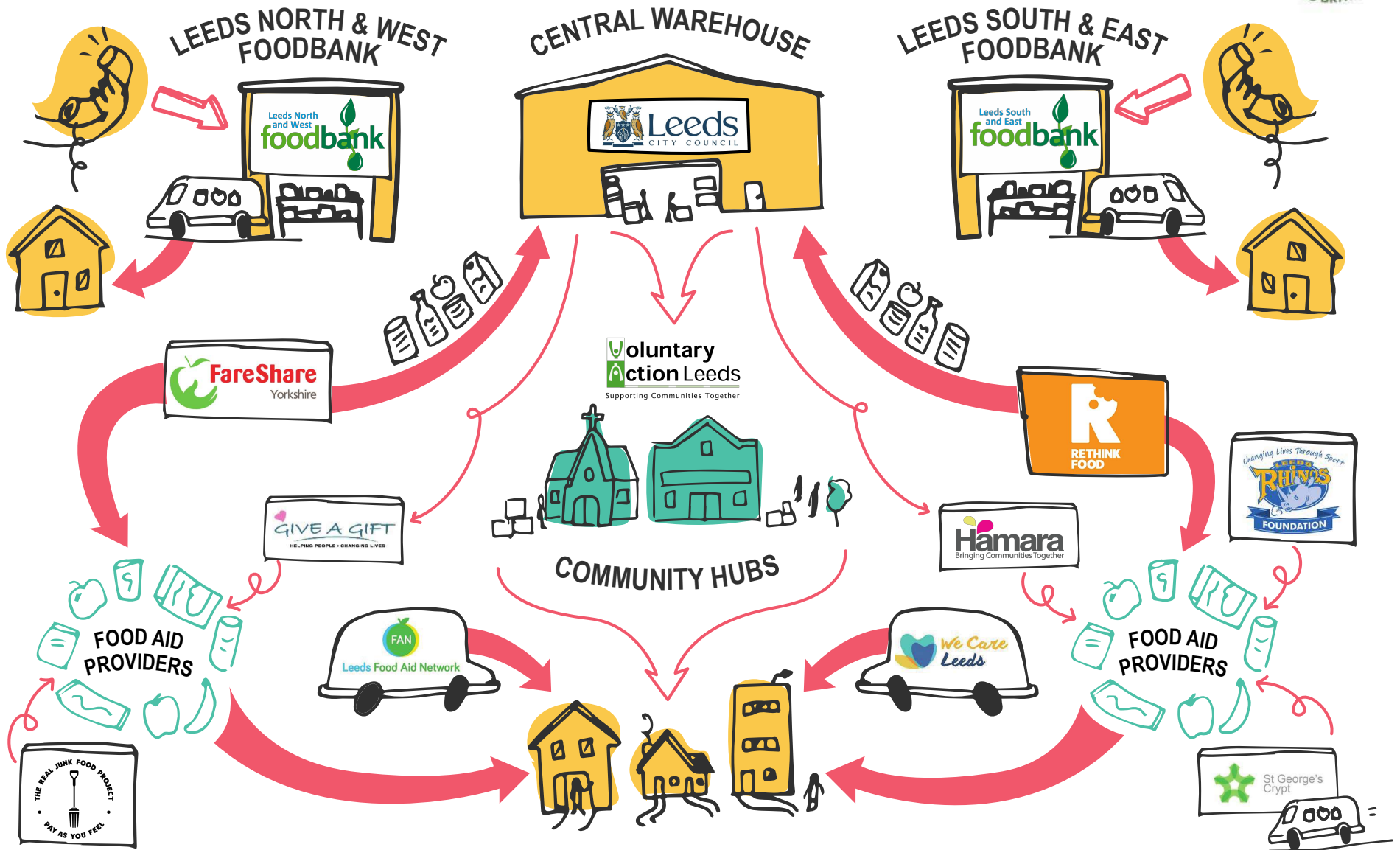


# LEEDS PANDEMIC FOOD INSECURITY RESPONSE



## LEEDS FOOD INSECURITY PANDEMIC RESPONSE

This document has been put together to provide a summary of the important work, carried out in the city of Leeds to tackle food insecurity during the Coronavirus Pandemic. We start by remembering what a challenging time some people had, who suffered from the virus and therefore this report begins with a brief reflection from someone who experienced both food insecurity and the Coronavirus itself.

### Story of lived Experience from someone with long Covid-19 symptoms

One lady, who was given support by a range of food aid providers and agencies stated how difficult it was physically when they caught the virus and suffered from long Covid19 symptoms. This meant they became out of breath on a frequent basis. Due to low income, they requested help with food support on a number of occasions during the pandemic. In the busyness of everything that was happening volunteers and staff would knock on the door but the vulnerable person wasn't always well enough to answer in time so food would be left outside. On more than one occasion a neighbour would take the food away leaving the person without a food parcel. There is no attempt to criticise staff or volunteers who dropped off food and lessons were learnt as time went on but we share this to keep our eyes open to the suffering some have experienced, due to the pandemic and the consequences many people went through when getting a bad dose of Coronavirus.



John Casey from Leeds South and East Foodbank speaks at Leeds FAN meeting in late January 2020

Since 2014 Leeds has had a vibrant Food Aid Network (FAN), which has involved important contributions and collaborations from a broad range of food aid providers, key food distributors, agency workers, debt / welfare advisors, the city Council and has also been connected to the cities Healthy Holiday Provision. Gatherings would happen quarterly where different topics would be presented on and discussed and these would be worked on by coordinators and participants in between meetings including: developing effective signposting tools; enabling the effective distribution of food to take place across the city with specific work happening with FareShare Yorkshire and Rethink Food; the development of on location support where debt / money advisors sit in at food providers to help vulnerable people navigate money issues; annual data collection on food aid usage; engagement with MP's; promotion of healthy Start Vouchers and helping to establish healthy holiday activities.

## TIME TABLE OF ACTIONS IN THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT

**Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March** - The Prime Minister announced major restrictions for the UK in light of the spread of the Coronavirus.

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March** - Around 30 people from the Council, UPA / FAN, Trussell Trust, FareShare Yorkshire, Rethink Food, Voluntary Action Leeds (VAL) and Leeds Community Foundation virtually gathered together on Skype to plan how we could revamp the existing food part of the welfare support scheme, share information on existing provision, start a new temporary delivery food parcel scheme and ensure that there was provision for school children if schools closed.

