntary and community sector (VCS) has played a prominent role in responding to food access needs in local communities across the UK. This part of the mapping looks at national level responses and organisations. It captures national funding schemes (for local projects) but does not capture – at this stage – how this funding was spent and its impact on the ground. This will be explored in the next stages of the research. Following national funding schemes for the VCS response, this part of the report goes on to scope out some of the organisations which have been involved in responses across the UK, such as food charity networks or national charities providing cash or food assistance at a national level.

UK: Funding from government for the voluntary and community sector

Over the course of the COVID-19 crisis, the government has announced funding for voluntary and community sector organisations, with some targeted specifically towards organisations focused on food provision.

Financial support for voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations to respond to coronavirus: £750 million

UK-wide funding for VCSE organisations was announced on the 8th of April.¹⁵⁸ Whilst organisations engaged in food provision were not a specific target, these organisations received funding through the following allocations:

- £360 million from individual government departments to charities in England (of this, £200 million to hospices)
- £310 million for smaller, local VCSEs, including £200 million Coronavirus Community Support Fund distributed by National Lottery Community Fund
- £60 million in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland to support charities
- £35 million to National Emergencies Trust

England: Funding from government for the voluntary and community sector

COVID-19 Emergency Surplus Food Grant: £3.25 million

This first tranche of funding for charitable food provisioning was announced on 2 April 2020 to provide support to food redistribution organisations to help them redistribute surplus stock during the coronavirus outbreak.¹⁵⁹ While the focus of this grant was on reducing food waste caused by lockdown, it also aimed to “get food to people who need it”. The funding was to be used to overcome operational barriers in obtaining, storing, and transporting food from restaurants; and for supporting drops in volunteer numbers. The scheme was managed by WRAP, who redistributed funds to businesses and charities who bid for funds.¹⁶⁰ The details

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/financial-support-for-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-vcse-organisations-to-respond-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cash-support-for-food-redistribution-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

¹⁶⁰ <https://wrap.org.uk/content/covid-19-emergency-surplus-food-grant>

of WRAP's activities are provided below.

Funding for food charities to provide meals: £16 million

On the 8th of May, it was announced that FareShare and WRAP and smaller food distribution charities would receive a total of £16 million of funding for the purchase of food by their distribution networks.¹⁶¹ The source of this funding was from the VCSE grant outlined above.

As outlined below, FareShare used their share of the money (£10 million) for the procurement of food for distribution to the frontline charities they support. They did not use the funds for running costs. WRAP outlined they would use their additional funding to boost existing work redistributing surplus food in the supply chain.

£3.45 million of this funding was used for the *COVID-19 Food Charity Grant Scheme*, announced on the 11th of May.¹⁶² Frontline food aid charities in England were able to apply for grants of a minimum of £30,000 up to £100,000. To be eligible to receive the funding, charities had to show they were unable to meet an increased demand for food from vulnerable individuals or supporting charities and that they would be able to distribute all food purchased with the money by 9 August 2020. The funding could only be used for the purchase of food to support people unable to afford food or people who have moved into temporary accommodation as a result of COVID-19. Initially, it was unclear whether organisations supported by FareShare were also eligible to apply for this funding, but it was later clarified in the published guidance that they were eligible to apply.¹⁶³

The scheme was closed on 17 June 2020 due to a high volume of applications.

Northern Ireland: Funding from government for the voluntary and community sector

An announcement from the Department for Communities on the 17th June noted that the crisis has highlighted the issue of food poverty, with an estimated 75% of those receiving the department's weekly food parcels being from economically vulnerable households. To provide further support for these households, the Minister approved an additional investment of more than **£875,000**, to allow the department to use the services of FareShare, a national network of charitable food redistributors, to improve the supply and distribution of food.¹⁶⁴

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme, provided **£250,000 via the Community Foundation NI and the Rural Community Network (RCN)**, to eligible community and voluntary organisations so that they could help address the very specific needs of those living in remote areas. The funding was made available to over 80 rural organisations, so that they can help on the ground, with things like emergency food packages, oil delivery, blankets and duvets and delivery of medicines. The fund targets supporting isolated older people (aged over 50), as well as those people of all ages who are at increased risk in relation to poor mental health and wellbeing; and vulnerable isolated people and families, particularly those living in rural areas.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/16-million-for-food-charities-to-provide-meals-for-those-in-need>

¹⁶² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-apply-for-the-food-charities-grant-fund>

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/food-parcel-service-be-extended-those-medically-shielding>

¹⁶⁵ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-sees-impacts-ps250000-coronavirus-community-fund>

Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, an independent, grant making trust opened a crisis fund for charitable groups supporting older people and dealing with emerging issues from Coronavirus.¹⁶⁶ The Department for Communities provided **£200,000** match funding to this fund.¹⁶⁷ The fund will offer between £1,000 and £2,500 of emergency funding to community organisations working with older people (aged 50 and over).

Funding worth **£60,000** was given to Women's Aid by the Department of Health to provide care packages for families who have been victims of domestic abuse during the Covid-19 lockdown. The funding is to provide initial care package for families who have experienced, or been a victim of, domestic abuse. This package will provide food parcels, home based resources and games for families, including laptops and mobile phones.¹⁶⁸

On 22nd April the Communities Minister published a Community Response Plan, setting out how the department will support grassroots community organisations helping the most disadvantaged during the pandemic. The response plan, which has been developed in partnership with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), contains 15 actions and includes commitments to:¹⁶⁹

- provide additional funding to grassroots delivery of support on the ground;
- establish a dedicated Community Helpline;
- support the volunteering effort; and
- coordinate the supply of emergency food parcels.

