



Food Insecurity in West Lancashire

Final Report

April 2021

West Lancashire Borough Council

Contents

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Introduction | 1 |
| 2 | Food insecurity in West Lancashire | 3 |
| 3 | Addressing food insecurity | 10 |
| 4 | Food insecurity and welfare support in West Lancashire | 15 |
| 5 | Opportunities to address food insecurity in West Lancashire | 27 |
| 6 | Conclusions | 33 |
| | Appendix | 35 |



16 Orchardfield Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 7SX
0131 627 0070

www.iconic-consulting.co.uk
ian@iconic-consulting.co.uk

Company registration number: SC415033
VAT number: 159 8925 47

1 Introduction

West Lancashire Borough Council (WLBC) commissioned this research on food insecurity to inform the potential development of preventative, sustainable and cost-effective policy solutions to food insecurity in West Lancashire. The study set out to:

- Evaluate the socio demographic and other characteristics of households in the Borough experiencing food insecurity to develop a clear understanding of the local picture.
- Establish a better understanding of who is using foodbanks in the Borough and provide insight into potential gaps in accessing them or gaps in accessing sufficient welfare support.
- Understand the severity and chronicity of household food insecurity and how often people are receiving assistance from foodbanks and other supporting agencies.
- Establish the economic status of those facing insecurity.
- Establish and assess the current support and provision already available in the Borough to address the issue.
- Consider the health implications of those living with food insecurity.

In addition, the study set out to consider:

- The steps the Borough can take to prevent food inequality.
- How the Borough can make the best use of the range of services and approaches already available and respond more effectively.
- Opportunities for communities across the Borough to grow their own food, through the Community Food Growing network, West Lancashire Allotment Federation, primary and secondary schools.
- How community centres and voluntary organisations can support the local Birchwood Café model and divert supermarket waste food from landfill.
- How the Borough can invest in longer term sustainable solutions so that more can be done to make people less reliant on foodbanks and alternatives.
- Prevention opportunities through financial inclusion and other initiatives.
- Long-term sustainable models to prevent food insecurity.
- How the project will support wider social value in the Borough i.e. social, environmental and economic costs and benefits.

Iconic Consulting was commissioned by WLBC to undertake the research. The study was due to start in March 2020 but was paused because of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions. WLBC gave the go-ahead for the research to begin in September 2020 and it has involved the following tasks:

- A review of literature on food insecurity including the nature and extent of the problem, the characteristics of those experiencing it, and initiatives developed elsewhere to address the issue.
- Analysis of local, regional and national data related to food insecurity.
- A brief review of local, regional and national policy.
- A mapping exercise to gather information on existing services in West Lancashire that seek to address food insecurity.
- Consultation with 17 stakeholders including Councillors and senior staff from WLBC, and service providers in West Lancashire that seek to address food insecurity, including

local foodbanks, welfare support, and other community and voluntary sector organisations.

- Consultation with five West Lancashire residents with lived experience of food insecurity. The interviews gathered the residents' views and experience of times when they have struggled to feed themselves or their families, and considered how people in their situation could be better supported in the future. The residents volunteered to take part in the research following awareness raising by local third sector organisations supporting people experiencing food insecurity.
- A workshop with nine participants – three officers/elected members from WLBC and six representatives from local third sector organisations supporting people experiencing food insecurity and poverty. The workshop discussed the emerging study findings and potential opportunities to address food insecurity in West Lancashire in the future.
- An assessment of the costs and benefits of the potential opportunities identified during the study to tackle food insecurity. The assessment considered the economic, social and environmental costs/benefits.

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 sets out the nature and extent of food insecurity in West Lancashire.
- Section 3 summarises policy and services designed to address food insecurity.
- Section 4 describes the existing support in West Lancashire to address food insecurity and identifies gaps in provision.
- Section 5 considers opportunities to address food insecurity in West Lancashire in the future.
- Section 6 draws together the study conclusions.

2 Food insecurity in West Lancashire

In this section we outline the nature and extent of food insecurity in West Lancashire. The section starts with a definition of food insecurity. It then draws on the literature and national data to identify the socio demographic and economic characteristics of households experiencing food insecurity, and the severity and chronicity of household food insecurity in West Lancashire. The literature and data are also utilised to identify the characteristics of foodbank users and how often people tend to receive assistance from foodbanks. The health implications of food insecurity are also summarised. Finally, the impact of Covid-19 on food insecurity is addressed.

What is food insecurity?

An extensive literature review on food insecurity in the UK undertaken by Heriot-Watt University, on behalf of the Trussell Trust¹, highlighted the most commonly used definition of food insecurity:

‘Food insecurity exists whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways, is limited or uncertain’.

The report highlighted the significance of the definition, referring ‘to the social and economic problem of lack of food due to resource or other constraints’ which it distinguished from ‘fasting or dieting or the effects of illness’. It also noted that the definition captured ‘a range of experiences, from going without meals and not being able to afford a nutritionally adequate diet, to feeling insecure about where the next meal is going to come from’.

Severity of food insecurity

The severity of household food insecurity varies, and the term tends to be broken down into three categories – households that are marginally, moderately, or severely food insecure.

Surveys have been used to examine whether households are food insecure, and to estimate the severity of the issue. The surveys tend to use a standard set of ten questions (see Appendix). Originally used in the US Household Food Security Survey Module the questions have been applied internationally, including in the UK where they form part of the Food & You survey in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the Scottish Health Survey. Responses to the ten questions are used to estimate the severity of household food insecurity using the scale below; examples of each category are shown beneath the scale.



¹ Sosenko F, Littlewood M, Bramley G, Fitzpatrick, S, Blenkinsopp, J & Wood, J, 2019. [A State of Hunger. A study of poverty and food insecurity in the UK](#)

The extent of household food insecurity in the UK and West Lancashire

The headline findings from the 2016-18 surveys referred to above show that in the UK:

- 9.8% of households experienced food insecurity.
- 2.8% of households experienced severe food insecurity.
- 11.0% of children aged under 16 lived in food insecure households.

The above food insecurity figures for the UK can be used to estimate food insecurity for other geographies including West Lancashire. Although such estimates are relatively simple, they serve a useful purpose in the absence of more detailed modelling on food insecurity. Using demographic data produced by Lancashire County Council², estimates of food insecurity in West Lancashire for 2018 are as follows:

- 4,580 households in West Lancashire experienced food insecurity.
- 1,310 households in West Lancashire experienced severe food insecurity.
- 2,175 children aged under 16 in West Lancashire lived in food insecure households.

Food insecurity can be closely linked to fuel poverty, with people often having to make the difficult decision of 'heating or eating'. The West Lancashire Financial Inclusion Strategy 2021-24 shows that 11.5% of households in West Lancashire were in fuel poverty in 2018 which was approximately 5,480 households³. This figure could be used as an alternative approximation of food insecurity in West Lancashire. The Financial Inclusion Strategy also notes that there are between 21-28% of households with children under 16 in West Lancashire living in relative poverty (defined as households that receive 50% less income than average median incomes) and another 21-28% living in absolute poverty (defined as households where income is insufficient to afford basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, or shelter).

It should be noted that the above figures relate to the extent of food insecurity and poverty before the Covid-19 pandemic. As discussed elsewhere in the report, the pandemic led to a significant increase in food insecurity and poverty throughout the UK.

Who is affected by food insecurity?

Extensive literature exists on the households affected by food insecurity. The Heriot-Watt University and The Trussell Trust report cited above found the chances of being food insecure were higher among the following household types:

- Lower income households (annual income below £10,400).
- Lone-parent households.
- Single working-age adult households.
- Households who rented, particularly social renters.
- Unemployed people.
- Younger people (aged 16 to 24).
- People affected by ill-health.

The study also found that gender could be an additional factor in some households and noted that in households with two adults and at least one dependent child, the women tended to be more food insecure than the men. The authors suggested this was because women were more likely to skip or reduce their own meals so the children could eat.

² Lancashire County Council, 2018. [Demographic Dashboard](#)

³ [Financial Inclusion Strategy 2021-24](#)

Our literature review confirmed that low-income is a critical factor in food insecurity. Clearly, households where disposable income is limited are more susceptible to food insecurity than those with greater incomes. In addition, evidence shows that food insecurity has been increasingly problematic for low-income households over time - between 2004 and 2016, food insecurity among low-income adults across the UK rose from 28% in 2004 to 46% in 2016⁴. One factor that can exacerbate or reinforce issues such as food insecurity among low-income households is the so-called 'poverty premium'. This occurs when low-income households face disproportionately higher costs or charges for utilities such as energy, access to internet and mobile phone bills⁵. Research by the University of Bristol estimated the poverty premium costs the average low-income household £490 a year, although the cost to some households is as high as £1,190 a year⁶.

Foodbanks and foodbank users

Foodbanks began to appear in the UK around 2010 and their use has been steadily increasing since in response to rising levels of food insecurity. The Trussell Trust network of foodbanks, constituting around 61% of all foodbanks in the UK, grew from 65 in early 2011 to 1,261 in 2019. By 2019, there were also 809 independent foodbanks in the UK bringing the total to 2,070. Together these foodbanks are estimated to have distributed three million emergency food parcels across the UK in 2019. The Trussell Trust reported that more three-day emergency food parcels were given out in North West England than in any other part of the UK⁷. The Heriot-Watt University report estimated that approximately 2% of all UK households used a foodbank in 2018/19. IFAN, the Independent Food Aid Network, estimated there were at least 961 independent foodbanks in November 2020⁸.

The Trussell Trust estimate that the average number of foodbank visits over a year was 2.6. It should be noted that use of a Trussell Trust foodbank usually requires a voucher issued by referral organisations such as a local authority, advice provider or Jobcentre/DWP and households are generally limited to three referrals to a Trussell Trust foodbank in a six-month period. Independent foodbanks set their own eligibility criteria and access tends to be less stringent and more frequent than the Trussell Trust foodbanks.

The Heriot-Watt University report highlighted that four fifths of Trussell Trust foodbank users were severely food insecure. The profile of foodbank users is therefore not surprisingly, similar to that of those affected by food insecurity. Significant demographic factors prevalent among foodbank users include:

- Low income.
- Unemployment.
- Ill-health.
- Lone parents.

