FOOD VULNERABILITY DURING COVID-19

Local responses to household food insecurity across the UK during COVID-19 (September 2020 – September 2021)

An analysis of experiences from 14 local areas from around the UK and recommendations for future policy and practice appendix

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About the report

This report presents findings from the second phase of work exploring local responses to food access issues during the COVID-19 pandemic across the UK. The first phase of this research involved 14 local case studies which explored responses to food access issues between March-August 2020 (the first UK COVID-19 lockdown). Individual areas and a cross comparison report were published. The outputs from the first phase are available on the project webpage: http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/. This second report presents findings from four follow up thematic workshops with previous case study research participants across the 14 areas. The workshops focussed on activity during the period September 2020 – September 2021 in relation to three broad themes which were identified in the findings of the first stage of the research: the work of local councils, local food aid landscapes and the role of local collaboration and partnership working in responses to food access issues.

This case study research is part of a wider project designed to map and monitor responses to risks of food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) through the UKRI Ideas to Address COVID-19 grant call and runs from July 2020 to January 2022. In addition to the local case study work presented in this and the previous reports, the project is also examining national level responses and working with a participatory policy panel made up of people who have direct experience of a broad range of support to access food over this time. We welcome your feedback on the contents of this report. If you would like to get in touch with the project team, please email us at foodvulnerabilitycovid19@sheffield.ac.uk.

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on food access in multiple ways, but also on the ways that governments, third sector organisations, and communities responded to the problem of food insecurity. Responses have been varied and at scales unprecedented before the pandemic. Our ESRC-funded project has mapped and monitored local and national responses to risks of rising food insecurity in the UK over the course of the pandemic.

As part of this project, in summer 2021, we published 8 individual case studies and a cross-case comparison of 14 local authority areas that reported on the nature of local level responses to food insecurity enacted over the first wave of the pandemic (March-August 2020). This report builds on those findings, examining local level responses in the 14 case study areas, as the pandemic continued over September 2020 to September 2021, with a particular focus on the work of local councils, food aid providers, other third sector organisations, as well as local collaboration and partnership working.

We find that during September 2020 – September 2021, a wide range of initiatives in the case study areas continued to support households experiencing food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. This support included initiatives that pre-dated the pandemic, many of which had been adapted for the new context, and initiatives that had emerged during the pandemic. There was an ongoing combination of financial, food and other support; the split between types of support varied between and within local areas. There were also attempts to restore support and activities which had been disrupted by the pandemic, but in some cases, there were a number of challenges to doing so.

Local councils, local collaborations and partnerships, and food aid providers continued to provide a range of activities to support food access from September 2020 to September 2021 in the case study areas. Many **local councils continued to provide direct food provision** to certain population groups, such as people who were self-isolating. Some of the significant adaptations food aid providers made to their service during March to August 2020 were still in place during September 2020 to September 2021, such as home deliveries of food parcels. In other cases, organisations were reverting back to pre-pandemic ways of operating.

The **level of demand** that individual food aid providers experienced since September 2020 varied. Individual food aid providers reported increased demand, reduced demand and unchanged demand for their services. Where additional support in place earlier in the pandemic had ended (e.g. local authority food box provision), some existing food aid providers were starting to get busier. Alternatively, where the new support available in response to the pandemic was continuing, there was an ongoing reduction in need for the existing food aid providers.

There was a mixed picture in the trajectory of **new actors** providing food aid during March to August 2020. Some of the more informal, community provision had now ceased; other organisations returned to their pre-pandemic activities which did not involve food provision; and others continued to operate. There was also evidence of an increasing interest in, and use of, low-cost community food retail models.

Activities were taking place to **strengthen the provision of 'wraparound support'** such as the development of resources for signposting purposes. The use of **'cash first'** schemes continued by councils and third sector organisations, and there were examples of cash first approaches newly being introduced as well.

Some types of food aid activities, such as community meals and cooking groups, had been paused in March 2020 because of lockdown restrictions. The extent to which these activities had subsequently resumed varied. Where they had not resumed, this was a cause for concern, particularly given that **social** isolation was seen as likely to have increased during the pandemic due to the lockdown and social distancing measures.

Data from the case study areas highlighted four key trends that have the potential to reshape the landscape of local responses to food insecurity:

1. **Cash first approaches increasingly integrated in local responses to food insecurity**

Cash first approaches were playing an increasingly prominent role in local responses to food insecurity in the case study areas – in both council and community sector provision. A spectrum of 'cash based' responses was evident, including income maximisation efforts, cash grants and vouchers. A common concern with these approaches, however, was that their success is determined by the adequacy of the social security safety net and/or earned incomes, over which local level governments and organisations have little control.

2. **A range of actors driving for comprehensive approaches and system-wide strategies**

Participants' priorities for the future include that work be done to foreground sustainable collaboration in future responses. This should involve key actors including local government departments and public services that can help people access appropriate support and advice, as well as other third sector organisations. Food partnerships, food poverty alliances and other local networks continue to be powerful vehicles for collaboration, sharing of good practice, and developing a joint system-wide vision and accompanying set of actions.

3. **Recognising the role of third sector organisations and the limitations of food aid capacity and food supply**

This research has once again highlighted that third sector food aid provision was a linchpin of local responses throughout the COVID-19 response. However, the data also highlighted levels of fatigue and potential burn out amongst food aid providers. As we expect the economic fall-out of the pandemic to endure for a number of years, there needs to be full, frank and inclusive discussions – at both the national and local levels - of the role that community organisations should and can play in response to food insecurity.

4. **Increasing the reach of community food projects and other services**

As specific groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and its aftermath, we consider that targeting and tailoring of support warrants particular attention from practitioners and policymakers. Furthermore, as some projects aim to have more inclusive

models of support and reach a wider group of people, projects are considering how they communicate and facilitate access to support.

There are some powerful lessons to be taken from the experiences of those leading local responses to food insecurity during COVID-19 in the case study areas. These relate to the overall approach to food insecurity, support for both individual and partnership initiatives, the roles of the third sector and new initiatives, perceptions of food support, and food boxes for those who were shielding.

- **Take a whole systems approach to tackling household food insecurity:** This includes increasing emphasis on 'cash first' support, alternative framings of responses such as a rights-based approach, publicising the desire to end the need for food banks and the plan for how this can be achieved, and campaigning locally and nationally.

- **Retain and sustain networks and partnership working:** Partnership working continued to be a key feature of effectively implementing a joined-up response. Participants hoped that strong partnership working, and support to enable it, will continue.

- **Harness and guide new interest in food support systems:** Many new actors began providing food aid across March to August 2020. This capacity and the intent were welcomed however there were also some concerns, tensions and challenges regarding these new actors. Reflecting back on that period, there were concerns that the new actors did not have the appropriate knowledge to, for example, ensure compliance with data protection. There were also concerns about the longer-term impact of their actions.

- **Retain wide engagement, from a range of audiences, for food access interventions:** Participants reflected on how the food aid provided during the pandemic may have increased engagement with issues of household food insecurity and income crises through bringing more people to the 'table' or by raising the awareness of the work being done by the third sector. However, there was still more to be done to increase engagement from a range of stakeholders, and there were concerns that engagement was waning.

- **Empower third sector responses in a sustainable way:** Third sector organisations continued to play a pivotal role in supporting food access during September 2020 to September 2021. They are valuable sources of insight as well as key for reaching communities. Though they faced varying levels of need for their services, they were all concerned about increasing need in the future. The toll of providing high levels of support during the pandemic, fear for the future and burnout were all present.

- **Understand, and respond to, the range of factors impacting food access:** These factors include particular challenges in rural areas, a spectrum of physical food access issues, the stigma of seeking support, and (in)effective food recovery.

- **Avoid negative local perceptions of food support:** Third sector food aid providers reflected on the judgements that were sometimes made, by people in their local communities, of their activities and the people their projects were supporting. Such judgements can feed the shame and stigma of accessing food aid.

- **Learn from the limitations of the national food box schemes for people who were shielding:** Shortcomings of the national food box scheme for people who were shieling continued to be raised including suitability, variety, nutritional quality and duplication.

In addition, the data from case study areas also raises some more immediate and practical questions that local stakeholders, policymakers, researchers and funders may wish to consider when looking ahead:

- There have been significant challenges for organisations restarting social and face-to-face activities. How can these challenges be addressed, and this be prioritised?

- There is clearly a need to garner the support of communities in times of crisis but how can this be done in a way that complements and supports, rather than frustrates and disrupts, existing infrastructure and systems?

- Where new food aid providers have been established over the pandemic and remain, what support can be provided to them to develop from or critique the direct food aid model?

- How can data be gathered which evidences the use, reach and impact of funding provided by local and national governments to third sector organisations, but in a way that is not overly resource intensive for these organisations?

- Among social service providers (whether third sector or local authority), some of the new ways of working over the pandemic have been useful in particular circumstances such as home delivery, telephone support and online classes, meetings and events. How can organisations be supported to maximise the positive aspects of new ways of working while also addressing the shortcomings of these?

- Direct food aid provision can be contentious locally. How can assumptions in local communities be addressed?

- How do projects and local communities think through the role of open access provision that may help to reach those in need or who may not come forward and support a preventative approach?

In **conclusion**, our findings suggest some promising developments have emerged from the pandemic, most notably the trend towards cash-first responses, the strengthened partnership and collaborative working and, more broadly, the momentum for integrating food insecurity responses into wider systems. However, the crucial role of the food aid sector, the toll of this reliance and the fear of growing need on a sector already at capacity are areas of significant concern. This, again, reiterates that charitable food aid cannot be the vanguard response to household food insecurity in the UK; governments and councils must play a proactive role in shaping policy and practice in line with the needs of people and those organisations who have provided support.

1. Introduction

In July 2021, we published a first round of findings from case study research into local level responses to household food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a specific focus on the period March-August 2020.[1] This first phase of the research highlighted the enormous scale of the response seen in local areas, with voluntary food aid front and centre of the support available, as well as the unprecedented level of provision of food parcels, vouchers and financial support by a range of actors including local governments. This new report presents findings from a second phase of case study work, exploring how local responses to food access issues during the COVID-19 pandemic went on to evolve after August 2020. It looks at local level responses to risks of household food insecurity between September 2020 and September 2021, with a particular focus on the work of local councils, food aid providers and local collaboration and partnership working.

Both phases of the local case study research have focused on the following 14 areas:

England	Northern Ireland
- Bradford - Herefordshire - Greenwich - Leeds - Merton - West Berkshire	- Belfast - Derry City and Strabane
Scotland	**Wales**
- Argyll and Bute - Edinburgh - Glasgow - Moray	- Cardiff - Swansea

This phase of the case study research adopted a cross-case thematic approach to build on the phase one findings. It explored the following themes:

1. Council responses to risks of household food insecurity (September 2020 – September 2021).

During the March-August 2020 UK-wide lockdown, our previous research showed that local councils played several different roles in response to food access issues. These included significant direct food provision, funding and partnering with food charities, and changes to income maximisation and discretionary grant support. To build on these phase one findings, this second stage of the research sought to explore what councils went on to do in later stages of the pandemic (September 2020 – September 2021) and to capture their future plans for supporting access to food. This phase of the research also sought to give participants the chance to reflect on what they learned from providing responses to food access issues over this time, and how these lessons can inform future activity in their areas and beyond.

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[1] http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/#case-studies

2. The role of local collaboration and partnership working in responses food access issues during the COVID-19 pandemic (September 2020 – September 2021).

During the March-August 2020 UK-wide lockdown, across the case study areas partnership working, coordination and collaboration were seen by participants as key to the success of local responses. The areas studied included places with existing formal partnerships, partnerships that were set up in response to the pandemic and areas that had less structured practices of working together. Both new partnerships and strengthened partnerships were seen as key positives to emerge from this period, and participants hoped these would continue. The second phase of the research sought to learn more about the role of partnerships between September 2020-September 2021, the characteristics of effective partnership working over this time, and the enablers of, or barriers to, best practices in partnership working. It also sought to give participants the opportunity to reflect on what was learned from providing responses to food access issues through partnership working and how these lessons can inform future activity.

3. Changes to the landscape of charitable food aid landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic (September 2020 – September 2021).

Our previous findings highlighted how local landscapes of food aid changed significantly over March to August 2020, with many actors (including local councils, third sector organisations, food alliances and partnerships, and informal community groups) providing support with food access through a range of interventions. Over this time, changes to the landscape included existing food aid providers making significant adaptations to their operations, new funding sources becoming available to food aid charities, and an increase in actors providing support in the form of direct food provision.

Given the scale of need and the interventions put in place, as well as the changes observed over spring/summer 2020, we concluded that it would be important to monitor the charitable food aid landscapes in the longer-term, including the impacts of these changes on the experiences of household food insecurity and the support offered in response. In this second phase of the case study research, we therefore set out to learn more about the actors providing food aid in the period September 2020- September 2021, how they continued to adapt, and the plans they were developing for future food aid provision. We also sought to provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on the legacy of these changes and adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To explore these themes, four online interactive workshops were held, two on the theme of food aid landscapes and one each on themes of collaboration and partnership working and on the work of local councils. The full method is outlined in the methodological appendix. Each of the 131 research participants from the phase one data collection were invited to attend a workshop, based on their area of policy or practice. Due to the high number of participants in the first phase of the research that were working on charitable food aid provision, the 'changes to the landscape of charitable food aid landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic' workshop was held twice. The other workshops were held once. The target participation level was about 8-10 people, so once registration for each workshop reached between 10-12 people no further reminder emails were sent. A total of 32 participants attended the workshops. The participant

breakdown for each of the workshops is shown in Table 10 of the Methodological Appendix. Each of the fourteen case study areas was represented in at least one of the workshops.

This report begins by providing an account of key developments in the local activities being undertaken to support access to food from September 2020 to September 2021. The report goes on to explore the key learnings that emerged through the pandemic and the priorities for key local actors as they look ahead. Based on workshop findings, evidence-based learning for the future is then outlined.

2. Updates and developments on activity to support food access from September 2020 - September 2021

The first phase of the local case study research explored local responses to food access issues between March to August 2020 (the first UK-wide COVID-19 lockdown). The second phase of the research follows on from this, seeking to provide an update on activities from September 2020 to September 2021. These updates were gathered during the online workshops using an interactive whiteboard tool and a subsequent facilitated discussion, asking participants for an update on their activities.

2.1 High level summary of activities supporting food access

Tables 1-3, on the following pages, present a high-level summary of the types of activity being undertaken in each of the thematic areas (by local councils, by local collaborations and partnerships and by food aid providers), via data collected on the online whiteboards.[2]

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[2] The Google tool Jamboard was used for the interactive whiteboard method.

Table 1: Activities to support food access by local councils from September 2020 – September 2021

Types of activities over the 'COVID winter' (September 20 – March 21)	Types of activities over March 2021 – September 2021
School Food ● Supporting households with children eligible for free school meals by providing vouchers or cash payments during school holidays. ● Supporting households with children eligible for free school meals who were self-isolating during term time by providing vouchers or cash payments during school holidays. ● Providing funding for free school meals for families with no recourse to public funds and other families identified by schools as being in need. ● Funding food provision for school holiday clubs and/ or providing food parcels to households attending holiday clubs during school holidays.	**School Food** ● Providing lunch for pupils eligible for free school meals, but unable to attend school due to self-isolation. ● Continuing support for households eligible for free school meals through holiday clubs in Easter and Summer holidays.
Support for households experiencing physical barriers to accessing food ● Providing food parcels and meals to households self-isolating or shielding. ● Providing digital devices and support with online shopping. ● Creating directories of local companies offering delivery.	**Support for households experiencing physical barriers to accessing food** ● Ongoing provision of support for households that are self-isolating[3] e.g., provision of food parcels and meals.
Support for households experiencing financial barriers to accessing food ● Providing cash payments and vouchers for food, fuel and white goods vouchers. ● Referring households to food banks and money advice services.	**Support for households experiencing financial barriers to accessing food** ● Revising eligibility for local welfare assistance schemes. ● Providing payments and vouchers for food, fuel and white goods vouchers. ● Referring households to food banks and money advice services.
Supporting the third sector ● Providing funding for third sector organisations supporting households experiencing food insecurity. ● Ongoing coordinating of local food responses via for example, weekly meetings with key partners. ● Providing expertise on nutrition, suitability, cultural appropriateness, safety ● Building capacity and skills for signposting food aid recipients to other sources of support.	**Supporting the third sector** ● Ongoing provision of funding for third sector organisations supporting households experiencing food insecurity. ● Supporting food aid providers to address presenting issues at food banks.
Strengthening partnerships ● Maintaining and strengthening the partnerships that developed before or during the first phase of the pandemic.	**Strengthening partnerships** ● Continuing to liaise with and support networking and collaboration with partners.

