



FOOD VULNERABILITY
DURING

COVID-19



MAPPING LOCAL RESPONSES:
MARCH TO AUGUST 2020

Cardiff Case Study

Loopstra, R., Gordon, K., and Lambie-Mumford, H.

About this report

This report presents findings from local case study research undertaken as part of an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project designed to map and monitor responses to concerns about food access during the COVID-19 pandemic across the UK. Details about the research and project outputs are available at <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/>.

This report is one of eight area-based case study reports examining local-level interventions put in place in response to risks of rising household food insecurity during the pandemic between March – August 2020. These are being published alongside a comparative report, '*Comparing local responses household food insecurity during Covid-19 across the UK (March – August 2020)*' looking at some of the similarities, differences and key themes to emerge in these responses in the different areas. A comprehensive '*Local Area Case Studies – Methodological Appendix*' for this case study research has also been published. This appendix, the comparative report and all 8 area case studies are available on the project website.

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.

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Abstract

Cardiff has had an active food partnership, Food Cardiff, in place since 2013. Food Cardiff sits within the Cardiff & Vale University Health Board's local public health team, and works closely with the Cardiff Council, as well as various community food and food aid organisations working across the city, such as ACE (Action in Caerau & Ely)'s Dusty Forge Pantry. Cardiff Council had a focus on food poverty before the pandemic, as outlined in their food strategy. The Cardiff Food Bank has long played a leading role in the provision of food parcels to people who are economically vulnerable and also had a history of working with the Council. These foundations likely contributed to the rapid mobilisation of responses to concerns about food insecurity over the pandemic by these groups. Importantly, Food Cardiff also saw their role as linking up actors who were newly engaged in food responses, ensuring that they were supported and part of the overall food response in Cardiff. Thus, though there were many moving parts and many actors involved, the overall feeling was that a comprehensive response was established across the city that should have met food needs over the spring and summer of 2020.

The responses enacted involved direct food provision by the Council and the coordination of a local (usually ward-level) food response by Food Cardiff and the Council. The Cardiff 3rd Sector Council also played an important role in providing training and recruitment of volunteers to this food response, as well as supporting other food projects with funding and volunteers over the spring and summer.

We heard about the ways that organisations adapted their ways of working, sometimes at the expense of meeting their usual aims, yet being able to maintain food provisioning activity was a priority. New actors became involved in food provisioning, especially to respond to the needs of people who were not necessarily economically vulnerable or on the shielding list, but who were unwilling or unable to go out to acquire food. Groups, including the Council, also worked to address the gaps in the adequacy of the Welsh Government shielding box scheme. Looking ahead, though the rapid mobilisation of a food response across the city was applauded, our research participants flagged the need for a returned focus on the root causes of insecure access to food in Cardiff.

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Summary of mapping: Key actors and activities responding to food insecurity in Cardiff

A number of actors and activities provided a response to food insecurity in Cardiff before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are summarised below and described in more detail later in the report.

Key actors and activities to address food insecurity before the COVID-19 pandemic

A key actor leading on work to address food insecurity in Cardiff before the pandemic was the food partnership, Food Cardiff. Food Cardiff was established in 2013, sitting within the Cardiff & Vale University Health Board's local public health team. The partnership is also a member of the Food Power Network.¹ The partnership includes a working group focused on food poverty, the Food and Poverty group, comprising of seven key organisations: Cardiff Council, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (Public Health Dietitians), Cardiff 3rd Sector Council, Action in Caerau & Ely (ACE), Business in the community, Albany Baptist Church, FareShare Cymru, and Cardiff Foodbank (Trussell Trust network). Some main areas of work since the partnership was established have been setting up and piloting a school holiday enrichment programme, outlining a 5-year plan for tackling food insecurity,² developing and rolling out a maximizing family income programme and helping establish food pantries and community food retail projects.

As well as active participation in the Food Cardiff partnership, the Cardiff Council provided support for addressing food insecurity primarily through their money advice services, which operated across the city as part of the Councils "community hubs". Money advice staff located at the hubs offered support to ensure that people were claiming their full benefit entitlements and other forms of financial help, such as the Welsh Government Discretionary Assistance Fund. If appropriate, people accessing the Hubs for support would also be referred to the Cardiff food bank. In addition, the Council funded staff from their money advice services team to visit each of Cardiff food bank's distribution centres.

The Cardiff Public Health Division was also involved in supporting food access prior to the pandemic, including the provision of funding or in-kind support for a number of food poverty initiatives in the city, delivering the Maximising Family Income programme in partnership with Food Cardiff, supporting a range of community programmes (including food banks and food aid projects) aiming to improve nutrition knowledge and cooking skills in areas of deprivation, and mapping and research on food insecurity.

As well as these public sector actors, third sector organisations provided a direct food response. The Cardiff Foodbank, a member of the Trussell Trust network, is the largest food parcel provider in Cardiff. An independent food bank has been running from the Al-Ikhlās Centre mosque. Dusty Forge is a community food pantry run by ACE (Action in Caerau & Ely). Members paid £5 per visit on an allocated day and were allowed to choose ten items

¹ <https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpower/>

² <http://www.cardiffandvaleuhb.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/1143/Building%20Resilience%20Food%20Security%20Plan.pdf>

from the food shop, with an estimated minimum value of £15. The Tremorfa Pantry operated as a bit of a hybrid between a community pantry and food bank. There were also a number of organisations providing various pay-as-you-can meals prior to the pandemic.

Key actors and activities to address food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic

Covid-19 Food Response Task Group

Food Cardiff took the lead in setting up a Covid-19 Food Response Task Group, which included council departments, Cardiff 3rd Sector Council, FareShare Cymru, the Cardiff Foodbank, and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board. The response structure established involved identification of 11 “anchor” organisations and various “food response partners” in each ward of the city (these were the same organisation in some wards). Anchor organisations that already had experience in safeguarding, training, and GDPR were responsible for coordinating the local area volunteer response. Food response partners were involved in collecting and coordinating the distribution of food to other organisations and groups in their local areas and providing support for those involved in food distribution (for example, by providing advice on food hygiene or providing a physical space for cooking). Food response partners also were involved in accepting referrals of people needing food or help with shopping.

The work of anchor organisations and food response partners were supported by organisations in the Covid-19 Food Response Group:

- Food Cardiff continued to be a source of information and responded to offers of help and community requests. They also directly supported Food Response partners.
- Cardiff Council’s role in this scheme was to manage the “Together for Cardiff” volunteering portal and to provide staff resources to support anchor organisations and food response partners.
- The Cardiff 3rd Sector Council also supported the scheme with volunteers and providing best practice advice on managing volunteers.
- The Cardiff and Vale Public Health Dietetic team provided nutrition advice.
- FareShare Cymru supported the scheme by managing food supplies for their members involved in the scheme.

The Cardiff Council

The Council set up a triage system for callers to the Cardiff Council advice line. Different referral routes were available for the different triaged groups.

- People who were self-isolating and were facing financial access barriers were referred to the Cardiff Council Food Team.
- People who were not self-isolating but were struggling to access food were referred to the existing local council hub for either a food parcel or a referral to the food bank.
- People who were self-isolating who could afford food were advised on local volunteer shopping support and supermarket delivery details.
- People who were shielding but for whom the national food box delivery scheme was not appropriate were referred to the Cardiff Council Food Team.
- Any contact could lead to a money advice team call back of appropriate.

The Council's Money Advice Team was expanded over the lockdown period to enable them to take more calls and bolster their capacity to help direct people towards correct benefit entitlements. Referral to the Cardiff Council Food Team resulted in the delivery of a food box from a temporary warehouse which was set up in response to the pandemic. The Cardiff & Vale Public Health Dietetics team worked with the Council to ensure the food parcels they were providing met nutritional, dietary and cultural requirements. The breakdown of the number of boxes provided by the Council is shown in the table below.

	March 23-31st	April	May	June	Total
Food parcels collected from Hubs	87	318	113	33	551
Food parcels delivered	825	1,621	730	616	3,792
Shielded food parcels delivered	n/a	777	770	385	1,932
	912	2,716	1,613	1,034	6,275

The form of the replacements for free school meals when the schools were closed evolved over the lockdown. Initially replacements were provided in the form of a 'grab bag' collected from the school. This later changed to the provision of vouchers. However, after a couple of weeks this approach was replaced with a direct cash payment system, providing cash transfers of £19.50 per week per child to cover breakfast and lunch. A partnership with the Council, schools in Cardiff and the Cardiff & Vale Public Health Dietetics team, set up a new summer programme, the Cardiff Summer Squad, which served children identified as vulnerable by Children's Services. During the half day session children were provided a breakfast (morning session) and lunch (afternoon session). This summer programme was set up in response to the pausing of the usual School Holiday Enrichment Programme, the funds for which were diverted towards free school meal replacements during Summer 2020.

Emergency food providers and community food organisations

Cardiff Foodbank kept six of their seven distribution centres open, running 9 of their usual 11 sessions each week, but the model changed. Instead of offering clients tea, a chat and other support as necessary as they had prior to the pandemic, a 'grab and go' system was established. The food bank experienced an increase in demand in March and April when more than twice as many food parcels were given out compared to the same months in 2019. The food bank also worked with the Council to provide food parcels via the aforementioned community hubs. The benefit of this was that people could receive both a referral and a food parcel during one visit to the hub.

The independent food bank at the the Al-Ikhlâs Centre mosque scaled up their operations over the pandemic to serve a wider range of people, open on more days and offer delivery. They also extended the support available, becoming open to anyone who needed support. In comparison to their pre-pandemic figures, their weekly average rose from just around 25 food parcels per week to 200 food parcels per week.

The Dusty Forge food pantry moved to a delivery model service early in the pandemic so that their most vulnerable members, namely those who were shielding and/or low-income families with children not eligible for free school meals, would still have access to their food.

Parcels cost members £5 and members received about £25 worth of food: one ambient bag, one chilled/frozen, and one fruit and vegetable bag. Two new pantries were also established in Cardiff over the spring and summer of 2020.

A range of new actors also started supporting people with food access during the lockdown including community groups, comprised entirely of volunteers and existing organisations and groups that normally provided an array of services but not food. One example of a new meal provider during the spring of the pandemic was a local school who used their facilities to prepare hot meals for older people and others who were self-isolating or shielding and unable to prepare their own meals. Food retailers and local businesses also adapted their models to improve food accessibility.

Data overview

The full methodology for the local area case study research has been published alongside this report in the Local Area Case Studies – Methodological Appendix. This is available on the project website. Details of the data collected for this particular case study is reported below.

In Cardiff, we had one “Research Champion” from Food Cardiff who helped promote the research and recruit participants. An initial scoping interview was carried out with the Research Champion to receive an overview of the role of Food Cardiff during the COVID-19 pandemic and also to learn about the activities of other key organisations. From this initial scoping interview, invitations to participate in research interviews and the research workshop were sent by the Research Champion. Candidates for the interviews were people who played leading roles in various responses to food insecurity over the pandemic, of whom three were council staff and one worked with Cardiff Foodbank. Candidates for the workshop included those invited for interviews, as well as additional council staff, staff from the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board Dietetics team, individuals who worked or volunteers for “Anchor organisations” (explained below), businesses and food suppliers involved in the food response in Cardiff, food aid project representatives in Cardiff, and other third sector organisations (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of individuals invited to participate in interviews and/or the research workshop for the Cardiff case study and numbers who participated.

