FOOD VULNERABILITY
DURING
COVID-19

PHASE TWO

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

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Contents

Introduction

Background to the report

This is the second report from an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project designed to map and monitor responses to concerns about food access during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the initial stage of the research, we sought to identify national level responses implemented from the beginning of the UK lockdown, covering March to July 2020. The focus was UK wide and covered 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. The resulting report was published in August and is available on the project webpage (http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/).

The first mapping report highlighted the unprecedented scale and complexity of the responses to food insecurity resulting from COVID-19. The responses came from all sectors - government, private, voluntary - and at all levels - local, national, UK. Collectively the responses provided targeted support for groups at risk of food insecurity in a way that has not been seen in recent times. They included new or adapted interventions designed to mitigate some of the impact of restricted financial and physical access to food across three population groups: the shielding population; the moderately clinically vulnerable who were advised to stay at home as much as possible; and low income households. Key national interventions detailed in the report included the grocery box scheme for people on the shielding list, school food replacements, state-provided financial protection, funding and signposting to local authorities, emergency financial support, emergency food assistance and retailer adaptations.

The report concluded that to fully understand responses to threats to household food security, systems mapping must also be done at the local level. Though national governments have announced programmes and funding schemes, it is local governments, schools, local charities and communities that have often been the ones on the ground delivering responses. Insight into this local level response is being captured in the second pillar of the research project through 'deep-dives' into responses in eight local authority areas across the UK.[1] Collating these streams of research in later publications provides an opportunity to capture the multi-layered, multisectoral partnerships that, collectively, delivered the suite of support systems.

About this report

This second report looks at how the national interventions worked in practice. It draws from a range of secondary and primary research methods. Firstly, a systematic search for existing evidence and a review of this evidence. Secondly, primary data collected from a range of stakeholders including civil servants from government departments in each constituent country of the UK, national and UK-wide NGOs and charities, food and poverty charities and

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[1] See a full description of the pillars of this research here: https://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/

business representatives through stakeholder workshops, interviews, and written consultations. Appendix 1 provides full details of the methods used.

The report explores the implementation and impact of four of the national interventions identified in the earlier national mapping and reflects on some key lessons learned, and important questions raised, for the next phases of the COVID-19 outbreak and the health, social and economic challenges we face.

The report presents the initial findings on each of the following responses:

- **School food**: replacements for food ordinarily provided in school, including breakfast and free school lunches, put in place when schools closed during national lockdown.
- **Emergency finance**: cash-based responses provided through existing and new state provided schemes in each of the constituent countries. Also, emergency grants provided through third sector organisations.
- **Emergency food:** adaptations made by charitable emergency food providers to assist people facing economic barriers to food access.
- **Shielding grocery box scheme:** national programmes providing delivery of weekly food boxes to people who were shielding who had no other means of accessing food.

These interventions sat amongst a range of other types of provision or funding made available by local councils, provision from other local voluntary community sector groups, and other national interventions (as documented in our mapping report). However, in the first stages of our research, the above schemes featured prominently and in such a way that we felt warranted further investigation. For ease, the report is structured so the current evidence on each of these responses can be read on a standalone basis. However, throughout, readers should remain mindful of the ways in which they sit in relation to one another and in the context of wider support systems, namely local-level support and the benefit system. Future outputs of the project will seek to bring together insights on this interconnected landscape of support.

We welcome your feedback on the contents of this report to inform the next stages 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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School food
alternatives

School food alternatives

Summary

This section looks at the rollout and effects of alternative school food provision during school closures in the UK national lockdown from March to July 2020.

The findings presented here reflect on replacements for free school meal (FSM) and breakfast provision over this period. Apart from in Wales, where breakfast is a statutory entitlement, there is limited evidence on adaptations made to breakfast provision by organisations involved in this prior to lockdown through breakfast parcel packs. A range of alternative approaches to FSMs were provided across the UK, including direct payments via BACS or other cash transfers, food parcels and food vouchers. The evidence suggests that there was a very varied picture in terms of implementation, but because of the localised nature at a school and local authority level, it is not easy to obtain a comprehensive overview of provision.

Early in the scheme, there were significant problems with access to the food voucher system rolled out in England. Across the UK, concerns were raised over the suitability of eligibility criteria and the ultimate reach of the replacement schemes. There has also been an important debate around the benefits of cash or food provision as alternatives for this scheme during lockdown. Based on the evidence presented in this section, we call for systematic and on-going evaluation and monitoring of adaptations to FSM schemes. This includes an evaluation of the reach and efficacy of the alterative provision during national lockdown (March–Sept 2020), as well as monitoring current provision during the academic year 2020–2021 as local authorities and schools are expected to provide meals for children, both in school and absent from school for COVID-19-related reasons. Finally, given the challenges facing school food systems in relation to food supply and catering, it will be vital that adequate support is given to suppliers and providers over the coming months.

Introduction

When schools closed to all children except those of key workers or vulnerable children in mid-March 2020, governments across the UK worked to facilitate alternative forms of the food provision that children would have received in school. To address the loss of access to free school meals, governments across the UK implemented replacement meal provision in different forms, through food parcels, vouchers or cash. In Northern Ireland, a cash scheme was rolled out, with payments made to families either directly to their bank accounts or by posting cheques. In England, the Department for Education encouraged schools to provide families with food using their existing caterers or other local arrangements and established a centralised eGift card voucher scheme as an alternative.[2] In Scotland, the Scottish Government issued guidance to local authorities setting out options for forms of continued provision based on the need and circumstances of local populations – direct payment, vouchers, delivery or collection. In Wales, schools or local authorities could choose between retailer vouchers, cash or food deliveries. Cash or voucher amounts varied across the UK,

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[2] Lambie-Mumford, H., Loopstra, R. and Gordon, K., *Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK, Food Vulnerability during COVID-19,* Phase 1 Report March – July 2020 (Sheffield: SPERI, 2020) <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Food-Vulnerability-During-COVID-19-first-project-report.pdf>

ranging from £13.50 (Northern Ireland) to up to £20 (Scotland) per child per week. In all countries, FSM replacement schemes ran through the Easter, May half-term and summer holidays.[3] This is a significant divergence from the policy pre-COVID-19, where holiday food provision is not systematically implemented across the UK outside of term time. In addition to FSM replacements, over the summer holidays, government programmes across the UK operated to provide further support, including the Holiday and Activities Fund scheme in England and the Eat Well, Live Well programme in Northern Ireland. School breakfast provision was also adapted over this time.

Universal school food provision programmes – which are provided to children regardless of household income levels – were not replaced, including universal FSMs for all children in the first few years of school (in England and Scotland), the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme, and milk schemes for younger children in primary school settings (in England), although this may have varied at a local authority level.[4]

In Wales, where entitlement to breakfast provision is protected in legislation, a replacement was put in place by adding £1 to vouchers/cash substitutes and food deliveries. Magic Breakfast and Family Action, who work with Department for Education (DfE) funding, also adapted their provision to families during the national UK lockdown.

This report reviews existing research and evidence on school food replacement schemes over March to August 2020 and provides additional primary data on these programmes collected through workshops and interviews with stakeholders. It covers replacement schemes for free school meals as well as breakfast programmes. The key questions explored were:

- What evidence is available on the implementation and impact of school food replacement schemes?
- What further insights can be gained from policy and practice stakeholders on the process of implementing these programmes and the impacts they saw on the ground?
- What can be said about how effective the replacements were?
- What are the key lessons that can be taken away from this scheme for further COVID-19 responses?

Data

Appendix 1 provides full details of the range of secondary and primary research methods including a systematic search for existing evidence and evidence review, national stakeholder workshops, interviews and written submissions. The data relevant for this section on school food replacements are described below.

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[3] Department for Communities, *Ministers take action in relation to Free School Meals payment* (NI.gov.uk, 26 March 2020)
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/ministers-take-action-relation-free-school-meals-payment>

[4] The Scotsman, *Will kids get free school meals over the summer holidays? Voucher scheme in Scotland explained - and who is eligible.* (The Scotsman, Edinburgh, 16th June 2020).
<https://www.scotsman.com/education/will-kids-get-free-school-meals-over-summer-holidays-voucher-scheme-scotland-explained-and-who-eligible-2886244>

Key sources of existing evidence

The subset of search results that were directly applicable to this section on school food and included in this literature review are: one empirical academic paper and 19 pieces of grey literature. After stakeholder interviews, a COVID-19 impact assessment done by Magic Breakfast was identified. This is reviewed as part of the Breakfast replacements section below.[5]

Of the 19 pieces of grey literature, 12 focused exclusively on school closures and school food in this context, whilst the remainder addressed food interventions during COVID-19 more generally, with school food as one area of focus. Five of the focused reports gathered primary data: three from people accessing the alternative provision, one from children upon return to school after the summer holidays and one from those involved in delivering, or with expertise in, the scheme or wider food aid. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) surveyed 3,600 parents and carers and 1,300 children across England, Scotland and Wales, with 635 respondents providing insight into their different experiences of alternative FSM provision.[6] Defeyter and Mann (2020) conducted a study involving 57 nine-to-twelve year-olds who live with a parent/guardian using FSM vouchers to purchase food in order to investigate what children were eating.[7] The Poverty and Inequality Commission reported on how local authorities in Scotland are providing replacements and includes insights from community activists.[8] Human Rights Watch published a report that sought to explore the extent to which the replacement schemes were meeting children's needs.[9] They drew from in-depth telephone/video interviews or exchanged written correspondence with a total of 33 people: 12 representatives of nongovernmental groups and academic or independent experts with knowledge of food aid, children's rights, and education; 4 representatives of local government catering agencies; staff or volunteers from 8 food banks or food distribution organizations; staff from 9 schools or children's centres involved in delivering food aid to children from low-income families; and statutory children's rights oversight bodies in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. More recently, the Food Foundation reported on a survey of 1,064 children aged 7-17 years and a second survey of 2,309 parents or guardians living with children under 18 years, which explored demand for FSMs and experiences of school food since schools returned after summer.[10]

Alongside this primary data from people accessing or providing support, other reports based on desk-based research provide some facts and figures around the scheme, discuss how

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[5] Magic Breakfast, *Keeping Breakfast Going through Covid-19 Impact Report.* (Magic Breakfast, 2020) < https://www.magicbreakfast.com/Blog/keeping-breakfast-going-during-covid-19-impact-report>

[6] Child Poverty Action Group, *The cost of learning in lockdown family experiences of school closures* (London, CPAG, June 2020) <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-learning-lockdown-family-experiences-school-closures>

[7] Defeyter, G. and Mann, E. *The Free School Meal Voucher Scheme: What are children actually eating and drinking? (*Healthy Living Lab, Northumbria University). <https://healthylivinguk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Covid-19-Free-School-Meal-Vouchers-FINAL.pdf>

[8] Poverty and Inequality Commission. *Free school meal provision during the COVID-19 crisis*. (Glasgow, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2020) <https://povertyinequality.scot/publication/free-school-meal-provision-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>

[9] Human Rights Watch, *UK: Children in England Going Hungry with Schools Shut.* (Human Rights Watch, May 2020) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/27/uk-children-england-going-hungry-schools-shut>

[10] Food Foundation. '*Demand for free school meals rises sharply as the economic impact of covid 19 on families bites*' (Food Foundation, 2020) <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/demand-for-free-school-meals-rises-sharply-as-the-economic-impact-of-covid-19-on-families-bites/ >

the school meal replacements operated, provide commentary on the different forms of provision, and made recommendations for adaptations.

The remaining seven grey literature reports include data on school meal replacements in a section of a wider report. Most notably, evidence from an Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Commons Select committee report covering submissions to their inquiry on COVID-19 and food supply in the spring 2020.[11] Evidence was gathered through written and oral submissions from businesses in the food supply chain, food aid organisations, charities, academics and Defra, and an online voluntary public survey conducted in April, to which over 5,500 people responded.[12]

The one paper found in the search of academic databases by Parnham et al (2020) sought to investigate access to FSMs among eligible children and describe factors associated with uptake through cross-sectional analyses of questionnaire data collected in April 2020 from 635 children who were eligible for FSMs.[13]

It is important to note that after our searches were undertaken, the National Audit Office published an investigation into the free school meals voucher scheme in England. It was published on 2 December, immediately prior to the publication of this report, and whilst we point to its key conclusions, we would signpost readers to the full report.[14]

Primary data and stakeholder consultation

In addition to these literature sources, primary data on school food replacements were gathered from national policy and practice stakeholders through online workshops (total of 39 stakeholder participants), telephone interviews with purposively sampled stakeholders and written submissions.. Of the purposively sampled interviews for this phase of the research, six explored school food in detail, and other interviewees provided additional insight.

Free school meal replacements findings: evidence review

Nature of provision and variation

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) reported on the evolving education policy response of governments across the UK to the pandemic, setting out a summary of the responses across the four nations.[15] As shown in Table 1, the EPI research indicates that there was more

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[11] Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *COVID-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020)
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

[12] Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *COVID-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020)
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

[13] Parnham, J., Laverty, A., Majeed, A. and Vamosa, E., *Half of children entitled to free school meals did not have access to the scheme during COVID-19 lockdown in the UK*. Public Health, Volume 187, October 2020, Pages 161-164 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0033350620303875>

[14] National Audit Office (2020) *Investigation into the free school meals vouchers scheme, HC 1036 SESSION 2019–2021 2 DECEMBER 2020*, <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investigation-into-the-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme.pdf>

[15] Sibieta, L. and Cottell, J. *Education Policy Responses across the UK to the pandemic*. (Education Policy Institute, Oct 2020) <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UK-Education-Policy-Response_Pandemic_EPI.pdf>

focus on a localised response in Wales and Scotland, due to "greater encouragement on behalf of governments for local discretion and the lack of a national voucher scheme in either country". The approach was fully national in Northern Ireland, where a national cash transfer scheme was in operation.

Table 1: Summary of provision of free school meals during lockdown, by country.

	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
How support was provided	National voucher scheme, direct provision and alternative vouchers.	Supermarket vouchers, direct payments, and direct provision (deliveries and at hubs).	Supermarket vouchers, direct payments, and direct provision (deliveries and at hubs).	Direct payments only.
By whom	National [voucher] scheme provided by private company via schools.	Collaboration between schools and local authorities.	Collaboration between schools and local authorities.	Education Authorities and in some cases the Home Office.
Local Discretion	Some discretion, though costs mostly met via national voucher system.	Local Authorities encouraged to use 'local approaches'.	Provision that 'meets local needs and circumstances' encouraged.	None.
Level of support	National voucher scheme: £15 per week or £3 a day. Costs of other means of support likely to vary.	Government funding for vouchers: £19.50 per week, or £3.90 per day. Costs of other means of support likely to vary.	Varies between local authorities and by methods of support, from £10 to £20 per week.	£13.50 per week or £2.70 per day.
Period of support	Term time, Easter holiday, spring half term and summer holiday.	Term time, Easter holiday, spring half term and summer holiday.	Term time, Easter holiday, spring half term for all eligible children and summer holiday for children from means tested families only.	Term time only till June 30 and summer holiday.

Source: Sibieta and Cottell (2020): https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/UK-Education-Policy-Response_Pandemic_EPI.pdf

A review by Treanor (2020) highlighted that local authorities in Scotland formulated a range of local approaches. As of 12 May, 13 out of 32 local authorities were providing cash replacements, although the frequency of payments and amount differed; these ranged between £2.00 and £4.00 per day and payment regularity ranged from weekly, to fortnightly to every four weeks. Other approaches included voucher provision for supermarkets (some were only for one supermarket chain), food parcel deliveries, and meals collected from school.[16] A later update (although the date is unknown) suggested at least half of the local authorities were providing cash replacements.[17]

Problems with the English voucher system

The national voucher scheme offered in England through Edenred faced significant problems in the early weeks and was criticised for being inaccessible and not providing vouchers through a wide enough range of retailers. The report by Human Rights Watch highlighted several issues with the national voucher scheme. These included technical glitches, inadequate preparation, understaffing, difficulties and delays for school administrators, delays in families receiving vouchers, the inability to redeem vouchers at budget supermarkets, and some supermarkets being unable to process the vouchers. The voucher provider's website was taken offline during the Easter weekend (April 11-12) and subsequently improved.[18] Other problems with the voucher scheme were identified in the EFRA evidence review. These initially included vouchers only being redeemable in the major supermarkets, including those that low-income families would not typically shop in, and barriers to other retailers joining.[19] Overall, the scheme was reported to be complicated for both schools and families. It required email address verification, applying for a code and downloading/printing the voucher; in addition, vouchers could only be used in a limited number of stores, although the number of options did increase over time.

The National Audit Office (NAO) investigation into the voucher scheme also reports on the problems experienced by some schools and families, particularly in the early weeks of the scheme.[20] However, the report notes that the Department for Education and Edenred took action to improve the scheme's capacity and performance. It describes how 'at the height of the problems, departmental officials held daily calls with Edenred to monitor progress. Ministers also intervened directly to seek assurance that Edenred was taking sufficiently robust action in response to the problems'.[21]

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[16] Treanor, M. *COVID-19 crisis measures, poverty and free school meals. (*Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Equalities Research, Heriot Watt University, June 11 2020). <https://www.i-sphere.hw.ac.uk/covid-19-crisis-measures-poverty-and-free-school-meals/#_edn11>

[17] Poverty and Inequality Commission. *Free school meal provision during the COVID-19 crisis*. (Glasgow, Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2020) <https://povertyinequality.scot/publication/free-school-meal-provision-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>.

[18] Human Rights Watch, *UK: Children in England Going Hungry with Schools Shut.* (Human Rights Watch, May 2020) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/27/uk-children-england-going-hungry-schools-shut>

[19] Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *COVID-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

[20] National Audit Office (2020) *Investigation into the free school meals vouchers scheme, HC 1036 SESSION 2019–2021* 2 DECEMBER 2020, https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investigation-into-the-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme.pdf

[21] National Audit Office (2020) *Investigation into the free school meals vouchers scheme, HC 1036 SESSION 2019–2021 2 DECEMBER 2020,* https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investigation-into-the-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme.pdf p.7

The NAO report also sets out the high take up of the scheme amongst schools. By August 2020, 94% of state schools in England were registered for the scheme. Edenred reported to the NAO that based on the number of unique email addresses used, their estimates were that the scheme supported between 850,000 and 900,000 families.[22]

Eligibility for and protection provided by means-tested free school meals

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, concerns had been raised over the eligibility criteria for means-tested FSM provision, which leaves some low-income households without entitlement to FSMs, and calls have been made to expand this provision.[23] In England and Scotland, universal meal provision is available to pupils in the first three years of school; reception and years 1 and 2 in England, and primary 1–3 in Scotland. This provision was not replaced during the Covid-19 lockdown, only means-tested FSM provision was adapted. Concern was raised that at the time of the lockdown, some eligible children may not have been registered to receive FSMs if they had previously been receiving universal provision.[24] It would be important to understand the extent of this in more detail, because schools may encourage eligible parents to apply for FSM even if they are receiving a universal provision (UIFSM), because it affects school funding. There was also concern that families who had previously been ineligible but whose financial circumstances worsened due to the crisis would miss out on support because they would have had to go through the application process.[25]

During the UK national lockdown eligibility criteria were also adjusted in England to cover children with parents who are ineligible for public funds. This provision already existed in Scotland. In Wales, local authorities already had powers to implement flexible charging for school meals. Welsh Government encouraged local authorities to use their discretion in relation to children living with parents with no recourse to public funds.

Defeyter and Mann's (2020) study of 57 nine-to-twelve year-olds who lived with a parent/guardian who was using FSM vouchers in England completed the 'Day in the Life Questionnaire' on three days prior to school closures and three days approximately two months following school closures.[26] This study highlighted changes in diet before and after the school closures. Comparing data pre and post school closures showed significant differences with children consuming fewer portions of fruit and vegetables, more sugar

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[22] National Audit Office (2020) *Investigation into the free school meals vouchers scheme, HC 1036 SESSION 2019–2021 2 DECEMBER 2020*, https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investigation-into-the-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme.pdf p. 8

[23] Department for Education. *Eligibility for free school meals, the early years pupil premium and the free early education entitlement for two-year-olds under Universal Credit.* (Gov.uk, March, 2018) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/692644/Government_response_FSM_and_EY_entitlements_under_Universal_Credit.pdf>
O'Connell, R., Knight, A. and Brannen, J. (2019) *Living Hand to Mouth. London, (CPAG, 2019)* <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/living-hand-mouth>
Child Poverty Action Group (2020) *Expanding eligibility for free school meals in England*. (London, CPAG, DEC 2020) <https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/CPAG-FSM-briefing-2020.pdf>
https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/15148.

[24] Montacute, R. *Social mobility and Covid-19.* (The Sutton Trust, April 2020) <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-Social-Mobility-1.pdf>

[25] Montacute, R. *Social mobility and Covid-19.* (The Sutton Trust, April 2020) <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-Social-Mobility-1.pdf>

[26] Defeyter, G. and Mann, E. *The Free School Meal Voucher Scheme: What are children actually eating and drinking? (*Healthy Living Lab, Northumbria University). <https://healthylivinguk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Covid-19-Free-School-Meal-Vouchers-FINAL.pdf>

sweetened beverages and unhealthy snacks. More children were skipping at least one meal a day after school closures. The authors concluded that the voucher scheme failed disadvantaged children and that the additional £15 from food vouchers did not enable households to move out of the risk of children experiencing food insecurity during lockdown, especially at a time when household income was likely to have suffered.[27]

Reach of free school meal alternatives

Despite evidence of increasing uptake over the pandemic, some data suggested that families receiving FSMs were not reached by replacement programmes. Parnham et al (2020) did a cross-sectional analysis of UK Household Longitudinal Study COVID-19 survey data, which was collected in April. The data included 635 children who were eligible for FSM, although it is important to note that the sample across the UK varied, with only 30 respondents from Wales. The paper reported that 49% of participants did not receive any form of FSM entitlement in April 2020. However, the data did not distinguish between means-tested and universal schemes. The data, when grouped by age (infants, juniors and secondary) showed a much higher proportion of infants did not access a FSM replacement, compared to the other age groups, perhaps reflecting the concern of other reports that not all eligible children were registered for means-tested provision if they were receiving universal free school meal provision. Among FSM eligible children, the lowest-income children were more likely to access a replacement FSM.