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[3] Self-isolating guidance, to not leave your home because you have or might have coronavirus, is issued by Governments in each of the four countries.

Table 2: Activities to support food access by food alliances, food partnerships and other partnerships from September 2020 - September 2021

Types of activities over the 'COVID winter' (September 20 - March 21)	Types of activities over March 2021 - September 2021
Direct food provision ● Continuing with direct food provision such as meals on wheels services, community pantries, community larders, emergency food parcels.[4] ● Continuing to run COVID-19 community hubs to distribute food to households requiring support. **Collecting and sharing data** ● For households: Providing information such as developing websites which listed all food aid providers in the area. ● For research and learning: Collecting data on local food responses throughout the pandemic. **Supporting activity to address the root causes of food insecurity** ● Supporting member organisations to think beyond crisis support and develop longer term sustainable responses that tackle root causes of food insecurity. ● Ensuring members were aware of financial support available to households.	**Direct food provision** ● Continuing provision as over the COVID winter period. ● Beginning to resume services stopped as a result of the pandemic. ● Supporting new responses such as 'affordable food' models. **Supporting ongoing communication and networking across actors** ● Coordinating and attending regular networking meetings. ● Ongoing communication with actors operating in the space. ● Distributing regular newsletters. **Engagement with wider efforts to tackle systems change** ● Developing and contributing to local food plans. ● Facilitating and promoting local supply chains.

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[4] Here participants differentiated pantries as operating a membership model and larders not operating a membership model. These terms may be used differently by other organisations.

Table 3: Activities and changes in operations of third sector food aid providers since September 2020[5]

Types of activities to support food access since September 2020	Changes to operations and working practices since September 2020[6]
Direct food provision • Continued emergency food parcel distribution, food larders and meal delivery services (both takeaway and delivery, free and 'pay what you can', hot and cold). • Food aid support for priority groups (e.g., people experiencing homeless). • Food hampers provided over Christmas. **School food** • Provision of breakfast club at local school. • Provision of vouchers for families eligible for free school meals who were self-isolating. **Support for households self-isolating** • Including meal delivery and shopping services to households self-isolating. **'Cash first' approaches** • Local welfare provision payments. • Provision of vouchers for supermarkets and/or local shops. • Provision of grants for clients to attend "pay what you can" meal provision. • Providing advice remotely. **Other food activities** • In person community and family cooking sessions. • Online cooking classes. • Food growing. **Food recovery** • Utilising surplus food to reduce food waste. **Signposting** • Increasing the awareness of available local council support. **Contribute to wider efforts to tackle food insecurity** • Involvement in initiatives such as moving beyond food banks, COVID-19 inquiry, and COP26.	**Changes to the form of support offered (unique to individual organisations)** • Ceased provision of vouchers as an alternative to a food parcel. • Provision of vouchers for community larders and supermarkets rather than food parcels. • Transition from food larder (free food) to pantries (membership model). **Changes to referral routes** • Resumed acceptance of self-referrals. • Referral agents working with a wider range of food aid providers (food banks, food larders, food pantries, community fridges). • Dealing directly with clients rather than through an intermediary organisation. **Additional services** • Offering money advice services, including face-to-face where possible. • Provision of children's clothing. **Increased availability of food banks** • Food banks closed during spring/summer 2020 now reopened. • Increased opening hours of existing food banks. **Means of delivery** • Continuing with delivery model of emergency food parcels as well as or rather than resuming face to face collection. • Resuming face to face collection of food parcels (where this had been paused). • Coffee/ tea provision at time of collecting food parcel still on hold. • Option to choose food items for emergency food parcel resumed (rather than pre-packed parcels).

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[5] The first Jamboard presented in the charitable food aid workshop asked about changes in demand and changes in operations and working practices since September 2020. Data provided on changes in demand is reported in section 2.3.4. The data provided in response to 'changes in operations and working practices' provided insight into current activities and changes to operations. For ease, the data has been split according to these two headings.
[6] Participants in this workshop were not asked to split activities to cover the two periods, September 2020 – March 2021 and April 2021 to September 2021.

Further details of activities supporting food access during September 2020 - September 2021, and the developments in these activities since August 2020 (our first data collection period) arose in the group discussions. These are discussed below.

2.2 Developments in direct food provision by national and local government

The first phase of the research identified that a range of actors were providing a varied landscape of food responses between March and the end of June 2020.[7] These included responses at both a national and a local level. In all four countries, national schemes were established to support people who were shielding and unable to access food. Many councils also began providing their own local government food parcels. There were several reasons for this local government provision. These included providing support to a much wider range of eligible households than the national scheme (i.e., not only to people who were shielding but to other households unable to access food due to physical or financial reasons); providing a wider range of fresh food than the national schemes; providing rapid support in crisis situations; providing food as a 'stop gap' before receipt of national government food parcels; and providing tailored support for individual households. From late June to August 2020, as some of the lockdown restrictions were eased, there was a move away from direct provision of food by national and local governments. Shielding guidance was paused at the end of July 2020 (mid-August in Wales) and the national grocery box schemes for people who were shielding came to an end at this time. Across our case study sites, direct local authority food provision was also generally wound down. Resources also began to reduce as redeployed staff returned to original roles, volunteers who had been furloughed returned to their jobs and council-owned buildings, such as schools and community centres, which had been used as food hubs, returned to their usual uses.

Since July 2020 formal advice to shield, that is, to not leave home for any reason except in the case of medical emergencies or health appointments, was not reintroduced again in Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland. In England, however, shielding advice was reinstated during November 2020 and January to March 2021 lockdowns. National food box schemes for clinically extremely vulnerable people did not resume in any UK nation at any point after they ended in summer 2020. As can be seen from Table 1, from September 2020, local councils continued to provide food parcels to specific population groups as needed, particularly people who were self-isolating or shielding. This provision was ongoing, for example, the participant from Cardiff Council noted:

> "Going forward, we're still providing food boxes for people who are self-isolating who don't have anyone to provide food for them and no one to go and get food bank vouchers and food for them on their behalf." (Council workshop, Jamboard, Cardiff)

In Glasgow, a partnership between the council and third sector organisations, which had been established in the early stages of the pandemic, continued to provide food parcels for households that were self-isolating due to having COVID-19:

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[7] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

> "When there was the shielding guidance, the council was given the responsibility for contacting people who were shielding. They put in place a partnership through us, with third-sector food banks and community transport organisations. They would say, "We've got these people who need a food parcel today."…We're still doing that. We're still doing emergency food-bank food parcels to people who the council have phoned because they've been newly notified as having COVID." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)

Although this provision was common, we also heard of other council areas where this support did not seem to be in place. One third sector food aid provider in Argyll and Bute noted they were now sometimes supporting people who were self-isolating:

> "Something which has emerged a new demand (although small) is a call for us to provide food support for those who are self-isolating. The Council no longer has a mechanism for providing the kind of food parcels that they did at the start of the pandemic." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Argyll and Bute)

We also heard that councils were transitioning away from some of the activity that had been put in place earlier in the pandemic. For example, Bradford Council had been providing funding to one organisation to provide food to food banks to ensure they had adequate supply. This arrangement stopped in July 2021. In Leeds, the approach taken to provide emergency food during the pandemic was stopped in March 2021, with new systems in place to support households in need:

> "I think when the need to increase the emergency food provision started back in March [2020], we had a group that started to direct how that delivered its work. It was more strategic partners working around food insecurity. I think there were new people who came to the table. Certainly, from a leadership perspective, there was Public Health and Financial Inclusion leading that together. I think back in probably this March [2021], we took the decision to bring that to a close because we'd set up another infrastructure around hubs that were supporting in different areas of our city to have good coverage for support. We were looking at how they would be running longer term." (Council workshop, Leeds)

However, also in Leeds, where the council anticipated that changes in their direct food provision may lead to increased pressure on the local food aid organisations, they were working with them to sense check their capacity for a potential increase in need:

> "I think we're very aware that during the pandemic we [the council] obviously put in a lot of additional capacity to support, in terms of a one point of access for food parcels and that type of provision. But we're now reviewing how that will work moving forward. Because ultimately a lot of our providers who did food aid were in the city and working in the city prior to COVID and maybe [they] have seen a bit of a reduction in [the need for] their support. As the council provision phases back potentially, they could see an uptake." (Council workshop, Leeds)

Local councils also continued to provide support to families of children eligible for free school meals during the school holidays, and this was sometimes in the form of direct food parcels if required.

2.3 Developments in direct food provision by the third sector

The previous research highlighted a range of direct food provision by third sector organisations during March to August 2020.[8] Generally, across the third sector organisations the types of food provision were food parcels for collection, food parcels for home delivery, takeaway hot meals, and home delivery of hot meals. To provide these services existing food aid providers made a significant number of adaptations including changes to the means of distribution, parcel contents and referral routes. Organisations which, before the pandemic, provided community meals, community lunches and community cooking groups also changed significantly due to the restrictions imposed by lockdown. Many reoriented their services in March/ April 2020 and began to provide hot meals for takeaway, home deliveries of hot meals, food parcels (collect and delivered) and virtual cookery and other support sessions. The data collected during the workshops provided an update into these activities and adaptations.

2.3.1 Means of food parcel distribution

As reported in the previous case studies, many food aid providers started providing home deliveries of food parcels during March to August 2020. Participants discussed how some providers had now stopped this, whilst others continued to offer them:

> "Now we're beginning to think, it [deliveries] has been really helpful, for other reasons, other than the pandemic, for some people. We don't want to just say, "We'll continue delivering," because there's a lot to be said for engaging with people, sitting and talking to them, but I also don't feel that we should just revert back and say, "Absolutely never. We're never going to deliver now." Unfortunately, some of our colleagues in other areas have said, "No. We're going back to what we did before. You used to have to come to us, and that's what you'll have to do." I think there needs to be a bit of a middle ground. I think we just need to try it and see. We're going to continue, certainly for the rest of this year, whilst alongside opening up our food bank centres anyway, and see how that goes." (Charitable food aid workshop, Leeds)

Other participants discussed some of the advantages of delivery services such as overcoming issues of limited transport options in rural areas and providing an opportunity to identify other needs which households may have. Examples provided were observing a lack of kitchen equipment or an overgrown garden which then allowed the food aid providers to link people in with a wider suite of support to address these wider household needs. We also heard of one organisation in Moray which had newly provided emergency food in March 2020 in the form of food parcels delivered to households transitioning to a food larder model in December 2020. The larder, which still provides free food, is open to all every day.

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[8] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

2.3.2 Referral routes

During March to August 2020, changes were made to the referral options for people seeking third sector food aid. These changes included starting to accept self-referrals and accepting alternative forms of referrals from referring agencies who were no longer seeing their clients face to face. These types of referrals included phone calls, emails, and e-referrals.

For some organisations the changes to referral routes introduced in March to August 2020 were still in place over September 2020 to September 2021 and were planned to be retained for the future. For example, one food aid provider from Argyll and Bute discussed how, prior to the pandemic, they provided food parcels to people via another agency, such as advice services or social workers. As a result of the pandemic, they changed to providing them directly to recipients following referral. They expected this new process would continue as it was easier, logistically, for the volunteers, and it fostered a better connection between the organisation and the people receiving the food parcels. Another entry to the Jamboard in the charitable food aid workshop (area not identified) suggested "agencies being able to refer online" was a feature of the response introduced during the pandemic that should be continued into the future. Alternatively, others were reverting back to the referral routes that were in place prior to the pandemic. For example, the food bank in Moray had stopped accepting self-referrals during the first lockdown to ensure people were first routed to the cash first options that were available through the local council. At the September workshop, they reported that they had now started to accept self-referrals again due to some of the other support available operating at maximum capacity.

One food bank in the Trussell Trust network in Leeds noted changes in the common access routes over the pandemic, from March 2020 to September 2021:

> "Pre pandemic referrals were all paper based. Once agencies and the food banks stopped being directly open to people we moved to e-referral. Most referrals came via the Citizens Advice 'help through hardship' helpline. Since organisations and agencies have started to see clients locally we have started to get more referrals from people working directly with their clients." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Leeds)[9]

We also learned of new practices by referral agents. One participant who represented a housing association that was a referral agent for local food banks reported that since September 2020, they were now working with a larger range of food banks and community larders/fridges/pantries. They had also "refined the referral process and also provided membership for larders" (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, West Berkshire).

2.3.3 Direct meal provision

Our previous research highlighted that some third sector organisations, across case study areas, had started to provide hot or cold meals, either for delivery or takeaway, in response to the pandemic. The workshops provided some updates to this form of support from August 2020.

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[9] https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/our-work/advice-partnerships/help-through-hardship/

The previous Moray case study reported on a partnership of third sector and community organisations which introduced a meals on wheels service in April 2020.[10] This was primarily in response to the physical access barriers that rural households, often with elderly residents, were facing and to offset the loss of lunch clubs and other social opportunities that ceased to operate in March 2020. This provision was stopped in March 2021; this was partly due to the end of the funding but also because it was perceived that the need for the service had reduced as other sources of support were now more readily available:

> "Our funding took us up to that point, but we felt that the need wasn't quite as high. By that point we were really just giving meals into sheltered housing and older people's complexes. More people were able to go to cafés, and life was just starting to get a wee bit more back to normal." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

Alternatively, we heard from an organisation in the more rural area of Derry City and Strabane District which had provided a meals on wheels service during the pandemic. At the time of the workshop, they were hoping to get funding to be able to continue to provide this service. The rationale for the meals on wheels was that it was a good way to make a connection with people who may be isolated:

> "I think the meals on wheels service is more looked on as connection, you know, for isolated folk, rather than them actually needing the meals. But it's a good way of making a connection with someone coming on a daily basis in a lot of cases. That's the sort of thing that, we as a small group are targeting." (Charitable food aid workshop, Derry City and Strabane)

We also heard about community cook and freeze sessions that had provided meal deliveries during the pandemic in Greenwich. They perceived the demand for the support, in the form of a frozen meal, had reduced, although this did not necessarily reflect a reduction in a need for general food support.

2.3.4 Demand

The levels of demand that individual food aid providers were experiencing since September 2020 varied. Individual food aid providers reported increased demand, reduced demand and unchanged demand for their services.

One organisation in West Berkshire that reported reduced demand since September 2020 suggested this was because many of the physical access barriers experienced in the first lockdown were no longer present and some of the other support systems, that had been paused due to the pandemic, had now restarted:

> "For us, the main reason for it [reduced need] is because most of the demand came from people having logistic issues because we cover quite a rural area. It was access to transport, which is always there. It was people not being able to use their normal kind of community support, extended family and so on. I think a lot of support that was

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[10] Gordon, K., Loopstra, R., Goldberg, B. and Lambie-Mumford, H., (2021) 'Moray Case Study, Mapping local responses: March to August 2020', published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

there pre-pandemic stopped during the pandemic, for all kinds of reasons, and that has been resumed." (Charitable food aid workshop, West Berkshire)

Where the pandemic had led to an increase in the levels of other support available (through new actors or new interventions) the impact of this on existing food aid providers since August 2020 varied. Where the additional support in place earlier in the pandemic had now stopped, some existing food aid providers were starting to get busier. For example, a food bank in Moray reported getting busier since the more local interventions that were available earlier in the pandemic had stopped operating:

"Then there was a lot more community-based work set up, so people were able to get support a lot more locally. In some places, that has ended and a lot of the funding that was available is going now, so we are definitely starting to see ourselves getting busier now." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

Alternatively, where the new support available in response to the pandemic was continuing, this sometimes led to an ongoing reduction in need for the existing food aid providers. For example, one food bank in Leeds reported lower demand than before the pandemic:

"Demand for our service has remained lower than it was pre pandemic we believe this is due to the large number of independent food aid available and the food aid organised by the local authority. There were a few weeks when it seemed to be increasing but overall it is lower." (Charitable food aid workshop, Leeds)

2.4 Developments in the use of low-cost community food retail

In our earlier case study reports, there was evidence of an increasing appetite for and use of low-cost community food retail models. These are variously called local or community pantries, larders, or fridges, social supermarkets or food clubs. Though they often also rely on redistributed surplus food, they differ from food banks because people usually pay a small amount either as a membership fee or on a per-use basis and then get to choose from the selection items available. Making fresh foods available are also usually a feature of these models.

