

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE

FOOD AND BASIC SUPPORT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee about initiatives to support Nottinghamshire residents to access food, essential supplies and wider support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Information

2. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council has worked in conjunction with Local Resilience Forum (LRF) partners across Nottinghamshire to support vulnerable people to be able to access the food and essential supplies that they need in order to live within the COVID-19 guidelines mandated by central government.
3. For example, approximately 7,000 Nottinghamshire residents who were advised to shield between April and August initially indicated that they required support to access food and essential supplies. The Council's Contact Centre helped people register on the government shielding portal if they were having difficulties and contacted people who had advised that they were unable to access supplies to support them to access food where it was required, from a range of community sources. The Contact Centre made 57,000 outbound calls during this period and opened on Saturdays until the end of May to ensure that residents could access support at the weekend. 24,000 inbound calls relating to COVID-19 were also fielded by the Contact Centre. In addition, during this period approximately 600 food parcels were delivered directly by the Council and its partners to people who were shielding, with the majority of these being delivered during the initial 12 week shielding period.
4. In addition to food support for those advised to shield, the Council and partners also contacted residents who were identified as vulnerable by the NHS. This covered a range of people including those living on their own with dementia or with other health concerns. This cohort was supported to access food, other essential supplies and personal support through the network of agencies, community and voluntary/volunteers organisations established and co-ordinated through the Nottingham Coronavirus Community Support Hub that the Council developed in March/April.

5. The Council's school catering service also worked flexibly alongside schools across the county to support pupils' continuing access to hot and cold meal support through the spring and summer terms. This work, which has seen the Service support school wrap around breakfast and holiday clubs, for example, in addition to the core school meal offer, continues.

Nottinghamshire COVID-19 Community Support Fund

6. The Nottinghamshire COVID-19 Community Support Fund, launched in April 2020, gave local voluntary and community groups the opportunity to apply for funding to support local people throughout the initial stages of the pandemic.
7. The fund closed in September having awarded £695k to 260 successful applicants from across Nottinghamshire.
8. The fund supported groups providing access to food, medicine and basic supplies, and also supported initiatives that helped support the social, physical and mental wellbeing of Nottinghamshire residents. Of particular note is that approximately £350k was awarded to food-related initiatives, with the Fund directly supporting food banks and the delivery of food parcels to vulnerable people, the establishment and operation of temporary food banks in areas where they did not already exist, help with food shopping and the provision of hot meals to local people.

Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies

9. In July the Council was allocated £858,285 by Government to support people struggling to afford food and other essentials due to COVID-19. The funding was allocated based on population, weighted by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).
10. Due to the substantial number of food-related initiatives already funded through the Nottinghamshire Coronavirus Community Fund, the Council has taken a medium-term approach to the distribution of this funding and collaborated with district and borough councils to ensure that funding is directed to those most in need. The continuing allocation of funding is being made on the basis that food banks and other food related initiatives are likely to see increased demand during the winter months as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to develop and evolve.
11. Applicants have been advised that they are not restricted to one application and can reapply when they have assessed their requirements for the winter period. As of 22 October, this medium-term approach to allocation of funds has resulted in £246,178 being awarded to 22 projects, with a number of further applications under assessment and refinement with bidding organisations. Funded projects to date include food banks (to replenish/augment stocks for winter), local food clubs, district, borough and parish council food initiatives, and other local organisations focussed on directly providing food and essentials to those struggling due to COVID-19.

Broader support for the voluntary and community sector and the financial sustainability of the sector

12. The development of the Community Hub and the collaborative approach taken by the Council and its partners to support vulnerable people during the pandemic has been recognised as a positive outcome of our response to COVID-19 in Nottinghamshire. Within this, the role taken by the voluntary and community sector has been significant, and has been pivotal to Nottinghamshire's ability to meet the needs of vulnerable people within our communities.
13. In recognition of this, work is underway to support the development of a sustainable county-wide volunteer capacity through the Hub. Three main areas of work are being progressed:
- The development and testing of a "One Step at a Time" service to focus on the initial first step of getting people back out of their houses in a way that keeps them safe and ensures that they also feel confident to leave the house after months of staying at home.
 - The development of a longer-term engagement approach for collaborative working across Councils, health partners and the voluntary and community sector with the aim of developing a range of volunteer-led services designed to help tackle loneliness and isolation.
 - Work with partners to identify how development of the community hub could support the work and coordination of the sector
14. Taking this work forward will help strengthen and grow the volunteer capacity to provide services that will be required to support lonely and isolated people in our communities as the pandemic continues through the winter.

Future demands on food in Nottinghamshire – Shielding

15. From 1 August, shielding Nottinghamshire residents were advised that they no longer needed to shield. The national food scheme which provided weekly free food boxes to those residents with no alternative means to access food ended on 31 July.
16. The Government regularly monitors this position, and is keeping under consideration options for shielding to restart either locally or nationally. Government has also produced a framework for local authorities to use to develop their own local food support plan (LFSP). The framework replaces the national scheme that ran from April to July this year.
17. The framework advises that as managing the threat from coronavirus has become part of daily life, the market conditions which led to emergency food boxes being provided at the start of the crisis have also now changed. There is more reliable access to online deliveries from supermarkets and support from volunteers, such as NHS Responders, and further local support networks have been developed.
18. Officers have worked with LRF partners to develop a LFSP to meet the needs of Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people were they to be asked to start shielding again. The Plan addresses how food and essential supplies services would be organised and co-ordinated during the autumn/winter period and how local organisations will be supported to provide food and essentials to people who cannot access it in any other way.

19. In addition to the funds already allocated through the Nottinghamshire Community Fund and the Emergency Assistance Fund, a minimum £300k will be reserved from the Emergency Assistance Fund for local food banks and other food related organisations to support the continuing food needs of the vulnerable through the pandemic.
20. To provide additional food security, the Council's County Enterprise Foods (CEF) service has been engaged to produce and store 20,000 extra frozen meals in anticipation of an increase in demand should shielding be reintroduced. The Council has also engaged a national food distribution partner; this will help secure the necessary supplies and capacity to deliver a large number of food parcels in an emergency situation.
21. As per government guidance, the LFSP has been designed to support food independence, focussing on helping residents to access commercially available food offers where possible and drawing on support from volunteers to help with shopping as needed. Where individuals can afford to pay for their food, they will be encouraged to do so. The Nottinghamshire Coronavirus Community Support Hub will remain key to providing people with commercial and voluntary food options in their local area.

Other Options Considered

22. None

Reason for Recommendation

23. To enable members to consider the issues set out in the report.

Statutory and Policy Implications

24. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That members consider whether there are any actions arising from this report.

Adrian Smith
Corporate Director, Place

For any enquiries about this report please contact:
Mark Walker,
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Constitutional Comments (CEH 23.10.2020)

25. This report can be considered by the COVID-19 Resilience, Recovery and Renewal Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (MM 23.10.2020)

26. Paragraphs 9 and 11 state that from the Local Authority Emergency Assistance Fund (LAEAF) of £858,285 allocated to NCC in July 2020, £246,178 has been awarded to food related projects to date, with further applications under assessment. Paragraph 19 refers to reserving a further £300,000 from the LAEAF for local food banks/other food related organisations to support continued needs, which would result in a balance remaining of £312,107

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All