Food for vulnerable people in Covid-19 lockdown
Learning from Greenwich

Briefing for local authorities and Local Resilience Forums working in partnership with local community and voluntary organisations.

Photo credit: Claire Pritchard, chief executive of Greenwich CDA. It shows 200 healthy food bags for vulnerable non-shielding residents, packed by Greenwich CDA, working in partnership with the Royal Borough of Greenwich and Charlton Athletic Community Trust, Monday 6th April 2020. The system is strategic, well planned and can be scaled up to meet greater need over the coming weeks.

Published: 7th April, 2020
Who is this briefing for?

This briefing aims to inform strategic emergency planners, local authorities, food partnerships, Local Resilience Forums and voluntary sector groups – especially those working in partnership to organise food provision – at large scale – for vulnerable people needing to self-isolate or stay at home during Covid-19.

This briefing does not address:

- Food for ‘shielded’ people – those with specific medical conditions eligible for a government food parcel if they cannot access food by other means (the Greenwich scheme can also cover this).
- Prepared meal delivery for vulnerable people, although the authors believe revitalised ‘meals on wheels’ services could play an important role in the near future – not least for the large numbers of older people who will otherwise struggle to access adequate, nutritious and appropriate food.

Who compiled this briefing?

The authors of this briefing (published 7th April 2020) are:

- **Claire Pritchard**, Chair of the London Food Board that advises the Mayor of London on food policy for the capital; also chief executive of Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency, which is working in partnership with the Royal Borough of Greenwich and Charlton Athletic Community Trust to provide food for vulnerable people in Greenwich during Covid-19.
- **Kath Dalmeny** chief executive of the charity Sustain: The alliance for better farming, whose members include the main UK food bank and charitable food aid distribution associations; advisor to the London resilience forum; member of the London Food Board; and participating in regional and national strategic groups advising on food for vulnerable people during Covid-19.

The scale of food need

The first headline to take from this briefing is this: **There is not enough free food or volunteer capacity to feed all economically vulnerable people through local authority and charitable means.** All of the main food aid and poverty groups across the UK are reporting severe difficulties accessing sufficient free food to meet existing need; rapidly increasing demand; and difficulty maintaining services as predominantly older volunteers fall ill choose to self-isolate, or premises close. The main UK food aid and poverty groups are calling urgently on government – first and foremost – to put more money into the pockets of millions of economically vulnerable people via benefits and local authority welfare assistance schemes so that they can buy their own food; relieving local authorities, LRFs and charities to focus on those most in need.

In every local authority area there are likely to be a very large number of people vulnerable for reasons other than the ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’ designation that triggers eligibility for a government food parcel. A proportion of these people will not be able to access the food they need to stay at home due to:

- Too little money to buy food
- Personal crisis for reasons other than Covid-19 (e.g. debt, domestic violence)
- Delays or sanctions with social security benefits payments (noting that the estimated 1 million who have reportedly signed up for Universal Credit in March 2020 will need to wait five weeks for their first payment, receive a repayable advance, and be unexpectedly on a very low income)
- Health issues, disability or caring roles personally, or in the household
- Lack of friends, family or social support to help buy or collect food
This could mean hundreds of people in less populous areas; perhaps thousands in towns; and perhaps tens of thousands in urban conurbations. As just one example, the Greater London Authority calculated that 1.5m adults and 400,000 children in London live in a condition of low or very low food security – up to a third of children in deprived areas. The Mayor’s Fund for London estimates that 200,000 of these children are in families who will struggle to afford adequate food during Covid-19 lockdown, and are not eligible for the national supermarket voucher scheme that replaced Free School Meals from March 2020.

At time of writing, we are very concerned that national government has imminent plans to signpost food support for economically vulnerable people to local authorities, LRFs and charities, who would then face overwhelming need. This deluge of need is already being experienced by charitable food banks. Further referrals at large scale would create an inefficient drain on local authority, LRF and charitable resources and emergency planning, which could be better alleviated through benefit payments and welfare assistance.

