



FOOD VULNERABILITY  
DURING

**COVID-19**



MAPPING LOCAL RESPONSES:  
MARCH TO AUGUST 2020

# Swansea Case Study

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## 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](mailto:foodvulnerabilitycovid19@sheffield.ac.uk).

### Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Swansea did not have a food poverty alliance or food partnership, though early conversations were happening among Swansea Council staff and community organisations about starting one. Swansea Council did not have dedicated resources for work related to food poverty, but food poverty fell under the Council's "Tackling Poverty" priority. Responses to food poverty included providing referrals to food banks from various departments across the Council, keeping a list of food banks and other free food projects updated on the Council website, and recently, administering a Food Poverty grant with Brexit preparedness funding from the Welsh Government.

Across Swansea, the Council had Local Area Coordinators who worked in neighbourhoods to support vulnerable people in accessing support where needed and helping them find solutions to challenges they were facing. This role included providing support to people using food banks. The Education team at the Council had an "opt out" rather than "opt in" approach to free school meal entitlements, reflecting their wish to ensure low-income families were accessing the help they were entitled to.

There was a mix of food banks in the Trussell Trust network and independent food banks operating. The Swansea Foodbank operated seven distribution centres before the pandemic, and there were approximately six independent food banks operating. In addition to food banks, a community fridge had recently started, and there was a long-standing "food share" project operating from Blaen-y-maes drop-in centre, which also redistributed surplus food. In addition to take-home food provision, Swansea had an active informal network of meal providers who served people who were vulnerably housed and/or isolated every day of the week.

Early in the pandemic, two main concerns were raised as signs that vulnerable people may not be able to access sufficient food over the pandemic. These were: the inability of frontline services like food banks and meal programmes to run due to the loss of volunteers; and insufficient supplies of food for food banks.

In response to these concerns, two major new initiatives were launched in Swansea.

One was the Swansea Together project, an initiative led by Matthew's House (a meal provider) but done in partnership with the Council, the Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS), local business and community groups, and other meal providers, resulted in the daily distribution of meals to people living in temporary accommodation around the city.

The second was the establishment of four food distribution centres by the Council. These housed purchased and donated food in community centres to ensure that food banks were able to maintain an adequate supply of food to distribute over the period from March to August 2020. In addition, when needed in emergency, the Council also provided "crisis packs" for individuals and families facing acute insufficient access to food and who were unable to go to the food bank.

Another important source of food support for food banks in Swansea was from the SCVS, who funded FareShare Cymru memberships for seven (rising to 12) food banks and other food aid providers from April 2020.

Partly attributed to the support from the Council, most food banks remained open over March to September and very few switched to delivery services. They did, however, switch to “doorstep collection”, which impacted the other social services and signposting services they provide.

In addition to these city-wide initiatives, the emphasis was on local action in Swansea. Whether from local businesses, community groups, or neighbour-to-neighbour, it was felt that much of the food response happened at the local level, enabling people to access groceries if isolating and other forms of food help as needed. The outpouring of support from the public and businesses was noted and evident from the number of people recruited for volunteering by the Swansea Council for Voluntary Service over this time.

Key reflections made by our respondents were how well groups from across different sectors worked together; the speed with which Swansea Together and council food distribution hubs were established; and the need to return to having spaces (food bank and drop-in meal programmes and cafés) where people accessing food provisioning services could once again benefit from the social and health services offered in these places. The Swansea Food Poverty Network has now also been established and is meeting monthly, bringing together the various stakeholders that worked on food poverty responses in Swansea over the pandemic.

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

A number of actors and activities provided a response to food insecurity in Swansea 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

Swansea Council's approach to food poverty prior to the pandemic came under their wider "Tackling Poverty" strategy. Their more direct responses to food poverty included providing referrals to food banks from various departments across the Council and keeping a list of food banks and other free food projects updated on the Council website. In 2019-20, they also administered a Food Poverty grant, which was funded by Welsh Government and available for organisations in preparedness for Brexit. Across Swansea, the Council also had 'Local Area Coordinators' who worked in neighbourhoods to help vulnerable people access support and find solutions to challenges they were facing. This role included providing support to people using food banks. The education team at the Council had an "opt out" rather than "opt in" approach to free school meal entitlements, reflecting their wish to ensure low-income families were accessing the help they were entitled to.

A range of food responses were provided by organisations in the third sector. There was a mix of food banks in the Trussell Trust network and independent food banks operating. The Swansea Foodbank operated seven distribution centres before the pandemic, and there were approximately six independent food banks. In addition to food banks, a community fridge had recently started, and there was a long-standing "food share" project operating from Blaen-y-maes drop-in centre, which distributed surplus food. In addition to take-home food provision, Swansea had an active informal network of meal providers who served people who were vulnerably housed and/or isolated every day of the week. Of particular note for this study is Matthew's House, which ran a "Pay-as-you-feel" meal programme accessed by a range of people including those who were vulnerably housed, such as living in temporary accommodation, B&Bs, hostels, rough sleepers, people living in poverty (particularly people experiencing loneliness and social isolation), and sex workers. On three days a week, chosen to complement when meal programmes were running from other locations, Matthew's House served between 250-350 three-course meals each day.

Other actors included the Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS) who have been a source of support for third sector organisations, providing information and advice, and advocating on behalf of the sector. They became involved in campaigning on ending holiday hunger and fed into the development of the School Holiday Enrichment Programme.<sup>1</sup> In addition, they held and distributed food parcels on behalf of the Swansea Foodbank. The Nutrition and Dietetic team from the Swansea Health Board provided training to staff from the SCVS through their Nutrition Skills for Life programme and worked with them on food and nutrition projects.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wlga.wales/food-and-fun-school-holiday-enrichment-programme>

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

### Swansea Together

One of the first responses to concerns about rising food insecurity in Swansea during the pandemic was the Swansea Together project, led by Matthew's House. Matthew's House initiated this project as, although in the early days of the pandemic they continued to provide meals via a takeaway service, their clients were expressing significant concerns about where they could access food on other days of the week since other meal providers were not operating. In response, Matthew's House organised a meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March to bring together other meal providers, representatives from the Council, SCVS, an NHS homeless outreach nurse, and other organisations involved in supporting people who are homeless. Within days, the devised programme was up and running, delivering hot meals to people in temporary accommodation. Meals were prepared in five venues across Swansea (including Matthew's House, the catering company Goggi's a community interest company, The Shared Plate, the Mecca Bingo Hall and the Swansea City AFC and Community Trust).<sup>2</sup> The programme ran from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March through to August and expanded over this time to provide meals to a wider range of people who were identified through referrals. Over 12 April 2020 to the end of August, the Swansea Together campaign supplied a total of 23,185 meals.<sup>3</sup> The delivery of meals was slowly phased out over the last month, replaced by takeaway pick-up instead.

### Swansea Council

As well as their participation in the Swansea Together programme, the Council undertook a number of actions to support people with food access. A key part of this was the establishment of four food distribution hubs, primarily set up to support food banks. The hubs, located in community centres, became a storage point for food purchased by the Council from local suppliers as well as donations from businesses. This food was then distributed to food banks, the Swansea Together project and the range of other community food responses operating at a local level. The rationale for this approach was to firstly provide a 'Covid safe' way for organisation to access food and to provide community organisations with a secure and reliable source of food. The Council also started distributing food directly to people in need from the hubs if they were experiencing an acute emergency where referral to a food bank would not be appropriate given the urgency of their situation. The Council also allowed food banks and other food aid projects to repurpose funding they had been awarded for Brexit preparedness towards the COVID-19 response instead.

In addition, the Council set up a Food Administration Team, made up of approximately 14 redeployed council staff from a variety of departments. The team actioned support for people requiring food related support, who were referred to the team from the Council's support helpline. The support provided depended on the persons situation: people who had money but were unable to go out were referred to the SCVS or Local Area Coordinator (see below) for help with shopping, people who were facing financial difficulties were referred to a food bank or received a crisis food parcel from the aforementioned hub if necessary; people who

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.goggiscuisine.co.uk/>, <https://www.thesharedplate.co.uk/about>

<sup>3</sup> Swansea Council. Coronavirus Support Analysis. Provided by research participant.

were shielding were signposted the national Welsh Government food parcel scheme (which from June was delivered by the Council). The Council's Helpline, Food Administration Team, and food distribution centres all ran through to the end of the shielding scheme in Wales (mid-August).

The Council also expanded the Local Area Coordinators team, increasing from 16 Local Area Coordinators to 38 and covering all geographic areas of Swansea. Local Area Coordinators provided help with shopping, were involved in local volunteer coordination, continued to provide support to local food banks, and engaged in outreach so that community members would know what help was available. They also played a coordination role, especially where neighbourhood and community groups were already active in responding.

The nature of replacements for free school meals evolved over the spring. Initially, cold lunches were offered, requiring families to collect these from schools. Due to concerns about social distancing and low take up, this changed to the provision of weekly shopping bag for families to pick up on Mondays, enabling them to prepare food themselves at home for the week. This food bag system was only in place for a short period of time, as the Council then started providing a cash replacement instead, depositing money directly into parents'/guardians' bank accounts. A number of organisations in Swansea also successfully lobbied the Home Office to allow the free school meal allowance to go onto Aspen Cards to support families of asylum seekers and refugees.<sup>4</sup>

Other actions by the Council were support for the establishment of a Food Poverty Network, supporting increased awareness and applications to the Welsh Discretionary Assistance Fund and the provision of a hospital discharge service, providing hot meal deliveries for people being discharged from hospital.

## SCVS

SCVS played a key role in the recruitment of volunteers over the spring and summer, who were then allocated to the various responses happening across Swansea, including the Swansea Together programme. SCVS was also an important source of funding for organisations. They covered the membership fees of FareShare for 12 organisations, allowing them to receive food every week over April 2020 to March 2021. They also used this funding to provide food parcels themselves to people who could not physically go out to shop, had no means of doing an online shop and/or had no financial resources to purchase food temporarily.

## Food banks

The Swansea Foodbank closed about half of their distribution centres. Those that remained open switched to a model where food parcels were distributed from the doorstep of the centre. This was in stark contrast to pre-pandemic when centres operated alongside a cafe and provided a wider range of support. Use of the food bank was high through April and May, but stabilised in the following months. Independent food banks variously adapted their services, with some continuing to operate collection but with social distancing measures in place and possibly requiring pre-booking, and others offering delivery. An additional four

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get>

independent food banks started operating over the course of the pandemic.

### Other responses

An existing 'foodshare' project and the Swansea community fridge adapted their services as was necessary, such as providing parcels for collection outside of the venue and allowing community volunteers to collect parcels on peoples behalf. Neighborhood responses, often informal street level support, was also a key source of support for people and local food businesses in Swansea adapted quickly to lockdown conditions, offering takeaway and delivery services within two weeks of the start of lockdown.

## 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.

The following case study draws from the following data sources:

- One interview with one person and one interview with two people conducted with representatives from Swansea Council, Swansea Council for Voluntary Service, and Matthew's House.
- One workshop conducted with 7 participants of whom:
  - 3 worked for Swansea Council (one previously interviewed)
  - 4 worked or volunteered with third sector organisations or voluntary groups (one previously interviewed)

In addition to these research participants a further 36 people including from the Council, food aid projects and other third sector organisations were suggested as potential participants by initial interviewees, but did not do so, as shown in table 1. The Swansea Health Board Dietetics Team were not initially suggested to be invited, however they were invited to feed into the research later and subsequently provided data by email correspondence.