All three workshops highlighted what seemed to be a sustained interest in these models over 2020 to 2021. This was particularly evident in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Moray, Leeds, and Bradford where these low-cost models were discussed as being a development in provision over September 2020 – September 2021:

"Another feature during this time [the COVID winter] was the growth in new 'pantries', which was fast." (Partnership workshop, Jamboard, Glasgow)

In response to the question on 'partnership activity and collaborative working to support food access now' one participant from Leeds wrote:

> "Development of 18 food pantries been put in place in Leeds. 12 with Family Action, 1 with Church Action on Poverty and 5 with Health for All." (Partnership workshop, Jamboard, Leeds)[11]

One participant described the pantry model which they were trialling in Moray:

> "On a more practical level, we're trialling pantries, which is zero waste. It'll be open to everybody for a very small fee. So, you pay £2.50, but you're getting £10, £15 worth of food, but we would also have some free food there, as well. It's just trying a different way to give people the choice and the access to food and taking away the stigma around it as well." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

As well as new low-cost community food retail models being set up, we also learned of an existing food bank in Bradford that was transitioning to a low-cost model at the time of data collection.

Whilst these developments in low-cost community food retail models were generally perceived to be positive, participants also highlighted that there may always a need for some free food aid:

> "But I think there's always a need for food banks, free food, as well." (Partnership workshop, Bradford).

Although there are distinctions between low-cost community food retail and food banks, often on membership, cost, eligibility criteria and referrals, one participant noted that the distinction between food banks and food pantries may not be well understood including by their target groups, creating a "messy" space:

> "Part of the consultation [we did] with the Food Family's Network across Edinburgh, which Food Power supported, was [asking] what is the difference between a food bank and a food pantry? And people just- they don't know, they don't know. They just know it's a place for food, so it's a bit messy at the moment, to be honest with you." (Charitable food aid workshop, Edinburgh)

2.5 Developments in activities paused in March 2020

Our previous case study research highlighted that the in-person social aspects, which third sector organisations provided alongside food aid, had largely ceased as a result of the restrictions imposed by the UK-wide lockdown in March 2020.[12] This included some of the social and wraparound aspects of food bank operations, such as inviting people in for a cup of tea and a chat when they collect their parcel, or the social activities such as community lunches, community cafes and community cooking groups. These had not resumed at the time of our case study data collection (late 2020), and they were keenly missed by research participants. At the time of this data collection (September 2021), there was a mixed picture in terms of the extent to which such activities had resumed.

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[11] https://leedsfoodaidnetwork.co.uk/parish-pantries/
[12] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-

In response to the Jamboard question 'what did you/your organisation stop doing during spring of 2020 because of the pandemic that you think should be picked back up again?', a common response was around the restarting of the social aspects of food provision such as community meals or lunch clubs. This was particularly the case given that social isolation was seen as likely to have increased during the pandemic due to the lockdown and social distancing measures. These entries imply that there are still a lot of such activities to be resumed. In addition, we heard examples of the briefer social interactions that food banks sometimes offer having still not resumed. For example, one food bank in Swansea was still not inviting people in for tea or coffee. One food bank in Leeds, which operated from the same building as a community café, noted the café was not yet open.

There was also a varied picture regarding the resumption of lunch clubs. Lunch clubs provided by the third sector had recently restarted in Moray, although this has been later than they had hoped due to the venues of the lunches not yet being back in operation. However, having been restarted for a couple of weeks at the time of data collection the lunches were getting increasingly busy:

> "Two weeks ago it started. It's starting to get busier again. Everybody is coming back and they're quite confident to come back." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

In other areas such lunch clubs were yet to restart. In contrast to the previous quote that attendees were confident to start attending, another participant said:

> "Similar result in luncheon club etc - folk still reluctant to gather in groups due to relatively high covid rate still." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Derry City and Strabane)

We heard one example of an organisation in Edinburgh restarting community cookery sessions.

Whilst organisations had worked hard to offer alternatives, and continued to do so, such as virtual cooking groups, these were appreciated but not a sufficient replacement in the longer term:

> "Through the pandemic we also did a slow cooker class. We sent out the slow cooker to the families and sent out the ingredients and then on Zoom showed them how to cook it. It's not ideal but it was the best we could do at that time. They're now saying they would like to actually come in and learn it in a classroom with the tutor rather than on Zoom because they feel they missed quite a lot of it during the Zoom. That was the feedback we got from that programme. Although they appreciated it and enjoyed it, they thought they'd missed some stuff because it was done on Zoom rather than in a classroom environment." (Council workshop, Derry City and Strabane)

Although, alternatively, one participant noted that online classes can have a wider reach, particularly for people who may struggle to get out of the house. Thus, some areas were considering whether and how to retain some online activities.

Participants discussed some of the reasons as to why such services may not have restarted. In some cases, this was due to not getting access to the venues in which the activities were hosted prior to the pandemic and mixed availability of volunteers. The restarting of the lunch club in Moray was much later than they had hoped due to delays in the usual venue becoming accessible again:

> "We had hoped to get our own lunch club up and running at that point, but it has taken us quite a few more months because we were relying on the church. The churches were quite slow to come back into operation." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

In Edinburgh it was estimated that less than half of the community cafes had reopened, and this was partly attributable to lack of access to venues:

> "The buildings are controlled by private landlords or [the] council and they don't have access, they share building space. Just, you know, the red tape and just the uncertainty." (Charitable food aid workshop, Edinburgh)

The cooking classes that had restarted in Edinburgh were made possible by the organisation changing their model from hosting the classes at external sites to running them in-house:

> "One of the things that we've done is we've developed space in our warehouses. We've already got groups booked in, who are coming and doing sessions, educational cook-along sessions within our warehouse. And they also take away food with them. So, we've developed a new model of delivery where we bring the community to us. It's just less red tape with trying to find locations and it makes my team feel safe as well." (Charitable food aid workshop, Edinburgh)

Other reasons for the activities not restarting included the need to ensure staff and volunteers are safe, particularly vulnerable people in what are often small spaces, access to venues, and general feelings of uncertainty:

> "Some of the food banks in our area have got older volunteers still and small spaces and premises have been a real issue for quite a number of them. And it's just not big enough to feel that you can have people coming in and milling around safely, particularly at the moment, where we've got very high levels of COVID. So, it's a combination of volunteers, structures and systems and premises." (Charitable food aid workshop, Herefordshire)

It is worth noting that some of the local councils were supporting organisations to re-open these types of services. For example, Greenwich Council was working to "motivate other community centres/groups to restart community meals/lunch clubs etc that they suspended." (Council workshop, Jamboard, Greenwich). Similarly, Leeds Council were providing support to lunch clubs around "how to make sure they're delivered in a COVID-secure environment." (Council workshop, Jamboard, Leeds). The third sector based lead organisation of the Edinburgh Community Cafe Network was also providing support to the members to reopen. The package of support included visits to discuss reopening and help with publicity:

"We have offered a package to cafes, to get them back open again, which is a full package for reopening. [Such as] support to do some publicity. So, we're going to visit them and put the people and their recipes online. So, really, trying to support them and hold their hand, trying to get them back. Because they're absolutely crucial in a community." (Charitable food aid workshop, Edinburgh)

2.6 Developments in the provision of wraparound support

Data highlighted that both councils and third sector organisations were working to provide 'wraparound' support. Such support entails linking households in with a wider suite of support. Our research covering March to August 2020 highlighted that providing this wraparound support was challenging. Often, this related to the loss of social interaction or signposting opportunities which resulted from the 'grab and go' or home delivery models that had to be adopted by food aid providers. However, we also learned of some organisations finding alternate ways to provide this wraparound support during that time, such as making phone calls to food aid recipients and using the doorstep delivery model as a means to 'check in' with households.[13]

In order to increase this provision, we learned of activity in both Leeds and Swansea to support the development of resources to maximise organisations' capacity to provide wraparound support. The participant from Swansea Council explained the rationale for this:

> "Volunteers at food banks have the opportunity to develop relationships with people that perhaps council staff might not, so it's really important that we are equipping volunteers that work across food aid projects to be able to signpost people and support people and make referrals as appropriate. That's something that we are trying to slowly develop some tools and roll out in Swansea to try and improve that situation somewhat." (Council workshop, Swansea)

Accordingly, Swansea Council provided funding to the third sector organisation, Matthews House, to develop and launch an app to support signposting and linking people in with a range of other support agencies. The 'Hope in Swansea' app was launched in Autumn 2021.[14] The app was developed in response to feedback around knowing where to signpost people to:

> "One of the key messages that we've had from all organisations is that if there are so many organisations that can help to support people, how do we know where to signpost people? There is an app that was launched at the end of August in Swansea. It's called Hope in Swansea, free to download. It's useful for frontline workers, volunteers, people who are just looking for where they can get help." (Council workshop, Swansea).

A partnership of organisations in Leeds developed a Building Food Resilience toolkit which was launched in July 2021.[15] The toolkit identifies an overall vision for the city which seeks to

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[13] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-

[14] https://hopeinswansea.org.uk/

[15] https://leedsfoodpartnership.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/building-food-resilience-toolkit.pdf

support an approach where people experiencing food insecurity are supported "back to independence". Following feedback from food aid providers the toolkit includes a summary of all the signposting opportunities:

> "We understood that for food aid providers, they needed to have the confidence about where they were sending people who they'd supported to and trusting those services to implement the same practice that they have been doing as part of that transition." (Council workshop, Leeds)

Inn Churches, a third sector organisation that provides practical support to people in Bradford including a Food Hub, established the 'Food Savers' scheme with the rationale that they did not want the legacy of COVID-19 to be an overdependence on free food.[16] Members of the scheme access the low-cost food markets whilst also establishing a savings account through the Credit Union:

> "In addition to the pantry model, one thing that's developing in Bradford, and it's beginning to spread as well, is our FoodSavers Network, where the local Credit Union has got on board, as well. That has actually, although maybe it's not a huge number of people yet, it has actually really turned lots of people's lives around that they've actually started saving a few pounds. They're purchasing their food at low cost and they're putting a pound a week aside or something. Then, for some people, that has really shifted their thinking. We've found that lots of people have been really positive. We've been surprised that people… We were worried that people would resent having to put some money in, but then some people have really found that a positive thing and actually have started to take charge of their life in a way they never had before, which is really, really positive." (Partnership workshop, Bradford)

This model was also something that was being considered in Leeds.

Participants also discussed some more general activity to support the provision of wraparound care. For example, in Cardiff meetings of the anchor organisations, who played a key role in direct food provision during March to August 2020 had continued but were now "more broadly around wellbeing support/referrals than distributing food" (Partnership workshop, Jamboard, Cardiff). One of the food banks in Leeds talked of their plans to reiterate to their referrers the need for a range of support to be provided, rather than simply a referral to the food bank:

> "One of the things that I think we really need to do, as a food bank, is engage with people who are making referrals to us. We always have had a relationship with them. That's how they come to be referrers to us, but just to revisit the whole thing about, really, you need to be putting in other support." (Charitable food aid workshop, Leeds)

As well as these specific examples it is also important to note that some of the other interventions also incorporate wraparound support, such as the pantry and social supermarket model (section 2.4) or the 'cash first' scheme in Moray and Argyll and Bute (section 2.7.2).

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[16] https://innchurches.co.uk/foodsavers/

2.7 Developments in income or cash-based responses

We previously reported that many of the case study areas offered or supported income-based responses in a variety of forms, at the same time as food provision, during March – August 2020.[17] Such 'cash first' work encompassed a range of responses including schemes designed to refer or support people to access and maximise their entitlements to the social security system (e.g. signposting or advice services) as well as the provision of additional cash support on top of access to basic entitlements through crisis emergency payments (e.g. emergency finance schemes).

During September 2020 – September 2021, the use of 'cash first' schemes in these two forms continued and we heard examples of local councils and third sector organisations continuing or newly introducing cash first approaches.

2.7.1 Support for income maximisation

Various activities were being undertaken to support households with income maximisation across case study areas during September 2020 – September 2021 in the form of offering, or signposting people to, advice services. These activities were sometimes a resumption of services that has been paused due to lockdown restrictions in March 2020, a continuation of adapted provision introducing during March to August 2020, or services that were introduced more recently (after August 2020). In other cases, where face to face advice had been provided prior to the pandemic, this has been paused and not yet resumed.

Our earlier research highlighted work to make advice services more accessible by, for example, extending opening hours to include evenings and weekends, and providing services in a number of ways, rather than only face to face.[18] We learned that some of these adaptations that were made in response to the restrictions imposed by lockdown were to be continued, even when the restriction had been eased. For example, in Cardiff, advice services had now returned to face-to-face appointments however, the additional means of service delivery, via phone or webchat for example, were also retained:

> "We have been opening our advice services back up as restrictions end, but rather than stop anything we used to do, we have widened our offer, i.e. advice by phone, webchat etc, not just going back to face-to-face advice." (Council workshop, Jamboard, Cardiff)

Similarly, one participant in the charitable food aid workshop (no area provided) identified, in the Jamboard, the provision of advice services alongside direct food aid as a feature of the pandemic response that was a new way of working for their organisation, and that this should be continued in the future. This highlights new activity being introduced earlier in the pandemic continuing to be undertaken in the longer term. One participant from Derry City and Strabane District Council highlighted this as a positive outcome of the new ways of working during the pandemic:

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[17] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

[18] ibid

"One of the things we found that has really strengthened through the pandemic would be, through the local growth partnerships [and] through community planning, doing a wraparound service. They [community groups] then had a thing of working with the advice services, which maybe a lot of them didn't have that experience before, as we were saying, of signposting things..... That was one of the big positives we found throughout the pandemic, offering that wraparound service for people that needed it." (Council workshop, Derry City and Strabane)

We also learned of new work being done to support income maximisation that was being introduced at the time of data collection. For example, we heard from a participant in Herefordshire that local food banks were starting to offer money advice services:

"Some of our independent food banks are also starting to offer money advice services alongside their food bank – either purchased in service or starting up their own service." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Herefordshire)

We also learned of third-sector organisations that had previously provided face-to-face interviews with clients to support income maximisation but this had been paused as a result of the lockdown restrictions. For example, a food aid organisation in Argyll and Bute had paused face-to-face interviews and provided an advice leaflet as an alternative. At the time of the workshop, they had not yet resumed their face-to-face service. Although the leaflet was a new response to support income maximisation that they planned to continue they were also hoping to resume the face-to-face service in the future:

"Had to stop all face-to-face interviews and replace with advice leaflets. Need to pick back up [the] social interaction and one-to-one contact with clients." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Argyll and Bute)

It is worth noting that whilst participants highlighted the key role of income maximisation as a response to food insecurity, some also discussed that this may not, alone, be an adequate solution. This is because even with support for income maximisation households are still experiencing poverty, due to the current limitations of social security support or other income. A participant in Glasgow noted that whilst income maximisation had been a key feature of the response earlier in the pandemic, over time, it had been established that this alone was not an adequate solution for everyone:

"The local Community Food Network was pushing very hard for a cash-first approach to food. There was a lot of partnership work done, bringing in the Citizens Advice Bureaux and the law centres, to do benefits checks with people, but we've, kind of, de-prioritised that work to some stage because what became clear was, in fact, people were on the benefits that they were entitled to. There weren't a lot of people, we found, who weren't getting what they were entitled to, but they still couldn't afford to feed their family, particularly with the recent cuts in Universal Credit. So, we found that actually this idea of maximising benefits of people in food need wasn't the gold or the silver bullet it had been thought it would be, because many, many people were already maximised but still living in poverty." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)

2.7.2 Cash grants

As reported in our national monitoring report, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland prior to the pandemic, discretionary crisis grants were available through national schemes. Changes were made to these schemes at a national level.[19] During March to August 2020 we learned that councils and third sector organisations continued to refer and signpost people to this support where appropriate.[20] Workshop participants did not raise any changes in activity on these national schemes at a local level, however, our forthcoming report updating the national mapping will provide an update to these schemes including funding from national governments and guidance on how the funding should be used.[21]

In England, local welfare assistance schemes which are administered (designed and implemented) at a local authority level, may provide discretionary grants or support with basic needs, such as food. In our previous research, we learned of changes made to local welfare assistance schemes in response to the pandemic.[22] For example, Leeds Council relaxed their eligibility criteria for their assistance scheme. During the September 2021 workshop we learned that Leeds Council was now looking to set new criteria for support, although the details of this were not provided.

