



The Orkney Partnership
Working together for a better Orkney

A Dignified Approach to Tackling Food Poverty in Orkney - Recommendations for Action

Orkney Food Dignity Working Group
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Nick Hopkins Consulting

This report forms part of the Orkney Food Dignity Project, managed by Voluntary Action Orkney on behalf of the Orkney Food Dignity Working Group.



The Orkney Food Dignity Working Group reports to the Orkney Partnership's Community Wellbeing Delivery Group.

The group has been made up of:

- Representatives with lived experience.
- Age Scotland Orkney
- Citizens Advice Orkney
- Homestart Orkney
- NHS Orkney Public Health, and allied health professionals
- Orkney Charitable Trust
- Orkney Foodbank
- Orkney Health and Care- Chief Officer
- Orkney Housing Association
- Orkney Islands Council- Community Learning and Development, and Homelessness and Advice.
- Relationship Scotland Orkney
- Robert Gordon University
- THAW Orkney
- Trussell Trust
- Voluntary Action Orkney
- Westray Development Trust

If you have any questions about this report, please email enquiries@vaorkney.org.uk.

Foreword

Orkney is in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis which has the potential to plunge large parts of our community into a period of prolonged hardship.

Across the third sector, we continue to hear about the ever-harrowing choices families face, as households are forced to choose between heating and eating, parents skip meals to feed children, and the cost of transport becomes an insurmountable barrier to accessing services.

This is not a marginal issue. The research we have collated for this work suggests that one in ten people in Orkney are experiencing food insecurity every year.

This crisis requires urgent and immediate action from all sectors and services within Orkney. The purpose of this Recommendations Report is to provide a roadmap for this action.

Our work revolves around the value of dignity, which is about giving people choice and control in their lives. Primarily, this means joining our contribution to national efforts to work towards a system in which food poverty and the need for emergency food aid no longer exists. Achieving this vision means people having enough money in their pockets to afford the food they need, whether through increased incomes, or access to cash-based support when they experience challenging times.

Whilst this forms a critical tenet of the actions proposed here, we are aware that factors beyond our control, national and international, are likely to delay this reality.

Our report also considers the ways in which support services can provide choice and control; the actions we can take to ease the impact of rising cost of living locally; the progress which needs to be made to tackle the stigma around food insecurity and the steps we need to take to continue to sustain the incredible web of support that exists within our communities.

In the following months we will be producing an implementation plan to accompany this report, which will outline those who will be responsible for realising these recommendations and the resource required. We realise that food poverty does not exist in isolation therefore we must align this report's aspirations with those that are developed to address fuel poverty and child poverty

I am grateful for all those who took part in this process and proud of the breadth of recommendations we have created together, which provide a realistic route to change.

In particular, I would like to thank all of those who shared their own experience of food poverty in Orkney by joining our workshops. The contributions of Claire, Hilda, Jenny, Kath, and Taliah were invaluable and have ensured that this report is focused and meaningful to those for whom this work matters the most.

I look forward to seeing the progress we make in Orkney as partners, as we move forward with this vital work.



Gail Anderson

Chief Executive, Voluntary Action Orkney/Chair, Community Wellbeing Delivery Group

Introduction

Over the last decade public awareness of rising food poverty has grown and grown, with media coverage of the rising numbers of people accessing foodbanks, and high profile campaigns generating public and political debate and attention, both focused directly on the issue itself and as part of broader controversies around austerity, independence, the benefits system and Brexit.

The importance of access to food was brought home even more starkly during the pandemic, and the cost of living crisis that has followed has generated a widespread fear that over the coming years more and more people will struggle to feed themselves and their families.

Orkney has not escaped. One set of statistics from Orkney Foodbank captures the extent of change in the last three years alone. 900 individual food parcels were handed out by the foodbank in 2018/19, rising to 1,367 individual three day food parcels in 2020/21. Over 40% of parcels across that period went to children.

That rise in the demands on Orkney Foodbank leaves many of us discomfited, feeling that in a rich society like ours and in communities that pride themselves on being caring, people should not be left reliant on charitable help to meet basic needs, or worse still, unable to meet basic needs if they cannot access appropriate help.

This report sets out a series of recommendations developed by the Orkney Food Dignity Working Group for finding effective and dignified ways of meeting the needs of people in poverty, and specifically food poverty.

1 How this Report Has Been Produced.

This report was commissioned by Voluntary Action Orkney on behalf of the initial members of the Orkney Food Dignity Working Group, which reports into the Community Wellbeing Delivery Group of the Orkney Community Planning Partnership. The recommendations in this report draw on the insights gained from three phases of work.