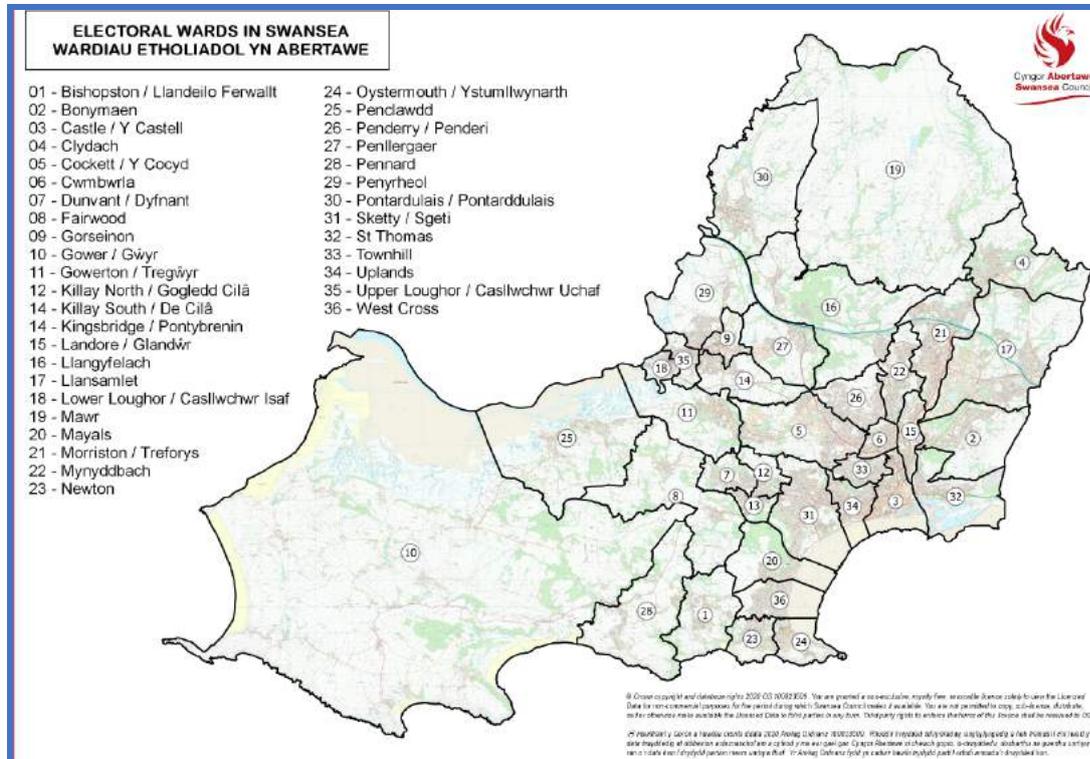
In addition to primary research data collected through the interviews and workshop, desk-based research was conducted to identify further sources of information about activities and groups active in responding to food insecurity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sources such as project reports and action plans were also shared by research participants. 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 Swansea

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. Swansea was selected due to the absence of a Food Power network member and being predominantly urban. The change in claimant rate over January to July 2020 was 79%.

Swansea is the second largest city in Wales and has a population of about 247,000 people, of whom about 35,720 are 70 years of age or older.<sup>5</sup> There are 36 electoral wards, as shown below.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1: Electoral wards in Swansea.



Source: <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/wardmaps>

According to Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation data from 2019, of the 148 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in Swansea, 17 (11.5%) were among the 10% most deprived areas in Wales, which is a proportion that is above the average.<sup>7</sup> However, at the local authority level, Swansea has a lower proportion of LSOA among most deprived than seven other local authorities in Wales, including Cardiff (18.2% of LSOA among most deprived).

Before the pandemic, the Claimant Rate in Swansea was 3.3% in January 2020, but this rose to 5.9% in July 2020. It was shared by some of our respondents that according to the Department for Work and Pensions, Swansea fared better economically than other areas in Wales, and our respondents attributed this to Swansea having some major employers, such as Amazon, who took on new workers over the pandemic.

Data reported by the Trussell Trust showed a 37% increase in the number of food parcels distributed during 1st April 2020 - 30th September 2020 compared to the same time period last year.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/wardmaps>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/wimd2019>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/mid-year-stats/>

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

### Swansea Council

#### *Addressing poverty*

The Council has a Swansea Poverty Partnership Forum, facilitated by their Tackling Poverty Service. The group met quarterly and brought together organisational stakeholders to “align resources and develop collaborative working on the tackling poverty agenda.”<sup>9</sup>

In 2017, the Council published a “Tackling Poverty Strategy”, outlining a three-year plan over 2017-2020.<sup>10</sup> Among the many actions outlined in the strategy, there was the goal to continue to deliver advice services for council tax and housing benefit entitlements and to continue to provide support and advice to council tenancy in arrears and with financial difficulties; and a plan to newly target services around income maximisation. The plan also included expanded Local Area Coordination approaches (described below).

Support workers from the Council also may have helped people make applications to the Welsh Government’s Discretionary Assistance Fund.

It was highlighted that food fell under the Tackling Poverty remit, though without dedicated resource:

“We don’t have a dedicated team looking at food poverty within the Council... We have done in the past, we don’t at the moment. Food poverty does fall under the tackling poverty priority, but we don’t have a dedicated resource looking at food. Obviously, when COVID - hit, access to food became a priority for Swansea Council.” (Council staff respondent)

#### *Local Area Coordinators*

The Council has had Local Area Coordinators that work across the city in wards offering help and support to community members.<sup>11</sup> They support older people, disabled people, people with mental health problems, and their families and carers. Their work involves supporting people to access information, being a listening ear and supporting people to make choices and feel more in control, and helping find ways for people to do the things they need or want to do, develop and use personal and local networks, and access support and services where required. They are able to visit people in their homes, and people who are isolated are a key target group.

Food banks have been one place where Local Area Coordinators work. In a case study of the role of local area coordinators, shared in the Council’s Poverty Strategy, a Local Area Coordinator met someone in a food bank and helped him to identify useful resources for

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/povertypartnershipforum>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/povertystrategy>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/localareacoordination>

addressing his housing and transportation issues.<sup>12</sup> One of our respondents also shared their experience of working as a Local Area Coordinator in a food bank:

“There have been frequent occasions at Gorseinon Foodbank where I’ve been in attendance and somebody can’t walk home. They’ve managed to get down on crutches or off a bus and managed to make the walk and they’ve got the food parcel. They just can’t carry it home because there are three big bags of tins. Somebody there, either one of the volunteers or on occasion I’ve transported people back to their house.

It’s often on that drive home back to their house with the food parcels that there might be a bit more of a conversation around the circumstances that have arisen to need them to go to the food bank. It’s whenever those conversations start, we can look at ways to resolve that in the long term.” (Council staff respondent)

### *School food provision*

Families eligible for free school meals in Swansea apply through the Council’s website and most schools also had breakfast clubs.<sup>13</sup> The Council’s education department had the following approaches to school provision and working with schools, as described by one council staff respondent. This quote also suggests that schools were also involved in food parcel provision to families in need at times:

“Prior to COVID pupils could get entitlement for free school meals. What we worked with our benefits team on is that it would be an opt out rather than an opt in. If parents are applying for Council Tax benefit or anything else through the Council, unless they’d checked a box to say they didn’t want to be eligible for free school meals, we’d automatically give the child that entitlement.

As well as that, our schools work well on admission promoting free school meals, putting leaflets out to everybody that’s applying to try and get that entitlement up as high as they can. Obviously, the point of that is to get a hot meal in the child while they’re at school. This wouldn’t have covered at the time then holidays, if somebody was off ill or whatever.

All bar one of our primary schools runs the free breakfast club as well. I think the intention of that was more looking at areas of poverty and things like that. I think it’s developed into becoming more of a childcare type approach in a lot of cases. We offer that free food there...

We also supported schools administratively with the free school milk. All children then in the infant’s section had an entitlement to a milk allowance every day. With schools as well, a lot of them do have links with Asda, Tesco and the like. I know they do work with families themselves that are the more needy, the supermarkets and they do get food through the school that they’ll hand out to parents.” (Council staff respondent)

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/povertystrategy>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals>

The Council was also involved in school holiday provision through the Welsh Summer Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP). It ran for the first time in Swansea in 2019, and the Council was intending to run it again in 2020.

### *Meals on Wheels*

The Council has not had their own or a contracted Meals on Wheels service. Our respondents did not know of any council services aimed at addressing potential barriers to physical access to food for older people or people with disabilities before the pandemic.

### *Work with food banks and food poverty organisations in Swansea*

In late 2019/early 2020, the Swansea Council's Tackling Poverty Section administered a Welsh Government grant scheme intended to help organisations prepare for the potential impacts of Brexit on their food supplies and demand. In Swansea, this fund was called the Food Poverty Grant and about £111,000 was available for organisations to apply for. The Council distributed these funds to food banks and other organisations involved in food poverty work in Swansea. This included funding for the launch of Swansea Community Fridge (see below).

The Council was a referral agent for food banks. Requests for help with food access due to a lack of money across the Council were likely met with a referral to a food bank, as reflected in the following quote:

“The Council didn't provide food. Frontline council staff would have made a referral to a food bank. Most food banks in Swansea require a referral, so support workers can make referrals for people, and there are a number of food banks that will take self-referrals. For example, in our contact centre in our main civic building, the team there would have (pre-COVID), have been able to give food bank vouchers. That's if someone is saying, “I don't have the money to buy food,” then a food bank referral can be made. Unfortunately, that is the situation. What we need is people to have enough money to buy food and not have to have food banks.” (Council staff respondent)

The Council kept an up-to-date list of food banks on their webpage, providing details on opening hours, referral requirements, and contact information.<sup>14</sup>

### *Swansea Council for Voluntary Service*

The Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS) is an umbrella organisation for the third sector in Swansea. It is a source of support for third sector organisations, providing information and advice, and also advocating on behalf of the sector.<sup>15</sup> It is also involved in direct project provision for the Swansea community in various ways. Their work specifically related to food poverty is described below.

The SCVS has been a part of the Swansea Poverty Partnership Forum and in 2013, became involved in campaigning on ending holiday hunger. They fed into the development of the

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/foodbanks>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.scvs.org.uk/>

SHEP and a cross-parliamentary review on holiday hunger. In addition, they held and distributed food parcels on behalf of the Swansea Foodbank:

“We’ve always had an active part in hunger and food poverty for the last decade. To the point where in 2015 Swansea CVS started providing its own food parcels because as a CVC we’re quite unusual. We have a lot of frontline projects within our CVC. Those frontline staff were seeing those food poverty needs as well. In partnership with the Trussell Trust, we started collecting food parcels. We always had a supply in the office for the projects to be able to access and take out to families they were working with.” (Third sector respondent)

### Swansea Bay University Health Board Nutrition and Dietetic Service

In Wales, public health falls under Health Boards, not local authorities. We received written input from a representative of the Nutrition and Dietetic team about how they supported responses to concerns about food access over the pandemic. Before the pandemic, it was shared that they had provided training to staff from the SCVS through their Nutrition Skills for Life programme and worked with them on food and nutrition projects:

“We often work together as partners on food and nutrition projects therefore links with SCVS has been well-established and communication channels open [before the pandemic]” (Public Sector employee – Written submission)

### Food banks and other food parcel providers

Swansea has many food banks in the Trussell Trust network and independent food banks. They were described as providing both food parcels as well as social support before the pandemic:

“In terms of the food banks, the food banks that I’ve attended in Swansea are always more than just food. The one in Gorseinon, which is a Trussell Trust one that I’ve been going to for about five years now, has got a café there. It’s a place for people to socialise, which is often as important as the food. The volunteers then can strike up conversations. They’ll be aware of the regular people who come in. They’ll be aware if something has gone worse in people’s lives. Then they’ll help them address that...” (Council staff respondent)

### Swansea Foodbank

Swansea Foodbank is part of the Trussell Trust network and has eight distribution centres across the city. In addition to offering food parcels from their distribution centres, they also have provided food parcels for organisations to be available for their clients. These included SCVS, as mentioned, as well as health visitors and the Council. This was so clients could be provided with food parcels upon these organisations meeting with them or in emergencies when food banks were not open.

### Independent food parcel providers

Before the pandemic, it was shared that there were six independent food banks operating. Below, we provide some details of two independent food banks.