These data were similar to YouGov data collected in early May commissioned by the Food Foundation, who reported that half a million children who normally relied on FSMs received no substitutes at all since lockdown came into effect.[28] A report of an Independent Children's Rights Impact Assessment which focused on Scotland only noted that in the absence of data on families accessing replacement FSMs, broken by area or provision type, it was difficult to know if the needs of children were being equitably met across the country.[29] Available data to partially fill this gap comes from the reporting of the number of children and young people provided with a free school meal alternative by each Scottish local authority although the form of provision is grouped as either 'school meals taken in the Hub' or 'Vouchers, direct payments, home deliveries'.[30]

Means of Provision

Across the relevant reports, strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches were highlighted. Key concerns about the use of food parcels to replace FSMs were: a lack of choice; whether the food provided met individual dietary requirements; whether families were able to afford the costs of preparing and cooking the food; and possible stigma of having to

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[27] Defeyter, G. and Mann, E. *The Free School Meal Voucher Scheme: What are children actually eating and drinking? (*Healthy Living Lab, Northumbria University). <https://healthylivinguk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Covid-19-Free-School-Meal-Vouchers-FINAL.pdf >

[28] Food Foundation, *More than five million people in households with children have experienced food insecurity since lockdown began,* (Food Foundation, May 2020) < https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/New-COVID-19-childrens-food-insecurity-data-FINAL.pdf>

[29] Children and Young People's Commissioner, Scotland. *Independent Children's Rights Impact Assessment on the Response to Covid-19 in Scotland*. (Edinburgh: CYPCS) <https://cypcs.org.uk/wpcypcs/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/independent-cria.pdf >

[30] Scottish Government Education Analytical Services, *Learning Analysis, Data and charts for the daily updates on COVID-19 on publicly funded, private voluntary and independent early years and school/hub settings.* <https://public.tableau.com/profile/sg.eas.learninganalysis#!/vizhome/Covid19ELCandHubs/Introduction>

access a food parcel.[31] Delivery, as opposed to collection from school, which was used by some local authorities, may have reduced stigma and also increased safety by making it easier to comply with social distancing.[32] Responses that required families having to travel to schools to pick up food parcels were considered inappropriate as these journeys may have required travel on public transport, which was against government guidelines in all but essential circumstances at the time.[33]

Concerns with replacements in the form of vouchers also related to safety. Because vouchers had to be spent in person and not online, families had to travel to shops, again adding to risk if public transit was required and even more challenging for families living in rural areas. Other concerns included: where vouchers were limited to particular shops, families may not have been able to buy the food their families wanted and enjoyed or shopped where they usually do; stigma may have made people reluctant to use the vouchers, and families may have been unable to afford the other costs associated with cooking a meal.[34]

The same reports noted the benefits of replacements in the form of cash paid directly into people's bank accounts, in comparison to food parcel and voucher schemes. These included families having a choice of where to shop and which foods to buy, providing more flexibility. Cash schemes did not have the same accessibility issues, as they allowed families to buy food from the shops they normally would use. This meant they were more suitable for families, not requiring any extra effort to claim vouchers or food parcels. The flexibility of money meant families could use any retailer, including online retailers, for the purchase of food or volunteers to help with shopping, reducing safety issues. If needed, cash could also be used to cover cooking costs such as gas and electricity.[35]

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[31] Child Poverty Action Group, *The cost of learning in lockdown family experiences of school closures* (London, CPAG, June 2020) <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-learning-lockdown-family-experiences-school-closures> Bevan Foundation, *Free School Meals and Coronavirus* (Bevan Foundation, April 2020) <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/State-of-Wales-FSM.pdf>

[32] Bevan Foundation, *Free School Meals and Coronavirus* (Bevan Foundation, April 2020) <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/State-of-Wales-FSM.pdf>

[33] The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 2nd June 2020. (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 2 June 2020)* <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Community-organisations-COVID19-Poverty-Alliance-briefing-2nd-June.pdf>
Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland. *Education and Skills Committee: Vulnerable children during the Coronavirus pandemic. (*Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, 2020) < https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/General%20Documents/20200501Child_Poverty_Action_Group_i n_Scotland.pdf>

[34] Child Poverty Action Group, *The cost of learning in lockdown family experiences of school closures* (London, CPAG, June 2020) <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-learning-lockdown-family-experiences-school-closures>
The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 2nd June 2020. (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 2 June 2020)* <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Community-organisations-COVID19-Poverty-Alliance-briefing-2nd-June.pdf>
Bevan Foundation, *Free School Meals and Coronavirus* (Bevan Foundation, April 2020) https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/State-of-Wales-FSM.pdf

[35] Child Poverty Action Group, *The cost of learning in lockdown family experiences of school closures* (London, CPAG, June 2020) <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-learning-lockdown-family-experiences-school-closures>
The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 2nd*

Other reports noted some drawbacks, however. Bank transfer cash schemes could not benefit families who do not have bank accounts and, when focusing on nutrition outcomes, it has also been noted that unlike the provision of food in school, it is not possible to monitor the food consumption outcomes of direct payments.[36]

Further evidencing the strengths and drawbacks of the various approaches, the CPAG survey found varying levels of satisfaction with the different approaches. Among families receiving direct payments, 81% of families said this worked extremely or very well. Among families receiving vouchers that could be spent in more than one supermarket or only one supermarket, these figures dropped to 60% and 35%, respectively. Among families having food delivered, 46% said this worked well or extremely well, but only 36% of families collecting food said this. Of those receiving direct payments, 90% said they would pick this method if they had the choice.[37]

Evidence also showed that the level of support was not sufficient to overcome financial barriers to food access for families in receipt of FSMs during the pandemic. Some families reported that whilst the support was welcome, many budgets were under such pressure that they still struggled to afford what they needed.[38]

Free school meal replacements findings: stakeholder perspectives

Means of provision

Stakeholder workshop discussions across England, Scotland and Wales all reflected on the challenges with FSM replacement schemes. In interviews and written submissions, policy stakeholders highlighted that in different countries Government guidance was issued on the contents of any direct food provision. For example, in Scotland, guidance was issued which stated that school food and nutrition regulations standards had to be met in replacement FSM provision; and in England, work was done between the Department for Education with LACA and Public Health England to produce guidance on food parcels. It will be important for future research to explore the final outputs of in-kind food provision and outcomes for families. In the stakeholder workshop in England, themes already identified in existing literature relating to difficulties of the voucher system were discussed:

> 'I mean, I could go on, in terms of using the voucher scheme; families that don't have reliable wi-fi, requirements to print vouchers when they didn't have printers, and those kinds of things.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

June 2020. (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 2 June 2020) <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Community-organisations-COVID19-Poverty-Alliance-briefing-2nd-June.pdf>
Bevan Foundation, *Free School Meals and Coronavirus* (Bevan Foundation, April 2020) https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/State-of-Wales-FSM.pdf

[36] Bevan Foundation, *Free School Meals and Coronavirus* (Bevan Foundation, April 2020) <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/State-of-Wales-FSM.pdf>

[37] Child Poverty Action Group, *The cost of learning in lockdown family experiences of school closures* (London, CPAG, June 2020) <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-learning-lockdown-family-experiences-school-closures>

[38] Child Poverty Action Group, *The cost of learning in lockdown family experiences of school closures* (London, CPAG, June 2020) <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-learning-lockdown-family-experiences-school-closures>

Reflecting on the early issues with the voucher scheme (reported in the Human Rights Watch report discussed above), one stakeholder suggested the demand for the national scheme was greater than had been anticipated, as guidance suggested utilising existing school caterers, and this may have contributed to some of the early problems with the scheme. Stakeholders in England also pointed out that Public Health England produced shopping lists and recipe suggestions linked to voucher values to support families receiving vouchers over the summer.

In contrast to concerns over voucher provision, in Northern Ireland stakeholders were incredibly positive about the roll out of their cash-based scheme involving direct payments to families:

'In relation to the payments for free school meals. I know that in comparison to other parts of the country, the direct payments definitely worked, and I know my colleagues in England and Wales and Scotland have kind of articulated some of the difficulties associated with the vouchers, and other alternatives. So fantastic initiative.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Stakeholder interview data from Wales also reported that families talked very positively of direct cash payments, with benefits being that they gave families the freedom to choose what they wanted to buy and where they wanted to shop.

However, stakeholder discussions also reflected the need for, and benefits of, a range of provision types to be able to support households in different circumstances.

'So, in Cardiff, we have got three different options for parents. They can have direct payments, they can have supermarket vouchers or they can have food parcels. And, as I say, from a Cardiff perspective, we've got a large number of asylum-seekers, we've also got a large traveller community population. Those groups don't always have access to bank accounts, so direct payments wouldn't work, and they are the ones who have obviously taken up the supermarket vouchers and food parcels.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

'And there has been a variety of responses, be it cash-based or be it food-based. I know there's, sort of, a preference within particularly the third sector for the cash-based responses, but we found the food provision really valuable as well. And, sort of, the contact with people, as a result of the actual food delivery. So being able to check in with people, and do, sort of, some of the- we were talking about some of the social isolation this morning, and councils being able to sort of offer other services as a result, and get a real gauge of how families are getting on.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Stakeholders reflected that local authorities in Wales who provided food parcels worked to make these as nutritious and practical (for parents with limited preparation and cooking skills) as possible, with some providing freezer meals plus basic staples (e.g., bread, milk, cereal, fruit, vegetables, desserts). One stakeholder in Wales discussed how opting to do food parcel deliveries may have had wider benefits to the local community from a supply perspective:

> 'Caerphilly were the first ones to do it and they also supported their local suppliers. The local authority called upon several different departments to put together their approach. They received lots of positive feedback. Residents appreciated that the local authority had made it happen so quickly and were supporting local suppliers and staff, rather than just the parents of children eligible for free school meals. It was more of a holistic approach' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

In Scotland, reflections were made in the workshops on the importance of taking into account particular logistical factors faced in rural communities:

> 'Things around transport, particularly highlands and island communities, about what was the best way to make sure people could get food. It needed to include a voucher to get on the ferry, if the ferry was running, to get food in the big shops. Contributing to local shops and trying to use systems that also bolstered local communities and local economies by making sure that those vouchers were for accessible local food provision.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Workshops with stakeholders from England and Wales also highlighted the important role played by schools and local authorities in helping families access and utilise the alternative provision which was available:

> 'And one of the problems that we found with the summer scheme is that schools turn-families turn to schools for support in accessing vouchers and other support schemes. So, if schools aren't open, it's much harder for families to access support, and to activate the vouchers if they haven't used them before.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

> 'Welsh Government has been working with the local authorities to increase take-up. And that's not just new applications, there was quite a big percentage of children who were eligible for free school meals, but who never took up free school meals at school. And those families are now being encouraged to accept the support that's available over the summer holidays, to help feed their children. So that is ongoing.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Phases of provision

As was the case with many urgent policy redesigns in response to the national COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, there was a period of transition between the provision of FSMs in schools before the closure of schools was announced to FSM alternatives being provided. In Scotland, it was reported to us that Scottish Government introduced guidance for local authorities and agreed funding in 8-10 days from schools closing. School food replacements involved setting up whole new systems of support to families, whether they were voucher schemes or parcel provision. Necessarily, except for Northern Ireland which announced direct cash payments from an early stage, there were periods of adjustments and changes in the nature of the support.

In England, the voucher scheme was rolled out from 31 March. In interview data, one stakeholder reflected on the popularity of the scheme and the significant take up from schools. The voucher scheme had originally been designed as a 'back up' with guidance emphasising that schools were encouraged to find a local solution in the first instance using

their own caterers. Complementing the findings of existing evidence, stakeholder data recounted the processes of adaptation in the voucher system in response to initial difficulties with the usability and accessibility of the scheme.

In Wales, stakeholder interview data suggested there were three distinct phases in the evolution of FSM replacement provision:

> "So the way I see things and how the system developed over time is that there were three main phases to the response in Wales. There was an initial response, which is the first couple of weeks. A refined response, which is the following about eight weeks. Then there is the recovery response, which we are still in, but starting to have sub-phases within that." [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

This stakeholder described these three phases. The first was characterised by each local authority doing what they could in the time and resources that they had:

> 'It was pick up from schools and local authority hubs in each local authority, or it was delivered to homes…. But certainly, the first week, I think, everyone was, "Okay, we'll provide cold packed lunches because we just haven't got the time to prepare anything else, but in the meantime, we are looking to refine it.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

After the initial rush, the second phase was characterised by more reflection and tailoring:

> 'So what followed from pretty much after the first two weeks was a refined response, where each authority looked at its local needs and circumstances and capabilities and decided how to refine their position to get the greatest take up. So that most people could benefit. No one authority is the same as another. So it did vary and it did take some authorities longer than other authorities.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

The third, ongoing phase was described as the recovery response., although the interviewee reported subphases emerged within this The first phase,"check in, catch up and prepare", was a period of three to four weeks when children returned to school in what would have been the final weeks of the Summer term, but only for short periods of time and only a small number of pupils at a time. During this time, most authorities continued with their current provisions, although five opted to provide a lunch service for the children that were in school at that particular time. The second subphase was 'back to school' which was a phased return to school across the first two weeks of the autumn term up to 13 September, when all pupils were expected to return to school. During this time, provision seemed to vary from continuing with direct payments or vouchers, offering free lunches in school (either hot or cold), offering free breakfast, and providing packed lunches in secondary schools.

> 'It really depended on what the school wanted and that was the key thing. When schools returned, local authorities had to prepare individual plans for each school because each school was different and each school wanted a different thing. The decision ultimately, with how children were phased back and how they were going to eat their lunch was with the head teacher and the governing body. So it was very challenging, but each authority managed it.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

From this time, authorities have gradually increased provision and are returning to more regular and consistent provision. A final challenge of this phase has been supporting pupils during self-isolation, shielding and local lockdowns which *"came up on top of authorities quicker than expected".* This meant they had less time to consider this response. These observations highlight the challenges of the necessary speed at which local authorities had to implement this replacement support and how ongoing uncertainty and changes have a continuing impact on how school meal replacements are provided. This stakeholder described how providing a range of alternative options was more challenging for some local authorities than others, referring to direct cash payments:

'It did have some inefficiencies. Especially in the authorities which weren't geared up to provide payments, or didn't have that information on record, or it wasn't easily accessible digitally. So it did highlight some issues there that have since been resolved. It just took a lot of administration.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

Caterers and school food supply systems

Stakeholders highlighted the knock-on effects of replacement provision on the suppliers of school food.

'With lockdown restrictions and vouchers and payments being the primary method of FSM provision, suppliers weren't receiving as many orders as they would during normal term-time. Schools are an important part of their business. Authorities want to be able to support local suppliers, and also want to be able to, when it comes back to a sense of normality, be able to return to the suppliers that they know and trust and have got all their allergen information and nutritional information for their products. If these suppliers are not supported now by customers and national governments the suppliers may not be there when normal returns, whenever that is. This may then impact on the ability of local authorities to provide their service.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

Stakeholders in England discussed how guidance issued to schools was to, in the first instance, arrange provision through their existing caterer as this would be a way to support the caterers when demand for their services was severely impacted. It was noted that schools continued to receive their FSM allocations and were encouraged to use this to continue to pay their catering suppliers.

Alternative breakfast provision findings: evidence review

At the time of our evidence searches, nothing had been published on alternative provision of breakfasts during March-August 2020. Subsequently to our searches, Magic Breakfast published an impact report of their work during the crisis which we draw on as part of the analysis in the following section.[39] Stakeholder data collection gathered insights into how alternatives worked in practice.

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[39] Magic Breakfast, *Keeping Breakfast Going through Covid-19 Impact Report.* (Magic Breakfast, 2020) < https://www.magicbreakfast.com/Blog/keeping-breakfast-going-during-covid-19-impact-report>

Alternative breakfast provision findings: stakeholder perspectives

Wales

In Wales, breakfast provision is an entitlement for primary school children. There is no entitlement for breakfast provision in the other three countries. Welsh stakeholder data noted an expectation that the replacement provision would include provision for breakfast, be it in the amount of direct payments, vouchers or in food deliveries. Referring to the amount of direct payments one stakeholder said:

> 'Provision in the school holidays was £3.90 per pupil, per day. That was to include the lunch meal, the breakfast, and the free milk. £2.90 was the highest value of free school meals in Wales, plus £1.00 for breakfast and milk.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

Magic Breakfast

Prior to the pandemic, Magic Breakfast provided breakfast in schools for 48,000 pupils with 480 partner schools in England and Scotland. During the crisis, they provided breakfast for 24,000 during school closures and 35,000 during school holidays.[40] Prior to the crisis breakfast provision was in term time only.

Following the announcement of the closure of schools, Magic Breakfast reached out to the schools it was working with to find out what their plans were and whether they would be interested in alternative breakfast provision.

> 'From week one of school closures, Magic Breakfast continued to deliver breakfast food to schools which were open and able to receive deliveries. Some schools continued to offer breakfast to those pupils still attending while others allowed families to collect breakfast food packs from the school, in a socially distanced way, or offered home delivery services via their school network.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

As with FSM replacements, there was a period of adjustment. Interview data noted that initially, a quarter of schools said they would join the alternative provision; after the first few weeks more schools joined, and the impact report states two thirds of partner schools participated in the replacement scheme.The alternative provision was a significant change in Magic Breakfast's work. From previously providing food for breakfast meals to be served and eaten in a school setting, alternatives for the lockdown period took the form of breakfast packs designed to last for a two-week period, containing cereal, beans, bagels and milk vouchers (Arla vouchers for Cravendale milk). Magic Breakfast delivered the food to the schools who then packed it up and distributed it. In addition, a scheme was run in partnership with Amazon, delivering breakfast packs to children's homes. Magic Breakfast worked with several corporate partners to deliver this replacement scheme including Heinz, Arla, Morrisons, Kellogg's.

Some of Magic Breakfast's provision is regularly delivered in partnership with Family Action, through a contract with the Department for Education on the National School Breakfast

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[40] Magic Breakfast, *Keeping Breakfast Going through Covid-19 Impact Report.* (Magic Breakfast, 2020) < https://www.magicbreakfast.com/Blog/keeping-breakfast-going-during-covid-19-impact-report>

Programme. Interview data highlighted that, due to budget restrictions, home deliveries of breakfast were not available to these schools. This meant that uptake was lower than in the schools not part of this programme. Now that schools have returned, stakeholder interview data included an observation that although schools and local authorities would like to offer extended school day activities, including breakfast clubs, the current priority has to be safety and social distancing. This makes such provision more challenging to provide.

School food and free school meals from September 2020

Concerns about FSM provision remain even now that schools have returned. In October, the Food Foundation reported that some schools were struggling to provide hot meals, and that only 45% of school canteens were running as normal (with social distancing in place). A review of local authority websites in Scotland on 25 August (schools opened on 11 August) suggested that at this point, half were providing cold meals only.[41] The Childwise Survey run for the Food Foundations survey found that 8% of children reported that their school canteen was closed and that 10% of children were being asked to bring a packed lunch. A further 16% reported only cold lunches being served (16%), while 21% reported the canteens were only serving a small number of pupils.[42] What hot food provision in schools looks like now (after a full term back) is important to understand, as stakeholders reflected how a free school meal can be a child's only hot meal for the day.

Stakeholders observed there is significant variation in the uptake of school meals since schools have returned.

'It is varied across Wales and within authorities, across schools. In primary schools, some authorities are finding that take up of free school meals is higher than pre-COVID. Some are finding that it is much lower than pre-COVID. Some are finding that it started low but is increasing towards pre-COVID levels. Some of the reasons suggested for higher take-up include increased eligibility and more parents wanting their child to have a hot, nutritious meal again, rather than continuing the eating habits they may have developed during lockdown. Some of the reasons suggested for lower take-up include anxiety about COVID-19 cross-contamination during food preparation and low attendance in schools that have a high proportion of pupils self-isolating. So it's quite a mixed bag, in terms of take up in primary schools. In secondary schools, take-up is generally much lower than pre-COVID. This appears to be a result of the reduced range of appropriate food provisions and the temporary changes to the school day, with many secondary schools no longer operating separate morning breaks and lunch breaks, opting for one extended and staggered break time.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

Sustainability of the school food sector

There were, and remain, significant concerns over the sustainability of the sector in England and Wales. Some schools and school caterers shifted to providing meals on wheels to help

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[41] Obesity Action Scotland, *Primary School Meals in Scotland 2020: a snapshot and a future vision. (Obesity Action Scotland, 02 September 2020)* <https://www.obesityactionscotland.org/blog/primary-school-meals-in-scotland-2020-a-snapshot-and-a-future-vision/ >

[42] Food Foundation. '*Demand for free school meals rises sharply as the economic impact of covid 19 on families bites'* (Food Foundation, 2020) <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/demand-for-free-school-meals-rises-sharply-as-the-economic-impact-of-covid-19-on-families-bites/

sustain meal production during the lockdown.[43] One interviewee reported that following the re-opening in September, some schools found their catering companies had gone out of business or withdrawn their work in the area. Even with the re-opening of schools, school break and lunch patterns have changed, and in many schools eating now takes place in the classroom. Thus, the take up of 'paid for' meals from caterers remains an issue. Questions of food supply and prices posed by EU Exit in January 2020 are also causing concern for the sustainability of the sector.

Providing for isolating and attending children simultaneously

A further challenge schools are facing at the time of publication is to provide FSMs for children attending school as well as those in isolation (either 'bubbles' of children sent home to isolate following contact with a confirmed case in their class/year, or children who are isolating following a COVID-19 positive result for themselves or someone in their household). Schools in England are expected to support children eligible for means tested free lunches who cannot attend school due to self-isolation or local restrictions by working with suppliers to prepare meals or food parcels whilst they are unable to attend.[44] In Wales, the Welsh Government has announced funding to support local authorities to provide FSM replacements for pupils who are shielding or self-isolating.[45] Support for pupils self-isolating in Scotland is provided at a local authority level.[46]

As noted above, one stakeholder discussed how the requirement to provide for pupils who may be self-isolating came about quicker than anticipated and at a time when schools and local authorities were still making adjustments to provision as pupils returned after the summer holidays. For example, one stakeholder shared:

> 'But it was upon us quicker than anyone anticipated. So each authority has had to make their own decisions about how they are going to manage pupils who may not be at school because they are self-isolating or shielding. There has been some funding introduced from Welsh Government, but it probably won't be enough to cover all these cases. It is anticipated local authorities might receive more funding, with regards to this.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview].

Increased demand for free school meals

Demand for FSMs has reportedly increased over the pandemic. In Wales, as of 20 May 2020, 37% more pupils were receiving FSMs compared to January 2020, with around 5,000

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[43] Sustain, *School caterers put their meals on wheels: a guide for local authorities and school caterers on delivering to older adults during Covid-19*. (London: Sustain, 2020) <https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/school_caterers_put_their_meals_on_wheels/>

[44] Department for Education, *Providing school meals during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. (*Gov.uk, 2020) < https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>

[45] Welsh Government, *£420,000 will ensure access to free school meals for learners shielding or self-isolating (Gov.wales, 2020)* < https://gov.wales/420000-pounds-will-ensure-access-free-school-meals-learners-shielding-or-self-isolating>

[46] Peebles, C. *Free school meals payments for eligible children self-isolating due to coronavirus. (The Courier.co.uk, Nov 24 2020)* < https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/schools/1758169/free-school-meals-payments-for-eligible-children-self-isolating-due-to-coronavirus/ >

pupils becoming eligible since the start of lockdown.[47] A survey of 1,064 children aged 7-17 years carried out in the United Kingdom conducted between 8-20 September showed that 29% of children (equivalent to 2.2 million children) aged 8-17 reported being registered for FSMs. Among all children registered, 42% (900,000) were newly registered to the scheme. In contrast to characteristics of families usually receiving FSMs, 64% of newly registered children were from households where the main earners reported being in higher income occupations compared to 36% from lower income occupations, showing how the economic impacts of COVID-19 have reached across socio-economic groups.[48] Stakeholder interview data included concerns that households who have unexpectedly lost income due to the crisis may be reticent to access FSMs, even though they are eligible. Other families who are newly eligible may not be aware that they are entitled to FSMs. This may be exacerbated as there are fewer informal conversations with teachers happening at the school gates which, in the past, would have provided an opportunity to raise awareness.