The first phase, carried out by Edwina Lloyd and Meghan McEwen, resulted in the development of a 'Food Dignity Briefing Document'. From a review of national and local data and literature, as well as interviews with local stakeholders, this report explored some of the key factors driving food poverty in Orkney, set out key statistics relating to the issue, gave a brief overview of current local action to tackle food poverty, and made some initial recommendations for action.

The second phase of work, led by Nick Hopkins, invited members of the public to anonymously submit their experiences of food insecurity online and to join an online 'Community Conversation' to discuss the proposed focus of these recommendations.

The third phase of work, also led by Nick Hopkins, focused on the development of the recommendations within this report through four online workshops which brought together statutory and third sector organisations, as well as people with a lived experience of food poverty, who were remunerated for their time. All workshop participants were provided with a copy of the 'Food Dignity Briefing Document' and a 'Food Dignity Summary Deck' which included insights from the second phase. In the first workshop, participants agreed the core themes of this report. In the second and third, these themes were discussed in detail. A final workshop invited feedback on a draft of this report.

2 Definitions

Dignity

The Working Group's title emphasises Partners' commitment to the value of treating people with dignity when they are experiencing food poverty and food insecurity.

In practice that means the provision of services and support which:

- Treat people as they themselves would wish to be treated.
- Are non judgemental, welcoming and compassionate, and communicate respect.
- Seek to avoid stigmatising, or where possible, singling out people experiencing food poverty.
- Emphasise choice and control in the support provided, with a preference for cash first approaches where possible. This is particularly important for people on low incomes, who may experience restricted choice and control in their daily lives.

Food Poverty/ Food Insecurity

Food poverty can also be termed food insecurity. A household experiencing food insecurity is in an economic and social situation in which they have limited or uncertain access to food.

Food insecurity can be understood as being experienced on a spectrum of levels of intensity. At the less intense end, it involves people worrying about putting food on the table. As it becomes more intense, people are placed in a position of not always being able to afford/ access healthy food, and may start reducing their consumption. At its more severe end, people find themselves at risk of going hungry or facing making unacceptable choices, to heat or eat, or to eat and freeze.

3 Drivers for Food Poverty/ Insecurity

The increase in food poverty/ insecurity in Orkney is the consequence of both national and local drivers (These are covered in more detail in the Briefing Document¹.)

At a national level people in poverty have experienced a decade in which there has been tightening of access to benefits, reductions in the amounts paid for some benefits, and reductions in the real terms value of benefits which have not kept pace with inflation in some years. Scottish Government policy has mitigated only some of the most significant losses. For those in work, economic growth prior to the pandemic was only taking living standards for those on lower incomes just beyond levels seen before the late 2000s crash.

The pandemic, Brexit, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have all played their part in the triggering of the current cost of living crisis, the impacts of which will become clearer over the coming year.

People living in Orkney face particular challenges, which exacerbate risks of experiencing food poverty:

- The existence of an 'Orkney Premium' the higher costs faced by local people for food, energy and transport, particularly acute for residents living on the ferry-linked isles².
- Work available is often low paid, part time, casual and seasonal.
- Local housing stock, particularly in the social rented sector, is poorly insulated, hit by bad weather, and off gas grid.
- Lack of childcare facilities which prevents parents, and particularly mothers, from returning to work.

Those local and national drivers bear heavily on:

- The 19% of children in Orkney living in households with limited means, with levels above that average in North Isles and Stromness and South Isles³.
- The 31% of Orkney households already living in fuel poverty, and the 22% in extreme fuel poverty⁴.

¹ Orkney Food Dignity Briefing Document, E Lloyd, M McEwen, February 2022

² 'A Minimum Income Standard for Remote and Rural Scotland' Highlands and Islands Enterprise 2016

³ Work from Orkney Child Poverty Strategy Group based on DWP statistics

⁴ 'Scottish House Condition Survey: Local Authority Analysis 2017-2019' Scottish Government 2021

They result in 1 in 10 people on the ferry linked isles choosing between heating and eating and 1 in 14 on the Orkney Mainland⁵.

4 Triggers for Severe Food Insecurity

People's experience of food insecurity can vary across time. A number of triggers/ events can take people from a situation of worrying about not being able to feed themselves or their family, or not even having such a worry, to crisis/ severe food insecurity- actually not being able to do so adequately. People facing particular challenges in their lives may be less resilient to consequences of such triggers⁶.

Individuals are more vulnerable to these triggers when they:

- Have been living in poverty across the long term, leaving them with a lack of/ eroding existing financial buffers.
- Experience or have experienced mental health problems/ long term ill health/ addiction problems, or are disabled.
- Live as the only adult in a household.
- Have caring responsibilities.
- Are in debt.

Those triggers may involve:

- Benefit issues; including non/ underpayment, repayment of overpayment, loss of entitlement, sanctions, and the wait for initial/ increased Universal Credit payments.
- Unexpected bills.
- Loss of employment.
- Household changing events triggering a loss of income; bereavement, relationship breakdown etc; or increased costs, for example arrival of a child.

