

What can community food initiatives do to support cash-first approaches to food insecurity?

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Introduction

This paper is for those working with or within community food initiatives (CFIs) in Scotland and who use community-led approaches to support access to – and take-up of – affordable, nutritious and sustainable food.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many CFIs extended or began food aid services to support vulnerable people in their communities¹ and meet their immediate food needs. But many CFIs are working together with charities and agencies to develop longer-term solutions to food insecurity and poverty by adopting cash-first or income maximisation approaches.

This paper outlines the benefits of using cash-first approaches, what CFIs are already doing to use or promote these, and ideas on how to join with others locally to support this work.

Why support cash-first approaches?

Effectiveness

Providing people with cash or income maximisation support instead of food aid is more dignified and can reduce stigma. It means that people have agency: they can buy what they need.²

Food aid activities only reach a portion of people who are food insecure: UK surveys show higher levels of food insecurity compared to the number of people using food banks.³ CFIs provide a wide range of activities within low-income communities so may be able to reach people beyond those solely seeking food aid.

Food aid is not sustainable – food aid organisations report they are struggling to meet an increase in demand.⁴

Health and social impact

Food insecurity is associated with poorer diets and unhealthy weight as a lack of money may have an impact on diet quality and nutritional intake.⁵

Food insecurity can have a negative impact on mental health: people who are food insecure have higher levels of anxiety and depression. It also impacts people's ability to source food in socially acceptable ways or join in with the social aspects of food.⁶

Poverty is a key driver to food insecurity and has a negative impact on health. Children born into poverty are more likely to experience a wide range of health problems, compared to children from affluent families.⁷

Supports Scottish policy outcomes

Cash First: Towards ending the need for food banks in Scotland. The aims of this plan are to prevent food insecurity using actions that will strengthen incomes and reduce the cost of living and respond to food insecurity by using emergency financial assistance, money advice and the use of holistic services.

The **Good Food Nation Act** was passed in 2022 and will require public bodies to produce Good Food Nation plans, which must have regard for a range of factors, including social and economic wellbeing and tackling child poverty. A **consultation** on this plan closes on 22 April 2024.

The upcoming **Human Rights Bill** plans to incorporate the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into Scots Law as far as possible within devolved competence. Within the treaties intended for incorporation are included rights such as an adequate standard of living, which includes adequate food and housing. The right to healthy and sustainable food has been proposed as a substantive aspect of the right to a healthy environment as protected by the Bill.

Best Start, Bright Futures is the Scottish Government Plan to address child poverty up to 2026.

Ending destitution together is the Scottish Government's strategy to improve support for people with no recourse to public funds living in Scotland up to 2024.

What are CFIs doing already to support cash-first approaches?

Many CFIs support cash-first approaches. Here are some examples.

Signposting to money advice

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)'s 'Worrying about Money?' leaflets are available across Scotland and are distributed by, among others, CFIs, community groups and food aid providers. The step-by-step guides help people who are food insecure or unable to afford food and support workers to find local agencies best placed to help maximise income and access any existing entitlements. The leaflets are available in a range of formats and free printed copies can be ordered from IFAN for local distribution.

Local groups have collaborated with IFAN to co-produce individually tailored leaflets across the UK. For example, in Glasgow, the **Glasgow Community Food Network** worked with IFAN and other local organisations to co-produce Glasgow's 'Worrying about Money?' leaflet. The network continues to support the community food sector to adopt cash-first approaches across Glasgow.

The Faith in Community **Dundee Community Food Network's** online community food map includes information about money and housing advice alongside its information on food banks, community meals and food growing projects.

Opportunities and challenges

Providing a leaflet or online information can help raise awareness of services but keeping it up to date may be challenging. Some people may prefer more tailored, additional support.

Access to money advice

CFIs are sometimes part of wider community organisations or development trusts that run both CFIs and other activities led by the community. This may include money advice services.

Cranhill Development Trust runs a community shop, post office and a community garden. It also has its own welfare advice worker to support people with benefits advice and forms.

The Ripple Project in Edinburgh runs a wide range of food initiatives, including a community café, a lunch club, a pantry distributing surplus food and a weekly fruit and veg market. It hosts Granton Information Centre's benefits, money and debt advice outreach service each week as well as running its own financial wellness project. Over one year (2022–2023), the financial gains recorded for 181 clients at the Ripple Project was £217,212.34 (an average of £4,432.90 per client with a financial gain recorded).