Summary and conclusions

School is an important part of children's food environments. Depending on their age and which nation of the UK they live in, children may receive milk, fruit and vegetable snacks, school meals (lunches) and/or breakfast. The national COVID-19 lockdown and closure of schools disrupted every kind of school food provision. The findings presented here reflect on replacements for FSM and breakfast provision over this period. Apart from in Wales, where breakfast is a statutory entitlement, breakfast provision was adapted by organisations involved in the provision before lockdown in the form of food parcels. The national lockdown precipitated an entire reworking of the FSM scheme across the UK. A range of alternatives were provided including food parcels, food vouchers and cash. The evidence suggests that there was a very varied picture in terms of implementation, but because of the localised nature (at a school and local authority level), it is not easy to obtain a comprehensive overview.

Reflections and recommendations at the current time

As the COVID-19 outbreak and policy responses to it evolve, school food and FSM provision remain in a state of flux. There are several key considerations and recommendations at this current time.

Monitor and evaluate current provision and its efficacy

Whilst guidelines have been issued for schools to provide support to children who are not in schools for COVID-related reasons, we are not aware of how this provision is being implemented or monitored. As children may develop symptoms quickly, resulting in them staying home, this must be a logistical challenge for schools. Whether replacements are reaching children fast enough, and with appropriate provision, warrants some investigation. The lack of provision of FSMs, or fear of a lack of provision, may motivate parents to continue to send children into school in some cases, undermining self-isolation guidance.

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[47] Data Cymru, *Free School Meals (FSM) in Wales on 20 May 2020. (Data Cymru, 2020)* <https://www.data.cymru/covid19/free-school-meals.pdf>

[48] Food Foundation. '*Demand for free school meals rises sharply as the economic impact of covid 19 on families bites'* (Food Foundation, 2020) <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/demand-for-free-school-meals-rises-sharply-as-the-economic-impact-of-covid-19-on-families-bites/ >

Evaluate the impact eligibility changes during national lockdown had on children who were previously ineligible for support

To our knowledge, no studies have been conducted to examine the impacts or reach of the extension of FSM replacements to children living with parents with no recourse to public funds in England. This extension covered both children who were attending school and those who were self-isolating.[49] In Scotland and Wales, local authorities were encouraged to use their discretion in extending eligibility.[50] Given this change in entitlement (in England) was a direct result of the crisis, data on the numbers of households accessing this support would provide insight into the efficacy of the roll-out of the change and also highlight the extent of the gap in provision prior to the pandemic. Comparisons in uptake across the four countries may highlight whether the change in eligibility at a national level (England) compared to discretion at a local authority level impacted on accessibility and uptake (Scotland and Wales).

Analysis and evaluation need to clearly take account of the implications of the multiple aims, and structural and institutional arrangements involved in free school meal policy

Free school meals in the UK are designed to provide access to food for children in school. They are therefore designed to both enhance food access for children from households facing economic barriers to food and provide food in a school setting. The distinct but interwoven institutional, legislative and structural dimensions to these two aims are important to be aware of.

School food involves a range of actors (local authorities, public health, schools, food suppliers, food caterers), regulations and supply chains. This raised particular challenges for policy makers considering the knock-on effect of national lockdown on caterers and food suppliers.

In parallel, means tested categorisations of 'disadvantage' introduce a different set of structural determinants, institutional processes and state and non-state actors. These include household income levels and security, social security systems and take up, and voluntary sector support and advocacy.

It is important to understand these dynamics to understand the ways in which FSM replacement schemes held in tension a number of different policies and agendas. The question of how to restructure FSMs during the lockdown incorporated two distinct – and divergent – questions. On the one hand, a policy question of how best to facilitate access to food for families experiencing financial difficulty during the lockdown; and on the other, what to do about school catering while schools were closed. The first of these questions relates to a significant social policy issue during the COVID-19 outbreak: the most effective ways to protect incomes during the crisis. The second question was how best to support an important food sector, which needed to function effectively again when lockdown was lifted, and schools returned. The intersections between these policy agendas and considerations are important context when looking at how FSM replacements were designed, the differing recommendations and interpretations of the policy problem, and variation in practice. As the

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[49] Department for Education. *Coronavirus (COVID-19): temporary extension of free school meals eligibility to NRPF groups.* (Gov.uk, 2020) < https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/guidance-for-the-temporary-extension-of-free-school-meals-eligibility-to-nrpf-groups >
[50] Welsh Government, *Revised guidance for schools in Wales: supporting children eligible for free school meals* (Gov.wales., 2020),<https://gov.wales/free-school-meals-coronavirus-guidance-schools#section-40902> ;
Scottish Government, *School Meals* (mygov.scot, 2020) <https://www.mygov.scot/school-meals/>

crisis continues, it will be important to consider these policy dimensions relatedly but distinctly.

Prioritise support for school food systems in the coming months

The concerns raised in the data we collected indicate that now is a worrying time for the school food sector. Current hybrids of having some children in school and other bubbles or groups isolating is a challenge for school food contractors and businesses, as is the threat of school closures in future lockdown scenarios. The impact of Brexit on food supplies and prices are also factors of concern for procurement in this system. The viability of school food businesses for the future when schools fully re-open is an important policy concern, and the most effective ways of supporting this sector need to be urgently explored.

Emergency finance provision

Emergency finance provision

Summary

This section looks at the effects of national emergency finance schemes during the UK-wide coronavirus lockdown over March to July 2020. In Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, nationally funded and managed emergency payment schemes were in operation during the COVID-19 national lockdown to provide money for people in financial hardship to buy essentials. In England, there has been no national emergency payment scheme, though the central government provided local authorities with additional funding to support people to meet essential needs. To date, there is limited evidence on the impact of the emergency payment schemes implemented during the crisis.

Additional funding, changes to eligibility criteria and easier access mechanisms were widely welcomed by stakeholders who took part in the research and felt these schemes played a key role in supporting people in need. However, significant concern regarding the reach of the schemes was evident. Potential reasons for barriers to the reach of the schemes included concerns about the insufficient promotion of the schemes. It was also felt that because many people struggling financially at this time were people who were newly eligible and who had not previously sought support, they may not have known how to access the support available. There is a notable gap in evidence relating to the impact of these schemes in general, with no assessment of the impact of such schemes on the household food insecurity of applicants during the crisis, even though providing funding for people to access food is a key aim of these schemes.

Introduction

In Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, nationally funded and managed emergency payment schemes were in operation during the COVID-19 national lockdown to provide money for people in financial hardship to buy essentials. In Northern Ireland, the Discretionary Support COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Short-term Living Expenses scheme was announced at the end of March and designed to provide cash support for people if they (or an immediate family member) were diagnosed with COVID-19 or asked to self-isolate and had an income of less than £20,405 a year. This was in addition to existing support already available through the Universal Credit Contingency Fund Short-term Living Expenses Grant and other discretionary grant schemes.[51] Additional funding was committed by the Scottish Government to the Scottish Welfare Fund and Local Authorities were advised to use their discretion to relax the usual limit of three payments in 12 months if appropriate, as current circumstances were considered 'exceptional'. In Wales, the Discretionary Assistance Fund's Emergency Assistance Payment scheme also provided specific COVID-19 related support. Changes included increased flexibility in how the scheme could be administered and an increase in the frequency of payments people could apply for.[52]

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[51] Nidirect, 'Extra financial support', *nidirect*, 2020 <www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/extra-financial-support>.

[52] Lambie-Mumford, H., Loopstra, R. and Gordon, K. *Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK, Food Vulnerability during COVID-19,* Phase 1 Report March – July 2020 (Sheffield: SPERI, 2020) <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/ >.

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In England, there has been no national emergency payment scheme. Local authorities administer Local Welfare Assistance schemes, but these are not required to be cash-based assistance, nor do they have ring-fenced budgets for this provision. However, in June 2020, the Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies was announced, providing £63 million for local authorities in England. Local Authorities were advised to use the funding from July onwards to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and essentials due to COVID-19.[53] Allocations were made according to the population of each local authority, weighted by a function of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation as a proxy for additional need. The amount allocated to each local authority is reported on the UK Government website.[54] Guidance suggests Defra is collecting data on the use of the funding but, as yet no data are available on how it was used (i.e., whether it was used to provide emergency payments or used in other ways). Some national charities operated hardship payment schemes throughout the COVID-19 national lockdown. For example, The British Red Cross, in partnership with Aviva and the Aviva Foundation, created a £5 million Hardship Fund to provide financial support to people who are struggling as a result of the coronavirus crisis.[55] Action for Children also launched a Coronavirus Emergency Fund, providing grants of up to £250 (or higher in particular circumstances) to children, young people and families in need.[56] Cash for Kids were also providing families with £35 grants supported by Scottish Government funding. Aberlour, a Scottish children's charity, was providing financial support to families via its Urgent Assistance Fund, with a total of £500,000 available in the fund (as of July 2020).[57]

This report presents a review of existing research and evidence on emergency finance schemes and an analysis of primary data collected from national governmental and third sector stakeholders on the impacts of these schemes. It is important to note that the focus in this section is on national schemes. In some areas (for example in Scotland) locally funded schemes run in parallel to national support, but the focus in this part of the research project is on national responses to risks of household food insecurity during COVID-19. The questions explored and addressed were:

- What evidence is available on how the emergency finance schemes worked?

- Is there any evidence showing the impact of these schemes on helping people access food?

- What can be learned from experiences of these schemes, particularly comparing experiences between the nations of the UK?

[53] Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): Local authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies', GOV.UK, 2020 <www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-local-authority-emergency-assistance-grant-for-food-and-essential-supplies>.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Fraser, A. 'Cash grants give people the support they need during the coronavirus pandemic, with dignity', Red Cross, 2020 <www.redcross.org.uk/stories/disasters-and-emergencies/uk/coronavirus-cash-grants-support-people-with-dignity>.

[56] Action for Children, Childhood during coronavirus: protecting children from the effects of poverty (Watford: Action for Children, 2020) <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/our-work-and-impact/policy-work-campaigns-and-research/policy-reports/childhood-during-coronavirus-policy-report/>

[57] Treanor, M. Evaluation of Aberlour urgent assistance fund (Stirling: Aberlour, 2020) <www.aberlour.org.uk/evaluation-of-aberlour-urgent-assistance-fund/ >.

Data

Appendix 1 provides full details of the range of secondary and primary research methods including a systematic search for existing evidence and evidence review, national stakeholder workshops, interviews and written submissions. The data relevant for this section on emergency finance are described below.

Key sources of existing evidence

The subset of literature found in the searches directly applicable to this section on emergency finance provision included no academic papers and 10 pieces of grey literature. A stakeholder highlighted one additional source of data. Three published reports focus exclusively on emergency cash payment schemes. Two of these related to third sector emergency payments funds and one on the Scottish Welfare Fund. Action for Children conducted a quantitative analysis of anonymised data gathered from applications to their emergency fund. Reviewing 2,760 grant application forms submitted between 23 March 2020 and 31 July 2020, they reported on key characteristics of families applying for support and identified key needs.[58] A process and outcome evaluation of the Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund was undertaken by Professor Morag Treanor of Heriot-Watt University.[59] The process evaluation explored how the fund is working in practice and how its administrative processes are perceived in terms of ease, accessibility, responsiveness and timeliness. This was based on eight interviews: five interviews (by telephone or by zoom/skype) were undertaken with sponsors, who made applications to the fund on behalf of families, to elicit their experiences and recommendations on the practical aspects of applying; three interviews were undertaken with Aberlour's in-house assessors to elicit their experiences and recommendations in administering the fund. The outcome evaluation comprised a quantitative analysis of data from 1,511 applications to the fund made between mid-March 2020 and 20 July 2020, and interviews with eight families to explore their experiences of receiving the fund and the impacts it has had on them. The third report was from the Poverty and Inequality Commission, which examined the Scottish Welfare Fund during the COVID-19 pandemic, analysing applications, spending and use of the funds by local authorities.[60]

Two further reports explored local welfare assistance schemes in England. As before, local welfare assistance schemes may provide emergency cash payments, but this is at the discretion of local authorities and there is no national government stipulation that funds be used to provide cash assistance. Both reports detailed data collected prior to the crisis but also included case studies of local authorities during the crisis which explore the role of local welfare assistance in the crisis and how the crisis has affected their local welfare provision.

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[58] Action for Children, *Childhood during coronavirus: protecting children from the effects of poverty* (Watford: Action for Children, 2020) <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/our-work-and-impact/policy-work-campaigns-and-research/policy-reports/childhood-during-coronavirus-policy-report>.

[59] Treanor, M. *Evaluation of Aberlour urgent assistance fund* (Stirling: Aberlour, 2020) <www.aberlour.org.uk/evaluation-of-aberlour-urgent-assistance-fund/>.

[60] Poverty and Inequality Commission, *The role of the Scottish Welfare Fund during the COVID-19 pandemic*, (Scotland: Poverty and Inequality Commission, 2020) <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Scottish-Welfare-Fund-briefing-.pdf>.

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The Children's Society reported on five local authority case study areas and the Trussell Trust reported on 6 local authority case study areas.[61]

In addition to these five focussed reports, five other reports provided brief commentary or observations of emergency payment schemes as part of a wider report.

Primary data and stakeholder consultation

In addition to these literature sources, primary data on emergency finance schemes were gathered from national policy and practice stakeholders through online workshops (total of 39 stakeholder participants), telephone interviews and written submissions. Of the purposively sampled interviews for this phase of the research, two interviewees spoke exclusively about emergency payment schemes and four raised them as part of a wider discussion during the interview.

Findings: evidence review

Scottish Welfare Fund

£45 million of additional funding was committed for the Scottish Welfare Fund in March 2020, with £22 million being distributed immediately. The remaining £23 million was kept in reserve to be used where it was most needed. Of this £23 million remaining, £20 million has now been allocated to a flexible fund for financial insecurity which will be administered by local authorities and £3 million was provided to increase the support available through Discretionary Housing Payments. This £22 million 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'".[62] In Table 1, data available from the Scottish Welfare Fund Monthly Management Information are shown. Community Care Grants refer to funding provided for people who need financial help to assist them to live independently in the community or to ease exceptional pressures on themselves or their family; Crisis Grants are provided to people who have an immediate financial need as a result of an emergency or a disaster that requires to be met to avoid a risk to the wellbeing of an individual. Data reported by the Scottish Government which compares October 2019 to October 2020, is shown in Table 1. The table shows 13% more applications were made for Community Care Grants, and there was a 7% decrease in expenditure.[63] The number of applications for Crisis Grants was 25% higher than the same month in the previous year, and expenditure was 33% higher. Reporting on trends, the management information notes Crisis Grant demand peaked in April 2020. Since August 2020, Crisis Grant applications and expenditure have

[61] The Children's Society, *Leave No Family Behind: Strengthening Local Welfare Assistance during Covid-19*, (The Children's Society, 2020) <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/leave-no-family-behind.pdf

Thompson, E., Spoor, E., Weal, R. *Local Lifelines: Investing in Local Welfare During and Beyond Covid-19*, (The Trussell Trust, 2020) <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/LWAS_1020_v3.pdf>.

[62] Scottish Government, '*Helping communities affected by COVID-19*', *Gov.scot*, 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/news/helping-communities-affected-by-covid-19/>.

[63] Scottish Government, 'S*cottish Welfare Fund, Self-Isolation Support Grant and Discretionary Housing Payments: monthly data*', *Gov.scot*, 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/swf-monthly-management-information/ >.

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increased each month. In October 2020, Crisis Grant applications and expenditure were higher than in September 2020 and October 2019 but are lower than the peak in April 2020. Additional analysis of data available, which compares March to October 2019 to the same period in 2020 is shown in Table 2. This table shows a 33% increase in crisis grant applications and 45% increase in expenditure. Together these data suggest that more crisis-related funding went out to individuals through the Scottish Welfare Fund, possibly reflecting the increased flexibility of the programme.

Table 1: Applications for, and expenditure on, community care grants and crisis grants from the Scottish Welfare Fund over 2020 and percentage change from the year prior.

	<-- Official statistics				Management information -->				% change
Year	2020								
Month	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Oct 19 to Oct 20*
Community care grant applications	6,840	4,920	5,015	4,950	6,373	6,479	7,468	8,256	13%
Community care grant expenditure (£)	1,604,463	1,182,024	945,370	1,331,555	1,715,561	1,888,289	2,685,177	2,449,357	-7%
Crisis grant applications	26,195	31,815	22,700	19,980	19,479	20,615	21,037	22,990	25%
Crisis grant expenditure (£)	1,474,891	2,530,769	1,420,318	1,262,085	1,215,193	1,274,608	1,362,759	1,497,174	33%

* In previous years there has been a cyclical pattern in monthly applications and expenditure, with a drop in December and a peak in the new year. For this reason, it is recommended to compare figures for the most recent month with the equivalent month last year.

Source: https://www.gov.scot/publications/swf-monthly-management-information/.

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Table 2: Applications for, and expenditure on, community care grants and crisis grants from the Scottish Welfare Fund over March to October in 2019 and 2020 and percentage change from the year prior.

	March to October 2019	March to October 2020	% Change
Community care grant applications	52,430	50,301	-4%
Community care grant expenditure (£)	17,696,865	13,801,796	-22%
Crisis grant applications	139,360	184,811	33%
Crisis grant expenditure (£)	8,299,569	12,037,797	45%

Source: based on data from https://www.gov.scot/publications/swf-monthly-management-information/.

Guidance provided by COSLA notes that EEA nationals can directly access the Scottish Welfare Fund but other migrants with no recourse to public funds conditions cannot. However, the guidance continues *"funding provided by Scottish Government to support local resilience and hardship plans can however be utilised and may provide some flexibility to support people with NRPF".[64]* More recently, self-isolation support grants are available through the Scottish Welfare Fund and these grants are available to people with no recourse to public funds.[65]

The Poverty and Inequality Commission report provided commentary on the available data on fund applications and payments. They note that expenditure over April to June 2020 accounted for 15% of the annual budget; if spending was proportionate, 25% of the budget would have been spent by this point in the year. Accordingly, they state, "… in the 3 months at the epi-centre of the biggest public health crisis in over a century, it does not seem right that the money allocated to the Scottish Welfare Fund is not being used to maximum benefit".[66] Speaking to a range of third sector organisations, the Commission gathered insights into possible reasons for this underutilisation. They reported five reasons: lack of knowledge and awareness of the fund; variation in how local authorities promote the fund; barriers in applying (online applications or busy phone lines); apparent suspension of Community Care Grant; and local authorities not having the resources to properly administer the fund during the crisis.[67] Of 1,135 complete responses to an online survey of the ScotPulse panel run at the end of June, 20% of respondents were aware of the Scottish Welfare fund.[68]

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[64] COSLA, *COVID-19 Response Planning: Supporting Migrants with No Recourse to Public Funds*, (COSLA, 2020) <www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/Guidance%20Covid%2019%20Supporting%20People%20with%20NRPF%20200420%20%28002%29.pdf>. pg. 13

[65] Scottish Government, *Help with living costs – Scottish Welfare Fund: Self-Isolation Support Grants*, *mygov.scot*, 2020 <https://www.mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund/self-isolation-support-grants/ >.

[66] Poverty and Inequality Commission, T*he role of the Scottish Welfare Fund during the COVID-19 pandemic* <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Scottish-Welfare-Fund-briefing-.pdf> pg. 2

[67] Poverty and Inequality Commission, T*he role of the Scottish Welfare Fund during the COVID-19 pandemic* <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Scottish-Welfare-Fund-briefing-.pdf>

[68] Scotpulse, *Research carried out by ScotPulse for Mark Diffley Consultancy COVID-19 Wave 4* (Scotpulse, June 20) <https://www.cas.org.uk/system/files/publications/cas_-_wave_4_-_tables_-)_010720.pdf>

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The qualitative element of the outcome evaluation of the Aberlour Urgent Assistance fund also generated data on the Scottish Welfare Fund. Interviewees highlighted issues such as low awareness of the scheme, suggesting this could be overcome by more targeted advertising. It was also felt that criteria were still too strict, despite the changes made to application conditions. Concerns about variation in the ease of application across different local authority areas were also raised.[69] In other reports, anecdotal evidence highlighted barriers to accessing the fund such as not being able to apply online and telephone lines being busy.[70]

Wales Discretionary Assistance Fund

On 23 October, the Welsh Government announced an additional £5 million funding increasing the DAF budget to £25 million for 2020/21.[71] Pre-crisis, the announced budget for the fund for 2019/20 was £11.7million.[72] The pre-existing eligibility criteria for applications remained in place, namely that these funds were used to support people who had lost a job, had a flood or fire in their home or applied for benefits and were experiencing financial hardship.[73] Changes were made, however, to the conditions of emergency cash awards. Previously, these were that an applicant could not receive more than one payment in 28 days and no more than three in a 12-month period. These conditions were waived over COVID-19, allowing people the ability to apply for up to five awards, which could be given consecutively (i.e., one a week for five weeks in a row). Although these flexibilities were originally in place until 31 July, they were later extended to 31 March 2021.[74] Welsh Government has monitored COVID-19 related emergency assistance payments separately to the wider grant schemes (EAP and IAP). Between 18 March and 12 November, 102,068 COVID-19 related Emergency Assistance Payments were made, with a total paid value of £6,579,060.[75] The breakdown per month is shown in Table 2 below. This table shows data specifically on COVID-19 related EAP payments. Non-COVID-19 related EAP grants and the IAP grants also continued with 25,812 payments totalling £1,632,586 from 18 March to November 5.

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[69] Treanor, M. *Evaluation of Aberlour urgent assistance fund* (Stirling: Aberlour, 2020) <www.aberlour.org.uk/evaluation-of-aberlour-urgent-assistance-fund/>.

[70] One Parent Families Scotland, *COVID-19 Impact Reports*, (*One Parent Families Scotland*, 2020) <https://opfs.org.uk/who-we-are/covid-19-impact-reports/>.

