

## Food Insecurity and Response to Household Support

### Report of the Head of Communities

#### 1) Introduction

Over the last 12 months, the symptoms of poverty have manifested themselves well beyond food insecurity, which itself has worsened, as the cost of living crisis has continued to emerge and impact the whole of society.

Since the last full report on this issue to this Committee from the Head of Communities (November 2021), the Council, as part of its Strategic Plan 2021-25, has highlighted the need to work in partnership to help tackle poverty and support people that are experiencing hardship. This paper updates this Scrutiny Committee on progress made to date in this arena.

#### What is food insecurity?

As a reminder and for the purposes of this paper, household food security is assured when members of the household are confident of having economic and physical access to sufficient, acceptable food for a healthy life (Defra, 2014). Conversely, food insecurity was defined in the Low-Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, commissioned by the Food Standards Agency, and conducted across the UK between 2003 and 2005, as:

*Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.*

So, food security is impacted by many factors including household income, and the supply, quality, variety, and desirability of diet. It relates to every part of the entire food system, and the County Council's strategy and response covers each aspect.

#### 2) Understanding and Learning in Partnership

##### Quantitative Research

In 2021, and conducted again this autumn (2022), DCC funded quantitative research on food insecurity in Devon. The report shows that food insecurity has grown in Devon over the last year. The high level headlines from the research can be viewed in **Appendix A**.

In Devon, levels of food insecurity have risen from 17% overall (Spring 2021) to around 29% in October 2022. These levels are considerably higher in households on low income and combined with other factors:

- where household income is less than £16,190 and with children (70%).

- single adult households with children (60%).
- households where the main respondent is long-term sick or disabled (58%).

In addition, fuel insecurity is a huge issue in Devon. Overall, 79% of Devon households said they were planning to reduce their energy usage, with 36% saying they were planning to switch their heating off altogether; and 15% said they were planning to spend time somewhere else to keep warm.

## **Qualitative Research**

### **Specialist Hubs - Food Insecurity**

A key part of the development of a new Devon, Plymouth & Torbay VCSE (Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise) Assembly is to pilot and develop new ways of working that benefit communities. One approach, seed funded by the Devon Recovery Coordination Group, is for the Assembly to create specialist hubs, bringing together insight, intelligence, innovation and lived experience on a broad range of community issues. In this way, the Assembly will develop coordination in the sector and act as a 'known' place to go to find out what is happening across VCSE organisations in Devon, Plymouth & Torbay.

One of the specialist hubs is focussing on food insecurity and is convened and led by Devon Community Foundation (DCF). This builds on the collaborative work begun last year between VCSE partners and Devon County Council exploring the district-level organisational landscape relating to food support. As a result of the quantitative research (2021 & 2022) on food insecurity, the hub has a clearer picture of relevant stakeholders, and of potential areas for focus.

The food insecurity hub has implemented plans for targeted learning and pilot working, as indicated by the results of the quantitative research in 2021 and 2022. This will help to delve deeper into the complex issues facing people in food insecurity. The pilot projects, for example, look into the correlation between certain cohorts, such as Asian, Black and other ethnic minorities and food insecurity, and what this means for food support provision, or the fact that a large proportion of people reporting food insecurity in Devon do not currently access food support. The hub will, by building on this evidence base, pilot projects and emerging collaborative working practices, propose model(s) for collective cross-sectoral working, focused on tackling food insecurity in the county. The understanding and learning from the hub will inform the work of the new VCSE Assembly and wider partnerships. The hub findings will be reported no later than March 2023.

### **Complementary Qualitative Research**

Tackling food insecurity and the wider cost of living issues requires a whole systems partnership approach – no one organisation on its own can understand, learn, and respond adequately to the issues being faced. In addition to the quantitative research repeated this autumn, and with a small amount of DCC funding, DCF will also conduct additional qualitative research to further inform understanding of food insecurity amongst partners; ensuring user led experience and 'expertise by experience' intelligence is captured. This will inform understanding, learning and

follow on discussions surrounding partnership approaches, collaborative opportunities, and future practice.