We learned of other examples of councils providing discretionary grants. In Moray, this was the continuation of the scheme introduced in May 2020, when it was introduced in direct response to the pandemic. New schemes were now operating in Argyll and Bute and Cardiff, and there was one due to start in Leeds at the time of data collection. Each is described below.

In addition to the national Scottish Welfare Fund, the Moray case study from the first phase of this research described a new cash grants scheme introduced by Moray Council in response to the pandemic. The Council opted to use a proportion of the funding that all councils received from the Scottish Government to operate a 'flexible food fund'. This provided eligible households (defined very broadly) with two cash transfers, one a month, to support them with food (and associated costs). The second payment was made provisional on the recipients engaging with the wider support available through the Council's money advice team.[23] The fund was available from May 2020. An email submission in August 2021 from a previous research participant unable to make the September 2021 workshop, informed us that the fund was still operating. In January 2021, the Argyll and Bute Community Food Forum, a partnership between the Council, advice agencies, local food providers and a local energy

[19] Lambie-Mumford, H, Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. (2020) Monitoring responses to risk of rising household food insecurity during the Covid-19 crisis across the UK, published December 2020. Available here: http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/

[20] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

[21] Report publication pending – will be available on the project website: http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/

[22] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

[23] Gordon, K., Loopstra, R., Goldberg, B. and Lambie-Mumford, H., (2021) 'Moray Case Study, Mapping local responses: March to August 2020', published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/

charity, established a 'flexible food fund', providing discretionary cash grants.[24] The fund was based on the model implemented by Moray Council and is funded by Argyll and Bute Council:

> "The subsequent programme entitled the Flexible Food Fund Project has been incredibly successful. At our last count we had achieved a client gain of over £800,000 since its beginning in January 2021 and we are going to do everything in our power to continue this vital work beyond March 22 when the present funding runs out." (Partnership workshop, email submission, Argyll and Bute)

The fund was promoted in several ways including roadshows, leaflets and social media campaigns.[25] Partnership working was highlighted as a key factor of the initiative:

> "The success of the project has stemmed from the close working relationship the partners, Bute Advice Centre, ALIenergy and ABC have developed with the food banks…Bute Advice Centre values the relationships that have been formed with all the partners including IFAN in our collective response to the challenge." (Partnership workshop, email submission, Argyll and Bute)

We also learned that in March 2021 Cardiff Council launched a new discretionary fund, 'Together for Cardiff' to provide emergency grants.[26] Initially this was funded through both Council funding and public donations. From September 2021 it is funded through the Welsh Government's 'Food poverty and food insecurity grant scheme'.[27] The fund is available to individuals and families experiencing severe hardship to provide support with expenses such as paying for essentials like gas and electric, for an essential repair to a cooker or washing machine, for essential furniture or equipment to address digital deprivation. In this respect, the discretionary scheme by Cardiff Council differs to that of Moray and Argyll and Bute. Applicants to the fund are also supported by Cardiff Council's Money Advice team.[28]

As well as the continuation of the scheme launched in Moray early in the pandemic, and the establishment of new schemes in Argyll and Bute and Cardiff in 2021, we also learned of a pilot cash grant scheme in Leeds that was due to start at the time of data collection. One participant described the scheme:

> "The idea would be that people who needed support would be able to approach the council for support and get money, rather than being sent, as what is currently happening, is "Well, you can go to a food bank," and just sending them our way." (Charitable food aid workshop, Leeds)

The pilot, which is funded by the Council, will initially only be operationalised through the food bank in the Trussell Trust network who will refer clients to the Council for consideration of a cash grant. The rationale for limiting it to referrals from this food bank was to stop the scheme being "swamped". However, in the longer term it is hoped that the scheme would open to several referral routes:

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[24] https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/forms/flexible-food-fund
[25] https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets
[26] https://www.cardiffmoneyadvice.co.uk/benefits-and-income/cardiff-discretionary-emergency-fund/
[27] https://gov.wales/food-poverty-and-food-insecurity-grant-scheme
[28] https://www.cardiffnewsroom.co.uk/releases/c25/26014.html

"So, we are going to be referring people through to the council, with the understanding that, if it's successful, we will not be the route into that cash first. If it became a sustainable option and they had the money to keep it running, we wouldn't… We don't want to be the gatekeepers of it. It would have to be either independent people accessing it themselves or via the people who are already referring to us. Instead of referring to us for food, it would be ideal if they actually could put people in touch with the council for cash rather than sending them to us for food." (Charitable food aid workshop, Leeds)

Referring to this pilot another participant says:

"We have had some success in that they've started – we're actually starting at the beginning of October – trialling a cash first system. It's such a tiny trial. There's not an awful lot of money behind it, but Trussell Trust are going to help support that with the research, looking at how it works, so, yes, I'm hopeful." (Charitable food aid workshop, Leeds)

These practical examples of a 'cash first approach', both support for income maximisation and discretionary cash grants were underpinned by a general consensus across the workshops that 'cash based' interventions are the most appropriate because they were seen to provide recipients with choice and dignity. However, similar to our earlier findings, it was acknowledged that there is no 'one size fits' all solution with some noting the need for tailoring depending on particular circumstances, for example in rural areas where the cost of living is more expensive or when, despite maximised income, households still experience poverty due to the inadequacy of the welfare support they receive.

2.7.3 Vouchers

Our earlier research highlighted that some organisations were providing vouchers for people to use in supermarkets, local shops or for fuel over March to August 2020. This was sometimes existing organisations providing vouchers in addition to food parcels, or as an alternate to their usual provision that was paused, such as to families that would ordinarily attend holiday clubs. In comparison to food parcels, vouchers are seen to allow recipients to have more choice.[29] We also heard that it took some of the pressure off third-sector organisations during March to August 2020 when they were experiencing food shortages and fewer volunteers.[30]

During the workshops, we learned of organisations who were offering vouchers as an alternate to direct food aid during September 2020 to September 2021 as well. Some organisations provided vouchers for the larger supermarkets and others for local shops, including smaller retailers such as butchers or fruit and veg shops.

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[29] https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/bf9f4bfb-abfc-4c08-b2e6-a3a04a27a8b4/IFAN%20Infographic%20(1).pdf?id=3713853
[30] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

Two of the food aid providers that are based in more rural areas of Derry City and Strabane and Moray described that the vouchers were provided for local shops, with the support of those shops. Referring to the approach the participant said:

> "We received a block [of] funding from the Department of Communities. And it was basically left up to ourselves as to how we would use it in the second phase of COVID. And we put quite a bit of it into food vouchers, approached all the local stores, none of the multi-nationals, but local stores and asked them to participate in it. That was very successful." (Charitable food aid workshop, Derry City and Strabane)

Similarly, in Herefordshire some food aid providers had started to provide vouchers for local shops. We also learned of independent food banks in Shropshire receiving grants from the Council to purchase vouchers to distribute to households. Where these locally focussed schemes had been introduced this was considered to have the dual benefit of also supporting local businesses:

> "Across South Shropshire and Herefordshire, some of them have fundraised and used their funding to buy vouchers for the local shops. It's also helping local businesses stay afloat as well. So, it's a win-win both sides." (Partnership workshop, Herefordshire)

As well as vouchers for local shops or supermarkets, we also heard examples of organisations providing cash or vouchers for people to link in with other forms of food aid provision. For example, one housing organisation in West Berkshire, that was a referral agent for food banks, talked of providing vouchers for community larders. A supported accommodation provider in Moray has been providing cash to residents for the specific purpose of them attending a "pay what you can" meal service. They also provided support for people to attend the meal.

In Belfast, where the provision of vouchers was a relatively new practice participants reported this had been well received and often preferred to food aid:

> "What feedback we were getting is that the voucher scheme was much more preferable to them for reasons of dignity and choice and lots of other things. It's something we in Belfast haven't really dabbled in that much just through some community partners who chose that route to go when we funded them." (Council workshop, Belfast)

2.8 Developments in resources for food response

Our earlier research highlighted funding, food supplies and human resources as key resources for ensuring a food response was delivered over March to August 2020.[31] In the workshops, participants discussed the availability and challenges of accessing these types of resources over September 2020 – September 2021.

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[31] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

2.8.1 Funding

The previous case studies highlighted that, generally, it was felt there was an abundance of funding available during March to August 2020; however, there were concerns, at that time, as to what this might mean for the availability of funding in the future if, for example, future budgets from funders would be reduced to compensate for the higher spending during the pandemic.[32]

There was evidence that there was no longer an abundance of funding available at the time of data collection in September 2021. This was shared by third sector organisations across case study areas. As previously noted, the food bank in Moray reported getting busier; they attributed some of this increase to the closure of other local initiatives that had provided food aid in direct response to the pandemic, which no longer had the funding to operate. One of the participants from West Berkshire, whose organisation acts as a referral agency, noted that some of the local organisations that had been previously funded had recently closed down:

> "Hopefully, going forward, with the funding that is left for the local organisations, they are able to continue running. Because it is quite sad, there have been quite a few having shut down due to being reliant on funding which they just don't have anymore." (Charitable food aid workshop, West Berkshire)

Although uncertainty around funding was not a new experience for third sector organisations, there was heightened concern at this time. For example, for one food aid provider in Belfast, the reduced availability of funding was particularly worrying given that there has been an increased level of reliance on their services by other agencies:

> "That's what worries me, is the level of dependency [there has become] on our service, and we now have no funding attached to us, and how we get out of that. That's frightening for us." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

Another participant discussed how the availability of funding for third sector organisations, and the stipulations as to what funding can be used for, varies considerably between different areas, impacting food aid providers in different ways:

> "Many of these smaller food banks rely on their community to sponsor and provide for them. It's interesting that two local authorities of the areas we cover, one of them has provided direct grants to the food banks, but some for infrastructure type of funding and some for food and vouchers type funding. But the other local authority has encouraged the food banks to expand and move into debt advice, provision and things like that and offered grants for that sort of thing, which stretches them- some of them have taken that up, but it does stretch them even further. They're all small, so they're all voluntary organisations with volunteers running them all and their capacity to apply for funding is very limited. So, that reliance on local communities is huge and if you've got a 'well-heeled' *[wealthy]* local community around you, who can support that food

[32] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

bank, that's great. In some areas, they haven't and that's more challenging."
(Charitable food aid workshop, Herefordshire)

Although there was considerable uncertainty and concern around funding, one participant noted that the pandemic had brought food aid to the forefront of people's attention, and this had opened up a wider range of funding options:

> "Interesting that we have had private investment from, you know, companies and things like that, people getting in touch to talk about a wee bit more secure, longer term things. Some of it on quite a small scale. The other thing we've been talking to people about is people in terms of the universities, some funding pots from them. So, I'd say that it's going to become… It was already a mixed model of funding and I think it's going to be a much wider range of funding." (Charitable food aid workshop, Edinburgh)

However, this participant was also concerned that the opportunity for constructive conversations about future funding may be waning:

> "I do think that we need to have the food conversations, the food funding conversations now before people lose interest. And I think that that interest is waning." (Charitable food aid workshop, Edinburgh)

Governments made funding available to local councils across the four nations to cover the COVID winter period (see the national mapping update for full details).[33] Council participants spoke of the funding they had received from national government over September 2020 – September 2021 and their expectations of this going forward.

Over the COVID winter, councils in England were provided with national funding through the COVID Winter Grant Scheme which covered the period 1 December 2020 – 31st March 2021. The grant was to be used to support households most in need with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs.[34] Participants from Greenwich and Leeds Councils reported extensions in this funding that allowed them to support families eligible for free school meals over the Easter and Summer holidays in 2021:

> "I was just going to say that our winter grant funding was extended so we were able to support families with free school meals during the Easter period and the summer period as well….There was some additional funding allocated, but also there was some council budget put to match. We looked at how we could span the budget out across and make sure that we could cover the Easter and summer period." (Council workshop, Leeds)

At the time of data collection, there was some uncertainty about the amount of government funding that councils were going to receive. For example, the participant from Derry City and Strabane District Council said:

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[33] Report publication pending – will be available on the project website: http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/
[34] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-winter-grant-scheme

"We wouldn't have the same funding now as what we did have. We're still waiting to see what the department is going to issue now for the future." (Council workshop, Derry City and Strabane)

The participant from Greenwich Council discussed hopeful speculation that increased central government funding might continue:

"We were discussing this last week at our food response group. Our colleague from the welfare team, she was really crystal ball gazing, but she was saying how the government made that additional funding available when it wasn't expected previously. Perhaps the same thing is going to happen again going forward. She was hesitant to predict that, but hesitantly hopeful I suppose, given the end of furlough and the Universal Credit reduction. She was thinking maybe they will take that step, hoping they would take that step." (Council workshop, Greenwich)

In Leeds, where reductions in Council budget were expected, the Council were working with the third sector to prepare them for potential increased demand for their service and to support more sustainable responses, given the possible reduction in Council provision:

"We're trying to prepare them [third sector organisations] as well about how the council's provision might begin to reduce with the lack of funds that have been put in externally so that we can make sure that they're resilient enough and are looking at how they can support people back to independence rather than continually supplying a food parcel." (Council workshop, Leeds)

One further practical point on funding that was raised was the need to simplify the process of funding applications. Referring to the funding which the council provided to third sector organisations, one council participant said:

"Just one point we have had fed back to us is that the monitoring of our funding, so obviously it's quite bureaucratic, and has been in the past. We tried to really, really simplify that down as much as we could within the confines of audit. We have continued to try and streamline that. It helps both them and us in terms of our resources as well. It's something definitely, going forward for us, we need to consider how to move that forward, how to make that easier for those groups and still tick the box for us and for audit that we've covered everything." (Council workshop, Belfast)

2.8.2 Food

The previous case studies highlighted there were disruptions to food supplies in the early weeks of the pandemic (March-April 2020) and then mechanisms were put in place to minimise the impact of these. These included setting up accounts with trade suppliers and working in partnership with the big supermarkets. Third sector organisations also previously reported increased cash donations from the public (as opposed to food donations) which meant they bought their own food supplies.[35]

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[35] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

In slight contrast to this, the discussions around food supplies raised during the September 2021 workshops mostly related to concerns regarding the use of surplus food by third sector organisations. This may reflect a return to pre-pandemic ways of sourcing food, rather than the increased direct purchasing of food that was witnessed between March – August 2020. Concerns were voiced about the quality, quantity and suitability of food sourced in this way. For example, one participant said:

> "Need to move away from dependence on surplus food - unreliable both in quantity and perhaps more importantly, quality." (Council workshop, Jamboard, Greenwich)

Other concerns were raised about the long-term viability of this reliance on surplus food:[36]

> "Concern about dependency on long-term viability of surplus food" (Council workshop, Jamboard, Bradford)

Whilst these concerns were prevalent, others recognised the valuable source of food that this surplus provides the third sector, highlighting the need to be mindful of the words used when discussing this issue:

> "I think it's about the terminology, as well, because you talk about food waste, and it makes it sound like leftovers, but actually it's quality surplus food that has still got a lot of life in it. So, we don't tend to call it 'waste'. It is quite a negative connotation, I think." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

There was also some evidence of new means of sourcing food in practice or in planning. One Leeds food bank that is part of the Trussell Trust network had been supporting "lots of the independent food providers with lots of food over the past year" (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Leeds). As they had not been receiving as may referrals as they previously did this meant they could still ensure households were receiving food aid.

Also in Leeds, a scheme where the Council purchases food and distributes it via a pantry model is being considered:

> "They are looking seriously at a model of the council purchasing food so that it's basically cheaper than Aldi or Lidl, and then setting up pop-up cafe, pop-up shop places and then distributing the food out, in the same way you would do in a pantry, but it's not about surplus food. A lot of the pantries are based on surplus food from FareShare. It's quite an interesting model and doing it on a large scale, so it's going to be very interesting to see how that works out." (Partnership workshop, Leeds)

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[36] It is worth noting that these concerns regarding unreliability and long-term viability may have been exacerbated by the issues in the wider supply chain, which led to some food shortages in the UK un the Summer of 2021: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/supply-chains

2.8.3 Human resources

Our previous research highlighted that many third sector organisations, particularly food banks, experienced an immediate change in volunteer availability at the start of the pandemic.[37] Organisations reported changes in their volunteering workforce, most commonly an initial decline in volunteers who were older or had been required to shield. However, generally the loss of existing volunteers was compensated for with new members of the public volunteering. Another source of workforce that became available to organisations providing a food response was council staff being deployed from other teams. However, it was noted that by August 2020, some of the people who became available through either redeployment or furlough were gradually returning to their original roles.[38] The workshop discussions in September 2021 largely focussed on the volunteer workforce. Across the case study areas, participants stressed the importance of ensuring volunteers were, and felt, safe.