[71] Welsh Government, E*xtra £10 million package to help protect jobs and those struggling financially*, (*gov.wales,* 2020) <https://gov.wales/extra-10-million-package-help-protect-jobs-and-those-struggling-financially>.

[72]Welsh Government, *Draft Budget 2019-20 Detailed proposals: A budget to build a better Wales* (Wales, Welsh Government, 2018) <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-10/draft-budget-2019-2020-detailed-proposals.pdf>.

[73] Welsh Government, *Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF)*, (*gov.wales*, 2020) <https://gov.wales/discretionary-assistance-fund-daf/eligibility>.

[74] Welsh Government, *Relaxation of Discretionary Assistance Fund rules extended*, (*gov.wales,* 2020) <https://gov.wales/relaxation-discretionary-assistance-fund-rules-extended>.

[75] Welsh Government, *Summary data about coronavirus (COVID-19) and the response to it: 13 October 2020,* (*gov.wales*, 2020) <https://gov.wales/summary-data-about-coronavirus-covid-19-and-response-it-13-october-2020-html>.

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Table 2: Data on the number of Covid-impact related EAP payments and total paid

	March (from 18th March)	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov (up to 5th only)	Total
No. of payments	4,421	5,119	6,961	15,973	17,187	14,448	16,508	17,683	3,768	102,068
Total paid (£)	277,350	313,170	430,460	990,220	1,059,453	890,680	1,130,587	1,228,220	258,920	6,579,060

From data at: https://gov.wales/summary-data-about-coronavirus-covid-19-and-response-it-12-november-2020-html [Accessed 3 December].

In Wales people with no recourse to public funds are eligible for emergency assistance payments due to the creation of an 'exceptional process'. The exceptional process enables migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to access the emergency assistance payments available from the Discretionary Assistance Fund.[76]

Northern Ireland discretionary payments

To help support people during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department for Communities put in place additional financial support from 25 March 2020.[77] This provided funds for the 'Discretionary Support COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Short-term Living Expenses Grant'; 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. Eligibility criteria included having an extreme, exceptional or crisis situation which placed 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.[78] Previous discretionary support regulations were amended so that applicants were not limited to one application in a year and the option to apply online was introduced.[79] We could not locate any data on the scale of applications or spending on this scheme over March to September 2020.

England local welfare assistance schemes

There is no centrally managed government emergency payment scheme in England. Local authorities in England have had the responsibility to deliver local welfare provision, but have not been provided with a ringfenced budget to do so, nor are they under statutory obligations to provide a scheme.[80] A report by the Children's Society on local welfare assistance schemes in England described changes in local welfare assistance before the pandemic,

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[76] Data provided by stakeholder via email

[77] Department for Communities, 'Minister announces further support for those affected by COVID-19', *Department for Communities*, 2020 <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-announces-further-support-those-affected-by-covid-19>

[78] Nidirect, 'Extra financial support', *nidirect*, 2020 <www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/extra-financial-support>.

[79] UK Government, 'Discretionary Support (Amendment) (COVID-19) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020', *Legislation.gov.uk*, 2020 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nidsr/2020/9780338012319/note>.
Department for Communities, 'Minister announces further support for those affected by COVID-19', *Department for Communities*, 2020 <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-announces-further-support-those-affected-by-covid-19>.

[80] Thompson, E., Spoor, E., Weal, R. *Local Lifelines: Investing in Local Welfare During and Beyond Covid-19*, (The Trussell Trust, 2020) <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/LWAS_1020_v3.pdf

including some concerns regarding the inconsistency across local authorities, limited types of support, restrictive eligibility criteria, an onerous application approach and low awareness.[81] Calls were made from third sector organisations to relax qualifying criteria for local welfare assistance to include people with no recourse to public funds.[82] Such decisions were to be made at a local authority level.

On 11 June, an additional £63 million of funding was announced for local authorities, called the Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies. It was outlined that this funding was intended to provide local authorities with the ability to provide support for more families and individuals struggling with food access and other essentials.[83] Guidance suggested it 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 that suit the needs of their local community. This could include the provision of cash payments, food vouchers, or alternative support.

The five local authority case studies included in the Children's Society report reported an increased demand for local welfare assistance. For example, one local authority reported a 75% increase in applications in April 2020 compared to April 2019, and another reported a 164% increase in applications over the first seven weeks of the pandemic compared to the year prior.[84] Data reported by the Trussell Trust showed a higher proportion of people accessing their food parcels had also applied for local welfare assistance: before the pandemic, 15% of people who had needed to use a food bank in the network had applied for local welfare assistance in areas which had a scheme; this increased to 23% during the summer of 2020.[85] CPAG reported, from a survey and interviews of 285 low-income households, that only two respondents had received support through a local authority welfare assistance scheme. They stated, "his supports other evidence that shows that local welfare assistance schemes are often not well promoted in local areas, with local residents unaware if a scheme exists in their local area or how to access it" (pg. 42), although a small number of families reported receiving financial assistance from their local council in another form.[86]

The Trussell Trust report on local welfare assistance commented that the additional funding from June had "improved the capacity of local authorities to meet unprecedented levels of need for emergency financial assistance" and that "local welfare provision has acted as a

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[81]The Children's Society, *Leave No Family Behind: Strengthening Local Welfare Assistance during Covid-19*, (The Children's Society, 2020) <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/leave-no-family-behind.pdf>.

[82]Trussell Trust, *Strengthening local welfare support during the COVID-19 outbreak – England briefing,* (The Trussell Trust, 2020) <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/Briefing-Strengthening-local-welfare-support-during-the-COVID-19-outbreak.pdf

[83] Department for Environment et al, *£63 million for local authorities to assist those struggling to afford food and other essentials*, *gov.uk*, 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/63-million-for-local-authorities-to-assist-those-struggling-to-afford-food-and-other-essentials>.

[84] The Children's Society, *Leave No Family Behind: Strengthening Local Welfare Assistance during Covid-19*, (The Children's Society, 2020) <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/leave-no-family-behind.pdf>.

[85] Thompson, E., Spoor, E., Weal, R. *Local Lifelines: Investing in Local Welfare During and Beyond Covid-19*, (The Trussell Trust, 2020) <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/LWAS_1020_v3.pdf

[86] Sophie Howes, Rhiannon Monk-Winstanley, Tom Sefton and Alice Woudhuysen, *Poverty in the Pandemic: The impact of coronavirus on low-income families and children,* (Child Poverty Action Group, 2020) < https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Poverty-in-the-pandemic.pdf>.

lifeline to people facing financial hardship during the crisis".[87] However, there was variability in how these funds were utilised across the six local councils included in their case studies. Those that already had a well-developed local welfare assistance scheme in place were able to respond flexibly and made changes to ensure people in need could access support easily and quickly. Councils that did not have well-developed infrastructure to provide local welfare support were more likely to struggle to deliver support themselves and had increased their reliance on community and voluntary groups.[88] The Children's Society also found evidence of positive changes due to COVID-19 funding in their five local authority case studies, such as allocating additional funding and additional staff to meet growing needs, making the application process less onerous, and awarding more generous grants. Despite these positives, the organisation raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of these changes, particularly around the uncertainty of national government funding for the scheme into the future.[89]

Voluntary sector hardship funds

As noted above two reports explored the emergency payment funds of third sector organisations.

Action for Children quickly launched an emergency fund which has provided one-off grants of up to £250 (or higher in special circumstances) to children, young people and families supported by their services across the UK, namely those struggling to afford daily essentials. By the end of July, the charity had provided grants totalling approximately £500,000 to over 10,000 children and young people, across more than 4,800 families. Analysis of 2,760 grant application forms showed that the most common reason for applications was for help to afford food, with 39% of households requesting help with this. They also reported a significant proportion of families saying they were skipping meals in order to feed their children, cutting back on food portions and, in some cases, having to choose between eating meals or paying household bills. Many also said that they would have struggled to feed their children without the emergency grant.[90]

The process and outcome evaluation of the Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund provided both quantitative and qualitative insights. The process evaluation was resoundingly positive, highlighting the value sponsors placed on the cash-first approach. It was also felt that it was a positive that the application process, which was based on professional trust, did not require multiple forms of evidence. The outcome evaluation evidenced a huge increase in applications to the fund: 1,511 applications were made between 19 March to 20 July compared to 134 in the same period in 2019. At the time of the report, 2,000 families had benefitted from the fund. The most common reason for applying to the fund was for support with food, with 59.6% of families citing this as a reason for applying.

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[87] Thompson, E., Spoor, E., Weal, R. *Local Lifelines: Investing in Local Welfare During and Beyond Covid-19*, (The Trussell Trust, 2020) <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/LWAS_1020_v3.pdf Pg 11

[88] Thompson, E., Spoor, E., Weal, R. *Local Lifelines: Investing in Local Welfare During and Beyond Covid-19*, (The Trussell Trust, 2020) <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/LWAS_1020_v3.pdf

[89] The Children's Society, *Leave No Family Behind: Strengthening Local Welfare Assistance during Covid-19*, (The Children's Society, 2020) <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/leave-no-family-behind.pdf>.

[90] Action for Children, *Childhood during coronavirus: protecting children from the effects of poverty* (Watford: Action for Children, 2020) <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/support-for-children-and-families/childhood-during-coronavirus-policy-report/ >.

Findings: stakeholder perspectives

Scottish Welfare Fund

Stakeholder data echoed some of the observations regarding the Scottish Welfare Fund found in our literature review. For example, one concern raised by stakeholders was around the advertising of the scheme and variation in awareness across different local authorities:

> 'But I think the welfare fund could have been better highlighted during all of this by local authorities.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Interviewees discussed how some local food aid organisations they work with were not aware of the fund, whilst others already had partnerships with local councils which meant they already had established pathways for referring people to the fund.

Despite this lack of awareness, interview data highlighted how the shift in referral pathways to support during the crisis may have made the Scottish Welfare Fund more easily accessible. The setting up of local authority level helplines created a central, streamlined point of access to lots of support across the Council area, including to the Scottish Welfare Fund. This provided a clearer and consistent access point for support, which stakeholders felt was easier for people to navigate. This was considered a positive, and stakeholders hoped this may improve the accessibility of support. This said, it was also pointed out that funding for these helplines was limited, and it was not clear whether local authorities would be able to continue to run them.

Welsh Discretionary Assistance Fund

Stakeholders in the Welsh workshop discussed the key role that the Discretionary Assistance Fund was playing in supporting people during the crisis. Interviewees highlighted some additional promotion of the fund. One interviewee discussed how the payments had changed form, from cash, prior to the crisis, to BACs (Bankers' Automated Clearing System). Whilst payment changed from a Pay Point text voucher (redeemed locally for cash at a Pay Point retailer) to a BACS payment, there was flexibility in the approach – for example, if someone didn't have a bank account, the other payment mechanism (Pay Point voucher) was still an alternative option. This had been communicated to all local authorities. All updates and regular communications throughout the pandemic were sent across the DAF partner network. The DAF Partner network across Wales includes local authorities, charities & health organisations, housing organisations, food banks and other support organisations.

Welsh Government also launched a series of DAF information messages on social media platforms to reach those newly in need of support – this communication activity is still ongoing (as of December 2020). It was emphasised that this would allow recipients to use the allocated payment for online shopping, meaning people did not have to visit the shops if they were shielding or staying at home, as much as possible.

Welsh Government have worked with DWP who have included DAF information within their customer care calls for those new to welfare benefits with the Wales system. However, stakeholders still had concerns that the fund still may not be reaching people who found themselves newly in need of support, as this was a situation in which they had never found themselves before, and therefore had limited knowledge of available support. Referring to the fund, one stakeholder said,

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> 'So, what isn't happening at the moment is that those measures are not reaching people who are newly-unemployed or who are experiencing financial crisis for the first time. And we've certainly seen that at food banks. So we saw, in the early days, an influx of self-employed people, who weren't able to work and who were turning to food banks, and simply had no idea at all how to navigate the new world that they found themselves in.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

One stakeholder reflected positively on the change in criteria, which increased the number of applications that can be made to the fund.

> '[The] Welsh Government acted very early on in the crisis, to introduce the flexibilities to the Discretionary Assistance Fund. And I think it's no coincidence that the flexibilities allowed five payments on a weekly basis. So it used to be the case, as [xxx] has already said, three claims in a year, and there had to be a month in-between them. And the Welsh Government acted very quickly to allow people to make a weekly claim, up to five weeks. And that obviously covers the five-week wait for universal credit.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

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

Similarly, one interviewee in Northern Ireland highlighted the important source of help that the Discretionary Support COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Short-term Living Expenses scheme was providing. They felt the flexibility in the grants was very beneficial, suggesting it played a key role in tiding people over until their first universal credit payment, meaning people did not have to take on the debt of an advance payment. Furthermore, unlike existing discretionary support, this discretionary fund did not require claimants to take some form of universal credit advance, which improved the accessibility. This interviewee also felt it was useful for agency workers who may not be entitled to SSP or Universal Credit and whose employer had to close temporarily (e.g., for a deep clean).

England: Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies

One interview stakeholder discussed the £63 million funding provided for Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies. Given that many organisations had been calling for a temporary COVID income support scheme, they considered this funding to be a "campaigning win". However, although the framing and guidance reflected what NGOs had called for, this was advisory and not binding, and there was no explicit stipulation that the funding had to be spent on providing emergency discretionary grants. The stakeholder discussed anecdotal evidence that some of the funding has been allocated as grants to food banks, as was also found in the Trussell Trust case study report. [91] Other stakeholders drew attention to evidence about the status of local hardship grants from before the COVID-19 outbreak, which highlighted that as of October 2018, 28 local authorities had closed their schemes completely and at least 3 more had stopped direct public access, allocating all funds to other organisations or projects.[92] This

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[91] Loopstra, R., Goldberg, B., Gordon, K., Lambie-Mumford, H. (2020) I*nvestigating outlier trends in Trussell Trust foodbank usage over the Covid-19 crisis in the UK* (Available on request).

[92] Gavin Aitchison, *Compassion in crisis: How do people in poverty stay afloat in times of emergency?,* (Church Action on Poverty, 2018) < https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Compassion-in-Crisis.pdf>.

prompts a question of how many local authorities went into the COVID-19 crisis with the capacity (systems and staffing), existing policy framework or intention to use their allocation of the £63m hardship fund to offer emergency cash payments?

Third Sector Hardship Funds

Interview data provided additional insight into the implementation of the British Red Cross COVID-19 Hardship fund. As of the start of October 2020, 6,000 people had been helped by the fund. The fund aimed to provide financial support to the most vulnerable during the outbreak. The scheme's 130 partners (charities, local organisations, local authorities) referred people to the scheme; the idea was that people would receive support with their circumstances from the partner organisation, for example, helping them access social security or helping them with housing, while the hardship funds would support them in the immediate term. People could claim up to £120 per person a month, up to three people per household, for up to three months – a maximum of £1,080 per household. This was designed to cover food, toiletries, and communications. The fund was launched to scale in early June, following a pilot in April and May. The plan is for the scheme to come to an end at the end of winter 2021 so it will have covered the initial outbreak and second wave. As a crisis charity, the rationale provided by the British Red Cross was that this scheme would then have covered the crisis period.

Referring to the Action for Children funding discussed in the evidence review above, one stakeholder referred to the speed at which this was put in place.

> 'In fairness, we were quite quick off the mark. I think we started the emergency fund just before lockdown. So yes, I think we were quite pre-emptive… we were able to get those food vouchers together [and get] support out to vulnerable families rather quickly' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Collectively the stakeholder data adds a range of perspectives to the limited existing literature on emergency payment schemes. Stakeholders welcomed the additional funding and the easing of eligibility criteria and recognised that these schemes provided a key source of support for people in need during the crisis. However, a number of concerns remained regarding accessibility, awareness and reach.

Summary and conclusions

To date, there is limited evidence on the impact of the emergency payment schemes implemented during the crisis. Data on both the Scottish and Welsh schemes, in terms of applications and payments, are readily available on governmental websites. Equivalent data were not found for Northern Ireland and, for England, would require data collection at a local authority level. To date, publicly available secondary analysis of this data is only available through the report by the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission.

Additional funding, changes to eligibility criteria and easier access mechanisms were widely welcomed by stakeholders who felt these schemes played a key role in supporting people in need. However, significant concern regarding the reach of the schemes was evident. This was exacerbated by the potentially insufficient promotion of the schemes and a cohort of newly eligible people facing previously unchartered territory in need of this support.

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Perhaps the most notable finding is the gap in knowledge regarding the impact of these schemes on food insecurity. Though these schemes are specified to help people access food, to our knowledge, none of the governmental schemes have been evaluated against this outcome. Data from the third sector evaluation evidence suggested that the need for support with food was a key driver of the use of such schemes, and the qualitative findings in the evaluation of the Aberlour Fund evidence the significant difference their grants made to applicants. However, to date, there is no assessment of the impact of such schemes on the household food insecurity of applicants during the crisis. Research with a specific focus on the impact of these schemes should gather data from the beneficiaries of the statutory support and seek to identify potential beneficiaries who did not access this support and the reasons for this. This would help to inform further support provided by governments and local authorities over winter 2020/21.

As arrangements for financial support over the winter are being put in place, based on the findings presented here, we would make the following recommendations:

- That additional funding, wider eligibility, and easier access to the schemes are maintained.

- That evaluation work is undertaken to understand the efficacy of current communication about the scheme to make sure reach is as broad as possible.

- That rigorous evaluation is completed on the impact of these national schemes and in England, how local authority schemes compare.

- Evaluations should explicitly address the impact of emergency finance schemes on food outcomes, especially where access to food is a stated aim of the schemes.

Emergency food systems

Emergency food systems

Summary

This section looks at how systems of emergency food provision to people facing economic barriers to food access adapted and changed during the national UK-wide coronavirus lockdown over March to July 2020.,

The data highlights significant increases in the provision of food parcels over the course of the lockdown, and that significant government and corporate funding was directed towards food aid charities. The ways in which these networks adapted were extensive and highly responsive. The scale of funding and bulk food donations they were able to move through their networks in the space of a few months was unprecedented.

There was a heavy reliance on charitable emergency food providers by government. When the UK national COVID-19 lockdown was announced in March 2020, the UK government designated food banks as essential services and permitted them to continue their operations. Through various funding schemes across the UK, they were also offered over £20 million to support their work, though it is important to note that Trussell Trust and the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) did not take this funding.

The data also highlighted how the COVID-19 outbreak and UK national lockdown threatened several of the well-established vulnerabilities in food charity systems: food donation supply chains, reliance on volunteer labour forces and challenges of meeting dramatic increases in need. As a further round of funding is announced for food charities as part of the UK Government COVID Winter Grant Scheme, it is important to revisit, once again, the heated debate around the role of food charities as frontline responses to a lack of economic access to food.

Introduction

Emergency food provision for those facing economic barriers to food access was a prominent feature of the response to food insecurity during the COVID-19 UK lockdown. Leading food aid charities including the Trussell Trust Food Bank Network and the network of independent food aid providers, the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), reported large increases in demand for emergency food assistance. Across the UK, there was a 177% increase in demand between March 2019 and March 2020.[93] Independent food aid providers in Scotland reported increases in provision of 246% compared to April to July 2019 figures.[94] In May, the Trussell Trust reported an 81% increase in provision in the last two weeks of March compared to the same time in 2019.[95] More recently, they reported an increase of

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[93] Independent Food Aid Network, *Independent food banks and increased need for emergency food parcels since the outbreak of COVID-19. (IFAN, 2020)* <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-data-since-covid-19>

[94] Independent Food Aid Network, *IFAN's latest figures collated from Scotland's independent food banks. (IFAN, 2020)* < https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/f9eedd5a-0657-417e-b368-1911790c18d8/IFAN%20Scotland%20Independent%20Food%20Bank%20Food%20Parcel%20Distribution%20Report_FEB_JULY_19_20_8.9.20.%20(1).pdf>

[95] Trussell Trust, *Food banks report record spike in need as coalition of anti-poverty charities call for strong lifeline to be thrown to anyone who needs it. (The Trussell Trust, May 1 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/05/01/coalition-call/ >

47% over their mid-year stats period from April to September, though some areas experienced much larger increases than others.[96] Food banks were identified as 'essential services' by the UK government in March, which enabled them to continue their provision through the national lockdown. However, food charities had to make significant adaptations to their systems in order to continue to provide food. Some volunteers were unable to continue working (if they had to shield or were otherwise in a high risk or vulnerable category), food supplies were interrupted, projects had to adapt workspaces to accommodate social distancing, and many moved to home deliveries. Some projects that previously provided other forms of food aid (e.g. providing meals or running social supermarkets) changed to provide food parcels instead. Governments across the UK provided various grants to projects providing help with food. This included Defra's £16 million funding for food charities to provide meals; £875,000 invested by the NI Executive to develop the work of FareShare in Northern Ireland; and over £15 million provided to organisations tackling food insecurity through the Scottish Government's communities funding package (combination of Food Fund, Wellbeing Fund and Supporting Communities Fund, not including Community and Third Sector Recovery Programme).

The focus of this report is to review existing research and supplementary primary data to explore in more detail what happened to emergency food charities over this time. This section explores several key questions:

- What evidence is available on how the COVID-19 outbreak impacted on demand for food charity during the national UK lockdown?
- What evidence is available on how charities adapted to the lockdown and government guidelines?
- What impact did these adaptations have?
- What were the changes to inputs (finance, food, volunteer labour) during this time and what impact did this have on the work of projects?
- What are the key lessons that can be taken away from the experiences of food charities during this phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK?

Data

Appendix 1 provides full details of the range of secondary and primary research methods including a systematic search for existing evidence and evidence review, national stakeholder workshops, interviews and written submissions. The data relevant for this section on emergency food are described below.

Key sources of existing evidence

The subset of literature found in the searches directly applicable to this section on emergency food included 3 academic papers and 26 pieces of grey literature.