### *Swansea East Side food bank*

One example of an independent food bank operating in Swansea is Swansea East Side Food Bank. They have been operating since 2014 and accept self-referrals as well as referrals from organisations. Before COVID, they had already felt their food bank project had reached its limits, as shared below:

“We know our patch, I think, well enough to take self-referrals, but we don’t advertise it. Before COVID we got to a point where we were thinking this has grown to a point now where it’s actually blocking the other things I want to do. We’re based in a little mission hall sort of chapel. It was just taking up more and more space.” (Third sector respondent)

In addition to providing food, before the pandemic, they partnered with Shelter Cymru, Mind Cymru, and the University Law Clinic, to offer debt advice, mental health support, and legal advice from their food bank, respectively.

The Swansea East Side food bank also provided “emergency food boxes” to the Red Cross local office and Police Community Support Officers.

### *Swansea Mosque Foodbank*

From our desk-based research, we learned about the Swansea Mosque Foodbank, which began operating in January 2015.<sup>16</sup> They have required a referral voucher from social service agencies for people to access food. They have provided pre-packed boxes of food items intended to last recipients for two weeks.

### *Community pantry or community fridge projects*

#### *Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-in Centre’s Foodshare*

The Blaen-Y-Maes drop in centre opened in 2012 and runs a food sharing project, described variously as a food co-op, “foodshare”, or food hub. From our desk-based research, we gathered they distribute surplus food provided from Lidl and Marks and Spencer. They have not operated a referral system, and it did not appear that membership was required.

#### *Swansea Community Fridge*

The Swansea Community Fridge is a project run by the housing charity Goleudy in Swansea.<sup>17</sup> The project received support from the Council’s Food Poverty grant to launch in 2020. Their mission is to distribute fresh food that would otherwise go to waste for free to the community. The project collects food from retail businesses, restaurants, and individuals. There is no membership fee to access the fridge, nor eligibility criteria to access the food. People are instructed to only take what they need.

### *Meal providers*

Our project stakeholders highlighted that there was a lot of food provision available to people who were vulnerably housed in Swansea before the pandemic. Hot meals were available seven days a week from different agencies. Below, we describe the work of two of these projects.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.swanseamosque.org/foodbank>

<sup>17</sup> <https://goleudy.org/>

### *Matthew's House*

Matthew's House began operating a meal programme, Matt's Café, in March 2017. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was shared with us that Matthew's House was running what they called "outreach days" on three days of the week, specifically chosen to complement when meal programmes were running from other locations. This involved serving meals to people from 10am to 3pm. Usually around 250 three-course meals were served in a day to 150 to 180 people, but this could have been up to 350 meals. About 40 people would be served at a time. The meal programme ran on a "Pay-as-you-feel" basis with no expectation that everyone will be able to pay. The demographic of people who would come for the meal programme was diverse, including people who were vulnerably housed, such as people living in temporary accommodation, B&Bs, hostels, rough sleepers, people living in poverty (particularly people experiencing loneliness and social isolation), and sex workers.

Matt's Café was run mostly by volunteers, over 100, referred to by one third sector respondent as their "army of volunteers". It had only two staff members. The food that made up their meals was mostly "intercepted food waste" (Third sector respondent), which they collected from supermarkets around Swansea. Before the pandemic, they were collecting food 26 times per week.

In addition to offering meals, they provided what they referred to as their "dignity packs", which included sanitary and hygiene items. They also had a shower that rough sleepers could use and a laundry service. People were welcome to stay and 'hang out' in the café, having a cup of tea, chatting with volunteers, or reading a paper.

They also used their food resources to support other organisations. For example, they would provide meals for asylum-seeker support groups or Women's Aid.

### *Zac's Place*

Our desk-based research identified Zac's Place is an urban mission church and outreach for people who are poor and marginalized, particularly people who are vulnerably housed.<sup>18</sup> Before the pandemic, they provided many services for people from their centre, including meal provision alongside other health and social services. This included a daily breakfast provision for rough sleepers from 7.30 a.m. to 9 a.m. On their website, it was reported that about 25 people would receive breakfast on a typical morning.<sup>19</sup> They also ran a soup kitchen on Thursday evenings, providing up to 45 meals each session.

### *Other meal providers*

Other meal programmes operating across the city targeted people vulnerable to social isolation. Swansea University Discovery Student Project ran a large community meal programme. The Older People's Information Centre (TOPIC) provided meals to older people who found it difficult to provide themselves with adequate food. The Swansea Carers Centre provided support and meals to people with dementia. Faith groups and the Christ Well Café were other types of organisations running community meals for people facing inadequate food access.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.zacsplace.org/about-us/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.zacsplace.org/zacs-place-3/supporting-those-in-crisis/>

## Early signs of food access issues in COVID-19 pandemic

One council staff member reached out to food banks in mid-March to gather their key concerns. Three areas of concern were identified:

“Number one was supply of food. [Two], expecting or anticipating a potential increase in demand because of what was happening with the pandemic. [And three] volunteers, many of which are vulnerable themselves. Food banks rely on volunteers, the ability to stay open and keep doing what they do. For me, I think those were the three areas of concern.” (Council staff respondent)

These were echoed by our respondents who worked in food banks, as shared below:

“I think pretty much instantly we had about three times as many people come in for food [to our food bank]. There were definitely a few weeks where we were holding our breath and thinking, how is this going to work? Just straightaway our donations dropped right off because our donations come from often groups of people who meet together either in workplaces, churches or social groups. Obviously, those groups weren't meeting. Even if people did want to donate, they couldn't get the type of food we wanted or we needed from supermarkets, like tins of tomatoes. There were definitely a few weeks where our stocks depleted incredibly rapidly.” (Third sector respondent)

An independent food bank also described the increase in need for their services, not only from people who were financially vulnerable, but from people just unable to access food:

“Yes, we saw the spike [in early demand]. We had people ringing up because they just weren't able to get food. They said, “We can buy it from you.” We said, “We just can't handle that, I'm sorry. We can't account for it. We're a charity, we're not a marketing business.” (Third sector respondent)

Meal programmes having to close was another key indicator that people would not be able to access their usual sources of food in Swansea. As shared, this was mostly due to a dramatic fall in volunteer capacity:

“We had 90 volunteers roughly. Overnight, over a week, we lost about 50, 60. And you could probably say that to every other outreach [was affected in the same way]. Because of the age of volunteers often, and the vulnerabilities of volunteers... in general, most volunteer groups lost about 70% of their workforce. And I know another group who had 11 volunteers, so when you lose 70% of them, they had 3 left, and they had to close.” (Third sector respondent)

In turn, these closures translated to concern about where the usual patrons of these meal services would be able to access food. One third sector respondent shared that in the early days of the pandemic, he was seeing “panic” in the eyes of people they had been serving over the past years, as shared in the following quote:

“It was just mass worry. People were like, “Where am I going to eat tomorrow? What am I going to eat now?” And we didn't plan for this. Nobody planned for it, did they?... it was panic, mass panic in the eyes of people we had been looking after for the last 12, 24, 36 months. And when people are coming to you, going,

“What do we do?” and they are people you already look after, people you already support...” (Third sector respondent)

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

Swansea Together (a city-wide partnership with Matthew’s House, Swansea Council, Swansea Council for Voluntary Service, and others)

One of the first responses to concerns about rising food insecurity in Swansea during the pandemic was the Swansea Together project. Because it featured so prominently in our data collection, it was one of the first food-based responses set up in Swansea, and involved numerous actors, we describe it here.

Swansea Together was initiated very early in the pandemic by Matthew’s House in response to seeing people who were vulnerably housed being unable to access usual daily meal provision offered across the city. In March, Matthew’s House initiated a takeaway service instead of closing, but as above, their patrons were coming to them saying that did not know if or where they would be able to get a meal the following day.

In response, Matthew’s House organised a meeting very early (18<sup>th</sup> March), bringing together their network of people and organisations who they worked in coordination with across the city. This included other meal providers, representatives from the Council, SCVS, an NHS homeless outreach nurse, and other organisations involved in supporting people who are homeless, such as Crisis. The aim was to provide a meal service to ensure that people who are vulnerably housed, many of whom had been moved off the streets and put into temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfasts and hostels, were still able to have regular access meals.

Within days, the programme was up and running, delivering hot meals to people in temporary accommodation:

“I think he called that meeting on 18th March, by the Friday the 20th, we’d put the call out for COVID volunteers, and I’m pretty sure the first volunteers were allocated and the first lot of meals were being prepped on week beginning 23rd March.” (Third sector respondent)

Matthew’s House led the project, coordinating the daily delivery of meals around the city. There were significant challenges to ensuring meals could reach people, as shared in the following quote:

“We didn’t cook every day of the week, but we logistically managed and delivered every day. It was a logistical nightmare... We had to gain the trust and confidence of housing agencies, to get the details of where people are staying, who is staying where. And when you work with vulnerable people, there are a lot of things where they’ve been kicked out of this B&B and now, they’re moving into this one. So, every single day, we had to be ready between 6:00pm and 7:00pm to get the distribution lists for when the volunteers turned up at 7:00am the next morning to start the cooking, to know where, how much, when. And you would have some B&Bs, one day there would be 26 people in there, the next day there

would be 13. And there were two fires during the first four months, so B&Bs, 3:00am, you'd have 15 people being put somewhere else. So, they were mad days..." (Third sector respondent)

The project delivered about 150 meals a day. Matthew's House did about 30-40% of the cooking and the remaining meal preparation happened in four other venues across the city.<sup>20</sup> These included Goggi's (a catering company in Swansea) and The Shared Plate (a community interest company that does catering and runs a community café in Swansea).<sup>21</sup> Other venues included the Mecca Bingo Hall, which provided its facilities and food to prepare meals, and the Swansea City AFC and Community Trust. The Swansea City AFC's head chef and catering team cooked about 180 meals in the Liberty Stadium on Saturdays, which were then packed and distributed by the Swansea Together team.

In addition to the logistics of delivering food, another challenge was where to receive and store food donations and surplus food from supermarkets. Due to potential COVID-19 transmission from food packages and loss of volunteer force to continue to pick up surplus food, Matthew's House stopped picking up surplus food from supermarkets at this time:

"One of the decisions I made in early days was, "I don't know where that food is coming from." I wasn't happy with food coming into the building, that 400 panic-buyers had picked up and put back, walked past. And I couldn't keep it safe. We also lost about 70% of our collectors as well, so we couldn't keep up with that collection, even if it was there and it was safe, straightaway." (Third sector respondent)

Described later below, the Council set up food distribution hubs during the pandemic. This idea was described as first coming from Matthew's House, since they needed safe places to store food:

"I coordinated with the Council, I said, "I need these centres all over the city, donation hubs." So, the public can donate food. And [the Council] did, they opened four of them... So, when Costa shut down, they delivered everything there. And then what happened was I'd call them and go, "What have you got? I need this, this and this," and then the Council drivers would drop a van of all donations down. We came up with an idea of we needed rotational areas. Obviously guidance [from Public Health Wales] is the bug is 72 hours. So, if we could sit food for 72 hours and have seven stations in that community centre, a big, huge hall, then you know that, on a Thursday, I can take the Monday pile and it's free and sanitised, self-sanitised, and there has been no-one touching it." (Third sector respondent)

In addition to setting up these food distribution hubs, the Council was involved in the Swansea Together campaign through providing council staff and vans, re-deployed from other jobs, to deliver meals. They did this for about five months from March 23<sup>rd</sup>. They also provided some funding from their Food Poverty Fund.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/57273/4000-hot-meals-provided-for-vulnerable-in-Swansea>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.goggiscuisine.co.uk/>, <https://www.thesharedplate.co.uk/about>

Other funding sources for Matthew’s House for this project were other charities that were not continuing to operate their usual programmes. SVSC also provided funding for them to have a FareShare membership to enable them to receive food weekly from April through to March 2021 (described later below).

The programme ran from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March through to August and expanded over this time to also provide meals to people that were vulnerable for other reasons, not just those who were homeless or precariously housed. These were people identified through referrals, the helpline or local authority. They also provided meals to three women’s refuges.