There was evidence that some of the volunteers who had worked prior to the pandemic but had stopped doing so in response to the pandemic had not resumed their roles. One food aid provider in Argyll and Bute talked of resuming a service that had stopped during the pandemic, but now with a different set of volunteers:

> "We also provide starter packs. We stopped these during the pandemic. We have since re-started these but the volunteers have changed. This change was founded on the age and vulnerability of our volunteers, who are all of retirement age." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Argyll and Bute)

Similarly, a participant from Belfast noted that social activities (such as lunch clubs) had not yet restarted and this was partly attributable to there not being the same volunteers to support such activities.

Alternatively, a participant from Derry City and Strabane District noted that some of the volunteers who had started working in direct response to the pandemic had subsequently decided to continue on a longer-term basis:

> "Some of our community groups had fed back to us to say their volunteer base has actually increased after the pandemic because people have come out to help in the pandemic and have enjoyed the experience of volunteering. Now they're looking to see where they would fit in to volunteer." (Council workshop, Derry City and Strabane District)

One participant noted that some volunteers who were returning to volunteering were nervous about a loss in their skills and knowledge. Organisations were therefore providing training before volunteers restarted in their roles.

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[37] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

[38] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

2.8.4 Working virtually

Participants reflected on how switching to virtual methods for organisational management had some advantages. Online trustee or regional meetings, rather than face-to-face meetings, for example, had led to reductions in time spent travelling. One participant also felt the virtual format meant meetings were more productive. Responding to the question as to practices that had stopped as a result of the pandemic that should not be restarted one participant wrote:

> "Long trustee meetings!! Since holding online meetings these have become much more focussed and decisions taken quicker." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Leeds)

One food aid provider from Merton noted that they had stopped using their website during the pandemic, using social media instead, which was easier to keep up to date. Another participant from Moray (in the north of Scotland) reflected that the increase in virtual work meant it was easier for them to connect with national organisations and wider campaigns:

> "We've linked in more with IFAN and the Poverty Alliance. It's the advantage of Zoom meetings. We've been able to network a lot more, and just tie in with the campaigns that they've been doing, and making sure that we promote them on all our social media. We've signed the letters and we've contacted our MP and our MSP." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

However, whilst there were benefits of this virtual work, some participants also highlighted a need to get back to face-to-face meetings as well, particularly to establish and further develop relationships between the range of actors providing food aid.

2.9 Developments in new actors providing food aid over March – August 2020

Our previous research highlighted that over March to August 2020, there were a number of new actors operating in the field of food aid across the case study areas. These may have been existing organisations which newly started doing food aid or organisations the 'popped up' in direct response to the pandemic.[39] During the workshops, we sought an update on some of these actors.

One participant in the charitable food aid workshop was from an existing organisation that is primarily a furniture reuse organisation. They had newly started providing food aid in response to the pandemic in March 2020. They had now stopped providing direct food aid on the rationale that they had filled a gap during March to August 2020 because some of the usual support systems in place (such as family support or support through schools) was less readily available at the start of the pandemic. These other support systems were now back in place. However, whilst they are not directly providing food aid themselves, they are still supporting the organisations that do in the local area by sharing surplus food and providing access to transport:

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[39] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

> "What we did was we filled the gaps during that period, but those gaps are now… those gaps are not there. The existing food bank, which is the Trussell Trust one and a couple of other small church groups, there's more than enough capacity there now to deal with that demand. We still support them if we get surpluses in, and there's a standing offer if they want access to transport or chiller vehicles." (Charitable food aid workshop, West Berkshire)

In Swansea, one of the informal community food responses that had been established early in the pandemic had now "come under" the Swansea food bank, which is part of the Trussell Trust network.

In the other case study areas, workshop participants described, more generally, what had happened to some of the new actors. Referring to the mutual aid groups that had started providing food aid in Glasgow in March/April 2020 one participant said:

> "They're just not in the park. The whole situation now is so light years away from what it was in March 2020. The Mutual Aids are not advertising." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)

Across case study areas, it was generally felt that the majority of existing organisations who had not provided food aid prior to the pandemic (such as sports clubs, rotary organisation, theatre groups) had now stopped providing food aid and returned to their 'normal' services. The food partnership in Belfast had recommended that such organisations do so:

> "They have stopped doing that – frankly, on my advice, on the basis that the [support] structures are actually there. It would alleviate pressure on them if they refocused on what they were [originally] doing."(Partnership workshop, Belfast)

Participants from Bradford, Cardiff, Greenwich and Swansea noted that some of the new actors were continuing to operate. Where this was the case, workshop participants were keen to work with them to now take stock and a plan for their future activities. For example, the food partnership in Bradford was encouraging the new actors to "take stock":

> "Getting people just to question, if they started [providing food aid] during the pandemic, do they want to and do they need to continue that? Or is it better to work alongside one of the bigger food banks and just become referrers, just open the questions up: "You did this brilliant job. Let's take stock." (Partnership workshop, Bradford)

The food alliance in Cardiff and the public health team from Greenwich Council were keen to promote an ethos of going beyond emergency food aid, and ensuring best practice was shared with some of the newer providers:

> "I think for us it's almost more about making the… We're at the stage now where there are a lot of pantries, and food clubs and larders. So, it's not necessarily about creating more of them now, but making sure that the ones that are operating are operating with the ethos that we want to and they're not just the new food bank." (Partnership workshop, Cardiff)

"It's finding ways to try and support those groups to move beyond that reactive food aid response, and if they're going to be continuing to take action around food, to find ways to support them to potentially come together, work together, support each other, develop new ideas and develop more longer-term, sustainable solutions." (Council workshop, Greenwich)

For the participant from Swansea Council, this work to support the new actors was to focus on the wider wraparound support that many food aid providers offer:

"Really a priority now is looking at, well, how do we reduce the dependency? That's particularly important for new organisations that have come forward who've become experts in providing food discretely to people who need it, but not experts in benefit entitlement and perhaps some of those other complex issues that people have that are putting them in that position in the first place." (Council workshop, Swansea)

2.10 Tailored food aid provision

Our previous research highlighted some of the work being done by organisations to tailor food support to particular population groups. We heard some examples of tailored provision being made available to families with school aged children, Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, and asylum seekers and refugees during March to August 2020. Although there were examples of this tailored provision, there was also some concern that there may still have been population groups who were missed by the support that was available during this time.[40]

In the September 2021 workshops, participants were keen to reiterate some of the work their organisations were doing to support Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Greenwich Council have been working with third-sector organisations to support them to make a food offer that is appropriate for the culturally diverse population in the area. In Bradford, the Council provided funding to the Race Equality Network to operate a grant scheme which was open to organisations supporting Black and minority ethnic communities.[41] Organisations could apply for funding, from July 2020, to support projects for up to a year. Glasgow was described as having third-sector support for Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities through a "tapestry of very many, very small organisations." These organisations were utilised in the early stage of the pandemic to provide the necessary tailored support:

"But around the ethnic minority issue, yes, it did become a real one where the money was getting dribbled down to the smaller charities, to target the very specific communities. It didn't happen overnight, but it did happen within that first stage of lockdown, and it was a good piece of work." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)

One of the participants in Bradford talked of a reluctance to use council funding to fund new initiatives, the rationale being that funding should be provided to known providers. However,

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[40] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19
[41] https://localoffer.bradford.gov.uk/post/funding-opportunity-for-bame-led-organisations-

this may have limited the reach of the support, as some of the support that was effectively reaching the Asian population living in the city was through these new providers:

> "The council had wanted to put money into known providers and existing networks, and asked us to do that. Of course, we worked with people that we knew about, and there was a sense of not wanting to fund brand-new things, but then, actually, some of the brand-new things were the ones which were actually reaching out to our large Asian population." (Partnership workshop, Bradford)

One participant from a food bank in Belfast observed how the extent to which they had tailored their provision to be culturally appropriate for Black, Asian and minority ethnic households developed over time. They felt it had been left to them to take the initiative to provide this more tailored support and, over time, this was a key learning for them:

> "I think for us, especially around ethnic minorities and asylum seekers, actually we were very bad, to be quite honest, we were actually very bad at helping people from other countries. We didn't go out of our way to give them the food they wanted. We didn't show an understanding. I think what happened [then] was we addressed those issues and we did [do] that. That came to the fore, so there were lessons learnt along the way." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

The same participant felt that support to provide suitable and tailored food offerings for different ethnic groups should come from national and local government. However, when this is not in place, the third sector needs to "take the initiative, first of all, to do these things".

Tailored provision to other population groups, such as people with disabilities or asylum seekers, was not readily discussed during the workshops. There was evidence of work being undertaken to support older people and people who are experiencing homelessness, however. For example, a food bank in Belfast reported:

> "We delivered [a] meal programme [in] Dec [2020] and then again in Jan/Feb [2021] to older/isolating/vulnerable people - 400 people getting meals 3 time per week. Also provide outreach homeless meals in Belfast and static food station in Belfast with People Kitchen Belfast." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Belfast)

We also learned of a scoping exercise being undertaken in the more rural area of Derry City and Strabane to determine the demand for a meals on wheels service for older and disabled people.

3. Key learnings from local responses to food insecurity during COVID-19 in the case study areas

Across the data, participants reflected on some of the key learnings from responses to food insecurity during COVID-19.

3.1 Retaining networks and partnership working

Our previous research showed that, across the case study areas, participants saw partnership working, coordination and collaboration as key to the success of local responses during March to August 2020. The partnership working may have been through food partnerships, food poverty alliances or other arrangements. The areas which had existing strong and active food poverty alliances or food partnerships considered this a significant enabler for a timely and coordinated response. In other areas, newly established partnerships, both formal and more informal, were warmly received and positively reflected upon.[42] At the time of previous data collection (late 2020/early 2021), participants hoped that this partnership working would be an enduring and positive legacy of the pandemic.

The workshops provided insight into further developments in partnership working since August 2020. In both the council and the food aid workshops, participants were asked 'what responses/features of the response to food insecurity have you seen over the pandemic that you think should be continued into the future?' Table 4 provides data that reiterates that partnership working was a key feature of the response, shows ongoing hopes that strengthened partnership working will continue and some of the ways in which it could be strengthened further.

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[42] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

Table 4: Jamboard entries relevant to partnership working from the charitable food aid and council workshop

Jamboard entries relevant to partnerships working in response to the question 'what responses/features of the response to food insecurity have you seen over the pandemic that you think should be continued into the future?'	
Charitable food aid workshop	• "Close coordination between all local food providers with sharing of surplus stock, storage facilities and transport" (Unidentified area) • "Continued partnership working with other agencies and local retailers who would not typically work together" (Moray) • "Stronger working links between groups but this could be strengthened further with more joint projects." (Swansea) • "Regular network meeting of providers of food aid (via zoom) to share information, good practice etc" (Unidentified area) • "More partnership working, more working with restaurants etc to reduce food waste" (Belfast) • "Increased partnership with other providers although comms need some improvement" (Unidentified area) • "Most positive thing for us was the increased networking with other agencies. The formation of the Argyll and Bute food forum of all food banks... A presence on discussion meetings with members of the council and a voice being heard." (Argyll and Bute)
Council workshop	• "Greater partnership working across LA teams, investment in the independent food network (Leeds Food Aid Network)" (Leeds) • "Greater partnership working both between LA and voluntary sector and also between voluntary sector/ charities etc. Sharing of information and best practice has improved. Feel this will strengthen food work in the city going forward- in all areas i.e. food provision, dignity around food, food growing, sustainability. Conversations have been started and links made, these seem to be continuing. Hopefully lead to a more coordinated response/ provision going forward." (Edinburgh) • "Our council Neighbourhood services and VCS, operating through hubs were the major parts of the crisis food response. Maintaining this closer working together is something to [work on]" (Bradford) • "Partnership working with other agencies and organisations, and also improved communications with other service areas within the council." (Cardiff)

As can be seen from the table, the partnerships that have been developed are between a range of actors such as different departments within the council, between statutory and third sector organisations, and between different third sector organisations.

All the participants at the council workshop were keen to retain and build upon these partnerships with the third sector. For example, the participant from Derry City and Strabane District Council talked of their desire to retain the partnerships with the third sector, particularly given the challenging conditions that they foresaw:

"We're looking at keeping the engagement going with the voluntary sector and with that wraparound service, especially going into these worrying times of furlough, higher national insurance and the working poor." (Council workshop, Derry City and Strabane)

The participant from Swansea Council felt the partnership working that had developed over the pandemic would allow the Council to both support the third sector and, collectively, provide comprehensive support to households:

"The pandemic has really strengthened that opportunity for developing partnership working with the various food projects and finding the gaps, and partly being led by those organisations in terms of identifying what their needs are and how the authority can help fill those gaps and build on that." (Council workshop, Swansea)

In Glasgow, one participant in the partnership workshop suggested there had been a shift in the Council's approach to the third sector, which was considered a very positive development:

"Perhaps [there has been] a slight lessening of the council's approach to the third sector, which, no matter how much they try, does end up being quite patriarchal, and old-fashioned and, "Can the third sector do this?" You're like, "Yes, of course we can. We're better at doing it than the council." So, there has been that kind of cultural stuff that we're addressing, as well. Feeling very positive about it." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)

However, it is important to note that in other areas, these experiences of partnership working, particularly between the third sector and the local council were not evident. One participant described trying to engage with the local council as "flogging a dead horse". Another said:

"I find, just in a more general way, unless the outcomes that we desire and need are written specifically into the overarching frameworks and policies of the statutory agencies that we're trying to engage with, it's almost impossible to build momentum, because it comes down to a personal relationship. Say you spend six months building a personal relationship, someone who very much gets the sort of outcomes that you want to move towards, which is less people in food poverty and stuff like that, but then they move on. Things are constantly shifting and changing, and you're always starting the conversation from scratch, and it is very tiring." (Partnership workshop, Belfast)

To help us identify and share some of the best practice around partnership working, participants at the partnership workshop were asked, via Jamboard, about the enablers and challenges of partnership working. These data are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Enablers and challenges of partnership working during the pandemic as identified via Jamboard in the partnerships workshop

Enablers of partnership working during the pandemic.
Recognition of the need for a joined up approach and support, no one could do it alone.
Getting the right people 'round the table'.
Having a lead organisation that can enable collaboration.
Having established partnerships and networks in place.
Goodwill and willingness to support the response.
Learning from what was happening in other areas.
Challenges of partnership working during the pandemic.
Different agendas of the actors competing with each other.
Initially, getting the right people 'round the table'.
Lack of co-ordination.
Increase in inexperienced food aid providers.
Continually changing provision made it difficult to communicate what was available.

We also learned of other work that was being done to develop and retain partnerships. One of the larger community food providers in Edinburgh was working to foster connections and networks between the smaller providers across the city. They felt this brought strength and energy to the efforts to tackle household food insecurity:

> "I do feel for the smaller organisations and that's why a lot of the work that we're doing is about connecting people. You know? The more that we connect, it's like you're connecting people in your community to be stronger. We need to connect together for us to be stronger and to keep the momentum going and keep our energy levels going, you know?" (Charitable food aid workshop, Edinburgh)

The public health team at Greenwich Council were working to build a network of smaller providers and, in doing so, worked to provide a means of doing this in a way that suited the third sector organisations:

> "We didn't have a network for those smaller community sector organisations and we've tried to set that up, but actually it's really difficult to engage people who are often working in a voluntary capacity and very busy and focused on just running what they're doing with their own organisation. What we're finding is that actually having to do a lot of legwork to actually have individual conversations and not expecting for those conversations to all happen conveniently in a Food Action Alliance meeting. [This] is really necessary, and building those relationships and building that trust with those smaller voluntary sector organisations. When you're coming from a council, there's often a lack of trust and you have to take time to build that." (Council workshop, Greenwich)

The participant form Swansea Council talked of current work to update the Council's Tackling Poverty strategy. The revised version will have a stronger emphasis on "the role of partnership working and collaboration across the board." (Council workshop, Swansea)

3.2 Retaining wide engagement, from a range of audiences, for food access interventions

Participants across the workshops reflected on how the food aid provided during the pandemic may have increased engagement by a range of stakeholders, with this type of work. This may have been through bringing more people to the 'table' or by raising the awareness of the work being done by the third sector. For example, we heard that more departments in councils became involved in food access activities over the pandemic:

> "I think there were new people who came to the table. Certainly, from a leadership perspective, there was Public Health and Financial Inclusion leading that [emergency food provision] together." (Council workshop, Leeds).