Opportunities and challenges

Hosting established money advice services will help ensure a professional service in your community, but some money advice services may have limited capacity to offer such outreach support.

Providing emergency cash or vouchers

Some community food providers and CFIs provide cash or vouchers to give to people who are food insecure or experiencing crisis.

Govan Community Project supports asylum seekers and people who have no recourse to public funds who have fewer options to engage in a cash-first approach. The project received funding to pilot providing this community with supermarket vouchers using partner organisations to reach a wide range of people. The partner organisations said this helped them to engage with individuals and offer them other services, such as English language support.

The Alexandra Rose Charity runs the Rose Vouchers for Fruit and Veg project, which provides vouchers for families on a low income to buy fruit and vegetables from local suppliers. It runs the project in eight areas across the UK, including Glasgow. A range of community organisations and the Thriving Places Project deliver the project. The work has been supported by Glasgow City Council and the **Thrive Under 5** project.

Opportunities and challenges

Vouchers and other short-term cash payments are more dignified compared to receiving a food parcel, but they will not tackle the causes of poverty. Providing money advice alongside vouchers or cash payments can help maximise people's income in the longer term.⁸

Accessing funding for vouchers to distribute as an alternative to food aid is challenging, as those that donate may be reluctant to provide money for vouchers instead of food.⁹ However, a Trussell Trust review of cash-first approaches shows that 'misuse' of cash payments is low.¹⁰

Community groups may not be able to hold or distribute cash.

People in rural areas may have problems redeeming supermarket vouchers if the supermarkets are not nearby.¹¹

Ongoing funding is required for vouchers or cash.

Providing holistic support

Many CFIs offer a range of services to address issues beyond people's food needs.

Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) delivers a wide range of food services and uses these to engage with, support and work with people facing wider issues. People accessing emergency food can request financial and benefit advice through the SAFE (Support, Advice, Finance, Education) team. A £1.06m financial gain was achieved in 2022–2023 with an average of £4,165 per person. Additionally,

CFINE's employability courses, the training kitchen and community food growing, all support skills development and offer routes to volunteering and employment.

Central and West Integration Network (CWIN)'s activities include supporting people in Glasgow who may have no recourse to public funds. CWIN runs a wide range of holistic and person-centred services and activities to help reduce the cost of living. It runs the Food Hub (which runs like a pantry) and provides culturally relevant foods and fresh fruit and veg. It hosts community meals, cooking groups and offers food-growing activities. It also provides English language classes, employability support and activities that bring people together to address isolation and support wellbeing.

Opportunities and challenges

Many community organisations develop organically in response to community needs and funding opportunities. Not all CFIs will have the resources or capacity to develop a range of services to provide such wrap-around support.

Involving local people with shaping services

Whatever cash-first approaches are delivered, knowing that these fit people's needs is crucial.

Greener Kirkcaldy ran its 'Choice First' pilot for six months for 14 households considered to be food insecure in 2022. It was a partnership between Fife Council's Putting People First project and Kirkcaldy food bank. Choice First provided shopping vouchers alongside a range of holistic services from Fife Council's Putting People First Team (community learning and development, community social work and housing) and Cosy Kingdom energy advice service based in Greener Kirkcaldy, and other partner services. Greener Kirkcaldy used feedback from this pilot group to adjust how it ran its second pilot project 'Your Choice'. This resulted in the vouchers being redeemable in a wider range of shops and providing these at a lower value but more frequently. The pilot project found that ten households out of the 14 involved in the Choice First pilot used the money advice services and as the result were better

off by an average of £138 per month each. People reported that engaging with services over a six-month period gave them enough time to move from 'day to day survival' to feeling more financially stable and better equipped to manage their circumstances.

Where else can you get support?

Learn from national initiatives

Nourish Scotland leads the **Dignity Peer Network**, which supports CFIs and community food providers to share practice with peers, including issues about poverty and cash-first approaches.