Scotland: Funding from government for the voluntary and community sector

Supporting Communities Funding

As part of the £350million package the Scottish Government announced at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown period in March 2020, a significant amount of this went to designated funding schemes to support the voluntary sector meet local needs, including:¹⁷⁰

- £70 million Food Fund to help organisations (public, private and voluntary) address issues of food insecurity, especially for older people, and families who may not be able to rely on free school meals
- £50 million Wellbeing Fund will help charities with capacity to work with at-risk people, including homeless people and those experiencing fuel poverty
- £40 million Supporting Communities Fund to support community efforts at a local level
- £20 million Third Sector Resilience Fund, to help organisations stay sustainable during the crisis

The Food Fund ring fenced £30million to fund the Weekly Grocery Box scheme for shielding

¹⁶⁶ <https://communityfoundationni.org/community-foundation-launches-coronavirus-crisis-fund/>

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/communities-minister-releases-ps200000-coronavirus-community-fund>

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-26-june-2020>

¹⁶⁹ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/executive-daily-update-initiatives-deal-coronavirus-22-april-2020>

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/news/helping-communities-affected-by-covid-19/>

people.¹⁷¹ As of mid-April, the funding had been directed to housing providers and other agencies to work across local authority areas and £10 million was ringfenced for the third sector response.¹⁷² £1.6 million was allocated to FareShare in early June, further to £500,000 of funding in March, to purchase more food to support local authorities, community-run initiatives and frontline charities across Scotland.¹⁷³ Other large investments from this fund included £500,000 each to Social Bite and Cash for Kids.¹⁷⁴

As of the 8th June, nearly £12million of the £350 million communities funding had been committed to 110 projects across 93 'key trusted national partners':¹⁷⁵ An initial analysis of this funding indicates at least £4.5 million went to projects that explicitly mentioned support with food access. Several of these projects explicitly referenced facilitating access to culturally appropriate food, including funding for the Wing Hong Chinese Elderly Group, Scottish Highlands and Islands and Moray Chinese Association, Perth Chinese Association, Networking Key Services (NKS), Mel-Milaap Community Centre, Edinburgh Chinese Community School, Dudhope Multicultural Centre, and the Aberdeen Multicultural Centre.¹⁷⁶ Over £100,000 of funding was committed by Scottish Government to support minority ethnic older people during the COVID-19 crisis.¹⁷⁷

Wales: Funding from government for the voluntary and community sector

On 6th April, the Welsh Government announced a *Third Sector Covid-19 Response Fund of £24 million*.¹⁷⁸ This funded three particular pots of funding:

- Third Sector Resilience Fund to support organisations with bills and cash flow
- Voluntary Services Emergency Fund for organisations helping to coordinate the volunteer response
- Third Sector Infrastructure Enabling Fund

As of 10th July 2020, 64 applications to the Third Sector Resilience Fund have been approved and £2.83 million paid.¹⁷⁹ Over 130 applications have been approved and £5.75million paid through the voluntary services emergency fund.¹⁸⁰

Also announced on the 6th April, through the Third Sector Support Wales,¹⁸¹ the Welsh Government also set up Funding Wales¹⁸² to provide a funding search portal for VCS

¹⁷¹ <https://www.gov.scot/news/emergency-free-meals-to-those-most-in-need/>

¹⁷² <https://www.gov.scot/news/emergency-free-meals-to-those-most-in-need/>

¹⁷³ <https://www.gov.scot/news/gbp-1-6m-to-help-tackle-food-insecurity/>

¹⁷⁴ https://foodfoundation.org.uk/vulnerable_groups/scottish-government-has-announced-emergency-funding-for-food-projects-across-the-country/

¹⁷⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/immediate-priorities-fund-organisations-funded/>

¹⁷⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/immediate-priorities-fund-organisations-funded/>

¹⁷⁷ <https://twitter.com/ScotGovFairer/status/1250058580960698369>

¹⁷⁸ <https://gov.wales/written-statement-coronavirus-covid-19-support-third-sector-and-volunteering>

¹⁷⁹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-07/summary-data-about-coronavirus-covid-19-and-the-response-to-it-13-july-2020-294.pdf>

¹⁸⁰ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-07/summary-data-about-coronavirus-covid-19-and-the-response-to-it-13-july-2020-294.pdf>

¹⁸¹ <https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/>

¹⁸² <https://funding.cymru/>

organisations, including through a COVID-19 funding category^{183,184} The funding available through Funding Wales is not all government funding, it includes funding from Trusts and Foundations in Wales.

The UK-wide response by Voluntary and Community Sector

The voluntary and community sector has played a key role in many food access responses. Much of this happened at a local, grassroots level with existing organisations adapting their services and new groups forming to support people in need. These local level dynamics will be explored in the next stage of the project. This national level mapping focusses on responses by key nationwide voluntary sector organisations. The following section discusses the direct provision of food, financial support for food, or operational support to food aid organisations by these organisations. Recognising that these, and many other organisations, also continued advocacy and research work through the crisis, the focus here is on financial, in-kind, or operational support.

Magic Breakfast

Magic Breakfast has been running the “Keep Breakfast Going” Campaign since the school closures. They have continued to deliver breakfast food to all those partner schools who have requested it. Food includes cereal, bagels, porridge, baked beans and vouchers for milk. Schools are either feeding children at school, and/or making up breakfast packs. These packs can then be collected by families or distributed by school staff, or volunteers, safely to the doorsteps of families. To reach children whose schools are closed, Magic Breakfast has also arranged deliveries of breakfast food to alternative distribution sites (nominated by schools) and has expanded its long-standing partnership with Amazon to deliver breakfast packs for children to their homes.¹⁸⁵ This provision will continue over the summer.¹⁸⁶

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army responded to the crisis in different ways across their branches in the UK. The website lists many examples. These include continuing to do food shopping for people aged 70+ and accepting new referrals to this existing support, continuing with emergency food provision, providing cooked meals to take away, working as a food distribution hub, creating ‘hibernation packages’ to vulnerable people, and drop-in takeaways for people who are homeless.¹⁸⁷ This support is provided to people vulnerable to food insecurity on account of both physical and economic food access issues. The specific support offered differs depending on the branch in each local area.