⁵ 'National Islands Plan Survey: Final Report' Scottish Government, 2021

⁶ 'State of Hunger- Building the Evidence on Poverty, Destitution and Food Insecurity in the UK. Year Two Main Report' Trussell Trust 2021

5 Scope of the Report

Early on in the process it became clear that members of the Working Group viewed food poverty and insecurity as just one of many dimensions on which poverty may be experienced, and that some of the solutions it would wish to propose would inevitably focus on poverty more generally, rather than just food related issues.

The decision was therefore taken that, whilst the report is not an overarching anti poverty strategy for Orkney, it also encompasses some broader recommendations on tackling poverty, and some actions on other specific dimensions of poverty, in particular fuel poverty. Partners are aware that this report has been produced alongside work on Child Poverty and Fuel Poverty strategies for Orkney, and the Working Group hopes that the recommendations set out here can be a contribution to those processes.

The Working Group is also conscious of the extent to which control over the levels of poverty and food poverty experienced locally sits beyond its members, that many local actions which will impact on poverty are being taken forward by colleagues of participants rather than participants themselves or by organisations not involved in the process, and that communities have a key role to play in their delivery.

The report focuses mainly on practical actions that the Working Group can collectively deliver in a context set by others, but also includes recommendations which support/ seek to influence other local work, or which are intended to be the focus of engagement with the UK and Scottish Governments.

Theme 1: Prevent the occurrence, continuation and reoccurrence of severe food insecurity through developing ‘every door a right door’ pathways to third sector and statutory services, improving access for people experiencing, or at risk of, severe poverty to income maximisation, money and energy advice, resilience building and other support.

Why this theme?

- Getting people timeously to relevant income maximisation, or to money or energy advice can prevent people from finding themselves in severe food insecurity/ crisis.
- People’s risk of being in poverty and severe poverty is also impacted by their employment, health and family circumstances, and their financial and broader resilience, getting people to the right services to help them with these issues can also prevent crisis.
- A system that is effective at getting people to the right support will be based around:
 - An ‘every door a right door’ approach, in which someone experiencing problems can seek help from any organisation, have the range of issues they are experiencing identified, and be referred appropriately to other support.
 - Supporting people to self refer for support.
 - Key services which reach out to people in need of support.

Task 1.1: Build front line staff capacity to identify and refer people at risk of poverty, severe poverty or food insecurity

Partners felt that people in need of support in relation to poverty issues are not always identified as having that need and may be reluctant to admit to being in that situation, perhaps particularly in Orkney’s smaller communities.

Local organisations are confident that lack of identification and referral is not about staff’s willingness to help people in poverty, and that there is a genuine opportunity to shift practice in this regard but are concerned that working relationships between organisations and staff at the frontline are not always tight or effective enough.

For front line staff to identify people at risk of poverty they must:

- Have the time and space to discuss the relevant issues with clients.
- Have the knowledge of poverty and the benefit system to respond appropriately to what they hear and observe, and the knowledge and confidence to ask appropriate questions, when engaging with people.
- Know which other organisations can help people in these circumstances, trust/ are confident in these organisations to do so and have a positive relationship with them.

Recommendation 1.1

A programme of poverty awareness training targeted at frontline staff across Orkney is delivered, which should also cover local sources of support in detail. This should build on existing ‘Money Matters’ training delivered by the NHS. It should take a multi-agency, inter-organisational approach, to promote the building of cross organisational relationships that can survive service changes and staff turnover. It should take advantage of the opportunity presented by the size of Orkney and its communities to build those strong relationships.

Task 1.2: Provide extra support to people at risk of poverty to enable them to navigate the support system available to them.

The complexity of support systems means that some people experiencing or at risk of poverty may need extra support to access services, both to navigate their way to the right service, and in their initial engagement with those services. Some people may also need more intensive support around income maximisation, money and budgeting issues, or housing or employment issues.

Partners believe that current advice services, advocacy support, and support provided to people with housing or health needs are not always able to meet the needs of clients relating to benefits

and money issues, do not always enable their access to more holistic support, and that there may be particular groups whose needs are less likely to be met.

Recommendation 1.2a

There is investment in a Family/ LINKS / Advocacy Worker role focused on working with those clients of Orkney Foodbank, THAW and the CAB, Scottish Welfare Fund claimants, and beneficiaries of the Orkney Charitable Trust, etc who are identified as needing more holistic support. This would complement existing community links works aligned with Orkney GP practices.

Recommendation 1.2b

There is enhanced investment in Orkney CAB to create a post focused on the provision of more intensive and capacity building benefits/ money/ housing advice with clients who are identified as requiring it, potentially backed by the provision of outreach support at the foodbank.

