

## Cabinet (Resources) Panel

17 March 2021

<b>Report title</b>	Supporting people who need us most by providing 500,000 meals to our City's food banks	
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Ian Brookfield Leader of the Council	
<b>Key decision</b>	Yes	
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	Ross Cook, Director of City Environment	
<b>Originating service</b>	City Environment	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Crissie Rushton	Visitor Economy Manager
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<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	City Environment Leadership Team	2 March 2021
	Strategic Executive Board	4 March 2021
	Leader's Briefing	8 March 2021

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### Recommendation for decision:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is recommended to:

1. Approve the allocation of £450,000 to deliver a further 500,000 meals to our most hard-pressed families in the City, as part of a wider package of support to our food banks to support people who need us most.

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek agreement to continue to support those who need us most in our city during the pandemic by funding a further 500,000 meals for city food banks to distribute. This twelve-month support plan builds on the wider package of emergency assistance put in place by the council to support our most vulnerable residents.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated levels of household food poverty and insecurity across the city and the UK, with many residents finding it much more difficult to financially or physically access vital food supplies. The current economic downturn is likely to continue and exacerbate conditions, affecting job security, household incomes, the welfare system and the demand for food aid.
- 2.2 The City of Wolverhampton Council has prioritised supporting the city's most vulnerable during the last twelve months of the pandemic and, through its *'Relighting our City'* recovery roadmap, has made this a priority moving forward. The principle at the heart of this work is: no-one gets left behind.
- 2.3 In terms of specific support to city foodbanks, The City of Wolverhampton Council has been providing emergency assistance by funding weekly food parcel deliveries since the start of the pandemic.
- 2.4 Between March 2020 and February 2021, the council provided a total of 850,000 meals to a number of city foodbanks including The Well, Adventist Foodbank, Bilston People's Centre and Excel Church, Stratton Street Park Village and the Elias Mattu Foundation at a time when vital, much needed supplies were reduced during lockdown. Foodbanks were hit hard by coronavirus with many of their usual volunteers unable to help due to shielding, fewer donations and increased demand.
- 2.5 The support provided has been highly valued by our foodbanks who in turn have distributed meals through their wider community networks. Caroline Price, project leader at The Well, said: *"The weekly donation of the council food boxes have been a great support, not only to us, but to other projects we have shared them with."*
- 2.6 Building on this support, this report seeks approval to allocate an extra £450,000 from the Covid-19 Emergency Grant fund to continue this work for the rest of the 2021-2022 financial year, so that food banks across the city, can continue to support people who need us most.
- 2.7 By committing to supply vital food parcels for a further 12 months, the Council is guaranteeing support to those who need it most at a time when the city aims to recover from, and to an extent 'live with', the effects of the covid-19 pandemic. These are likely to include increased unemployment, poverty, anxiety and insecurity.

### **3.0 Wider support**

3.1 During the pandemic, the Council has mobilised its employees and worked with partners to look after our own through a number of other key projects including;

- Delivering more than 1.3 million meals across the city to those who need them most by setting up the Council's Food Distribution Hub, which saw officers redeployed from across the authority to deliver vital support to shielders and other vulnerable residents.
- The Food Bank Forum, which brings together the experiences of the food banks and their communities to pursue new and creative ways to support each other.
- The Winter Grant Scheme, focussing on children and households who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing poverty as a result of the pandemic. This project has supported with not only the cost of food, but also energy costs for heating, cooking and lighting, water bills and other essentials. Fresh produce and culturally diverse food options were also supplied to our food banks. The project has successfully supported 12,690 applications, supported Care Leavers to live independently, and worked with over 20 partners, including Wolverhampton Homes.
- The Council stepped in on the eve of the holidays and supported over 5,000 families with Free School Meals during October half term 2020 through a mixture of food parcels direct to their door and vouchers to ensure that their children didn't go hungry over half term.
- The Holiday Activities and Food Programme will deliver activities across the Easter, Summer and Christmas Holidays for those eligible for free school meals, committing to deliver 4 hours a day, 4 days a week 6 weeks a year. This project will enable the children to eat more healthily, be more active and be more engaged with other local services during the holidays.
- The 'Kindness of Christmas' Crowd Funding Campaign donated over £10,000 to the City's Food Banks
- The One City Fund 'Feeding Our City Crowd Funding Campaign' raised over £27,000, which was shared between the Food Banks taking part in the Food Bank Forum and other food projects across the City.

### **4.0 Moving forward - taking a longer-term view**

- Alongside this continued supply of food parcels for Food Banks we will; Establish a new food distribution working group to help coordinate food supply work streams across the organisation and the relations with food banks.
- Establish several pathways of food support tailored to differing needs.
  - Ensure provisions are easily accessible

- Appropriate to diverse communities
- Engage partners, to ensure that residents have access to vital services to help them back onto their feet through support around employment and digital poverty.

## **5.0 Financial implications**

- 5.1 From the early days the Council considered evidence when drawing up a response to the pandemic to ensure that the right response was delivered at the right level to support the residents of the City.
- 5.2 The cost of the support detailed in this report totals in the region of £6.3 million funded from one-off Government grants. In addition, the council mobilised its employees, at an estimated cost of over £900,000. Crowd funding campaigns have also raised £37,000 to support our food banks.
- 5.3 This report seeks approval to allocate an additional £450,000 from the Covid-19 Emergency Grant fund to support the delivery of a further 500,000 meals to our most hard-pressed families in the City, as part of a wider package of support to our food banks to support people who need us most.

[AS/09032021/O]

## **6.0 Legal implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications from this report. If the Council enters into any contracts these will need to be authorised in accordance with the Council's Constitution and relevant legislation

[TS/08032021A]

## **7.0 Equalities implications**

- 7.1 Food is a key aspect of culture and of religion, so it is covered by the Equality Act 2010. It is consequently important that any plan for food provisions going forward to be able to fulfil relevant culturally based requirements of the food that a diverse city like Wolverhampton will have at various of the outlets from which the food will be available.
- 7.2 Key components of this will be vegetarian and vegan options as these food requirements can amount to a belief as described by the Act. If at any stage in the future meat were to be supplied, then there would also be additional religious requirements of it e.g. Halal and Kosher options.
- 7.3 The Council's offer also needs to protect and support disabled people with serious and potentially life-threatening allergies - for example those who are gluten or lactose intolerant, where this is clearly a requirement rather than a choice of any kind.
- 7.4 Considering the local ethnic diversity of the area around an outlet and discussing with local management food items in demand at a facility will also improve the offer and its impact in diverse and vulnerable communities.

**8.0 All other implications**

8.1 The Council has committed to support the people who need us most throughout 2021 by continuing to support the City's Food Banks, with emergency food parcels for the City's most hard-pressed families.

**9.0 Schedule of background papers**

9.1 None.