This does not have to be the case; a strategic approach to economic vulnerability is possible; we must bring the scale of food need down to a manageable level through strategic interventions. In Northern Ireland, for example, the devolved administration is providing cash grants to parents whose children are eligible for free school meals. In Scotland, the local authority welfare assistance scheme has been doubled, to enable more cash grants to people in crisis. Poverty charities are calling for an immediate uplift to child benefit; the Universal Credit advance payment to be a grant, not a loan; a freeze on household costs such as utility bills; and for people with ‘no recourse to public funds’ to become eligible for social security support and welfare assistance if they are struggling to access the food they need.

Money first; but some food provision is needed

If we can bring the scale of food need down to a manageable level, then we have a chance of being able to feed the people who are most in need – those who cannot access food by any other means. Learning from Greenwich and other places, people requiring food support need to be triaged to identify:

- **People who are financially secure but cannot shop**, i.e. those with no other support network. They can pay for food, but need to have it delivered. They may not have sufficient money to afford minimum order thresholds for delivery, so may need volunteers to help with shopping.

- **People who are financially insecure and cannot shop**, including those in crisis. They need to receive free food support, and may have other needs. So the food needs to be safe, nutritious, appropriate and easy to prepare (for example in places where kitchen equipment is limited to just a kettle).

- **People who are financially insecure and can shop**. They need to receive financial support to be able to buy the food they need, such as welfare assistance grants.

On the next page, we share the Covid-19 response pathway developed by Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency, working in partnership with the Royal Borough of Greenwich and Charlton Athletic Community Trust. Within just two weeks of establishment, it is already delivering 200 Food Boxes that meet Covid19-safe as well as nutritional guidelines, also supported by the local authority environmental health team to ensure food safety, for vulnerable non-shielding residents in Greenwich. It is providing food for vulnerable people who can afford to pay for it, and for people who are not able to pay. Food procurement is directed via local food businesses to support the local food economy and jobs that Greenwich’s diverse communities rely on in the longer term. The system is strategic, well planned and the organisers are confident that this can be scaled up to meet greater need over the coming weeks.

Prior to Covid-19, Greenwich had well-established relationships between the local authority and the voluntary and community sectors, as well as local organisations committed to high quality, equitable and sustainably produced food. These relationships may be less well developed in other places. However, we believe there is a lot to learn from Greenwich that could inspire appropriate food provision elsewhere.
Covid-19 food response pathway for vulnerable individuals

This model pathway shows how local authorities, LRFs and the voluntary sector can work in partnership and is designed with the aim of relieving pressure on emergency food banks and other food aid providers; however referrals can still be made where absolutely necessary.

KEY ISSUE is cost of sending residents through the non payment pathways and the potential cost to the local authority – this need could be reduced by national action to increase social security benefits payments (e.g. child benefit) or reduce or freeze household costs such as debt and utility bills; also additional national funds for local authority welfare assistance grants

Note: This pathway is being implemented in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, in partnership with Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency and the Charlton Athletic Community Trust – generously shared with the Sustain alliance to help with wider efforts to inspire and support good practice in response to Covid-19. Pathway will evolve, this snapshot taken 6th April 2020.
Considerations for the food response pathway

1. **Role of volunteers (partnership with Volunteer Centre, Local Authority Volunteers, Covid Mutual Aid)**
   - Some discreet shopping will still need to take place to respond to individuals in need, but this pathway should be limited (partnership with volunteers).
   - Delivery options will change as more partners come on board.
   - There is potential for volunteers to help box scheme packing.
   - Any shopping must be done in line within shopping protocols (to be produced) which will advise regarding infant formula (covered by specific legal requirements) and other dietary requirements.

2. **Surplus**
   - Surplus food may be added to the food offer as and when available.

3. **Government defined ‘shielded’ group**
   - Shielded group will move to direct delivery managed centrally.

4. **Box scheme delivery to workplaces**
   - Currently exploring options to support key workers via workplaces.

5. **Food Bank**
   - Food bank criteria includes people: with unmanageable debt and working with debt management agency; with nil recourse to public funds; with lost income as a result of domestic abuse; with lost income as a result of physical or mental health issues; who are homeless and working with an agency to seek accommodation; with chemical dependency issues working with an appropriate support agency.