Task 1.3: Enhance routes for self referral into support through outreach work and expanded delivery channels

Self referral into support, where people identify that they need support and seek it out, may mean that people access support earlier, and have more control over the help they get.

Barriers to people seeking out support include:

- Concerns about stigma/ admitting that help is needed; in a recent survey carried out by the Island Wellbeing Project two thirds of respondents indicated that they would be too embarrassed to seek help in a crisis.
- Fear that help will involve intrusiveness, or being identified as vulnerable in some way.
- Lack of understanding of how their own situation might enable them to benefit from help, or even that they need help.
- Lack of awareness of organisations that can provide the help they need.

There was agreement from participants that

- Messages about benefit and poverty related issues are not always communicated clearly locally, and there is a lack of local tailored poverty focused information across different channels.
- There is no single, widely advertised portal or set of portals to help with poverty related issues whether through phone or online, and nothing that yet carries the recently produced cash/ advice first leaflet (seen as an important step for the Working Group.)
- Some organisations are less accessible face to face on the ferry-linked isles than is needed, with other channels not fully compensating given issues around broadband, digital exclusion and use of the phone.

Recommendation 1.3a

An online portal to services working with people in poverty is created through which people may:

- *Identify organisations that can provide them with the help they need.*
- *Seek contact from those organisations.*
- *Access information about benefit entitlements and other money issues.*

This would also be of benefit to front line staff seeking to make referrals, and may build both on the VAO service directory and work underway with the support of the University of the Highlands and Islands to create a referral system for front line staff.

Recommendation 1.3b

A phone portal to the same services is piloted, with staffing shared across existing staff from key organisations/ agencies. Staff manning the portal will be able to:

- *Hold a basic brief diagnostic/ information gathering conversation with callers.*
- *In response providing information about services available to callers, or where appropriate booking an appointment with a partner organisation on behalf of callers.*

Recommendation 1.3c

Key advice organisations review the extent of their presence on the ferry-linked isles, and consider ways of increasing it, through accessing additional funding, through co-operation with development trusts and island wellbeing officers, through the recruitment and training of local volunteers, and potentially through the reinstating of outreach events, perhaps using the cost of living crisis as a hook. Ferry terminals are acknowledged as key points for advertising services with high levels of footfall.

Task 1.4: Maximise information sharing between organisations.

Effective information sharing between organisations working with clients might help create more effective referral relationships between organisations, and avoid situations in which people facing difficulties have to share the same information repeatedly with different organisations. It might also help avoid duplication of effort between organisations working with the same clients.

There are barriers to such information sharing:

- People engaging with services have understandable concerns about confidentiality and privacy.
- GDPR very significantly restricts the range of information that can be shared between organisations without the consent of the people concerned.
- Worries about the precise boundaries set by GDPR may result in organisations unnecessarily restricting the information they share with each other, or not consent for information sharing from the people they are working with.

Recommendation 1.4

Based on a review of current local practice, of national best practice, and involving input from data protection legal specialists, Partners:

- *Develop and implement a set of information sharing and consent protocols for organisations working with people in poverty.*
- *Consider the cost effectiveness of purchasing a common case work system which would engage key organisations working with people in poverty.*

Theme 2: Develop a statutory cash first approach to the provision of support for people experiencing food insecurity and facing challenges meeting other basic household needs.

Why this theme?

The Partners agree that cash first approaches to tackling severe food insecurity are preferable and more dignified for people in that situation, giving them choice and some control over their situation, communicating a sense that they are trusted. Partners believe that, reflecting the state's responsibility to help people in food insecurity, this means the Scottish Welfare Fund should be the first port of call intervention for people in this situation.

Orkney is currently a significant distance from taking such an approach. In contrast to the 17-18 households being helped per quarter by Orkney Council through Crisis Grants in 2020/21, not all of whom are being helped with food related issues, Orkney Foodbank was helping c145 per quarter.

Further examination of the Crisis Grant figures suggest:

- Potential issues with awareness of and/ or a reluctance to apply/ refer for Crisis Grants; there were 187 people living in Orkney for every application made for a Crisis Grant in 2020/21, the 2nd lowest level of applications of any local authority in Scotland.
- Potential issues with the decision making process; 59% is the 6th lowest of any local authority in Scotland.

- Potential issues with awards themselves, with the award per grant being £260, twice as much as any other local authority in Scotland⁷.

Orkney is also some way from taking a cash first approach to supporting people in need of larger household goods/ a larger set of household goods to help them to live independently; some of the issues seen with Crisis Grants may be repeated with the other element of the Scottish Welfare Fund, Community Care Grants. There were 187 people living in Orkney for every application made for a Community Care Grant in 2020/21, the 3rd lowest level of applications of any local authority in Scotland, although approval rates and award levels are both much higher than the Scottish average.