> "It's been an opportunity to hook people into conversations with things that they might have thought didn't involve them before or weren't relevant. I think it's been useful in that way." (Council workshop, Edinburgh)

Participants also noted that the pandemic had provided an opportunity for third sector organisations to showcase their work:

> "There are a lot of voluntary organisations that have been doing really good work. The pandemic has given them a platform to show off what they can do to a wider audience, but who might not have been aware of that before." (Council workshop, Edinburgh)

In Swansea, this greater awareness brought food onto the Council's tackling poverty agenda:

> "We're in the process of revising a strategy, that's now out of date, for Tackling Poverty in Swansea. Food previously didn't feature greatly in that strategy, but it will do going forward." (Council workshop, Swansea)

However, others felt that there was still work to be done to further establish tackling food insecurity as a key priority, and this needed to be driven by high-level political support. Referring to the broader anti-poverty agenda one participant noted:

> "We need more top-level political support to move this further up the council's priorities list." (Council workshop, Jamboard, Greenwich).

Furthermore, others felt that some of the recognition and support they had received was now waning partly, as a result of people returning to their pre pandemic roles which may not have had a focus on food access:

> "But they've all gone back to their day jobs now, which is great. But they do seem to have, kind of, forgotten that there is still a large group of people in our local community who are vulnerable, who are living in poverty all the time... it is a shame that they don't seem to be willing to provide any more of that support." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

One of the participants from Bradford who attended the partnership workshop was working to ensure that some of the new voices that were added to the food aid conversations during the earlier stages of the pandemic remain so, as they were a valuable addition because they provided wider representation:

> "We're still trying to find an appropriate way of bringing people together, because some of those groups have disappeared again very quickly. But [we're trying to] make sure that we're representative, because it tends to be the people who come along to the meetings are the same old crowd." (Partnership workshop, Bradford)

3.3 (Over) reliance on the third sector, and the toll this takes

Our previous research highlighted the pivotal role that third sector organisations played in supporting food access during March to August 2020. This was at both a national and local

level.[43] The workshops highlighted that, since August 2020, the third sector are continuing to play a key role supporting people experiencing food insecurity at a local level. As previously noted, the sector is undertaking a range of activities to provide this support (see Table 3), facing varying levels of demand for their services, and are concerned about the upcoming winter (2021) period and the demands this may place on their organisations (section 2.3.4 and 4.1)

One participant from Belfast discussed the dependency by other statutory agencies on their food bank. They felt this had developed during the earlier phases of the pandemic, but had persisted throughout 2021, even though there was much less funding available for the food bank:

> "But one of the things that, I suppose, has really struck me is the number of other funded services that have now become reliant on our food bank…. What we now have is, we have both statutory community and voluntary agencies actually turning up every day at our food bank, wanting food parcels for people. Our problem is actually getting them to take responsibility and ownership for their client base again…. That's what worries me, is the level of dependency [there has become] on our service, and we now have no funding attached to us, and how we get out of that. That's frightening for us. (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

This participant also reflected that some of the statutory agencies utilising the food bank in this way underestimated the resources required to support households and the ongoing pressure that the pandemic was placing on the third sector:

> "You'd have to then start to look at families and individuals on a very individual level. You have to tailor that support service to them. I don't think that statutory organisations actually realise the amount of detail, and work, and care that we all put into doing that on a daily basis. I suppose it's making sure that they understand that what the pandemic has created is still with us." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

Perhaps as a result of this reliance, participants reflected on the toll that providing support and services during the pandemic had taken on third sector organisations and the people working and volunteering for them. One food aid provider from Moray described there being a:

> "Wear and tear on volunteers' energy over time (especially in winter)" (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Moray)

One participant from Derry City and Strabane discussed difficulties for their organisation in making decisions as to eligibility for food vouchers. As they were based in a small community, making decisions as to who was eligible for vouchers and how much they received was uncomfortable and challenging. As a follow on to this discussion, another participant talked

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[43] Lambie-Mumford, H., Loopstra, R. and Gordon, K. (2020) Mapping responses to risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK, published August 2020. Available here: http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/; Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

about the human 'cost' of people in local communities making decisions on food provision in their own community:

> "But there is that human cost in terms of mental wellbeing for everybody that has provided [during] this [pandemic]. That's one of the things - if during COVID decisions were made in a community to distribute things by people in the community, what's the aftermath of that?" (Charitable food aid workshop, Edinburgh)

Furthermore, whilst participants welcomed the wide range of approaches that were being undertaken to support households experiencing household food insecurity, there was concern around the impact of this on food aid providers if the responsibility for this was placed with them. For example, one participant representing a food bank said:

> "But I think there's- we need to just be a little bit cautious. Because it can be quite overwhelming thinking, "Oh, I should be doing this, that and the other." And I think a lot of emergency food organisations, it's not the only thing they do. You know, you might be also running other community projects, with other client groups and it just can be quite overwhelming really." (Charitable food aid workshop, Swansea)

Participants felt there was a balance that needed to be achieved:

> "I think it's about supporting organisations to understand about that dignity, but also balancing that with the needs of how you can manage that in a way that doesn't put a whole lot of emotional demands on a voluntary organisation that's making decisions, which they don't feel able to do." (Charitable food aid workshop, Herefordshire)

3.4 Negative local perceptions of food support initiatives

In this round of data collection, third sector food aid providers reflected on the judgements that were sometimes made by people in their local communities of their activities and the people their projects were supporting. Some spoke of anger in communities, stemming from perceptions that the people projects were supporting were not 'worthy' of support:

> "People were angry in places and actually remonstrated with me in the street. I was sworn at by many people for helping [those] who were perceived to be people they didn't want in their community, even though they were local people. It was a bizarre reaction, but I suppose people were frightened. Sometimes, frightened people behave in a bizarre way." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

> "During COVID, a lot of these community groups set up public-facing larders, and there have been a lot of issues around people feeling that they have been abused."
> (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

Our previous case study research found that some organisations undertook less needs assessment around the provision of food, partly to speed up the process of receiving support

and also to achieve wider reach of the schemes.[44] Participants reflected that the perceptions of abuse may have resulted from this lack of needs assessment in some areas:

> "What we had was a lot of people who became angry about the situation, that it was just a free for all and it was being abused." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

However, the organisation themselves noted that these perceptions of 'abuse' were often unfounded, based on their own knowledge of the people accessing support. The previous participant continued:

> "Actually, when you tag it [food provision] to [advice] services, that [abuse] is not the case, because we know your income, we know your issues." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

One participant reflected that judgements around who is 'worthy' of support was not new, but seemed to be expressed with more ease during the pandemic:

> "This issue as well about judgment - all these 'druggies', all this, that, and the other - we're thinking, "Well, actually, we know that family are not drug users. They're just poor. You've just imprinted your prejudices onto them," but that's just a wider thing. It was there before, and it's there now. It's just that people felt a little bit more free during COVID to express their prejudices, I think." (Charitable food aid workshop, West Berkshire)

Responding to conversations about potential 'abuse', one of the food bank managers described experiencing some resistance to continuing to do food parcel delivery as people were concerned this was open to 'abuse'. Pragmatically, they said:

> "People who don't want to do deliveries are warning me how much abuse that system would get, but every system is open to some form of abuse, isn't it?" (Charitable food aid workshop, Leeds)

3.5 National food boxes for people who were shielding

In our previous research, at both local and national levels, concerns were raised about the food boxes that were provided to people who were shielding through the national schemes in each of the four countries. Concerns were raised around the suitability, variety and nutritional quality provided by the boxes and duplication in provision.[45] These food parcel schemes were discussed, unprompted, in every September 2021 workshop. The concerns highlighted in our earlier research continued to be raised. Accordingly, when asked via Jamboard what features of the response should not be continued participants consistently noted these national

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[44] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

[45] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19; Lambie-Mumford, H, Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. (2020) Monitoring responses to risk of rising household food insecurity during the Covid-19 crisis across the UK, published December 2020, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

schemes. The continued discussion of this intervention highlights again the perceived shortcomings of this response.

As well as the above concerns, workshop participants reflected on how these national schemes had then impacted on them. Participants reflected that poor communication about the scheme created an expectation that food parcels could be accessed through the third sector:

> "What happened for us was it created a sense of entitlement. That, actually, was the problem for us in terms of managing our food bank numbers at the start, was this, the shielding letter. Just in the middle of it all, we were doing a COVID helpline here and we just had people saying, "So, I'm here to claim my parcel." We were like, "No, that's not how this works." So, the messaging, even, around the food parcels, the food packages, was all wrong to start, and the overflow from all of that just went straight onto community food banks. Like here, we had so many problems with it, but yes, it just added to the numbers for us." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

Another participant described how recipients contacted the third sector food aid provider with queries, even though they were not the provider:

> "I think there was an issue there as well about the accountability for it, because our local authority didn't really have a handle on who these boxes would be delivered to. Neither did we, so in some instances we were turning up to deliver a supposedly emergency parcel to somebody, to find there was a box already on the doorstep. Similarly, many people were trying to stop the boxes being delivered to them, so either they called us up and said, "I've had a box. I don't want to come and collect it," or alternatively calling up to harangue us because we were the only person who were picking up the phone, to ask us what on earth it was that made us think that they needed food. So, there was a total failure of communication on it" (Charitable food aid workshop, West Berkshire)

3.6 Tensions amongst new and existing actors

As discussed in section 2.9, and highlighted in our earlier research, a number of new actors began providing food aid over March to August 2020 at a local level. These were sometimes existing organisations who newly started providing food aid or new 'pop up' groups, established in direct response to the pandemic. The updates provided during the workshops suggested a varied picture in the trajectory of these new actors since August 2020 across case study areas with some "disappearing", others returning to their original focus, and other continuing to provide food aid in some form. For the latter, some of the existing food aid providers and food poverty alliances were supporting and sharing best practices (see section 2.9).

Whilst workshop participants recognised that these efforts were well intentioned and did play a role in providing support with food access during March to August 2020, there were also some concerns, tensions and challenges regarding these new actors. Reflecting back on that period, there were concerns that the new actors did not have the appropriate knowledge to, for example, ensure compliance with data protection. There were also concerns about the longer-

term impact of their actions. Referring to a call one organisation received asking for a list of 'vulnerable' people that needed support the participant said:

> "It just showed this complete lack of understanding of how the system works and how people who are affected by this are almost protected – rightfully so – behind GDPR and stuff. You can't just walk into an organisation, say, "Give me a list. Give me a list of your vulnerable people, please. I want to help them." That's not how it works." (Partnership workshop, Belfast)

In response they encouraged the caller to link in with existing organisations providing food aid, who had the skills and knowledge to provide this support such as their local soup kitchens, and food banks, and community organisations.

Another participant reflected their concerns about a lack of awareness on the longer-term impact of a lack of needs assessment:

> "We had a similar issue, just well-meaning people, but not really having a clear understanding of the impact of what they were doing. In one of our local areas, they were just turning up at people's doorsteps and leaving food, whether they needed it or not. Part of that was that they got so much funding. They had so much money that they don't really know what to do with it, so there was no real accountability behind the work they were doing, and the spend. The worry is that there's now quite a large reliance in that area." (Partnership workshop, Moray)

As well as this potential lack of expertise, some participants also felt that the new actors did not work to link in or collaborate with the existing providers, therefore exacerbating the lack of expertise:

> "The Mutual Aid movement was not collaborative. They publicly criticised the formal third sector for being 'slow' and 'bureaucratic', but some of their practices were really dangerous 'wild west' stuff." (Partnership workshop, Jamboard, Glasgow)

This lack of collaboration may have led to confusion, duplication and potentially diluted the attention available from statutory organisations providing support:

> "Where we had rotary clubs and lion clubs suddenly deciding they were going to do something in their area and just deciding what they were doing and doing it without any kind of linking in with those who are already providing stuff. And that whole, kind of, confusion about who's doing what where and are we reaching all the right people or are we duplicating etc.?" (Charitable food aid workshop, Herefordshire)

> "A lot of money was wasted in that way because the local authority felt that, as they were local residents, they have to listen to everybody. You'd have a food hub meeting. We had organisations that were feeding, maybe, 300 families, and then you'd have another very loud person in there who had, maybe, given a tin of beans to the neighbour. There were a lot of problems there with the coordination. As I say, they've mainly disappeared, but they do cause issues and it diverts attention." (Charitable food aid workshop, West Berkshire)

Another participant provided an example of where a new actor has disrupted the existing systems in place. They described a situation where existing food banks on the outskirts of Belfast reported not receiving food through their usual channels because one of the main suppliers intervened and was diverting food to organisations in central Belfast. Describing this situation the participant said:

> "That was just somebody trying to help, and that's at a slightly more influential level, frankly, because that's one of our main local suppliers, who has just waded in with big boots: "Want to help". But actually, they destabilised the system that was already working." (Partnership workshop, Belfast)

Another tension around some of the new actors was their apparent lack of appreciation of the existing skills, expertise and infrastructure that already exists in the third sector:

> "A lot of the people who seem to set up the Mutual Aids in these kinds of pop-up emergency, "I'm here and I want to do good," a lot of them are people who were on furlough. Just as soon as they got furloughed and sent home, they thought, "With my skills, I really must be [needed]". [They] had no understanding that there was a third-sector infrastructure already built around the area they lived in…...There was a bit of that: "I've come to save you." You're going, "That's great. The church around the corner is doing a food bank. There's a community housing association here. There's a community project here. What is it you've come to save us all with?" (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)

This was a source of frustration for the existing providers:

> "We had a lot of self-appointed people who were very busy telling everybody else, including established charities, what to do…It's a bit galling when you've been doing the same job for 17 years. Maybe we've been doing it badly for 17 years and people who've been doing it for 5 minutes know better." (Charitable food aid workshop, West Berkshire)

These reflections highlight that, whilst existing organisations value the efforts and contributions of the new actors, tensions still arose. Given the discussions of tensions around the new actors, participants in the partnership workshop were asked what the 'ideal' way would be to harness the commitment and good will of people who want to help in crisis situations, without creating the challenges that were faced. Participants felt that a widely promoted central contact point would be a positive approach. In Scotland, the volunteer centre infrastructure was suggested as a potential route to garner and maximise people's willingness to get involved:

> "The volunteer centre would be the person that would coordinate people who wanted to volunteer in the community for the first time, but I don't know how the structures are in the other UK nations. I just know that in Scotland there's a volunteer centre in every local authority area, or its equivalent." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)

Although it was acknowledged that the partnerships approach of volunteer centres may differ in different areas even within Scotland. Another participant agreed with the central contact point suggestion:

> "I think one thing we've done, we launched a website for Find Food in Bradford, but part of that was volunteering. I think somehow getting the word out there, like volunteer centres, yes, but also just directly linking with what's happening already, that's the message we need to get out there. That's the first place to look. Look and see what's happening already. I guess getting our website and things better publicised and out there wider is one of the things that need to happen to enable people to think, "I need to look and see what's happening." (Partnership workshop, Bradford)

One participant hoped that a key learning is the need to link the desire to help that naturally emerges in crisis situation to existing infrastructure and expertise, rather than individuals setting up their own responses:

> "We're just hoping that, if there is another crisis of any form, that hopefully they learned their lesson and don't do it again, but it seems at the moment that the British response to any crisis is, "Let's set up an independent charity, because nobody else knows what they're doing, apart from us. We've got no experience, no knowledge and no funds." (Charitable food aid workshop, West Berkshire)

4. Looking ahead

4.1 In the near future

Participants reported that they were expecting an increase in households requiring support with food access in the near future due to, at the time of data collection (September 2021), the impending end of the furlough scheme and expectation that this would lead to redundancies, the cut to the uplift to Universal Credit and increased fuel costs. Food bank managers reported:

> "Given the state of things we would expect to be much busier. We expect demand to greatly increase in the coming weeks." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Swansea)

> "The cuts to Universal Credit and increased fuel charges will impact our client group which we expect to increase." (Charitable food aid workshop, Jamboard, Argyll and Bute)

> "We are expecting the end of furlough and UC changes to have a significant effect, and a continued increase in those at risk of homelessness." (Council workshop, chat, Derry City and Strabane)

This was causing concern about the capacity of third sector organisations to deal with this increased need due to a lack of resources and energy. For example, one food aid provider in Moray said:

> "There's only so much that we can do. From the beginning of COVID, we had really reached that point. If we go back to that, we can only sustain it for so long without reaching burnout. It is a bit of a concern." (Partnership workshop, Moray)

Despite some of the strengthened partnership working that has been evidenced there was still concern that there was not a joined-up approach in place to meet the expected increase in need. For example, one participant from Derry City and Strabane said:

> "At the minute, we, as the community transport organisation, are aware that perhaps there is going to be this increased need, but, to be honest, we haven't really been approached or been involved in any sort of work to prepare for that. From what I can see to date, there has been no kind of joined-up approach to the demand that may be increasing now, probably from next week on. Not in this area, anyway." (Partnership workshop, Derry City and Strabane)

4.2 Priorities looking ahead

At each of the workshops, participants were asked the priorities for their organisation looking ahead. These data were primarily captured by Jamboard. Table 6 presents a summary of this information.