### **Food Insecurity Summit - Spring 2023**

DCF is seeking to convene a Food Insecurity Summit in Spring 2023, via the Devon Food Partnership of which DCF is a steering group member. The Summit will connect a range of partner organisations with an interest in Food Insecurity and in tackling it in a collaborative way. This initial connection will bring together the research and understanding gathered by partners to date (many outlined above), so they can experience and identify joint learning, whilst also seeking better connections and discuss possible future partnership approaches.

### **3) Household Support Fund (HSF): A much needed short-term sticking plaster**

To help to meet some of the challenges highlighted so far from the research, DCC has worked with and across multiple partners to distribute around £15m of HSF. The funding has been made available from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) through a series of short-term HSF schemes (around £5m per scheme); each announced at relatively short-notice and with its own specific guidance, priorities, restrictions, and tight timescales.

The HSF's support is targeted at those most in immediate need and to help to address the significantly rising cost of living. The total value of awards split by household composition, under the DWP Guidance relating to the first and second HSFs, can be seen in **Appendix B**.

For the HSF, a range of support gateways have been established including, free school meal holiday vouchers, funded Team Devon district/city council hardship schemes, a Citizen Advice Devon Energy relief scheme, a minor rapid energy efficiency pilot (via Sustainable Warmth), an Early Help family support scheme, as well as a Devon Community Foundation delivered grant scheme for the voluntary and community sector.

Details of these gateways and of the wider support available can be found on the Council's website [Help with the cost of living in Devon – Devon County Council](#).

The need for support continues to rise; evidenced by eligibility for free school meals, which has risen from around 10,000 children in 2018 in Devon; to 18,900 in January 2021, to now over 20,000 children locally.

A further commitment to implement HSF schemes over 2023/24 has been made by the UK Government, via the recent Autumn Statement. However, scheme details and requirements, priorities, timescales and budget have yet to be confirmed. The current and third scheme HSF is well underway and the initial funding allocations can be viewed in **Appendix B**.

## 4) Community Resilience (Capacity & Capability Building)

### Growing Communities Fund (GCF)

To further help communities and people needing to build self/community resilience, improve mental health, wellbeing support and wider connection, the Council launched its Growing Communities Fund in April 2022. Grants of £500 - £3,000 are available. Already this year 160 awards have been made with a value of over £285,000. A further £150,000 remains available. Given the current cost of living crisis, funding has been further targeted towards reducing food/fuel inequalities, and by supporting warm space and service provision.

The fund can support projects that:

- address hardship such as food or fuel insecurity, for example offering warm safe spaces, something to eat and drink, and a place to work, learn or socialise.
- build greater degrees of self-reliance and community resilience for example offering advice, peer support or guidance on budgeting, cooking low-cost nutritional meals.
- tackle loneliness and isolation and build self-esteem.
- have a clear and direct community benefit whilst aiming to respond to the climate emergency

Further details can be found on the Council's website [Growing Communities Fund – Communities \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/growing-communities-fund).

### Locality Budget

In addition, elected Members may use their [Locality Budget](#) to help nurture community resilience, in terms of building community capacity and capability to meet local needs and priorities and to reduce issues such as hardship and poverty, loneliness and isolation.

### Other Community Resilience Grant Schemes

Likewise, and for short periods of time, other community resilience funds are available (via [DCC Funding News](#)) to help in this regard, such as the current:

- [Connecting You](#) grant scheme (a consortium of partners including DCC secured this funding) that seeks to tackle loneliness and isolation through community transport offers and initiatives.
- [Open Up to Skills](#) (a DCC Economy initiative) which provides additional training opportunities for members of the hospitality, tourism, and retail sectors, including VCSE organisations.