Over 12 April 2020 to the end of August, the Swansea Together campaign supplied a total of 23,185 meals.<sup>22</sup> The delivery of meals was slowly phased out over the last month, replaced by takeaway pick-up instead. In part, this was because groups that had been a part of the project delivery, such as the Swansea City Football Club and council staff, were returning to their usual roles. Similarly, the bingo hall that had been used as a site for food preparation was re-opening. Takeaway also became possible because many of the sites that had been shut were re-opening. At the time of our interview (November 2020), the Swansea Together project was operating a seven-day-a-week takeaway service from 11.30-1pm in four locations across the city (Matthew’s House, St. Mary’s Church, Zac’s Place, and i58 (City Church)), serving about 80-100 people a day. As shown in Figure 2, this provision was targeted towards people who are vulnerably housed and in need of food.

Figure 2: Takeaway food provision locations across Swansea over autumn 2020.

**EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION**  
FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE VULNERABLY HOUSED

**Monday**  
Matt's Cafe (Matthew's House),  
82 High St, SA1 1LW

**Takeaway service**  
11.30am - 1.00pm  
Every Day!

**Tuesday**  
Matt's Cafe (Matthew's House),  
82 High St, SA1 1LW

**Wednesday**  
St. Mary's Church,  
St. Mary's Square SA1 3LP

**Thursday**  
Zac's Place, George Street, SA1 4HH

**Friday**  
Zac's Place, George Street, SA1 4HH

**Saturday**  
i58 (City Church),  
Dyfatty Street, SA1 1QQ

**Sunday**  
Matt's Cafe (Matthew's House),  
82 High St, SA1 1LW

We are trying our best to keep you safe and well fed during the current crisis. If you have any symptoms of coronavirus do not visit any venue. Message us for support in another way. Only use this provision if you are in need. Social distancing and sanitising measures are in place at each venue. You must stick to these rules. Please respect each venue and their volunteers. Help us to keep everyone (including you) as safe as possible.

For more information email friends@matthewshouse.org.uk or message 07708 115903

Swansea Together MATTHEW'S HOUSE

<sup>22</sup> Internal document shared by participant.

### Swansea Council

It was felt that the early meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March with Matthew's House attended by council staff was critical for putting food access at the fore of council activities during the pandemic, as expressed below:

"I attended that meeting. When I came back to colleagues, it really helped raise food as a priority for the Council. That was relayed to the cabinet member and Swansea Council then made access to food a priority for the pandemic." (Council staff respondent)

### Support for food banks

One of the first actions of the Council in support of food banks was to allow food banks to use the funding they had previously granted them through Food Poverty grants to instead respond to any new needs they had arising from the pandemic. They could deviate from what they had originally outlined they were going to do in their applications and given flexibility in how they could spend the funds to meet new demands.

In response to concerns raised by food banks about not having a sufficient supply of food, the Council set up food distribution hubs early in the lockdown, making use of four community centres that had been closed on account of the lockdown. As above, these hubs also provided food to the Swansea Together project. The Council purchased food for these distribution centres, using local suppliers such as Castell-Howell. They also received donations from local and national businesses. It was reported that as of June, more than 60 companies had provided donations.<sup>23</sup> These were not centres for the public to access, but instead for the purpose of storing food so that it could be available to food banks as needed. The Council team liaised with food banks regularly, and if they were running out of food, the Council's food distribution centre would provide a supply.

This food went out to existing food banks, and in some cases, enabled them to re-open if they had to close early in the pandemic, but it also supported new food parcel distribution efforts, as described:

"We did have a couple of food banks that closed. I think solutions were found, partly probably because of the help that we put in place, those food banks did reopen. Or a different version of it, and then other new food banks were established as well...I'm talking about neighbours, little community groups, things that were set up really quickly...some of those groups decided, "Actually our neighbourhood could use something like a food store." There were some projects that were set up that were new throughout." (Council staff respondent)

### Emergency food parcels

The primary aim of the food distribution centres was to support food banks, but as time progressed through the pandemic, they also became places from which the Council would assemble and deliver their own food parcels. These were intended for people in acute emergencies, where referral to a food bank would not be appropriate given the urgency of their situation, as described by one council staff member:

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.wales247.co.uk/thousands-benefit-from-foodbank-support-in-swansea>

“Instead of calls saying, “I’m going to run out of food in three days’ time, could you help me?”, there were calls saying, “I’ve got no food, I’ve got no money now. I don’t know how I can eat or how I’m going to feed the children tonight.” You need quick responses. Some of the food banks expanded their hours and did what they could, but there were moments in time where it’s like “I need an emergency parcel out and there’s no available solution”. So the food distribution centres actually did that as well. They provided a back-up for when another solution couldn’t be found.” (Council staff respondent)

### *COVID-19 Helpline and connecting people with food*

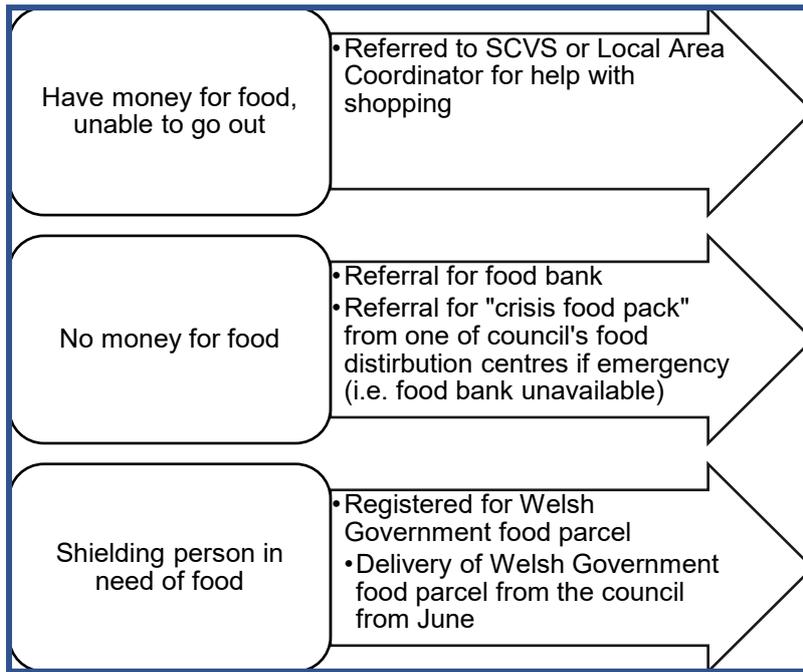
The Council established a COVID-19 helpline in early April that was staffed by people re-deployed from across the Council, such as library staff. The helpline received any kind of enquiry, but food access was a key concern.

The Council’s Tackling Poverty section set up a Food Administration Team, made up of approximately 14 redeployed council staff from a variety of departments. This team established a referral form for the Helpline Team so that information could be collected on the nature of food needs. These referrals were passed on from the Helpline Team to the Food Administration Team who would then be the team to action a response. Staff on this team were assigned to different wards across the city and within each of these wards, asked to connect with the food banks operating there:

“One of the early things the staff did in that team was to make contact with the local food banks, so they could introduce themselves, say what they were doing and work out how the food banks would like to receive the referrals. They’d set up that system effectively. That was based on a ward basis.” (Council staff respondent)

Depending on the nature of help needed and indicated in the referral form, the following responses outlined in Figure 3 below would be actioned:

Figure 3: Actions taken by Swansea Council Food Administration Team in response to calls regarding food access to the COVID-19 Helpline.



As indicated in above figure, in the middle of the lockdown, the Council took over the “last mile” delivery of the Welsh Government’s shielding food parcel scheme in June. This decision was in response to the following concerns:

“We found that there were issues, there were parcels going missing or stolen. We knew that we could do, for want of a better way of describing it, a better job of delivery. So we had all the parcels delivered to one location in Swansea and then a council team got involved and they took over the delivery. The beauty of that was that A) they know Swansea, but B) they could add more care to the delivery of the parcels; they could take more time on making sure that that parcel got to the individual... We really, really improved the success rate of getting a parcel to the individual” (Council staff respondent)

The Council’s Helpline, Food Administration Team, and food distribution centres all ran through to the end of the shielding scheme in Wales (mid-August). This was felt to be because need had lessened but also because of changes in staff capacity:

“The food distribution centres, the COVID helpline and food help administration team ran through to the end of the shielding scheme. We did keep the helpline open longer. We were finding that the amount of calls were tailing off in terms of help that people needed. One of the main drivers for the decision being taken to close the work of the help admin team, the helpline and the food distribution centres was that all the staff were working on those activities needed to go back to their normal day jobs at that point.” (Council staff respondent)

It was also felt that food banks were no longer struggling with food supplies by the end of August, which was affirmed by our participants who worked in food banks.

A council press release in August 2020 highlighted what help would remain available to people in Swansea after the shielding food parcel scheme ended.<sup>24</sup> Of about 9,000 people on the shielding list in Swansea, about 500 of them were reported to have received a food box per week from the Welsh Government scheme over the spring and summer. It was highlighted that after the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, people on the shielding list could continue to access priority supermarket delivery slots, delivery of food from local food businesses (listed on the council's webpage), or that they could contact the SCVS to receive help with shopping from a volunteer. Help from food banks was also pointed to.<sup>25</sup>

### *Hospital Discharge Initiative*

In partnership with the Health Board, SCVS and Wiltshire Farm Foods (among other providers), the Council provided a new hospital discharge service over the first lockdown. Their role was to fund and provide the delivery of meals for people being discharged from hospital. The SCVS provided other elements of the service, such as help with food shopping, prescription collection, and befriending services.

### *Local Area Coordinator Expansion*

Before the pandemic, Local Area Coordinators were not active in all parts of Swansea. Since the lockdown resulted in staff in other roles having capacity, the Council was able to expand the team to cover all geographic areas of Swansea. The team grew from 16 Local Area Coordinators to 38.<sup>26</sup>

“About a month into the crisis, we got assigned 22 temporary staff from other parts of the Council. People joined us from museum, from libraries, from sports and employment teams. They started to get involved in areas we haven't covered traditionally.” (Council staff respondent)

During the lockdown, Local Area Coordinators provided help with shopping and were involved in local volunteer coordination. They also continued to provide support to local food banks, sometimes taking on delivery of their food parcels (as described below, see Gorsein food bank) and helping establish a new food bank in Penlan.<sup>27</sup> They also engaged in outreach so that community members would know what help was available:

“There was an early recognition there are a lot of people not on Facebook or online at all. One of our first objectives was to get leaflets dropped to all the houses in the community so they'd know what was available and where they could call for it. Actually, quite a lot of people got in touch from those phone numbers whenever they were sent...we did find we were delivering [food bank] food parcels to people who weren't necessarily facing hardship, but they didn't have access to their money. They didn't have cash sitting in the house. They couldn't go to a cash machine and they didn't have anybody to do that for them. We were on occasion arranging food parcels for people in those circumstances.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/58844/Alternative-food-support-in-place-for-people-shielding>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

