

POVERTY



Newcastle City Council

Addressing food insecurity with VCS partners

During COVID-19, Newcastle City Council developed a joint response to address food insecurity alongside local voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners, schools and businesses. Initially over 40 organisations supported residents affected by food insecurity who had to self-isolate or were affected financially because of the virus. Food parcels, hot meals and essential items were provided, with food banks relaxing their criteria through the first wave.

Newcastle City Council and ConnectedVoice, the city's voluntary sector infrastructure organisation, set up a helpline for residents - "Citylife Line" where the majority of requests were for food and essential items. Citylife Line developed into the multi-disciplinary Welfare and Wellbeing Team, which established a proactive approach to supporting residents, addressing the causes of food insecurity, typically relating to poverty.

Originally, providing fresh produce in food parcels was a particular challenge. In 2021, the Welfare and Wellbeing team established a contract with the city centre Grainger Market to deliver fresh food parcels to residents, at an optional cost for those with means to pay. This partnership improved food quality and residents' individual agency, and supported local businesses trading during lockdown.

Newcastle City Council received a DEFRA emergency grant for food and essential items. This supported people with No Recourse to Public Funds due to their immigration status, homeless and rough sleeping communities, enhanced provision within the Early Help family support service and a grant scheme for VCS organisations. The Council provided resources and delivery drivers to support the VCS work and funded local membership of FareShare, the national food redistribution charity.

Newcastle City Council also supported free school meal entitlement during school holidays initially providing emergency support in October 2020, with partners including Newcastle United Foundation, then distributing grants through schools to alleviate the harms of 'holiday hunger'.

A Food Support Group was established as part of Food Newcastle, the city's partnership for Sustainable Food Places. This brought together many organisations supporting the food insecurity agenda and allowed them to work more closely together throughout the pandemic.

The strategic approach to food insecurity and its links to covid recovery will be led by the Newcastle Food Poverty Group. This is one of the theme groups for the Food Newcastle partnership and is chaired by Councillor Paula Holland, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.

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