## 5) Wider Strategic Work

There are numerous DCC-led and DCC partnership initiatives underway to tackle food insecurity, poverty, and hardship. A few examples of note follow:

### [The Devon Food Partnership](#)

Established as a strategic food partnership for Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay, enabling collaboration and open communications with food stakeholders across the county. The partnership connects the County Council together with other key organisations and partners via an Interim Steering Group. It also facilitates smaller task groups to complete discreet projects and actions. The scope of the partnership's work is guided by the six Sustainable Places principles and goes far beyond the current food insecurity issue, as defined earlier:

Healthy Food For all: Tackling food poverty, diet related ill-health and access to affordable healthy food.

Food for the Planet: Tackling the climate and nature emergency through sustainable food and farming and an end to food waste.

Food Governance and Strategy: Taking a strategic and collaborative approach to good food governance and action.

Sustainable Food Economy: Creating a vibrant, prosperous, and diverse sustainable food economy.

Catering and Procurement: Transforming catering and procurement and revitalizing local and sustainable food supply chains.

Good Food Movement: Building public awareness, active food citizenship and a local good food movement.

The Interim Steering Group is nearing completion of a draft strategy for the partnership, informed by consultation with stakeholders in the food system. The outputs of this activity will be important to inform (e.g., at the Food Insecurity Summit) the development of strategic direction for interested partners, including DCC, around food and fuel insecurity more specifically

### [The HAF \(Holiday Activity & Food\) Programme](#)

The aim of the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme is to support children to eat more healthily, be more active over the school holidays and have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition as well as be more engaged with school and other local services.

In November 2020, the government announced that the [Holiday Activities and Food \(HAF\) programme](#) would be expanded across the whole of England in 2021.

Following on from this, the Department of Education has agreed a further three years of funding, starting 2022. The programme, coordinated locally by DCC, has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018.

## Integrated Care Partnership

Whilst relatively early in their journey, and using one-off NHS England funding, the Integrated Care System Partnership Board has awarded £300k to the VCSE Assembly to tackle priority issues around the cost of living crisis in terms of building and coordinating its capacity and capability. The fund is available for VCSE organisations covering Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay. As with Covid, the VCSE sector continues to lead the response to tackling immediate and burning issues faced by people and communities, and so a grant scheme developed by the VCSE sector (via the Assembly) for the VCSE sector is being developed over the coming months.

## **6) Conclusion**

The Council continues to work with a range of partners on the long-term opportunities to understand, learn and develop practice and approaches, alongside the equally important short-term immediate distribution of direct support from funds such as the Household Support Grant and community resilience building enablers, such as the GCF. Over the next 12 months the County Council will continue to:

- Deliver the Household Support Fund from DWP to families across Devon to 31 March 2024 (following the Government's Autumn Statement)
- Work in partnership to develop an understanding and learning phase; building on the experiences around food insecurity to link with wider hardship/welfare issues and inform approaches
- Work in partnership (where possible) with Team Devon and other partners to develop community resilience building that responds to the needs of communities, including food insecurity
- Agree common Team Devon principles for welfare/hardship/support and wider poverty, informed by the understanding and learning phase, where appropriate and helpful.

**Simon Kitchen**  
**Head of Communities**

**Electoral Divisions:** All

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Prosperity: Councillor Roger Croad

Director of Public Health, Communities and Prosperity: Steve Brown

## **Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers**

Nil

## **Contact for enquiries:**

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## Appendix A to SC/23/1 - Devon Food and Fuel Insecurity Research (Autumn 2022)

Draft Headline findings from the survey of 1,206 Devon households (Data is subject to verification and finalising):