Orkney's allocation under the Scottish Welfare Fund has been significantly underspent, by £10,345 in 2019/20 and by £39,078 in 2020/21.

Council staff administering the Scottish Welfare Fund were not available to participate in the sessions that developed this report. The Working Group is therefore uncertain about the extent to which these statistics reflect local decisions, and the extent to which the Council might be prepared to commit to taking this approach.

Partners feel that Crisis Grant decisions criteria are currently not transparent. Partners also suggest that there is a reluctance on the part of the Council to make payments, and that the Council see the fund as a last resort with people expected to seek help from other sources, including family and foodbanks, first. They report that this has led to a reluctance from some organisations to make referrals to the Scottish Welfare Fund, who see the Foodbank as, in contrast, providing support more rapidly to people they refer and with no further questions asked. Partners cautioned that, particularly in the current situation, not all people experiencing food poverty will have an automatic preference for a cash first approach, as opposed to seeking help from the Foodbank, or feel that such an approach is more dignified than accessing the Foodbank:

- Some people do not like dealing with statutory organisations, particularly where they are associated with social work.
- Some may find the questions asked of them during the application process intrusive.
- Others may find them repetitious, if they have already have described their circumstances in detail to other organisations.

There was some discussion about at sessions about whether cash first approaches were suitable for everyone. Partners suggested that for some people, particularly those experiencing chaos in their lives, help in kind may be more appropriate than cash based help, where there is a significant risk that they may spend their award unwisely/ not for the intended purpose. Partners with lived experience, whilst acknowledging this risk, emphasized again the importance of choice and control, and suggested that at least the default position should be for cash first approaches.

Task 2.1: Review operation of Scottish Welfare Fund

There is a need to develop a shared understanding amongst Partners of the local operation of the Scottish Welfare Fund and to fully involve relevant Council staff responsible for its operation in the work of the group.

That understanding needs to encompass both Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants:

- The extent to which the current situation in Orkney reflects local strategic/ policy decisions in relation to communication with potential claimants and referring partners and in relation to guidance for decision making.
- Operational decisions in terms of staffing.
- The practice of those making decisions on claims.
- Claimant experience of the system.

⁷ All figures on Scottish Welfare Fund quoted/ used as basis for calculations at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-statistics-annual-update-2020-2021/>

- The quality and durability of goods provided through Community Care Grants.
- Current usage of cash for Community Care Grants, and the size of awards for those on ferry linked isles, given transport costs.

Recommendation 2.1a

Orkney Islands Council staff responsible for strategic decisions/ operation management of the Scottish Welfare Fund locally are re-invited to become involved in the Orkney Food Dignity Working Group.

Recommendation 2.1b

A quick review of the operation of the Scottish Welfare Fund locally is carried out looking at both Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants and exploring both policy and organisational issues.

Task 2.2: Pilot a cash first approach to tackling food poverty, with or without additional strategic resources available through the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government is shortly expected to make additional resources available to local authorities through a competitive bidding process to create local strategic capacity to support the development of local statutory cash first approaches in pursuit of its ambition to end the need for foodbanks in Scotland. This work will also be taken forward in the context of the Scottish Government's response to its own review of the Scottish Welfare Fund.

There is no certainty that those resources will be accessed by the Working Group, but not doing so should inhibit its work. Whether or not the Working Group is successful it will need to proceed carefully towards a cash first approach, mindful both of the budget available through the Scottish Welfare Fund and the capacity of administrative staff, although current levels of underspend suggest a degree of headroom, even at current budget levels, before resources are stretched.

Recommendation 2.2a

The Orkney Partnership applies to the Scottish Government for this funding when it becomes available. It uses this report, the above review and the recommendations within it, as demonstration within its application of its commitment to take action. The Working Group becomes the body accountable for delivery of the work on implementing statutory cash first approaches.

Recommendation 2.2b

Partners roll out a statutory cash first approach to food insecurity in three stages:

- *They identify a small number of key Foodbank referral organisations, agree with them that their preferred primary referral route for people identified as being in severe food poverty will be to the Scottish Welfare Fund, and provide the necessary information and training to support their staff to implement the change.*
- *They analyse the extent of demand for Crisis Grants generated by the shift to the cash first approach, the demands placed on staff administering the grants, the quality of experience of people benefiting from the approach, and the impact on them.*
- *They use this analysis to guide the roll out of the cash first approach, subject to resources.*

Task 2.3: Implement appropriate changes to the way that Community Care Grants are used in Orkney.

Community Care Grants remain a critical part of the Scottish Welfare Fund. Partners with lived experience identified issues with choice, quality of goods and poor value for money. There is some suggestion that insufficient use is made of second hand goods, particularly in the context of small overall individual grants. Many claims for Community Care Grants result from goods which are broken/ have ceased to work, and partners with lived experience identified that there can be issues accessing repair services particularly on the ferry-linked isles.