⁴ Loopstra R, Reeves A, Tarasuk V. 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. 2019

⁵ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty, 2014. [Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland](#)

⁶ Davies S, Finney A, Hartfree, Y, 2016. [Paying to be poor: uncovering the scale and nature of the poverty premium](#). University of Bristol's Personal Finance Research Centre

⁷ Trussell Trust, 2019. [End of year stats](#)

⁸ IFAN, 2020. [Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution in the UK February to November 2019 and 2020](#)

- Working-age adult living alone.
- Living in rented accommodation.

The Heriot-Watt University report also highlighted that young people are at risk of food insecurity but are less prevalent among foodbank users, suggesting they are less likely than other groups experiencing food insecurity to access emergency food parcels.

The need for support from a foodbank was very clearly demonstrated by the finding that 94% of foodbank users were destitute (see Appendix for a definition of destitution). Median weekly equivalised household income after housing costs was approximately £50 per week in 2018 and therefore substantially lower than the official relative poverty threshold of £262 per week after housing costs.

It is important to note that foodbank use is not confined to people living in deprived areas⁹. As the evidence presented in this section demonstrates, the key factors are personal circumstances and socio demographic characteristics, not area of residence.

Drivers of food insecurity and foodbank use

Food insecurity is driven by low income, material deprivation and poverty. There is substantial evidence that the main reason people are referred to a foodbank is linked to the benefits system. This includes delays, sanctions and benefit changes, which together account for around 52% of referrals made to foodbanks by Citizens Advice Bureaux¹⁰. The All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger report on ‘Feeding Britain’ identified additional reasons for foodbank use including debt, addiction, and experiences of family breakdown.

In 2019, The Trussell Trust’s Introduction to a Study of Poverty and Food Insecurity in the UK¹¹ noted that evidence about drivers of foodbank use ‘highlight the role of key policy developments since 2011, such as benefit sanctions, the roll-out of Universal Credit, cuts in Housing Benefit, changes to disability benefits, and the freezing of benefits’. As well as benefits-related issues, the report went on to identify other drivers of foodbank use as:

- Challenging life experiences such as eviction or divorce.
- An adverse work-related experience such as losing a job or reduced hours.
- Ill-health or a disability.
- Lack of informal support from friends and family.

A recent survey of independent foodbanks¹² found that almost all indicated that people with benefit issues and people who were unemployed made up a significant proportion of their clients. For those in work, the increased use of zero hours contracts and wage stagnation have resulted in more people being in ‘precarious, insecure, low-paid work’¹³. The report noted:

‘Quite a few foodbanks reported that groups less often observed in Trussell Trust foodbanks made up a large proportion of their clients. For example, 71% of

⁹ Garrat, 2017. [Foodbank use in the UK is more complex than suggested, according to new research](#)

¹⁰ [Citizens Advice Bureaux foodbank survey](#) (Citizens Advice, 2014)

¹¹ Sosenko F, Littlewood M, Bramley G, Fitzpatrick, S, Blenkinsopp, J & Wood, J, 2019. [A State of Hunger. A study of poverty and food insecurity in the UK](#). The Trussell Trust

¹² https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/0681ad7a-2d07-489f-9c11-77dc3d1aa968/Report_IndependentFoodBankStudy_Dec2019-pdf.pdf

¹³ [Tackling Poverty Together](#) (Devlin and Ramsay, 2016)

(independent) foodbanks reported people in part-time work made up a large proportion of their clients; 62% reported people on zero-hour contracts made up a large proportion of their clients; and 36% even reported having a large proportion of people in full-time work. Among Trussell Trust foodbanks, only 14% of households using foodbanks include someone with employment, and this is very rarely full-time employment’.

Furthermore, the survey of independent foodbanks found that a higher proportion (37%) reported that people with no recourse to public funds made up a significant proportion of their clients, compared to only 5% of Trussell Trust foodbanks. Waiting for a benefit payment or decision was one of the three most common reasons for independent foodbank use and many of the foodbanks in the survey also reported debt, benefit sanctions, and insufficient incomes to meet living costs as among the three most common reasons for their clients’ accessing foodbanks.

The Health Foundation’s review of progress in addressing health inequalities highlighted by the Marmot review¹⁴ concluded that the main reasons for the increases in foodbank use are ‘the impact of low wages and increasing costs of other household necessities, and the freezing of benefit rates in 2016 and other changes to the benefit system, which reduced the value of benefits’. The report also cited evidence of the impacts on foodbank use of rising housing costs, the five-week wait for the first Universal Credit payment, cuts to support programmes (such as Healthy Start), limits to eligibility for free school meals, and decreasing food welfare budgets.

Health implications of food insecurity

In 2019 the Food Foundation analysed price data for 94 healthy and unhealthy foods and drinks (using categories developed by the Food Standards Agency). In each year between 2007 and 2017 the average price of healthy food was more expensive than unhealthy food. The poorest decile of English households would need to spend close to three-quarters of their disposable income on food to meet the guidelines in the NHS Eatwell Guide, compared with only 6% of income for households in the richest decile¹⁵.

The Health Foundation review cited above, examined the evidence that shows that in the previous 10 years, working-age families with children within the five lower income deciles had experienced the most significant and negative impacts in the long-term as a result of tax and welfare policies affecting their ability to buy nutritious food and remarked that:

‘There is also widespread concern at food insecurity and poor nutritional intake and impacts on health and wellbeing; likely contributing to inequalities in cancer, diabetes and coronary heart disease. Stress, depression and anxiety associated with food insecurity affect more than half of households who are referred to foodbanks and a quarter of households have a member with a long-term physical condition or illness in 2018. Children who grow up in food insecure homes are more likely to have poor health and worse educational outcomes compared with children growing up in food secure homes’.

¹⁴ Health Foundation Feb 2020. [Health Equity in England: the Marmot review 10 years on](#)

¹⁵ <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Broken-Plate.pdf>

Poor diet is a risk factor in obesity¹⁶, cancer, coronary heart disease (CHD) and diabetes¹⁷. Poor diet is characterised by excessive intake of saturated fat, salt or sugar which are common in processed food, and an insufficient consumption of fruit and vegetables, and dietary fibre.

Food insecurity also has social and psychological impacts such as social isolation, anxiety and depression. The impact on children can be particularly negative, with reports of children in Lancashire taking food from school bins¹⁸. The social and psychological consequences of experiencing food insecurity, combined with the physical health costs of an inadequate diet, present key challenges when trying to improve health, reduce health inequalities and reduce health costs¹⁹.

The impact of Covid-19

Food insecurity and foodbank use increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In April 2020, a report for the Food Foundation²⁰ estimated that the number of adults who were food insecure in Britain quadrupled under the lockdown, with key factors being availability of food in shops, and lower incomes (including amongst those typically not previously at risk of food insecurity). The report concluded that susceptibility to food insecurity worsened for the economically vulnerable, including those experiencing income losses and self-isolation. Our consultation with a small number of West Lancashire residents with lived experience of food insecurity included one person with longstanding mental health issues. This resident reported their increased anxiety during the pandemic prevented them from going food shopping and as a result there were times when they did not eat.

The Trussell Trust reported an 89% increase in the number of emergency food parcels provided in April 2020 compared to the same month in 2019. Research undertaken for the Trust by Heriot-Watt University and the National Institute for Economic and Social Research²¹, found that people who had not previously used foodbanks did so during the lockdown. The research found that almost 100,000 households received support from a foodbank in the Trussell Trust network for the very first time between April and June 2020. The research also forecast future demand for foodbanks based on the economic impact of the pandemic. The findings predicted a significant rise in levels of destitution in the UK by the end of 2020, and at least an extra 300,000 emergency food parcels likely to be distributed by foodbanks in the Trussell Trust network in the last quarter of 2020 – an increase of 61% compared to the previous year. The research suggested that levels of need could be even higher than forecast depending on factors such as the strength of the economy and a second wave of Covid-19 (which subsequently occurred). The latest information available shows that the Trussell Trust’s foodbank network provided 1,239,399 emergency food parcels to people in crisis between April and September 2020 compared to 843,655 in the same months in 2019.

¹⁶ [Understanding Food in the Context of Poverty, Economic Insecurity and Social Exclusion](#) (Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland, 2015)

¹⁷ [Food Poverty and Health Briefing Statement](#) (The Faculty of Public Health of the Royal Colleges of Physicians, 2005)

¹⁸ [Hungry children 'eating from school bins' in Morecambe](#) (BBC, 2019)

¹⁹ [Food Poverty](#) (NHS Health Scotland, 2018)

²⁰ https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Report_COVID19FoodInsecurity-final.pdf

²¹ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-food-banks-report.pdf>

IFAN also reported significant increases in the number of emergency food parcels distributed by independent foodbanks as a result of the pandemic²². They reported a 177% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed in May 2020 compared to May 2019. In addition, 47% of their members had increased the size of their parcels to support people with a food supply for a longer time period than usual. They also noted that access to referral services has been affected:

‘69% of our data set, have seen an increase in the number of self-referrals or have started to accept self-referrals (15%) as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Although telephone and internet-based systems have replaced some referral services, these are not necessarily accessible to people living with no or low income. Of the 69 organisations reporting to have started to accept self-referrals and an increase in self-referrals, 46% reported supporting people unable to access referral agencies. 19 of these 32 organisations had supported up to 40 households in this situation’.

The Poverty and Inequality Commission²³ found that community organisations in Scotland reported that demand for emergency food aid had been rising during the pandemic and they expected this to continue as more people in poverty become aware of the help offered and more people experienced poverty for the first time. Many organisations, they claimed, were working to full capacity and had concerns over whether they would be able to continue to meet the rising demand.

As the pandemic has continued and the impacts of furlough, job losses and welfare dependence have increased, concerns have grown about increasing levels of poverty, with more families struggling to make ends meet. A high-profile campaign by Marcus Rashford and others to extend access to free school meals during school holidays highlighted the issue of the impact of food insecurity on children and this became an ongoing political issue²⁴. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the Treasury’s independent forecaster, reported in July 2020 that unemployment could rise beyond the levels seen in the 1980s. The latest figures from the ONS show that the unemployment rate was 5.0% in the quarter November 2020 - January 2021²⁵.

²² <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-data-since-covid-19>

²³ <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Food-insecurity-PIC-response-and-recommendations-June-2020.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/free-school-meals-live-vote-petition-uk-mps-marcus-rashford-boris-johnson-b1308103.html>

²⁵ [Employment in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

3 Addressing food insecurity

This section of the report summarises the key interventions aimed at supporting people experiencing food insecurity, and highlights calls to tackle the underlying causes. National and local policies are also summarised.