Type of Organisation/Group	Number Invited	Number Attended Interview/Workshop
Cardiff Council	5	4
Cardiff and Vale Health Board	1	1
Anchor organisations (see case study for explanation)	6	3
Food project suppliers	1	1
Cardiff Third Sector Council	2	1
Food Businesses involved in the response	1	0
Food aid projects including food banks	4	2
Other third sector organisations	1	0
Mutual Aid Groups	2	0
Other Food Cardiff members	1	1

The following case study draws from the following data sources:

- Three individual interviews conducted with representatives from the Cardiff Council, Food Cardiff, and the Cardiff Foodbank.

- One workshop conducted with 12 participants of whom:
 - 4 worked for the Cardiff Council
 - 7 worked or volunteered with third sector organisations or voluntary groups
 - 1 was part of the public health dietetics team from the Cardiff and Vale University of Health Board

In addition to primary research data collected through the interviews and workshop, desk-based research was conducted to identify sources of information about activities and groups active in the food response during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sources such as project reports and action plans were also shared by research participants. We also received written submissions to questions from a representative from one food aid project who was unable to participate in an interview or the workshop. Lastly, during the workshop, written responses were collected from participants using Padlet and level of agreement with various statements assessed using Mentimeter. These sources of data are also reported on.

About Cardiff

As detailed in the methodological appendix available on the project website, case study selection criteria were chosen to allow comparisons across the case study areas. The selection criteria were the presence/absence of a food poverty alliance registered with the Food Power network, areas that were either predominantly urban or rural, and evidence of economic impact on the population, as reflected in rising claimant rates. The claimant rate reflects people either receiving Jobseeker's Allowance or receiving Universal Credit and expected to be looking for work. Cardiff was selected due to the presence of a Food Power network member and being predominantly urban. The change in claimant rate over January to July 2020 was 100%.

Cardiff is a city of about 364,200 people, of whom about 36,400 are 70 years of age or older.³ It was described by one of our research participants as a "tale of two cities", with the Southern Arc containing areas of high deprivation and the Northern Arc being relatively well-off. Compared to Wales, in 2015, Cardiff had a lower proportion of households in income poverty (30.8% compared to 34.5%) but these headline figures mask variation across wards in Cardiff. In some wards, such as Ely, Llanrumney, and Adamsdown, income poverty levels were greater than 40% in 2015.⁴ This said, it was pointed out that there are also pockets of deprivation in wealthier areas of the city, but that most interventions focus on the Southern Arc, as shared in the following quote:

"We get pockets of deprivation in the wealthy areas as well...but I'd say that Southern Arc is particularly deprived, and we've known that. There are a lot of interventions that we have and then we get complaints going, "All the money goes to the Southern Arc." It's like, "That's because they haven't got any."
(Council staff respondent)

³ <https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/ENG/Your-Council/Have-your-say/Ask%20Cardiff%20Library/1.Amcangyfrif%20Poblogaeth%20Caerdydd%20-%20Cardiff%20Population%20Estimate.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/ENG/Your-Council/Have-your-say/Ask%20Cardiff%20Library/Aelwydydd%20Caerdydd%20mewn%20lodi%20yn%20ol%20ward%20-%20Cardiff%20Household%20Poverty%20by%20Ward.pdf>

2019 and 2020, 38 organisations were very involved with Food Cardiff and another 27 have engaged with the partnership but been more peripherally involved. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were about seven organisations involved in the food poverty working group specifically, including the Cardiff Council, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (Public Health Dietitians), Cardiff 3rd Sector Council, ACE, Business in the community, Albany Baptist Church, FareShare Cymru, and Cardiff Foodbank (Trussell Trust network).

Some key areas of work since the partnership was established have been:

- 1) Setting up and piloting a school holiday enrichment programme in 2015.
- 2) Outlining a 5-year plan for tackling food insecurity.⁹
- 3) Developing and rolling out a maximizing family income programme. Working with the local health board, public health team, and the Cardiff Council, Food Cardiff developed a food-related benefits training programme. This initially provided supervisors of money-advice teams in the Council with a three-hour training session on Healthy Start, free school meals, breakfast clubs, and the school holiday enrichment programme. Supervisors, in turn, delivered training to their teams, who were then better equipped to advise people coming for advice on these benefits. This programme was later delivered to third-sector advice services as well.
- 4) Helping establish food pantries and community food retail projects. The first pantry they supported, The Dusty Forge, opened in June 2019. This project is detailed below.

Food Cardiff would also have regular networking meetings.

Cardiff Council

Strategy setting

It was shared by one council staff respondent that before the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity was “very much on the agenda of the Council.” (Council staff respondent). In November 2019, the Council published a food strategy and tackling food inequalities is one of the key priorities.¹⁰ Actions proposed in the strategy included rolling out the School Holiday Enrichment Programme across more Cardiff schools and across more holidays, supporting the strategic roll out of community pantries, promoting and encouraging the uptake of food-related benefits via the Council’s community hubs, advice teams, and schools and social services, and promoting Living Wage accreditation.¹¹

The Council’s involvement in Food Cardiff, from helping form the partnership in 2013 to sitting on its Steering Group, is another way that the Council has been involved in work on food poverty, as was shared by one council respondent.

Community hubs, money advice teams, and financial support

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council operated “community hubs” across the city. These were often located in community centres, where there might be a library and/or leisure centre. The Council’s money advice team worked at these hubs, offering money

⁹<http://www.cardiffandvaleuhb.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/1143/Building%20Resilience%20Food%20Security%20Plan.pdf>

¹⁰<https://cardiff.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s35885/Cabinet%2021%20November%202019%20Food%20Strategy%20App%201.pdf?LLL=0>

¹¹ Ibid.

advice, to ensure that people were claiming their full benefit entitlements and other forms of financial help, such as the Welsh Government Discretionary Assistance Fund. The Council also supported Food Cardiff's maximizing family income programme described above.

In-kind financial support from the Cardiff Council has also been available through a discretionary fund available to families moving into council-owned social housing, the majority of social housing in Cardiff. The fund provides a grant for people to purchase white goods, which are not provided in council properties. However, it was noted that the amount of money for these grants is limited and finite.

School food provision

Families eligible for free school meals in Cardiff apply through the Council's website. Working with Food Cardiff, the Council was involved in setting up one of the first, at-scale, holiday provision programmes in Wales, the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP). This programme received funding from the Welsh Government in 2017 and continued to do so through 2019.¹² For 2020, they had committed £2.7 million in funding for a summer holiday programme, but as outlined below, this was repurposed for free school replacements through the summer of 2020 due to COVID-19. The Welsh Government funding that goes out to local authorities is match-funded by local authorities and in each area, there is a steering group that delivers the programme. In Cardiff, Food Cardiff, Cardiff Council, Cardiff & Vale University Health Board's Dietetics team, and Sport Cardiff have been involved in the delivery of the programme.

Contracted Meals on Wheels

The local authority has a contracted Meals on Wheels service. It is run by a company called Telecare Cardiff.¹³ To be eligible to receive their Meals on Wheels service, one or more of the following eligibility criteria had to be met:

- Having difficulty preparing a meal safely.
- Unable to shop for food.
- Liable to self-neglect or would eat an inappropriate diet without the service.
- Have a mental or physical disability.
- Needing support due to recovery from hospitalisation or illness; carer illness or holiday, or bereavement.

Costs for receiving just a meal delivered are £3.90, which includes free delivery and a welfare check as standard. This increases to £4.50 if dessert is also included.¹⁴

Work with food banks and food pantries

One council staff respondent shared that before the pandemic and as described below, the Cardiff Council also worked with the Cardiff Foodbank to provide food bank referrals. As above, the Council ran community hubs; in addition to providing money advice, these were also places where people could access a referral to the Cardiff Foodbank.

¹² <https://www.wlga.wales/food-and-fun-school-holiday-enrichment-programme>

¹³ <https://telecarecardiff.co.uk/meals/>

¹⁴ <https://telecarecardiff.co.uk/meals/#how-much-does-it-cost>

The Council also partnered with the Cardiff Foodbank to have money advice officers present in their food bank distribution centres. The Council funded staff from their money advice services team to visit each of the food bank's distribution centres. This was described by one third-sector respondent:

"A client would come in and have their food and would sit down and have a chat. They were offered the provision from the Council. They were able to, I mean I haven't got the figures now, but they've been able to either save or provide a huge amount of money over the months and the years that they've been doing it." (Third sector respondent)

The Council was also involved in financially supporting the setting up of food pantries (ACE and the Wyndham St Pantry, see below).

Allotment gardens

Another element of the Council's food work has been the oversight of allotment gardens. They have 28 allotment sites and 2,500 plots across Cardiff.

Cardiff 3rd Sector Council (C3SC)

The Cardiff 3rd Sector Council (C3SC)¹⁵ has played an important role in supporting third sector organisations in Cardiff. Their work has included advocacy on behalf of third sector organisations, providing training, networking opportunities and funding, and providing support to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of third sector organisations' work in their communities. Whilst not involved specifically in food-related work before the COVID-19 pandemic, as below, they played a key role in the food response during.

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board Public Health Division

In Wales, public health falls under the remit of local health boards. In Cardiff, there is a Public Health Division which includes a Public Health Dietetic team. The Cardiff Public Health Division was involved in providing funding or in-kind support for a number of food poverty initiatives in Cardiff prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have provided funding for food pantry set-up costs and have delivered the Maximising Family Income programme in partnership with Food Cardiff. They also have been involved in mapping and research on food insecurity. Lastly, they ran the Nutrition Skills for Life programme, which involved their dietetics team supporting food banks and food aid projects, as well as other community programmes, such as Flying Start,¹⁶ with Families First,¹⁷ and various other Welsh Government programmes, to improve nutrition knowledge and cooking skills in areas of deprivation.

Food banks and other food parcel providers

Cardiff Foodbank

The Cardiff Foodbank is a member of the Trussell Trust network and has been in operation since 2009. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, they operated a warehouse that holds 28-29 tonnes of food and seven distribution centres and had four staff and 180 volunteers. They

¹⁵ <https://c3sc.org.uk/about-c3sc/>

¹⁶ <https://gov.wales/get-help-flying-start>

¹⁷ <https://gov.wales/families-first>

have always operated according to the Trussell Trust food bank referral model, with about 90 organisations acting as referral agents (voucher holders) across the city. It was shared by a third-sector respondent that they have had to move from a focus on short-term crises to supporting people over a longer term because many income crises cannot be resolved quickly. The example provided here was the 5-week wait for Universal Credit. They only provide ambient food in their food parcels because they cannot store fresh food, but one third sector respondent emphasised that the food provided in food parcels are nutritionally balanced.

The Cardiff Foodbank is the largest food parcel provider in Cardiff and a part of the Food Cardiff network. Stakeholders affirmed that if someone in Cardiff called the Council or advice services prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it would be likely that they would receive a referral to Cardiff Foodbank. It was also reported that the Council community hubs, which, as above, are places where people can receive referral vouchers, are one of highest providers of referrals. The relationship between the Council and Cardiff Foodbank was described as an informal one, as they have not received funding for their food provisioning activities.¹⁸ One third-sector respondent described the food bank's role as one piece of a "jigsaw puzzle" with their role to provide emergency food, with other organisations and the Council having their own roles, for example, in administering discretionary funds for people in financial crises. The food bank would signpost their clients on to other organisations and services when appropriate.

Independent food parcel providers

An independent food bank has been running from the the Al-Ikhlās Centre mosque.¹⁹ Before the pandemic, the eligibility criteria to use the food bank were either being on a low income or being a refugee or asylum seeker with a card to show status. The food bank would usually serve an average of 25 food parcels per week.