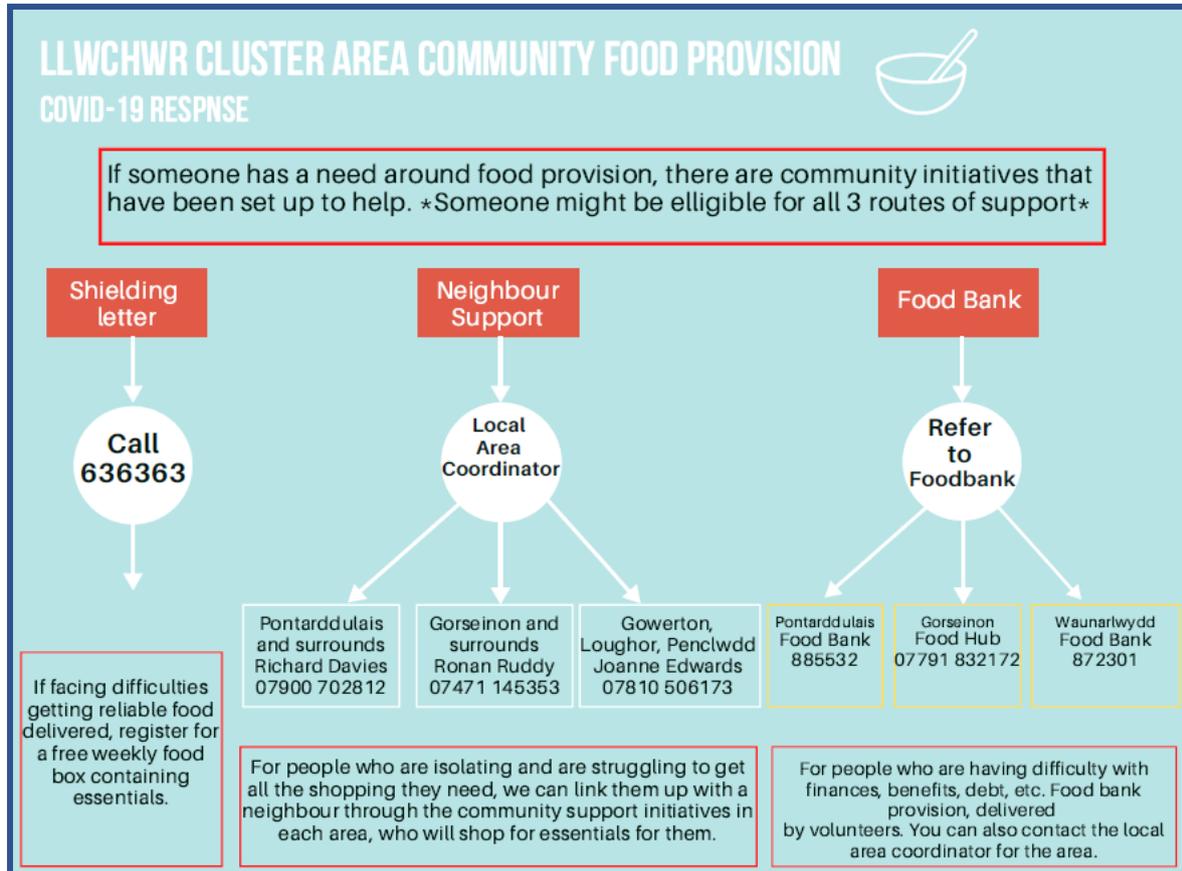
<sup>26</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/57164/Every-community-now-has-local-area-coordinators-on-the-front-line>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/57120/Neighbourhood-foodbank-is-a-big-hit>

Sometimes it was with them agreeing they'd make a donation as soon as they were able to." (Council staff respondent)

An example of a signposting leaflet provided by the local area coordinators in one area of Swansea is provided in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Signposting to COVID-19 help available in Llchwyr area in Swansea



Local Area Coordinators also played a coordination role, especially where neighbourhood and community groups were already active in responding:

"I think one of the benefits I found is whenever we were involved early, we were able to join the dots together quicker and help organise it a bit. The drive definitely came from people on the ground whenever they realised their neighbours were going to be in difficulty." (Council staff respondent)

**Money advice or cash-based assistance**

Whilst we did not hear specifically about any work to expand the Council's work on money maximisation or to newly provide cash-based assistance in Swansea over the pandemic, it was felt that awareness and use of the Welsh Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) was increased, as reflected in the following quotes:

“I think the Discretionary Assistance Fund certainly came into its own during the lockdown, doing the pandemic, this would have been widely distributed...it was referred to much more; we could support people with applying for it, that kind of thing...” (Third sector respondent)

“I would expect that the awareness of the DAF for frontline workers across Swansea has [grown]; more people will be familiar with it and there’ll be people who will have made applications on behalf of people, whereas they might not have before. And the flexibilities and the additional funding that was put into it... [DAF data for Swansea] does show the demand and it shows the trends over this year.” (Council staff respondent)

As reflected in the quote above, the number of applications for Emergency Assistance Payments from the Discretionary Assistance Fund significantly increased in Swansea following the introduction of greater flexibilities to the fund in May 2020. We received the following figures from one of the Council participants:

Figure 5: Emergency Assistance Payments applications and awards for Swansea from Discretionary Assistance Fund (January-September 2020).

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Number of applications received	1297	1161	1791	1655	1669	1791	2735	2248	2501
Number of applications awarded	498	452	964	748	875	1595	1678	1385	1566
Percent awarded	38%	39%	54%	45%	52%	89%	61%	62%	63%

*Notes: EAP: Emergency Assistance Payments. From 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020, the Welsh Government allowed greater flexibility and discretion to number and frequency of EAP payments that people may require. In March 2020, applications/awards increased due to flood impacts from storms at the end of February 2020.*

### Free school meals

In response to the closure of schools, the Council quickly implemented a free school meal replacement programme, providing cold lunches for pick-up. However, it was found that the take up of this provision was very low, possibly because of the difficulty of having to go to the school to pick up the lunch and because of safety concerns, as described below:

“We found that the take up was really low on it. And knowing Swansea quite well and some of the schools, the logistics of getting to those schools, especially if you’ve got a large young family. It’s quite a hassle to have to go maybe from Gors up to Townhill, which is quite a steep hill, with a little one in a pram and two toddlers walking alongside to go and get lunch every day...when we were speaking to these families, a lot of them were saying the reason they weren’t going to the school to get their lunch was because they were worried about congregating in large crowds as well, in large numbers. Congregating outside the schools to get their lunches.” (Third sector respondent)

The SCVS raised these concerns with the Council and suggested that instead, schools provide a weekly shopping bag for families to pick up on Mondays, enabling them to prepare food themselves at home for the week, reducing how often they had to go and also enable pick up times to be staggered. It was reported that some schools delivered these bags as well. Uptake was reported to have increased from 30% to 60% with the change in delivery. A problem with these food parcels was described as “we could only give what we could get” (Council staff respondent), referring to their reliance on their current catering suppliers:

“Our catering suppliers for schools were given a massive tin of beans, that’s what [our suppliers] sell us. Trying to get more family sized, individual food sized portions of things was an issue initially. I know a lot of families initially were, “I don’t want another tin of beans and tuna.” (Council staff respondent)

This food bag system was only in place for a short period of time, as the Council then started providing a cash replacement instead, depositing money directly into parents’/guardians’ bank account.

It was shared that, because Swansea is a City of Sanctuary, there are many families of asylum seekers and refugees.<sup>28</sup> Ensuring a system of free school meal replacements for these families required a different response than money being deposited into bank accounts because these families may not have debit cards or because they may have limitations on funds they are allowed to have in bank accounts. Sandwich-type food parcels were also recognised to not provide culturally appropriate foods for many of these families. The SCVS and local authority and other organisations lobbied the Home Office for the following:

“We did manage to lobby and put pressure on the Home Office to actually allow the free school meal allowance go onto their Aspen Cards, which meant that they could then also have food, shopping, that way as well.<sup>29</sup> So that I think was a big, well, we were all really rejoicing, we were thrilled with that.” (Third sector respondent)

As above, the Council was intending to run and expand SHEP through the summer in 2020, but this was unable to go ahead due to the pandemic:

“Last year we did start our first SHEP, our School Holiday Enrichment Programme in one of our schools during the summer holidays. We were intending obviously to run more through these holidays as well, but obviously with COVID we haven’t had them... We were going to expand it as well, but obviously we couldn’t.” (Council staff respondent)

The loss of the SHEP programme was felt to be a negative adaptation to school food provision, as described below:

“There are a lot of things I think aren’t working quite as well with some things to support families. Like I said, there’s no SHEP provision this year. People are getting paid [referring to cash payments for free school meals through the summer], but they’re losing that [experience]. It’s the experience side of things that was part of that [SHEP] they’re not having.” (Council staff respondent)

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<sup>28</sup> <https://swansea.cityofsanctuary.org/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support/what-youll-get>

### *Supporting the establishment of Swansea Food Poverty Network*

Before the pandemic, the work of the Council in administering the Food Poverty grant to food banks and other community food providers revealed that many groups who engaged in food poverty work in Swansea did not have the opportunity to get together to speak to one another, collaborate, and share. This realisation led to the idea that Swansea would benefit from a Food Poverty Network. The potential benefit of this became clearer over the course of the pandemic. At the time of our interview, a group had been established and started having monthly meetings. The role of the Council is described below:

“It was an aspiration to set up a Swansea Food Poverty Network. Our role in that is to facilitate it happening rather than imposing it on the members. The way I see it, it belongs to the members, I’m just facilitating them coming together, looking at how to improve collaboration, talking about gaps, talking about problem-solving issues, etc.” (Council staff respondent)

### *Swansea Council for Voluntary Service*

One of the first initiatives of the SCVS early in the pandemic was to put out a call for volunteers. They were able to recruit a significant number very quickly, and they were involved in various roles, as outlined below:

“Basically, we have a volunteer centre within Swansea CVS, so we put out a call for volunteers as soon as we knew of the lockdown. I think we got 500 people registered in the first weekend...those volunteers had a variety of different roles. [They were involved in] the Swansea Together campaign to support the preparation of the food that was going to be distributed.... we had volunteers who were supporting people with doing their shopping for them... we also had volunteers that were providing telephone befriending services.” (Third sector respondent)

The SCVS call played a key role in recruiting volunteers to the Swansea Together campaign in particular, but also supported businesses who were newly involved in food deliveries:

“We had 1,200 people come forward in a month. We were able to put about 100 of those through to the Swansea Together project. About 150 maybe through to our colleagues in the local area coordination team. About 100 through to the Co-op. [Talking about] cross sector, the Co-op said to us, “There’s a problem with delivery, we can’t get food to people. We don’t use volunteers ordinarily, can we start?” (Third sector respondent)

As a result of this request, the SCVS provided volunteers to collect and then deliver shopping for people who purchased food over the phone from the Co-op.<sup>30</sup>

While the SCVS was able to recruit volunteers quickly, this was not without challenges. They had to quickly audit people’s skills, establish who had food hygiene training, who could drive vans to deliver food, who could take on door-to-door meal delivery etc. This time was described as “quite chaotic”, though also as “very exciting times [as] we did mobilise quite a

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.scvs.org.uk/news/scvscovidresponse-ufeval-sept20>

lot of stuff together” (Third sector respondent). As they moved through the spring, they also supported organisations with these tasks:

“Then as we moved into adapting, we almost took a breath, a half a breath and we started developing guides for volunteers or for community action projects that had newly set up to try and give them some ideas about safety, whether it was safeguarding or being aware of all aspects of safety.” (Third sector respondent)

The SCVS also worked with the Council to put together an “Essential Foods List”, which directed people to the range of offers from local food shops, supermarkets, and takeaways.<sup>31</sup>

SCVS was also an important source of funding for organisations engaged in responding to food insecurity over the pandemic. Using funds provided to them by the Welsh Government for a COVID-19 response, they were able to cover the costs of monthly FareShare Cymru membership fees (£65 per month) for independent food banks and other food aid providers to enable them to receive food every week over April 2020 to March 2021. At first, seven food banks and food aid projects were supported, including Pontarddulais, HOP, Birchgrove, Eastside, Swansea Mosque, Morriston Salvation Army food banks, and Matthew’s House. This rose to 12 organisations being supported as new food projects started or existing projects came on board over the pandemic.

This funding from the Welsh Government also enabled them to fund the provision of their own food parcels. These were provided to support people who cannot physically go out to shop, have no means of doing an online shop and/or have no financial resources to purchase food temporarily. This new initiative was described by one respondent:

“We also used some of that money to purchase a lot of dry goods to SCVS directly. We do have staff who also have food parcels, staff who live in Swansea also have food parcels [stored] at home. Due to the nature of the referrals, we still have at times late on a Friday afternoon, there’s a need to get a food parcel out to someone, so the staff have got it there to be able to do that...I think it was June or July where we thought we do need to be able to have this. Seeing as we had the funding available, we put it into doing a large purchase from a food wholesaler so there were parcels available and they still are, they’re still available with staff now. It wasn’t there before.” (Third sector respondent)

### Swansea Bay University Health Board Nutrition and Dietetic Service

During the pandemic, the Nutrition and Dietetic team provided nutrition information to SCVS which could be posted on their website and social media. They also were a partner in the Hospital Discharge Initiative set up by the Council and SVCS. They liaised with the Council on what contents should go into the food parcels and what types of meals should be provided to hospital patients being discharged who were receiving this service. They

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/essentialsuppliers>

provided guidance on checking labels and suggestions for people following special dietary requirements. They also provided a “Food Fact” sheet about malnutrition.

