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Our Ref: SL/YMcB/FF  
Your Ref:



Public Petitions Clerks  
Room T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament  
EDINBURGH  
EH99 1SP

**Regeneration &  
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For the attention of Ned Sharratt, Assistant Clerk

Dear Sir

**CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1571 (Food Bank Funding)**

I refer to your letter dated 23 September 2015 which has been passed to me by the Chief Executive for attention and would advise as follows.

**What support does the local authority provide food banks in its local area?**

North Lanarkshire Council via its Corporate Welfare Reform Group recognised that food poverty and insecurity was an area that had to be addressed in order to ensure the correct support was given to the communities. The Council with Community Planning Partners NHS Lanarkshire commissioned a report; "Tackling Food Poverty" which was published in March 2014, the report detailed 6 key strategic areas;

- *Ensuring access to money advice and income maximisation.*
- *Developing, maintaining and improving systems and services to ensure that people in crisis have access to food.*
- *Improving uptake of free school meals and breakfast clubs and services for Older People.*
- *Sourcing, warehousing and distributing food at low or no cost to support activities which address food poverty.*
- *Promoting access to affordable, healthier food and food preparation and cooking skills - particularly in deprived communities.*
- *Maximising volunteering, employability and training gains for priority groups from all food poverty activities.*

The Council implemented a number of immediate actions to drive forward the strategic priorities contained in the report:

- A Food Poverty Working Group was established with the remit of taking forward the 6 key areas. The group is made up of representatives from key Council services, together with representatives from the food banks and other food initiatives, local information and advice services, NHS Lanarkshire and Barnardo's.
- There was also a Food Bank Forum created whose membership consists of representative from all the food banks and food initiatives. Here they discuss the more practical issues at an operational level.
- The Council also carried out a scoping exercise to find out exactly what food initiatives were operating in North Lanarkshire, what their criteria was, what their referral system was etc.
- In February 2014, as part of the 2014/15 budget, the Council approved investment of £100K to support the findings and recommendations of the report on food poverty and insecurity in North Lanarkshire. Specifically; the Council agreed to provide support as follows:
  - One-off grant funding to the third sector – £85,000.
  - Marketing campaign aimed at increasing the uptake of free school meals and breakfast club provision – £7,500.
  - Direct funding to pay membership to the Glasgow FareShare operation for community based food initiatives (including community cafe, food banks etc) via piloting of a 'hub and spoke' model for North Lanarkshire – £7,500.

The 2014/15 grant funding was allocated to 12 third sector organisations (6 food banks and 6 community food initiatives) to support infrastructure and running costs. Typically, funds have been used to purchase chilling units, shelving and assist with overall running costs. To date, the funding has also supported 11 cooking and nutritional awareness sessions in local communities as well as supporting 61 volunteer training sessions. In addition, 7 community food members (including 1 food bank) are currently taking part in the FareShare pilot which will be reviewed post November 2015.

As a Council our "hope" was that we would eradicate the need for food banks, however, our findings from the above were that a number of food banks had been in operation for over 20 years mainly under the radar and without publicity. From our discussions with these groups it became apparent that eradicating was not going to be an option as there will always be some cases where emergency food provision is the only answer. What the target had to be was to reduce the number of referrals to them by ensuring the appropriate advice, information and support was given to tackle the cause of food poverty.

An event took place in December 2014 with the Council services, NHS Lanarkshire, food banks, soup kitchens and elected members to discuss the issues people are facing when they are in a food crisis situation and to look at how our existing resources can address these issues.

From the event findings and collaboration across the public and third sector, we established the **Food Poverty Referral Pathway**, to ensure that the cause of the food crisis is addressed together with a resolve to the immediate problem. Without addressing the cause, a food parcel can be a temporary fix, whereas all parties agreed what we should be doing is looking to assist people with a more long term solution to the underlying causes of poverty.