British Red Cross (BRC)

¹⁸³ <https://funding.cymru/pages/coronavirus-latest/>

¹⁸⁴ <https://gov.wales/written-statement-coronavirus-covid-19-support-third-sector-and-volunteering>

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.magicbreakfast.com/blog/magic-breakfast-and-school-closures>

¹⁸⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-children-offered-nutritious-breakfasts-during-summer>

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/how-we-are-helping-communities-coronavirus?msclkid=f82ae9f38fa816e56754b6e3ca408a60>

The BRC, in partnership with Aviva, has created a £5 million Hardship Fund to provide financial support to people who are struggling as a result of the coronavirus crisis.¹⁸⁸ This Hardship Fund will provide cash grants of £120 a month for up to three months to help people immediately meet their essential living costs. BRC and Aviva aim to support 13,000 of the most vulnerable people in the UK via the Hardship Fund.¹⁸⁹

The BRC also launched a new support line for anyone finding it difficult to cope during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁹⁰ In addition to providing emotional support, the helpline also connected people to food deliveries or the ability to access their Hardship Fund.

BRC have also been involved in a number of direct food provision projects. Through partnership with tech company Huggg, BRC are delivering food to people who are shielding. Those shielding can order and pay their shopping using a simple web flow and card payment. A BRC volunteer is assigned to the order to collect and deliver the shopping.¹⁹¹ BRC has also partnered with FareShare to work together to source food and create a 'last mile' delivery service that will see BRC community reserve volunteers packing and delivering food parcels from local distribution hubs onto the doorsteps of vulnerable people.¹⁹² They also piloted the use of football clubs as food distribution hubs over the course of the pandemic ("Football Food Aid" see Aldershot Town Football as an example).¹⁹³

FareShare

FareShare operates in 1,500 towns and cities across the UK with 21 regional centres run by 17 independent organisations redistributing surplus food to almost 11,000 local charities.¹⁹⁴ They continued their operations during the crisis, though many of the local charities they support may not have continued to operate, such as community lunch clubs. Organisations and charities could access FareShare food support from a local supermarket through their FareShare Go service or from one of their regional centres.¹⁹⁵

FareShare partnered with the BRC to scale up their capacity. The partnership involved using FareShare's food redistribution warehouses and network of frontline charities and the BRC's crisis response volunteers, equipment, space and resources to enable them to significantly increase the amount of food distributed.¹⁹⁶

FareShare have made changes to some of their operations, providing organisations with food parcels as opposed to ingredients which, before the COVID-19 crisis, would have been

¹⁸⁸ <https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/disasters-and-emergencies/uk/coronavirus-cash-grants-support-people-with-dignity>

¹⁸⁹ <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/press-releases/new-hardship-fund-to-provide-financial-support-to-people-across-the-uk-during-coronavirus>

¹⁹⁰ <https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/coronavirus/support-line>

¹⁹¹ <https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/british-red-cross-partner-with-huggg-to-deliver-food-to-those-who-are-shielding/>

¹⁹² <https://fareshare.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/fareshare-partners-with-british-red-cross-to-help-keep-britain-fed-through-covid-19-crisis-and-aftermath/>

¹⁹³ <https://www.theshots.co.uk/aldershot-town-become-a-football-food-aid-club/>

¹⁹⁴ <https://fareshare.org.uk/fareshare-centres/>

¹⁹⁵ <https://fareshare.org.uk/getting-food/fareshare-go-support/>

¹⁹⁶ <https://fareshare.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/fareshare-partners-with-british-red-cross-to-help-keep-britain-fed-through-covid-19-crisis-and-aftermath/>

used to provide community meals/lunch clubs etc.¹⁹⁷ As outlined, FareShare has received various amount of funding from national governments and industry.¹⁹⁸ Food donations have also increased from supermarkets and government donating long-life foods. The food industry has also pledged thousands of tonnes of packets and tins.¹⁹⁹

On 21st May, FareShare reported delivering an average of almost 2 million meals a week to those at risk of hunger, up from 1 million before lockdown. Since the crisis began the number of charities joining the charity's waiting list to receive food has tripled.²⁰⁰ The number of food businesses diverting surplus or donated food via FareShare has increased 25% since lockdown,²⁰¹ in part due to the hospitality sector closing down.

Trussell Trust

The Trussell Trust supports a national network of over 1,200 food bank distributions centres, as well as engaging in campaigning and research on poverty.²⁰²

Food banks were legally able to continue operating throughout the crisis with staff and volunteers designated as key workers 'caring for the vulnerable'.²⁰³ Food banks in the Trussell Trust network have been making adaptations to continue to support people who are economically vulnerable. These adaptations include making home deliveries (in partnership with British Gas),²⁰⁴ opening fewer centres,²⁰⁵ accelerating the roll out of an e-referral mechanism and increasing the provision of seven-day food parcels (as opposed to the usual three days).

On 1st May, the Trussell Trust reported an 81% increase for emergency food parcels from food banks in its network during the last two weeks of March 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. This included a 122% rise in parcels given to children.²⁰⁶

The Trussell Trust have received funding from a variety of sources, including a £1m donation from XTX Markets, along with many other donations from both corporate business and individuals.^{207, 208} Extra food support included a pledge from Tesco to support food banks in

¹⁹⁷ <https://fareshare.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/fareshare-calls-for-more-food-funding-and-volunteers-to-support-vulnerable-amid-coronavirus-outbreak/>

¹⁹⁸ <https://fareshare.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/asda-makes-significant-donation-to-food-banks-and-community-charities-to-help-support-most-vulnerable-through-covid-19-crisis/>

¹⁹⁹ <https://fareshare.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/fareshare-doubles-the-amount-of-food-delivered-to-those-in-need-during-coronavirus-crisis/>

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ <https://fareshare.org.uk/news-media/press-releases/almost-150-more-businesses-sign-up-to-get-their-food-to-charities-through-covid-19-pandemic/>

²⁰² <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/>

²⁰³ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/03/23/14922/>

²⁰⁴ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/04/03/british-gas-partners-trussell-trust-help-food-banks-coronavirus-crisis/>

²⁰⁵ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/04/17/coronavirus-food-banks-questions-answered/>