The sources of grey literature on the topic of emergency food were mixed. Of the 25 sources, 13 focussed specifically on emergency food. Data on food bank use, including number of food parcels provided, reasons for referral, comparisons with previous periods and demographics of people seeking support were reported from the Trussell Trust Network,

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[96] Trussell Trust, *2,600 food parcels provided for children every day in first six months of the pandemic. (The Trussell Trust, Nov 12 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/11/12/2600-food-parcels-provided-for-children-every-day-in-first-six-months-of-the-pandemic/ >

members of the Independent Food Aid Network and the Salvation Army.[97] These reports also discussed changes in the operations of food banks required as a result of the crisis. IFAN also produced three additional briefings: one drawing on data from 8 independent food banks, exploring how they have coped and thoughts about the coming months; the second provides learning and reflections from independent food banks who have been providing vouchers as one form of support; the third, in partnership with Feeding Britain, drawing on data collected through a combination of written and verbal submissions as part of a joint webinar with Feeding Britain, reflects on who has been accessing support and why there has been this need.[98]

Three other reports explored the experiences of the organisations delivering food aid. One was a small study of six community organisations which the researchers used to inform a subsequent larger survey of 211 frontline organisations working in communities across Scotland.[99] The third study reviewed social media, websites and other informal data sources to explore how community food initiatives were responding to the crisis.[100]

Emergency food was also a sub-focus of other reports, the largest two being the FSA Covid-19 Consumer Tracker and the Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Commons Select committee report, covering submissions to their inquiry on COVID-19 and food supply in the spring 2020.[101] The FSA Covid-19 Consumer Tracker, which surveyed approximately 2,000 people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in each of the four waves of data collection, included quantitative data on numbers of respondents accessing a food bank. The Tracker also included a qualitative element which collected interview data from 20 people to explore the lived experience of food insecurity during the crisis, including discussion on emergency food support.[102] The equivalent Covid-19 consumer tracker in Scotland, by Food Standards Scotland was highlighted to us by a research stakeholder. The most recent wave

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[97] Trussell Trust, *Summary findings on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on food banks (The Trussell Trust, June 2020)* < https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/APRIL-Data-briefing_external.pdf>; Weekes, T., Spoor, E., Weal, R. and Moffett, G. *Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network (The Trussell Trust, June 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf> ; Independent Food Aid Network, *Independent food banks and increased need for emergency food parcels since the outbreak of COVID-19. (IFAN, 2020)* <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-data-since-covid-19> ; Salvation Army, *UK approaching poverty tipping point warns The Salvation Army (Salvation Army, 29 May 2020)* <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/news/uk-approaching-poverty-tipping-point-warns-salvation-army>; Salvation Army, *Supporting Families through 'holiday hunger' (Salvation Army, 30 July 2020)* <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/news/salvation-army-prepares-support-families-through-holiday-hunger>

[98] Independent Food Aid Network and Feeding Britain Briefing October 2020 '*What am I supposed to do? Is it destitution or prostitution'? Hunger and the need for food banks between March and September 2020* (October 2020) <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/6b2c2c70-7322-4f95-a83c-8b37368e9536/IFAN%20Feeding%20Britain%20briefing%20October%202020.pdf

[99] McKendrick, J. and Campbell, S. *Local action in Scotland to tackle food insecurity during the coronavirus crisis.* (Scottish poverty & inequality research unit, Glasgow Caledonian University. June 2020) <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Food-insecurity-SPIRU-final-report-June.pdf>

[100] Community Food and Health (Scotland) *A snapshot of Covid-19, food insecurity and community food initiatives What happened and what can we learn? (Public Health Scotland, 2020)* <https://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CFHS-A-snapshot-of-Covid-19-food-insecurity-and-community-food-initiatives.pdf>

[101] Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *Covid-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

[102] Food Standards Agency, *The COVID-19 consumer research* (FSA, 2020) <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/the-covid-19-consumer-research>

of data collection, from 14-17 August, was the fourth in the series and involved online interviews, gathering quantitative data, from a representative sample of 511 adults, aged 16-75 living in Scotland.[103] Evidence was gathered by the EFRA select committee through written and oral submissions from businesses in the food supply chain, food aid organisations, charities, academics and Defra, and an online voluntary public survey conducted in April, to which over 5,500 people responded.[104] The remainder of the reports explored emergency food as part of a wider report often discussing emergency food as one form of support people were accessing during the crisis.

The three academic papers were all published early in the pandemic.[105] Collectively, all three papers explored responses from the UK Government, the food industry and the charitable sector, discussing early signs of strengths and vulnerabilities of these responses. All three, largely due to the timing of their publication, drew on their existing expertise and other publicly available information to inform their commentaries.

Primary data and stakeholder consultation

In addition to these literature sources, primary data on emergency food provision were gathered from national policy and practice stakeholders through online workshops (total of 39 stakeholder participants), telephone interviews and written submissions. Of the purposively sampled interviews for this phase of the research, five explored emergency food provision in detail.

Findings: evidence review

Rising food parcel distribution from food banks

There is evidence of significant increases provision of food assistance from both food banks in the Trussell Trust network and the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN). IFAN have reported dramatic rises in food parcel distribution across their network of independent food banks. Data collected from 112 organisations operating 213 independent food banks across the four nations showed a 175% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed, comparing April 2019 and April 2020. The number of food parcels distributed rose each month from February to May: the number distributed in May was 148% higher than it was in February.[106] More recent data from food banks in Scotland showed that from

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[103] Food Standards Scotland, *COVID-19 consumer tracker Wave 4* (FSS, 2020) <https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/publications-and-research/publications/covid-19-consumer-tracker-wave-4>

[104] Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *COVID-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

[105] Power, M., Doherty, B., Pybus, K., Pickett, K. (2020) How COVID-19 has exposed inequalities in the UK food system: The case of UK food and poverty, Emerald Open Res 2020, 2:11 (https://doi.org/10.35241/emeraldopenres.13539.2); Barker, M. and Russell, J. (2020) Feeding the food insecure in Britain: learning from the 2020 COVID-19 crisis, Food Security volume 12, pages 865–870(2020); Caplan, P. (2020) Struggling for food in a time of crisis, Responsibility and paradox. Anthropology Today, 36: 8-10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12573>

[106] Goodwin, S., *Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK Comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020* (Independent Food Aid Network, 2020) <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/9c7292e6-4bea-410e-9e9b-f9de7e22f3d1/IFAN%20Emergency%20Food%20Distribution%20Report%20Feb%20-%20May%201920%20Published%2009.07.20.pdf >

Emergency food systems

February to July, emergency food parcel distribution by independent food banks rose by 113%, and comparing July 2019 to July 2020, there was a 108% rise in the number of emergency food parcels distributed.[107]

The Trussell Trust also reported rising food bank use early in the pandemic. Reporting on data provided by 303 of the 425 food bank charities in the network showed an 81% increase in the number of people supported by emergency food parcels, with 122% more children receiving support from a food bank in the network in comparison to the same period last year in the last two weeks of March.[108] Across the UK April saw an 89% increase in the number of three-day parcels given to people, compared to the same period last year. However the level of increase differed across the four UK countries, with the percentage increase in all people fed reported as England – 95%, Northern Ireland – 142%, Scotland – 47% and Wales – 89%.[109] More recently, they reported an increase of 47% across their network in the six-month period from April to September compared to the same time last year.[110] A larger percent increase was observed over April to June (83%) than over July to September (13%).[111]

Data from the Trussell Trust also provide insight into the demographics of people using food banks at this time through two data sources: administrative data collected by their food banks and a survey of 435 people using food banks in the last week of June and into July, which was distributed through the same sample of food banks that took part in an equivalent survey of 716 people in January and February 2020. These data showed there has been a significant increase in the proportion of people receiving support from a food bank for the very first time – over half in April (52%) and 45% in May, compared to one in three (34%) across January and February 2020. Their data also suggested that families with children have been hit hard by the crisis making up four in ten (38%) households that needed support from food banks in April 2020, in comparison to one in three (33%) in April 2019. People from ethnic minorities were overrepresented in the survey of people accessing support from a food bank (9% vs. 3% of the UK population). The number of people born outside Europe accessing a food bank increased, with 18% of people receiving food parcels during the pandemic from outside Europe verses 7% in early 2020. The prevalence of mental health issues continued to be extremely high for people needing to use food banks. Younger people also were more likely to be using food banks during the pandemic, with close to two

[107] Goodwin, S. *IFAN's latest figures collated from Scotland's independent food banks.* (Independent Food Aid Network, 8 September 2020*)* <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/f9eedd5a-0657-417e-b368-1911790c18d8/IFAN%20Scotland%20Independent%20Food%20Bank%20Food%20Parcel%20Distribution%20Report_FEB_JULY_19_20_8.9.20.%20(1).pdf>

[108] Trussell Trust, *Food banks report record spike in need as coalition of anti-poverty charities call for strong lifeline to be thrown to anyone who needs it. (The Trussell Trust, May 1 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/05/01/coalition-call/>

[109] Trussell Trust, *Summary findings on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on food banks (The Trussell Trust, June 2020)* < https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/APRIL-Data-briefing_external.pdf>

[110] Trussell Trust, *2,600 food parcels provided for children every day in first six months of the pandemic. (The Trussell Trust, Nov 12 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/11/12/2600-food-parcels-provided-for-children-every-day-in-first-six-months-of-the-pandemic/>

[111] Trussell Trust, *Trussell Trust data briefing on mid-year statistics relating to use of food banks – April to September 2020* (The Trussell Trust, June 2020) < https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/Mid-year-stats-2020-data-briefing.pdf >

in three (62%) of those that received emergency food in June or July aged 25-44, up from 53% in early 2020, and significantly higher than the UK population (33%).[112]

As well as these data from the Trussell Trust network and IFAN, other organisations provide further evidence of growing demand. Using a snapshot survey, which 59% of their food distribution projects completed, the Salvation Army reported a 63% surge in households given food, comparing one week in February and one week in April.[113] Aberlour, a children's charity in Scotland, reported an overwhelming demand for food packages, basic shopping and cooked meals for families across the services and report supporting an additional 3,000 children, young people and parents previously unknown to their services with food parcels and hot meals.[114] Insights from community organisations, collected by the Poverty Alliance, cite one food bank reporting a 300% increase in the last few weeks, as reported in early April.[115]

Alongside this data from organisations providing food aid, Defeyter et al (2020) provide evidence of people increasingly turning to food aid as a coping strategy during the crisis. Reporting on a national representative survey conducted in early June, which gathered 1,004 responses, findings showed that 4.3% of adults are relying on food banks and other sources of food aid, and 2.6% of adults have relied more heavily on this strategy during the pandemic than they did before. These figures increase to 19.1% and 12.3% respectively amongst adults living in households with low or very low food security.[116] The Food Standards Scotland survey of 511 adults conducted in August found 6% of participants had received delivery of food through a food charity or food bank. 6% of participants also reported this in the May data collection, whilst June and July data reported 5% of participant accessed food in this way.[117]

Changing capacity

New emergency food projects were set up over the initial UK lockdown period and some existing community projects moved to newly provide food aid. In November 2020, IFAN's membership had grown by 163 organisations running 213 venues. A third of these organisations (56) were distributing food aid for the first time since COVID-19. IFAN has

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[112] Weekes, T., Spoor, E., Weal, R. and Moffett, G. *Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network (The Trussell Trust, June 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

[113] Salvation Army, *UK approaching poverty tipping point warns The Salvation Army (Salvation Army, 29 May 2020)* <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/news/uk-approaching-poverty-tipping-point-warns-salvation-army>

[114] Canavan, M. *Aberlour Response to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee Inquiry: Vulnerable Children During the Coronavirus Outbreak* (Aberlour, May 2020) <https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/aberlour_dev/2020/05/07111626/COVID19-Impact-on-Vulnerable-Children-SP-Education-and-Skills-Committee-Evidence-FINAL.pdf>

[115] The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 6th April* (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 6 April 2020) <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Community-organisations-and-COVID19-PA-briefing-6-April-2020.pdf >

[116] Defeyter, G., Paul Stretesky, P., Forsey, A., Mann, E., Henderson, E., Pepper, G. and Walters, P. *Food and coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic (*Healthy Living Lab, Northumbria University and Feeding Britain, June 2020). <https://healthylivinguk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Food-and-coping-strategies-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic.pdf>

[117] Food Standards Scotland, *COVID-19 consumer tracker Wave 4* (FSS, 2020) <https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/publications-and-research/publications/covid-19-consumer-tracker-wave-4>

identified least961 independent food banks operating across the UK.[118] 39% of the 211 frontline organisations working in communities across Scotland responding to the survey by the Poverty and Inequality Alliance had expanded their activities to include food work because of the crisis.[119] Community Food and Health Scotland reviewed around 650 pieces of information on community food organisations from a range of sources – mainly social media and website posts. They reported that many organisations ceased their usual work immediately and reconfigured to adapt to the conditions imposed by lockdown. Other organisations reconfigured their services to deliver food activities more often, or for the first time.[120] The Poverty Alliance reported that some organisations expanding into food work had less time to work on their core work: "One mental health-focused community organisation, for example, has engaged with all local food banks to support with food distribution; meaning less time to focus on their core work of supporting people through mental health issues".[121]

Existing food aid providers experienced shifts in capacity as well. Data from IFAN members reported increases in capacity, with 52% of the 132 organisations surveyed in June running larger operations involving more volunteers and additional venues. Around 4% of surveyed organisations had to run a reduced service as COVID-19 made it difficult to operate at full capacity.[122] Despite some short-term closures of food banks in the Trussell Trust network, whilst the food banks established new ways of working, the Trussell Trust report nearly every one of their 400+ food banks in the network has continued to provide food parcels since the beginning of the crisis, even though some of their centres may have closed.[123]

Service user experiences

The bulk of the literature to date details the experience of the organisations providing food aid, as opposed to the service users themselves. One exception is a qualitative study undertaken as part of the FSA COVID-19 Consumer Research Project, which included 20 exploratory 1-2 hour remote qualitative interviews with people from England, Northern Ireland and Wales experiencing food insecurity and 6 follow-up case study interviews.[124] The findings provided some insight into experiences of accessing food support. Many people who were food insecure had not been in touch with support schemes or received help. When participants had accessed support, it had "often made a real difference, easing hunger and

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[118] Information provided to the research by IFAN

[119] McKendrick, J. and Campbell, S. *Local action in Scotland to tackle food insecurity during the coronavirus crisis.* (Scottish poverty & inequality research unit, Glasgow Caledonian University. June 2020) <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Food-insecurity-SPIRU-final-report-June.pdf>

[120] Community Food and Health (Scotland) *A snapshot of Covid-19, food insecurity and community food initiatives What happened and what can we learn? (Public Health Scotland, 2020)* <https://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CFHS-A-snapshot-of-Covid-19-food-insecurity-and-community-food-initiatives.pdf>

[121]The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 6th April* (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 6 April 2020) <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Community-organisations-and-COVID19-PA-briefing-6-April-2020.pdf >

[122]Goodwin, S., *Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK Comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020* (Independent Food Aid Network, 2020) <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/9c7292e6-4bea-410e-9e9b-f9de7e22f3d1/IFAN%20Emergency%20Food%20Distribution%20Report%20Feb%20-%20May%201920%20Published%2009.07.20.pdf >

[123] Weekes, T., Spoor, E., Weal, R. and Moffett, G. *Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network (The Trussell Trust, June 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

[124]Food Standards Agency, *The COVID-19 consumer research* (FSA, 2020) <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/the-covid-19-consumer-research>

anxiety". [125] The report states that most participants were not aware of the wide range of support available from charities, community schemes and local councils. Most assumed the only available help, other than Government financial support, was food banks. Interviewed participants indicated there was often stigma attached to receiving food from more formal schemes, and many seemed willing to use these kinds of support only when absolutely critical and, after use, would revert to self-reliance wherever possible.[126]

Early impact of the crisis

Early in the crisis, food banks reported disruptions and challenges. IFAN, as quoted in the EFRA evidence review, reported independent food banks initially struggled to purchase food in supermarkets due to the shortages in shops and restrictions on product lines introduced by supermarkets to reduce impact of consumer stockpiling.[127] About 77% of organisations surveyed by IFAN in mid-June 2020 reported they had struggled to access an adequate food supply at the end of March and during early April.[128] The Trussell Trust reported challenges relating to the loss of volunteers due to shielding requirements and the need to change their typical operating model due to social distancing requirements.[129] However, corrections in the food supply system and quick adaptations seemed to mitigate some of these early challenges. The impact of the food shortages in shops was largely rectified by the middle of April and when surveyed by IFAN in June, 90% of organisations reported good access to food supply.[130] A survey administered over mid to late May – to which 211 community organisations providing food aid in local communities in Scotland responded – found the vast majority of organisations reported that: they had enough volunteers and funds to deliver

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[125] Connors, C., Malan, L., Canavan, S., Sissoko, F., Carmo, M., Sheppard, C and Cook, F. *The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19 (*Bright Harbour Collective Report for the Food Standards Agency, July 2020). <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-food-insecurity-2020_-report-v5.pdf> pg. 8

[126] Connors, C., Malan, L., Canavan, S., Sissoko, F., Carmo, M., Sheppard, C and Cook, F. *The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19 (*Bright Harbour Collective Report for the Food Standards Agency, July 2020). <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fsa-food-insecurity-2020_-report-v5.pdf> [127]

Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *COVID-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

[128] Goodwin, S., *Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK Comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020* (Independent Food Aid Network, 2020) <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/9c7292e6-4bea-410e-9e9b-f9de7e22f3d1/IFAN%20Emergency%20Food%20Distribution%20Report%20Feb%20-%20May%201920%20Published%2009.07.20.pdf >

[129]Weekes, T., Spoor, E., Weal, R. and Moffett, G. *Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network (The Trussell Trust, June 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

[130] Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *COVID-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm> ; Goodwin, S., *Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK Comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020* (Independent Food Aid Network, 2020) <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/9c7292e6-4bea-410e-9e9b-f9de7e22f3d1/IFAN%20Emergency%20Food%20Distribution%20Report%20Feb%20-%20May%201920%20Published%2009.07.20.pdf>

work; thought there was effective local co-ordination; had an adequate supply of food; and were not concerned for the physical health of their workers/volunteers.[131]

The three academic papers that discussed emergency food, amongst other topics relevant to household food insecurity, did so in the early phase of the crisis, therefore capturing the issues and challenges that food aid providers faced. Power et al discusses the fragility of the charitable food aid system, reporting that food banks were seeing reduced individual food donations, were unable to buy the items required for food parcels due to poor availability in the supermarkets, were experiencing reduced volunteer capacity due to shielding and that some food banks had to close.[132] Barker and Russell similarly observe the challenges for the third sector in providing a response to the crisis and Caplan wrote, "it has become clear that this sector cannot possibly deal with a crisis of this magnitude".[133]

Adaptations in operations

Food banks reported changes in their operations as a result of the crisis, including changes in the amount of food provided and the means by which people received the parcel. From a survey of 100 organisations operating 191 independent food banks across England, Scotland and Wales, IFAN reported 60% of organisations started to run delivery services to allow for social distancing, in addition to 19% of organisations which ran a delivery service before COVID-19. 47% of respondents had increased the size of their parcels to support people with a food supply for a longer time period than usual.[134] Similarly, many food banks in the Trussell Trust network put in place arrangements to deliver food parcels instead of, or as well as, collecting parcels from the food bank centre. However, across the network, collection remained the more common method of provision; a survey of people using food banks across June and July showed 57% of parcels were collected from food bank centres, and 39% of people needing a food parcel had this delivered. This shift to delivering food parcels also meant that some food banks started to provide seven days' worth of food, rather than the usual three days, in a single food parcel.[135] During April 2020, 9% of parcels given out were seven-day parcels.[136]

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[131]McKendrick, J. and Campbell, S. *Local action in Scotland to tackle food insecurity during the coronavirus crisis.* (Scottish poverty & inequality research unit, Glasgow Caledonian University. June 2020) <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Food-insecurity-SPIRU-final-report-June.pdf>

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

[133] Barker, M. and Russell, J. (2020) Feeding the food insecure in Britain: learning from the 2020 COVID-19 crisis, *Food Security* volume 12, pages 865–870; Caplan, P. (2020), Struggling for food in a time of crisis,: Responsibility and paradox. *Anthropology Today*, 36: 8-10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12573> =

[134]Goodwin, S., *Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK Comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020* (Independent Food Aid Network, 2020) <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/9c7292e6-4bea-410e-9e9b-f9de7e22f3d1/IFAN%20Emergency%20Food%20Distribution%20Report%20Feb%20-%20May%201920%20Published%2009.07.20.pdf>

[135]Weekes, T., Spoor, E., Weal, R. and Moffett, G. *Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network (The Trussell Trust, June 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

[136]Weekes, T., Spoor, E., Weal, R. and Moffett, G. *Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network (The Trussell Trust, June 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

Emergency food systems

As well as changes to the size and delivery of food parcels, IFAN reported on changes in the type of provision through their project to support a cash-first approach at a local level in Scotland, running between June and November.[137] One such approach included the provision of shopping vouchers instead of, or in addition to, a food parcel. Another organisation started working through some of their referral partners to provide supermarket vouchers directly to clients who would ordinarily have been referred for a food parcel. IFAN have produced a briefing on learning and reflections of this use of shopping vouchers, drawing on insights collected from food banks offering this form of provision.[138]

As the crisis continues and different forms of lockdown are implemented, the impact of potential sustained increased demand for food aid organisations should be monitored. One research project, which investigated data from crowd-funding websites on donations to food banks, suggested signs of compassion fatigue. Data showed a surge of public generosity at the onset of the crisis, but donations declined as lockdown come to an end, which the researchers suggest may indicate compassion fatigue. The brief report on these findings (available at the time of the search) suggested, however, that before the crisis, such appeals through crowd-funding sites usually make up a relatively small part of food banks' income.[139]

Findings: stakeholder perspectives

Immediate response

Echoing some of the results from our evidence review, stakeholders told us that the first few weeks of the crisis felt chaotic, with experiences of unprecedented demand. They observed that food charity systems seemed to mobilise quicker, therefore being heavily relied upon as a key provider of food support in the very early days of the crisis. Once other support from the local council, resilience hubs and the shielding food boxes were put in place, community food organisations became one part of a wider response as opposed to being the main or sole provider of food support.

New provision and adapted models

Stakeholders also spoke to us about changing capacity and operating models in emergency food provision. Data provided from Fareshare summarising changes in their membership base, showed evidence of how the numbers of organisations providing food fluctuated. FareShare UK reported that 2,000 of their community food members closed in the first few weeks (FareShare had 10,963 charity and community group members in 2019), but this was counterbalanced by an equivalent number of new projects setting up or other projects

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[137] Independent Food Aid Network. *Using a cash-first approach at local level: towards ending the need for emergency food aid in Scotland. (IFAN, 2020)* <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/be22f57a-0a17-4be0-8618-03587b86be6f/CASH%20FIRST%20PROJECT%20WEBSITE.pdf>

[138] Independent Food Aid Network. *COVID-19 learning and reflections: Use of shopping vouchers instead of or alongside food provision* (IFAN, September 2020). <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/46d3a45f-37b9-45b3-bb21-ffc90e410d16/Use%20of%20Vouchers%20by%20Food%20Banks%2030.09.20.pdf>

[139]Miller, O. *Are food banks facing compassion fatigue?* (University of Kent, 25 June 2020). <https://www.kent.ac.uk/news/covid19/25823/are-food-banks-facing-compassion-fatigue>

adapting to provide different/new forms of food during the crisis.[140] Other stakeholders reported how community food organisations, whose work is primarily not emergency food provision (e.g. community meals and pantries), had to quickly change their model, and many started providing emergency food aid. Also, organisations not normally distributing food aid at all began giving out food parcels.

Stakeholders recognised the values of the adaptations in allowing continued service provision.