The Trussell Trust is running a pilot financial inclusion project until 2025 in six areas across Scotland (Orkney, Dundee, Aberdeenshire, Perth and Kinross, Glasgow and North Lanarkshire). The project will support increased access to advice services for individuals; test and learn what works to develop these advice services, and to roll out this advice and cash-first approach more widely. The Trussell Trust also runs a **Pathfinder programme** across the UK. This programme focuses on testing different approaches locally to reduce the need for food banks.

Make use of training and resources

IFAN's website has information about training to support the use of its 'Worrying about Money?' leaflets. Training is tailored to each local authority area and is available on an ad-hoc basis to help support people from a range of sectors including NHS, local authorities and community groups, to be confident in using IFAN's resources and speaking with people about money worries. IFAN has an **online form** to register interest in its training. IFAN's website has a range of resources and infographics which outline the benefits of moving away from a charitable food aid response to poverty including a reliance on surplus food.

The **Public Health Scotland Child Poverty Learning Hub** has online resources about child poverty in Scotland, including the drivers of poverty, stigma, the impact of poverty on health and actions to address it.

The **Improvement Service** website has information about how money advice services operate, including about the standards that must be met.

The **MATRICES learn** programme provides training funded by the Scottish Government and is delivered by Citizens Advice Scotland and Money Advice Scotland for people who plan to give professional debt advice for free.

Training may also be available from local third sector money advice and guidance organisations, health boards and local authorities.

Link in with local policies and plans

Public sector bodies such as local authorities produce a wide range of plans and policies. Although these might not specifically mention cash-first approaches, these will indicate what the local priorities are around food and/or poverty and may provide local contacts. Here are a few plans and policies that may offer opportunities for local links.

All local authorities and regional health boards must produce joint annual **Local Child Poverty Action Reports** (LCPAR), which describe activity undertaken locally to address the drivers of child poverty and outline future planned activities as part of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act.

For example, the **Perth and Kinross Council LCPAR** describes providing funding to community organisations over the 2022–2023 winter to support local communities with access to warm spaces and community food. All funded organisations provided signposting to other services and support. Letham4all, one of the larger third sector organisations, was supported to install PayPoint, to support cash-first options.

Local Community Plans or Local Outcome Improvement Plans or Food Growing Strategies may also refer to community food activities, food insecurity or poverty and cash-first approaches.

Join in with referral pathways

Many local authorities in Scotland provide or contract others to provide money advice services and all local authorities administer emergency funding, such as the Scottish Welfare Fund. CFIs or community organisations can have a role in linking people with relevant referral pathways.

For example, **Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership** (LCFHP) is part of the **North Lanarkshire Food Poverty Referral Gateway**. Community organisations such as food banks or LCFHPs refer people to the local authority Financial Inclusion Team who can either help people to access money advice including about the Scottish Welfare Fund, and other services such as housing. The Financial Inclusion Team will in turn refer people to an emergency food aid service as a last resort. The LCFHP's role is to provide a link between the Gateway and community food providers and other CFIs.

Referral pathways for healthcare services

In some areas, NHS health services such as GPs and maternity and health visitors services are working with third sector or local authorities to refer people to money and welfare advice providers.

For example, **NHS Tayside, Public Health Tayside and midwifery colleagues** worked in partnership with the Angus Council Welfare Rights Service in 2019 to launch the Angus Midwifery Pilot Project on Financial Inclusion. The financial inclusion referral pathway supports midwives to routinely engage in meaningful discussion with parents on financial concerns they are facing and to refer as appropriate to the Angus Welfare Rights Service.

Infant food insecurity pathways

In late 2022, **UNICEF** developed a guide for local authorities and health boards across the UK promoting cash first as best practice within infant food insecurity pathways. It provides guidance to CFIs and community food providers and identifies the vital role these organisations have with engaging with families in need.

To support work to respond to and prevent Infant food insecurity, the Scottish Government have developed an **Infant Food Insecurity toolkit** to support cross-sector teams within local health boards and local authorities to ensure there are robust and accessible routes for parents and carers struggling with food insecurity to feed their infants. The aim of the toolkit is to provide a supportive resource to aid local agencies, frontline workers and volunteers in supporting families with infants with money worries, including those who are struggling to afford infant formula, before and at crisis point.