²⁰⁶ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/05/01/coalition-call/>

²⁰⁷ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/04/06/xtx-markets-donates-1-million-trussell-trust-support-food-banks-coronavirus-pandemic/>

²⁰⁸ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/07/17/passenger-donates-proceeds-new-album-support-food-banks-coronavirus-crisis/>

the Trussell Trust network, independent food banks and Fareshare with £15 million worth of food.²⁰⁹

Some food banks have worked collaboratively with local authorities which put in place arrangements to support people who were shielding for medical arrangements. However, as reflected on the Trussell Trust's website, their food banks have continued to focus their support on those who cannot afford food.²¹⁰

Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)

IFAN connects, supports and advocates on behalf of a range of 335 frontline food aid providers and envisions a society without the need for food banks. The network's membership currently includes 276 organisations operating 368 independent food banks regularly distributing emergency food parcels at least once a week, with more organisations joining the network every week since March. Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, independent food banks have seen a large increase in need for emergency food parcels. IFAN reported a 177% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by independent food banks comparing May 2019 to May 2020.²¹¹ A survey of 65 independent food banks in Scotland showed food parcel provision for April 2020 was up 246% compared to April 2019 and up 76% in March 2020 compared to March 2019.²¹²

Independent food banks have reported changes to their operations.²¹³ Whilst many have always accepted self-referrals, more are now doing so or seeing an increased number of self-referrals. Many independent food banks are now also offering a delivery service. Some existing food banks are now running larger operations and other organisations had started offering food parcels during lockdown instead of their usual food aid service.²¹⁴ Many food aid providers usually offering meals or running social supermarkets have started to distribute food parcels in place of their usual service.

WRAP

WRAP administered the COVID-19 Emergency Surplus Food Grant, funded by Defra.²¹⁵ Grants ranging from £5,000-£50,000 were provided to many small and medium-to-large food redistributors.²¹⁶

WRAP is also working to with businesses, redistribution organisations and other key players in the sector to find new ways to significantly increase surplus food redistribution at this critical time. Main activities include providing guidance, launching new grant funding,

²⁰⁹ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/07/23/tesco-support-food-banks-covid-19/>

²¹⁰ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/coronavirus-food-banks/faqs/#1585815322735-9695c857-a1d6>

²¹¹ https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/0f6e2f2c-8b8a-4149-8eab-053693cc3104/INDEPENDENT%20FOOD%20BANK%20EMERGENCY%20FOOD%20PARCEL%20DISTRIBUTION_FEB-MAY_2019_20_FINAL_PUBLISHED_9.7.20..pdf

²¹² <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/378499b3-c557-4d97-879e-a3a1692bed01/Scotland%20breakdown%20for%20IFAN%20data%20release%20June%20160620V2.pdf>

²¹³ <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-data-since-covid-19>

²¹⁴ https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/0f6e2f2c-8b8a-4149-8eab-053693cc3104/INDEPENDENT%20FOOD%20BANK%20EMERGENCY%20FOOD%20PARCEL%20DISTRIBUTION_FEB-MAY_2019_20_FINAL_PUBLISHED_9.7.20..pdf

²¹⁵ <https://wrap.org.uk/content/covid-19-emergency-surplus-food-grant>

²¹⁶ <https://wrap.org.uk/content/covid-19-emergency-surplus-food-grant-award-recipients>

collecting and coordinating intelligence in the sector with other organisations, convening the Courtauld 2025 Redistribution Working Group, and providing connections and contacts of redistribution organisations to food businesses.²¹⁷

Other relevant work includes releasing, along with the Food Standards Agency and Defra new labelling guidance for surplus food to advise on how long after the 'Best Before' date different foods can be expected to be suitable for redistribution,²¹⁸ and connecting businesses with surplus food, who have been in contact with WRAP, to ensure they know how to get the surplus to people who need it most.²¹⁹

Sustainable Food Places and Food Power

Sustain has been working to support the work of local authorities through the COVID-19 crisis by providing guidance on how local authorities can work to mitigate the most immediate threats to household food security.²²⁰ Their national programmes, Sustainable Food Places and Food Power, have also been working more directly to support local communities.

Sustainable Food Places is a partnership programme led by the Soil Association, Food Matters, and Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming which supports a network of 50 food partnerships across the UK. Food partnerships are made up of local authorities, third sector organisations, businesses, and academic institutions that variously work to achieve good food governance, active food citizenship, a local good food movement, reduced food poverty and increased access to affordable healthy food, a diverse sustainable food economy, transformed catering and procurement, sustainable food and farming, and reduced food waste.

Food Power is a network of 60+ food poverty alliances, led by Sustain and Church Action on Poverty which supports local areas to develop longer-term responses to reducing food poverty.

Through the COVID-19 crisis, Food Power and Sustainable Food Places have teamed up to provide guidance and funding to support the work of their members in their own communities. They published weekly COVID-19 digests from the end of March to June to provide information, advice and guidance to their network and ran a weekly 'coordinator catch-up' for local leads from across the UK which shared information from national and local organisations from across the two networks and beyond. In turn, local Food Power alliances and Sustainable Food Places partnerships have been involved in handling and delivering of emergency food to people on low income or without support systems to be able to physically access food. They have also provided signposting and up-to-date information on where people can access food in their communities. Of note is that they have been working to support families on low income who do not receive free school meals, including children who are normally eligible for universal infant free school meals, who are no longer receiving these.

²¹⁷ <https://wrap.org.uk/content/emergency-covid-19-surplus-food-redistribution-resource-hub>

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ <https://wrap.org.uk/blog/2020/04/banking-food-sector-help-those-need>

²²⁰ https://www.sustainweb.org/coronavirus/local_authority_food_response/

On the Sustainable Food Places website,²²¹ there are a number of case studies of actions being taken in local areas. We will be exploring some of these in more detail in the case study phase of our research.