Supporting people experiencing food insecurity

The following summarises five key interventions aimed at tackling food insecurity in the UK. These summaries set the scene for the mapping of interventions in West Lancashire presented in section 4.

Emergency food parcels / foodbanks

Emergency assistance in the form of a food parcel for households experiencing food insecurity. The parcels tend to include a nutritionally balanced range of food supplies intended to support the recipients through an emergency situation for a short period of time such as three or seven days. This category includes foodbank services although emergency food parcels are provided by many other organisations in the public, community and voluntary sectors. A referral is often required from another service (such as a health service, Citizen's Advice Bureau, local authority welfare rights service, or third sector provider) and access can be limited to a prescribed number of uses in a specific timeframe; Trussell Trust, the main foodbank provider in the UK, flags up users who present with more than three vouchers in a six-month period. Parcel contents tend to be sourced through donations from food retailers, wholesalers and producers or the general public, as well as being supplied by intermediary organisations such as FareShare that redistribute surpluses from the food supply chain, including supermarkets. Some initiatives seek to refer or signpost people to local advice and support services in an attempt to address the underlying issues that led to them needing an emergency food parcel.

Community food shops

Variably referred to as community food shops, larders, fridges, co-operatives, pantries or food clubs, this type of support is set up to feel like a shop and allows people to choose from the items available. There may be a small cost per visit and/or membership fee and there can be limits on the number of items that can be taken per visit. A referral is not usually necessary although some do operate on a referral-only basis. Food tends to come from the same sources as those listed above for emergency food parcels. Additional essentials such as toiletries, laundry, cleaning products and personal care items may be available, adding to the retail-like environment. These initiatives tend to have a no-questions asked ethos and so generally do not have formal relationships with advice and support services, although some do. Some also provide additional support such as informal advice on budgeting or suggested recipe cards. Broadly speaking, these initiatives tend to have dignity and choice as key principles in the way they provide their service and have become more prevalent for the reasons discussed below.

Community kitchens and cafés

These initiatives provide low-cost food in community settings and tend to be centred around bringing people together and tackling social isolation as well as addressing food insecurity. Some incorporate additional support in the form of donated clothing or drop-in visits from advice and support services. There is often informal 'pastoral' type support available if wanted. Most are community-based, volunteer-led initiatives with limited and insecure funding. Operating hours can also be limited. They rely on surplus and donated food from a variety of sources including those listed above. Their ability to provide consistent quality and range, especially perishables (fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy and meat) can be a challenge.

Community growing projects

These initiatives are recognised as a helpful and dignified addition to helping people to access low-cost food. While community growing projects have a role in the alleviation of household food insecurity it is important to note that some projects - including many allotments - do not specifically aim to tackle the issue. As well as traditional allotments, community growing projects connected to schools, community food or welfare projects such as Homestart encourage people to grow their own food, get involved in growing food for sale at low cost, or to grow, prepare and eat food together. Some include cookery workshops or lessons, advice on food and healthy eating or signposting to other services.

Practical cooking skills

Opportunities for people to acquire and improve their ability to cook healthy nutritious food from scratch. Sessions are delivered in a variety of settings including in some community kitchens where people are encouraged to join in with preparing the communal meal and some community food initiatives situated within wider community projects, growing schemes or hubs. Some provide help with budgeting skills, or signpost to other services.

Addressing food insecurity is closely associated with the provision of emergency food parcels, particularly by foodbanks, although this is not the only type of intervention, as shown above. As the number of foodbanks and the level of use have increased quite markedly in recent years, some academic papers have questioned the model²⁶ arguing that ‘this practice undermines calls for direct actions to both reduce the production of surplus food and to address upstream drivers of food insecurity and ensure the right to food’. A ‘cash first’ approach has been advocated whereby people in financial crisis are encouraged to access existing financial entitlements through advice and support as an alternative to emergency food aid; the approach has drawn on experience from the Menu for Change project in Scotland and is advocated by the likes of the Independent Food Aid Network and Sustain and has been adopted by the Scottish Government.

As well as concerns about tackling the root financial causes of food insecurity, the need for sustainability and for a rights-based approach to support, concerns have been raised about the reliance on volunteers to provide emergency food aid. Furthermore, some food insecure people or households are reluctant, or unable, to access foodbanks because of: 1) feelings of embarrassment and shame, 2) a belief that it does not offer them what they need, 3) lack of availability locally, particularly in rural areas or areas poorly served by public transport, or 4) that the local foodbank is open so infrequently that it is not perceived as accessible.

Recognition has grown that support for people experiencing food insecurity needs to be more compassionate and respectful. Dignity has become a key principle in delivering initiatives to enable improved access to nutritious and affordable food²⁷. Dignity underpins many of the alternatives to emergency food aid including community kitchens, larders, pantries and other community food retail initiatives. Additionally, opportunities to grow food through allotments and community gardens are being seen as a further helpful addition to the range of initiatives that can facilitate dignified access to sufficient and sufficiently nutritious food. Similarly, practical cooking skills projects are seen as a dignified means of supporting people to help themselves and improve their ability to access a good nutritious, affordable diet.

²⁶ <https://foodresearch.org.uk/publications/is-it-appropriate-to-use-surplus-food-to-feed-people-in-hunger/>

²⁷ <https://www.nourishscotland.org/projects/dignity/>

In September 2020, Sustain published guidelines for developing projects²⁸ which concluded:

‘Although their scope in addressing the underlying causes of poverty is variable, community food retail initiatives can help maximise families’ incomes and provide community-based solidarity. People should be able to feed themselves and their families in a dignified way. Food aid initiatives should sit alongside advocacy for more sustainable and long-term changes to policies around wages and benefits that reflect the real cost of living and a situation where healthy food is affordable to all... The current food system does not make it easy for people on a low-income to access an affordable healthy diet and diverse retail models can help mitigate this, with some offering more sustainable and/or dignified solutions than others’.

National policy - addressing the root causes of food insecurity

There is widespread recognition, from academics and those supporting people experiencing food insecurity, of the need to address the root causes of the issue. For example, the Trussell Trust recently stated²⁹:

‘We are clear that food cannot be the answer to people needing a foodbank – and that everyone should have enough money to afford essentials. That is why we need a national social security system which provides everyone with enough to keep them out of serious financial hardship, and is responsive to individual needs and changing circumstances. But it is also vital to have a safety net at the local level, which can be adapted and tailored to local needs and can provide flexible discretionary emergency support when people are at risk of falling through gaps in the national system. Local welfare assistance, whereby local authorities provide crisis support to people, is a fundamental part of this local safety net’.

Central government allocated funding to all upper tier local authorities in England for the Local Welfare Assistance scheme to help people on low incomes or receiving benefits in an emergency situation. The funding was passed on to councils on a non-ring-fenced basis and with no statutory duties attached. The funds were expected to be concentrated on those facing greatest difficulty in managing their income and to enable a more flexible response to emergency situations through a combination of cash and goods. Availability, awareness and access to the scheme across England is mixed.

The Government commissioned an independent review as part of the development of a national food strategy. The review’s initial report³⁰ noted that:

‘Most disadvantaged children can get left behind by food insecurity and the lifelong legacy of poor nutrition in childhood and that in the post-lockdown recession, many more families will struggle to feed themselves adequately. A Government that is serious about “levelling up” must ensure that all children get the nutrition they need’.

A joint report from the IPPR thinktank and the TUC³¹ argued that the UK’s social security offering, even with recent amendments in response to the economic impact of the pandemic, was

²⁸ <https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/community-food-retail-and-food-poverty/?section=#>

²⁹ Trussell Trust, 2020. [Local Lifelines Investing in Local Welfare During and Beyond Covid-19](#).

³⁰ <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/>

³¹ <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/a-family-stimulus>

inadequate to cope with the expected steep rise in joblessness caused by the pandemic. As a result, the report forecast increased reliance on foodbanks for families, and called for specific welfare measures to reduce child poverty.

Public Health England's strategy 2020-25³² makes no mention of food insecurity or access to food, but includes the ambition to:

'Enable current and future generations to live in local environments that promote a healthier weight as the norm and make it easier for everyone, regardless of background, circumstance or where they live, to access healthier food, enjoy healthier diets and live active lifestyles'.

West Lancashire policy

Health and wellbeing is a priority in West Lancashire and this study directly addresses recommendation 21 of Lancashire's Fairness Commission report³³ which stated:

'We recommend an increase in the number of sustainable locally-led community projects such as community food growing, co-operatives and 'grow, cook and eat' projects to produce, distribute and share quality, healthy food.'

The Fairness Commission heard that the drivers of food insecurity in West Lancashire reflect the national picture, and added:

'The trade-off between food and fuel poverty ("eating or heating"), for example, is all too real and many older people struggle to maintain their standard of living ... Those requiring support from the benefits system to maintain a basic standard of living are currently facing significant challenge with increasing dependency on support from foodbanks and short-term lenders ... Those currently in work reported reduced workplace benefits and problems with zero-hour contracts. Charities that try to provide a route back to work for lower-skilled jobseekers reported that the cost of transport to work can significantly reduce income to such an extent that new employees are forced to use foodbanks. These challenges are particularly acute for former addicts who may be stigmatised because of past dependency on alcohol or drugs. Low pay is exacerbated by the rising cost of energy and foodbank volunteers suggested a correlation between food and fuel poverty'.

West Lancashire's Financial Inclusion Strategy 2021-24³⁴ acknowledges that difficulty paying food bills can be one impact of financial exclusion. The Strategy aims to ensure there is a comprehensive offer for all citizens of West Lancashire to tackle poverty and financial inequalities across the Borough and it sets out the following objectives:

- To be a Council that enables and empowers partners, specialist agencies and stakeholders to work together to deliver a range of relevant and supportive financial inclusion services that meets the needs for all citizens.
- To offer a borough-wide brand for services and key messages to promote awareness and improve access, use and signposting of existing and any new services.