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March** - The first Food Parcel Delivery Scheme was started with the charity We Care Leeds working with the Leeds Food Aid Network to receive referrals and deliver food parcels across the city. An Email was sent out to over 300 workers who could then ring or email in and a delivery would be made to vulnerable people's houses. Other forms of food aid provision continued simultaneous to this activity and We Care Leeds developed its own referrals using social media.

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March (Daytime)** lunchtime provision for Schools started as they were now closed. Lunch bags were provided at schools due to be collected by parents and children on free school meals. This then developed to offering hampers that would last a week and the offer of a food voucher was developed.



**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March (Evening)** @ 8pm the Prime Minister announces a full Lockdown in the United Kingdom.

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March** – The Governments everyone in scheme is announced and 6 hotels are used to provide shelter for the homeless. Efforts are made from across the city to coordinate lunch packs and hot meals to the hotels involving the Council and St George's Crypt.

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March** the revamped welfare support scheme started. The original model pre pandemic involved food banks / parcel providers working with FareShare Yorkshire to provide food parcels following a phone call from a worker or vulnerable person to the scheme's helpline. The new model involved vulnerable people being able to call 2 helpline numbers run by the council; then a large central warehouse, operated by LCC and supported by FareShare Yorkshire and Rethink Food, was used to pump food around the city, utilising 27 makeshift Coronavirus Care Hubs supporting 33 wards.

**In Early May** the Leeds South and East, Leeds North and West and Wetherby Trussell Trust Foodbanks moved to a citywide delivery food parcel scheme, which was run in partnership with a Citizens Advice helpline, which people could use to request assistance. British Gas provided vital van driver support at the start to transport food to where it was needed as well as important driving contributions from volunteers. This worked well from a city perspective as the We Care Leeds / FAN delivery scheme disbanded at the same time, so the setting up of a new delivery model meant the city always had 2 delivery schemes operational from March 2020 until the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lockdown in summer 2021.

## COMMUNITY CARE HUBS AND CENTRAL WAREHOUSE

The major thrust by which the city supported people was the citywide Community Care Hub scheme which was based on the original welfare support scheme model that existed pre pandemic. The scheme involved food being pumped into a large central warehouse in the East of Leeds by FareShare Yorkshire and Rethink Food as well as food being purchased directly by the Council in bulk through finance. Each Hub would receive referrals from the council, who themselves had received either agency or self-referrals for people in need of food, medical supplies or a befriending call. There were 2 phone lines used, one was the existing welfare support scheme helpline number and the other was a specific Coronavirus helpline. When a referral came through claimants would be split into a traffic light system putting them in one of 3 categories depending on need:

**Red** – This was for people in urgent need and they would be put forward to receive a direct delivery of food to their house from a van driver who would take food from the central warehouse directly to their home.

**Amber** – Referrals would be sent on to 1 of the Community Care Hubs who had their own allocation of food, which they ascertained both locally and from the Central Warehouse. They would source a food parcel and arrange delivery or collection for the person in question.

**Green** – This category was for people who could afford to pay but were self-isolating / house bound. People could receive shopping through a voucher scheme where a referral would be sent to a Community Care Hub; a volunteer would be assigned, who would receive an electronic voucher; which would pay for desired food items; they would then take them to the persons house and the person in question would be contacted by the Council to pay for the purchased shopping a few days later.



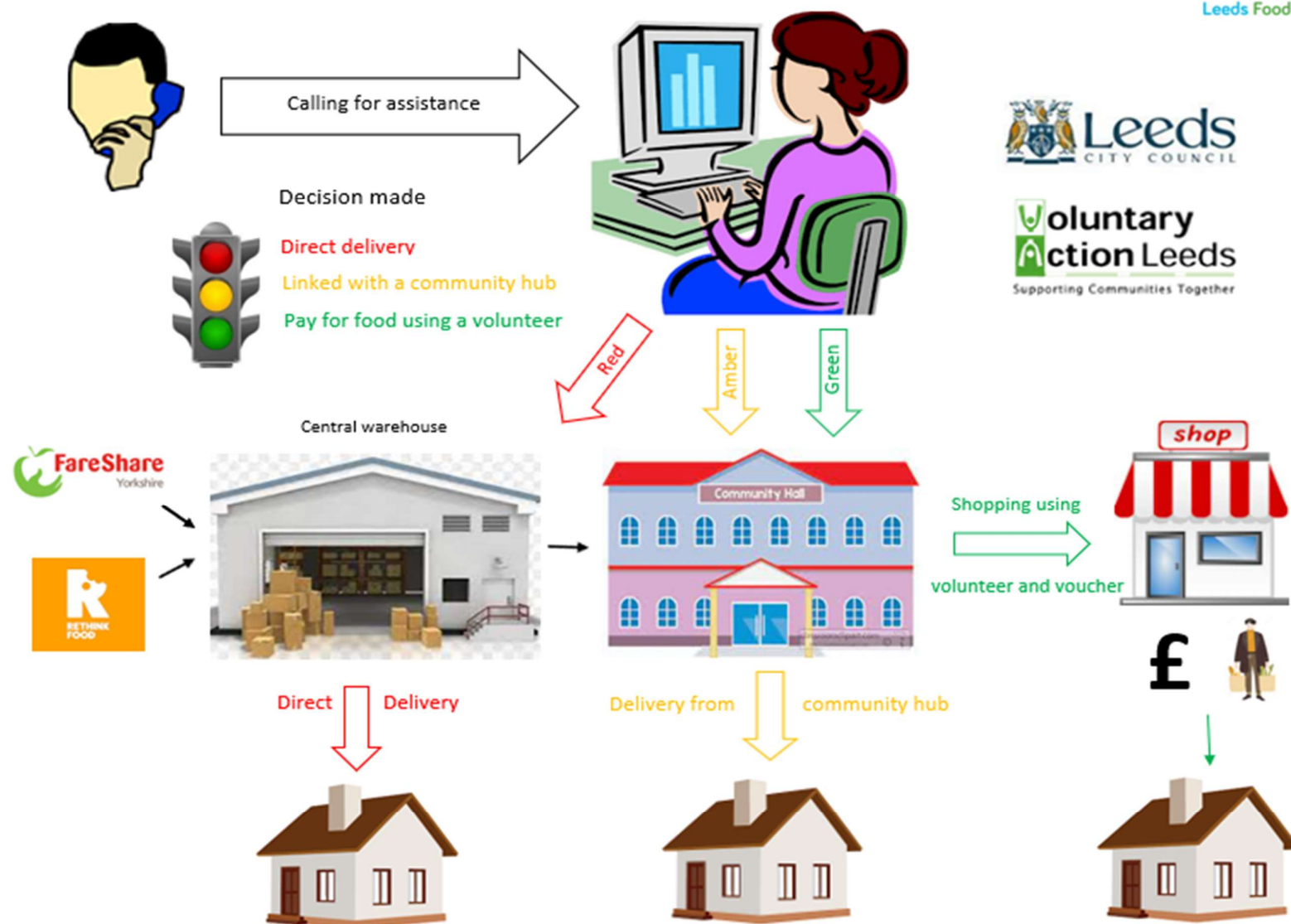
Over 23 weeks in spring and summer of 2020, the Covid 19 and LWSS service helplines recorded over 19,400 enquiries. These resulted in almost 25,000 referrals for services such as food parcels, help with shopping, medicines and essentials, help with fuel, shielding / self-isolation support and welfare checks. It is estimated that almost 63,000 food bags have been distributed by the Emergency Food Service in Leeds which have been made up into 33,900 food parcels over the whole 23 weeks from the end of March to the end of September. The Community Care Hub welfare Support Scheme model ran intensely before slowing down towards late summer 2020. It then continued from late September time without the main central warehouse being used to supply food and instead FareShare Yorkshire would be responsible for providing hubs with supplies from a new location just outside the city centre. Please see diagram of Community Hub Model on page 5.