Community pantry or community fridge projects

The Dusty Forge

Established in 2019 and following a "Your Local Pantry" model, the Dusty Forge is a community food pantry run by ACE (Action in Caerau & Ely).²⁰ People are required to be members and meet some requirements (e.g. living in Caerau & Ely, self-identifying as having difficulty affording food). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, members paid £5 per visit on an allocated day and were allowed to choose ten items from the food shop, with an estimated minimum value of £15. Their main supplier of food items is FareShare Cymru. One third sector respondent shared that the pantry was also involved in helping people access grants for the purchase of cookers and fridges, either through the Cardiff Council's scheme or a scheme, Building Blocks, from Save the Children.

Tremorfa Pantry

Stakeholders also referred to other projects giving out food but that would not consider themselves food banks. One example is Tremorfa Pantry, which started as a project

¹⁸ It was reported that they did receive a grant from the Council to support work they were doing to address women not having financial access to sanitary products.

¹⁹ <https://www.alikhlas.org.uk/foodbank.html>

²⁰ <https://www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/>

supported by Cardiff Community Housing Association.²¹ It operates as a bit of a hybrid between a community pantry and food bank, where people go to choose food items to take home, but with the option to make a donation. They are a member of FareShare Cymru and also receive fresh produce from a community garden.

As outlined below, other pantries were in development before the COVID-19 pandemic but were first opened over the pandemic in spring or autumn 2020.

Meal providers

Stakeholders shared there were community cafes running various pay-as-you-can meals prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. One example was a business that ran a monthly community supper for families from a local school. Another council staff respondent shared how different faith communities had been actively running community meals before the COVID-19 pandemic. In our stakeholder workshop, one third-sector respondent shared that there were a number of organisations running lunch clubs for people who were aged 50+ and food provision for people living in hostels. Much of this community food provision was run by organisations that were members of FareShare Cymru. Another organisation highlighted by respondents in our workshop was the Oasis Centre in Cardiff, which provided meals to refugees and asylum seekers.²² This work was supported on a government contract basis as well as through charitable donations for those not eligible for council support.

Early signs of food access issues in COVID-19 pandemic

As the above sections highlight, numerous organisations were engaged in programmes and projects aimed at responding to, or reducing risks of, food insecurity in Cardiff before the COVID-19 pandemic. One reason why there were concerns about rising food insecurity early in the pandemic is because it threatened how these programmes and projects could operate. Stakeholders shared that there were widespread concerns about the need to close community pantries and food programmes and a lot of uncertainty about what would be able to stay open. The closure of these projects would compromise food access for the many vulnerable people that relied on them as a source of low-cost groceries or meals. In a briefing note sent to Cardiff Council by Food Cardiff on 23rd March, it was highlighted that there were fears the COVID-19 pandemic would exacerbate food access issues due to increased demand from the food system (i.e. panic buying), a more limited availability of staff and volunteer resources, and the closure of public services that are food access points for vulnerable people (e.g. schools closed affecting access to free school meals, day centres for adults).²³ Three main challenges were outlined:

1. People being unable to afford food in crisis
2. People who are unable to access food (self-isolation, service closures etc.)

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/tremorfapantry/>

²² <https://www.oasiscardiff.org/>

²³ Food Cardiff. "Cardiff Food Access and Covid-19, Note for Cardiff Council". Available on request.

3. Local food businesses unable to open (having knock-on effects on food supply, workers' income etc.)²⁴ (Source: Cardiff Food Access and Covid-19, Note for Cardiff Council)

Other early signs that people were having difficulty accessing food was reflected in the volume of calls the Council was receiving related to concerns about food. For example, one third-sector respondent shared:

“The Council were...I haven't seen these figures recorded but they were saying that 80% of calls coming through to their advice line were around food. So we took that as a real indicator that food was a massive issue here.” (Third sector respondent)

Data provided by a participant from the Council suggested that in the last week of March almost 70% of the 1,548 calls made to the Council advice line related to food enquiries.

In our workshop, one council staff respondent shared that right at the beginning, there was a delay in support being made available, especially for people who were shielding. There were also concerns that because people had to move to home working and/or were having to shield that there would not be the staff, or volunteer capacity, to operate as usual, leading to reduced capacity to provide support.

One third sector respondent engaged in food parcel distribution described their feelings in the first week as “panic” and said, “we spent 24 hours in meltdown to be perfectly honest”. They were worried about their food supplies and how the lack of food in supermarkets would affect them, how need would increase, if they could continue to operate their model as usual, and what would happen if staff and volunteers got ill.

The Cardiff Foodbank also received an influx of calls for help, which they attributed to their well-known role in the city as an emergency food provider. They reported that in the first days, before free school meal replacements were announced, they were receiving requests from schools for food parcels for families entitled to free school meals.

Similarly, a third sector respondent shared that FareShare Cymru witnessed the closure of some of their member projects in the first weeks of the pandemic, while others put in immediate requests for a greater volume of food to be delivered. They also observed new projects opening and ones that had been in development accelerating their opening.

Other organisations, which had not typically engaged in food projects, also were receiving calls about food needs from people in the communities they worked with very early in the lockdown. One third sector respondent shared:

“For us it was a lot of calls from beneficiaries that we were getting. With kids being at home there was not enough food to feed the kids all the time. Most of the Black, Asian and minority ethnic community [we work with are] taxi drivers and in shops and they were not having that income. They were calling us, and a lot of people from our Golden Year project [a life skills project for Black, Asian and minority ethnic women aged 50+] as well were hesitant to step out and shop for food for themselves because of the shielding, and the food that they were

²⁴ Ibid.

receiving from the Council was not appropriate for them.” (Third sector respondent)

It was also reported that the Cardiff Third Sector Council was also receiving an unprecedented number of calls from people in the community:

“Very early at the beginning we started receiving lots of enquiries from community members, not only [third sector] groups, about people who were supposed to be shielding but had not received the letters...so there was a lot of confusion there and people wanting to know what was out there that they could receive, what support and where from. That was something completely new for us. We were inundated, suddenly, and not really sure...” (Third sector respondent)

Concerns about support for people who were shielding were also quickly raised to the Public Health dietetics team. One respondent shared the queries that were received by the clinical dietetics team at this time:

“[We had] quite a lot of queries come into the clinical dietetics service about those with special dietary requirements and where they were going to be met. So special diets and things like that, where the national food parcels were not meeting their needs, particularly from paediatrics as well...there were clinical needs that were arising because of [the lockdown].” (Public sector employee)

One respondent who had been active in a local community group shared what he was hearing from people involved in various community projects early in the lockdown:

“Their neighbours are all telling them that this lockdown has really led to an emergency for them, for food in particular. They were not able to afford food, they could not get out, the shops were shut, all of the internet booking system was booked up...a range of different problems and this COVID combination, as we ended up calling it, to do with health, to do with self-isolation and to do with shielding... led to really a lot of need.” (Third sector respondent)

Key actors and activities to address food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic

In response to these early signs, organisations responded in different ways. Some focused on playing a strategic role, helping link up and promote available food assistance across the city, looking out for gaps, and ensuring that safeguarding measures were in place. Others adapted their ways of working and others took on completely new roles in direct food provision. These are described by organisation below, highlighting new actions taken by pre-existing stakeholders and also highlighting new organisations that became involved in the food response over the spring and summer 2020.

Food Cardiff

It was shared with us that a first key action taken by Food Cardiff early in the COVID-19 pandemic was to use Twitter to flag actions being taken by organisations, businesses, and service providers to help link people with food. These included flagging things like groups

providing help with shopping, for instance. Food Cardiff saw themselves as having an important coordinating role. Given their membership and established relationships with various organisations, the public health board, and the local council, they were well placed to gather information on what different actors were doing and communicate this to others. This was seen as important for preventing duplication, as illustrated in the following quote:

“[Our coordinating role] enabled say [person name] from the cafe that I mentioned, wanted to set up her own provision. She could know what was happening elsewhere so as not to duplicate, and to target a different area.” (Third sector respondent)

A next key action was the writing of a briefing note for the Cardiff Council, which outlined the key issues Food Cardiff identified (as above) and their recommendations for what the Council should do.²⁵ The main recommendations in this briefing note were for the Council to establish a COVID-19 Food Response group including staff from across council departments (e.g. welfare and money advice, sustainable development, adult social services, child services, and education) and from external organisations, including the Cardiff Foodbank, the Cardiff & Vale University Health Board, FareShare Cymru, and Cardiff 3rd Sector Council (C3SC). They also recommended that the Council assign a full-time staff member to lead the Council’s response in ensuring Cardiff’s residents can access food. In addition, they recommended the Council use city facilities to produce and deliver food for people in isolation, to provide quality advice to the public including money advice and to adapt services such as providing referrals to the Cardiff Foodbank to accommodate people who are self-isolating or unable to leave their homes. They also recommended that the Council play a role in bolstering local food production through the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring allotments remain open, identifying and advertising land that can be used for growing, and allocating space and staff resources for larger-scale food growing in parks.

As it happened, it was Food Cardiff that took the lead in setting up a Covid-19 Food Response Task Group, which included council departments, Cardiff 3rd Sector Council, FareShare Cymru, the Cardiff Foodbank, and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board.

Through April, Food Cardiff, in partnership with the Covid-19 Food Response Task group and with the Cardiff Council and Cardiff 3rd Sector Council also playing key roles, set up Cardiff’s “City-wide Food response.”²⁶ Here, the response was devised to respond to two main challenges:

1. People unable to afford food in crisis.
2. People who are unable to access food (due to self-isolation or service closures, for example).

One stakeholder shared with us that the model they developed was based on activities they were seeing in other cities, such as Bristol and Leeds.²⁷ The aims were to develop a response that would:

²⁵ Food Cardiff. “Cardiff Food Access and Covid-19, Note for Cardiff Council”. Available on request.