Feeding Britain

Feeding Britain supports 18 regional partnerships in England and Scotland to run four key projects: holiday food and fun clubs, fuel banks, food bank plus centres, and citizens' supermarkets.²²² Through the COVID-19 pandemic, they have also been running an emergency food programme aimed at children and their families. This has involved providing cooked meals and food packages for delivery or collection. Regional partners have taken the lead in their local areas. For example, Feeding Bristol led the development and implementation of a holistic strategy for the city alongside other key stakeholders (notably Bristol City Council, FareShare South West, Bristol Food Network, the city's foodbank network and a range of community groups).²²³

Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (VCSEP)- Food Response Group

The VCSEP is made up of a range of organisations within the sector with the aim of improving coordination at national and local levels before, during and after emergencies.

The VCSEP's Food Response Group is a subgroup, made up of organisations that "interact with food and who have come together to respond to changing food insecurity in crisis".²²⁴ They aim to deliver the short- and long-term outcomes to meet unmet food needs across the UK as part of the COVID-19 response. The group includes FareShare, IFAN, Trussell Trust, Alzheimer's Society, BRC, Magic Breakfast, Diabetes UK, Business in the Community, Food Foundation, Sustain, Citizens Advice, Age UK and Local Government Association. Their work includes responding to food insecurity (e.g. emergency crisis support), forecasting food insecurity in the coming year, and advocacy for long-term solutions to poverty.

²²¹ https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/coronavirus/securing_food_for_vulnerable_people/

²²² <https://feedingbritain.org/what-we-do/flagship-projects/>

²²³

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d77ba51bfcde93040b571c1/t/5f081c94db9508010b183032/1594367128760/Bristol's+Covid-19+Community+Food+Response.pdf>

²²⁴ VCS EP- Food Response slide deck shared with report authors.

Food industry responses

Over the course of the COVID-19 crisis, food retailers have made a number of adjustments to their operations to improve food access for the population but especially for people at risk of insufficient food access over the course of the crisis. They also made various contributions to support the work of food aid organisations. As already outlined above, they have also worked with Defra and the DfE to support priority delivery slot schemes and free school meal voucher schemes. Below, in Table 5 information on retailers' actions as summarised by Defra and the Welsh government are outlined.²²⁵

Table 5: Retailers Actions in response to COVID-19

Tesco	<p>£30 million package of support for local communities tackling COVID-19, including £25 million food donations programme</p> <p>Efforts to increase online delivery capacity resulted in ability to fulfil 1 million grocery orders in one week.</p> <p>Reserving an hour in stores for elderly and vulnerable shoppers.</p> <p>Used customer and government data to identify elderly and vulnerable customers for priority slots.</p> <p>Increased home delivery and click and collect capacity.</p> <p>Limited shopping hours to enable restocking overnight.</p> <p>Vouchers could be used (e.g. by a volunteer or family member) to purchase food for someone shielding or isolating.</p>
Sainsbury's	<p>£3 million to FareShare</p> <p>Reserving an hour in stores for elderly and vulnerable shoppers.</p> <p>Used customer and government data to identify elderly and vulnerable customers for priority slots and are increasing home delivery and click and collect capacity.</p> <p>Introduced cashless volunteer shopping voucher schemes for those self-isolating or in vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Offered an expanded 'click and collect service' and increasing the number of collection sites across the country.</p>
Asda	<p>£5 million to community charities (specifically food charities)</p> <p>Reserving an hour in stores for elderly and vulnerable shoppers.</p> <p>Used customer and government data to identify elderly and vulnerable customers for priority slots and are increasing home delivery and click and collect capacity.</p> <p>Introduced cashless volunteer shopping voucher schemes for those self-</p>

²²⁵ <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/03/21/daily-update-on-the-coronavirus-response/> ; <https://gov.wales/getting-food-and-essential-supplies-during-coronavirus-pandemic#section-42913>

	<p>isolating or in vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Limited shopping hours to enable restocking overnight.</p> <p>Sold essentials boxes online for people to purchase</p>
Morrison's	<p>£10 million of dedicated stock to be donated to Trussell Trust and independent food banks.</p> <p>Partnered with Magic Breakfast to provide 200,000 boxes of cereal to schoolchildren.</p> <p>Increased production and delivery of food boxes aimed at vulnerable and self-isolating people. These also delivered to hospitals, care homes, and sheltered accommodation for NHS and social care workers.</p> <p>Partnered with Deliveroo to offer grocery home delivery and offered more delivery slots.</p> <p>Became available on Amazon Prime Now.</p> <p>Launched food box services to help customers get the products they need and support those who aren't able to easily visit stores.</p> <p>Limited shopping hours to enable restocking overnight.</p> <p>Vouchers could be used (e.g. by a volunteer or family member) to purchase food for someone shielding or isolating.</p> <p>Sold essentials boxes online for people to purchase</p>
Co-op	<p>£1.5 million to FareShare</p> <p>Members given option of donating unspent loyalty points to support food banks and other charitable organisations.</p> <p>Limited shopping hours to enable restocking overnight.</p> <p>Vouchers could be used (e.g. by a volunteer or family member) to purchase food for someone shielding or isolating.</p> <p>Priority shopping times (Wales)</p>
Marks and Spencer	<p>Launched a food redistribution app to all stores- supporting donations of over one million meals.</p> <p>Reserving an hour in stores for elderly and vulnerable shoppers.</p> <p>Introduced cashless volunteer shopping voucher schemes for those self-isolating or in vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Launched food box services to help customers get the products they need and support those who aren't able to easily visit stores.</p> <p>Limited shopping hours to enable restocking overnight.</p> <p>Started community fund.</p> <p>Vouchers could be used (e.g. by a volunteer or family member) to</p>