> 'But I think in general, most organisations were able to adapt their services…., I think they were able to, there were some brilliant examples of service delivery developments.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

> 'So, they've had to change it to deliveries of food, and have to change the model to having collections at the centre, rather than people coming in. That's been tough. But those changes in the model, and then the changes in the volunteer resource that we have, have kind of helped us get through.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

The Trussell Trust network forged a new partnership with British Gas, which supported local food banks offering a delivery model. Stakeholders described the scheme in which local food banks could opt in to have British Gas drivers deliver food parcels to households. British Gas also supported the transportation of food from central warehouses to local food banks. Some independent food banks also benefitted from support from British Gas volunteers, though the scale of this has not yet been quantified.

Other stakeholders observed how making the necessary adaptations around finding new volunteers and switching to delivery may have been more challenging in rural areas.

> 'From my experience, organisations were able to do that in certain areas, and there was certain difficulty with, sort of, finding volunteers in order to do that, and ensuring that we were reaching everybody, especially in more rural areas. That was where the more challenges were. From discussions we've had, like, sort of, in the cities especially, that was covered, but in more rural areas there were difficulties on that.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Stakeholders also spoke of a range of consequences of these changes. For example, one stakeholder spoke of the switch to either delivery or socially distanced parcel collection being necessary, but difficult for staff and volunteers, as it removed some of the social contact which is an essential component of the service they provide.

> 'So we've had to train up really quickly, and change our operating model from one where people would come into the food bank, they would have a cup of tea, they'd be greeted as an individual, and given dignity and respect. That's been really hard for food banks,

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[140] FareShare, *Annual Report 2018/2019*. (London, Fareshare, 2019) <https://fareshare.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Annual-Report-2019-interactive-export.pdf>

> because that's why they do this, it's that personal contact.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Where adaptations were made, organisations tried to retain as much of their pre-crisis support as they could.

> 'A lot of the organisations that we worked with either closed down or they changed what they were doing in order to fit the, sort of, new regulations. So, like people have been saying, they were still trying to do what they were doing before, but add, like, change that, if that makes sense. So, we have organisations that used to provide community meals, that were now delivering food parcels at home, but actually they still wanted to do that delivery themselves, in order to then check in with their beneficiaries, to make sure that they were still...' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

One stakeholder reflected that some of the changes in operation made support more accessible:

> 'Then, in terms of delivery, what I'm hearing is that the pandemic has given more room to provide food at different times. So, whereas, normally, let's say, an emergency food aid organisation would be open only at very specific times during the week, meaning that a lot of people wouldn't have access to that food, now, there's more of a delivery system. In some cases, not all, it, kind of, allowed more food to be available to more people.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Stakeholders highlighted the work of Nourish, a food justice organisation in Scotland, which produced guidance and ran a series of online workshops for new and existing community food organisations on promoting and enhancing dignity for those experiencing food insecurity.[141] This work was funded by the Scottish Government to support organisations to adapt; it built on the Dignity Principles underpinning their approach to policy and practice and was designed to help organisations continue to provide support in their communities, but doing so in a way that was not solely about emergency food provision.

Changes to referral processes

The Trussell Trust implemented changes to the referral process which stakeholders spoke to us about. Although they already had an e-referral scheme in operation, the roll-out of this was accelerated, and they encouraged food banks in the network to take that option up; it was seen as a helpful tool during lockdown.[142]

> 'We already have an e-referral system that the network has available to them. Not everybody was using it, there was definitely some work to do on it, but when this happened, we really strongly encouraged everybody to take that up and to at least be able to accept an e-referral, which they would've been able to do anyway with the system they have. Just to, kind of, do some training around that. So that was, kind of, our main drive to

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[141] Nourish, Scotland. *Community responses to coronavirus: guidance for good practice*, (Nourish, Scotland, Aug 2020). <https://www.nourishscotland.org/resources/guidance-for-community-responses-to-coronavirus/>

[142] Weekes, T., Spoor, E., Weal, R. and Moffett, G. *Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network (The Trussell Trust, June 2020)* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

> try to support them to receive referrals safely. In theory, on the ground, that was incredibly helpful. We can see the amount of referrals coming through now are… You know, there're so many more e-referrals coming through than we've had before.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

To support this, the Trussell Trust also offered free tablets with 4G connectivity to every food bank so they could have the tech they needed to operate electronically. Some food banks had a system of just receiving referrals through one system through the local authority.

The Trussell Trust also set up a national helpline with CAB (to cover England and Wales). Initially the helpline was primarily focussed on supporting people with food, so callers would speak to a member of CAB staff who would make an e-referral to the local food bank. There was a 'quiet launch' due to concern over demand; the phone number was put on the micro sites of individual food banks if the food banks wanted it to. This helpline is now developing to provide more general advice, of which referral to a food bank as a last resort is one part of the support offered. Trussell Trust also involved IFAN and independent food banks interested in being involved in the scheme.

Stakeholders reported that there were some moves away from any kind of referral process instead meeting needs as presented. For one stakeholder, this raised concerns around whether people were accessing all the right support they may have needed, and whether opportunities were being missed to help people beyond providing food. Independent food banks were reported to be particularly accommodating of self-referrals and often helped people who were not able to access a referral agent. Some independent food banks do not usually operate via an official referral system.[143] This means that they do not require external agencies to make assessments of need. IFAN research of 100 independent food banks found that 67 of the 100 organisations ran a self-referral or mixed referral/self-referral system before the outbreak of COVID-19.[144] 69 organisations, or 69% of the data set, have seen an increase in the number of self-referrals or have started to accept self-referrals (15%) as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Although telephone and internet-based systems have replaced some referral services, these are not necessarily accessible to people living with no or low income. Of the 69 organisations reporting to have started to accept self-referrals and an increase in self-referrals, 46% reported supporting people unable to access referral agencies. 19 of these 32 organisations had supported up to 40 households in this situation.

Food supplies

Stakeholders reported disruptions in surplus food supplies from retail supply chains in the early weeks when demand for food – and the need to get food onto supermarket shelves – was high. Increased demand on national food supply chains also meant that food charities had difficulty purchasing food as they were competing with retailers, wholesalers and other procurement (e.g. the national grocery box schemes). This was particularly difficult for

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[143] Loopstra, R. et al (2019) *A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network*. < https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/0681ad7a-2d07-489f-9c11-77dc3d1aa968/Report_IndependentFoodBankStudy_Dec2019-pdf.pdf>

[144] Goodwin, S., *Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK Comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020* (Independent Food Aid Network, 2020) <https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/9c7292e6-4bea-410e-9e9b-f9de7e22f3d1/IFAN%20Emergency%20Food%20Distribution%20Report%20Feb%20-%20May%201920%20Published%2009.07.20.pdf >

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independent food banks, with the situation especially acute until at least mid-April.[145] Trussell Trust food banks reported difficulties accessing food in the context of low stocks and panic buying. Nationally, the Trussell Trust worked with retail partners, Tesco and Asda, to enable food banks to purchase food in bulk in-store.

> 'Obviously, the panic buying really impacted our food banks as I know it did other emergency food providers across the country. We did a lot of work around working with our supermarket partners to try to support our food banks to be able to go into supermarkets and buy more food which……We had to obviously talk to wholesalers, and there was quite a lot of quite desperate work around trying to understand how we could get the level of food to the food banks.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

These arrangements were particularly important when there were restrictions on purchases per shopper when supermarket stocks were low. Whilst this agreement was made centrally, access was determined at store level.

> 'I think decisions were made at both of those, at head office level, that we were allowed to support our volunteers to buy more but it was at the discretion of each store. So they had to still go in and have that conversation.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

IFAN worked in similar ways to support individual food banks access food from large retailers at this time, with particular success working with Morrisons and, with support from Trussell Trust, accessing Asda stores.

Some Trussell Trust food banks had never purchased food in-store in this way before, previously managing on donations alone.

> 'While some of our food banks will be used to buying food to top up donations, that was quite a new thing for a lot of them. They would be totally reliant on donations normally, suddenly that wasn't there so they had to go and purchase food.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

Other changes to food inputs included new or additional food donations from corporate partners. A donation from Tesco is discussed in the next section, but other examples included PepsiCo donating cereal to the Trussell Trust. These donations were added to stock sourced through agreements with the supermarkets and distributed amongst food banks in the network.

Corporate funding and partnerships

Food charity stakeholders highlighted the importance of the support offered by existing partners such as Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda, who they had a history of working with before the crisis. Corporate partners made a number of donations to food charities, in particular to the Trussell Trust and FareShare; stakeholder data highlighted how important these were for the capacity of food charity to continue to provide emergency food over this

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[145] Independent Food Aid Network *Written evidence submitted by Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)(COV0120)* (IFAN, 1 May 2020) <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/3673/pdf/%3e>
for more information see media reports: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/21/food-banks-plead-with-uk-supermarkets-to-set-aside-supplies-amid-coronavirus-fallout
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/10/food-banks-run-out-of-milk-and-other-staples-as-shoppers-panic-buy-coronavirus

period. Donations included £25 million from Tesco, £3 million from Sainsbury's, £1.5 million from Co-op. Some of these donations were specific in nature; for example, the Tesco donation was specifically for the purchase of food. Some of these partnerships also incorporated other kinds of non-food input such as Sainsbury's providing logistic support to FareShare and British Gas providing support through workers on furlough who delivered food boxes from Trussell Trust food banks. The Entertainer (a national toy shop) also helped both FareShare and Trussell Trust with warehouse space for their national redistribution schemes.

As an example of a key donation and partnership over this time, the Trussell Trust received £7.5 million worth of food from Tesco. Discussing this partnership, one stakeholder said:

'Tesco came out to us and said, "What do you need?" We gave them a list of our most needed items which were fairly… It was fairly easy because everyone was so low on food that even things like pasta and beans, which we never ever need in the network because we're always really well stocked with those, were low. So we were able to give them a list of what we would want. Then they went away and looked at what they could give us before it hit the stores. Obviously, they were also experiencing supply chain issues as well.

We then ended up with regular deliveries of that food to a central warehouse that we had organised with an organisation that was happy to do that. It was a mixture of Parcelforce, who were helping us to move that food to several locations across the country, and then British Gas were going in to pick that up for us and delivering to food banks.

So we, kind of, split everybody up into the size of the food banks and how often we thought they might need a delivery of food. Then we had to just go with that, so they would receive either a weekly delivery or biweekly delivery of food from Tesco via British Gas. That, kind of, saved the network, I think, really, because we were really struggling.' [Autumn 2020 stakeholder interview]

This quote highlights the significant difference in the availability of food for the food bank network from the partnership, and the key role this played in allowing the network to meet demand.

In comparison, there were far fewer opportunities for independent food charities to benefit from corporate donations. A notable exception was that the £10 million donation from Morrisons could be taken up by independent projects not affiliated with Trussell Trust or FareShare. Overall, it was reported to us that hundreds of independent food banks did not necessarily benefit from these arrangements. When membership fees are in place, FareShare fees are a barrier for many small independent projects to access corporate donations.

Food charity approaches to government funding

There were a number of government funding schemes made available to food charities at this time, and stakeholders reported different uses of this funding. Each of the governments of the four constituent countries provided funding to Fareshare, including £10.5 million from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to purchase and redistribute ambient food through their network in England, and £2.1 million Scottish Government investment in FareShare, which builds on a £1 million investment in the previous year to mitigate the impact of No Deal EU Exit. Stakeholders from Fareshare

discussed how this funding helped them scale up operations, with 6,100 tonnes of food redistributed through their network a month: four times the pre-COVID-19 amount. The funding also allowed them to purchase food. As a surplus food charity before the pandemic, the move to purchase food was a major change in their operations.

The Trussell Trust did not accept government funding to purchase food for distribution through their networks. Instead, they offered their own grants of up to £5,000 for individual food banks, which was reported to be an important stopgap for projects before the network was able to distribute a donation of £7.5 million worth of food from Tesco.[146] However, as each food bank is an independent charity, some did apply for Defra grants in their own right.

Defra also funded a £3.5million grant scheme for individual food aid projects. The scope of the scheme was for grants of £30,00-£100,000 to be spent within 12 weeks. Stakeholders discussed how this funding structure was not well suited to smaller charities. Some smaller organisations, in the IFAN network for example, clubbed together to apply to the scheme. Given the scale of highly localised, small-scale community provision of food during this time, the fact that this grant scheme was not suited to small organisations is a key limitation. As one stakeholder reflected, there was an underestimation of small-scale independent provision and the slack picked up by smaller organisations. This raised concerns over the institutionalisation of food aid, namely, that the organisations that benefited from the scheme were the bigger charities.

National scale logistics

FareShare and the Trussell Trust also made significant adaptations to their logistics, both setting up national food redistribution systems for the first time. Fareshare set up two national centres in England (Lutterworth and Banbury) where the food was mixed and matched for the regional centres. This was to process the ambient food purchased with the Defra £10.5 million and was possible as a result of a corporate partnership with The Entertainer. These national centres closed at the end of September 2020, as the food had all been distributed. Significantly, in terms of the longer-term impact of these changes, FareShare are now exploring whether they should work to keep national logistics operational. Adjustments were made to some of FareShare's membership fee arrangements, although this was not uniform across the UK countries or within different regions and some fees were charged for food (as opposed to membership). In Scotland, an information sheet was provided on different policies across the different FareShare regional centres to provide clearer information to community projects and charities.

In Scotland, FareShare had been supported by Scottish Government to expand reach to Highlands and Islands pre-COVID. During the COVID-19 outbreak it was reported to us that FareShare had an identified local authority lead for each area and distributed food to organisations and local hubs in every local authority area. The Scottish Government also provided FareShare with an allocation methodology to ensure food was distributed to areas where the government expected greatest need. The Scottish Government also received monthly monitoring data from FareShare on the amounts of food distributed to each local authority, to allow rapid detection of areas that could be receiving a lower share of food than needed.

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[146] Trussell Trust, *Tesco announces £15 million food donations to support food banks and local community groups* (Trussell Trust, 1 Apr 20) https://www.trusselltrust.org/2020/04/01/tesco-announces-15-million-food-donations-support-food-banks-local-community-groups/

Emergency food systems

The Trussell Trust national logistics programme was designed to redistribute the £7.5 million worth of food from Tesco. Trussell Trust food banks also reported having to increase their own warehousing capacity in order to manage the increased flow of food needed to meet rising need.

Current concerns of food charities

As we go into the winter, stakeholders reported concern for the coming months. Projects are anticipating increasing need as the socio-economic impacts of the health emergency and policy responses are felt by those on the lowest incomes. One stakeholder interviewed put it that food banks are '*wary and weary*'. With exhaustion throughout food aid networks, there are concerns for the ability of projects to sustain their work under ongoing and increasing pressures. The combination of increased economic impact of COVID-19 and the forthcoming impact of Brexit is also a concern for charities.

One stakeholder discussed the appropriateness and acceptability of the significant investment in food aid organisations in response to the crisis, and that this might serve to further entrench reliance on this sector. They felt strongly that food banks should not have been relied upon to provide this service, and voiced concern as to the legacy of this and the expectations of their role in future lockdowns. They also reported that community food organisations were seeking guidance on how to transition back to previous models, such as community cafes, but at the time of interview there was no guidance on this, despite there being guidance available for businesses re-opening. Though in Scotland, funds have been provided to the Dignity Programme to support community organisations to adapt, and the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) created a bank of resources on supporting communities safely. Stakeholders from the Scottish Government highlighted new funding available – announced in September – for community food organisations through the Community and Third Sector Recovery Programme, which is a £25m Scottish Government funded programme aiming to support charities, community groups, social enterprises and voluntary organisations that are supporting people and communities through the shift from lockdown to recovery.[147] The fund has two streams, one to support organisations to adapt and be sustainable to the challenges presented by the crisis, and one to support services that were suspended or reduced due to the crisis. The stakeholders told us this ambition is already reflected at local level with attempts to revive and reconfigure activity from very established initiatives such as cooking classes to more recent ones such as community pantries.

Summary and conclusions

When the UK national COVID-19 lockdown was announced in March 2020, food banks were designated as essential services and permitted to continue their operations. Food parcel distribution increased, and over the course of the lockdown, significant government and corporate funding was directed towards some food aid charities. Alongside meeting demands of increased provision, organisations were impacted by disruptions to food and financial inputs, the need to adhere to social distancing, and reduced volunteer workforce due to isolation guidance. The ways in which these networks adapted were extensive and

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[147] Community Food and Health (Scotland), *Community and Third Sector Recovery Programme*, (Public Health Scotland, September 18, 2020) <https://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/2020/community-and-third-sector-recovery-programme/>

highly responsive. The scale of funding and bulk food donations they were able to move through their networks in the space of a few months was unprecedented.

Overall, these findings highlight the incredible amount of work done by national food charities and local communities to establish and maintain emergency food provision across the country during the UK lockdown. Local charitable organisations, in some cases supported by national networks, adapted to an unprecedented health, social and economic emergency in agile ways in attempts to meet local needs in their communities. The findings also, however, reinforce previous evidence on the vulnerabilities embedded in food charity systems, including reliance on donations (or ad hoc funding) and a volunteer labour force, as well as unpredictable levels of need.

It is striking that during the COVID-19 outbreak, UK governments have relied heavily on emergency food charities as frontline services, making over £20 million in funding available to these organisations. Many food and poverty charities are calling for cash-first approaches and enhanced investment in social security at this time, over increased funding for ad hoc charitable food provision.[148] As a further round of funding is announced for food charities as part of the UK Government COVID Winter Grant Scheme, it is important to revisit, once again, the heated debate around the role of food charities as frontline responses to a lack economic access to food.

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[148] Marshall, C. *Promoting 'cash first' responses at local level – IFAN's work in Scotland*, (Independent Food Aid Network, August 6, 2020). <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/promoting-cash-first-responses-at-local-level-ifan-s-work-in-scotland>; Trussell Trust, *Together, we can create a Hunger Free Future. (*Trussell Trust, 2020) <https://www.trusselltrust.org/hunger-free-future/>

Grocery box for people who are shielding

Grocery box scheme for people who were shielding

Summary

This section looks at the rollout and effects of the grocery box scheme available to people who were shielding during the UK-wide coronavirus lockdown over March to July 2020

The findings draw attention to the unprecedented nature of the scale, speed and complexity of the need for direct food provision targeted at supporting those on the shielding list. Strengths identified in the implementation of the scheme, in the context of local and other kinds of support in Scotland, included extensive co-production and close working between national and local governments. However, findings also revealed the limitations of national grocery box schemes. The contents of the grocery boxes delivered were generally not adequate. They did not provide sufficient fresh food of good quality, and the boxes were generally not appropriate for meeting the nutritional, cultural or dietary needs of their recipients. Stakeholders expressed significant confusion around who was eligible for the scheme, especially in the early weeks. At a local level, there is evidence that local authorities worked hard to adapt the national provision to make it more fit for purpose, and in Scotland, implementation of the grocery box scheme was purposively co-produced with local authorities to augment (and overcome the limitations of) the national grocery box provision.

Through the lifetime of the scheme, there were intersections between government and voluntary support. Voluntary and community sector food providers, such as food banks and social enterprise food providers, reported mixed experiences of supporting people who were shielding, with some providing significant amounts of support, especially when people needed additional help with food for themselves and their families. Others demarcated their provision to only be for those who were facing economic barriers to food access.

The grocery box scheme for people who were shielding was a policy designed to protect the food security of those in the clinically extremely vulnerable group who could not access food by other means, and who were advised to not go out for any reason over March to July, including for food acquisition. Existing evidence and stakeholder data suggest key challenges in this provision (variety, food quality, flexibility). Whilst stakeholders identified examples of best practice from their perspective in the delivery of the scheme in the context of a wider suite of food support designed and delivered locally to those on the shielding list, it will be important for the food security outcomes of this grocery box scheme – in itself and in the context of wider support – to be robustly and rigorously evaluated across and between UK nations.

Introduction

During the UK national lockdown between March and July 2020, people who were extremely clinically vulnerable to severe complications from COVID-19 were advised to "shield", that is, to self-isolate and not leave their home for any reason, including to shop for food. In an attempt to overcome the barriers to food access that this created, governments across the UK – the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in England, the Northern Ireland Executive, Scottish Government and Welsh Government – coordinated the establishment of grocery box schemes for shielding individuals. All four schemes were announced between 29 March and 6 April and ran through to the end of the shielding policy at the end of July (and mid-August in Wales). One key difference was that in Northern

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Ireland, people who were economically vulnerable to food insecurity could also receive a box through this scheme.

Primarily ambient food, that can be stored at room temperature, was provided. Details of the scheme published at the outset in Scotland stated that it would involve "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".[149] Two of the UK's largest food wholesalers, Bidfood and Brakes, were procured to deliver the scheme in England, Scotland and Wales, with these companies overseeing the delivery of standardised boxes to people's homes.[150] In Northern Ireland, the scheme was run through the Department for Communities working with councils and voluntary and community organisations, as well as private firms.[151]

The grocery boxes were intended to provide a week's worth of food for individuals who were shielding. In a government press release (England) it was stated that the contents of the boxes were put together in consultation with nutritionists and industry groups (not named) and in Scotland industry stakeholders reported to us that the FSA Scotland had been consulted on the box content.[152] In Scotland, a policy decision was taken to invite people to request more than one box if this was needed for dependents, or others in their household, who were also not able to leave the house to buy groceries.[153]

People on the shielding list registered for boxes either through a telephone hotline or website (England and Northern Ireland), via a government SMS service (Scotland) or by contacting their local authority (Wales; people could also contact their local authority to receive a box in Scotland). In England, people had to be on the government's shielding list to be eligible for a grocery box and had to declare that they couldn't source food by any other means (e.g., online, or through friends or family). It did not extend to those who were moderately vulnerable to severe complications from COVID-19. Eligibility criteria in Northern Ireland were broader: boxes were available through the government scheme for both people shielding and those not shielding but in critical need of food due to, for example, being disabled, isolated or having too little money.

Of an approximate number of individuals on the shielding list ranging between 170,000 and 180,000 over the time of the shielding policy in Scotland, data suggest around 50,000 to 70,000 grocery boxes were requested each week.[154] In Wales, around 130,000 persons

[149]Scottish Government, *Deliveries for high-risk groups. (gov.scot,* 03 Apr 2020) <https://www.gov.scot/news/deliveries-for-high-risk-groups/>

[150]Bidfood, *Bidfood and Brakes join forces to support the vulnerable in isolation (Bidfood, 29 March 2020).* <https://www.bidfood.co.uk/2020/03/29/bidfood-and-brakes-join-forces-to-support-the-vulnerable-in-isolation/>

[151]Chakelian, A. *Revealed: The £208m food box rip-off (New Statesman, 16 Oct 2020)* <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/10/208m-food-box-rip-off-private-outsource-government-contract-covid-corona-virus>

[152] Gov.uk (2020) *Over half a million food packages delivered to those at risk,* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/over-half-a-million-food-packages-delivered-to-those-at-risk>; written submission to the research

[153] <https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202000066398/> ; policy decision referred in written evidence provided by a policymaker in Scotland.