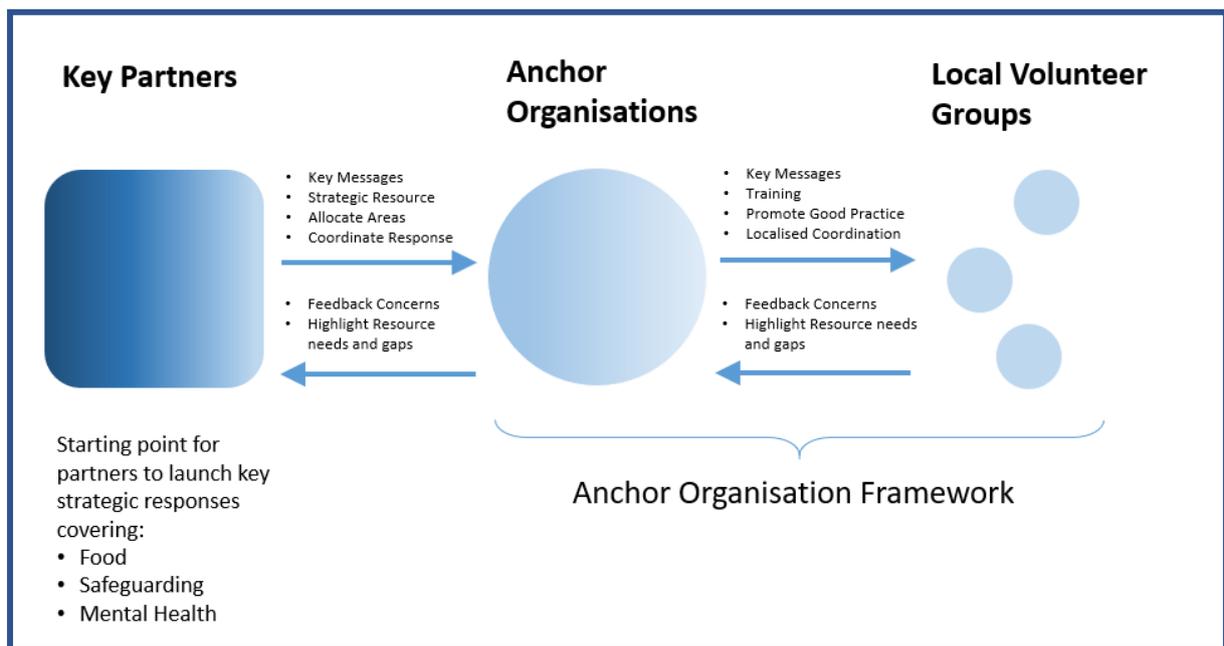
²⁶ <https://foodcardiff.com/app/uploads/2020/05/30.4.20-City-wide-food-response-6.1.pdf>

²⁷ <https://feedingbritain.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Bristol%E2%80%99s-Covid-19-Community-Food-Response.pdf>, <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/news/leeds-local-response-19/>

- Increase the efficiency of food distribution routes, therefore increasing the amount of food available to those in need
- Maximise the amount of vulnerable people receiving support
- Connect smaller, local initiatives to the wider effort and enable new entrants to join in
- Ensure all elements of the response are safe and risk is managed (e.g. food hygiene, safeguarding, GDPR)
- Help provide the best possible food, considering the nutritional needs of those receiving support
- Embed co-production and principles of dignity for those receiving food and support

In Cardiff, the structure established involved identification of “Anchor” organisations and “Food Response Partners” in each ward (these were the same organisation in some wards). Details on the vision for this scheme was first laid out in a document published by Food Cardiff at the end of April and further details were shared with us by our interview participants.²⁸ There were 11 anchor organisations across the city with responsibility for coordinating the local area volunteer response (see Figure 1). They were organisations that already had experience in safeguarding, training, and GDPR.

Figure 1: Role of anchor organisations in Cardiff’s COVID-19 Food Response.



Food response partners were involved in collecting and coordinating the distribution of food to other organisations and groups in their local areas. They were also involved in accepting referrals of people needing food or help with shopping and provided support for other organisations, community groups and grassroots movements involved in food distribution (for example, by providing advice on food hygiene or providing a physical space for cooking).

²⁸ <https://foodcardiff.com/app/uploads/2020/05/30.4.20-City-wide-food-response-6.1.pdf>

The work of anchor organisations and food response partners was supported by organisations in the Covid-19 Food Response Group (referred to as “Key Partners” in Figure 1). Specifically, Food Cardiff continued to be a source of information and responded to offers of help and community requests. They also directly supported Food Response Partners. The Cardiff Council’s role in this scheme was to manage the “Together for Cardiff” volunteering portal and to provide staff resources to support anchor organisations and food response partners. One council staff member shared that in the first couple of months, their role was to act as a “go-between to smooth things out and get [the anchor organisations and Food Response Partners] to realise that they were both trying to do the same thing”. Another council member involved in establishing and supporting anchor organisations shared:

“I think what we wanted to do was try and support groups... It is, “How do we do that? How do we help them and how do we enable them?... On the anchor organisations’ set up... [we provided] support and an element of coordination for all of the volunteering going on, from grassroots all the way up to the more established groups, which is what we call the anchor organisations. I think that is probably the key task... Our first attempt at it was, “Right, can we get every ward covered?” Then we started thinking, “What wards need more help?” So we started to look at the data. Then it became quite clear it was a lot more complicated than we or anyone could possibly anticipate, first of all. We had to adapt, we had to evolve and work with what was potentially there already.”
(Council staff respondent)

The Cardiff 3rd Sector Council also supported the scheme with volunteers and providing best practice advice on managing volunteers. The Cardiff and Vale Public Health Dietetic team provided nutrition advice. FareShare Cymru supported the scheme by managing food supplies for their members involved in the scheme.

Important to note here that this response was viewed as a “back-up” to the Council’s response (described below), as illustrated in the following quote:

“These services were almost a back-up, in a way, because the Council had a really good triage system and food response system.” (Third sector respondent)

But another third sector respondent shared that this “city-wide food response”, and work of the anchor organisations in particular, was to help people who were self-isolating and could afford food, and who, for whatever reasons, did not want to engage with the services offered by the Council.

In October 2020, Food Cardiff reported that a total of 48 organisations plus 23 COVID-19 Mutual Aid support groups were engaged in a food response, either providing food parcels, community meals, and/or shopping services.²⁹ Their work was coordinated through the anchor organisations and food response partners.

Cardiff Council

²⁹ <https://foodcardiff.com/blog/new-cardiff-covid-19-food-response-report-published/>

Helpline

Cardiff Council established an advice line which people could contact for any reason. The number of calls to the helpline, and those that related to food, are shown in the table below.

	March 23-31st	April	May	June
Total calls to Council advice line	1,548	6,273	4,747	3,670
Food-related enquiries	1,070	3,388	2,650	1,218
Percent of total calls related to food	69%	54%	56%	33%

Money Advice

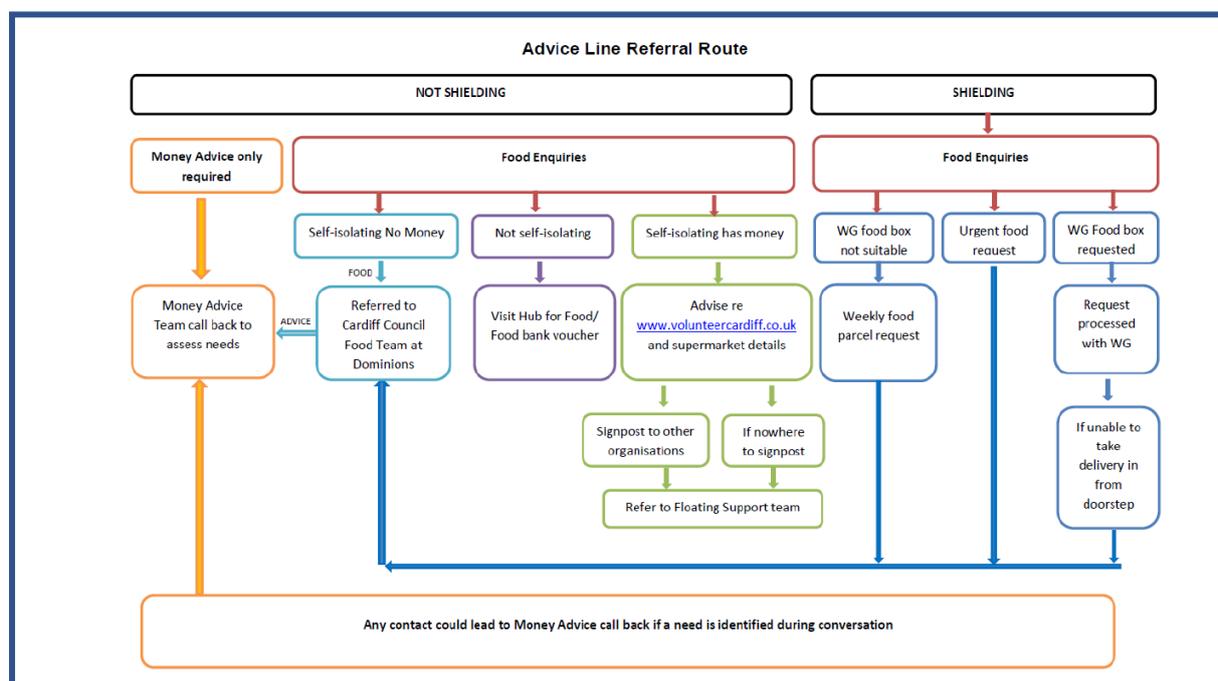
Food Cardiff reported that an important part of the Council's food response over March to June 2020 was to embed a cash-first approach in their work. The Money Advice Team was expanded over the lockdown period to enable them to take more calls, and they set up a triage system to help direct people towards correct benefit entitlements. It was shared in our workshop that they set up a website, www.cardiffmoneyadvice.co.uk, in the first weeks of the lockdown to provide simple and clear advice on money, benefits, and debt, and it also had a specific COVID-19 advice section.

Food boxes

One third sector respondent shared that very early in the COVID-19 pandemic, within the first 10 days of the national lockdown, the Council was busy with establishing and then delivering food boxes.

The Council set up a triage system that involved splitting people into the following groups: shielding and could afford food; shielding and couldn't afford food; self-isolating and could afford food; self-isolating and couldn't afford food; and not self-isolating but unable to afford food. The referral routes for these groups are outlined in Figure 1 and elaborated on below.

Figure 2: Referral pathways from calls made to the Cardiff Council advice line over the COVID-19 lockdown (April-June 2020).



Source: Food Cardiff and Food Sense Wales. "Cardiff Covid-19 Food Response: State of play March-June 2020" 8 Oct 2020.³⁰

The table below shows the referral outcomes of the calls made to the Council helpline that related to food.

	March 23-31st	April	May	June
Money Advice	898	722	258	185
Food bank voucher or referrals	172	2,118	965	393
Shielding (range of solutions)	0	548	1,427	640
	1,070	3,388	2,650	1,218

Source: Data provided by Cardiff Council staff respondent by email.

As shown in the light blue box in figure 2, there was a Cardiff Council food team set up, which provided food parcels from a temporary warehouse, a former library store, on Dominions Way. As highlighted in the diagram and shared with us by a council staff member, the food parcels provided by the Cardiff Council from this warehouse were primarily for people who were unable to go out and struggling to access food, whether because they didn't have people who could help them, couldn't get a delivery slot, and also couldn't afford food.

"But if you were isolating and you couldn't get a food slot or you had no neighbours to help you...basically, if you were isolating and you couldn't afford food, then you were getting a food parcel from us [Cardiff Council]." (Council staff respondent)

³⁰ <https://foodcardiff.com/blog/new-cardiff-covid-19-food-response-report-published/>

Over the pandemic, the Council’s aforementioned community hubs became a place for food parcel pick-up and delivery, though fewer were operating than before the pandemic. As below, the Council also provided food parcels on behalf of the Cardiff Foodbank, saving people from having to receive a referral and then go elsewhere to pick up their food bank food parcel. But their hubs were also places where people could pick up a council food parcel.³¹ This distribution began to be phased out in August, first by ceasing to advertise their availability but still providing if people expressed a need for them. In our workshop, it was shared by a council staff respondent that the Council continued to provide food boxes to people right through the autumn, particularly on weekends. The breakdown of the number of boxes provided by the Council is shown in the table below.