	<p>purchase food for someone shielding or isolating.</p> <p>Sold essentials boxes online for people to purchase</p>
Aldi	<p>Signed up to government's Free School Meals voucher scheme.</p> <p>Reserving an hour in stores for elderly and vulnerable shoppers.</p> <p>Introduced cashless volunteer shopping voucher schemes for those self-isolating or in vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Launched food box services to help customers get the products they need and support those who aren't able to easily visit stores.</p> <p>Limited shopping hours to enable restocking overnight.</p> <p>Vouchers could be used (e.g. by a volunteer or family member) to purchase food for someone shielding or isolating.</p> <p>Sold essentials boxes online for people to purchase</p>
Waitrose	<p>Announced trebling of number of delivery slots per week. 40% of new slots reserved exclusively for elderly and vulnerable.</p> <p>Reserving an hour in stores for elderly and vulnerable shoppers.</p> <p>Used customer and government data to identify elderly and vulnerable customers for priority slots and are increasing home delivery and click and collect capacity.</p> <p>Limited shopping hours to enable restocking overnight.</p> <p>Set-up £1 million Community Support Fund.</p> <p>Vouchers could be used (e.g. by a volunteer or family member) to purchase food for someone shielding or isolating.</p>
Lidl	<p>Reserving an hour in stores for elderly and vulnerable shoppers.</p> <p>Donated £100,000 to the Covid-19 Emergency Community Fund, supporting vulnerable groups such as the elderly, and families who need help during school closures.</p> <p>Partnered with FareShare to donate ambient produce to FareShare and Trussell Trust.</p> <p>Started community fund.</p>
Iceland	<p>Reserving an hour in stores for elderly and vulnerable shoppers.</p> <p>£150,000 to AgeUK to support older people.</p>

Government responses to support food retailers' responses

To support retailers' actions to increase their food stocks and capacity for home food delivery,²²⁶ the government took the following actions:

- Temporarily relaxed competition laws to allow retailers to exchange data with one another on stock levels, coordinate on when shops are open, and share distribution depots and delivery vans. Staff could also be shared to help meet demand.
- Drivers' hours rules were also relaxed so that retailers could deliver more food to supermarkets and to allow drivers to meet increased demand for home deliveries.

²²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/supermarkets-to-join-forces-to-feed-the-nation>

Discussion

The mapping of national-level responses to threats to household food security as a result of COVID-19 has highlighted the vast scale of work done across governments, the third sector, and food industry. Here, we discuss some key observations from the findings, organised into four key themes: the scale and complexity of the response effort; the importance of different layers of government policy (local, national and UK-wide); the need for a better understanding of the groups at particular risk of food insecurity during the crisis; and key questions raised about the reach, responsiveness, and effectiveness of the various interventions which have arisen in response to risks of food insecurity during COVID-19.

Scale and complexity

As this mapping has set out, the responses to risks of food insecurity during COVID-19 came from all sectors (government, private, voluntary) and at all levels (local, national, UK). The resulting picture is highly complex and interdependent, with public and private funding moving through third-sector food charities, charities and businesses working together to enhance the capacity and efficiency of charitable food networks and the direct provision of food and money by government. In moving on to monitor and explore the impact of responses to food insecurity during COVID-19, the research project will seek to explore in detail the dynamics of these relationships.

Local level research will undoubtedly reveal further layers of complexity and highlight the importance of different types of interventions not captured in this report. It is notable that, in undertaking a mapping of coordinated national-level responses, this part of the research did not identify interventions often considered staple parts of food assistance landscapes, for example, meals-on-wheels provision.²²⁷

Policy at all levels

Another key outcome of the mapping exercise has been to highlight the importance of looking at policy responses from all layers of government. As national mapping exercise, this report looks at UK-wide policy and policies made in the four constituent countries. **The findings highlight that in order to understand responses to food insecurity in the UK, we need to pay close attention to the nuances of public policy making, especially devolved responsibilities, and the differences which result in different responses between the four countries of the UK.**

The national mapping has also served to highlight the important role of local governments, which will be explored in more detail in the next stages of the research. However, the importance of local governments in the delivery of government food support schemes (free school meals and grocery box interventions), as well as in running emergency payment schemes and coordinating voluntary efforts locally, is apparent from this national-level analysis. **It will be important to understand the nature and impact of the emphasis on local-level responsibility and delivery on the effectiveness of mitigating risks to household food security during the crisis.**

Variations in responses across the constituent countries and emphasis on the role of local authorities are reflected in how people struggling to afford food during the COVID-19 crisis

²²⁷ https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/meals_on_wheels_for_21st_century/?section

have been directed to help, as shown in Figure 3. The UK Government service “Find out what support you can get if you’re affected by coronavirus”²²⁸ directed people who needed help with “getting food” and “finding it hard to afford food” to following support based on where they indicated they were living.

Figure 3 Signposting to help for people finding it hard to afford food based on their country of residence from the UK Government.

<p>England</p> <p>If you’re finding it hard to afford food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out if you’re eligible for Universal Credit • Find out if you can get help from a foodbank (Citizens Advice) • If you need food urgently and have no other support, find out if you can get help from your council • If you have a child, find out if they can get free school meals • Find out if you can apply for Healthy Start vouchers if you’re 10 or more weeks pregnant or have a child under 4 	<p>Northern Ireland</p> <p>If you’re finding it hard to afford food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out if you’re eligible for Universal Credit • Find out about the financial support and benefits you might be able to get (NI direct) • If you need food urgently and have no other support, find out if you can get help from your council • If you have a child, find out if they can get free school meals • Find out if you can apply for Healthy Start vouchers if you’re 10 or more weeks pregnant or have a child under 4 • Call the coronavirus Community Helpline for Northern Ireland on 0808 802 0020, email covid19@adviceni.net or text ‘ACTION’ to 81025
<p>Scotland</p> <p>If you’re finding it hard to afford food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out if you’re eligible for Universal Credit • If you need food urgently and have no other support, find out if you can get help from your council • If you have a child, find out if they can get free school meals • Find out if you can apply for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods if you have a child (mygov.scot) • Find out if you’re eligible for the Scottish Welfare Fund (mygov.scot) • Find out if you can get a grant if you’re a parent or looking after a child (mygov.scot) 	<p>Wales</p> <p>If you’re finding it hard to afford food</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out if you’re eligible for Universal Credit • Find out if you can get help from a foodbank (Citizens Advice) • If you need food urgently and have no other support, find out if you can get help from your council • If you have a child, find out if they can get free school meals • Find out if you can apply for Healthy Start vouchers if you’re 10 or more weeks pregnant or have a child under 4 • Check if you’re eligible for the Discretionary Assistance Fund (Welsh Government)