### Key points of analysis: ESTABLISHING 27 COMMUNITY CARE HUBS

through Churches such as Pudsey Parish Church and agencies such as Catch Leeds, Helping Hands, Hyde Park Source with Rainbow Junkion, Touch Stone and Slung Low meant that because they were part of one joined up scheme, working towards set guidelines of good practise, there were less issues with independent food providers setting up sporadically as many of them became incorporated into this city wide hub scheme. The scheme accounted for an estimated **106,185 FOOD PARCELS** been given out between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021. These were often allocated on a more informal basis. *See Diagram on the next page.*



# Coronavirus Community Care Hub Model



## COMMUNICATION

Weekly Council calls were held from March to August 2020 and then continued on a more fortnightly / monthly basis until May 2021. The first Zoom Food Aid Network meeting took place in May 2020 and these continued every other month until the end of March 2021 involving a range of food providers, agencies and council workers. A range of presentations were given updating on the current situation and looking at the challenges ahead. The breakout rooms facility on zoom was used to good effect to improve participation. In certain areas local WhatsApp groups were set up e.g., Harehills to help with the sharing of information, especially around food supply and a number of areas developed localised meetings on Zoom e.g., Headingley, Hyde Park, Woodhouse and Little London.

[See front page diagram for an overview of citywide operations.](#)  
[See back page for a summary of initiatives who took part in all activities.](#)

## Reflections from Voluntary Action Leeds (VAL) on Community Care Hubs

In March 2020, in response to the covid pandemic, 27 different community organisations covering all 33 electoral wards of Leeds mobilized to form the network of Community Care Hubs. They were representative of a wide variety of organisations in the city, from older people's organisations, youth projects, arts, environmental and faith groups.

Voluntary Action Leeds acted as a central point of communication and volunteer coordination for the mobilization.

Organisations had to react quickly, redeploying staff and redirecting their services. Within a week of lockdown being announced hubs were receiving their first referrals from Leeds City Council Welfare Support Line.

Requests could range from dog walking to prescriptions collection, taking someone a food parcel or putting their bins out for them. Another vital service that hubs offer is telephone befriending,

we saw a high demand for this service, especially in wards with larger older populations.

And it wasn't just the immediate need that hubs stepped up to meet. As lockdowns eased and people began to return to their usual activities there were many community members who had lost the confidence to use public spaces and buildings. Hubs then adjusted their offer to provide volunteers to visit supermarkets with people, show them how to wear a mask properly or wipe the trolley down. Helping people with these first steps back to independence was vital for many people whose access to food was limited, not just because of financial difficulties but through lack of confidence too.

Throughout 2021 hubs gradually shifted from a reactive to proactive approach. Many hubs have worked with local partners to form food pantries or social supermarkets offering local people access to cheap, healthy food. In a recent survey one of the hubs conducted in their area, over 50% of respondents said they use the food pantry because they would otherwise not have enough food to eat. The use of surplus stock redirected from landfill is a vital source of food, organisations such as FareShare, Re-Think and The Real Junk Food Project provided a significant amount of the food that was distributed through hubs.

Very quickly in the pandemic response it became evident that cultural food was far more difficult to source than other food types. Typically dried goods with long sell-by dates are less likely to find their way into surplus stocks. Leeds City Council recognised this gap in provision and in May 2020 worked with Hamara Health Living Centre, the African Community Centre (Little London) and Give a Gift to provide hubs and other partners with culturally appropriate food for the diverse communities of Leeds. This project has also supported lots of small grass roots groups working with different diverse communities to help ensure these communities had equal access to appropriate food.

Nearly two years on from the initial response and hubs are looking to wind down the offer of immediate help via the welfare support line as numbers of referrals coming in has dropped significantly from the

days of peak lockdown. But the legacy of the hubs continues, one hub commented that 'in the first 6 months of the Community Care Network we made connections to communities and organisations that it would have otherwise taken 5 years to build'.

Those partnerships and the learning will continue in the form of the Community Anchor Network.

Hubs who have signed up to be a community anchor will act as a local hub which aims to ensure that local communities are supported to thrive, as outlined in the Characteristics of a Thriving Community. See - <https://doinggoodleeds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Characteristics-of-a-Thriving-Community.pdf>

#### Reflection from Hamara's Cultural Food Hub – 2020 - 2021

Hamara noticed the need for culturally appropriate food parcels at the start of the pandemic and carried out a research exercise with the 5 main ethnicities city wide. These were the African, Caribbean, South Asian, Middle Eastern and Eastern European communities, and soon established that the food parcels they were receiving were not in accordance with their needs. Simultaneous to this similar calls on cultural food were made by the African Community Centre based in Little London, who were also involved in providing cultural food at the start. Through further research key staple foods for each community were identified and from the findings the city devised culturally appropriate food parcels that were distributed within the

#### Key achievements

**30,254**

Number of families supported/total number of parcels distributed

**30**

Number of organisations Hamara is providing support to through this project

community. Hamara were then selected by Leeds City Council to be the Cultural Food Hub of South, North and West Leeds. Give a Gift would cover the East of the city.