Recommendation 2.3a

Based on the above review, guidelines for the future use of cash support under Community Care Grants are implemented which maximise client choice, strike a balance between risk and choice relating to cash versus in kind support for people experiencing a degree of chaos in their lives, and maximise the potential for enhanced engagement with second hand/ recycled goods suppliers and discounts from local stores.

Recommendation 2.3b

Consideration is given to the establishment of a repair service social enterprise which might reduce the number of claims for new household goods/ furniture made from the Scottish Welfare Fund, possibly linked to existing Care and Repair or handyman services.

Theme 3: Ensure that, when statutory approaches are exhausted, or not appropriate, people experiencing food insecurity and challenges meeting other basic household needs have access to cash, or food and other in kind support through third sector services and assistance that maintain their dignity.

Why this theme?

It is not possible to be certain about the extent to which levels of severe food poverty locally:

- Can be reduced by the transition in Orkney to a cash first approach based on primary initial referrals to the Scottish Welfare Fund.
- Will be increased/ reduced by decisions in relation to social security, taxation and employment policy taken by the Scottish and UK Governments.
- Will be impacted by events affecting food and energy markets at a national and international level, including Brexit, climate issues and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

It is clear that even a more generously funded Community Care Grant budget that is seen as the first port of call for people needing household goods and appliances will not fully meet demand from local residents on low incomes, particularly in the context of the cost of living crisis.

It is likely that some people living in poverty will sustain a preference for accessing support from the third sector, whether in relation to food or household goods.

The assumptions of the Working Group are therefore that:

- The work of Orkney Foodbank and other emergency food providers will still be needed into the long term.
- There will be a continued demand on the voluntary sector for cash and in kind support to access household goods and appliances.
- It is essential that local providers are sustainably supported to deliver support which is as dignified as possible for as long as they are needed.

Task 3.1: Ensuring that the provision of emergency food is carried out in as dignified a way as possible.

Orkney Foodbank is by some distance the main provider of emergency food aid in Orkney. Its core commitments are to provide the most dignified support possible to clients, whilst working for an end to the need for foodbanks.

It provides 3 days worth of non perishable food, alongside toiletries and other basic products, to people in severe food poverty referred by partner organisations from the statutory and voluntary organisations. Interventions are not intended to last for the long term, but to provide critical support until the person referred can resolve the issues pushing them into severe food poverty.

The Foodbank aims to ensure the dignity of its provision in two ways, through:

- The way in which it engages with clients.
- The quality of the produce which it provides.

It continues to explore ways of increasing access to fresh food and client choice, including direct adding of fruit and vegetables into parcels, in a way which is equitable across Orkney whilst still maintaining client confidentiality. It also has an arrangement with Boots, allowing young parents to use vouchers to purchase nappies and baby food (although they are not restricted to these items) which is under review to ensure best use of funding.

The Foodbank has a strategic commitment to ending the need for its own services, creating a challenge to balance stating that longer term aim with communication of the non judgemental and compassionate service it offers.

There are specific challenges for providers meeting the needs of people on the ferry linked isles.

A number of other voluntary organisations, such as Women's Aid and The Salvation Army provide emergency food to clients on an ad hoc basis.

There is a community fridge on the Orkney Mainland which distributes surplus food from the Co-op for free, which is open three times a week, and some smaller community fridges in other areas. The OLIO app supports private citizens redistribute food that they do not want to others in need. Whilst useful, these initiatives are more focused on food waste than on food poverty. They are limited in terms of the amounts they make available and the times that they are available, and are less accessible to those not living on the Orkney Mainland, or without access to private transport.

Some commercial providers carry out or have supported work around the distribution of surplus food; Lidl's food boxes are mentioned in this regard, as is the past work of Doulls on South Ronaldsay, taking food close to its sell by date round the island.

Recommendation 3.1a

Orkney Foodbank continues to explore options for the provision of fresh food to clients and expansion of client choice, perhaps including building links to community or private growers locally.

Recommendation 3.1b

Partners explore options for increasing the availability of community fridges and community pantries, making surplus food available free or at low cost, and expanding engagement of local people and tourists with OLIO.

Recommendation 3.1b

Partners ensure that in communicating their commitment to ensuring dignified approaches to food poverty, they avoid suggesting that the support provided through the Foodbank is undignified, risking adding to the stigma faced by people accessing such support, or deterring them from doing so.

Task 3.2: Maximise the impact of third sector cash based or dignified in kind support on reducing the challenges facing people in poverty.