	March 23-31st	April	May	June	Total
Food parcels collected from Hubs	87	318	113	33	551
Food parcels delivered	825	1,621	730	616	3,792
Shielded food parcels delivered	n/a	777	770	385	1,932
	912	2,716	1,613	1,034	6,275

Source: Data provided by Cardiff Council Staff respondent by email

Important to note is that 1,932 of these food parcels did go to the shielding population. Through the hotline the Cardiff Council established, people on the shielding list could register for a Welsh Government food parcel, but the Council provided their food parcels to people who were shielding if the Welsh Government boxes were inappropriate, if there was an urgent need for food, or if someone was unable to bring a food parcel in from their doorstep. For example, a third-sector respondent shared:

“If people couldn’t physically pick up a box from their doorstep, Cardiff Council would provide the boxes for them instead so that social services could go in with an actual box and make sure that it wasn’t just left on the doorstep.” (Third sector respondent)

Other concerns about the Welsh Government’s shielding boxes raised in a Food Cardiff report were the nutrition quality and quantity, particularly the lack of fruit and vegetables, that the size of the food parcel did not account for other household members, or consideration for dietary and cultural needs.³² These concerns were also raised by our stakeholders, as reflected in this quote from a council staff respondent:

“I think our food parcels were better than the shielding food parcels because we took on board the advice of our dietary colleagues in the NHS... we got them to analyse, after a few weeks, what was in our food parcels for those isolating who couldn’t afford food, to make sure it was nutritious and balanced. We also tried to cater for dietary requirements, but that became very complicated, I've got to say. I'm not sure how successful that actually was. I

³¹ <https://foodcardiff.com/blog/new-cardiff-covid-19-food-response-report-published>

³² <https://foodcardiff.com/blog/new-cardiff-covid-19-food-response-report-published>

think they were often vegetarian. I think they were often halal and stuff like that, but I feel that's as good as you got.

The ones that came from Brakes [funded by the Welsh Government] were, literally, for a shielding person. There was not enough food in there for a week. I saw what was in one. There is no way that that was enough for even one person for a week, and if you're shielding... They were shielding with their whole family." (Council staff respondent)

When the Council could, they would provide food boxes to people who were shielding who requested an alternative and also provided feedback to the Welsh Government on the shielding boxes as shared below:

"It was something that we collected data on [later on] - people who wanted alternatives [to the shielding food boxes]. We fed that back [to the] Welsh Government, but obviously there was one box available, and it was to fit all. It was something we did not have much choice with. We did, where we could, provide alternatives, but obviously to an extent we were reliant on donations and the food that we had supplied to us to provide those alternatives." (Council staff respondent)

Our respondents shared that the Council also took an active role in making sure people on the shielding list were aware of help available. They phoned everyone on the shielding list and if no one picked up after three times, they would visit their home. The active role they took was described by one council staff member in the following quote:

"Proactively, as a local authority, [we could] hunt down the people we thought qualified [for Welsh Government shielding food parcels] if we knew that Welsh Government hadn't heard from them – to, basically, do a welfare check and make sure they were okay... It got to the point whereby, off of all these massive, cross-referenced lists, there were people from communities going out and door knocking, and trying to work out, "Is there somebody in here that needs help and is too scared to answer the door? Is there somebody in here who's had an awful fall and needs help? Is there, even worse, someone who has died at the property? Or do we think the person has actually gone to stay with their family for this period of the pandemic and there's no need to worry?" (Council staff respondent)

At the end of the shielding food box programme, in mid-August, one third sector respondent shared that the Council was concerned about whether or not people who were shielding were self-sufficient. It was reported that the Council called people on the shielding list again to let them know that the food box programme was ending and to offer support in other ways.

Of note is that the Council was not formally asked by the Welsh Government to step in and support the shielding food box programme, however, as shared below, the Council felt it was their responsibility to do so:

"With the letters that went out from Welsh government there was a lot of, "If you need more help speak to your local authority, here is a list". Obviously that placed the onus on us to provide additional information. But as soon as we would see

what was in the parcels and the fact that they were not covering an awful lot of scenarios for people, it was something that we tried to do, to help out where we could.” (Council staff respondent)

Whilst not solely to help connect people with food, it was shared that the Council was also involved in a tablet gifting scheme so that people without access to online services could gain access to these. This was highlighted as a key way to support people now having to access online supermarket deliveries.

One source of funding for the food boxes provided by the Cardiff Council was re-purposed funds that had been allocated to the Council before the pandemic to support action to tackle food poverty and address food insecurity as part of preparations for Brexit.³³ Support was also provided from a £50,000 grant from Admiral and as a result of a public appeal for donations for pledges and donations from the public.³⁴

Contracted Meals on Wheels

Information on the Meals on Wheels provider’s website posted on the 19th of March 2020 stated that their meal delivery service was operating as normal, however that precautions would be taken if someone was self-isolating, with delivery drivers no longer taking meals into someone’s home.

One third-sector stakeholder shared that the Meals on Wheels service in Cardiff was involved in delivering and providing food to places where homeless people were being housed, as well as continuing to provide food for their client base. It was also reported that requests for meal deliveries through this service went up significantly over the COVID-19 pandemic.

Free school meals

It was shared that one of the quickest things the Council mobilised was a response for children entitled to a free school meal. The Council was very concerned about what would happen to these children as a result of schools being closed as reflected in the quote below from a council staff respondent:

“As we went into the pandemic [and school closures], we realised, "Oh, my God, free-school-meals, what’s happening to kids who receive these?” (Council staff respondent)

Their first response was to start a “grab bag” programme, where parents could come to a school and pick up a takeaway lunch bag. This was described as a “knee-jerk” reaction by one council staff respondent, to get something in place quickly. However, it soon became clear that there were issues with people not wanting or able to pick up these grab bags for self-isolation reasons or because of the stigma of being seen going to school and picking up a lunch for your children. The Council also had the obligation to protect the identity of children receiving free school meals, and this method did not allow for this.

In response to these concerns, the Education Catering team and with support now being provided by the Welsh Government, the Council then started offering food vouchers.

³³ <https://gov.wales/child-poverty-income-maximisation-action-plan-2020-2021-html>

³⁴ <https://www.admiral.com/community-and-sponsorship/cardiff-food-appeal>

However, they were only redeemable in some supermarkets. It was shared by a council staff respondent that this was a concern because some low-cost supermarkets, like Lidl and Aldi, were not included. This system was used for a couple of weeks while the Council then devised their own scheme.

The system that was then offered was a direct cash payment system. Families received a direct money transfer to their bank account via Parent Pay (an online payment system already established for paying school fees). The voucher system was also still offered, but it was shared that most parents opted for the Parent Pay option. The value of support was £19.50 per week per child, covering both free school meal provision and breakfast provision.

It was noted that in some cases, food parcels may have been provided (i.e. in cases where a family was self-isolating or where children were known to social services).

As was the case country-wide, free school meal replacements were offered over the summer holidays. In a report published by Food Cardiff, it was highlighted that funding for holiday free school meals diverted funds from the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP).³⁵ Participants considered this problematic since the programme offers more than food, including enrichment activities and nutrition skills and because it also serves children that are not eligible for free school meals but who may be food insecure.

The Council also worked to ensure children from families with no recourse to public funds could access free school meal food parcels or vouchers over the lockdown.

One council staff respondent shared how challenging it has been for school catering since children went back in the Autumn 2020. Issues such as social distancing measures and small kitchens have made it challenging for them to operate at full capacity and offer a full menu. Further, children often are eating in classrooms to maintain classroom bubbles, which also limits what can be served. Free school meal replacements have been offered to families when their children cannot go to school because of the need to self-isolate. It was shared that supermarket vouchers are sent out in most of these cases.

The Council has also experienced a large rise in demand for free school meals. One council staff member shared the following figures with us:

- On the 23rd of March, 11,400 pupils claiming free school meals.
- 14th October, 13,400 pupils claiming free school meals.
- 6th November, 13,800 pupils claiming free school meals.

Allotment gardens

The Council had to close their allotment gardens early in the pandemic because there were concerns that the entry to allotments, most often through a single gate and requiring handling a padlock, could lead to the spread of the virus. Concerns were heightened because many of the people who have the plots fall into older age groups. However, the Council worked to open them again, ensuring that hand sanitizer was onsite, as it was felt that it was beneficial to open them both in terms of mental well-being and food provision.

³⁵ Ibid.

Cardiff 3rd Sector Council (C3SC)

Though already mentioned in relation to their role in supporting anchor organisations and food response partners, the C3SC was also engaged in other work over spring and summer. They set up a service directory specifically focused on where people could receive help with food delivery and shopping during the spring lockdown.³⁶ They also supported many organisations that were newly providing food during the pandemic, as described below:

“We do not deliver food provisions directly to the community but we [support] lots of groups who were adapting, who had never provided food before, but now they were aware [of the need] and... then changed to provide food provision very quickly. Also, there were lots of different queries. We do administer some funding through the groups, so there were lots of enquiries back and forth to funders around whether they could change the project that they were delivering into a food type of delivery.” (Third sector respondent)

As highlighted in the above section about their role in supporting anchor and food response organisations, the Cardiff 3rd Sector Council was also involved in providing guidance on venue and volunteer safeguarding advice. They provided information briefs and virtual sessions on these issues over the pandemic. They also provided “Local Emergency Funding” and ran two grants schemes aimed at enabling groups to open safely and put in place Personal Protective Equipment and safeguarding requirements.

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board Public Health Division

Over the lockdown, the Cardiff & Vale Public Health Dietetics team worked with the Council to ensure the food parcels they were providing to people who were self-isolating met nutritional, dietary and cultural requirements. They issued two guides: one provided suggested food items to make up a food parcel for one adult for one week³⁷; the other outlined the most common special diets (i.e. Coeliac disease, Halal, Kosher, Vegan) and common food allergies, and then provided suggestions for food parcels for these special requirements. We were also told they conducted a nutritional analysis of the Welsh shielding food boxes to identify the nutritional gaps so that these could be addressed.

The team had to stop their Nutrition Skills for Life training, but at the time of the workshop (December 2020), had been developing the programme to be delivered online through a virtual programme.

In partnership with the Council and schools in Cardiff, the dietetics team was involved in setting up a new summer school programme, Cardiff Summer Squad. This was in place of the SHEP programme, which, as highlighted, was not funded by the Welsh Government in summer 2020 because all funds had gone into free school meal provision over the holidays instead. The Cardiff Summer Squad served children identified as vulnerable by Children’s Services. The programme ran for half days, with children either coming in the morning or afternoon (with breakfast provided in the morning and lunch provided to children in the afternoon). Physical activity, nutrition sessions and opportunities to play and engage with other children were also provided. It was funded through various pots of money from the Welsh Government and from across the Council.

³⁶ <https://foodcardiff.com/blog/new-cardiff-covid-19-food-response-report-published>

³⁷ Cardiff and Vale UHB Dieticians. “Suggested Food Items List for a Food Parcel”. 2020. Available on request.

Food parcel providers

The Cardiff Foodbank

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the food bank's usual ways of interacting with their clients, as shared below:

"We knew that we had to change what we were doing in that normally, when you have your voucher, you'll come to the centre, you come in, you have a cup of tea, a chat, sometimes mums in particular would be hungry and sometimes we had to give people, we've always had to do this, food themselves because they haven't eaten for a few days or something just as terrible. Then they would see the money advice person if they wanted to, etc. They would be with us for maybe up to an hour or something. [During the pandemic] we couldn't do any of that. We basically had to close the doors and have the voucher handed in almost around the door and the food handed out... for our volunteers in the distribution centres, it broke their heart. They were in tears all the time." (Third sector respondent)

The food bank kept six of their seven distribution centres open, running 9 of their usual 11 sessions each week, though there were instances when food bank centres were unable to operate temporarily (e.g. for one week) early in the pandemic as capacity issues were sorted out (see below). The one centre that had to close was because the church building that housed it was closed. From one third sector respondent's point of view, it was a benefit that many churches were not operating their usual activities such as services and nurseries because it gave the food bank distribution centre more room to operate, which was beneficial in light of social distancing requirements and the need to store more food at their centres.