Through this project we supported over 30 grassroot organisations per week by providing them with 30-60 culturally appropriate food parcels which they would then distribute within their communities to the most vulnerable. The demand increased weekly and the area and communities that we served increased with this.

In addition to the cultural food parcels, we also provided support to these organisations by:

- Forming a network of community organisations who meet monthly to discuss best practise, funding opportunity and partnership possibilities.
- Provided fresh food which included fruit, veg, refrigerated and frozen food and meat.
- Toiletries
- School uniform
- Support to tackle digital poverty.



Pics from Hamara

## Rainbow Junkion (Hyde Park / Headingley / Woodhouse and Little London)



**Rainbow Junkion** pre pandemic was a café run in partnership with All Hallows Church. On the 16th March 2020 we closed our doors as a cafe and switched to takeaway only. As the level of need in our community became clear we started giving out food to cook at home too and opened our doors 3 days a week as a foodbank and takeaway. We quickly realised that people needed more than food and within a couple of months we had fresh, frozen, tinned and dry food plus toiletries, cleaning products, baby products and clothes.

We partnered with Hyde Park Source and Oblong to become a community care hub for two wards of the city and soon were doing 20-30 deliveries every day (so 60-90 a week) to people unable to come to us because of isolation or other issues.

Between March 2020 and July 2021 we were giving out between 2000-4000 'plates' of food each month and seeing around 600-800 individual visits to the foodbank per month. We also added a signposting service during this time as many of our customers were facing multiple problems and accessing services had become difficult due to the pandemic. The feedback we got was both heart

breaking and affirming and we know we kept many people in food throughout some of the hardest months of their lives.

## FOOD DISTRIBUTORS (FURTHER INFO)

### FareShare Yorkshire and work in Leeds during the pandemic

**FareShare Yorkshire** has had an established food redistribution provision in the city since 2013 and operating from a shared warehouse with Leeds South and East Foodbank. Working with around 80 Leeds based community groups weekly deliveries of surplus food were well established. When the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 came round it was immediately clear that the scale and complexity of food need in the city would need a new solution and innovative thinking. By the end of March 2020, a new 35,000 sq. ft warehouse was kitted out and swiftly swung into action with Leeds City Council, FareShare Yorkshire, Rethink food, Voluntary Action Leeds and partners coming together to ensure that no one in the city lost access to food. A project that would normally have taken months of planning was operational and supporting residents within days.

Working with our national partner FareShare UK and the UK Government funding for food, purchasing was secured. Over the period from March 2020 to June 2021 food was sourced, sorted and redistributed to 122 community groups totalling 1,142 tonnes. The legacy left from this work has resulted in FareShare Yorkshire opening a second storage HUB site in the city to enable food to be sourced in greater quantities and of the right type and quality to support future provision.



## Food Distributors Continued

### Rethink Food / Food Revival

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit the UK and we entered a nationwide lockdown, our programme was more vital than ever in supporting those in need. In a 16-week period from April to July 2020, over 400 tonnes of food was rescued and distributed to partners:

## 30 TONNES OF FOOD

were sent to Leeds City Council's central food distribution site at Logic Park

## 72 SCHOOLS

in Leeds and Bradford received a weekly delivery of food

## 30 COMMUNITY PROJECTS

collected food weekly from the warehouse to support vulnerable families and individuals.

## 180 FAMILIES

per week collected Revival Boxes

There were important contributions from **Real Junk Food Project** which was based in Wakefield but would support initiatives in Leeds. This was through their food boxes and by allowing initiatives to come and collect from both their base in Wakefield and at a rented venue at Stourton in South Leeds, which they would use when they had additional surplus.

## Purchasing Food



Purchasing of Food was used hugely during the pandemic and is sadly becoming more needed to manage the cost-of-living challenges that are emerging post lockdown

**St George's Crypt** and the **Leeds Rhino's Foundation** did a substantial amount in the first 6 months to distribute food to other food providers. The Leeds Rhino's Foundation worked with the Crypt to allocate food to where it was needed using the Crypt's supply to support other providers and vulnerable people. The Leeds Rhino's Van was used to transport food to different parts of the city including significant volumes that had been purchased by Feeding Britain using Morrisons, Brakes Food and His Church which would be transferred in to Rethink Food / Food Revival and then allocated across Leeds and different parts of West Yorkshire supplying food providers with good purchased non-perishable food. They also took part in other ventures including supplying snack bags to hotels where homeless people were situated.

**Give a Gift** – This charity was able to purchase food to significant scale and deliver food to both individual people who were in need of a food parcel and to organisations and groups who needed support with additional food. Whilst the Hamara Centre acted as the Cultural food Hub for South, West and the North of Leeds they covered the

East. Give a Gift became the Cultural Food arm in East Leeds supporting a number of different initiatives with culturally appropriate food including Neruka's Soup Kitchen, Catch Leeds and PAFRAS to name a few.

## CITYWIDE DELIVERIES

### We Care Leeds

We Care Leeds was established by the businessman Joseph Battle. Joseph's sister was living in Italy, who were around 2 weeks ahead of the UK in terms of the spread of the Coronavirus, so he knew what was coming and from the week starting the 16<sup>th</sup> March started operations. The partnership with Leeds Food Aid Network (FAN) led to over 700 referrals been completed plus over 2000 referrals were carried out through their own communications / facebook group. By far the most useful aspect of this initiative was it provided deliveries right of the start of Coronavirus restrictions, which gave the city a delivery option right at the beginning. The charity raised approximately £30,000 to buy food and managed to come to arrangements with Supermarkets such as Aldi to purchase stock. We Care Leeds ran from the Middle of March until the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and was a significant unique, unexpected, good asset to the city's Pandemic response.