There are a number of third sector sources of dignified cash or in kind support available to people living in poverty in Orkney for example:

- The Orkney Charitable Trust provides flexible support to young people up to the age of 25 in time of need, hardship and disadvantage. They offer financial assistance through festive grants, plus partnership grants working with THAW and the Foodbank. They also offer dignified support to other people in need which helps ease the financial pressure they face, through projects such as Every Child Should be Warm in Bed, Bairns Need Nappies, Help from Home, Christmas Present boxes and the Coats for Kids scheme (cash to buy winter coats).
- Some development trusts distribute wind turbine profits to local people, often on a universal basis, sometimes in response to specific need.

- THAW provides support to clients in some specific groups through the provision of cooking equipment such as energy efficient pressure cookers and microwaves, alongside starter pack type good such as small energy efficient heaters.
- The Salvation Army provide starter packs to people who have been homelessness, consisting of basic household goods such as cutlery, kitchen utensils and appliances, towels and bedding.
- Restart retails recycled furniture.
- Organisations such as Women's Aid, Homestart and social work provide in kind support on an ad hoc basis.
- Examples of recycling and in kind support can be seen in schools, for example Papdale Primary School, offering school top swop, wellie boot exchange and a free Book Neuk.

Access to such support may sometimes depend on where those in need live, and their age or other characteristics, which may not automatically place them in a priority group; it is critical that support reaches both families and single people in need.

It is not clear that even a significant expansion of the support available through Community Care Grants would reduce the level of need for the type of support provided by these organisations, and some people are likely to sustain a preference for accessing support from these sources across the longer term.

Recommendation 3.2a

Partners involved in the delivery of cash first or in kind support to people living in poverty work together to:

- *Disseminate awareness of their work to other organisations working with people in poverty so that help can reach those most in need.*
- *Co-ordinate campaigns to increase the level of donations they receive so that they can expand the amount of support they provide.*
- *Gather intelligence on needs arising in the community to which they can respond, including from people with lived experience.*
- *Ensure that people accessing such support are also referred to advice organisations and other support as appropriate.*

Recommendation 3.2b

There is continued explicit recognition by Community Planning Partners of the role of third sector providers of cash based or in kind support, backed, where necessary, by investment to guarantee sustainable funding of those providers.

Task 3.2 Develop a 'Plus Food' initiative, integrating the provision of food into other activities/ supporting initiatives which might tackle food poverty alongside social isolation.

A number of organisations delivering activities such as community education classes provide a meal for participants. Homestart Orkney provide healthy snacks alongside family support sessions, and run 'confidence to cook' where parents prepare meals and eat together with their children, and from which they take skills, recipes and food home. A number of lunch clubs for older people etc build their work around a meal, although some have not restarted after Covid. The Salvation Army also provides free meals. Breakfast clubs support children at school. All these types of activity have an impact on the financial pressure they experience as well as social and other benefits.

Although they may make some significant difference to food poverty experienced by those engaged, there are limitations on such provision:

- Only those engaging with such activities can benefit, and engagement may be time limited.
- Activities may only be open to certain groups of people, and such initiatives will not be appropriate or attractive for all those in food poverty.

- Provision is dependent on budgets being available to support what might be. Some of such informal provision is seen as an extra cost, or on the capacity of organisations, some of which are working primarily through volunteers.

For people living alone, their risk of experiencing food poverty is increased by difficulties in buying in bulk without wasting significant quantities of food, to some extent their food poverty is exacerbated by social isolation.

Recommendation 3.2

Partners develop a 'Plus Food' initiative, backed by a fund created with input from public, third and private sectors and private individuals, which:

- *Highlights to organisations which are providing social/ cultural/ leisure, health, education or training activities the potential role in tackling food insecurity of incorporating food provision into activities, whether free or at pooled or nominal cost, alongside links to resources which enable them to think through any issues or pitfalls involved.*
- *Supports holiday hunger initiatives aimed at children and young people, and opportunities for intergenerational work.*
- *Encourages informal cooking/ social clubs where 'members' pool resources to buy in bulk and take turns at cooking or run pot luck lunches.*

Theme 4: Seek to reduce the cost of living for people on low incomes in Orkney, including increasing access to cheaper and higher quality food.

Why this theme?

The concept of the poverty premium captures the way that people on low incomes face higher costs for key goods and services, including food, energy and credit, than those on higher incomes. Most of these costs stem from people in poverty having less ability to buy in bulk, or from suppliers engaging in pricing for risk (for example in relation to access to credit) or for more expensive mechanisms for delivery (for example in relation to prepayment meters).

People living in Orkney also face higher costs for many key goods and services than those living in mainland Scotland, particularly those in urban areas. These costs are driven by high transport costs, high energy costs, reliance on small retailers with high margins- particularly on the ferry-linked isles, and being distant from key distribution points within supply chains. In relation to food, the quality of food available to people in Orkney may be reduced by the time taken for perishable goods to reach the islands. Transport between islands is an additional cost for those on low incomes and there is a lack of public transport on ferry linked isles.