³² [Public Health England Strategy 2020-25](#)

³³ [Fairer Lancashire Fairer Lives](#)

³⁴ [Financial Inclusion Strategy 2021-21](#)

-
- To be a borough that will tackle digital exclusion, and work with partners to provide other cost effective solutions where there is an identified need.
 - To build on and develop access and opportunities to training and employment targeted at key financially vulnerable groups.
 - To provide a one door, multi-agency offer with access to other advice services so citizens facing financial hardship are supported at the right time and through an effective referral process.

This study on food insecurity is also linked to the Council Plan 2019-2021³⁵ which prioritises delivering tangible and visible improvements in the Borough and engaging and empowering local communities. The Plan includes commitments from the Council to provide a wide range of opportunities that promote health and wellbeing in the community, target resources to most effectively support improvements in health and/or reduce health inequalities in the Borough, and to implement the Health and Wellbeing Strategy³⁶. The Health and Wellbeing Strategy includes the following commitments: undertaking community food initiatives to provide residents with essential dietary and lifestyle advice to enable healthier living; provision of a health professional team to carry out community engagement to encourage healthier lifestyles, such as undertaking health walks, delivery of exercise sessions, sports activities; and food seminars in local schools, colleges and community buildings, as well as providing accredited nutritional training.

³⁵ [Council Plan 2019-2021](#)

³⁶ [West Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-21](#)

4 Food insecurity and welfare support in West Lancashire

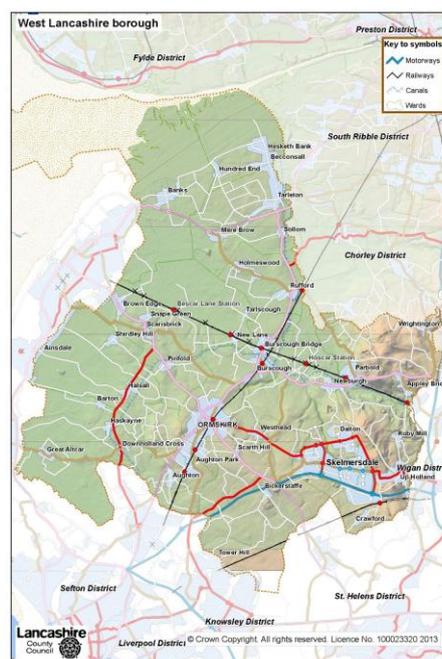
This section utilises information gathered by the mapping exercise to establish and assess the current support available in the Borough to address food insecurity, this includes welfare support as well as services directly addressing food insecurity. Where available, information is presented on the number and characteristics of those accessing these services in West Lancashire. The section also seeks to identify potential gaps in existing support. Findings from our consultation with people with lived experience of food insecurity are presented where relevant.

Emergency food parcels / foodbanks

The mapping exercise identified three established foodbanks in West Lancashire that provide emergency food parcels. Two of the providers are part of the Trussell Trust national network of foodbanks (Ormskirk and Skelmersdale) and Digmaor is independent.

| Table 1 – Emergency food parcel providers in West Lancashire | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Provider | Status | Access points | Delivery |
| Ormskirk Foodbank | Part of Trussell Trust network | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Church House, Ormskirk town centre | Approximately 40 volunteers |
| Skelmersdale Foodbank | Part of Trussell Trust network | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ecumenical Centre, Skelmersdale town centre Oak House, Tanhouse, Skelmersdale Trinity Methodist Church, Old Skelmersdale | 3 part-time staff and approximately 30 volunteers |
| Digmaor Community Foodbank | Independent foodbank operated by Evermoor Enterprises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evermoor Hub, Digmaor, Skelmersdale | Approximately 15 volunteers |

As shown in the table above, two foodbanks are based in Skelmersdale and one in Ormskirk. Between them Skelmersdale Foodbank and Digmaor Community Foodbank have four distribution points across the town. This includes a town centre location and access points in Tanhouse, Digmaor and Old Skelmersdale. Ormskirk is served by only one distribution point in the town centre. Approximately 60% of West Lancashire’s population live in Skelmersdale and Ormskirk and are therefore within reasonable travelling distance of an existing foodbank (ignoring for now barriers such as public transport services and finance). The most obvious geographic gap in access points is the northern villages such as Banks, Hesketh Banks and Tarleton which are approximately 10 miles north of Ormskirk. Previously, an independent foodbank (the Grove) existed in Burscough before it ceased operating in early 2020. Burscough is approximately 3 miles north of Ormskirk.



As part of the same network, the two Trussell Trust foodbanks reported they work collaboratively to serve

distinct catchment areas. Data provided by the two foodbanks shows that service users were distributed across West Lancashire. Beneficiaries were concentrated in the two main towns of Skelmersdale and Ormskirk, where the majority of West Lancs residents live. The data shows that residents of Burscough and the northern villages do access the foodbanks in Ormskirk and Skelmersdale. Ormskirk Foodbank reported that some people from the northern villages use Southport Foodbank as it is more accessible, particularly when relying on public transport. Table 2 shows the main location (wards) of Trussell Trust foodbank users in 2020.

| Foodbank | Wards | Vouchers |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Skelmersdale Foodbank | Tanhouse | 237 |
| | Skelmersdale South | 125 |
| | Ashurst | 124 |
| | Digmoor | 98 |
| | Skelmersdale North | 95 |
| | Moorside | 72 |
| Ormskirk Foodbank | Scott | 206 |
| | Knowsley | 67 |
| | Burscough East | 55 |
| | Derby | 53 |
| | Burscough West | 50 |
| | Aughton Park | 25 |

Digmoor Community Foodbank reported support was available to anyone in West Lancashire, although they tend to support residents of Skelmersdale, particularly the local neighbourhood where they are located. This was supported by Skelmersdale Foodbank which reported its service users figures for Digmoor were lower due to the presence of Digmoor Community Foodbank.

Foodbanks in some other areas have outreach centres to enable people to access support closer to home which is more convenient, can save them time and money travelling, and can engage people who may otherwise not seek support. As noted above, West Lancashire’s foodbanks have a number of access points in Skelmersdale and Ormskirk but none outside the main towns meaning, prior to Covid-19, residents from other areas had to travel to one of the towns, or Southport, to access support. Public transport can be a barrier to accessing a range of essential services and one of the foodbanks reported access can be difficult given the public transport system in West Lancashire and they had experience of people taking taxis to return home with their emergency food parcel. During Covid-19 lockdowns, emergency food parcels have been delivered to those in need which was a valuable service, albeit a temporary one. Once the lockdown restrictions end, those in need outside Skelmersdale and Ormskirk will face the same challenges accessing support. For this reason, we recommend in section 5, the development of additional emergency food aid access points in West Lancashire. We are aware there have been some tentative discussions among Burscough based organisations regarding foodbank services in the area following the demise of The Grove; outreach by one of the established foodbanks may be an option.

Skelmersdale Foodbank has plans to increase the times people can visit to pick up an emergency food parcel in the future. Their plans include evening and weekend opening to make it easier for working people, including those working shifts, to access support. Before the pandemic, the three foodbanks had limited daytime opening hours on weekdays only.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the three foodbanks provided significant support to those in need. Emergency food parcels were also provided by Birchwood, a charitable organisation based in the Tanhouse Centre in Skelmersdale as part of a co-ordinated approach to support people in need during the crisis. Recipients were identified by a wide range of public and third sector organisations. Birchwood provides a range of support for vulnerable people experiencing difficulties with their mental health and well-being, and had provided Christmas hampers for a number of years (as the other emergency food aid providers have also). Birchwood’s food parcels included a week’s worth of shopping including toiletries, and some ready cooked meals prepared by the Centre’s chef. Data gathered by WLBC showed a total of 10,522 emergency food parcels were provided by the three foodbanks and Birchwood from the start of July to the end of December 2020 – an average of 405 per week. The independent providers were responsible for the majority of the parcels with Birchwood averaging 249 and Digmaor 126 parcels per week; Ormskirk Foodbank and Skelmersdale Foodbank averaged 14 and 15 parcels per week respectively during the period. During the Covid-19 pandemic, emergency food parcels have also been provided to a small number of people in need in the northern parts of West Lancashire by Hesketh Bank and Tarleton Helpers. This is a smaller scale demand-led service operated by clergy and volunteers at All Saints Parish Church, Hesketh Bank and Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church, Tarleton.

Skelmersdale and Ormskirk Foodbanks provided valuable information on the number and characteristics of those accessing emergency food provision. The data showed that over 4,100 people were fed by Skelmersdale and Ormskirk Foodbanks in 2020, including over 1,700 children. Skelmersdale Foodbank accounted for approximately two thirds of the total. The two foodbanks issued approximately 1,500 vouchers. Digmaor Community Foodbank estimated about 15 people used the foodbank each day before the Covid-19 pandemic, a figure that had doubled since then.

Table 3 – Trussell Trust foodbank users in West Lancashire in 2020

| Indicator | Ormskirk Foodbank | Skelmersdale Foodbank | Total |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Adults | 942 | 1,452 | 2,394 |
| Children | 606 | 1,116 | 1,722 |
| Total fed | 1,548 | 2,568 | 4,116 |
| Vouchers | 601 | 949 | 1,550 |

The data from Skelmersdale and Ormskirk Foodbanks also showed:

- A 37% increase in the number of people fed from 2019 to 2020 made up of a 32% increase in the number of adults fed and a 46% increase in the number of children fed.
- Single households were the main recipients accounting for 35% of the total, followed by families (27%), single parents (24%), and couples (13%).
- The main reasons recorded for needing a parcel were: low income (44%), benefit changes (23%), benefits delays (14%), debt (11%), and sickness (8%).
- The main referral agencies varied between to the two foodbanks. At Skelmersdale Foodbank the two main referral agencies were West Lancs ARK (46%) and WLBC (34%), whereas at Ormskirk Foodbank the main sources were Jobcentre Plus (43%) and self-referral (27%).

The three foodbanks all reported some repeat use of their services. Digmaor has a voucher system issued by the likes of Social Workers and Health Visitors although people without a voucher are also supported. Generally, they try to limit users to three parcels in a six-month

period although they reported this was not strictly enforced. Digmaor reported a small but significant number of regular users including “people who visit every couple of months and people who have been coming here for years”. The Trussell Trust’s use of a voucher and comprehensive IT systems flags up repeat users who receive more than three vouchers in a six-month period. Skelmersdale Foodbank take a proactive approach to such cases, which involves contacting the referral agency to make them aware of the situation and to encourage them to discuss it with the person. By doing so, the foodbank is attempting to reduce reliance on their support and tackle the root cause of the food insecurity. This proactive approach could provide a template for support across West Lancashire.