### Trussell Trust in Leeds

Pre-Pandemic the Trussell Trust had 3 foodbanks with the Leeds North and West and Leeds South and East Foodbanks covering 20 outlets. When the pandemic hit around 70% of the foodbank outlets continued with some having to stop due to the reliance and vulnerability of older



volunteers. The red voucher system remained in place until the start of May but there were also people turning up at foodbanks without a voucher as it simply wasn't possible to get to an agency as they were physically closed due to the restrictions. On Monday May 4<sup>th</sup> the 2 large foodbanks, along with Wetherby foodbank went into a delivery model. Leeds South and East Foodbank had a central sorting distribution point concentrated at St Wilfred's Church in Halton and the Leeds North and West Foodbank had a central distribution point in Moortown, which later moved to Burley. Van Drivers from British Gas would assist with deliveries. A new E referral system was established where agencies could send in referrals by email and just as importantly vulnerable people could call a national Citizens Advice line which would then connect people in need with the appropriate TT foodbank in their area.

### Food provision with the Homeless community

A number of developments took place when the pandemic hit amongst initiatives working with the homeless. Those that operated from a building and were providing meals had to suspend activities and moved to deliver activities differently. St George's Crypt, which pre pandemic ran a 3-course meal for the homeless in Leeds City Centre moved to giving out food from the back door and then once the first wave subsided ran a chicane and pit stop model. This allowed service users to come in one entrance, work their way through a long corridor, stopping off for tea and coffee at one place and then food at the next before exiting out of a different entrance to the one they came in through. The Salvation Army in Leeds City Centre also had to change operations and began doing cooked meals from its location alongside distributing food parcels. There were around a dozen homeless groups operational out on the street before the pandemic. In March many stopped going out in the street and through discussions chaired through



the Homeless Charter agreed not to return to giving food out on the streets until August 2020 when infections had substantially reduced. In the meantime some groups started carrying out food parcel deliveries and Leeds FAN / Homeless Charter set up a system where snack bags could be distributed to 2 different hotels, which were accommodating large numbers of homeless people. These would be collected by the Leeds Rhino's Foundation from people's houses and taken to the different hotels. The Hotels were also supported throughout the lockdowns with meals made and delivered by St George's Crypt and in the first 6 months received additional food support from the Councils Central warehouse.



Leeds Rhino's collecting and delivering to hotels

From August 2020 guidelines were established but it's fair to say that it wasn't always easy working out what the Government guidelines were for street groups. Encouragement was given to not create gatherings on the street, especially during the 3<sup>rd</sup> lockdown when the new alpha variant was spreading. St Anne's Resource Centre, which had previously run a breakfast club for the homeless restarted operations in late 2020 allowing 4 people inside at a time. Then in April 2021 started to host different groups that had previously operated out on the streets. By June 2021 they were hosting Focus 4 Hope, Community Kettle, the Leeds and East Leeds Homeless Support Groups and West Yorkshire Hardship to cover 4 evenings of the week. One reflection from someone of lived experience called Stephanie (not real name) was how they felt they kept having to ask for food parcels during lock downs because there was no place to go and have a sit-down meal'. Once sit-down provision was re-established, alongside the increased new evening provision at St Anne's Resource Centre, Leeds had in place more sit-down indoor places to have a meal in the city centre than before the pandemic.

## Reflections of lived experience (Words taken from the Evening Post)

Andrea was 48 years old and had been shielding during the Covid-19 pandemic – stuck inside her one bedroom fourth floor flat in Burmontofts – due to health complications including anaemia and low immune system. She said coping with debt on just her monthly Universal Credit payment meant she has been forced to rely on hand – outs in times of desperate need – at least once a week during the early days of lockdown but now once or twice a month.

She said: 'just as lockdown was starting, I came out of hospital. I was really poorly and on medication. I had to eat to take my tablets. I got paid once a month, so it was hard trying to budget with that. Money is really tight. Because I've been in hospital quite a lot obviously the bills mount up. They keep adding £5 on top of them when I'm in arrears. I'm in a lot of arrears with bills'.

Andrea was referred to the foodbanks by an agency she is involved with. She said: 'If it hadn't been for them, I would have been starving. I wouldn't have been able to take my medication. I probably would have been really depressed – I suffer from depression and anxiety as well, so it's not a good thing not to be eating. I can send them a message and they put a referral in. They come to bring it and phone me and I go downstairs to the lobby and they leave it there. I go out and pick it up and bring it back in. They are brilliant. All the volunteers, the drivers – everyone. Just brilliant people. It's a relief, just knowing that it's there. It's the security. I've got no family or anything, so its knowing that I can get it'.





Key organisations such as Freedom for Girls, Baby Basics and Leeds Baby Bank played a decisive role in getting essential items to where they were needed.

**Freedom4girls** functioned from day one of lockdown, delivering period products to all who needed their support. Between the start of March 2020 and end of February 2021 they distributed 26,028 packs of period products to over 70 organisations supporting many vulnerable people during the lockdowns.

**The Leeds Baby bank** wasn't able to operate during the first lockdown but became active from late summer 2020 and continued through the rest of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lockdowns supporting families with babies and young children. Also, the project **Baby Basics** operated from St Pauls in Ireland Wood and was able to source a range of products for babies once the first Coronavirus wave had eased.

## ACCESS TO VACCINES

In early 2021 when the Vaccine roll out was taking effect participants of the Leeds Food Aid Network and the Leeds Homeless Charter were able to get access to vaccines remarkably quickly due to them being given key worker status. Leeds Forum Central were very helpful in linking Leeds FAN with vaccine workers in Public Health / NHS. Leeds FAN would then request that organisations send in a brief summary of the people they wished to get vaccinated and this information would be passed onto Public Health / NHS workers who would register the organisation or group and send through a link. Once they had the link, groups and organisations could get their staff and volunteers registered and vaccinated within a matter of days. One regional organisation started getting staff and volunteers from outside of West Yorkshire into Elland Road



Vaccination Centre, in order to get its workers vaccinated, as the system in Leeds was significantly quicker for key workers than it was elsewhere.

## OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN DURING THE PANDEMIC

On Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 schools closed for most children, with only those who were children of key workers or especially vulnerable able to access face to face education provisions. Schools then had a phased reopening from June 2020, and they stayed open until January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021, when they once again were closed to most pupils until March 2021.

The Council worked with a range of schools who had a partnership with Catering Leeds to provide all free school meal eligible children daily food support. Over the course of the pandemic, two different methods of distributing food were trialled, which were: Lunch bags that could be collected from the school by parents / guardians every day or weekly food hampers would be given. For schools who didn't work with Catering Leeds, they either worked with their catering firm to distribute food or provided vouchers to eligible children. This diverse model for operating free school meals in times of lock down worked well in catering for different families who had different needs and fitted well with Government guidelines.