[154]Scottish Government. *Individuals shielding receiving food boxes during lockdown: FOI release. (gov.scot,* 15 Sep 2020). <https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202000066398/>

were on the shielded list by July 2020.[155] An average of 11,300 food parcels were being delivered each week and, as at August 2020, the scheme had delivered 214,711 food parcels to people who were shielding.[156] No final data for England or Northern Ireland were found up to the pausing of shielding at the end of July, but earlier reports provide some insight into the scale: 150,000 boxes had been delivered in Northern Ireland by the middle of June (around 80,000 people were shielding), and as at late June 300,000 boxes were being delivered each week in England (around 2.2 million people were shielding).[157]

This report examines the implementation and impact of the grocery box scheme for individuals who were shielding on risks of household food insecurity between March and August 2020, drawing from existing research and evidence, and findings from interviews and workshops with national stakeholders. Though people on the shielding list were able to access other forms of support and help at the same time –for example, priority supermarket delivery slots, financial protection subject to eligibility (such as the furlough scheme, sick pay and Universal Credit), as well as support from community projects and other local voluntary sectors, or local authority support such as cooked meals delivery – given the prominence of this scheme as the primary food-based intervention for this group, this section focuses specifically on the grocery box intervention. It explores the following key questions:

- What evidence is available on the implementation and impact of the grocery box scheme for people who were shielding?
- What further insights can be gained from policy and practice stakeholders on the process of implementing this scheme and the impacts they saw on the ground?
- What can we say about how effective the grocery box scheme was?
- What are the key lessons that can be taken away to inform ongoing and future COVID-19 responses to risks of food insecurity?

Data

Appendix 1 provides full details of the range of secondary and primary research methods including a systematic search for existing evidence and evidence review, national stakeholder workshops, interviews and written submissions. The data relevant for this section on school food replacements are described below.

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[155] Welsh Government, *Shielded households (composition and characteristics during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic): July 2020* (gov.wales, 3 November 2020) <https://gov.wales/shielded-households-composition-and-characteristics-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-july-2020-html>

[156] Welsh Government, *Covid-19 Dashboard*. (gov.wales, 8 September 2020) <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-09/summary-data-about-coronavirus-covid-19-and-the-response-to-it-8-september-2020-423.pdf>

[157] Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, *Latest update to shielding guidance,* (gov.uk. 23 June 2020) < https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/06/23/latest-update-to-shielding-guidance/>

Department for Communities. *Food Parcel Service to be extended for those medically shielding. (NI.gov,* 17 June 2020) <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/food-parcel-service-be-extended-those-medically-shielding>

Leitch, W. *Coronavirus: New advice for people shielding in NI. (*BBC News NI, 16 June 2020) https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-53070814

Department of Health and Social Care and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, *Plans to ease guidance for over 2 million shielding. (gov.uk,* 22 June 2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-to-ease-guidance-for-over-2-million-shielding>

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Key sources of existing evidence

The subset of literature found in the searches directly focused on the shielding grocery box scheme identified no relevant publications in academic journals. The grey literature searches identified 10 pieces of relevant literature.

At time of writing, Public Health Scotland (PHS) had published a first report from an ongoing evaluation of the shielding programme, as requested by the Scottish Government. This final evaluation report will be published in early 2021. Part of this evaluation covered support to access food, and one third of respondents had received a grocery box.[158] An online survey of people who had received a letter from the Scottish Government advising them to shield ran for the first two weeks of June. The opt-in survey received 12,850 responses, which represented 7% of the shielded population. Evaluations from Wales, England, and Northern Ireland were not yet publicly available.

We also reviewed evidence from an Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select committee (EFRA) report, covering submissions to their inquiry on COVID-19 and food supply in the spring, 2020.[159] Evidence was gathered through written and oral submissions from businesses in the food supply chain, food aid organisations, charities, academics and Defra, and an online voluntary public survey conducted in April, to which over 5,500 people responded.[160]

Other data sources reviewed included qualitative insights gathered by the Poverty Alliance from community organisations and activists who are experiencing poverty a report from the British Red Cross drawing on a number of data sources including polling on lived experiences, qualitative and quantitative insights from a range of British Red Cross services and key insights from voluntary and community sector organisations providing food support; a survey of people's experiences accessing food by Which, a survey of people shielding by Asthma UK; and qualitative studies undertaken in London, and the East of England.[161] We

[158] Delvaux J and Marosi D. *COVID-19 Shielding Programme (Scotland) Impact and Experience Survey*. (Edinburgh: Public Health Scotland; 2020). <https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/media/2763/covid-19-shielding-programme-scotland-impact-and-experience-survey_sept2020_english.pdf>

[159] Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *COVID-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

[160] Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *COVID-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

[161] The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 2nd June 2020. (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 2 June 2020)* <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Community-organisations-COVID19-Poverty-Alliance-briefing-2nd-June.pdf> The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 6th April* (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 6 April 2020) <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Community-organisations-and-COVID19-PA-briefing-6-April-2020.pdf > British Red Cross. *Access to food in emergencies: learning from Covid-19. (British Red Cross, July 2020)* <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications>; Walsh, H. *Which? calls for urgent action as vulnerable people still struggle to get food. (Which, 2 July 2020)* < https://www.which.co.uk/news/2020/07/one-in-four-vulnerable-people-still-struggling-to-access-food-100-days-into-coronavirus-lockdown/> ; Cumella, A and Farrington-Douglas, J. *The experience of shielders and why shielding needs a more personalised approach (Asthma UK,* 10 June 2020) <https://www.asthma.org.uk/support-us/campaigns/campaigns-blog/the-experience-of-shielders/>; Moore, H, City Intelligence. *Experiences of Food Insecurity amongst Older Londoners before and during COVID-19.*

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also included a nutritional analysis of the content of grocery boxes for people who were shielding.[162] The review also draws on findings from previous and forthcoming research by the project team including papers to be published with the Food Foundation.[163]

Research stakeholders drew attention to the findings of several additional reports which highlight issues around the government procurement processes through which the grocery box scheme was arranged.[164] These were not identified in the evidence searches because they were either not available at the time of the search, or outside of the direct search scope. They included a National Audit Office investigation on government procurement during the COVID-19 pandemic and data published as part of a New Statesman investigation into the grocery box scheme.[165]

Primary data and stakeholder consultation

In addition to these literature sources, primary data on the grocery box scheme for shielding individuals were gathered from national policy and practice stakeholders through online workshops (total of 39 stakeholder participants), telephone interviews and written submissions. Of the purposively sampled interviews for this phase of the research, two explored the grocery box scheme in detail.

Findings: evidence review

Grocery box contents

Existing evidence has highlighted concerns with the contents of the grocery boxes. One study compared the contents of the standard food parcels (broken down into energy, protein fat, free sugars, fibre, salt, and a number of vitamins and minerals) to the recommended

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(Greater London Authority, September 2020) <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/experiences-of-food-insecurity-amongst-older-londoners-before-and-during-covid-19--> ; Thompson, C., Hamilton, L., Dickinson, A., Fallaize, R., Mathie, E., Rogers, S., Wills, W. *The impact of Covid-19 and the resulting mitigation measures on food and eating in the East of England: Interim Report. (*Centre for Research in Public Health and Community Care (CRIPACC) University of Hertfordshire, 2020) <https://arc-eoe.nihr.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/files/Covid19%20Food%20Study%20Prelim%20Report.%20FINAL.pdf>

[162] McNeill, G, Dowler, L., Shields, K. *Inside the box: an analysis of the UK's emergency food distribution scheme*. (Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Security, University of Edinburgh, 25 Aug 2020) <https://www.ed.ac.uk/global-agriculture-food-security/news/blogs-and-newsletters/inside-the-box-an-analysis-of-the-uk-s-emergency-f>

[163] Loopstra et al (2020), *How has food insecurity changed for people who are shielding and in isolation over the COVID-19 crisis in Great Britain?* Brief report (forthcoming)

[164]Chakelian, A. *Revealed: The £208m food box rip-off (New Statesman, 16 Oct 2020)* <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/10/208m-food-box-rip-off-private-outsource-government-contract-covid-corona-virus> ; National Audit Office (2020) *Investigation into the free school meals vouchers scheme, HC 1036 SESSION 2019–2021 2 DECEMBER 2020,* <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investigation-into-the-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme.pdf>

[165] Chakelian, A. *Revealed: The £208m food box rip-off (New Statesman, 16 Oct 2020)* <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/10/208m-food-box-rip-off-private-outsource-government-contract-covid-corona-virus> ; National Audit Office (2020) *Investigation into the free school meals vouchers scheme, HC 1036 SESSION 2019–2021 2 DECEMBER 2020,* <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investigation-into-the-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme.pdf>

intake of each of these components, for women aged 50-64. [166] The authors found that the boxes met the nutritional needs of most adults, and measured up favourably in relation to components of the diet which are harmful for health. However, the survey of service users in the EFRA evidence review found that only 44% of those who had received a grocery box said that the contents had met their needs. Insufficient quantities, the unsuitability of foods provided and a lack of nutritional balance were common reasons for this.[167] The Poverty Alliance data also highlighted concerns about the quality, adequacy and regularity of food provided in the grocery boxes.[168]

Data on support to access food are available for all individuals on the shielded list in Scotland. As at 11 June, 19% (33,376 individuals) were signed up for home delivery of free grocery boxes only, 16% (28,204 individuals) were signed up for a priority online slot and 10% (18,503 individuals) were signed up for both. 1,587 of the 12,850 respondents to the PHS survey had signed up for both. It was reported that amongst respondents receiving both, about half (51%) did so because there were items they could not get via the free boxes; a quarter (26%) wanted make sure that they definitely would not go without food, and a fifth wanted more choice than the boxes offered. [169] In-depth interviews with 16 people who were shielding in London found that recipients of the boxes all agreed that they could not have survived solely off its contents, which were mainly packaged basics and not fresh foods or 'proper' meals.[170]

Box delivery and practicalities

Another theme that emerged from the evidence reviewed was that the grocery boxes were not accessible, especially in light of the characteristics of the population they aimed to support. The British Red Cross (BRC) noted that some people may not have been able to understand or action the 'notes' included in the box explaining what to do if the contents were not suitable, for example, due to language barriers. The guidance issued to local authorities in England stated that: "An A4 note is included in each package. It explains that should the recipient have any allergies and/or religious or cultural dietary requirements which mean that the contents of the box do not provide adequate food for one week, they should contact their council. The note also asks people to contact their council if they feel they need

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[166] McNeill, G, Dowler, L., Shields, K. *Inside the box: an analysis of the UK's emergency food distribution scheme*. (Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Security, University of Edinburgh, 25 Aug 2020) <https://www.ed.ac.uk/global-agriculture-food-security/news/blogs-and-newsletters/inside-the-box-an-analysis-of-the-uk-s-emergency-f>

[167]Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs Commons Select Committee. *COVID-19 and Food Supply* (House of Commons, parliament.uk, 2020) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmenvfru/263/26302.htm>

[168] The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 2nd June 2020. (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 2 June 2020)* <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Community-organisations-COVID19-Poverty-Alliance-briefing-2nd-June.pdf>

[169] Delvaux J and Marosi D. *COVID-19 Shielding Programme (Scotland) Impact and Experience Survey*. (Edinburgh: Public Health Scotland; 2020). <https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/media/2763/covid-19-shielding-programme-scotland-impact-and-experience-survey_sept2020_english.pdf>

[170] Moore, H, City Intelligence. *Experiences of Food Insecurity amongst Older Londoners before and during COVID-19*. (Greater London Authority, September 2020) <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/experiences-of-food-insecurity-amongst-older-londoners-before-and-during-covid-19-->

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more than one package per week".[171] Further guidance issued to local authorities suggested work was done to identify people who may not be able to carry the grocery box into their house, another point of concern raised by the BRC.[172] In Scotland it was reported to us by stakeholders that the note in the grocery box explicitly set out that if people would not be able to carry the contents of the box into their home, they should contact the council which held information on other forms of support. Policy stakeholders in Scotland highlighted that this information included, for example, postcodes that would receive supermarket deliveries (and on which days). Although, it would be important to understand if such alternative provision overcame these problems, given the limited number of delivery slots available (even through government schemes), and problems of carrying groceries from doorstep to kitchen if COVID policies meant the commercial deliveries were also to the doorstep.

Eligibility and take-up

Only people on shielding lists were eligible for government grocery box support in England, Scotland and Wales. Despite the targeted nature of the provision, insights collected from community activists, reported by the Poverty Alliance in Scotland, suggested that many people who were shielding felt they were missing out on support.[173] Reasons for this were inconsistencies in the level of support made available by local authorities and a belief that the criteria for shielded groups had not been well-communicated in some areas. As a result, some people who were shielding were not accessing the support, resulting in people going without food or putting themselves at risk by shopping.[174]

Data on the scheme in Scotland, released following a freedom of information (FOI) request, highlighted that people who were shielding were able to request more than one box "if they had dependents or others in their household, who were also not able to leave the house to buy groceries".[175] Based on the FOI response, we calculated that about 13,000 to 21,000 additional boxes were delivered to the households of people shielding each month to meet the needs of their wider household.[176] Those were in addition to the 43,700 to 50,800 delivered to meet the needs of individuals.

In the Public Health Scotland survey of people who were shielding, 7% of respondents reported they were struggling to access food that met their needs, highlighting the existence of food insecurity in the shielding population. Key characteristics of respondents more likely

[171] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Shielding clinically vulnerable people from COVID-19 Guidance for councils, LRFs and other local delivery partners* (local.gov.uk, 24 April 2020) <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/SHIELDING%20GUIDANCE%20AND%20FAQS%20COMBINED%20-%2024%20APRIL%202020.pdf>

[172] British Red Cross. *Access to food in emergencies: learning from Covid-19. (British Red Cross, July 2020)* <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-publications

[173] The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 2nd June 2020. (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 2 June 2020)* <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Community-organisations-COVID19-Poverty-Alliance-briefing-2nd-June.pdf>

[174] The Poverty Alliance, *Community organisations, community activists & Covid-19: Poverty Alliance briefing, 2nd June 2020. (Glasgow, Poverty Alliance, 2 June 2020)* <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Community-organisations-COVID19-Poverty-Alliance-briefing-2nd-June.pdf>

[175] Scottish Government. *Individuals shielding receiving food boxes during lockdown: FOI release. (gov.scot,* 15 Sep 2020). <https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202000066398/>

[176] Scottish Government. *Individuals shielding receiving food boxes during lockdown: FOI release. (gov.scot,* 15 Sep 2020). <https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202000066398/>

to struggle to access food were: younger than 65; living on their own or in larger households (with two or more other people); have children in their household; are socio-economically more vulnerable; or unemployed or not working because of a long-term condition or disability; or those who are caring for a shielded adult or shielded child. Of the respondents in Scotland who received home delivery of grocery boxes, 13% reported still struggling to access food that met their needs. [177] This increased to 29% among respondents reporting that they would not be able to find £100 for an unexpected expense. It appears then, that receiving grocery boxes did not prevent the shielding group from food insecurity, and this was more so for socio-economically vulnerable households.

Findings: stakeholder perspectives

A novel scheme for unprecedented circumstances

Policy stakeholders in Scotland reflected on the numerous issues that arose urgently and simultaneously when they were designing government support for people on the shielding list, including not only the grocery box scheme but also wider types of support that could be made available. These issues included the need for shielding; the unique circumstances imposed by the national UK-wide lockdown; the lack of online shopping delivery capacity; how to identify individuals in need of support; how to access food, and how to deliver support in ways that met the need at pace. These policy makers also highlighted that the grocery scheme in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) was novel:

> 'During many years of planning and exercising for a Flu Pandemic, I never experienced any reference to a UKG/4-nation Shielding or a food-box contingency plan. As far as I know, this was a novel contingency plan which was conceived, planned, and deployed at incredible pace to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of our most vulnerable citizens.' [Policy stakeholder, Scotland]

Policy makers in Scotland reported unprecedented levels of intergovernmental collaboration (between Scottish and local governments) in the design and implementation of a range of support for people who were shielding:

> '[Local authorities] were the key sectoral partner, in regards the design and delivery of Shielding here in Scotland. In all my years working in emergency management I have never witnessed such close and collaborative levels of multi-agency working. We rapidly developed a respectful and genuine multi-agency partnership, with open and honest daily co-ordination meetings and real time feedback and learning loops […]. We agreed that the standard Government provision, whilst meeting nutritional standards, would be considered as the core-element of provision, that may be adequate for some, but which would be supplemented via local authorities, to ensure those Shielding could be supported to stay in, keep themselves safe and protect the NHS.' [Policy stakeholder, Scotland]

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[177] Delvaux J and Marosi D. *COVID-19 Shielding Programme (Scotland) Impact and Experience Survey*. (Edinburgh: Public Health Scotland; 2020). <https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/media/2763/covid-19-shielding-programme-scotland-impact-and-experience-survey_sept2020_english.pdf>

Grocery box scheme for people who were shielding

Procurement and expenditure of public money

Acknowledging that this provision was novel, and that the speed of implementation was a key criterion for this procurement, NGO stakeholders nonetheless drew attention to existing evidence which raises questions about the procurement process that was used to deliver the grocery box scheme.[178] Value for money is outside the scope of this report. However, there are other issues of concern raised about the procurement process. These reports, and NGO stakeholder reflections, reveal little evidence that government evaluated options for food provision for shielded people before choosing a centralised approach. Stakeholders have pointed to many examples during COVID-19 of flexible, nutritionally, and culturally appropriate food provision for vulnerable people that were devised and run at a local level. Some of the most celebrated services were run by partnerships between local VCS groups and local authorities, integrated with other social services. Some were also able to buy food from local businesses and hospitality supply chains adversely affected by lockdown. In these cases, stakeholders reflected that public money was used to create social value for local businesses and jobs. The centralised procurement arrangement chosen by national government could not offer such flexibility, nor benefits to local economies and to business and jobs adversely affected by the pandemic. Whilst policy stakeholder input from Scotland highlights how the national scheme was designed to sit alongside other locally developed provision, other stakeholders highlighted that there was little evidence national governments considered what role existing services could play in meeting need, for example the possible rapid expansion of existing cooked meals and 'meals on wheels' provision.

Inadequacy of fresh food provision

Stakeholder workshop discussions explored the contents of shielding box parcels. In support of the findings in other research, stakeholders conveyed concerns over the contents in terms of quality, quantity, suitability, and nutrition:

> 'We've also had reports that quite a lot of the fresh fruits or fresh vegetables have been a bit of an issue. […] They're worried about the carrots because they're almost not fit for purpose. [People have] been unable to eat [them] because they're not fresh enough. They've just been black and liquid too quickly for people to be able to use.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

> 'Just to say there was also a question around to what extent those food parcels met people's dietary needs. It was sort of, are they nutritional enough? For people who have got special dietary needs, their needs aren't met, and it's that kind of thing as well. So yes, they were all issues that came up during the scheme. But I think it was that they'd just got the one option, there wasn't an opportunity to make the food boxes any more sort of bespoke.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

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[178] Chakelian, A. *Revealed: The £208m food box rip-off (New Statesman, 16 Oct 2020)* <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/10/208m-food-box-rip-off-private-outsource-government-contract-covid-corona-virus> ; National Audit Office (2020) *Investigation into the free school meals vouchers scheme, HC 1036 SESSION 2019–2021 2 DECEMBER 2020*, <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Investigation-into-the-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme.pdf>

Grocery box scheme for people who were shielding

> 'By the time we got involved, the contents of those boxes had been decided on, and going forward, it would certainly be nice to look at the nutritional value. Especially given that those shielding people, and the people who have limited access to food are likely to be more nutritionally vulnerable. So, it's trying to make sure they get the best possible nutrition that they can from those boxes.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

One stakeholder reported that the amount of food included in a shielding grocery box was much less than would have been provided in an emergency food bank parcel, and suggested this may have led to people who met the criteria for accessing food bank support to opt for this form of support over the shielded food box.

Although policy stakeholders acknowledged the limits of the grocery box scheme, they also pointed out the wider range of support that was available to people

> 'We knew of its shortcomings (variety) and strengths (pace, reach, scale), and worked with a huge range of partners to make sure that other parts of the system complemented the service.' [Policy stakeholder, Scotland]

National and local adaptations to the grocery boxes

In interviews and at workshops, stakeholders spoke about the ways in which the nationally procured boxes through Bidfood and Brakes were adapted by different governments and groups. In Wales, public health stakeholder data highlighted that the Welsh government tried to add fresh, Welsh produce to the boxes. Local authorities also made adaptions, and some local authorities in Wales did not opt into the nationally procured scheme. The fresh, Welsh produce added to the boxes by the Welsh Government was estimated to equate to over £1m directly into the Welsh economy and to safeguard over 200 jobs.[179] In Cardiff, a local authority team reviewed the boxes for dietary appropriateness and cultural needs. This model was then reported to have been replicated elsewhere in Wales.[180] It was also reported that in Wales, opting into the Defra procurement through Bidfood and Brakes caused tensions with other food businesses and suppliers, for example with Welsh wholesalers.

As reported above, in Scotland as in other constituent countries, the grocery box scheme sat alongside other forms of support that people could be referred to, such as priority supermarket delivery slots. In Scotland, it was noted that this approach of augmenting the grocery box scheme with other forms of support was a preferable way of overcoming the limitations of the national scheme, compared to renegotiating the procurement of a different structure of national provision.

> 'As the contents of the box were limited – especially for particular dietary and cultural requirements – the Scottish Government did not see the food box as being sufficient for everyone's needs in itself. That is why it was augmented by access to the supermarket delivery services, and local authority top-ups, which we had discussed and negotiated with local authorities. The letter that accompanied the grocery boxes in Scotland explicitly

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[179] Written stakeholder submission Autumn 2020

[180] Welsh Government. *FOI: ATISN 14484 - Food boxed for those who were shielding.* (Welsh Government, Nov 2020). <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-11/atisn14484.pdf>

Grocery box scheme for people who were shielding

> advised people that if their needs were not being met by the staple supplies in the box, they should contact their local authority, who would be able to supplement the supplies. This was felt to be a more flexible and appropriate solution than renegotiating the procurement of a different national grocery box. It is important therefore, not to consider the impact of the grocery box on its own, but as part of a wider solution to food access which encompassed local authorities, voluntary and private sector support.' [Policy stakeholder data, Scotland]

This impact of this localised implementation will be important to capture. A large amount of local variation is being identified in early findings of this project's local area case study research. One finding emerging from this work is that in these case study areas local authorities and voluntary sector schemes – and those run in partnership between such organisations – supplemented the national scheme with their own local food box delivery scheme.[181]

Redistribution of boxes

Stakeholders, including those from food charity organisations, also reported a notable level of grocery boxes being donated to food banks. This was either because they were not wanted or because boxes automatically kept being delivered, without a regular process of checking if people still wanted or needed to receive them, as illustrated in the following quote:

> 'Many food banks have received huge amounts of shielding boxes from people who've had them that don't want them. So… there's a whole internal market of shielded food being shared around. And the feedback about what people have found useful from shielded boxes, partly it's been from people thinking that they don't need it so they've passed it on to where they think it's more effectively used. Or people have more than one shielded box, so they've given a spare one back. Or people had stuff from the shielding box that they can't use.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Sometimes these donations were not appropriate for the food bank to distribute either, causing problems:

> 'We've had food banks then having to contact local authorities to say, "We've been inundated with massive catering tins that we can't use that have come from your shielding boxes. Can you help us?" We had to work out what to do with all of this.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Stakeholders from food charities also suggested that procurement for the shielding box scheme disrupted other food support supply chains. Notably, during this period, food banks experienced difficulties purchasing or sourcing tinned meat, which was a key component of the shielding grocery boxes.