Source: <https://find-coronavirus-support.service.gov.uk>

Groups at particular risk of food insecurity during the crisis

This report has been published around the same time as shielding is coming to an end. In the first phase of the COVID-19 response in the UK (spring-summer 2020), this group have been a key area of focus for policy. Other groups of focus have been people who face financial barriers to food access (so called ‘economically vulnerable’) and those who are reducing contact outside the home because of a moderate vulnerability to severe

²²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-support>

complications from COVID-19 (such as people aged 70+, pregnant or living with long term conditions). The findings of this mapping, however, highlight that **more needs to be understood about who falls into these groups, the overlaps between them, and how individual and household needs are accounted for.**

In looking at interventions to support the shielding group, it is important to note that the numbers of people on the shielding lists changed over the course of the crisis. It is not clear whether people were shielding before being formally added to health authority lists and if so, how “self-diagnosed” shielding influenced access to food boxes and other support. People were also removed from shielding lists (or never added to them) but may not have felt comfortable going out in public after receiving health guidance to the contrary. How did removal from shielding lists or people being left off shielding lists affect food access for people in this group?

Across all four constituent countries, advice to shield is lifting and food box deliveries are stopping at the end of July (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland) or in mid-August (Wales). The end of the shielding guidance and food box schemes come at a time when the Prime Minister is warning of a second wave, and COVID-19 cases are increasing across Europe. How will these warnings influence how confident people who have been shielding feel about returning to work and going out to purchase food? Will other schemes, such as priority access to supermarket deliveries and volunteer schemes, be able provide sufficient support? What are the financial implications for shielding people who do not feel comfortable returning to workplaces, but who are no longer eligible for Statutory Sick Pay or Employment and Support Allowance?

Importantly when looking at the discrete populations that policy interventions have sought to target, there are important areas of overlap between these groups. Shielding likely had an impact on financial circumstances. In an ONS survey of people who were clinically extremely vulnerable in England, an estimated 28% of this group were working before being advised to shield.²²⁹ Over 15% of this group had to stop work and were not being covered by the furlough or self-employment schemes, meaning they were likely having to newly rely on Statutory Sick Pay or Employment Support Allowance. Over 35% had been furloughed and 6% received the self-employment income support scheme. In all of these cases, incomes were likely lower than they had been before shielding, which could have further compounded food access issues.

Importantly, the ‘shielding’ category applied to individuals. People with certain health conditions were given individual instructions to shield. However, following shielding guidance likely not only affected the person who was shielding, but also household members. In many cases, although not formally advised to do so, family members may have chosen to self-isolate alongside shielding family members, not wanting to put their loved ones at risk by going out in public. These choices (which likely did not feel like a choice) would have impacted whole households’ abilities to go out for food. In cases where the shielding family member was working and financially supporting their household, changes in income would also have affected the whole household. Yet, despite these potential consequences for the whole household, most food box schemes rolled out provided a quantity of food only for the individual identified as shielding.

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/coronavirusandshieldingofclinicallyextremelyvulnerablepeopleinengland/28mayto3june2020>

There has also been acknowledgement that many more people than those identified as extremely clinically vulnerable have been avoiding leaving their homes for any reason, but this group is highly diverse, including people with moderate risk health conditions, people who are self-isolating for 7-14 days, people aged 70 or older, and people who may not feel comfortable going out, even if they don't have a health conditions. Schemes for these groups have been voluntary at the national level, have developed late, or have been solely led by the retail sector. Much emphasis has been placed on local authorities to identify vulnerable people in their communities, and we will explore this in the next phase of our research, but we wonder whether local authorities have taken comparable approaches to one another in both identification of vulnerability and responses to it. Variation may result in very different experiences of food access for people who are in the same "risk group" across the country.

Impact of interventions

When we consider the scale of responses in relation to the threats posed to household food security, in the absence of counterfactual scenarios where these responses were not enacted, it is near impossible to know the role they have played in preventing food insecurity or responding to instances where it has arisen. However, over the course of the crisis, various media reports, research briefs, and commentaries (see ^{230,231,232,233} for some examples) have raised concerns about groups not covered by schemes, not covered quickly enough, or not covered sufficiently.

Based on the mapping we have completed to date, we have made the following initial observations on priorities for analysis looking at the impact of the interventions that we have seen to date. These include questions about the reach, responsiveness, and effectiveness of the various interventions in preventing food insecurity arising from physical and/or economic access to food over the course of the crisis, but also going forward in the months to come, as the situation continues to evolve.

The role of the third sector

Whilst there are key examples of direct government interventions to mitigate risks of food insecurity during the crisis, the voluntary food aid sector has been relied on heavily in the response to economic vulnerability to food insecurity throughout the crisis. Funding schemes across the four nations of the UK have been directed to food aid initiatives, even though there is clear evidence that many people who experience food insecurity do not access food aid. Further, the voluntary food aid sector has faced major challenges throughout the crisis that have impacted on their ability to meet pre-existing demand before COVID-19, let alone to cope with the massive rises in demand for their assistance observed. Questions about the role of the voluntary sector in helping people with access to food had been raised before the current crisis. Questions such as, how effective are these programmes at enhancing household food security? What role *should* these organisations play? The COVID-19 outbreak, and the policy responses to it, require an urgent return to these questions.