### Food insecurity

- Overall, **food insecurity levels** (Devon households with low or very low food insecurity) have increased from 17% in March/April 2021 to 29% now (September/October 2022).
- The overall increase of c.+12% is not consistent across all household types in Devon, although it is broadly consistent with increases being reported nationally across the same time period by the Food Foundation, etc.
- The types of households experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity currently are the same groups of vulnerable, low-income households identified in 2021, although the individual rates are higher now for each:
  - Income of less than £16,190 *and* children (70%)
  - Single adult household with children (60%)
  - Households where the main respondent is long-term sick or disabled (58%)
  - 1+ household member with a mental health condition (55%)
  - Households where the main respondent is unemployed (55%)
- The proportion of Devon households who have accessed **emergency food support** in the past 30 days has increased from 2% in 2021 to 5% now. This increased use of support is greater among the same sets of vulnerable households above. Of particular concern are the points that, among these households who have accessed emergency food support in the last 30 days:
  - 70% have very low food security: and
  - 84% are in receipt of means tested benefits
- Uptake of **free school meals** among households with children has increased from 14% in 2021 to 34% now.

### Fuel insecurity

- Overall, 79% of Devon households said they were planning to reduce their energy usage.
- 36% said they were planning to switch their heating off altogether
- 15% said they were planning to spend time somewhere else to keep warm
- 13% said that they won't be able to afford to pay increased energy prices, even with cutbacks and savings
- 16% said they would have to borrow to pay/use a credit card for their increased bills
- The following types of households were all found to be significantly more likely to be planning to switch their heating off altogether and/or spend time somewhere else warm. They were also more likely to say that they could not afford to pay for the increased energy prices and that they would have to borrow/use a credit card to do so:
  - Lone parent households
  - Households with income <£16,190 pa and children
  - Households where the main respondent was long-term sick or disabled
  - Households with 1+ member with a mental/physical health condition
  - Households where the main respondent was unemployed
  - Households renting from the council/social housing

## **Food and fuel insecurity correlation**

- This is something that we are working on, but it looks like, unsurprisingly, 80%-90% of households experiencing food insecurity are also experiencing fuel insecurity, either with not being able to pay energy/fuel bills and/or needing to borrow money to do so. This was very evident from the clear overlap in the types of households experiencing the two types of insecurities.
- Given that these households are already the most vulnerable, the combination of food insecurity and concerns over the impact of reductions in energy use on their home environment (increased cold, damp, etc), gives rise to great concern for the potential negative effects on their health and that of their children in particular.

## Appendix B to SC/23/1

### Household Support Fund 1

#### Total Value of Awards split by Household Composition

Household Composition	Spend (£s)
a) Households with Children	3,847,613
b) Households without Children	547,113
c) Total (a + b)	4,394,725

### Household Support Fund 2

#### Total Value of Awards split by Household Composition

Household Composition	Spend (£s)
a) Households with Children	2,817,833.66
b) Households with Pensioners	1,925,509.87
c) Other households	279,622.39
d) Total amount provided to vulnerable households (a + b + c)	5,022,965.92

### HSF3 Delivery Plan and Initial (Notional) Funding Allocations

<b>Total Allocated Notional Fund for the DCC Administrative Area</b>	<b>£5,064,876.12</b>
<b>Team Devon District/City Council Hardship Schemes.</b> Proactive and targeted contact and support to those identified as struggling, utilising local datasets	<b>£2,000,000.00</b>
<b>Citizens Advice Devon: Energy Relief Scheme</b>  <b>Devon Community Foundation:</b> Targeted grant support scheme for VCSE organisations providing direct support to specific cohorts who are struggling financially, and which research indicates do not seek help and support.  <b>Sustainable Warmth (Cosy Devon) Rapid Minor Energy Improvement Pilot</b>	<b>£500,000.00</b>
Eligible cohort for <b>Free School Meal (FSM) Holiday Lunch Vouchers</b> (6 weeks holiday@£15/week/child)	<b>£1,756,056</b>
<b>Early Help - Household Support Scheme</b>	<b>£200,000.00</b>
<p>Figures are estimated and subject to ongoing MI review. On receipt of regular MI returns from each support gateway, spend patterns will be reviewed and appropriate corrective action taken. Any further notional funding will be allocated and agreed based on such performance reviews.</p> <p>DWP Payment will be in arrears and subject to receipt of satisfactory/accurate MI returns.</p> <p>FSM figure estimated with an 93% uptake.</p>	