NHS Grampian and its three local authority services (Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Moray) have developed their own specific 'Infant feeding in a crisis' referral pathway. The aim of the pathway is to use a cash-first approach to support health professionals to provide timely assistance with emergency first-stage infant formula, food insecurity, and further support to maximise the family income of clients. For example, NHS Public Health Grampian has formed a direct partnership with Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) to support health visitors, midwives and family nurses to refer both breastfeeding and infant feeding parents and carers to the relevant support services. CFINE will organise a cash-first payment for first-stage formula where appropriate; provide support with food insecurity and membership of the CFINE Pantry; the CFINE Support, Advice, Finance and Education Team (SAFE) will carry out a full financial check-up with the family and will provide ongoing support as required. Where a family do not consent to being referred, health professionals leave a copy of the Aberdeen City Money Worries leaflet.

Access to Crisis Funding (Section 22 and Scottish Welfare Fund)

Section 22 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 sets out the local authority's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in its area who are 'in need'. Help can be given under Section 22 either in cash or in kind.

Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership has developed a referral pathway under the use of Section 22 payments of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, by health visitors and Family Nurse Partnerships, ordinarily only authorised by social work, to give

families in extreme hardship ready access to a crisis payment for families with young children. This could include the purchase of infant formula if the family required it but is not solely for that purpose.

There are two types of **Scottish Welfare Fund** grants, dependent on the individual's circumstances – a crisis grant or community care grant. These can be applied for through the individual's local authority and are dependent upon eligibility criteria.

Join other relevant networks or partnerships in your area

Around half of Scotland's local authority areas have become or are working towards becoming **Sustainable Food Places** (SFPs). SFP partnerships focus on ensuring healthy and sustainable food is available by joining up work across the food system. Tackling food poverty is an important part of this work.

The Glasgow SFP's **City Food Plan** includes actions to coordinate 'advice first and cash-first' principles across Glasgow to help it transition away from food-aid referrals. This will be achieved by training frontline staff to increase their awareness of advice agencies, crisis grants and referral processes across the city.

Food poverty or poverty networks are established in some areas. For example, **Edinburgh Community Food** hosts 'Menu for All', a food poverty network joining food and support access across Edinburgh, working with strategic partners, people with lived experience and community.

Summary

CFIs are already doing inspiring work to meet the needs of their communities and ensure they have dignified access to good, affordable food. By joining up with others locally and nationally there are opportunities to take action to address poverty in the longer term by supporting cash first, income maximisation or more holistic services.

Glossary

Community Food Initiative (CFI)

CFIs are usually third sector organisations that work with or within geographic communities or communities of interest to grow, prepare, supply, sell and/or share affordable, nutritious and sustainable food. Food may be central to the work of CFIs, or it may be used to meet aims such as tackling isolation or supporting community cohesion. Within this, Community Food Providers is a general description for organisations that deliver food aid in some format. The [Community Food and Health \(Scotland\) website](#) has information about how a variety of initiatives operate.

Food aid

Food aid is any type of food provision activity that aims to provide relief from the symptoms of food insecurity and poverty.

Cash first

A response to food insecurity that prioritises financial drivers of crisis. The Scottish Government's definition is about providing ready access to emergency income when someone has no money for food. To prevent future hardship, this should be delivered alongside welfare rights and income maximisation advice. Access to holistic support services, such as those that support financial, health, social and cultural needs, can also help address wider issues.

Pantries

Dependent on individual interpretation and geographic differences, this term covers a range of models – these are also known as social supermarkets or larders. Pantries offer access to low-cost food and may be open to all or have a membership criterion. Members often pay a few pounds at each visit to choose a specific number of food

and household items. Pantries are traditionally stocked with surplus food, but many now aim to use other sources and may provide other more holistic services.

Surplus food

Many community food initiatives and pantries receive surplus food from redistributors such as Fare Share. Redistributors collect food from supermarkets or producers which would otherwise go to waste and redistribute this to charities. Other ways to access surplus food can include using food sharing apps and linking directly with local supermarkets, producers and community growing projects.

Holistic support services

The Scottish Government's definition focuses on joining up services that are centred around wellbeing through meeting the whole needs of an individual or household, including services that meet financial, health, social and cultural needs.

No Recourse to Public Funds

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) is a condition that applies to people who are subject to immigration control under UK immigration law. It restricts access to certain public services and benefits. Public funds are defined in the UK immigration rules.¹²

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