Table 6: Summary of Jamboard content identifying priorities for each of the actors looking ahead

Councils	Partnerships/ alliances	Third sector organisations
● Develop or update food strategy plan. ● Encouraging and adopting cash first approach. ● Continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with the third sector. ● Continue to support third sector organisations with funding and expertise (as required) including smaller community organisations. ● Support transition to affordable food models. ● Support providers [to] resume social activities such as community meals. ● Continue to support and develop wrap around services. ● Increase opportunities for growing and cooking programmes. ● Promote and operationalise means to tackle the root causes of food insecurity and poverty. ● Continue to liaise with national Government.	● Promoting and embedding a wide approach to support household food insecurity focusing on inequalities. ● Encouraging and adopting cash first approach. ● Support transition to affordable food models. ● Continue and facilitate regular engagement and networking with relevant organisations. ● Engaging with and building relations with new food aid providers by meeting face to face, rather than virtually. ● Retaining or building engagement with statutory agencies in partnerships. ● Collating data on food aid initiatives in the local area. ● Supporting rural communities with food access issues particular to this geography. ● Provide support, guidance and accredited training with partnership organisations.	● Encouraging and adopting cash first approach. ● Resuming face to face services. ● Accessing funding. ● Safely resuming volunteer opportunities (where these have been paused). ● Networking with relevant organisations to ensure a joined up approach. ● Consult families and communities with lived experience to shape services and delivery. ● Resume services to pre-pandemic levels. ● Expand range of services on offer (such as clothes bank, befriending services, community freezer and training opportunities). ● Promote and operationalise the means to tackle the root causes of food insecurity and poverty. ● Food growing and cooking activities. ● Getting the messages out to the public and politicians that food banks should not be the answer to poverty.

4.3 Priorities for wider efforts to tackle food insecurity

Data were also collected on participants' insights on priorities for wider efforts to tackle food insecurity, described below.

4.3.1 Perspectives collected during the charitable food aid workshop

Participants in the charitable food aid workshops were asked what the priorities are, from their perspective, for the wider efforts to support people with food access. Table 7 summarises the content provided via a Jamboard, some of which reiterates themes already discussed.

Table 7: Priorities, from their perspective, for the wider efforts to support people with food access, as collected in charitable food aid workshops. Data submitted via Jamboard.

Approach food insecurity from a food systems perspective	• "Look at food systems across the counties - using Sustainable Food Places model - encouraging development of projects that enable better access to reasonably priced food/meals in areas where it is needed" (Food aid workshop, Herefordshire) • "Look at how we can address this issue long term, instead of quick fixes. Looking more towards sustainability also." (Food aid workshop, West Berkshire)
Utilise third sector knowledge and expertise	• "Make sure we are consulted, listened to and valued for our understanding and connection with communities" (Food aid workshop, Edinburgh)
Adopt a rights based approach	• "To embed [reducing] food poverty and access to food as basic human right into our New Anti-Poverty Strategy Framework" (Food aid workshop, Belfast)
Publicise the desire to end the need for food banks. And plan for how this can be achieved	• "Publicise boldly that we want less food banks, not more" (Food aid workshop, Leeds) • "Contributing to a Swansea / Wales plan to end the need for emergency food" (Food aid workshop, Swansea)
Understand the range of factors impacting food access. Particularly in rural areas.	• "Need to understand the other factors that prevent people accessing affordable food e.g. low cost transport to get to cheaper food shops" (Food aid workshop, Herefordshire) • "Equality around access, have the same opportunities and access in rural areas" (Food aid workshop, Moray)
Support the spectrum of food access issues	• "What we do not do is help those who are 'just about managing'... We have and will continue to consider how best we might do so." (Food aid workshop, Argyll and Bute)
Overcome the stigma of seeking support	• "One of the main problems with any support is ensuring it goes to those in genuine need. We would have found that pride has prevented some of the most vulnerable from coming forward especially as this is a small rural rea where a stigma is attached to requesting assistance" (Food aid workshop, Derry City and Strabane)
Campaign locally and nationally	• "Pressurise Council for coherent and simple resourced Food Poverty Action plan that does something." (Food aid workshop, Merton) • Support campaigns that look to address the roots of poverty (Food aid workshop, Moray)
Enable effective food recovery	• "Better food recovery from shops/restaurants etc. Used to be very good but currently only M&S donating surplus food." (Food aid workshop, Moray) • "Pressurise Council to have local regularised agreement with local supermarkets to use waste food that is then used by community groups, and to ensure that the transport aspect is funded even if the rest cannot be." (Food aid workshop, Moray)

4.3.2 Increasing emphasis on 'cash first' solutions

As discussed in section 2.7 there were examples of 'cash first' work being undertaken to support households during the pandemic. These actions were underpinned with participant discussions around the need for these cash first responses to be foregrounded in interventions to address household food insecurity. Underpinning these discussions of developments in cash-based responses was the wide recognition of the need for adequate household income as a means to protect households from food insecurity. Such sentiments are articulated in the following quotes:

> "We need to demand a cash first [approach]. People should have… There's nothing dignified about a food parcel. There is nothing dignified about me picking your food, going and doing your shopping, and leaving it off at your house. That is the most undignified thing to have in today's society. I keep saying this to our politicians: we need to put money in people's pockets. We need to take people out of poverty." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

> "But we definitely support the cash-first [approach], you know, it's about people having better minimum wage, topped-up income, you know, it's just the same as everybody else in society in terms of their buying power." (Charitable food aid workshop, Edinburgh)

4.3.3 Responsibility and methods for tackling food insecurity

Participants also reflected on long-standing debates as to responsibility for addressing food insecurity being with the third sector:

> "It is ludicrous if local councils and government thought that we [the third sector] are the answer to their problems around poverty. By continuing to do it, in some ways I feel like we are letting them off. We are actually just giving them an out, and I feel like we need to stand together." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

The same participant described the situation in Northern Ireland, when they felt that the pandemic had further endorsed a shirking of responsibility by politicians:

> "In the sense for us here, in terms of the North and our Assembly, we had lots of politicians come out who wanted to go round doorsteps but never took any responsibility for it being that they were at fault. That was the big problem we had. They, kind of, pushed the blame to Westminster, so, even at a local level we don't have responsibility for some of these things. It's how you join all those dots together and how people start to take responsibility, not just at a Westminster level but at [a] local level as well, to address these things." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

A similar sentiment was voiced in the following quote which suggested that the pandemic had exacerbated this situation whereby statutory agencies were not providing the services it was deemed that they should:

> "I think inefficiency is currently being veiled… COVID is a convenient veil for impoverished councils to hide behind. "Everybody is working from home still. You

might not get hold of it. We'll get back to you in eight weeks," or something. Really? I see that as becoming a bigger issue. As [we're coming into] winter we might get a little bit of a kick up in the COVID rate. I perceive that [inefficiency] coming back again, even more groups – government-facing or control-type groups – hiding behind the COVID excuse for not coming up with the goods, basically." (Charitable food aid workshop, Moray)

Another participant questioned whether the high levels of funding available during the pandemic were put to good use:

"Could we start looking at how money could be best spent at government level, really, because that £6.1m is a lot of money and would have alleviated poverty for, probably, an entire city if it had been effectively managed? All it really did, at some level, was give bags of dry pasta to people." (Partnership workshop, Belfast)

4.4.4 Whole system approach to tackling household food insecurity

As well as recognition of the need to tackle the underlying causes of food insecurity, primarily with a focus on household income and cash first solutions, participants also reflected on the need for changes in the wider food system and considered this to be a priority in the longer term. We heard examples of this wider food system approach being implemented.

In some areas, including Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Herefordshire, the systems approach was focussed on the food system. For example, the Sustainable Food Places (SFP) initiative was a vehicle for which some participants hoped to mobilise such changes:[46]

"The practices that are in place in Northern Ireland at the minute aren't actually alleviating the problem so much, if you know what I mean, so we're really keen... We're at a really interesting point at the minute where we've got five councillors coming on the SFP journey, which is brilliant. They want to create a cohesive, countrywide dialogue around sustainable food so that everyone's, kind of, on the same page. A key part of that is, obviously, tackling food poverty. So, I'm hoping that over the next year or so, through the SFP thing, we'll be able to start really digging into what the good examples are and how we can replicate them." (Partnership workshop, Belfast)

In Cardiff, two local areas were developing their own local food plans through the Sustainable Food Places 'Good Food Movement' pilot.[47] Within each area a community consultation was taking place to develop a food plan for their local area:

"Our two pilots, actually one is being led by ACE, who we work a lot on the food response anyway, which is a community development organisation, but the other one is being led by a local person in that community, as well. So, it is quite nice seeing the two different approaches. It's early days at the moment, but they're doing their community engagement consultation stuff at the moment, to see what people want in the plans, and then, over the next year or so, probably develop those plans." (Partnership workshop, Cardiff)

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[46] https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/
[47] https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/local_good_food_movement/

Also in Cardiff, we learned that Food Cardiff had secured funding from the Welsh Government's EU Transition Funding for Food Poverty. The funding was to be used for three workstreams: a holistic approach to tackle food insecurity, building local supply chains to supply alternative retail, and mass engagement with good food.

Participants also reflected on the need for a systems approach to tackling poverty as a whole, recognising that this is at the root of many social issues. However, currently some participants felt that this was not acknowledged. Referring to local social work teams one participant said:

> "I do work with social workers, and what our big problem is [is] that poverty is not seen as something on their radar. So, they don't connect poverty with how that impacts on children, how that impacts on their life, how that impacts on their outcomes. So, poverty is left off the agenda in terms of teaching social workers to go out and work with families and individuals, when actually poverty is so much more important than that. That's key to a lot of the issues that our families have. Poverty leads to mental health. It leads to addictions and so they have to actually relook at how they take social workers to go out and look at those things. So, yes, there is a bit of work to be done around that." (Charitable food aid workshop, Belfast)

We learned of what one participant called, a "complete service redesign" that was being considered by Glasgow City Council:

> "It's a major business case about just redesigning how the council works so that, instead of people having to be referred to the council, the idea would be there would be some kind of telephone system where people would phone and say, "This is my problem." Someone trained at the council in good conversations – not in passing it on, but in good conversations – will assess the person. If they need to, make an emergency referral to social work, but otherwise look for a third-sector resource to support that person." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)

The impetus for this redesign was based on the collaboration between the Council and the third sector that had occurred up to this point in the pandemic:

> "But the idea is, at the very heart of it, it came from food, it came from COVID, and it would be a permanent, collaborative process for the third sector and the council." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)

Finally, one participant questioned the overall approach that is taken to addressing poverty:

> "I'm just wondering if anybody is looking at this in a different way, because many of these responses and stuff, as we know, is, kind of, like skirting round the edges, because fixing poverty isn't really in our gift. There's a whole massive industry around it [food aid], yet the people who are affected, their positions don't really seem to change. It's just something I'm thinking about." (Partnership workshop, Belfast)

4.5 Opportunity to learn and reflect

We heard examples of participants hoping to learn from the pandemic and use this to inform future responses to food insecurity. Reflecting on this time was seen as an opportunity to update and adapt the responses:

> "We're developing a new food strategy to pick up where needs/thinking has changed, and activities may need to be adapted to reflect that." (Council workshop, Jamboard, Bradford).

> "We're summarising all of that work that we did with the COVID winter grant in order to explore what we will do moving forward. It's a bit of a time of reflection really in terms of how we allocated that funding and how we can utilise council resources moving forward, bearing in mind we're under constraints of reductions in budget, so we're just looking into that." (Council workshop, Leeds)

Though some organisations had taken time to collate and share their activities over the pandemic, some felt that the learning they shared was not acted on, as in the example below

> "BFN [Belfast Food Network] collated COVID responses over a 9 month period, we shared this info with the Department of Communities Food Task Force and tried to influence their response, with minimal effect - they went for redistribution through non food channels [as] the winter response" (Partnership workshop, Jamboard, Belfast)

4.6 Recommendations for other areas

Following on from this, participants in the councils and the partnership workshops were asked what recommendations they would give to other local areas based on their experiences. Table 8 summarises the content provided via a Jamboard.

Table 8: Recommendations from local councils and partnerships/ alliances for other areas

Recommendation	Jamboard data
Ensure a coordinated local response	"Whilst the basics like partnership working are important everywhere, a local response, that works for your communities is needed" (Council workshop, Cardiff)
Develop wide networks	"Think beyond existing providers - which may be dominated by organisations with good reach into some communities but not others, finding networks that can help to tailor and expand the response to under-served communities (and can help that to be an appropriate response)" (Council workshop, Bradford)
Develop and implement a food strategy and/or action plan	"Develop an evidence-based strategy/action plan and find some highly influential champions to support you with this and help drive your agenda forwards." (Council workshop, Greenwich)
Work with and harness the third sector and communities	"Working with the third sector and communities to enhance and strengthen provision and whole system approaches to tackling food poverty and insecurity." (Council workshop, Swansea) "Use a third sector intermediary body to direct resources to the micro-third sector, the specialist and minority groups, etc. Public sector as enabler, facilitator and funder, but a partner." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)
Ensure effective practicalities are in place	"A very practical recommendation: allow public sector to use Zoom. In Scotland they're only allowed to use Teams, and most of the community moved on to Zoom, so public sector partners literally could not attend many online planning meetings." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow) "Get data-sharing sorted. Get a common understanding of GDPR." (Partnership workshop, Glasgow)
Identify effective ways to communicate amongst all relevant organisations	"Regular communication led by one partner organisation to avoid duplication of services." (Partnership workshop, DSCDC)
Learn from others	"Try and link in nationally to learn from other experiences." (Partnership workshop, Moray)

5.0 Discussion

Over the past 18 months, our research has evidenced the extensive work that has gone into responding to risks of household food insecurity in local areas across the UK. This has involved intensification and expansion of existing infrastructure (including food banks and low-cost community food retail models) as well as provision that was new to the case study areas (including local government food parcel provision, new cash/voucher grant schemes, and community food retail models where they weren't in place before). This report has provided insight into how local support systems evolved over September 2020 to September 2021. From these findings, we have identified four trends that have the potential to reshape the landscape of local responses to food insecurity. We also highlight major challenges or points of tension which have come through from the research.

1. **Cash first approaches increasingly integrated in local responses to food insecurity**

Work towards establishing cash first – rather than food first - approaches featured prominently in our earlier case study research (published July 2021) and formed a key finding from that phase of our research. Here, we found even stronger evidence of these approaches playing an increasingly prominent role in local responses to food insecurity – in both council and community sector provision. A spectrum of 'cash based' responses was evident, including income maximisation efforts, cash grants and vouchers. The Independent Food Aid Network, Sustain and other stakeholders have also recommended continuing to prioritise cash first support.[48] In England, the Household Support Fund provided funding for local councils to support those most in need over 2020-2021: while primarily encouraging voucher-based systems or food provision, the guidance did allow for cash transfers.[49] Cash first responses are a priority in the Scottish Government's current consultation on Ending the Need for Food Banks.[50]

Importantly however, participants in this research – and in other parts of this project - highlighted concerns over responses that only signpost people to social security entitlements, as these were seen as insufficiently funded by government.[51] The removal of the Universal Credit £20 uplift in October 2021 reduced the value of benefit payments to pre-pandemic levels, though even lower in real terms, given rises in costs of living. Stakeholders were fully expecting to see the impact of this on demand for their services. Furthermore, the uncertainty of funding for local government financial provision is also likely to be critical to the future of cash first approaches, especially in England. The security of funding for local welfare assistance schemes, for example, could have a particularly important impact on local authority planning for the development and security of grant or voucher schemes.