There were some teething challenges in terms of how many people would present for lunch bags and there were occasions where schools had a surplus. They would often call other food providers to get them distributed to people who needed them. There were also challenges with the electronic voucher system at the start, which was a regional and national problem, with some not working on people's phones. However, these challenges were ironed out and lots of children on free school meals received good support. See diagram on the next page.





Lunch bags that could be collected from the school by parents / guardians everyday.



Food hampers given to last a week.



Vouchers given, often by phone, which enables food to be bought from a supermarket.

**Healthy Holidays**, which aims to tackle holiday hunger, inactivity and isolation through providing healthy food and fun activities to eligible children, has been running in Leeds since 2018. Schemes are run by schools, third sector organisations and council provisions, co-ordinated by Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation. In spring 2020, Leeds Community Foundation funded 31 community organisations to provide “Healthy Holidays Covid-19 Response” projects; these generally provided food parcels alongside a combination of online activities and activity boxes delivered to the doorstep. Activities varied with each project, and included sport, physical activity, creative arts, cookery, indoor/outdoor gardening and mental wellbeing support. Over the summer of 2020 schemes delivered by schools, community hubs and third sector organisations were a mixture of face-to-face provision and activity packs / online activities with food hampers.

In the Autumn of 2020 the footballer Marcus Rashford led a campaign to make sure that similar levels of food could be given to vulnerable children during the holiday periods all year round. During the October half term, a big campaign was launched and many businesses offered support. In Leeds this led us to improve our general communications strategy so that the public and businesses could donate food using the Leeds Food Aid Network website. In Autumn 2020 additional funding was agreed by the government. The council worked with all schools to provide a scheme for all Free School Meal eligible children, and a small number of children deemed otherwise vulnerable, over-all holidays from December 2020 to March 2022, funded by the DWP. Support was provided through a mix of food hampers and vouchers.

#### Data for Healthy Holidays inclusive of the extra provision in the 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown in Spring 2020

Activity Period	No. children & young people supported	No. adults supported	No. meals/ portions of food provided
<b>2020 Covid-19 Emergency Response</b>	<b>16,389</b>	<b>5,996</b>	<b>82,666</b>
<b>2020 Summer holiday</b>	<b>6,024</b>	<b>2,711</b>	<b>76,071</b>
<b>2021 Easter</b>	<b>3,822</b>	<b>2,343</b>	<b>31,746</b>
<b>2021 Summer</b>	<b>9,372</b>	<b>4,176</b>	<b>78,623</b>
<b>2021 Christmas</b>	<b>5,491</b>	<b>2,316</b>	<b>36,125</b>

## INDEPENDENT FOOD AID PROVIDERS

Many Food Aid Providers have been long standing for years and continued and adapted their work. **Neruka's Soup Kitchen, St Aidan's Church and Harehills Lane Baptist Church** worked together to supply each other food and all developed food parcel models where sometimes over 100 were given out in one afternoon, often supporting large families. These services were vital for Harehills as was the local community Hub run from Catch Leeds, particularly as they provided physical venues where individuals could go to rather than having to navigate the phone lines, which didn't always work for communities that had a large number of internationals, where English wasn't their first language. In addition to existing forms of food provision new forms of Food Provision did emerge including Chapeltown Youth Development Project in Chapeltown and the African Community Centre in Little London. Both have chosen to continue post lockdowns.



## Creativity

There were also creative acts of engagement such as **Gateway Church** in Woodhouse / Little London working with Caring Together, local Councillors and the local community Hub to provide 3 meals a day over 3 days to members of the



local community involving bread, cereal and milk been delivered on a Wednesday, combined with a cooked meal and then a cooked meal would be repeated on a Thursday and a Friday. The combination of 3 visits alongside food provided nourishment and a mental health benefit with people seeing someone face to face, socially distanced, 3 times a week.

## Love in a Box

Love in a Box started in March 2019 initially as a support line for refugees and asylum seekers with provision of clothes, toys for children, and limited food assistance. Parallel to this was the provision of hot cooked meals for people suffering from homelessness.



With the advent of the lock down in March 2020, our operations were scaled up significantly to meet the needs of our community.

We currently have 42 volunteers and growing.

## Key activities include:

- Preparation, packing and distribution of 65-70 hot meals as well as 'snack packs' every Saturday in Leeds City Centre for homeless people.
- Collection and management of a range of food and clothing donations.
- Opening of the food and clothing bank twice a week for local clients, with an average food parcel for a household valued at approximately £30. We are currently supporting 45 households.

A key aspect to Love in Boxes work has been to engage with stakeholders to ensure coordination of activities, but importantly to additionally advocate for the communities we serve, as they remain extremely vulnerable to the ongoing impacts of Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis.

We strongly believe in the importance of understanding the needs of the people and communities we serve in a comprehensive way, and the stories shared with us have continued to be a powerful motivator for our action. It helps us to tailor our services, plan and work towards sustainable packages of responses, while recognising the need for crisis relief. In this way, we hope to strengthen and add value to the city's approach to addressing food insecurity.

## FOOD ALONGSIDE OUTDOOR ENGAGEMENT

**Lighthouse West Yorkshire** is an expression of Church for marginalised people. During the first lockdown they did many food parcels for those they engaged with but realised things were not sustainable and their cliental were missing face to face interaction. During the summer of 2020 they started doing activities, both relational and spiritual in line with their Christian faith outdoors.

They would develop this alongside people receiving a take-out meal downstairs in the Crypt and they would have an informal outside Church service or interactive bible study sat socially distanced outside after eating. It was a creative way of bringing people together who often struggled with isolation. See Pic.