The Working Group agreed that when someone presents in Food Crisis, the first port of call should **not** be a "food parcel". The person is first of all in "crisis" and therefore we should look toward the Government funded scheme for this, i.e. **The Scottish Welfare Fund**.

Recognising that not all applicants to the Scottish Welfare Fund would receive an award, the Working Group wanted to ensure that anyone entering the pathway would receive a positive outcome, whether in the form of a grant and help with the cause of the crisis, or a food parcel and help with the cause of the crisis. From this the pathway was rolled out across the partnership. The diagram on page 3 of Appendix 2 shows that Scottish Welfare Fund is the hub, ensuring where the referrer may not have the skills to illicit or deal with the information relating to the cause of the crisis, e.g. benefit sanction, late payment of benefit, creditors etc the Scottish Welfare Fund staff can refer to the appropriate agency, using well established referral systems.

The pathway was introduced in April 2015; to support it a Welfare Rights Officer (WRO) from Council Services attended some food banks and soup kitchens across North Lanarkshire to be on hand should anyone wish some advice and information. The WRO started in May 2015 and as at 31 July 15 had provided assistance to 45 people.

The WRO has made 15 claims for Crisis Grants and has been successful in 13 of these applications. The average award is £72.60 and this again strengthens the argument for the Referral Pathway. 87% of these cases did not need to go to the food bank and their crisis was resolved by the Scottish Welfare Fund. The individuals were awarded grants, thus avoiding the indignity of attending a food bank, but more importantly putting the control and choice back in their hands.

In respect of the 45 people seen, 32 were assisted with claims, advice or referrals to other agencies. This helps deals with the root cause of the crisis and therefore assists in long term sustainability instead of the short term solution a food bank referral provides. *(details available in appendix2)*

The Food Bank Forum is a platform for the food banks to discuss their issues and share their experiences of the pathway. The Forum is temporarily chaired by the Local Authority, but it is the aim that the food banks themselves take ownership of this. These meetings are minuted and can provide practical solutions to some local problems such as the issue of redistribution of food across the food banks. Whilst some food banks were reporting that they did not have enough supplies to meet the demands upon them, others were reporting they have excess food. The Forum gave the food banks a platform to discuss this and put arrangements in place to ensure food was where it was needed. These arrangements are now in place with food being transported to where it is required.

Through the work done with the Forum and the Working Group, the food banks also now have a representative on the North Lanarkshire Information and Advice Forum, an umbrella organisation for all advice and information providers in North Lanarkshire; this leads to better working relationships between the food banks and those likely to refer to them.

The Council and the Working Group were comforted by the recent Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) report, "Hard Choices: Reducing the Need For Food Banks In Scotland" which identifies 6 key actions that have to be done at both a Scottish and Local Government level to reduce demand on food banks, as it is our opinion that the Referral Pathway is implementing a number of these actions and working, where it can, on others.

The early findings of the Pathway are an 11.5% reduction in referrals to food banks. The evidence from Welfare Rights Officers' work shows that more benefit decisions are being challenged and people are being directed to services such as income maximisation and money advice to ensure a sustainable solution is given to someone's food crisis.

The North Lanarkshire Food Poverty Working Group similar to the CPAG is of the opinion that the approach should be to reduce the need for and reliance upon food banks in Scotland and look to finding a long term solution to the cause of the crisis.

To this end and over and above the targeted food poverty initiatives outlined above, North Lanarkshire Council continues to invest in wider regeneration initiatives supporting business, increasing employment and regenerating our communities. We also factor in additional new expenditure requirements and over the last financial year have included revenue support for the introduction of free school meals and additional social care requirements etc, all of which impact on food poverty.

North Lanarkshire Good Poverty Working Group believe that any resources available to tackle food crisis should be to support the recommendations highlighted in CPAG's report as opposed to funding food banks directly, as doing so would be accepting that food banks are a part of the welfare state, which should be resisted at all levels.

I trust the above information is of assistance.

Yours faithfully

**SHIRLEY LINTON**  
**Head of Planning & Regeneration**