Ormskirk supports people without vouchers, and they account for approximately 1 in 10 of their service users. The Ormskirk Trustees took the decision to do so as an increasing number of people were presenting without vouchers looking for support. Ormskirk volunteers have access to a folder of agencies they can signpost users on to for additional support for a range of issues including money and debt, mental health, substance misuse, and domestic violence. Churches Together in Ormskirk, which operates the foodbank also run West Lancs Debt Advice which provides a close relationship with that service. Ormskirk reported some regular users including some presenting as often as once a month. Our consultation with a small number of West Lancashire residents experiencing food insecurity confirmed some had made repeated use of foodbanks over a sustained period of time without being offered support to address the underlying issues that led to them seeking emergency food aid. Overall, it is our view that there is scope to improve support to tackle the underlying causes of food insecurity among foodbank users in West Lancashire.

Table 1 demonstrated that the emergency food providers in West Lancashire are heavily reliant on volunteers to deliver their services. Only Skelmersdale Foodbank has paid staff, with three part-time employees (Project Manager, Warehouse Manager and Distribution Manager) in addition to approximately 30 volunteers. The recruitment of paid staff was made possible by a fixed-term grant from the Trussell Trust which the Foodbank reported reflected the Trustees’ desire for the organisation to be resilient, sustainable and professionally run as well as reflecting the ongoing need in the town. The Foodbank also reported the recruitment of staff had made a positive difference to the organisation and their operations. Ormskirk and Digmaor foodbanks are both entirely volunteer run. The time and commitment shown by all of the volunteers is invaluable and highly commendable, allowing the three providers to support people experiencing food insecurity across West Lancashire over a number of years. However, voluntary sector organisations in general can face ongoing challenges such as capacity, skills gaps, and partnership working which can impact on service delivery and development. The experience of Skelmersdale Foodbank suggests paid staff can make a positive difference to services and we recommend that Ormskirk and Digmaor foodbanks give due consideration to a similar model. The three foodbanks may also wish to consider greater co-operation as a means of sharing costs such as warehousing and transportation, and minimising risk.

The food and other essentials such as toiletries and cleaning products, provided by West Lancashire’s foodbanks are sourced from donations and FareShare. The foodbanks benefit from a series of collection points in supermarkets across West Lancashire and neighbouring areas which gather public donations. They are also members of FareShare which distributes surplus food from supermarkets and suppliers. The three foodbanks also benefit from direct donations from the public and local companies. All reported an increase in food donated during the Covid-

19 crisis, for example, Skelmersdale saw an increase from 16 tonnes of food donated in 2019 to 20.5 tonnes in 2020. Ormskirk Foodbank also reported a significant increase in donations, and they re-distributed some of their surplus stock to Birchwood in the run-up to Christmas. Not only did this make best use of the donated goods, but it also demonstrated the good relations that exist among emergency food providers in West Lancashire. Local farmers donated significant volumes of food during the pandemic which would otherwise have gone to waste, for example, a local producer donated potatoes that could not be sold, as intended, to food outlets that were forced to close during the lockdown. The three foodbanks reported that the contents of their food parcels are tailored to the recipients, within the constraints of the supplies they have available. They strive to include healthy, nutritious contents, and take account of dietary needs and choices. Contents also reflect household size and age of household members. Trussell Trust foodbanks provide three-day emergency parcels. Digmoor has a flexible approach and will provide supplies for a longer period where appropriate.

Community food shops

As highlighted in section 3, community food shops are increasingly part of services to address food insecurity, and this is the case in West Lancashire. The mapping exercise identified three providers that include community food shops alongside other services designed to address food insecurity.

| Provider | Location | Access | Cost |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------|------------------------|
| Birchwood | Tanhouse Community Centre, Skelmersdale | Drop-in | Voluntary donations |
| Digmoor Community Foodbank | Evermore Hub, Digmoor, Skelmersdale | Drop-in | Voluntary donations |
| Village Food Hub | Banks, Hesketh Banks, Tarleton and surrounding villages | Click and collect | Membership £5 per week |

The Village Food Hub was opened in December 2020 by Compassion Acts, the organisation delivering Southport Foodbank and Southport Food Pantry. It currently operates a click and collect service for people from Banks, Hesketh Banks, Tarleton and the surrounding villages – it therefore provides a valuable service to the northern parts of West Lancashire. It is aimed at those people who are “just about managing” and not in emergency need of food. This service is part of a co-ordinated approach that aims to tackle the root causes of food insecurity. Unlike the other two community food providers, it works on a membership basis. For £5 per week members can choose food worth approximately £20. Access to the Food Hub is via referral from a local organisation rather than drop-in, and once enrolled Hub members are linked into the organisation’s benefits advice, budgeting and Next Steps service. Next Steps aims to help people progress without the need for the foodbank or food pantry and includes mentoring, counselling, life coaching, and the opportunity to attend Compassion Acts’ allotment in Birkdale, Sefton, to learn how to grow food. This is a holistic approach which aims to tackle the root causes of food insecurity and could provide a template for support across West Lancashire.

The community food shops operated by Digmoor Community Foodbank and Birchwood complement their other food-related services. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Digmoor service has opened daily, when restrictions allow, having previously been available once a week. Approximately 40 people per day use the shop, twice the level before the pandemic. Shoppers pay for items if they can, for example, the shop sells five tins for £1. Fresh vegetables, bread and frozen ready meals are usually available. Money generated by the shop is used to support Digmoor’s food-related services and provide a small but symbolic element of sustainability. Birchwood is also open daily and shoppers make a voluntary donation if they can. It also has a range of produce including fresh vegetables, bakery, tins and packets, as well as some cooked meals. Our consultation with West Lancashire residents experiencing food insecurity included some who had used the community shops at Birchwood and Digmoor. It was striking how frequently these residents used the shops and how reliant they were on them for their essential food supplies. It was also noteworthy that these residents had not been supported to address the underlying issues which led them to use the community food shop. Although the consultation demonstrated the community shops provide a very valuable service to people in need it also demonstrated a level of dependency and lack of focus on addressing the underlying issues. These findings have informed the opportunities presented in section 5 on how partners could better support people experiencing food insecurity in the future.



An increasing number of Trussell Trust foodbanks are opening community food shops across the UK as part of their dignified response to food insecurity. At present neither Ormskirk nor Skelmersdale Foodbank has a shop, or as far as we are aware plans to open one. Generally, community food shopping in West Lancashire is relatively small-scale and opportunities therefore exist to expand provision, linked to support to address the underlying issues.

Community cafés

Café Birchwood is a key element of Birchwood’s services. Formerly known as the Junk Food Café, the service was established to reduce the amount of surplus food going to landfill. The food is sourced from supermarkets and producers for use in the café, as well as the community food shop and emergency food parcels described above. The organisation reported that approximately 60 tonnes of food had been diverted from landfill in the last year. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Café Birchwood operated from three regular venues and supported approximately 6,650 people.

| Location | Days | 2019 beneficiaries |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Tanhouse Community Centre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monday 5-6 pm Wednesday 12-1 pm | 3,577 |
| Ecumenical Centre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thursday 12-1 pm | 776 (Jan – April only) |
| The Zone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friday 12-1 pm | 2,303 (May – Dec only) |
| | | 6,656 |

The café marked special events such as International Women’s Day, Valentine’s Day, Christmas, and Easter with appropriately themed menus. A monthly café also operated from West Lancashire College and the organisation was also catering for events and parties.

In 2019, volunteers provided approximately 3,200 hours input at Café Birchwood. The volunteers fulfil several roles including preparing and cooking food in the kitchen, front of house and waiting, cleaning, collecting donations and running the complementary pop-up community food shop. The volunteers work alongside Birchwood’s paid staff.

Café Birchwood is also referred to as Birchwood’s Social Inclusion Café reflecting its role in meeting the organisation’s goals. The café embraces a dignified response to tackling food insecurity in a number of ways. Firstly, it aims to create a welcoming atmosphere with tablecloths, flowers and table decorations, music and a table-waiting service. Secondly, diners pay for their meal, albeit at an affordable level of £2 for a three course meal, with under 5s eating for free. Thirdly, the café was previously accompanied by a pop-up community food shop, although this has become a more permanent feature at the Tanhouse Centre during the Covid-19 pandemic, as noted above. Café Birchwood is a dignified and holistic approach (alongside the community shop and cooking courses) to the issue of food insecurity that could provide a template for support across West Lancashire.

Birchwood’s cooking courses have gone online during the Covid-19 crisis and attracted approximately 10 people per week. No other practical cooking courses were identified during this study.

Birchwood was one of a number of organisations, including Digmaor Community Foodbank, providing meals for families during school holidays. Both these organisations have supported local families in this way for a number of years, before the Government provided funding to extend free school meals to school holidays following a high-profile campaign instigated by footballer Marcus Rashford.

Several other community cafés exist across West Lancashire. For example, a weekly lunch club operated on Tuesdays serving two-course meals at the Ecumenical Centre in Skelmersdale (which also functions as a distribution point for Skelmersdale Foodbank), and a similar service operated from Cottage Lane Mission on Wednesdays serving a three-course meal for £5 to approximately 65 people per week. These community cafes tend to be very local, often provided by church or voluntary groups, and are aimed at addressing social isolation, making them difficult to map effectively in a study focused on food insecurity.