## PANDEMIC FOOD AID DATA

Food Aid Data	1 <sup>st</sup> April 19 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 20	1 <sup>st</sup> April 2020 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021
The number of times people accessed food bank / parcels by referral	41,606	61,137. increase of 47%
Food parcels given out informally by groups, orgs and hubs that are available to all	15,968	153,335. increase of 860%
Meals / Sandwich Batches	108,345	100,707. Decrease of 7%

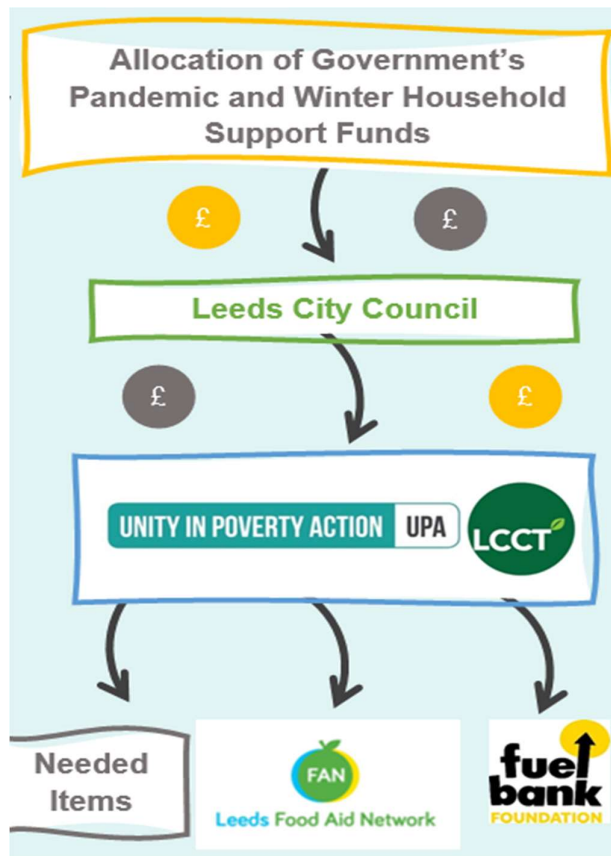
## ALLOCATING FINANCE - FINANCE





## Allocations for Food Providers

During the autumn and Winter months finance was released by the Council to support Grass Roots Food providers. £25,000 released in September / October and given out through the Leeds Food Aid Network in small grants. £100,000 allocated in January / February to assist food providers again and generating fuel bank vouchers which a small number of food providers could have access to. This has produced a healthy model to take on further finance as we enter the post lockdown era with a £150,000 being allocated through the Government's Winter Household Support Fund. The small grants are very much appreciated by food providers although we must be cautious in not losing site of the need for the Government to provide adequate provision for vulnerable people, so they don't need assistance in the first place. See diagram for allocation of finance.



## TOOLS THAT WERE DEVELOPED TOWARDS THE END OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup> LOCKDOWN

### Food Resilience Tool Kit

During the spring of 2021 a Food Resilience Tool Kit started to be put together by Foodwise to help assist those involved in tackling food poverty in the city. 3 meetings were held where presentations were given and consultations took place with those involved in tackling food poverty on the call. The tool kit encourages basic good practise in terms of giving food to vulnerable people, seeks to enable effective signposting in terms of where to connect people to deal with issues such as debt, welfare issues and finding work and encourages those who have been involved in pop up provision, in order to respond to the pandemic, to consider how they can progress forward in the medium to longer term. This includes the tricky topic of reducing ongoing food parcel support for individuals every week and requesting that those people seek to find nourishment through going to a community café if they need assistance on a regular basis. See tool Kit here - <https://foodwiseleeds.org/project/food-resilience/>

### Building Food Resilience Toolkit

From emergency and crisis support to creating pathways to independence.



## LEEDS FOOD AID MAP

During the pandemic the picture of food aid provision changed, new projects emerged, some projects changed the way in which they operated to continue support throughout the various restrictions and food businesses stepped up to provide some support. Leeds Food Aid Network, Leeds City Council and partners have been

working together to map food provision in the city. The Food Aid Network website now hosts a geographical map to show where projects and services are based in Leeds and can give further information including eligibility and if a referral is required.



This map is available at:

<https://leedsfoodaidnetwork.co.uk/document-2/>

The aim of the map is to help the public and partners to:

- Access food and other basic provisions
- Support signposting to food aid providers
- Understand the provision in the city
- Identify strengths and gaps in provision

## FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

As the lockdowns eased and have hopefully stopped for good the city of Leeds is in the process of developing new collaborative ways forward to support people in a state of food poverty. A summary of the current ways forward are:

- 1) **15 food Pantries** have been established where people pay around £3.50 to receive £15 worth of food a week. These are being run in partnership with initiatives such as Health for All and Your Local Pantry (Church Action on Poverty). This is deemed as a credible way of helping people reduce their reliance on foodbanks and crucially are being used by some community hubs and food providers to support people who were receiving weekly food parcels and now are asked to contribute to receive regular food donations. Key aims for the future are to put more wrap around support to help people deal with their money issues and to work alongside organisations such as Food Savers who partner with the Credit Union to help Pantry Users save money.
- 2) **A cash grants pilot** has run for 6 months, established between the Council, the Trussell Trust and Leeds Food Aid Network (FAN). This is based on the increasing desire to see cash used to help people through a crisis rather than the giving out of food and we hope this can be rolled out to benefit many more people in the city of Leeds and ultimately see food bank and food aid usage reduce.
- 3) **Healthy Start Vouchers** have increased in value to £4.10 per child to access healthy food and a funded worker is in place in Leeds to assist in developing the circulation and uptake of these vouchers.

- 4) Different options around people accessing **Fuel Vouchers** are still being developed with the Local Welfare Support Scheme, Debt Advisors and participants of the Leeds Food Aid Network (FAN) all having access to Fuel Vouchers. One key partnership enables Food Providers to link with the Fuel bank Foundation and make referrals via them to benefit many on Pre-Payment metres.
- 5) Money Buddies have been working with foodbanks as they have started to reopen and in 2022 they are looking at a major strategic partnership with the Trussell Trust to have debt / money advisors in different Trussell Trust Outlets to offer good on location support and advice.
- 6) Partnerships with FareShare Yorkshire, Rethink Food / Food Revival will be key to assisting with the distribution of surplus food across the city.
- 7) A New Flyer has been developed run in partnership with the National Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) called 'Worrying About Money' and is being circulated across the city to different agencies and food providers with the main aim of intervening before people get to a food provider.
- 8) Healthy Holiday Provision will continue over the city benefitting 5000 children with food run alongside activities and benefitting from the Department of Education's funding to support this. The city will continue to work with the government to encourage the release of funding to support food vouchers on top of activities.
- 9) Since this document has been put together the war in Ukraine has started and inflation has reached high levels. The hub infrastructure has moved into 19 Community Anchor roles and these look set to continue with the support of national

government finance to help with the purchasing of food. National finance, through the Household Support fund will also be made available in small grants to other food aid providers to help meet the growing need and the purchasing of food looks set to be a new reality for some time.