## Food parcel providers

### *Swansea Foodbank*

As described above, two challenges early in the pandemic for Swansea Foodbank were an increase in need and decline in food donations. They also experienced a drop in numbers of volunteers and disruptions in their referral system, as described below:

“About half our [distribution] centres closed because the volunteers were cautious about their own health. The link with referral agencies was majorly disrupted because agencies weren’t meeting with their clients. I think we still need to figure that out a little bit because obviously everyone is still working from home quite a lot.” (Third sector respondent)

With distribution centres that remained open, cafe facilities had to close and food parcels were distributed from doorsteps of the centre. This impacted on the “more than food” support offered at their food banks:

“Our cafe facilities are still closed. Those conversations you have with people as they’re waiting for their food parcels to be packed, on the whole we’re still not having really because [collection] is on the doorstep.” (Third sector respondent)

The trend in usage of the Swansea Foodbank seemed to be high need through April and May, but then to stabilise after a few months. One respondent described this:

“I think numbers of people did drop a little bit. This is just my theory. I think we see it in school holidays as well, there’s an awful lot of apprehension at the beginning of a school holiday. In the summer when you get to the end of August the demand has settled a little bit because they were really concerned they wouldn’t get through the holidays. Then you get to the end and people are like, “I did make it.” I think we saw that a little bit about people really, really worried about how they would manage. Then after a few weeks, a few months I suppose actually, things did settle a little bit to be a bit more steady.” (Third sector respondent)

Concerns about donations of food were abated in part because supermarkets started to have an abundance of food because other charities were not doing their usual collections, such as Matthew’s House, mentioned above. At one point, Swansea Foodbank was offered supermarket surplus five days of the week:

“There was a bit of a knock-on. We got some supermarket surplus before the lockdown. Then other charities that had picked up from supermarkets decided it was too risky, so then got more of their surplus. We offered five days a week of supermarket surplus at one point, which was logistically quite a lot to handle. There was a bit of that of some charities who were overly cautious about the fact a lot of customers would have handled the food during the day. We benefited from that.” (Third sector respondent)

One distribution centre, Gorseinon Foodbank, initially closed, but then the Council's Local Area Coordinator, local councillors, and local community members stepped in to take over running it instead:

"In Gorseinon, the food bank closed there and the [Local Area Coordinator], some of the local councillors and community members formed a little group that partly took over the running of a food bank, and it changed into a delivery service. There was no way given the crisis and the COVID restrictions that people would be able to come to the venue. It was delivery only to keep people away and to keep safe that way. The food parcels were all being delivered." (Council staff respondent)

It was shared that the food bank's usual referral system was relaxed under the circumstances:

"All of the referral process did go out the window because we were being contacted by people we weren't aware of who hadn't had support workers, who our organisation hadn't helped, or tenancy support hadn't helped. We had to take people at their word, which we did because the food was there. If people were highlighting there was a need for food, we just got it out to them. If it was going on week after week after week, we eventually had conversations around the long-term sustainability of it or if there were other options available to address their need." (Council staff respondent)

One source of funding for Gorseinon food bank at this time was from local councillors, who put forward their own budgets to support the purchase of food from wholesalers. Later, they applied for grant funding that came available from Admiral.<sup>32</sup>

The Swansea Foodbank had a new food bank join them over the pandemic. A community food bank that was established in Penlan by a Local Area Coordinator during the pandemic decided to remain open and joined as a Swansea Foodbank distribution centre.<sup>33</sup> Other changes in Swansea Foodbanks' operations included one distribution centre moving from being open just two hours a week to being open five days a week. All but one of the centres that had closed were all open at the time of the workshop in early December 2020. The Gorseinon Foodbank, described above, was taken back over by the Trussell Trust team in the middle of the autumn and returned to having food parcels collected by patrons rather than providing deliveries.

### *Independent food parcel providers*

Over the course of the pandemic, it was shared that an additional four independent food banks started operating and were still operating at the time of our interviews (November 2020).

Based on the published list of food bank activity in Swansea compiled by the Council, independent food banks variously adapted their services, with some continuing to operate collection with social distancing measures in place, and possibly requiring pre-booking, and others offering delivery (Table 2).

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.admiral.com/community-and-sponsorship>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/57120/Neighbourhood-foodbank-is-a-big-hit>

Table 2: Independent food bank activities during COVID-19.

Independent food banks	
Birchgrove Foodbank	Started operating 29 March 2020. <sup>34</sup> Open as usual for food parcel pick-up but also offered pre-booked delivery over the pandemic. Requires referral voucher.
Eastside Foodbank (Bonymaen)	Continued to accept “walk-ups”, though advanced booking for a collection time preferred. Did not provide delivery of food parcels.
Clase Foodbank	Open as usual. Referral required.
Morrison (Salvation Army)	Stopped drop-in food bank. To receive support, needed to phone on a Tuesday to be given a time slot to collect a food parcel on Wednesday. ID required for collection. Referrals accepted.
North Gower Foodbank	Food parcels collected by appointment only. No referral voucher required.
Pontarddulais Foodbank	Provided food parcel delivery during pandemic and also provided help with food shopping. <sup>35</sup> Referral usually required but accepted benefit letter or proof of address to receive food parcel during the pandemic. Limit on food parcel receipt from 18 March 2020: 3 in 3 months, regardless of previous visits. (Unclear whether this more or less generous than pre-pandemic.)
HOP Foodbank (Sketty Park)	Open as usual for collection. Required referral.
Swansea Mosque Foodbank	Provided delivery service until January 2021. Referrals required but e-referrals allowed from referral partners.

Source: <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/foodbanks> (accessed 9 February 2020) supplemented by additional webpage searches (see footnotes).

### *Eastside Foodbank*

We spoke to one representative from Eastside Foodbank who shared some of the adaptations and challenges they faced in their food bank. They faced the same challenges as other food banks: operating in a small space without room for social distancing, the loss

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/new-food-bank-opens-swanseas-18015137?utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=sharebar&fbclid=IwAR0kEWtVQ\\_L3hcHKhdz3QqFTetyWpoTbyZwCoT7OjToqg2yKBzQGN4BMdsUM](https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/new-food-bank-opens-swanseas-18015137?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=sharebar&fbclid=IwAR0kEWtVQ_L3hcHKhdz3QqFTetyWpoTbyZwCoT7OjToqg2yKBzQGN4BMdsUM)

<sup>35</sup> <https://swansea.gov.uk/article/58141/Pontarddulais-foodbank-providing-vital-supplies>

of volunteers due to health concerns or because they were keyworkers, and also difficulty accessing referral agencies.

They went from operating on just one day a week to operating on two days a week and had people pick up food parcels at the door, rather than coming inside their chapel space.

To help with their concerns about food supplies, they were able to set up a new account with a local wholesaler, but they also made use of the Council's food distribution centres, particularly in the early days of the pandemic when it was even a challenge to receive supplies from their wholesaler.

One challenge that was raised with replacing volunteers with new ones over the pandemic was the need to have volunteers checked first, as shared below:

“It’s a professional requirement for me that I’m qualified and topped up on safeguarding regularly. There’s no way we can allow a volunteer to come in unless they’ve got an enhanced DBS to deliver to people’s private addresses. That was an issue. It’s one of those things I thought the head had to rule the heart in that particular instance. As the minister of the chapel, I’d have been the person responsible and could have been held legally responsible if anything had gone wrong.” (Third sector respondent)

To overcome these safeguarding concerns, they had the Council's Local Area Coordinators, local councillors, and Police Community Support Officers deliver their food parcels when required.

### *Swansea Mosque Foodbank*

From our desk-based research, we learned that the Swansea Mosque Foodbank was able to continue running as usual over the pandemic, with support from the Council's food distribution centres and support for a FareShare membership from the SCVS.<sup>36</sup> They continued to require referrals to access their food, though allowed organisations to provide an emailed referral rather than a paper voucher.

### *Community pantry or community fridge projects*

#### *Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-in Centre's Foodshare*

The Blaen-Y-Maes drop-in centre announced changes in their operations on their Facebook page on 24<sup>th</sup> March, indicated that due to the unpredictable nature of donations from supermarkets at this time, they would post on their Facebook page when “foodshare” food would be available for collection. They continued to do this over the pandemic.<sup>37</sup> Food bags were provided for people to collect outside of their building. In October, they announced that they received funding from the SCVS for a FareShare Cymru membership for 6 months.

#### *Swansea Community Fridge*

The Swansea Community Fridge adapted their operations to provide pre-packed food parcels over the pandemic and rather than operating on a daily basis, were only open for

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.swanseamosque.org/foodbank>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/BlaenymaesDropinCentre>

collection one day a week.<sup>38</sup> They did not run a delivery service, but allowed others, including community volunteers, to pick up the food parcels on behalf of someone else.

Over the course of the pandemic, they also established a Community Pantry,<sup>39</sup> which involved them receiving and distributing dried and canned food and hygiene products. These items were both donated from supermarket surplus schemes as well as purchased with funding from grants. Rather than providing pre-packed bags of these items, they used an ordering system, whereby people could browse a list of items available online, complete a request form for required items, and then pick up the items the following week.

### Meal providers

Both Matthew's House and Zac's Place suspended their usual drop-in meal programmes over the pandemic to focus efforts on the Swansea Together campaign, described above. We learned that the Swansea University Discovery Student Project stopped their community meal programme and instead focused efforts on a sewing scrubs projects and a pen pal project targeted towards isolated adults over the pandemic. We were unable to learn from our research participants or desk-based research what other community meal providers, such as TOPIC or Christ Well Café, did over the spring and summer 2020.

### Other third sector organisations

We also learned that new organisations that had formerly not been involved in food provision started food provision activities over the pandemic. For example, there was concern about food access among asylum seekers and refugees in Swansea, so the African Community Centre was mentioned by participants as one group who provided food boxes and meals to people in these target groups. The SCVS supported this project with volunteers.

### The local response

We also heard about the strength of local or community responses in Swansea. Though these were often informal and neighbour-to-neighbour, it was felt that this was some of the first help available to people to support them getting food.

“Sometimes it was on a street level. That was the way things could be adapted the quickest... you saw local community members getting together to make sure their neighbours were able to get whatever they needed, whether that was food or prescriptions. Those things were in place... neighbours were looking out for neighbours a week in advance, that was the first thing to happen. People were delivering little notes to their neighbours saying, ‘I’m here, give me a call if you need anything.’” (Council staff respondent)

Though the above quote was in reference to one specific area in Swansea, it was felt this was being replicated across the city:

“What we found was a lot of community groups had started up their own WhatsApp groups, their own Facebook groups, in order to address the needs of the people who were isolating and shielding and couldn't get access to food or

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<sup>38</sup> <https://goleudy.org/our-services/community-fridge/food-parcels/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://goleudy.org/our-services/community-fridge/swansea-community-pantry/>

prescriptions or they arranged welfare calls. That was being established in communities all over the city and the county.” (Council staff respondent)

Local area coordinators collected stories of the ways that individuals helped in their communities. One story shared with us was a couple who started cooking meals in their kitchen and delivering them to people. As demand increased over the pandemic, they received support from friends.