Data shared for March to June 2020 showed that more than twice as many food parcels were given out by the Cardiff Foodbank in March and April compared to the amount given out in the same months in 2019. Children and adults received help from food parcels a total of 6903 times over March to May. The numbers were described by one third sector respondent as "through the roof" in April and May.

It was shared that though there was this increase in need, there was also an influx of food donations, and they did not struggle with their food supplies. However, they did face challenges getting food to everyone. One third sector respondent shared that a key challenge was how to get paper-based referral vouchers to people. The food bank received fewer referrals than usual from places that normally issued vouchers "face to face", and the food bank had concerns this meant there was unmet need. They experienced a drop in their numbers in the summer, and they attributed this, in part, to a decrease in referrals coming from some of their referrals agents that were not operating as usual, as shared below:

"But very definitely, our gut instinct, I don't have the evidence yet, our gut instinct is that there was quite a lot of unmet need because of the issue of voucher holder organisations not being able to get to individuals either because people were furloughed or they just didn't have the capacity to be able to do that." (Third sector respondent)

The food bank had also decided they were not able to offer a delivery service. To address both issues of access to vouchers and their inability to deliver food parcels, they worked with

the Council, giving them their food parcels to distribute from their community hubs. Partnering with the Council in this way allowed people to obtain a referral and food parcel at the same place at the same time. Further, the Council was able to use their delivery service to deliver directly to people who needed a food bank voucher and who couldn't leave their home. This could include people who were shielding, as was shared by one third sector respondent:

“If somebody that was medically shielding also was in emergency food hunger and [they] would have a voucher generated, they would count in [the food bank's] numbers.” (Third sector respondent)

Once restrictions on how often people could leave home were lifted, the distribution of food parcels by the Council on behalf of the food bank stopped.

Because Cardiff Foodbank had an abundance of food, they also shared their food with the Council and other organisations.

Another concern for the food bank, early in the pandemic, was the impact it would have on their volunteer capacity. As highlighted earlier, the food bank was highly dependent on volunteers, with only four staff. Though initially a concern, limited volunteer capacity did not end up being an issue for them, as described below:

“[The food bank] took the decision, even before the government said, to offer over 70s to step back for a season. It was causing much distress around the families because it was that unknown. They'd heard the virus hits older people... Then we were concerned that from a logistics point of view, we wouldn't have sufficient volunteers. But the brilliant thing was those that were furloughed then came forward. Some of them are now carrying on, in their spare time, to volunteer.” (Third sector respondent)

It was shared that the main thing they weren't able to offer over the pandemic was “extra support beyond the food parcel” (Third sector respondent). For example, they were unable to have staff from the Council's money advice team provide advice during open hours at distribution centres:

“The money advice officers, money advice team...they've been fantastic. Sadly, they can't come because of the model that we're having to be in now” (Third sector respondent)

When asked about whether what type of impact this might have had on their services, it was felt that this might have led to more repeat use, as people were not being signposted to other forms of support. However, it was also shared that the Council's helpline was available to people over this time and that other help was available from council hubs, where people were picking up food bank parcels directly.

To support the necessary adaptations to their service and handle the increased need for their services, the Cardiff Foodbank was able to apply for various grant schemes. These included grants directly from the Trussell Trust, grants from the Cardiff 3rd Sector Council, and donations from private companies that often provided in-kind items, such as a new delivery van, hand sanitised and personal protective equipment. They've also received support through “Local Giving”, an online website where individuals can set up monthly direct debits to support charities of their choice.

Independent food parcel distributors

The independent food bank at the Al-Ikhlās Centre mosque scaled up their operations over the COVID-19 pandemic to serve a wider range of people, open on more days and offer delivery. During the pandemic, it was shared that they “opened to all” (Third sector respondent – written submission). They served anyone made vulnerable to insufficient food access as a result of the pandemic, whether for financial reasons, because people were shielding, or because people were unable to go out for food or prepare food. They added a second weekly food parcel collection session and began a food parcel delivery service to people who were over 60 and isolating, people with underlying health conditions, and those on low or no income. This was primarily for people in their surrounding area.

Data shared by Al-Ikhlās centre on Facebook in August 2020 reported that over March to May 2020, they provided 1,427 food parcels. In comparison to their pre-pandemic figures, their weekly average rose from just around 25 food parcels per week to 200 food parcels per week.

The expansion of their services was, in part, enabled by the extra space they had for food storage and sorting, as a result of the Mosque’s closure. The main prayer hall was used for this purpose:

“The main prayer hall became a big food storage/sorting facility. It was quite amazing to see and quite emotional that it became such a vital space.” (Third sector respondent – written submission)

As demand reduced over the pandemic and with the reopening of the mosque when lockdown measures eased, their operations were scaled back again.

In addition to their scaled-up food parcel distribution, over Ramadan, they also provided takeaway meals, as a replacement for the hot evening breakfast meal they would usually serve their community during the month of Ramadan.

New food parcel distributors during the COVID-19 pandemic

Some new projects set up to provide food parcels during the spring lockdown were also highlighted by our research participants. One was a new food project set up in Butetown (Black, Asian and minority ethnic Covid-19 Food Rescue), which was the result of a collaboration between four organisations who had not previously engaged in food parcel distribution work, namely community organisations that worked with Black, Asian and ethnic minority households (Women Connect First, Hayaat Women Trust, Henna Foundation and Horn Development Association Cardiff). In our workshop, one respondent shared the following about this project:

“We sent out leaflets and informed people through social media, and the word was spread through word of mouth. We were getting a lot of requests, sometimes up to 300 a week. These were not organisations that had not particularly dealt with food before. Most of our projects were regarding healthy eating, so we do healthy recipes and we have afterschool clubs. Or we had projects for older women. But because of this sudden need for food among our beneficiaries and the people that were coming to us, we shifted most of our resources into food at that point in time.” (Third sector respondent)

They used the Butetown community centre as a base to distribute food parcels. One of their key aims was to provide culturally appropriate food parcels. They received donations from organisations and supermarkets and additionally purchased items from wholesalers to ensure cultural appropriateness. These were delivered by voluntary groups.

It was estimated that over April to June, they supported about 300 households with 2,000 food parcels.³⁸ The recipients of these food parcels were primarily households from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities (90%), including refugees and asylum seekers. Women in refuge from domestic violence and families with children experiencing sickle cell anaemia were also groups that were supported by this project. In June, this project received funding to be able to continue and employ a staff member.

Community groups, comprised entirely of volunteers, also formed over the pandemic to help support people with food and other help. One group was the Rumney Coronavirus Support Group. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, they set up a Facebook page for people in need and for the neighbours of people who were in need but not online, which quickly had 200 members. They also heard of people putting leaflets through the doors of their neighbours, offering to help, and this led to them wanting to set up a formal community group. During April and May, they formed 15 neighbourhood support teams, providing support to people in their neighbourhood, particularly targeting elderly and vulnerable people living in East Cardiff. While food provision was mostly “paid for” provision (i.e. help with grocery shopping), they also helped people pay for urgent essentials like food if they couldn’t afford it. The group received donations of surplus food from supermarkets and shops and also purchased food with grant money. It was reported that over April to June, they provided 79 households with 607 bags of food, which included food that was both paid for by recipients and foods donated for those who could not afford to purchase their own. It was shared by one third sector respondent in our workshop that it was important that this response was “neighbour-to-neighbour” and that “keeping it less formalised and more neighbourly” was important to them. More recently, this group received funding to set up a Your Local Pantry model and hire a pantry member. Building space has been provided by the Cardiff Community Housing Association.

Glenwood Church was provided as an example of a group who started providing food bags during the spring, and then became a member of FareShare Cymru. They also continued this work beyond the spring and at the time of our data collection, were looking to set up a pantry model.

More generally, in our workshop, it was shared that many groups that normally provided an array of services but not food before the COVID-19 pandemic were involved in a food response over the spring. One example was a mentor organisation and cultural group who provided food parcels and hot meals to people in their client community who they identified as vulnerable. It was shared that this was mostly done informally, and therefore went “below the radar”. (Third sector respondent)

Community pantry or community fridge projects

The Dusty Forge

The Dusty Forge food pantry moved to a delivery model service early in the pandemic. In the

³⁸ <https://foodcardiff.com/app/uploads/2020/10/Cardiff-Covid-19-Food-Response-Report-V1.0-8.10.20-1.pdf>

report from Food Cardiff, it was highlighted that this was so that their most vulnerable members, namely those who were shielding and/or low-income families with children not eligible for free school meals, would still have access to their food (supplied by FareShare Cymru).³⁹ But as shared in our workshop, this also meant serving fewer people:

“It changed the nature of what we were able to provide (i.e. switch from a community shop to a delivery model), but it actually meant that we were able, with the same amount of food, to help less people, which was quite frustrating. We obviously noticed the need was increasing but our capacity to support people with the adapted model was actually less, or required more staff, more resources and more food to provide the support for the same number of people.” (Third sector respondent)

It was reported that over April to June, they supported 111 households with 583 food parcels. Parcels cost members £5 and members received about £25 worth of food: one ambient bag, one chilled/frozen, and one fruit and vegetable bag. In September 2020, they were able to open as a shop again, operating in a COVID-19-safe manner. Emerging as a new strand of work from their operations during the lockdown, however, they also have been offering a new food delivery service in partnership with the South Riverside Community Development Centre and Global Gardens and with support from Food Power, which provides pre-cooked meals for the community.

Tremorfa Food Pantry

From our desk-based research, we gleaned that the Tremorfa Food Pantry partnered with other organisations to run a COVID-19 food response from a children’s play centre over April to August.⁴⁰ By September 2020, they had returned to their previous location, Tremorfa Hall, and were open for food collections on Wednesday and Thursdays. Later announcements suggested that the Welsh firebreak in October and subsequent lockdown measures reduced their open days to just Wednesdays 10-1pm, but that they continued to operate. Other changes to their operations included having to pre-bag food rather than allowing families to choose items. Families were able to collect one bag of food and items from FareShare Cymru were shared as equally as possible. Over the pandemic, the Cardiff Community Housing Association supported the project by delivering food, and the project also received extra funding from the National Lottery. They additionally provided support to families who were shielding, and in June, it was reported that they were delivering about 250 food parcels each week.⁴¹

³⁹ <https://foodcardiff.com/app/uploads/2020/10/Cardiff-Covid-19-Food-Response-Report-V1.0-8.10.20-1.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/tremorfapantry/>

⁴¹ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/coronavirus-unsung-heroes-national-lottery-22208601>

Wyndham Street Pantry

One food pantry, Wyndham Street Pantry, which South Riverside Community Development Centre had been in the early stages of developing before the COVID-19 pandemic with support from Cardiff Council, accelerated their plans to enable them to open in April rather than the planned start date of May or June. Rather than open as a pantry model, they opened as a delivery service, delivering 813 food parcels over the first three months.

Members paid a reduced weekly fee of £2.50 due to extra funding obtained from the

Figure 3: Wyndham Street Pantry promotion poster.



National Lottery Helping Working Families fund, and later, over July to October, the food parcels were free.⁴² The target groups for these food parcels are people living in Riverside, Grangetown, Canton, and Butetown, and particularly people in these communities who support large households through self-employment or flexible work (i.e. zero-hours contracts) and also people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. As evident in their promotion poster (Figure 3), during the pandemic, they targeted people who were both worried about going out to shops as well as struggling to afford a weekly shop. South Riverside Community Development Centre partnered with many organisations and local volunteers at the start of the pandemic to enable them to implement their delivery as quickly as possible.