Hope Food Pantry in Halton Moor with Worrying about Money Flyers

## CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNT

The city of Leeds achieved a strong response to the challenges of food insecurity during the lockdowns / restrictions that followed from the outbreak of the Coronavirus Pandemic. As our report shows this was achieved through establishing citywide delivery schemes early in the pandemic alongside the creation of a citywide hub model connected to a large central warehouse. We learnt that key partnerships between those locally connected and food distributors, who could prime pump food around the city was crucial to meeting this need. Secondly, the purchasing of food through additional finance, often made available via national and local Government, was crucial in keeping the supply of food moving to where it was needed. This combination of mobilising citywide food distribution mechanisms to local provision is a model that needs to be outworked in any crisis and the purchasing of food to increase supply to support existing provision is also crucial in managing a crisis. Sadly, the current cost of living situation means that making finance available to purchase food is still going to be vital to support many food providers.

2 key differences to highlight between the pandemic and the cost-of-living crises is that firstly there was more of a need to deliver food directly to people's accommodation in the pandemic and secondly much of the purchasing of food in 2020 was focused on resourcing the Council and Food Distributors (FareShare Yorkshire, Rethink, Hamara and Give a Gift). As we hit the 3<sup>rd</sup> lockdown financial resources started to be distributed more directly to food aid providers in order to resource their infrastructure and to help them purchase food. Due to this process already been in place towards the latter half of the lockdowns there is already an infrastructure in place now and we are developing how to effectively allocate finance from the Governments new Household Support Fund to support providers, in order to manage the cost-of-living challenges.

In terms of specific work with children then we learned that offering choice re: how vulnerable families can access free school meals from home then offering a mixture of pick-up packed lunches, delivered food hampers and the option of accessing a voucher was a good way of dealing with a situation where children / families had to isolate. The city has experienced the benefit of more regular funding to resource more Healthy Holiday activity from the Department of Education but there are concerns re: the fact that free school vouchers / meals have not continued during the holidays and larger numbers of children and families are missing out. We must work with politicians to make sure all children are catered for in the holidays.

Learning how to develop effective communication links using modern technology such as Skype, Teams and Zoom has been really important. The different virtual gatherings allowed for the stories of vulnerable individuals to be relayed back and new ideas to be developed such as the establishment of the intercultural food Hub to cater for specific dietary needs. In addition, we have learnt that the overall effort from the city could not have happened without strong pre-existing networks, which were there before the pandemic. The Councils relationship with the third sector and in particular their connection to participants of Leeds FAN and Voluntary Action Leeds was both crucial during this pandemic and will be crucial in meeting the needs re: the cost-of-living crisis. In addition, one of the most inspiring aspects of the food insecurity response in Leeds was how many people from the community gave time / energy to help distribute food locally. This combined with the cities infrastructure that was often able to support this local passion was something to be valued and needs to be modelled again in future and present crises.

Finally, one of the key lessons learnt is that the city of Leeds must continue to adapt and learn how to balance providing for the immediate needs of supporting people who find themselves in a state of food and general poverty (by providing food aid) and alongside this we must work with politicians locally and nationally to help tackle the under lying causes of food poverty. Whether it be a stronger safety net, better jobs with secure hours, cash grants / fuel vouchers instead of food, or establishing robust food pantries where people pay a small amount, we must work together to deal with both the immediate and longer term needs of people who do not have enough to eat.

# A HUGE THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO PLAYED THEIR PART INCLUDING:

St Vincents Support Centre    Leeds North and West Foodbank    St Aidan's Church    Cross Gates & District Good Neighbours Scheme

Leeds Baby Bank    St George's Crypt    Streetwise    Salvation Army Hunslet    Slung Low

Harehills Lane Baptist Church,    Sikh Sport UK    Leeds Black Elders    Leeds African Community    Vulnerable Citizens Support

Moortown Baptist    Leeds Homeless Street Angels    Citizens Advice    St Hilda's Church    Horsforth Community Aid Project

Caring for the Homeless    Hidden Homeless    Church of Nazarene,    Morley St Pauls Church    Groundworks (Morley)

Leeds South and East Foodbank    Otley Action for Older People    St Mary's Church    East Leeds Homeless Support Group

Leeds Grand Mosque    All Hallows Church Leeds    Leeds Rhino's Foundation,    British Gas,    Give a Gift,    Catering Leeds

Chapeltown Youth Development Project    Rothwell Live At Home    Life Café    Hyde Park Source    Rainbow Junktion

Help Hughie's Homeless Outreach    North Church    Leeds City Council    AVSED    Fareshare Yorkshire    ReThink Food

New Wortley Community Centre    OPAL    St Martins Church    Focus 4 Hope    Voluntary Action Leeds    Helping Hands Armley

LS14 Trust    Touchstone    FareShare Yorkshire    West Yorkshire Hardship    Leeds Mencap    Hope and Partners    Barca

Pudsey Parish Church    Homeless Leeds Support Group    Moor Allerton Elderly Care    Soup and More    Neruka's Soup Kitchen

Bramley Care Bears    Roundhay St Edmunds    Gateway Church    Bridge Community Church    Hawsworth St Mary's Church

Otley Foodbank    Wetherby in Support of the Elderly    Homeless Hampers    InterACT Church and Community Partnership

Wetherby Foodbank    Garforth Net    Salvation Army Central    St Matts Leeds    St Hilda's Church    Kirkstall Valley Development Trust

Love in a Box    Connecting Crossgates    St Edmunds church    Trussell Trust    PAFRAS    CATCH Leeds    Involve

Meeting Point Cafe    St Anne's Resource Centre    Holbeck Foodbank    Hamara    Oblong    Salvation Army Morley

UCKG Help Centre    Foodwise    Leeds Food Aid Network (FAN)    Lighthouse West Yorkshire    Drighlinton Methodist Church

Healthy Holidays Provision    Helping Hands Homeless    Leeds Community Foundation    We Care Leeds    Baby Basics

Leeds Refugee Forum    Freedom4girls    St Matts Church    Women's CIC (Burmontofts)    Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Community

**All of these initiatives were involved in either direct provision, which vulnerable people could access either by being signposted / referred to them or these initiatives were involved in the wider infrastructure which supported those on the frontline. This document was produced by the Leeds Food Aid Network (FAN), with support from volunteer David Smith and designer Verity Moon.**