6. **Emergency support scheme**
   - Emergency support scheme criteria includes those living in the local authority area with not enough resources to meet essential short-term needs in an emergency or after a disaster, with no other means of preventing serious risk to their health and safety or to a member of their family.
   - Community Trust emergency offer will focus on people discharged from hospital, urgent priority cases and shielded list (although this support will be centralised going forward). Community Trust will also hold a limited supply of food boxes in reserve (specified premises) to support this offer.

7. **Box contents**
   There are four standard Food Box options (a) single vegetarian (b) single meat (c) family vegetarian and (d) family meat, with a specialist box option for those who lack facilities to prepare or cook food (noting some will have only a kettle and need a ‘boil in the bag’ option); or those with long-term conditions.

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Photo credit: Claire Pritchard, chief executive of Greenwich CDA. It shows the contents of a Family Meat Box providing food for a vulnerable household for one week, Monday 6th April 2020.
### Typical contents of a Greenwich Food Box

These options are available in “single” or “family” size, depending on the size of the household.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetarian Box</th>
<th>Meat Box</th>
<th>Ready Meal Box</th>
<th>Boil in the Bag Box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tinned fruit</td>
<td>Tinned fruit</td>
<td>Bananas</td>
<td>Bananas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bananas</td>
<td>Bananas</td>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>Apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>Satsumas</td>
<td>Satsumas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satsumas</td>
<td>Satsumas</td>
<td>Cucumber</td>
<td>Cucumber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>Green veg</td>
<td>Green veg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cucumber</td>
<td>Cucumber</td>
<td>Onions</td>
<td>Onions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green veg</td>
<td>Green veg</td>
<td>Garlic</td>
<td>Garlic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onions</td>
<td>Onions</td>
<td>Fresh tomatoes</td>
<td>Fresh tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic</td>
<td>Garlic</td>
<td>Tinned tomatoes</td>
<td>Tinned tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh tomatoes</td>
<td>Fresh tomatoes</td>
<td>Tinned tomatoes</td>
<td>Tinned tomatoes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loaf of bread</th>
<th>Loaf of bread</th>
<th>Loaf of bread</th>
<th>Loaf of bread</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pitta bread or wraps</td>
<td>Pitta bread or wraps</td>
<td>Pitta or wraps</td>
<td>Pitta or wraps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crackers</td>
<td>Crackers</td>
<td>Crackers</td>
<td>Crackers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal</td>
<td>Cereal</td>
<td>Cereal</td>
<td>Cereal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats</td>
<td>Oats</td>
<td>Oats</td>
<td>Oats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta</td>
<td>Pasta</td>
<td>Pasta</td>
<td>Pasta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noodles</td>
<td>Noodles</td>
<td>Noodles</td>
<td>Noodles</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eggs</th>
<th>Eggs</th>
<th>Baked beans</th>
<th>Additional tinned fish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baked beans</td>
<td>Baked beans</td>
<td>Tinned fish</td>
<td>(for non-veggies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red lentils</td>
<td>Red lentils</td>
<td>Minced beef</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickpeas</td>
<td>Chickpeas</td>
<td>Sausages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veggie sausages</td>
<td>Tinned fish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minced beef</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UHT Milk</th>
<th>UHT Milk</th>
<th>UHT Milk</th>
<th>UHT Milk</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Additional Cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoghurts</td>
<td>Yoghurts</td>
<td>Yoghurts</td>
<td>Yoghurts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice pudding or custard</td>
<td>Rice pudding or custard</td>
<td>Rice pudding or custard</td>
<td>Rice pudding or custard</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetable spread</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biscuits</th>
<th>Biscuits</th>
<th>Biscuits</th>
<th>Biscuits</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pesto</td>
<td>Pesto</td>
<td>Vegetable soup</td>
<td>Tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta sauce</td>
<td>Pasta sauce</td>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curry sauce</td>
<td>Curry sauce</td>
<td>Teas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable soup</td>
<td>Vegetable soup</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>Tea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Greenwich Food Boxes are designed as far as possible with reference to the [Eatwell Guide](#) – the government’s guidelines on the balance of foods that make up a healthy diet.
Covid-19 food response pathway for community / third-sector groups

This model pathway shows how community groups can integrate with food provision for vulnerable people by local authorities, LRFs and the voluntary sector, working in partnership.