### Food retailers and local businesses

It was shared by a couple of respondents that local food businesses in Swansea adapted quickly to lockdown conditions, offering takeaway and delivery services within two weeks of the start of lockdown. It was also shared that when businesses were unable to open, they donated their food stocks to the Swansea Together campaign. Some of this work is reflected in the quote below, and in Table 3 presents a snapshot of local business activity at the end of March 2020 available in one area of Swansea, Pontarddulais, available on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020. This help was advertised through the Pontarddulais Community Response to Coronavirus-COVID-19 group Facebook page.<sup>40</sup>

“You saw local business were getting food deliveries in place long before Tesco or Morrison ever managed to do that.” (Council staff respondent)

Table 3: Local businesses providing food support to be people in Pontarddulais on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Name	Location	Tel No	Facebook	Type	Description
Chilli Express	43 St Teilo St, BONT	01792 885060	Yes	Takeaway	open 7 days wk 5.30pm-11.30pm/midnight. Takeaway, delivery
Pontarddulais Golf Club	Allt-y-Graban Rd, BONT	Tel 07873815877	Yes	Restaurant	Delivery.
Penllergare Stop & Shop	Penllergare	01792 894394	No	Shop, P.O	Free delivery, £10 minimum spend
Fforest Post Office	FForest	01792 882378	No	Groceries, P.O	Home deliveries
Hendy Pharmacy	Hendy	01792 881234	No	Chemist	Deliveries of prescriptions and goods to local area
Swallow Travel	19 High St, Gorseinon	01792 898888	Yes	Taxi	Asda click collect, prescription collection and delivery
Lloyds Pharmacy	5 St Teilo St, BONT	01792 882365	Yes (general)	Chemist	Home delivery service
Family Shopper	27-29 St Teilo St, BONT	01792 885809	Yes	Groceries, P.O	Home deliveries, shop open Mon-Sun 7am-9pm
Pheonix Cabs	Gorseinon	01792 896669	Yes	Taxi	Pick up of goods etc
McDoner	106 St Teilo St, BONT	01792 881171	Jut Eat	Takeaway	Takeaway from 4pm, delivery from 5pm. Also on Just Eat
Village/Tahybont Pharmacy	Station Rd, BONT	01792 885200	No	Chemist	Order prescription online, ring chemist, will deliver to isolated
A Taste of India	28 St Teilo St, BONT	01792 884401	No	Takeaway	Delivery from 5pm

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Pontarddulais-Community-Response-to-Coronavirus-Covid-19-103423331296995/about>

## Key themes emerging on supporting food access in Swansea

Below, we summarise some key themes we identified in our interviews, workshop, and desk-based research in Swansea.

### The panic of the first weeks

The unprecedented nature of the situation that the pandemic brought required organisations to quickly develop a response for which, in the early weeks, there was not a system in place.

“I think if we’re talking about that March period, which was mid-March going into early April, that was a time of developing a response to a crisis during a crisis...we had a contact centre, but we didn’t have our systems set up in terms of our response at that point in time.” (Council staff respondent)

This need for a quick response to this new situation led to a sense of panic for some. Respondents also noted panic amongst their existing clients as to where they would be able to access food.

“It was just mass worry. People were like, “Where am I going to eat tomorrow? What am I going to eat now?” And we didn’t plan for this. Nobody planned for it, did they?” (Third sector respondent)

Food projects also bore the brunt of the panic of the public. Panic buying resulted in shortages of items, leading to food banks being unable to acquire donations of basic staples that they usually rely on.

“Even if people did want to donate, they couldn’t get the type of food we wanted or we needed from supermarkets, like tins of tomatoes. There were definitely a few weeks where our stocks depleted incredibly rapidly.” (Third sector respondent)

### The role of Local Area Coordinators

Local Area Coordinators are a unique feature of the Swansea landscape. During the pandemic, they played an important role in connecting people with local services, providing services and help themselves, and helping coordinate volunteers. Interestingly, this coordination activity was ward-specific and not harmonised across different areas. This approach appears to reflect the aims of the Local Area Coordinators, which is to help build community resilience and enable people to help themselves.

Council press releases praised the work of Local Area Coordinators over the pandemic. For example, this quote was provided by a Councillor in April 2020:

“Cllr Mark Child, Swansea Council's Cabinet Member for Care, Health and Ageing Well, said: "The Local Area Coordinators do a really valuable job under normal circumstances but they have been an absolute godsend in the current coronavirus crisis. They have been using their skills and knowledge of their communities to help individual volunteers and organisations come together to

make sure that where people need help they are receiving it.” (Council Press Release, April 2020)<sup>41</sup>

### New ways of working

Across various stakeholders and projects, our respondents described the different ways they had to adapt and transform their ways of working. In the Council, this meant quickly training staff from across a variety of different departments to work on the food poverty response and to reach out to food banks to understand their needs. The following quote reflects the changes made across the Council:

“We did things as an organisation that we don’t do. And we worked in ways that we don’t normally work and we adapted. That’s just the Council.” (Council staff respondent)

For the Swansea Together project, this meant building new relationships with housing agencies in order to enable delivery to people who were in temporary housing there. Of course, it also meant a huge transformation of organisations’ meal services from serving in-house to delivering meals across the city.

For SCVS, they had to adapt their volunteer recruitment processes, as shared:

“Swansea CVS and the Council worked really, really well together in terms of building a really from the ground new system that would allow us to recruit volunteers immediately for actions we weren’t even sure what they were. We were kind of recruiting blind at one point.” (Third sector respondent)

### New actors engaged in food provision

Across the range of responses observed in Swansea, there were people involved in food provisioning activities that likely would have not done this before. At the neighbourhood level, this was neighbours checking on neighbours to ensure people who were isolating or shielding had a supply of food and providing meals for people. At the community level, this was newly formed community groups organising to open a food bank. At the city-wide level, this was the many volunteers who were enrolled by SCVS to support Swansea Together or to provide help with shopping. The role of people who were furloughed in volunteering was highlighted in particular:

“The demographic of volunteers changed overnight. There was a large proportion of older people volunteering. It suddenly became a large proportion of people who were much younger. With the furlough scheme, we had some incredibly skilled people who were not needed in their work for a little spell and were rolling up their sleeves and getting stuck in and had enormous skills. They were actually very exciting times.” (Third sector respondent)

Within the Council, new actors included staff being re-deployed from other roles to deliver food or respond to requests for food from the COVID Hotline.

Elected officials were also highlighted as key stakeholders engaged in provision:

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/57164/Every-community-now-has-local-area-coordinators-on-the-front-line>

“The elected representatives played a really key role as well. Whether that was community councils, city councillors or the assembly members and the members of parliament. From my experience, it was the local city councillors. They were all involved in my area with the food response, whether that was through the funding of it with their personal budget or through the volunteering, organising or distributing. They were a contact point, they were always well-known in their communities. People that were in need, they were becoming aware of them and they were referring them on for the help. I think they were a really key element of the response as well.” (Council staff respondent)

New organisations also became engaged in cooking for people who are vulnerably housed, such as the Mecca Bingo Hall and Swansea Football Club.

However, though many new people and organisations became engaged in food provisioning activity, much of this engagement came to an end when people and businesses returned to their regular roles. As highlighted, the Council’s Helpline, Food Administration Team, and distribution centres closed when staff returned to their regular roles in August 2020. The delivery of meals through the Swansea Together project came to an end when the football club and bingo hall returned to their usual operations, also in August.

This said, some projects that were initiated over the pandemic were established for the longer term, as was the case with the Penlan food bank, which is now operating as a Swansea Foodbank distribution centre.

### Funding and food donations

Though organisations experienced concern about whether they would have sufficient supplies of food and/or funding through the pandemic, respondents shared that in the end, an abundance of donations were received, including from the public. One respondent involved in a food bank shared:

“Our food donations picked up. As soon as the supermarkets were allowing people to buy items. People were incredibly generous financially, but also were fantastic about donating food as well. We were I suppose a bit concerned that wouldn’t continue...we were generally fine supported by our donors. It was really good.” (Third sector respondent)

When we discussed funding with Council staff representatives, they described the approach within the Council was to fund upfront and count on funds being provided by the Welsh Government later:

“The Council fronted up the funding to do things quickly, with the hope that the Welsh Government would be able to see us right at the end. And the priority was “we’ve got to support people, we need to do this.” Do it, and we’ll worry about how to log that later... Subsequently, we have had funding from Welsh Government, COVID response funding.” (Council staff respondent)

As mentioned throughout, other sources of funding and food in Swansea were:

- Re-purposed Swansea Council Food Poverty grants available to food banks and other food poverty projects (initially for Brexit preparation but allowed to be re-purposed for COVID-19 responses). A new round of funding opened for

projects in December 2020, again funded by the Welsh Government (though not from a Brexit preparedness fund).<sup>42</sup>

- SVSC funding from Welsh Government for COVID-19; in turn, this was used to provide FareShare memberships to nine food poverty projects/food banks.
- Private donations from individuals and businesses.
- Council food distribution centres (sourced with purchased food and donated food from businesses) supporting food banks and Swansea Together.
- City councillors' budgets.

One respondent reflected on the benefit of not receiving core funding from the Council or the Council taking on the Swansea Together project as their own:

“But if the Council fund you, you do what the Council say...if we were council-funded, we might not have been able straightaway to change the service as quickly as we did... there is a beauty in doing it alongside the Council but not for the Council, but there are ways that the Council can still support, with little grant pockets of funding. Because [council funding] is a lot about restricted funds and stuff like that.” (Third sector respondent)

### Limitations of the Welsh shielding box programme

A small number of comments regarding limitations of the national shielding box programme were raised. Some of these related to a lag between people being told to shield and receiving their first food parcel. This was exacerbated due to a delay between people on the shielding list gaining access to priority delivery slots. In this period, the SCVS mobilised their volunteers to help people do their shopping:

“We had volunteers who were supporting people with doing their shopping for them, because we did have quite a lag between the food parcels being available and the shielding list having come out.” (Third sector respondent)

“For example, during the initial lockdown, even though the shielding list had gone from the Welsh Government to the supermarkets 12 days before the UK Government listing, we all had to wait before slots were available to allocate to the vulnerable.” (Third sector respondent)

As described above, the Council had concerns about the Welsh Government's food parcels not reaching people due to parcels going missing or being stolen, which was why the Council took over “last mile” delivery in June. We also heard that the Council would respond on an ad hoc basis if issues with the Welsh Government's food parcels were raised by individuals. They also gave feedback to the Welsh Government, which raised concerns about the monotony of contents of the food parcels.

### Target groups of concern

There were some groups that were specifically targeted for food responses in Swansea. Since Swansea is a City of Sanctuary, there were concerns raised for asylum seekers and refugees. Programmes like free school meals replacements were specifically adapted for these groups. We also observed a programme specifically targeting people leaving hospital,

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/foodpovertygrant2021>

which is again a specific target group and response in Swansea. Lastly, people who are vulnerably housed was a key target group of concern, as reflected by the outpouring of support for the Swansea Together project.

### A lack of understanding of impacts of food provisioning activity

While it was clear that stakeholders felt proud of how many people and organisations engaged in the food response in Swansea over the spring and summer, one downside could be that it made it hard to gain a complete picture of what was happening across the city and how it could be influencing need. Though it was felt that some of this new activity could be leading to less demand from pre-existing food banks, this could not be clearly documented so it made it hard to understand trends in food bank use, as reflected in the comments below:

“I think there are fewer people coming forward for food than I would expect at the moment. Which you could see as a good thing, perhaps people are alright. I’m worried. It could be that people are getting food in centres that I’m not aware of. That’s quite possible, obviously. That’s just a nagging thought of we’re not as busy as I would expect given the situation we’re in.” (Third sector respondent)

“We went through quite a quiet spell from August through September. We found [our food bank use] picking up steadily through the autumn. Because there are more food banks about, things are probably a bit easier for us...” (Third sector respondent)

“There’s so much help out there. I’m aware of pubs that are helping people by cooking and delivering meals...To have the full picture is nearly an impossible task. There is a lot of help out there. A lot of food banks did spring up and some are still going. That might have helped relieve some pressure on some of the food banks that were existing already... It’s difficult to map and understand that -- the wider landscape has changed and that has an influence on [food bank numbers] as well. It’s a really tricky one...there are probably people who are helping each other at a community level that are helping take some of that pressure off food banks as well. It’s really difficult to understand the full picture.” (Council staff respondent)

Another example of how more food provisioning in one area could lessen the need for food banks was the provision of free school meal cash replacements through the summer, as shared below:

“Interestingly, in contacting the food banks for the school holidays, I wanted to see if there was a change in the demographic of the people accessing them because of the free school meal provision. And all apart from one said that there were definitely less families of school age children accessing the food banks during that time during the school holidays, which is quite interesting.” (Third sector respondent)

## 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 responses 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 asking respondents to reflect on the responses put in place over the spring and summer (as outlined in the Methods section).

