



## Food Access and Covid-19

### Note for Local Authorities

#### Coronavirus and Food

Across Wales there are significant differences in life expectancy between those in the least deprived areas and most deprived areas, within Local Authorities. Diet, both in terms of food options available and food consumed, has a part to play in this life expectancy. **The Covid-19 crisis will exacerbate this and it is important to act quickly to support households in our city.**

As a result of the pressure exerted on the food system from demand (panic buying), availability of resource (staff and volunteers) and closure of public services (e.g. children accessing Free School meals, day centres for older adults) there are three main challenges, which urgently need to be addressed:

1. People being unable to afford food in crisis
2. People who are unable to access food (self-isolation, service closures etc.)
3. Local food businesses unable to open (having knock-on effects on food supply, workers' income etc.)

#### First Steps

**Local Authorities or Public Services Boards should set up a Covid-19 Food Response Group to ensure a joined-up approach to providing food across the area.**

**Local Authorities should provide at least one full-time dedicated staff member to lead the Council's role in ensuring residents can access affordable healthy food during this crisis.**

Other council representatives could include: Education, Sustainable Development, Welfare & Money Advice, Parks, Economic Development, Adult Social Services, Child Services

Recommended external representatives could include: Public Health, Dietetics, Health Boards, County Voluntary Councils, Business representatives, Food Aid and Food Distribution organisations.

#### Following Recommendations

##### **1. Utilise facilities to produce and deliver food**

Support the public and private sector to work together to utilise public and private facilities e.g. schools, hubs, hospitality and food production capability and transport infrastructure to produce and deliver meals or "grab bags" to those in isolation should be explored. Keep public-owned markets open as long is safe to do so.



Welsh Government have confirmed that Local Authorities will be responsible to arrange school provision for key workers and food for Free School Meal recipients. Councils should make every effort to provide a balanced diet, for example following [Healthy Packed Lunch](#) guidance.

## **2. Provide quality advice to the public**

Ensure the Money Advice teams continue to offer a quality service with up to date information on food-related benefit schemes and support for families to maximise income. Adapt certain services (e.g. food bank voucher referrals) to provide equal access to those self-isolating or unable to leave the house.

## **3. Maximise use of land for food growing**

Fresh fruit and vegetables is the most at-risk category of food due to a high reliance on imports<sup>1</sup>. A recent study by the University of Sheffield found that converting just 10% of domestic gardens and 10% of available green space in the city, as well as maintaining current allotment land, could provide produce '5 a day' for almost 90,000 people<sup>2</sup>.

Local Authorities could bolster local food production by:

- Ensuring allotments remain open during social distancing measures and shutdowns (*at 24/03/20 visiting allotments is included in permitted exercise*)
- Identifying and advertising land that could be used for growing or farming
- Allocating space and staff resource in parks for larger-scale food growing

This could be supported by a campaign akin to "Dig For Victory" for people to grow in their homes and gardens.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-statistics-pocketbook-2017/food-statistics-in-your-pocket-2017-global-and-uk-supply>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/sustainable-food/news/urban-land-could-grow-fruit-and-veg-15-percent-population>