Community groups (including Covid Mutual Aid) and social housing providers

Voluntary Sector Food Partner assesses needs of community group or housing provider

Database managed by Voluntary Sector Partner

Voluntary Sector Food Partner

Emergency individual meals

Third sector organisation completes form

Form processed and request logged on SharePoint

Meals packed and delivered to one location for each group, once a week

Delivery logged on Community Hub database

Delivery logged on Community Hub database

Confirmed Delivery

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Note: This pathway is being implemented in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, in partnership with Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency and the Charlton Athletic Community Trust to generously shared with the Sustain alliance to help with wider efforts to inspire and support good practice in response to Covid-19. Pathway will evolve, this snapshot taken 6th April 2020.
What about meals on wheels for older people?

Approximately 8.8 million people in the UK are aged over 70 years old, identified as at increased risk from Covid-19. Whilst many may be eligible for the government scheme due to their medical condition, or may have the resources and connections to get through 12 weeks of full or partial isolation, lots of older people will inevitably struggle. Many will lack the money, family support, social services, physical ability or local volunteers to help them buy, access or prepare adequate food.

The Sustain alliance is arguing that it is time to revitalise neglected meals on wheels services; and to redeploy the many professional cooks, chefs and restaurant staff recently furloughed or having lost jobs due to Covid-19 social distancing measures. There are examples of existing services that could be scaled up with the right support, and lots of untapped goodwill and entrepreneurial energy in the dormant foodservice and hospitality sectors. We could re-open many of the nation’s school and commercial kitchens to prepare Covid-safe and nutritious meals for struggling pensioners, regular contact with people who could ask about their well-being, and help them shield through months of Covid-19.

Read this blog to find out more about how local authorities, LRFs and funders could help: British pensioners need meals on wheels to beat Covid-19.

Keeping diverse food shops and markets trading

Diverse food shops, retail bakeries and food markets are part of our nation’s essential food infrastructure, providing affordable food for diverse communities close to where they live. They can be:
- A source of fresh, healthy, affordable food for the local community.
- An important source of local jobs for people in lower socio-economic groups.
- A crucial route to market for many smaller local food businesses and producers.
- A safe place to shop, if effective social distancing policies and the right support is in place.

During Covid-19, we need to keep our retail and wholesale food markets open. They need to operate safely and help customers and stall holders to follow social distancing rules. The Government clarified (23 March 2020) that food markets can stay open during the crisis (see section 2, first bullet point). Guidance for traders has also been produced by several industry bodies including:
- NMTF (market traders association) have produced guidance for all market operators and traders.
- NAMBA (National Association of British Markets) have launched an information page for trader updates on the latest guidance and announcements and have published their position here.
- Farm Retail Association (farmers markets and farm retail) have published guidance written by Growing Communities on running a market safely.
- Farm Retail Association can support markets who may be considering online orders/delivery services; connect via Facebook for a helpful support pack.

Sustain and local organisations such as Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency are helping markets, traders and local authorities to share good practice, follow official guidance and to champion food markets with landlords and policy-makers at local and national level. Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency is also developing a coordinated scheme for local food businesses so that customers can order and pay for boxes of food from local businesses that might not otherwise be able to promote their food online, nor to offer home deliveries unless packaged up with a wider food offer.

In London, local authorities and LRFs can join the boroughs sub-group of the London Food Board, meeting online to share good practice: Liam.Weeks@london.gov.uk. For other parts of the UK, webinars and briefings on food and vulnerability will be shared via the Food Power monthly newsletter and Sustainable Food Cities monthly newsletter. See the Sustain website for more links: www.sustainweb.org/coronavirus