Llanrumney Food Pantry

A third food pantry⁴³ was started in Llanrumney, a ward in East Cardiff, in September 2020. It offers members 10 items valued at £15 to £25 each week for £5 and is supported by FareShare Cymru and part of the “Your Local Pantry” model.⁴⁴ As per the food pantry’s website, there are no strict eligibility criteria, other than that members must be residents of Llanrumney, though their aims are to reduce food poverty in Cardiff East and provide affordable and accessible food and household essentials to the local community.⁴⁵

Meal providers

FareShare Cymru reported the adaptations they saw among the projects they support over the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, one of their projects that ran a lunch club for the elderly quickly adapted their service to deliver meals instead. Others that normally provided a meal service changed to a food parcel service because people were not able to come into centres for a meal. Others had to close, as shared by one third sector respondent in our workshop:

⁴² <https://www.srcdc.org.uk/2020/04/30/wyndham-st-pantry-update/>, <https://foodcardiff.com/blog/new-cardiff-covid-19-food-response-report-published/>

⁴³ <https://www.llanrumneyhall.org/the-pantry>

⁴⁴ <https://www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.llanrumneyhall.org/the-pantry>

“There were, obviously, some groups as well that could not deliver what they were doing. I think a lot of those might fall into the 50-plus lunch clubs, because of the vulnerability of those groups they could not meet anymore. Some of them just stopped all together or just left it to online sessions to stay in touch, but other ones adapted to go and reach, and provide some food parcels to groups. So there is a variety.” (Third sector respondent)

It was shared that Women Connect First, one of the organisations working to provide food parcels in Butetown over the lockdown, also received informal referrals through word of mouth from neighbours and people involved in other programmes about elderly individuals from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who were unable to make use of the Wales shielding boxes and unwilling to reach out to other organisations because they did not want to give information out. This became a target group for meal deliveries, as described by one third sector respondent:

“We had to break those barriers to get in touch with them, and find volunteers that would be suitable to go and deliver foods, build that kind of trust with them, and check up with them.

Now what we have done is we cook ethnic food, and deliver freshly cooked food to these people on a daily basis around Cardiff. We will try to evolve our project as well to be able to reach everybody and make sure that people are eating healthy, because we know that even though we provide the boxes, some of them are ill or some suffer from arthritis and are not cooking regular meals. They are living off crackers and tea. So we have moved forward in providing hot meals.” (Third sector respondent)

One example of a new meal provider during the spring of the COVID-19 pandemic was a local school, Mary Immaculate High School, who used their facilities to prepare hot meals to elderly people or disabled who were shielding or not leaving their homes and who might struggle with meal preparation. Recipients were identified through the school’s partnership with Care & Repair Cardiff and the Vale,⁴⁶ a local charity that helps support older people to repair, adapt and maintain their homes. The school paid for ingredients and provided infrastructure to prepare the meals. The Dusty Forge pantry also partnered on this project, providing delivery services. Of note Mary Immaculate High School is one of the few schools in Cardiff with a private catering contract, with most schools otherwise using Cardiff Council’s Education Catering.

Other third sector organisations

FareShare Cymru, who supports many of the organisations described above, also had to change the ways they did things over the COVID-19 pandemic. These included taking on new members quickly and having to do kitchen and premises checks online. This was at the same time that they were seeing increased demand from their existing members.

Food retailers and local businesses

We also heard about various ways that food retailers and local businesses responded over the spring 2020. One council staff respondent shared the following in our workshop.

⁴⁶ <https://www.careandrepair.org.uk/en/your-area/care-repair-cardiff-and-vale/about/>

Key themes emerging on supporting food access in Cardiff

The desire and ability to act quickly, and consequences of this

The desire to act quickly was keenly felt by stakeholders given the concerns about rising need and the signs of this very early on in the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the first actions described above emerged from a wish of “just wanting to do something” (Third sector respondent). One respondent described the work by the Council in the start of the pandemic in the following way:

“Actually, I think those 10 days [at the end of March], people were just head down, “We’ve got to do something.” (Third sector respondent)

As we saw in the responses enacted over the spring and summer, some were described as “knee-jerk reactions”. However, the ability to act quickly was seen as a positive, for example, in contrast to the Council’s usual ways of working:

“I think sometimes councils can be very slow and risk adverse, but we could not afford to be in this situation...different departments and organisations within the same umbrella sometimes, and teams...they were really good. They just found ways through issues as soon as possible. People thought about things really quickly.” (Council staff respondent)

Reflecting on what they quickly put in place in the early days, some respondents felt they wouldn’t have done things differently, even with the benefit of hindsight:

“I suppose one of the extra things to add, particularly right at the beginning, was that it felt like a knee-jerk reaction. Actually it was the right reaction. We’re not living now, so eight months later, thinking, “If only we had done X,” simply because we couldn’t have done X. We did what we did, I think, out of what we saw at the time and learnt from it and have built on it instead of gone down a different path.” (Third sector respondent)

But as we saw in the above section on free school meal replacements, some actions, such as how free school meals replacements were delivered at first, were felt to require a different approach as the limitations of early “knee-jerk responses” were realised.

Importantly, the urgency of the situation felt by some stakeholders caused them to feel panicked in the early weeks of the pandemic. Though it caused them to act quickly, it was not without stress and anxiety, as reflected below:

“If I’m honest, it was panic. It was the unknown. It was almost crashing down together, so will we have enough food? The need will be absolutely huge. How will we deliver the model? What will we do? Will we get ill? The need to prioritise and then not knowing which one was the most important was what panicked us. I think that’s probably right to say, panicked us psychologically to begin with.” (Third sector respondent)

The confusion of the first weeks

Perhaps contributing to a sense of panic in the first weeks was that many stakeholders described being confused about what actions were being taken, by who, and who had responsibility. The confusion was compounded by people switching to at-home working, which inhibited communication. Some of the following quotes illustrate what these first weeks felt like to respondents:

"I've got to say those first few weeks of the pandemic were absolutely bloody chaos...we are local authorities. We are not agile workers...I was kind of left in charge. I was like, "Okie-doke. So I'm being told we all need to ship out by the end of tomorrow...and we're all homeworkers after that. Good luck, folks, if you don't have laptops." So it was hard work, I think, for everybody involved in the local authority. Those of us of a certain grade, we did get laptops, but it was very difficult for the rest, trying to use their own phones, trying to use blinking Gmail. It did all get sorted out in a few weeks....so it was hard going for all the partners....so communications were crap to start with, to be quite honest."
(Council staff respondent)

"[It was} kind of, 10 days until we'd got a response [from the Council] but that period seemed such a long period where I was like, "They're doing something and we don't know what they're doing and we're not linked up. What's happening here? After that, it was fine. There was really good communication and collaboration afterwards but I remember, in that week, just being like, "Come on, we need to share what everyone is doing." (Third sector respondent)

"[In the first weeks], the world and his wife were coming to us...I immediately contacted...the Council because for us, that was unsustainable. I immediately contacted the cabinet member for education and said, "Help. It's not we want to say no but I think we now need to have that coordinated approach that says, "You can't come to a food bank because if you do, we can't do this other bit."
(Third sector respondent)

Who was supporting people who were shielding and who should be shielding was another point of confusion:

"Very early at the beginning we started receiving lots of enquiries from community members, not only groups, about not being about shielding, people who were supposed to be shielding but had not received the letters...so there was a lot of confusion there and people wanting to know what was out there that they could receive, what support and where from." (Third sector respondent)

The importance of stakeholders playing a coordinating role

Both Food Cardiff and respondents from the Council highlighted the importance of coordination over the spring and summer, and both saw themselves as having key roles in facilitating this. It was felt that coordination was needed to connect people, businesses, and organisations who wanted to help with the people who needed help, to maximise the supply of food, donations, and people power, and ensure that there wasn't a duplication of effort. These feelings were reflected in the follow quotes:

“We had loads of offers of support and loads of people who we knew needed support, how do you match-make that?” (Third sector respondent)

“I know some groups that would usually get donations off of supermarkets had to find other ways of getting that food into the people that they were supporting, such as care homes etc. That is where we started helping out, in terms of the Council and other partners, trying to link people together, to help them to enhance what was already going on. If we knew people were local to each other we would put a rugby club in touch with a mosque, that is quite a good example.” (Council staff respondent)

New relationships and future impacts of these

Though pre-existing relationships were flagged as important, others highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic also brought groups together who had not worked together before, as shared in the following quotes:

“I could endlessly list some fantastic work that started happening. First of all, people linking up and starting to talk to each other, that possibly never talked to each other before. Adapting what they were doing... so it could be a local café that had not done volunteering before suddenly would talk to some volunteers and open a kitchen.” (Council staff respondent)

“Groups got together and set up their own network, regular meetings, strategies and it was brilliant to see.” (Council staff respondent)

Others felt that the pandemic would bring about even closer working, even if groups had been part of the Food Cardiff partnership before. For example, one third sector respondent who had been a part of the partnership shared:

“I think, looking to the future, I think we will be working more closely together. I could almost see a food hub arrangement if you like. We’re more than happy [to] work with anybody. It’s not that we want to be on our own. It’s just that that’s the way that it’s been up until now.” (Third sector respondent)

New ways of working and the need to establish new ways of responding to food needs

As reflected in our descriptions of the various new roles, new projects, and new ways of working that happened in response to the pandemic, it is clear that stakeholders involved in emergency and community food provision in Cardiff had to be incredibly adaptable and flexible over this time, though this was a major challenge:

“A lot of our work was face-to-face... obviously staff having to adapt as well, and...where we rely on volunteers for some of our services and staff...a lot of our staff and a lot of volunteers were shielding, so it was actually the staffing side of it...rather than just the food itself. It is actually the whole logistical side of it.” (Council staff respondent)

On reflecting on their work in food parcel distribution, one third sector respondent shared:

“It’s led to different ways of working, in other words, reacting to the need that COVID has brought about. We all talk about the new normal...In the warehouse for example, we would have 8 volunteers on a session or even up to 12. Now

we've had to do it differently. We can only have 6 because of what we know. Therefore that's then led to a different way of organising a particular area of the work. It hasn't expanded, it's changed." (Third sector respondent)

It was also shared that adaptations had to be made all the way through the spring and summer:

"We just had to keep adapting it as things changed really. Things like volunteers and when we had staff who were redeployed we had to move our services around to fit all those kinds of circumstances as well." (Council staff respondent)

Responsibility

Another theme that emerged from our interviews and workshop were questions about who should have had responsibility for different aspects of the food response during the pandemic and who was best placed to reach different groups of people. One feeling expressed by a couple of respondents was that in some areas of Cardiff, the council was not seen as the appropriate provider of a response because people would not want to engage with the Council:

"It's quite an interesting kind of power dynamic, isn't it, as to who hands out the voucher and where they're handed out from? And does the person feel comfortable there?... I've heard mixed reviews from the communities [about council hubs]. Some still see that it's not for them. So when we did the pandemic work, clearly, the Council hub wasn't the right place for Butetown. For example, there's a community centre there that's run by the local community. That was the main point of contact." (Council staff respondent)

"Sweeping statement: I would say multicultural areas have community networks already set up for themselves. Your traditional white poor areas, there is a little bit of an attitude of, "You need to do it for us." (Council staff respondent)

"Certainly from Cardiff Council, we know sometimes that people do not want to come to us because they think, "They will ask about my rents arrears. They will ask about this with my children. I am worried about this. I do not want to go to Cardiff Council." So it is really a question of trying to build up that trust with some of the organisations and with individuals as well, and making it clear that our money advice team is independent, that they will refer with consent, but ultimately they are there to help people get the help they need." (Council staff respondent)

"Traditionally we have always done all kinds of benefit take up campaigns for various things; we have put things out on social media, in with other letters, if you like, and that kind of information. But we still have a core of people that do not engage. So perhaps if we can utilise the links that some of the smaller organisations have with the community and say, "You know what, they will help you sort this out" or, "We can signpost you to other organisations if you do not want to go to the Council." (Council staff respondent)

Still others felt that it was critical that the Council play their role:

“My jigsaw piece is providing that emergency food with other things but I’m linked with somebody next door, their jigsaw piece, on the Council and they’ve done their bit. They’re not going to do my work and I’m not going to do their work, if that makes sense.” (Third sector respondent)

Others raised that the difficulty of having volunteers involved in food provision to vulnerable people, flagging the benefit of the Council working with the Public Health Dietetics team.