Participants' answers and reflections on responses are summarised below.

### Positive reflections about food responses enacted over spring and summer

#### *The ability to respond quickly*

In reference to the Swansea Campaign, many stakeholders shared how proud they were of the ability of Matthew's House and other partners to put in place the city-wide distribution of meals for people who were precariously housed within one week:

"All credit to [staff from Matthew's House], it was set up really quickly. He put together that plan, and they called us together, he was like, "This is what I need from you. This is what I need from you. This is what I need from you." And we were all able to see our role and play our part." (Council staff respondent)

Some features specific to Matthew's House were thought to have enabled their ability to set up the Swansea Together project quickly. These included having a small leadership team and small Trustee team who were supportive of the idea and of internal funds being moved from a reserve fund into a COVID crisis fund; having connections from before the pandemic that enabled them to bring stakeholders together for a meeting; and having a large team of volunteers, which meant that even with about 70% unable to volunteer, about 30 people were still available to respond immediately.

"And the beauty of what we do at Matthew's House is we turn something around within days and hours because we work together and we've got this missional focus, and we've got people who give to us monthly, who believe in what we do. We've got trustees who believe in what we do. And we haven't got 40 hoops and 20 sign-offs..." (Third sector respondent)

In reference to the response undertaken by the Council, the support of the cabinet member was felt to be essential for their ability to respond quickly:

"I'd engaged with our cabinet member about the project, and we made sure the Council was getting behind it. That helped a lot with how quick we were able to respond to that and be part of it." (Council staff respondent)

The SCVS was felt to be able to respond quickly because already in early March, they had started preparing for a shift to at-home working:

"We were also very fortunate in Swansea CVS that just two weeks before the lockdown, we'd already started testing a working from home rota, and we were all set up anyway with equipment. Even though the lockdown then happened, I think

it was on the 23rd, we were already set up and able to run immediately.” (Third sector respondent)

They were also well-placed to handle volunteer recruitment and screening, since this was work they were already engaged in before the pandemic.

### *The ability to adapt*

The ability of organisations to adapt and quickly develop new ways of working was highlighted by our stakeholders as a key strength of the response in Swansea, as reflected in the following quotes:

“The responses from the community upwards to the services who were having to change the way they worked and people working in totally new ways. It’s full credit to everybody who was involved in it. I’m absolutely blown away by what everybody managed to achieve.” (Council staff respondent)

### *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:

- Trusting local communities to find their own solutions.
- Strong local connections.
- Partnership among different sectors.

Elaboration on these points was provided by respondents.

### *Local knowledge and local concern*

It was felt that local neighbourhood groups were able to respond most quickly to needs in their communities:

“The hyper local response was the best because it was so adaptable, people looking out for each other is just the first thing that happened.” (Council staff respondent)

It was also expressed that local communities can be trusted to find their own solutions because they know the needs of their communities best:

“Trusting communities to find their own solutions to know what their own response should look like. [Local Area Coordinators’] job is to facilitate that, grease the wheels as they get things in order. I think it shows trust in the communities of Swansea. The hope is that it will encourage even more people to become resilient, part of their communities and to be contributing citizens.” (Council staff respondent)

Social media platforms were thought to be an important enabler of the local response, as described below:

“In terms of how a lot of it got organised, it would have been via Facebook, which was a great platform to get people together, to get people talking to each other

and to get word out there as soon as possible of what was available and where people could go to for help.” (Council staff respondent)

The pre-existence of Local Area Coordinators was also felt to help enable local support to be available. This was expressed in a council press release in August 2020:

“Cllr Clive Lloyd, Swansea Council's Cabinet Member for Adult Care & Community Health Services, said: "Swansea was the first council in Wales to start to use Local Area Coordination to make our communities stronger. The service proved its worth long before the current crisis but it gave us a huge head-start in making sure there was support available for those that needed it when the pandemic began.” (Council press release, August 2020)<sup>43</sup>

### Cross-sector working and working together

Respondents were particularly keen to highlight how well different sectors worked together over the pandemic, as reflected in the following quotes:

“What I would like to say is there has been really good partnership work in our coordination between the third sector, SCVS and the local authority within Swansea... It definitely has been very productive and we adapted quite to meet the needs of the residents of Swansea to have all that in place.” (Third sector respondent)

“I think what has been really outstanding in Swansea is the way that from the early days, certainly through to the middle of the first lockdown, how there was incredible will between sectors to work together, which was quite new. Obviously, we've done it before, but we were really successful.” (Third sector respondent)

“The other thing...is the links between us all. I think we've got a lot better links and communications and knowing how each other work through this.” (Council staff respondent)

“Yes, just to say one thing really. As everyone has said, the response to the crisis in Swansea and without knowing what happened anywhere else, it was amazing. It was partnership working that allowed that to happen.” (Council staff respondent)

“In terms of the response, it was possible because of everyone's contribution. [The] Council, statutory sector, SCVS and the third sector, communities, businesses, it was everyone working together that made it work. That willingness very early on to just get on with it.” (Council staff respondent)

One respondent who worked in a food bank highlighted the benefit of the council's food distribution centres in particular:

“I'd agree with everything that's been said about the way people responded, it was absolutely marvellous. The Council distribution centres worked pretty well for

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/59137/Local-Area-Coordinators-respond-to-20000-inquiries-during-pandemic>

us, particularly in the early days when it was hard to get hold of stuff.” (Third sector respondent)

### Concerns about responses enacted over spring and summer 2020

Stakeholders also identified the need to look back and reflect on what was put in place:

“You’ve got to look at this big picture. Yes, a load of really good stuff happened and it’s good to identify that, but it’s also good to identify maybe what we could have done better or thought about earlier or... You know, at the beginning of this we were making and adapting our plan as we implemented it.” (Council staff respondent)

The following were reflections on aspects of responses that were felt to be limitations or things to be concerned about.

### *The absence of other forms of support for people receiving food*

Stakeholders reflecting on different food responses in Swansea over the pandemic shared how adaptations made to various programmes meant that people were no longer being offered support or activities beyond food. This was true for food banks that could no longer operate their cafes and switched to doorstep collection; meal programmes providing delivery or takeaway, where patrons could no longer come and spend a couple of hours; and the replacement of the SHEP with cash provision of free school meals instead.

Reflecting on the provision from Matthew’s House, this was shared with us:

“Because it’s a takeaway, the community is not there. I saw a guy on the street that used to come for three years, a little old guy, and he hasn’t been. Because it’s not always about the food, it was being able to speak to someone... And that is one of the things that we are struggling with and we are looking at actively, [we might provide] a little outside seating areas where people can get supported in other needs. It’s the community aspect of it then, do you know what I mean?” (Third sector respondent)

Their hopes to return to their previous ways of working were also shared with us:

“The dream is to open up and have 40 people in again, and 8 volunteers in the kitchen, rather than 3. And serving and just making people feel welcome. A safe, warm space to sit in for an hour...” (Third sector respondent)

Similar feelings were also expressed by a respondent who runs a food bank:

“I was just going to say that as far as we’re concerned, trying to do some face-to-face stuff is something we would dearly like to pick up again. I think overall we’ve lost a lot of the effectiveness because we’ve had to hand stuff out through the door. It’s very hard to replicate that kind of contact and networking, particularly in our kind of community.” (Third sector respondent)

### *Unmet need*

When we asked respondents about whether or not they thought people were able to access sufficient food as a result of the responses put into place over the spring and summer, it was

generally felt that people were more willing to seek and access help over this period and that it was available:

“I think during the conversations that happened in COVID and lockdown, more people were willing to accept that help, which was a good thing. I think a key aspect was getting leaflets delivered to every household in the community so they knew the help was there and it wasn’t something they should feel ashamed about accessing. It was just having those reassuring conversations over the phone as well. I don’t think we hit everybody. I’m sure there were people out there who still didn’t get the help they needed and probably were hungry. I’d hope we hit the vast majority of people.” (Council staff respondent)

One group that was of concern to some of our participants were people who were older, as shared below:

“One of the groups of people or demographics I think haven’t always accessed the help when it’s been there is the older population, whether that’s an element of pride. We’d often go and visit people and realise there’s no edible food in the cupboards. Whenever you’d talk to the person about maybe getting a food parcel they’d say, “No, no, no. That’s not for me, that’s for other people.”” (Council staff respondent)

Though this was the only group highlighted that might not have accessed support, it was acknowledged that some food need may be hidden, but that it was felt that all could be done was ensuring help was available and doing one’s best to promote it:

“All we can do is ensure there is support and help available to everyone whatever their need is out there, that it’s accessible and people know about it. We’re working with partners, the work the local area coordination team does in linking communities.” (Council staff respondent)

As above, there were concerns about unmet needs among people who received food support, as projects and programmes were lacking the “more than food” support they usually offer.

### *Barriers to the food response over spring and summer 2020*

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

- The time taken to process Universal Credit claims was a barrier to registering children for free school meal provision, as described in the following quote:

“We had issues with families looking at the free school meals side of things. With Universal Credit, it was taking so long for them to get their eligibility confirmed. In the meantime, they were, “I can’t feed my children.” (Council staff respondent)

- The lack of availability of food supplies in the early days of the pandemic.

### *The present and looking ahead*

At the time of our interviews and workshop, Swansea had recently come through the firebreak, but was not currently in a lockdown. One respondent described their current work:

“We’re concerned about the [financial] impact of the crisis now. People in low-income households are being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This is something we’re now in, a different position, and is a different challenge I think going forward. Yes, the virus is still out there and that does cause problems. In the beginning, it was a response to the pandemic.” (Council staff respondent)

The Council had recently announced a new Food Poverty Grant fund of £100,000.<sup>44</sup> The priorities for funding were “capital/revenue funding that address issues relating to food poverty including enhancing crisis food provision and community growing projects and spaces.” Examples provided here:

- Extending existing food crisis provision.
- Food preparation and cooking equipment; storage/storage solutions; fridges/freezers.
- Mobile services.
- Growing spaces/growing resources.
- Enhanced access to and supply of food grown within communities.
- Website/App development eg. directory, network, communications etc.
- Food.
- Staff eg. Food bank staff/coordination of food activity/collection and distribution.
- Training eg. health and safety/cooking and nutrition skills.
- Volunteer expenses.

The Council also committed more funding to enable the Local Area Coordinator team to remain expanded:

“The Council have committed more in the local area coordination team, to secure our future going forward and expand the team, which is really good news. The eventual objective is to have the whole county covered with the local area coordinators.” (Council staff respondent)

Other details were shared regarding funding from the Welsh Government for the provision of free school meals through school holidays, suggesting commitment until the end of the financial year but uncertainty beyond that point:<sup>45</sup>

“For next steps the Welsh Government are committing up until 31st March to support us with the additional payments we’re making for free school meals. I must add, they don’t fully fund us for the payments they announced they’re going to make to families. It is at a cost to the Council. I suppose it’s what’s going to happen after 1st April, a new financial year and will there’ll be funding available from then on. Families are used to having support.” (Council staff respondent)

Into the future, respondents highlighted the need to provide free school meals for asylum seeker families. They also highlighted the need to continue to provide support for people unwilling or unable to go out to shop for food:

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/foodpovertygrant2021>

<sup>45</sup> While uncertainty about funding for 2021 was expressed by our workshop participant, the Welsh Government had announced in October an extension of funding to cover free school meals over the Easter holidays as well: <https://gov.wales/marcus-rashford-mbe-backs-welsh-government-decision-ensure-free-school-meal-provisions-every-school>

“It’s going to take a while, I think, for people to actually have the confidence to go out and do their shopping things as normal.” (Third sector respondent)

Respondents were also keen to carry forward positive aspects of Swansea’s food response and to learn from what was enacted. They hoped to continue to see links between the Council departments as well as with third sector organisations and continue to establish the Swansea Food Poverty Network:

“[The pandemic] has changed things. Like we’ve set up the Swansea Food Poverty Network...we want to take all the good stuff that’s happened and make it into normal, you know, make it part of what we do going forward.” (Council staff respondent)





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