Community growing

The table below summarises the key community growing opportunities in West Lancashire. As discussed in section 3, community growing projects and allotments can be part of a sustainable approach to tackling food insecurity

| Table 6 – Community growing in West Lancashire | | | |
|---|---------------|----------------|----------|
| Organisation/initiative | Location | Management | Size |
| WLBC allotments | Ormskirk | WLBC | 27 plots |
| Digmaor Inspired Growers Allotment Society | Skelmersdale | Independent | 8 plots |
| Hesketh Bank Allotments and Leisure Gardeners Association | Hesketh | Independent | 64 plots |
| Roby Mill Community Allotment Group | Roby Mill | Independent | 8 plots |
| St Teresa’s Allotment Group | Upholland | Independent | 34 plots |
| Appley Bridge Allotment Society | Appley Bridge | Independent | 14 plots |
| Lawns Avenue | Upholland | Parish Council | 17 plots |

| Table 6 – Community growing in West Lancashire | | | |
|---|-----------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Organisation/initiative | Location | Management | Size |
| Skelmersdale Horticultural Society | Skelmersdale | Independent | 60 plots |
| Liverpool Road | Skelmersdale | Independent | 22 plots |
| Richmond Avenue | Burscough | Independent | 14 plots |
| Burscough Community Farm | Burscough | Independent | 18 acres |

The West Lancs Community Food Growing project was established after a study found that West Lancashire was very poorly served by the provision of allotments, with the Borough only having 2.5 plots per 1,000 households against a national average of 15 plots per 1,000 households. The report, commissioned by NHS Central Lancashire and carried out by the Wildlife Trust in 2009, also found that there were waiting lists in most areas and particularly for allotments in the Skelmersdale area (where there were over 100 names on the waiting list). By working with local communities between 2009 and 2019, the project helped to almost treble the number of allotments - from 107 to 301 - which is a rate of approximately 6 per 1,000 households. The project aimed to get more people involved in growing their own food and eating more healthily, working with local communities and schools to set up community food growing initiatives and providing help in finding the land (and funds) that might be needed. As part of the project, some raised beds were placed in primary schools and linked into the curriculum. Fruit trees have also been planted in some schools. The annual potato day is a significant event in Skelmersdale, run and promoted by the West Lancashire Allotments Federation.

In addition to the community growing opportunities shown in table 6, a new 12 plot allotment site is being planned in Skelmersdale as part of the new housing scheme at Barnes Road. WLBC is working with Lancashire County Council to finalise details and planning approval has recently been secured. WLBC has also considered working at neighbourhood level to utilise redundant pockets of land, green spaces and brick boxes to provide community growing opportunities. The Council plans involved providing seeds for hardy vegetables for residents to help themselves to, and planting fruit trees. Some local organisations such as Birchwood have used spare land or planters to grow produce. We are also aware of attempts to improve links between the local community, including schools, and the local agricultural sector. One of the stakeholders we spoke to was keen to make links at local level with landowners, farmers and local companies to enable people to grow affordable food.

Burscough Community Farm is a Community Interest Company or social enterprise established in 2014 to improve health and wellbeing and reconnect people with the land. It offers training in growing food, keeping chickens and bees, wood crafts and permaculture, and has in the past supported volunteers from disadvantaged groups including the unemployed, people with mental health issues, and asylum seekers/refugees. The Farm also accepted GP referrals as part of the Active West Lancs 'Fresh Air, Fresh Start' program. Due to its rural location, access via public transport is challenging. Farm produce has been available to purchase including through the Open Food Network. The Farm has previously donated produce to local foodbanks. Community activities were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic which delayed the relaunching of training and plans for a community allotment (produce would be available to volunteers).

Welfare support services

The table below summarises the key welfare support services in West Lancashire. As shown in the table several public and third sector organisations are involved in the provision of a range of welfare related services. The table is not exhaustive as it excludes small, community-based

initiatives that provide welfare support as part of services focused primarily on issues such as substance misuse or mental health.

| Table 7 – Welfare and advice services in West Lancashire | | |
|--|--|---|
| Organisation/initiative | Location | Description |
| WLBC Money Advice / Financial Inclusion Team | Skelmersdale and Ormskirk | Budgeting, benefits advice and checks, debt advice, and referrals to CAB and foodbanks where appropriate. Initially support to Council tenants was provided by the Money Advice Team which was expanded to all residents provided by the Financial Inclusion team during the Covid-19 crisis. Home visits available by appointment. |
| Lancashire Citizens Advice Bureau | Skelmersdale | Part of national network of CABx – debt and money advice, food and fuel poverty – advice and referrals, benefits checks. |
| West Lancashire Debt Advice | Ormskirk | Debt advice delivered by Churches Together in Ormskirk – help with budgeting advice and work towards debt relief strategy. Contact through phone, messages, emails. Partner with Ormskirk Foodbank. |
| West Lancs ARK | Skelmersdale | Independent organisation providing advice, signposting and support including specific support for ex-offenders – budgeting, debt advice, housing, employment, training, drug and alcohol use. |
| SWLICAN (South West Lancashire Independent Community Advice Network) | Skelmersdale | Independent organisation providing advice – welfare, benefits, debt, low income, etc. |
| Hesketh Bank and Tarleton Helpers | Hesketh Bank and Tarleton | Faith and community group delivering food and picking up prescriptions etc, and supporting families in need during the Covid-19 crisis. |
| The Storehouse project (Wigan) | Skelmersdale Access in Greenhill Community Hub | Independent organisation that delivers food, furniture, baby items and other essentials to people in need. |
| Knowsley Credit Union | Skelmersdale access point two days a week | Financial co-operative providing access to affordable loans, savings, and insurance products to residents of West Lancashire, Knowsley, Liverpool, and Sefton. |
| Unify Credit Union | Remotely or via branches in Wigan, Leigh, Chorley, and Leyland | Financial co-operative providing access to affordable loans, savings, and insurance products to residents of Skelmersdale, Wigan, Leigh, Chorley, and Leyland. |
| Lancashire Community Finance | Skelmersdale and Burscough | Independent organisation providing money management and debt advice, advocacy, affordable loans. Dedicated Covid-19 helpline to provide expert money, benefits, housing, and debt advice. |
| Upholland Tawd Vale Lions | Skelmersdale | Independent organisation helping families with household goods and furniture – referrals from social services and other local groups. |
| Lancashire County Council Welfare Rights Service | - | Promotes benefit take-up and help people with benefit-related issues |
| Lancashire County Council Crisis Support | - | Crisis support scheme that helps with essential household furniture or white goods |

As can be seen in the table above, a range of welfare advice and support services exist in West Lancashire. These services are predominantly located in Skelmersdale and to a lesser extent Ormskirk, although they are available to residents throughout the borough. For many residents, including those in the rural parts of West Lancashire, physical access to the services relies on travelling to the main towns, such as to Skelmersdale to access the CAB or Ormskirk to access West Lancashire Debt Advice. As noted earlier, access to services based in the two towns can be challenging when reliant on public transport. Home visits are available by appointment with WLBC's Money Advice Team.

WLBC is an integral part of the welfare support network in West Lancashire. The WLBC Money Advice Team was initially limited to support for Council tenants although access has been extended to all residents during the Covid-19 crisis with the establishment of the Financial Inclusion Team. The Money Advice/Financial Inclusion service includes budgeting and financial health checks, assistance with benefits applications including Universal Credit, debt advice and referral to the CAB where appropriate. The service can issue foodbank vouchers for those in need of emergency food aid. They can also refer to Lancashire County Council's crisis support scheme which can help people in need acquire essential household items. As noted above, home visits are available by appointment for those who cannot access the Council's offices in Skelmersdale or Ormskirk. Referrals and signposting are received from a range of organisations including the WLBC and County Council staff, police, fire service, health visitors and schools. The WLBC Money Advice team report a steady increase in council tenants seeking advice, rising from 128 in 2016 to 334 in 2019. Figures were not available for 2020 but anecdotally have increased greatly during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, WLBC's More Positive Together team is currently assessing support for people who are long-term unemployed, or have complex lives and multiple issues to support them back into employment through confidence building, CV writing, interview preparation, etc.

The other welfare services included in Table 7 were unable to provide up-to-date statistics on service users. However, several provided anecdotal information about changing level and type of need. For example, West Lancashire Debt Advice reported one-off events such a business closure can lead to redundancies and loss of income, while the numbers overstretching with car loans and credit cards can vary year by year. Generally, there are also cycles throughout the year, for example, when schools return after the summer holidays, the additional pressure of school uniform costs can push some families over the edge; council housing report increasing arrears at this time of year as well. Services reported demand for support had risen in recent years and this included a wider range of resident/family type which one consultee described as 'absolutely across the board'.

Several services reported that referrals regularly come in at a time of crisis. For example, consultees described seeing people who were in a 'really desperate' situation, 'robbing Peter to pay Paul', or having to make difficult decisions to 'heat or eat', feed the kids instead of themselves or get school uniform. The impacts on food insecurity were mentioned frequently with foodbank referrals used increasingly as part of the support offered. West Lancashire Debt Advice report that when people get into financial trouble, they tend to leave it late to get help, so that when they do ask for help, it is often with an issue that needs dealing with straight away such as bailiffs, county court judgement, or car parking fines. Sometimes, there is problem that is a legacy of better times, for example taking on an expensive car and then not being able to get out of a finance agreement or car loan when circumstances change. Services including West Lancashire

Debt Advice reported that maximising income through benefits checks or advice can make a significant difference to income, for example helping people to apply for benefits like PIP. Issues with tax credits discrepancies or other benefits mistakes and resultant sanctions are often a contributory factor to people's financial difficulties. Families with three children, only receiving benefits for two, being capped for under occupancy and having to make Council Tax contribution are all benefits-related issues that services highlighted as impacting on finances and contributing to food insecurity.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on demand for welfare support in West Lancashire. As well as referrals for people on benefits, several of the services we spoke to reported supporting more people in work, self-employed people and people on furlough during 2020. They added that referrals were being received from a range of statutory and third sector sources including various Council departments, as well as self-referrals. The consultees reported more acute crises and levels of poverty fuelled by reduced hours and pay or furlough. Most services reported supporting more people in work who were struggling financially, and some were concerned that people who have not needed welfare services before will leave it late to seek help or will simply not know where to go and how to access support.

The WLBC Money Advice service has seen an increase in the numbers of people in employment using their service, with the majority of the increase since Covid-19 in this category. Pre-Covid-19, it was rare for them to be supporting people in full-time employment whereas now this is around half of their caseload. The WLBC Money Advice team also reported that referral numbers were increasing and were now greater than at the start of the pandemic. The establishment of the Financial Inclusion Team had led to non-Council tenants being supported. The CAB also reported changing patterns of demand during the Covid-19 pandemic. Previously benefits issues were the most frequent cause of money troubles. Since the pandemic, the CAB reported seeing an increase in the self-employed, business owners, and those facing redundancy. Conversely, West Lancashire Debt Advice report that 2020 has been quieter, with less debt advice delivered and no foodbank referrals all year. They suggested this was perhaps because creditors were pursuing people less during the pandemic.