“There is also that assumption that the people putting the parcels together are aware of what those special dietary requirements might be...we were lucky we had those links (between public health and the Council) and we did work together. But it is not up to volunteers to decide what is appropriate and what is not appropriate with regards to a special diet or, “Can they have this? Can they not have that?” I think there is a lot of responsibility and onus on someone then to have that.” (Public sector employee)

Looking ahead

Participants shared that there are ways they worked before the pandemic that they are eager to return to. The move to online delivery of services was not felt to be an adequate replacement for face-to-face delivery, mostly because of the potential for digital exclusion. People have also missed in-person meeting, events, and community engagement workshops. While the focus on COVID-19 has been understandable, others flagged that there is a need to also return to the more general aims, for example, of the Food Cardiff partnership.

At the time of gathering this data, Wales was not in a national lockdown. It was unclear whether a new lockdown would be imposed, but trends in the infection rates suggested this might be imminent. When asked about their concerns looking ahead, our respondents felt that most people working in food provisioning expected the need for their service to increase because of the economic situation and the end of support packages and buffers put in place to date, such as protections from evictions. The need to connect people to support that could deal with underlying financial issues was identified as critical.

Stakeholder reflections on responses to insecure access to food over spring and summer 2020

Over the course of our interviews and workshop, various reflections were offered on how organisations, the Council, and the Welsh Government responded to concerns about rising food insecurity over this time. In addition to freely offered responses, we also used Padlets to gather responses to targeted questions, as outlined in our methods. Responses to these questions and participants reflections on the responses enacted in Cardiff over the spring and summer are outlined below.

Enablers of the food response over spring and summer 2020

Reflecting over the range of responses enacted over the spring and summer, our respondents highlighted some key factors that they thought enabled the actions taken:

- People power – in the form of redeployed staff and the number of volunteers that came forward from the community.
- Local intelligence – it was felt that the existence of community groups with “local intelligence” meant responses could reach people that would have otherwise have “fallen through the cracks”.
- Adaptability – the ability of community and volunteer groups to adapt in a fast paced and changing environment was highlighted as an enabler of the response.
- Partnership working – as already highlighted, both existing and new partnerships were seen as critical.
- Funding and infrastructure – it was flagged that funding was provided for additional costs, that warehouse space was donated to allow for food storage, and that organisations received food support from major retailers. The Cardiff Foodbank in particular flagged that they received more donations than they ever had before, both in terms of financial donations and food donations.

The importance of pre-existing relationships and benefit of working together

Elaborating on the importance of partnership working indicated in the bullet list above, various stakeholders talked about the influence of pre-existing relationships on the responses enacted over the spring and summer and how this enabled their response. Many of these existed because of the Food Cardiff partnership. It was felt that this partnership meant that a Covid-19 Food Response Group could quickly be established and allowed for greater coordination and clear roles to be delineated, as shared in the following quotes:

“Objectively, [if I] think about what would’ve happened if it wasn’t for the partnership in place, I think there would be a lot less coordination and there might be a bit more tension between groups, like between the local authority and the third sector and the grassroots.” (Third sector respondent)

“That taskforce that was set up right at the beginning was hugely helpful, the Food Cardiff one, because not only did it alleviate anxiety but you knew that 1) you weren’t duplicating what somebody else was doing, 2) the gap was identified and then a solution was found. Then we knew that what we were doing was alright. We didn’t have to expand into it.” (Third sector respondent)

Examples were shared about how pre-existing partnerships strengthened the responses that various groups put in place. The following examples were shared:

“I think our food parcels were better than the shielding food parcels because we took on board the advice of our dietary colleagues in the NHS, who also sit on the Food Cardiff partnership. So again, the benefit of the partnership.” (Council staff respondent)

“Because [the Cardiff Foodbank] had that partnership arrangement with the Council where they were doing home deliveries...for those medically shielding people, they provided food. For those that would need a food bank and voucher but couldn’t leave their home, they provided food. We gave them [food bank]

food for them to distribute on our behalf. That worked really, really well. They've got their centre, they deliver. They've got the proper safeguarding things in place and all of that." (Third sector respondent)

Interestingly, one council staff respondent felt that a formal partnership was not necessarily what led to groups working together, as reflected below:

"But whether you have a formal partnership or not, I think there are still those community connections and the link between the local authority and those community groups anyway." (Council staff respondent)

Barriers to enacting responses to concerns about food insecurity over spring and summer 2020

Though challenges have already been highlighted, some of the key barriers identified by our stakeholders to enacting a response were:

- Quickly changing information that made it difficult to plan and prepare a response.
- Need for safeguarding and Health & Safety checks – in particular, it was flagged that many informal groups and volunteers did not have these checks in place.
- Reliance on online communication – it was flagged that a lack of access to online communication meant that responses and communications did not reach some groups.
- Lack of personal protective equipment – particularly at the beginning of the pandemic, it was difficult for some groups to get a hold of masks and sanitizer.

Concerns about responses enacted over spring and summer

Shielding food boxes

The provision of food boxes for people who were shielding from the Welsh Government was clearly a concern for many of our stakeholders. This has already been highlighted through describing the confusion about provision for people who were shielding at the start of the pandemic, concerns about what was being provided in the Welsh food boxes in terms of nutrition quality and quantity and ability to meet cultural and dietary needs, and how Cardiff Council had to step in to provide alternative food boxes for people.

New groups engaged in food provision

Although not raised by many research participants, there were some concerns about new organisations getting involved in food provisioning over the pandemic. Some of these related to whether or not they had adequate Health & Safety protocols in place and also safeguarding protocols. Scepticism about their legitimacy was reflected in the following quote:

"Particularly through the COVID times, there have been lots and lots of local support, organisations or people out of their own kitchens, which has been fantastic, but we sometimes have been a bit concerned about who they are and whether it's legitimate, etc." (Third sector respondent)

Short-term nature of funding

In general, it seemed that people felt there was an abundance of food donations and funding available to support their projects and work over COVID-19, though for some programmes, this meant having to seek out multiple sources, as was the case for funding the summer school holiday programme. However, it was raised that much of the funding was only provided for the short-term, and it was unclear whether projects would continue to be supported into the future. This concern was also raised in Food Cardiff's Cardiff-wide city response report.⁴⁷

Food-focused nature of responses

Many people raised that over the course of the pandemic, there was a lack of focus on the underlying drivers of insufficient access to food. In part, this was due to how frontline services were less available over this time and the inability of organisations to offer the usual face-to-face advice and signposting that they usually do. The following quotes illustrate these concerns among our research participants and felt by their volunteers:

“That’s one of the continuing messages I guess through the whole pandemic is the support that volunteers want to give. Yes, they give food but the frustration that they can’t really do anything else.” (Third sector respondent)

“Also it is about having a bit of a holistic aim and wider view as well. You know, the concentration, and very rightly so, was on food and food poverty, but I think what would be good to do differently next time is to look at the bigger picture... But also, organisations working with people with substance misuse, gambling, alcohol consumption, etc., who were raising a lot of concerns. The same with the organisations who were providing advocacy type of services as well, they were very concerned that the services had gone down at a time when they should have been up.” (Third sector respondent)

Another concern was that even though food was provided, that it was not always of the best quality. Here, the focus on meeting caloric needs meant nutritional needs may have been overlooked:

“[It shouldn’t be] just food at any cost. We have got the right to good nutritious food and we need to make sure that we are actually meeting those nutritional requirements, particularly with COVID where we have seen huge inequalities in how it affects people based on their obesity levels and what their nutritional intake is like. I think we need to ensure that whatever response it is, is actually meeting the nutritional needs for the people rather than just filling them up.” (Public sector respondent)

Underserved areas and groups

As pre-existing partnerships were highlighted as so key to establishing responses to concerns about food access over this time, it was felt that it was harder to support and coordinate responses in some places than others. The Council and Food Cardiff felt quite

⁴⁷ Ibid.

confident in identifying anchor organisations and food response partners in some places, but in others, it was not always clear which community-based organisations could take lead roles.

“But in some other parts of Cardiff, such as Butetown, Splott, off the top of my head, Pengam...we have got lots and lots of great groups, but not necessarily one that would take a lead. So in terms of the anchor organisation network, we were having a bit of a headache in terms of some places, like Butetown, “Who do we link in with there?” We had a few ideas, like maybe speaking to housing associations, but what I found interesting, and really to get to the point, is Butetown organised itself. Many of these groups got together and set up their own network, regular meetings, strategies and it was brilliant to see. It obviously removed a headache from us. It meant we had just one way to communicate with all that activity going on in Butetown rather than several different areas that we have had to look at doing. So I did not necessarily see that in some other parts of Cardiff, but it was very interesting to see in Butetown.” (Council staff respondent)

“I think when we were envisioning it at the beginning, it was going to be quite simple to get a list of organisations per ward, they would be the point of contact, and we would link up. It was much harder to put things in boxes like that. For example, it was not necessarily ward level for some of the organisations, and a lot was more self-organising.” (Third sector respondent)

It was shared with us that many of the well-established community development organisations in Cardiff that acted as anchor organisations, such as ACE and SRCDC, were Communities First organisations⁴⁸ and located in the Southern Arc. These were also organisations that the Council and Food Cardiff already had working relationships with. We asked whether it was harder to identify anchor organisations outside of the Southern Arc, and it was felt that it was, however, it was also pointed out that mutual aid organisations were equally active in areas outside of the Southern Arc.

Along the same lines, it was flagged that some individuals and groups were harder to reach than others over the pandemic. When asked using a Mentimeter poll whether people going without food by not receiving help is a significant problem in Cardiff, participants did not strongly disagree with this statement, though they also did not strongly agree. It was felt that some groups may not have received adequate support over the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these were identified in the following quotes:

“I think it is still people who are most vulnerable who have been affected the most, and I think they fall through the net a bit on some occasions. We had people who had sensory incapacities, who use BSL communication, etc., who were missing out on a lot of information... they did not know what was happening. We also had engagement with people with learning disabilities as well, who really felt let down by not being able to access the information. Sometimes that relates to food as well, because they are not able to communicate in the same way.” (Third sector respondent)

⁴⁸ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Communities-First/Cluster-Maps>

“But we did find people that, for whatever reason, were just struggling to reach the outside world. It could have been to do with internet access or it could have been just that they were disconnected from their network of support.” (Council staff respondent)



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