Gaps in provision

²³⁰ <https://www.which.co.uk/news/2020/05/which-calls-for-urgent-government-action-to-help-vulnerable-households-access-food/>

²³¹ https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/jul20_covid19_food_insecurity_mustnt_happen_again/

²³² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

²³³ <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/access-to-food-in-emergencies>

With the exception of Scottish Government guidance to local authorities²³⁴ and the NHS Responder Programme,²³⁵ we found very few responses that explicitly acknowledge insufficient food access arising from requirements to self-isolate for 7-14 days, and none in the case of people having to quarantine for 14 days on entry to the UK. As quarantine rules can quickly change, as recently implemented for people entering from Spain, and the track and trace programme identifying and advising people to self-isolate for 14 days around the country every day, there appears to need to be more available support for people to access food in these groups. For people to be able to self-isolate, they must be able to access sufficient quantities of food. Not ensuring this for these groups either means they may have to disobey public health guidance or risk experiencing food insecurity.

People who were economically vulnerable to food insecurity before the onset of COVID-19 have largely been overlooked by new governmental schemes. Ongoing research by the COVID-realities team²³⁶ and Child Poverty Action Group²³⁷ has highlighted how low-income families are a group who have been overlooked by most schemes. This includes families who had had to cope with increased expenses from having children and other household members at home; low-income families with young children who may have lost access to childcare, but may not have been able to work from home; and low income families who have children in reception year who normally receive universal infant free school meals and who have not been covered by free school meals replacement schemes.

Food access concerns have also been raised for people moved into temporary accommodation, including asylum seekers, people who have been trafficked, and rough sleepers. Whilst national strategies have provided accommodation, the provision of food was not coordinated or provided by a national scheme.

As highlighted throughout, access to information about help available from governments and being able to apply for help often required having access to the internet. There are concerns that people who are digitally excluded have not been able to access help, though there are also wider concerns that information about access to help has not been sufficient or available quickly enough throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

Grocery box schemes for people who were shielding

In all constituent countries, people were advised to shield before food parcel delivery programmes were in place. The lag time from the formal guidance to shield to first parcels being delivered ranged from just over a week to two weeks across countries, but even then, the ability of people to request or register for food parcels may not have been available. Data are needed to learn how long it took people to receive food parcels after making requests for them.

Our stakeholders across all constituent countries shared with us plans for evaluations of their shielding food box schemes. These will be important for understanding how quickly people were reached by the schemes, the scale of uptake, drivers of uptake, and appropriateness of the foods provided. As only ambient foods were provided and the contents uniform across all boxes delivered, many concerns have been raised about whether boxes were able to meet the dietary requirements of people who were shielding,

²³⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-food-and-other-essentials-guidance-to-local-authorities/>

²³⁵ <https://nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk/services>

²³⁶ <https://covidrealities.org/>

²³⁷ <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/briefing/supporting-families-during-covid-19-pandemic-0>

many of whom have special dietary requirements on account of the health conditions that make them extremely clinically vulnerable.

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

The “furlough scheme” has been incredibly important for protecting people from unemployment and significant losses of income, but for low-income earners on this scheme, a 20% reduction in wages may be the difference between just making it and no longer making ends meet. The ability of this scheme to protect people from food insecurity has likely been dependent on access to savings going into the crisis, income, family size, and employers’ actions. Importantly, from August, employers are being asked to contribute to covering the scheme, incrementally more each month until the scheme ends at the end of October. This likely will mean more businesses making furloughed employees redundant, which will further reduce their incomes.

Changes to social security

Despite an important uplift to the standard allowance of Universal Credit and Working Tax credits, and other changes to how benefit conditionality and eligibility operate over the crisis, intended to reduce barriers to accessing these benefits, concerns about the implications of the 5-week waiting for Universal Credit and levels of entitlements provided by benefits still stand, especially given evidence that moving onto Universal Credit is associated with food bank use.²³⁸ There have already been concerns raised about delays in access to Universal Credit given the sudden and dramatic increase in claimant numbers, but numbers are likely to increase much further. Will people be able to access financial support quickly enough through existing benefit options, and even if they are able to access this help, will it be sufficiently generous to meet their costs of living? Further, pauses in conditionality and sanctioning have now been lifted, even though meeting job search requirements and other claimant commitments are likely to be incredibly challenging at this time.

Free School Meal replacements

The free school meal replacement schemes put in place varied between constituent countries but also within constituent countries, in terms of the nature of replacements and the timing that it took for them to be in place. Many concerns have been raised about the appropriateness and accessibility of the National Voucher scheme in England and variation of support across local authorities in Scotland, whilst Northern Ireland has been praised for its swift and efficient delivery of money into the bank accounts of families receiving free school meals. We will be reviewing reports on free school meal replacement programmes and examining them at the local authority level in the next stage of this project, but a key question that arises looking across the schemes is whether a cash-first approach has enabled families to more easily afford the food and other essentials they need than in-kind provision or food vouchers.

²³⁸ Reeves, A., Loopstra, R. The continuing effects of welfare reform on food bank use in the UK: the roll-out of Universal Credit. *Forthcoming in Journal of Social Policy*.

Conclusion

This report has set out the findings of a mapping exercise of national-level responses to risks of food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis. It has described the interventions available across the UK, as well as those which have come from governments of the constituent countries of the UK. It has documented extensive national efforts mobilised across government, business and civil society to help facilitate access to food during an unprecedented health emergency.

However, this report is published in August 2020, at which time local lockdown restrictions are being imposed in parts of England, shielding is coming to an end and the furlough scheme is being wound down. To learn key lessons from the past five months for the next phase of the COVID-19 situation in the UK, our research will move on to do several key things:

- (1) Moving from mapping to monitoring: the research will begin a programme of primary data collection and secondary data analyses at the national level. This part of the research will focus on how the various responses to food insecurity have worked in practice and their impact. A key part of this national monitoring is to work project partners Church Action on Poverty to establish a panel of stakeholders with lived experiences of support with food access during the COVID-19 crisis.
- (2) In parallel to this national level work, the project will turn to look in detail at local-level responses to food access issues during COVID-19. Working with project partners Sustain, local area research will involve in-depth case studies as well as secondary analysis of data at a local authority level across the UK.

This report is the first of several which will be produced over the lifetime of the project. By publishing the findings of the national mapping to date, the aim has been to document key national interventions that have been seen in response to food insecurity during COVID-19.



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