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[48] https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/nov21-councils-must-go-cash-first/; https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first

[49] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/household-support-fund-final-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england

[50] https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-need-food-banks-consultation-draft-national-plan/;

[51] Food Exp CV19 Panel, 2021: Navigating Storms: Learning from Covid-19 food experiences [Aitchison, G. and Perry, J. (eds.)]. Church Action on Poverty. Available for download from www.church-poverty.org.uk/navigatingstorms

The findings presented above also provide examples of how cash first approaches can harness a wide network of local organisations such as credit unions, taking support beyond the limitations of social security provision. There are also opportunities to consider how these approaches may impact on other aspects of the local economy, and we found examples of organisations using voucher schemes to also support local shops. We note, however, unlike cash grants, voucher schemes restricted to particular shops do limit user choice.

2. **A range of actors driving for comprehensive approaches and system-wide strategies**

Our research has highlighted that a wide range of local actors have been, and remain, engaged in work responding to food insecurity in local areas. COVID-19 responses have involved extensive collaboration and partnership working across the case studies. These sought to bring together as many stakeholders as possible, including those who had not engaged on food issues before, to deliver systematic and comprehensive local responses. It is clear from data on participants' priorities for the future that work is being done to foreground sustainable collaboration in future responses, involving key actors including local government departments and public services that can help people access appropriate support and advice as well as other third sector organisations. Food partnerships, food poverty alliances and other local networks continue to be powerful vehicles for collaboration, sharing of good practice and developing a joint system-wide vision and accompanying set of actions. This was echoed in other findings; local alliances can respond well in times of acute crisis; ongoing support will be needed to maintain the value and potency of this infrastructure.[52]

We also observed shifts by local actors towards approaches that are looking to reshape and harness their local food systems, considering the contributions of local food businesses and producers as well as seeking to address the needs of local people who are struggling to access food. The data reported above showcased a trend towards low-cost community food retail alternatives rather than the provision of free food. How these may fit into broader local food system restructuring and food supplies will be important to explore.

3. **Recognising the role of third sector organisations and the limitations of food aid capacity and food supply**

This research has once again highlighted that third sector food aid provision was a linchpin of local responses throughout the COVID-19 response. The limitations of food aid as the primary response to household food insecurity has long been evidenced by research from the UK and elsewhere.[53] The data we have gathered from both phases of our case study work once again highlight levels of fatigue and potential burn out experienced by food aid providers. Despite this, they continue their work and regularly seek ways to improve their services, a testament to their commitment to supporting households and local communities.

[52] Knowles, S. et al.(2021) Food Power Final Evaluation Report; https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/food-power-final-evaluation-report/
[53] Riches, G. (2018) Food Bank Nation: Poverty, Corporate Charity and the Right to Food. Routledge: London; https://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/research-publications/community-food-programs/

Furthermore, there is a high level of enthusiasm and positivity around strengthened partnership working and increasing recognition of the capability of the third sector, which many participants feel has developed over the pandemic.

However, we expect the economic fall-out of the pandemic to endure for a number of years. Furthermore, the household impacts of national social security provision and local government funding are considered, by participants, as crucial factors in determining future levels of need for emergency food aid locally. Therefore, there needs to be full, frank and inclusive discussions – at both the national and local levels - of the role that community organisations should and can play in responding to food insecurity. Such discussions should recognise the strengths and capability of third sector organisations, and partnerships and collaborative working, whilst crucially not distracting from the role that national and local government must play in ensuring adequate household income.

We also heard of the opportunities and challenges of food supplies for community food projects. Many projects rely extensively on redistributed surplus food, the supply of which was heavily increased during the peak of the pandemic. Surplus food can vary in many ways, including its quality, nutritional value, cultural appropriateness, and reliability, so it is important to not make blanket statements about the merits or shortcomings of reliance on surplus food. However, we did hear about attempts to move away from over-reliance on surplus food, in part to increase reliability and to support local producers and suppliers. We note the importance for such supplies to be purchased at a fair price.

4. Increasing the reach of community food projects and other services

We gathered some evidence on how tailored approaches are meeting the needs of specific groups and communities, particularly Black, Asian and minority ethnic people. However, many stakeholders were unable to provide detailed information on how the needs of specific groups were addressed in their areas. As specific groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and its aftermath, while already being at greater risk of food insecurity, we consider that targeting and tailoring of support warrants particular attention from practitioners and policymakers.[54]

Our research also identified a wide range of perceptions on who should be getting support, with some prioritising those they felt to be in the "highest" level of need, rather than those perceived to be in less need. As areas move to more inclusive models of support, which aim to reach a wider group of people beyond those in most immediate crisis, such as community retail models, projects will need to carefully consider how they communicate to their target audience and avoid perceptions of abuse, particularly where projects explicitly aim to support those who are struggling in a preventative way, rather than in immediate crisis.

Finally, whether through cash first, voucher or food provision, our workshop participants have been clear about the benefits of being able to be in contact with people when they receive help to provide opportunities to signpost to other available support services.

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[54] https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/same-pandemic-unequal-impacts; Loopstra, R, Reeves, A & Tarasuk, V 2019, 'The rise of hunger among low-income households: An analysis of the risks of food insecurity between 2004 and 2016 in a population-based study of UK adults', Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, vol. 73, no. 7, pp. 668-673. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2018-211194

However, it is also important to recognise the tensions around this including the pressures put on third sector organisations to have knowledge, expertise and capacity to make such links, where responsibility for provision of this 'wraparound care' sits and the potentially problematic situation were receiving support with meeting the basic need for food becomes contingent on engagement with wider support services.

Other more immediate and practical questions

In addition, the data presented in this report also raises some more immediate and practical questions that local stakeholders may wish to consider when looking ahead:

- There have been significant challenges for organisations restarting social and face-to-face activities. How can these challenges be addressed and this be prioritised?

- There is clearly a need to garner the support of communities in times of crisis but how can this be done in a way that complements and supports, rather than frustrates and disrupts, existing infrastructure and systems?

- Where new food aid providers have been established over the pandemic and remain, what support can be provided to them to develop from or critique the direct food aid model approach?

- How can data be gathered which evidences the use, reach and impact of funding provided by local and national governments to third sector organisations, but in a way that is not overly resource intensive for these organisations?

- Among social service providers (whether third sector or local authority), some of the new ways of working over the pandemic have been useful in particular circumstances such as home delivery, telephone support, and online classes, meetings and events. How can organisations be supported to maximise the positive aspects of new ways of working while also addressing the shortcomings of these?

- Direct food aid provision can be contentious locally. How can assumptions in local communities be addressed?

- How do projects and local communities think through the role of open access provision that may help to reach those in need or who may not come forward and support a preventative approach?

6.0 Conclusion

We have captured detailed insight into responses to food insecurity in case study areas over the pandemic in this and the earlier reports, building up an evidence base on what can be learned from these. Further, we have highlighted how this learning can be used to inform ongoing and future responses to household food insecurity. Our findings suggest that some promising developments have emerged from the pandemic, most notably the trend towards cash-first responses, the strengthened partnership and collaborative working and, more broadly, the momentum for integrating food insecurity responses into wider systems. However, the crucial role of the food aid sector, the toll of this reliance and the fear of growing need on a sector already at capacity are areas of significant concern. This, again, reiterates that charitable food aid cannot be the vanguard response to household food insecurity in the UK; governments and councils must play a proactive role in shaping policy and practice in line with the needs of people and those organisations who have provided support.

As noted in the introduction, this case study research is part of a wider project designed to map and monitor responses to risks of food insecurity during the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK. These local case studies sit alongside the findings of the wider project research at a national level and with the participatory policy panel, who have shared their experience of accessing food during the pandemic for both themselves and for their communities.[55] This research, alongside other evaluative work that is being done, provides evidence to inform learning about responses to risks of household food insecurity during this extraordinary time.

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

7.0 Methodological Appendix

The 'Local area case studies: methodological appendix' report from the first phase of this research includes full details of the rationale and process for the selection of the 14 case study areas. As detailed in that appendix, the first phase of the research brought together 131 participants with frontline experience of responding to food access issues in their local area (either in a policy or practitioner role) in a series of online workshops and interviews, grouped by each case study area, and focused on mapping local responses in each location. Individual case study reports, a cross case comparison and the methodological appendix, are available on the project website, http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19/.

Data collection for the second phase of the research was undertaken through four online, interactive, workshops which were held in September 2021. This phase firstly sought an insight into the activity undertaken to support food access during the so called 'COVID Winter' (Sept 2020 - March 2021) and from April 2021 - September 2021. It also sought to provide a space for participants to reflect on lessons learnt and priorities for the future with a particular emphasis on informing future responses and post-pandemic policy and practice.

All 131 research participants from the first phase were invited to attend one of the four workshops. Each previous participant was primarily invited to the workshop most relevant to their work, however they were made aware of the other workshops running and invited to attend if they wished, with the exception of the workshop targeted at local council staff. Participants were invited to attend by email with follow up reminders. The target participation level was about 8-10 people, so once registration for each workshop reached between 10-12 people no further reminder emails were sent. The workshops ran for 2 hours and were held on Zoom. Full details on each of the workshops are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Workshop rationale, objectives and targeted participants

Title	Previous findings that drove the rationale for the workshops[56]	Workshop objective	Targeted participants (from phase 1)
1. Council responses to support food access during the COVID-19 pandemic	During the spring/summer 2020 lockdown, local councils played several different roles in responses to food access issues, including significant direct food provision, funding and partnering with food charities, and changing income maximisation and discretionary grant support.	Learn how local council responses have continued to evolve since the initial data collection as well as to hear plans looking forward. Provide time to reflect on what was learned from providing responses to food access issues and how these lessons can inform future activity.	Local council staff
2. The role of collaboration and partnership working in responses to support food access during the COVID-19 pandemic	Across the case study areas partnership working, coordination and collaboration was seen by participants as key to the success of local responses. The areas studied included places with existing formal partnerships, partnerships that were set up in response to the pandemic and areas that worked on less structured practices of working together. More and better partnership working was seen as a key positive to emerge from the spring/summer 2020 and participants hoped this would continue.	Learn more on the role of partnerships, characteristics of effective partnership working, and the enablers or barriers to best practices in partnership working. Provide time to reflect on what was learned from providing responses to food access issues through partnership working and how these lessons can inform future activity.	Food poverty alliances such as members of the Food Power and/or Sustainable Food Places networks or the Feeding Britain network. Other food partnerships/ networks identified in the first phase of the research. Organisations that support third sector organisations such as councils for the voluntary sector, area partnerships, community support organisations.
3. Changes to the landscape of charitable food aid landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic	The landscape of food aid changed during the spring/ summer 2020 with many new actors providing support with food access, existing food aid providers making significant adaptations to their operations, new funding sources becoming available to food aid charities, and an increase in responses providing direct food aid (potentially reversing pre-pandemic trends for a shift away from this type of provision). Given the scale of need and support, and the changes observed over spring/summer 2020 it will be important to monitor the longer-term impacts for support structures and experiences of food insecurity.	Learn more about the actors providing food aid, continuing adaptations that food aid providers are making, and future plans for food aid provision. Provide time to reflect on the legacies of these changes and adaptations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.	Third sector-based organisations providing support with food access during the pandemic including existing and new providers. Organisations acting as referrers to food aid providers. Third sector-based organisations providing support to particular population groups.

[56] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

Due to the high number of participants in the first phase of the research that were working on charitable food aid provision, the 'changes to the landscape of charitable food aid landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic' was held twice. The other workshops were held once.

A total of 32 participants attended the workshops. The participant breakdown for each of the workshops is shown in Table 10. Some of the participants from the first phase of the research delegated a different member of their organisation to attend the workshop. Four of the 32 participants were new to the research, but from an organisation that previously participated. One participant was from an organisation that had not participated in the first phase but had contacted the research team having read the case study report for their area.

Table 10: Participant breakdown by actor type and area

	No of participants	Area (of the original 14 case studies)	Organisation type
Council workshop	10	**9 areas represented:** Belfast (1), Bradford (1), Cardiff (2), Derry City and Strabane (1), Edinburgh (1), Greenwich (1), Herefordshire (1), Leeds (1), Swansea (1)	• Local council: 10
Partnership workshop	7	**7 areas represented:** Belfast (1), Bradford (1), Cardiff (1), Derry City and Strabane (1), Glasgow (1), Leeds (1), Moray (1)	• Member of national network (Feeding Britain Partnership, Food Power network, Sustainable Food Places network):[57] 5 • Council for the voluntary sector: 1 • Community transport provider: 1[58]
Charitable food aid workshop	15 (across the 2 workshops)	**11 areas represented:** Argyll and Bute (2), Belfast (1), Cardiff (1), Derry City and Strabane (1), Edinburgh (1), Herefordshire (1), Leeds (1) Moray (3), Merton (1), Swansea (1), West Berkshire (2)	• Food bank in the Trussell Trust network: 2 • Food bank independent of Trussell Trust network: 1 *(also an advice services provider)* • Existing, established community food provider (including provision of community lunches, cooking groups, emergency food parcels, food growing): 4 • Third sector organisation newly providing food aid during pandemic: 1 • Community group/ association providing food aid: 2 • Organisations supporting a particular population group (including the provision of food aid): 3 (*Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities (1), people experiencing homelessness (2))* • Referral agent: 1 *(housing association)* • Church of England support officer for independent food banks in the county: 1

Each of the fourteen case study areas were represented in at least one of the workshops. Five areas were represented at one workshop (Argyll and Bute, Glasgow, Greenwich, Merton and West Berkshire), five were represented at two workshops (Bradford, Edinburgh, Herefordshire, Moray, Swansea,) and four were represented at three workshops (Belfast, Cardiff, Derry City and Strabane, Leeds).

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[57] https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpower/; https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/; https://feedingbritain.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/

[58] * *Having been passed on a copy of the first case study report this participant got in touch with the research team as they were keen to have the voice of community transport providers heard, given they were a key part of the infrastructure delivering food parcels in their area over spring/ summer 2020. As they worked in partnership with several other organisations, they were invited to the partnership workshop.*

Prior to the workshops, participants were sent an agenda which indicated the planned broad topics of discussion. Following an introduction of the research and attendees, each workshop was split into three sections, broadly focussed on updates with activities to support food access, key learnings, and looking ahead. Each of these sessions began with a Jamboard (an interactive whiteboard) where participants added sticky notes in response to specified questions that were tailored to each actor types. After approximately 5 minutes participants were then invited into a group discussion, led by one member of the research team and based on responses to the Jamboard. Participants were also invited to add comments to the chat.

Four sources of data were collected from each workshop: Jamboard entries, fully transcribed group discussions, the Zoom chat function and researchers notes. Because the data from the different workshops spoke about complementary aspects, and because the previous case studies highlighted an interconnectedness between actors, a cross-cutting analysis was conducted across the three sets of workshop data. The analysis framework was designed around the objectives of each workshop, the data collected, and the questions asked. Therefore, as a starting point the analysis framework had three topics:

- Updates on activity September 2020- September 2021
- Key learnings from responses to food insecurity during COVID-19
- Looking ahead

In the initial phase of analysis one researcher reviewed each of the workshop transcripts, creating memos, via the comment function on Word, which identified subthemes under each of the three topics. Jamboard and chat entries were copied into separate word documents and data was sorted and grouped into subheadings under each of the questions posed on the Jamboard. Combined, this resulted in a word document which presented, in detail, data sorted into key themes and an early analysis. This was reviewed by two other members of the research team. Following the team discussion of this document, the second phase of the analysis involved returning to the primary data to robustly ensure the relevance and completeness of the themes to date, to clarify certain points, and to fill identified gaps. This led to further refinement of the themes, their content, and their order. Each theme was also reviewed with reference to relevant findings from the first phase of the case studies.[59] Researchers notes were reviewed at this stage to ensure the report captured the reflections made at the time of the workshop. The subsequent output was reviewed by three members of the research team, including the project's NGO partner. One of the reviewers had not been involved in the workshops themselves and therefore brought fresh insights and commentary on the analysis. Comments and questions were addressed in an iterative process, leading to this final report.

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[59] Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) 'Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020), published July 2021, available online http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/food-vulnerability-during-covid-19

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