There was genuine concern among consultees that there will be longer term issues because of the impact of Covid-19 on incomes, even for people in employment. It is feared that debt issues will persist for a long time, especially for people not on benefits, who will need continued support to deal with the ongoing debt issues. Consultees also reported Covid-19 has resulted in pressure on relationships. They reported increasing numbers of people dealing with issues such as relationship breakdown and domestic violence, which can increase pressure on budgets and ability to buy food.

As noted in section 2, the wait for Universal Credit has been shown to be a major cause of financial hardship and a driver of food insecurity. Local services supported this view as they reported issuing rising numbers of food and fuel vouchers. The DWP has attempted to mitigate the situation and during the Covid-19 pandemic, Universal Credit was increased by £20 per week for recipients not limited by the cap. The planned removal of this temporary uplift has been widely criticised with commentators stating it will reduce household income of some of the most vulnerable families which could lead to an increase in debt and food insecurity. During the pandemic, as some of these services have started to use online vouchers, digital exclusion has become an issue for some people.

WLBC and West Lancashire CVS secured funding from DFERA to support people who had been financially impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Emergency Assistance Grants up to the value of £150 for an individual and £250 per household were available to purchase food, essential supplies, essential household goods, removal expenses and housing debt to prevent immediate eviction. Access was via referrals from a range of public and third sector organisations, including schools. Some of those involved in the scheme reported it had been a great success reaching those in need and demonstrating the power of partnership working. This is a good example of the 'cash first' approach to financial crisis, as an alternative to emergency food aid, highlighted in section 3.

The Government allocated funding to all top-tier local authorities for Local Welfare Assistance Schemes. The funding was not ring-fenced and not all areas have an operational scheme. We have been unable to establish the status of the scheme in Lancashire. Crisis support does exist via the County Council to assist people in need to acquire essential household items. The CAB reported recent referrals they had made to this service had been unsuccessful.

This brief overview of welfare services in West Lancashire demonstrates that a range of support is provided by several organisations. However, it is our observation that co-ordination and co-operation is limited and we note the Financial Inclusion Strategy objectives include developing 'a borough-wide brand for services and key messages to promote awareness and improve access, use and signposting of existing and any new services' as well as providing 'a one door, multi-agency offer with access to other advice services so citizens facing financial hardship are supported at the right time and through an effective referral process'.

5 Opportunities to address food insecurity in West Lancashire

This section identifies potential opportunities to address food insecurity in West Lancashire. The opportunities have been informed by our initial consultation and mapping work in the borough, the workshop with local stakeholders which discussed emerging findings and possible actions, and our knowledge of initiatives in other areas. The costs of delivering these potential opportunities and the benefits that would be delivered are also summarised and assessed. Three broad opportunities are presented:

- Influencing policy at a national level.
- Strategic actions in West Lancashire.
- Local initiatives in West Lancashire.

Influencing policy at a national level

The evidence is clear that food insecurity is often the result of a household, quite simply, not having sufficient income. Alleviating poverty and food insecurity therefore, not surprisingly, include a strong focus on income maximisation and national policy. Consultees and the literature highlight the impact of welfare reform and the introduction of Universal Credit as critical factors in food insecurity. The same sources also highlight the impact of low pay and insecure employment. Several consultees encouraged WLBC and partners to continue to highlight the impact of these issues on food insecurity at a regional and national level. This included calls for the local authority to support the Trussell Trust's appeal for 'a national social security system which provides everyone with enough to keep them out of serious financial hardship and is responsive to individual needs and changing circumstances'.

Several other national opportunities were identified during the study. Some would require legislation whereas others would require improved financial support for local authorities to deliver. These opportunities include:

- Piloting a universal basic income scheme.
- Increasing the real living wage.
- Improvements to the Council Tax system including the removal of the under-occupation charge and reduction of proportion that people have to pay, especially for those on lowest incomes.
- Wider use of financial support such as school uniform grants.
- Tackling the issue of high interest loans and loan sharks.
- Rolling out a Healthy Start type initiative alongside Child Benefit.
- Investment in jobs and skills, including strengthening initiatives that enable local people to access job opportunities.

Strategic actions in West Lancashire

Three strategic actions in West Lancashire are recommended to help address food insecurity in the borough:

- Improved co-ordination and co-operation.
- Funding for organisations.
- Funding for individuals.

Improved co-ordination and co-operation

This study has shown numerous organisations are involved in delivering a range of activities to address food insecurity in West Lancashire. Connections, joint working and relationships among these organisations were generally good, and have strengthened in recent months via the Community Sector Open Forum meetings arranged to co-ordinate the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, overall West Lancashire’s collective response to tackling food insecurity could be more co-ordinated and joined-up, in our view. WLBC is well placed to provide a lead on this issue and improve co-ordination and we therefore recommend:

- A cross-sector food insecurity forum, led by WLBC, is created to strengthen ties and co-ordination.
- The forum commits to a sustainable and dignified approach to tackling food insecurity in West Lancashire.
- An existing senior officer from WLBC takes overall responsibility for co-ordinating West Lancashire’s response to tackling food insecurity.
- A WLBC councillor takes on the role of food security champion for West Lancashire providing political leadership at a local and national level.

WLBC representatives at the workshop indicated the Council would give due consideration to the above recommendations.

Funding for organisations in West Lancashire

The mapping exercise demonstrated that several organisations involved in tackling food insecurity are small, volunteer-led groups with limited capacity. In order to tackle food insecurity more effectively, they require additional resources. We therefore recommend WLBC, Lancashire County Council and West Lancashire CVS seek to provide additional resources – financial and in-kind – to help organisations improve their work to tackle food insecurity and poverty in a sustainable and dignified way.

Funding for individuals in West Lancashire

Section 2 demonstrated the close link between food insecurity and financial crisis, and highlighted recommendations in the literature for solutions to be based on tackling the root causes of food insecurity. For example, the Trussell Trust has called for ‘a safety net at the local level, which can be adapted and tailored to local needs and can provide flexible discretionary emergency support when people are at risk of falling through gaps in the national system. Local welfare assistance, whereby local authorities provide crisis support to people, is a fundamental part of this local safety net’. Although some emergency financial support is available in West Lancashire it is limited and several consultees suggested an expansion of hardship grants would have a positive impact on the numbers experiencing food insecurity in the area. The Emergency Assistance Grants available during the Covid-19 crisis demonstrated the value of additional targeted financial support and we therefore recommend that WLBC and partners seek to continue a scheme of this nature. Such a scheme would embrace the ‘cash first’ approach to tackling food insecurity highlighted in section 3.

Local initiatives in West Lancashire

The following local initiatives were identified during the study as potential opportunities to tackle food insecurity in West Lancashire:

1. A proactive, co-ordinated, **rapid response from services** that ensures anyone experiencing food insecurity in West Lancashire is effectively supported to tackle the

root causes of their food insecurity. This would involve early intervention by frontline services that encounter a person experiencing food insecurity who would be actively supported to receive the help they need, for example, to reduce debts, maximise income/benefits, access credit unions for low-cost loans, budget, learn cooking skills, or grow their own food. This would be an enhancement of the wraparound support that exists in an ad-hoc way at some services at present. It would also address the aims of the Borough's Financial Inclusion Strategy to provide accessible and timely support to people facing financial hardship. Some stakeholders at the workshop suggested partners should utilise local intelligence to focus on people who were most likely to be among the estimated 1,310 severely food insecure households in West Lancashire.

2. Development of **additional access points for emergency food parcel/foodbank** to address geographic gaps outside of Ormskirk and Skelmersdale and the limited opening times when current provision is inaccessible to those in emergency need.
3. **Extension of the community food shop network** including the rollout of joined-up services such as the Village Food Club that seek to address the underlying causes of food insecurity.
4. **Extension of the Café Birchwood approach** in other locations/communities across West Lancashire providing a dignified and engaging means of supporting people.
5. **Expansion of community growing spaces** and the **development of a scheme to use produce from the spaces and allotments**, including Burscough Community Farm, for the benefit of those experiencing food insecurity.
6. **Enhanced links with the local agricultural sector** to improve the supply of affordable, locally grown food to those experiencing food insecurity.
7. Work with local communities and retailers to **promote and encourage use of available third-party waste reduction approaches** such as the OLIO app, which enables free distribution of perishable foods to divert from landfill.

The costs of delivering these potential opportunities and the benefits that would be delivered are summarised below.

Costs of the potential opportunities

The costs of the specific opportunities cover any capital and revenue costs associated with developing the options. Table 8 summarises the costs associated with the delivery of each of the seven options presented above. In terms of capital costs, it is assumed that most of the options could be delivered from existing premises with minimal capital investment. This would include the sharing of some capital items e.g. transport. In terms of revenue costs, the cost of staff has been calculated and where volunteer hours are required, these have been valued using the national living wage (NLW). This is for information only, to highlight the important role that the voluntary sector plays in delivering the options.

The table shows that option 1 would, potentially, be the most costly option as we suggest it will require an additional employee and, given the need to drive the initiative forward, it is assumed the role would require a relatively experienced person. However, it is the option that most directly addresses the underlying causes of food insecurity rather than providing solutions to food insecurity and the benefits, presented in Table 9 reflect this.