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[181] Loopstra, R., Gordon, K., Goldberg, B., Lambie-Mumford, H. (forthcoming 2021) *Responses to risks of household food insecurity during COVID-19: local case studies*, to be published online at http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/

Grocery box scheme for people who were shielding

The extension of provision to those facing financial barriers to food access

In Northern Ireland, grocery boxes were provided for people who were on the shielding list or could not access food for financial reasons. For people who could not access food for financial reasons, there were reportedly no strict eligibility criteria. Call handlers would go through a list of support options (e.g. family/ friends) and if there were no other support options, people could receive a food box. Stakeholders described this as a 'catch-all':

> 'There was the shielding, as we know, and then there was the food vulnerability. […] We were trying to do the catch-all, to make sure that nobody was left out.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Stakeholders reported the benefits of this wider approach:

> 'I mean, just in response, I think that it was really helpful that this group was included. Because some of this is about prevention; it's preventing people falling into that poverty trap. And also, I think for those people, there was something about this crisis that, with, you know, government reaching out, they actually, people felt that they cared. That it helped their mental health. And there were some people, I know there were some people said, you know, they took the boxes for a couple of weeks, and then after that, they said, "Actually, I'm fine now. I'm okay. I can cope." And, you know, I wouldn't have any criticism of that. You know, the working relationships are all there. And I think it's a great foundation to build upon.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

In Northern Ireland, grocery boxes for the financially vulnerable ended in June while boxes for the shielding population ended in July. Stakeholder interview data reported that the helpline received a spike in calls around both times. For callers who were still in need at this time, other sources of support were identified, including advice services to maximise income, signposting to local community groups, and food banks.

Stakeholder data from outside Northern Ireland highlighted how important it was to understand the overlap between food access barriers (physical shielding barriers and financial barriers), and that where the shielding box scheme was only for individuals who were shielding, households still faced barriers to food access:

> 'And what we've heard anecdotally from the network that some of those people who were coming to us were inevitably economically vulnerable, in financial crisis and also entitled to a shield box. So there was some crossover between those two initiatives, and that's been one of the recurring themes, I think, that we've seen, in terms of crossover of a number of food responses through the crisis. And the feedback we had is that, for a number of people who were entitled to a shield box, the reason they didn't take it up, and instead came to the food bank, is because food bank parcels are there for the whole household, whereas shield boxes are only there, of course, for an individual within a household who is shielding. So that was a significant difference between those two food solutions. So I would say that potentially one of the reasons why there wasn't as great take-up is because the percentage of people who were shielding were also economically-vulnerable, and therefore they found that a food parcel [from a food bank] met the whole household needs.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Grocery box scheme for people who were shielding

Food charity stakeholders in Scotland reported confusion in the early weeks about the nature of the shielding box provision and what the expectations were in terms of which support schemes would support which groups. After the first two or three weeks, stakeholders reported trying to instigate a clearer demarcation between food banks supporting the economically vulnerable population, and the grocery box scheme helping those who were shielding – although this was difficult to maintain in practice:

'Likewise, we found in the very beginning, for sort of the first two or three weeks, there was quite a deal of confusion among local authorities while everything settled down as to whether we were going to be supporting the shielded group or whether the local authority was. By about two, three weeks in, that had all cleared up. And we were very active in stepping back from not being involved in the shielded group and passing that back to the local authority. So that we were quite active in trying to be involved in everything but the shielded group. There was some level of overlap that continued throughout with organisations that we were supplying food to who were carrying on doing home delivery to people who happened to be shielding. So it wasn't an absolute clear-cut. It just depended on how local organisations would set themselves up to be home delivery food organisations who were overlapping with local authority provisions. In general, we tried to work with local authorities so that they were clear that they had one part of the task and we were supplementing another part of the task.' [July 2020 stakeholder workshop]

Summary and conclusions

Our review of the existing evidence and the primary data we collected from stakeholders highlight substantial problems with the nationally procured grocery box scheme for individuals shielding. Whilst the procurement of this scheme to large national companies achieved pace, reach and scale, the contents of the boxes provided through the scheme were criticised for not including adequate or sufficient fresh and healthy, food stuffs. They were not able to be adapted according to dietary needs or nutritional requirements. This structure also did not allow for the utilisation of local businesses and investment, or the scaling up of existing food services such as meals on wheels. In addition, practical concerns were raised, such as whether people could lift the boxes into their homes. Whilst there is evidence of collaboration between national and local governments and local voluntary organisations to augment the grocery boxes with other provision or support, it will be important to understand the variations that this resulted in across the country and the impact of those, as well as, ultimately, to measure the outcomes of this support across the country for those on the shielding list.

Here, it is worth commenting on guidance for extremely clinically vulnerable people since different lockdowns have been put in place across the UK. When the 5 November – 2 December 2020 lockdown in England was first announced, this group was not advised to shield, but by 5 November, this advice was changed to people being advised not to go out for any reason except for medical appointments.[182] Despite this guidance, no national

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[182]BBC News. *Coronavirus: Extremely vulnerable advised not to go to work from Thursday*. (BBC News, 4 November 2020). https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-54809642

Grocery box scheme for people who were shielding

scheme to provide food provision was re-enacted, with guidance telling extremely clinically vulnerable people to contact their local authority if they could not access food: "If you cannot access food, your local council can offer support. This may include helping you to request a priority supermarket delivery slot (if you do not already have one) or help with shopping."[183]

During national and regional lockdowns in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland over October and November, guidance for people in this group has never reverted to instruction to "shield" and guidelines may vary according to national and local restrictions. If people from this group are, or feel unable to, leave the house in the current phase of the outbreak, provision in place includes supermarket priority delivery slot schemes and general increased delivery or 'click and collect' capacity. For those who cannot access this online provision, local governments and community infrastructure will likely become key points of provision and contact.

The COVID-19 lockdown and shielding policies were unprecedented. However, there is much more evidence needed in order to learn from the experiences of the grocery box scheme for dealing with comparable large-scale crises, as well as how best to support individual crises. At a national (constituent country and UK) level:

1. In order to maximise evidence-based learning, it will be important to publish (where it is available) or undertake (where it is not), detailed evaluation of the outcomes of the scheme for the individuals it was designed to help in order to inform approaches to future local or national emergencies that require the provision of food to people en masse. As part of this, there should be an explicit evaluation of the food security outcomes of this box scheme, as well as a value for money assessment made. Evaluation work should also be done which situates the grocery box scheme in the context of the suite of provision which was available in different local areas.
2. Government should clarify, in law, who is responsible and accountable for ensuring that everyone can access the food they need during a local or national emergency, and hence who is responsible and accountable for adequately resourcing this response, and what standards this response should meet. This might require an update to the Civil Contingencies Act, local authority obligations, or similar.
3. Policy makers should urgently evaluate their national procurement process, what can be learnt from the experience of this scheme, and how to ensure subsequent contracts secure a fit for purpose scheme providing varied, nutritious, appropriate and cost-effective food, as well as opportunities to support local jobs, services and food supply chains as part of wider social value.

Key questions for current support to this population:

- To more adequately protect the health of extremely clinically vulnerable people, must their household members also be advised to shield and therefore provided for?
- How can physical accessibility needs be taken into account? (i.e., ability to move food box from doorstep into home?)
- What are the respective roles of community provision and local government support in practice? How is local provision being evaluated?
- Does local-level operation and delivery enable a better response to individual needs?

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[183]Department of Health & Social Care and Public Health England, *Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19, (gov.uk, 14 December 2020)* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Grocery box scheme for people who were shielding

- How can a range of options for emergency response be considered and integrated?
- Can procurement and provision of food support schemes benefit the local economy, jobs and food supply chains whilst also meeting food access needs?
- But if so, how can consistent delivery be ensured across local areas?

Overall, it will be important to build a rigorous and robust evidence base, evaluating the food security outcomes of the grocery box scheme and wider support made available for those people who were on shielding lists across the UK. This will be vital to informing appropriate and successful (national and individual) future crisis planning.

Ongoing and future monitoring and evaluation

Ongoing and future monitoring and evaluation

This report forms part of the wider 'Food Vulnerability during Covid-19' research project.[184] It builds on the earlier mapping report, which highlighted the scale and complexity of responses implemented to support access to food during COVID-19.[185] The suite of responses at both a national and local level provided support with food access in a myriad of ways. Whilst this report has focused on only four key responses and presented each of these separately, it will be important to explore the overall effectiveness and impact of the range of interventions put in place over this time. Furthermore, these national schemes also interact with the responses implemented at a local level by local authorities, charities and communities. The localised dynamics will be reviewed in the next phase of our project in several case study areas.

COVID-19 has created a landscape that is constantly evolving, and all sectors continue to respond and adapt. The report reflects primarily on the period of national UK-wide lockdown but is published in the current context of local lockdowns and tier systems. Naturally the crisis in which these responses were implemented impacts on the volume of evidence that is available and the extent to which crisis responses have been evaluated. Stakeholders told us that formal evaluative work of some of the national schemes is underway. Once such reports are publicly available this evidence will provide valuable insight into their effectiveness and impact. In the meantime, this report captures evidence and reflections immediately following the UK national lockdown and provides a marker upon which future evidence, including from this research project, can build.

Across the four interventions the report has highlighted the need for robust, publicly available evaluative work. The availability of such data and evidence is vital to inform evidence-based learning from this crisis, the review of policies, and the design of effective interventions for the future. Based on the evidence we have collected so far for this research, we would point to the need for both process evaluations and outcome evaluations to understand the impacts of the various strategies on addressing food insecurity over this time. Process evaluations would enable a better understanding of why specific interventions were chosen and how they were implemented. Important questions for these evaluations to consider will be: which stakeholders were consulted? Where did relationships between government departments and different providers already exist and how did these shape responses? What were understandings of the problem that informed the shape that interventions took? What COVID-19-specific contextual factors need to be accounted for? Our research indicates that outcome evaluations will be critical to the next phase of learning. They will need to explore such aspects as how many people were reached among various target populations and the impact of these interventions on food security. Whilst data on the number of food parcels distributed or number of emergency grants provided are important, we will also need to link to robust evidence and direct measurement of wider need: how many people were struggling to access food and was the scale and reach of various responses adequate? And when reached, was the food and/or finances adequate to ensure food security?

Our mapping and monitoring work has showcased the intersections of need and responses to it. As the evidence base is developed, examinations of the individual components, the whole system of responses and the interplay between the two are necessary to draw

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[184] https://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/

[185] Lambie-Mumford, H., Loopstra, R. and Gordon, K., *Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK, Food Vulnerability during COVID-19,* Phase 1 Report March – July 2020 (Sheffield: SPERI, 2020) <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/>.

conclusions about the effectiveness of the response to rising food insecurity over this time. Future outputs from this project will seek to fill some of these gaps in knowledge and will sit in complement to other evaluative work that is being undertaken across the wide range of organisations providing data, insights and reflections. Collectively, this body of work will be crucial to enable evidence-based learning about responses to risks of household food insecurity during this extraordinary time.

Methodological Appendix

Methodological Appendix

Phase 2: Monitoring responses to risks of household food insecurity

This is the second set of findings to be published from an ESRC/UKRI-funded project designed to map and monitor responses to concerns about food access during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the initial stage of the research, we sought to identify national-level responses implemented from the beginning of the UK lockdown, covering March to July 2020. The focus was UK-wide and covered 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. The resulting report was published in August and is available on the project webpage (http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/).[186]

Following this mapping, the project entered a second phase designed to 'monitor' food access support systems during COVID-19. The aims of this second phase are:

- To explore how food access support interventions worked in practice, drawing from published reports and academic papers, as well as primary interviews and workshops with civil servants and voluntary-sector organisations involved in supporting and delivering them.
- To explore how they were implemented from the perspectives of stakeholders involved.
- To better understand the impact of these interventions and reflect on the key lessons learned, and important questions raised, for the next phases of the COVID-19 outbreak and beyond.

Interventions in focus

The initial mapping identified several key interventions that played a particularly prominent part in the responses from national policy makers and practitioners to risks of household food insecurity during COVID-19. These were:

- School food replacements
- State financial protection
- Emergency financial support
- Emergency food assistance
- The grocery box scheme for people on the shielding list
- Retailer adaptations

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[186] Lambie-Mumford, H., Loopstra, R. and Gordon, K. (2020) Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK, Food Vulnerability during COVID-19 Phase 1 Report March – July 2020, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/.

Methodological Appendix

This second phase of the research explores a report how four of these interventions worked – and their impact – specifically during the UK national lockdown between March and August:

1. School food replacements
2. Emergency financial support
3. Emergency food assistance
4. The grocery box scheme for people on the shielding list

These were selected because each of these interventions was either time-bound during the national lockdown (i.e. school food replacements when schools were closed (March – July 2020) and the shielding grocery box scheme which ran April – August 2020)), or because they were adapted in response to the national lockdown (i.e. emergency finance schemes having increased funding and changing eligibility criteria, and emergency food charities adapting ways of working to accommodate supply disruptions and social distancing guidelines during the national lockdown).

The sections relating to each intervention have section a distinct set of research questions, as outlined in Table A1.

Table A1: Research questions addressed in intervention sections report, December 2020.

SHIELDING	SCHOOL FOOD	Emergency FINANCE	Emergency FOOD
What evidence is available on the implementation and impact of the grocery box scheme for people who were shielding? What further insights can be gained from policy and practice stakeholders on the process of implementing this scheme and the impacts they saw on the ground? What can we say about how effective the grocery box scheme was? What are the key lessons that can be taken away to inform	What evidence is available on the implementation and impact of school food replacement schemes? What further insights can be gained from policy and practice stakeholders on the process of implementing these programmes and the impacts they saw on the ground? What can be said about how effective the replacements were? What are the key lessons that can be taken away from this scheme for further	What evidence is available on how the emergency finance schemes worked? Is there any evidence showing the impact of these schemes on helping people access food? What can be learned from experiences of these schemes, particularly comparing experiences between the nations of the UK?	What evidence is available on how the COVID-19 outbreak impacted on demand for food charity during the national UK lockdown? What evidence is available on how charities adapted to the lockdown and government guidelines? What impact did these adaptations have? What were the changes to inputs (finance, food, volunteer labour) during this time and what impact did this

ongoing and future COVID-19 responses to risks of food insecurity?	COVID-19 responses?		have on the work of projects? What are the key lessons that can be taken away from the experiences of food charities during this phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK?

This methodological appendix sets out the research methods used to address the questions above for the four schemes in focus.

Acknowledgements

Methods

The data in this report draw from results from a range of secondary and primary research methods including a systematic search for existing evidence and evidence review, national stakeholder workshops, interviews, and written consultations.

Evidence search and review

A key aim of this project is to collate and analyse evidence which emerges on responses to food access issues during the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK. As such, a focus of this monitoring phase of the research is to review existing research on the national level responses to date. Systematic searches were undertaken in August and October 2020 to identify existing research on responses to risks of household food insecurity so far during COVID-19. These searches were designed to find any existing research evidence on how interventions had worked in practice and their impact, including evaluations of interventions. The first search was undertaken week beginning the 16 August. A subsequent search was performed in the week beginning 11 October for any new publications.

Search strategy 1: academic literature

Researchers searched three databases, Scopus, Web of Science and ProQuest Sociology Collection, using the search terms "covid-19 AND food", "covid-19 AND poverty", "covid-19 AND food AND support", coronavirus AND food, coronavirus AND poverty, coronavirus AND food AND support, lockdown AND food, lockdown AND poverty, lockdown AND food AND

support. Results were filtered for publication date of 2020 and country of UK, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Manual review of all abstracts by the researchers led to the removal of studies that were not relevant based on the topic or the country. Results from each database were:

- Scopus – 131 articles returned, 106 excluded = 25 articles remaining.
- Web of Science – 124 articles returned, 64 excluded, 50 removed as duplicates with Scopus = 10 articles remaining.
- ProQuest Sociology Collection – 13 articles returned, 13 excluded = 0 articles remaining.

Review of the full papers led to the removal of one further paper, and researchers found an additional three papers during the grey literature Google search described below. This left a final list of 37 papers.

Search strategy 2: grey literature

We identified grey literature using three approaches: 1) asking relevant stakeholders to send us any evaluation/data; 2) reviewing websites of key organisations (Food Foundation, Sustain, JRF, Trussell Trust, Fareshare, IFAN, Salvation Army, Oxfam, British Red Cross, Institute for Fiscal Studies, Citizens Advice); 3) a Google search using the following terms 'free school meals + coronavirus + research + UK; 'shielding' + food + coronavirus + research + UK'; 'shielding + box + research + food + UK'; 'food banks + coronavirus + research + UK'; 'food parcels + coronavirus + research + UK'; 'Food insecurity + coronavirus + research + UK'; 'Furlough + research + UK'; 'Statutory sick pay + coronavirus + research + UK'. These were then repeated, replacing UK with England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Further search terms of 'Discretionary Support COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Short-term Living Expenses + research'; 'Scottish Welfare Fund + coronavirus + research'; 'Discretionary Assistance Fund + coronavirus + research'; Furlough + research + UK (repeated + Scotland ; + Wales + NI + England); Statutory sick pay + coronavirus + research + UK (repeated + Scotland ; + Wales + NI + England) were used. Researchers looked through the first 5 pages of results to review the returning items.
The included returns were those that presented empirical data, secondary analyses or expert commentary. This included: empirical data collected from people using the support or organisations providing the support; observations of the interventions from organisations providing support, often reporting on the needs and experiences of service users; commentary from relevant organisations about the interventions; and early reporting of academic studies not yet published in a journal. Together, these provided early insights into how the interventions worked from several perspectives.

In total, the search found 120 pieces of relevant literature. We reviewed each piece of literature in more detail and classified which intervention it discussed – free school meals, shielding boxes, retail access, state financial protection, emergency food assistance and emergency financial support. Some articles discussed more than one intervention. We also included an 'other' category to allow for articles that did not fit an intervention but rather provided context or other information to note.

Primary data collection and stakeholder consultation

This research project also involves working with national and local stakeholders across the UK to map and monitor responses to food access issues during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Methodological Appendix

This report draws on data from over 60 national stakeholder contributions. These stakeholders include civil servants from government departments in each constituent country of the UK, national (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) and UK-wide NGOs, food and poverty charities and business representatives. Data came from online workshops, telephone interviews and written submissions.

July 2020 stakeholder workshops

As part of the process of mapping national responses to risks of household food insecurity during COVID-19 (the results of which are published in our first report), workshops were held in July with national stakeholders from each constituent country (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).[187] In addition to reviewing the draft response mapping for the first report, this workshop data also included reflections on the implementation of interventions and their impact – which are analysed for this phase of the research.

A total of 39 stakeholders participated in these workshops from across national government, business and civil society.

England workshop	15 attendees	Civil servants from ministerial and non-ministerial government departments; national food charities; national poverty charities; business representatives.
Wales workshop	7 attendees	Civil servants from Welsh government; national food charities; national poverty charities.
Scotland workshop	9 attendees	Civil servants from the Scottish government; poverty campaigners; national food charities.
Northern Ireland workshop	8 attendees	Civil servants from executive and non-executive government departments; national food charities; national poverty charities.

Stakeholder interviews

Between September and November , a round of purposively sampled interviews were undertaken with 16 stakeholders. The purposive sampling framework was designed to fill key knowledge gaps, particularly in areas where existing research was particularly limited.

[187] Lambie-Mumford, H., Loopstra, R. and Gordon, K. (2020) Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK, Food Vulnerability during COVID-19 Phase 1 Report March – July 2020, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/.

Methodological Appendix

Purposively sampled stakeholder interviews were conducted with stakeholders from national government, food and advice charities and other NGOs.

Intervention	Number of interviews which covered the intervention	Category of stakeholder(s)
The grocery box scheme for people on the shielding list	2	Food aid charity; public health.
School food replacements	6	Child poverty organisations; public health; local government organisation.
Emergency financial support	6	Food aid charities; poverty charities; advice charities; public health.
Emergency food assistance	4	Food aid charities.

Interview protocols were individually tailored to cover details of the interventions most relevant to the work of the interviewee. Broadly speaking, for any intervention, the protocols would cover narrative accounts of experiences of the intervention or its adaptation under the UK lockdown; accounts, data or evidence held by the stakeholder organization relating to implementation, adaptation and impact; and reflections on current challenges and/or key learning.

Stakeholder consultation

A wider stakeholder consultation exercise was also carried out in September/October, which resulted in meetings with, and written submissions from, further government and NGO stakeholders. Further meetings were held with civil servant policy partners to discuss project progress and identify further data or insight to feed into this stage of the research. Written submissions (by email and through a Google form questionnaire) were also received from civil servants, NGOs and food aid providers providing evidence and reflections around the implementation and impact of the interventions under study.

Analysis framework

Qualitative data from the workshops (transcripts), interviews (notes and transcripts) and written submissions were analysed by intervention, with a coding framework designed to capture two key aspects: (1) implementation and operation; (2) impact and evaluation.

This framework took account of key system dynamics including actors (who did what); inputs (money, food); resources (what/how resources flow through this intervention); use (who receives support and how); outputs/outcomes; and connections to other schemes.

Next steps

The monitoring phase of the research will continue in the coming months. There are two further work programmes to this research. In partnership with Church Action on Poverty, we are convening a participatory policy panel made up of people with direct lived experience of difficulty accessing food during COVID-19. Meeting regularly throughout the project period (Oct 2020-Dec 2021), the panel will use a range of participatory and creative methods to share and reflect on their experiences and contribute these to policy recommendations. A series of local authority case studies are also being undertaken in eight areas across the UK in partnership with Sustain. These case studies will explore how local food access support systems evolved over the course of the COVID-19 outbreak.

We welcome your feedback on the contents of this report to inform the next stages 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 the project webpage: http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/.