| Table 8 - Summary of requirements to deliver options and potential costs | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Option | Requirements | Potential capital costs | Revenue / In-kind requirements |
| Option 1 | Rapid response service providing early intervention. | Based WLBC offices. | One FTE - £37,500 (including employers NI, pensions etc). Assumes basic salary of £30,000 to reflect relatively senior role required to oversee the service. |
| Option 2 | a. One additional foodbank access point, possibly Burscough. b. Extended foodbank hours, additional 6 hours per week over evenings and weekend | a. Outreach by existing foodbank, using existing premises in Burscough or another northern village. Will require use of a vehicle for collection / distribution to site. | a. Open 4 hours per week, drawing from pool of 10 to 15 volunteers. Assume 3 to 4 volunteers per week. Approx. 20 volunteer hours per week equivalent to £9,300 p.a. at NLW. b. Evening hours: 2 hours, twice a week. Weekend hours: 2 hours. Draw from existing volunteers. Approx. 25-30 volunteer hours per week equivalent to £13,900 p.a. at NLW. |
| Option 3 | Community food shops. Potential to link to Ormskirk and Skelmersdale foodbanks. | Use of premises, linked to foodbanks. Use of vehicle for collection of produce. | Assume membership model at £5 per week. Open 3 hours twice a week drawing from 15 to 20 volunteers. Volunteer hours are valued at £7,400 p.a. at NLW. 1 staff member (8 hours) could liaise/co-ordinate with foodbank. Cost estimated to be approx. £4,000 p.a. |
| Option 4 | Provision of community café based on Café Birchwood model in Ormskirk or northern villages. | Use of suitable premises with catering facilities. | Income £3 per person, 35 covers per day, £10,500 p.a. Staff cost: chef (8 hours across 2 days) £4,200 p.a. Assume 10 volunteers for 3 hours each day at an equivalent cost of £27,800 at NLW. |
| Option 5 | Community growing spaces. | Identification of suitable green spaces. Possible investment in equipment. Use of transport for delivery of produce. | PT employee to: identify/ develop new sites; co-ordinate volunteers (who may be from vulnerable groups/GP referrals); liaise with foodbanks/community shops to distribute produce. Employee could also develop Option 6. Cost approx. £20,000 (including employers NI, pension etc) |
| Option 6 | Links with agricultural sector. | | WLBC & partners to develop links with local agricultural sector to improve the supply of locally grown food to food initiatives. Development of scheme could be part of Option 5 employee remit. |
| Option 7 | Promote waste reduction. | | WLBC & partners to promote use of third party food reduction Apps. Promotional material. Undertaken by existing WLBC staff. |

Options 2 to 4 provide access to food on either an emergency basis (Option 2) or at a reduced cost (Options 3 and 4). There are a small number of part-time hours involved in Options 3 and 4, but all three of these options are primarily delivered by volunteers. Options 3 and 4 each have estimated staff costs of approximately £4,000 per annum, but these are modest costs compared to the volunteer hours required to deliver the options.

Options 5 and 6 are related to growing initiatives and they could potentially share a part-time employee. Both options deliver locally grown produce and, while this should be encouraged, the volume of produce is likely only be able to make a small contribution to food insecurity. Option 5 however, has the potential to link into other local initiatives and has the potential to create volunteering opportunities for disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

Option 7 has no real costs as it is essentially the promotion of “food apps” which could be included in WLBC promotional material or through its website.

Benefits of the potential opportunities

All the options identified have the potential to help address food insecurity in Wets Lancashire. Option 1 is designed to directly address the underlying causes of food security by providing benefits advice, debt reduction advice etc. The other options provide access to food and dietary/lifestyle advice. The benefits associated with the opportunities are primarily assessed on a qualitative basis, through their contribution to strategic objectives. Drawing on the review of West Lancashire policy in Section 3 the following strategic objectives are considered relevant to the assessment:

- Financial Inclusion:
 - Enable partners, agencies and stakeholders to work together to deliver relevant and supportive financial inclusion services i.e. provision of advice or support to move away from poverty
 - Provision of emergency food or subsidised food to reduce reliance on foodbanks
- Health and Wellbeing:
 - Develop community food initiatives to provide:
 - Advice on growing/consuming healthy food
 - Access to healthier food
 - Contribute to improved mental health
- Social Inclusion:
 - Reduction in social isolation
- Sustainability:
 - Reduce food waste sent to landfill

The contribution to strategic objectives is assessed using a scale where a ★ indicates that an option delivers against the objective. The number of ★ represents the extent to which an option contributes to the strategic objectives with ★★★ representing the maximum contribution. Given that food insecurity is primarily driven by poverty and financial inequalities, the strategic objectives have been weighted; the delivery of financial inclusion services has been given a weighting of 2 in the assessment to reflect its importance.

Table 9 sets out the assessment of the contribution of the options to the strategic objectives. It is assumed that anyone accessing Options 2 (foodbanks) and 3 (community shops) will be referred to the financial inclusion services provided under Option 1. Option 4 is the only option which delivers against at least one objective within each of the four strategic objectives.

The options delivering the highest level of benefits are Options 1 (rapid response from services) and 4 (extending the community café model). These are closely followed by Options 2 (extending access to foodbanks), 3 (additional community shops) and 5 (community growing).

While delivering one of the highest levels of benefits, Option 1 also has the highest cost. However, it is an option which is seeking to deliver a longer term solution to food insecurity and for this reason, it is prioritised as a key initiative.

Option 4 scores highly on the assessment of benefits, but its contribution to the financial inclusion objectives is slightly less than Options 2 and 3 as its benefits derive more from the health and wellbeing objectives.

Options 2, 3 and 5 have the same benefit score but, as with option 4, Option 5 derives most of its benefits from the health and wellbeing objectives while Options 2 and 3 are very focused on providing immediate access to food.

| Table 9 - Contribution of options to strategic objectives | | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 | Option 4 | Option 5 | Option 6 | Option 7 |
| Financial Inclusion | | | | | | | |
| - Delivery of financial inclusion services (weighted x2) | ★ ★ ★ | ★ | ★ | - | - | - | - |
| - Provision of emergency/ subsidised food | - | ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ | ★ | - | - |
| Health and Wellbeing | | | | | | | |
| - Provide advice to grow/consume healthy food | ★ | - | - | ★ | ★ | - | - |
| - Provide access to healthier food | - | ★ | ★ | ★ ★ | ★ ★ | ★ ★ | - |
| - Enhance mental health | ★ ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ ★ | - | - |
| Social Inclusion | | | | | | | |
| Reduce social isolation | - | - | - | ★ ★ | ★ ★ | - | - |
| Sustainability | | | | | | | |
| Reduce food waste sent to landfill | - | ★ | ★ | ★ | - | - | ★ ★ ★ |
| Total contribution to objectives | 6 | 7 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 3 |
| Weighted contribution to objectives | 9 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 3 |

6 Conclusions

This comprehensive study provides West Lancashire Borough Council and partner organisations with valuable information on food insecurity in West Lancs. It presents robust evidence on the nature and extent of food insecurity in the Borough, including up-to-date evidence regarding the impact of Covid-19. It also mapped and assessed the support that currently exists to tackle food insecurity in West Lancashire which helped identify potential opportunities to develop support further in the future.

Using national evidence, the study estimated that approximately 4,600 households in West Lancashire experienced food insecurity prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, including approximately 1,300 households that experienced severe food insecurity. The situation has undoubtedly worsened during the pandemic with national evidence suggesting the numbers experiencing food insecurity and accessing foodbanks increased by up to 90%. The study found that the chances of being food insecure were higher among low-income households, lone-parent households, single working-age adult households, renters particularly social renters, unemployed people, younger people aged 16 to 24, and people affected by ill-health. Foodbanks have become the most recognised means of supporting people experiencing food insecurity and national figures suggest, prior to the pandemic, 2% of UK households had used a foodbank, the average number of foodbank visits over a year was 2.6, and the profile of foodbank users was broadly similar to those experiencing food insecurity. The main reason people are referred to foodbanks is linked to the benefits system, with other important drivers identified as debt, addiction, challenging life experiences such as eviction or divorce, adverse work-related experiences such as losing a job or reduced hours, ill-health or a disability, and a lack of informal support from friends and family. Locally, over 4,100 people were fed by Skelmersdale and Ormskirk Foodbanks in 2020, including over 1,700 children. This was an increase of 37% from 2019 with a greater number of families with children seeking help during 2020. Evidence was also presented that food insecurity tends to lead to a less healthy and nutritious diet which can be associated with a range of physical and mental health issues.

The study identified a range of initiatives nationally to try to address food insecurity including emergency food parcels/foodbanks, community food shops, community kitchens and cafés, community growing projects, and support to develop practical cooking skills. Our mapping exercise established that all of the above exist in West Lancashire to varying degrees. Key support includes three established foodbanks that provide emergency food parcels, the innovative Café Birchwood and other community cafés, three community food shops including the Village Food Hub, and a network of welfare support providers. The mapping exercise also highlighted gaps including a concentration of support in Skelmersdale and to a lesser extent Ormskirk, as well as limited co-ordination between services to join-up support to tackle the root causes of food insecurity.

Looking to the future and trying to address food insecurity in West Lancashire, the study identified a number of opportunities at the national and local levels. Although national issues such as welfare reform and income maximisation are beyond the remit of WLBC and local partners, they have the potential to make a significant difference to tackling the underlying causes of food insecurity and we recommend partners continue to lobby for action. In the absence of such fundamental change, food insecurity is likely to continue and WLBC and partners are therefore encouraged to act on the other opportunities identified during the study and

presented in section 5 of this report to improve co-ordination and the delivery of support to people experiencing food insecurity in West Lancashire. An assessment of the costs and benefits of the potential opportunities suggests that a proactive, co-ordinated, rapid response from services that ensures anyone experiencing food insecurity in West Lancashire is effectively supported to tackle the root causes of their food insecurity has the potential to make the greatest impact.

It is hoped the findings of this report assist West Lancashire and partner organisations with their continued efforts to tackle food insecurity in West Lancs.

Appendix

Food insecurity

For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was OFTEN true, SOMETIMES true, or NEVER true for your household in the last 12 months.

1. “We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.” Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES, or NEVER true for you in the last 12 months?
2. “The food that we bought just didn’t last, and we didn’t have money to get more.” Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES, or NEVER true for you in the last 12 months?
3. “We couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” Was that OFTEN, SOMETIMES, or NEVER true for you in the last 12 months?
4. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in the household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals, because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
5. (If yes to question 4) How often did this happen - almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only one or two months?
6. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should, because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
7. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry, but didn’t eat, because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
8. In the last 12 months, did you lose weight, because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
9. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day, because there wasn’t enough money for food? (Yes/No)
10. (If yes to question 9) How often did this happen - almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only one or two months?

Destitution

People were defined as destitute if they lacked two or more of the following six essentials over the past month because they could not afford them (the ‘destitution on essentials’ criterion), or their income was so low (less than £10 per day for a single person after housing costs) that they were unable to purchase these essentials for themselves (the ‘destitution on income’ criterion):

1. Shelter (have slept rough for one or more nights).
2. Food (have had fewer than two meals a day for two or more days).
3. Heating their home (have been unable to do this for five or more days).
4. Lighting their home (have been unable to do this for five or more days).
5. Appropriate clothing and footwear.
6. Basic toiletries (soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush).

Source: Sosenko F, Littlewood M, Bramley G. [A State of Hunger. A study of poverty and food insecurity in the UK](#). The Trussel Trust: 2019.