This 'Orkney Premium' has the effect of increasing the level of household income required for local people to attain an acceptable standard of living, deepening, and increasing their risk of experiencing, poverty. People living in poverty may also experience financial challenges in relation to:

- Money management and cooking skills.
- If they are experiencing depression, low mood or other mental health challenges, motivation to manage their money effectively and to cook.
- Time and energy if under pressure with work or caring responsibilities.

Task 4.1: Maximise the impact of local growing on the availability of fresh, affordable and high quality food in Orkney.

There are a range of successful community growing/ gardening projects in Orkney, some involving the community in general, some involving people working with specific projects or services, for example people with mental health problems, and a small number operating on a commercial basis, for example the Westray Community Development Trust's market garden project selling salad stuffs to local people and businesses. There are also groups of neighbours who support each others' growing efforts less formally, and benefit from the interaction and food which are the result.

Community growing is not a complete solution to food poverty in Orkney:

- The scale of production means that costs are higher for some locally produced food than for food produced at the other end of international supply chains, local initiatives may have to operate at a loss.
- Significant investment in polytunnels etc is required to grow some products, and even then the growing season can be short with limited produce available at limited times.
- Only a minority of people will be involved with projects which host community growing, and not everyone will have the time or interest to be involved in such activity.
- Simple barriers such as restrictions on the amount of garden waste that can be disposed of each week may inhibit private gardeners.

However:

- Community growing approaches can have a role in reducing food poverty for some people, and may be worthwhile to scale up if they can reach most or all of those who might wish to benefit, rather than being seen as needing to benefit everyone in the population.
- Surpluses at particular points in the year may spread the benefits more widely.
- Significant opportunities exist to link agendas around community growing to broader healthy eating initiatives and work aiming to promote mental wellbeing and community spirit/ cohesion.
- There is a strong base of organisations, from community development trusts to other third sector organisations, with interest and experience in the field.
- There may be particular cultural currents in Orkney; of self reliance, community response and engagement with the outdoors; that can be tapped into.

It is currently a statutory requirement of local authorities to prepare a food growing strategy which identifies land that may be used as allotment sites, identifies other areas of land that could be used for community growing, and describes how the authority intends to increase provision for community growing, in particular in areas which experience socio-economic disadvantage.

Recommendation 4.1

Consideration is given to how Partners can be involved in the development, delivery and oversight of the Orkney Food Growing Strategy.

Those developing the strategy should consider:

- *Creation of a fund targeted at organisations and groups wanting to continue, develop or expand community growing projects, including gardening education. The fund would bring together public, from both a national and local level if possible, private and third sector resources and contributions from private individuals. Criteria for accessing the fund would acknowledge both the health and community cohesion benefits of such work, and its potential impact on food poverty.*
- *Linking the food growing strategy with community planning partners responsible for economic development, highlighting the role that community growing and food production may play as part of a general move towards adopting a circular economy approach across the islands.*
- *Exploring links between community food production and community energy generation, identifying opportunities to use the latter to reduce costs involved in the former, and potentially tapping into funding focused on climate change.*

Task 4.2: Support people in food poverty to cook in a way which maximises the value they get from limited budgets.

Food poverty is primarily an issue driven by lack of income. However, for every level of income, it may be possible for people to eat better and spend money more effectively. Doing so may be influenced by:

- The extent to which people have the relevant cooking and budgeting skills.
- The extent to which they have the necessary/ appropriate cooking and storage appliances.
- The extent to which they have the time and motivation.
- Their ability to afford the cost of consuming the energy involved in cooking, and the staples/ seasonings which make food more enjoyable.

Recommendation 4.2a

There is increased investment in cookery classes, delivered through existing and new providers, and in the delivery of cookery classes as part of broader community learning interventions. The piloting of online classes and the creation of online resources such as 'How to cook' videos are included within this approach.

Recommendation 4.2b

The provision of ongoing support to build people's capacity to cook is built into longer-term support interventions.

Recommendation 4.2c

There is exploration of the potential for retail of 'food boxes' through community organisations which are designed to provide people with the amount of food they need to prepare meals, rather than purchase more than they need, and are accompanied by recipes. Creation of such boxes might be linked to cookery classes or other interventions and involve community organisations in bulk purchasing and distributing, community growers, and local private sector retailers.

Task 4.3: To mitigate the impact of recent and projected rises in the cost of energy on Orkney households.

The Working Group is clear that the cost of energy must be within the scope of this report, based both on its recognition that energy consumption, like food, is a household essential, critical for health, and on the impact of energy costs on the ability of low income households to prepare food.

The high costs of energy in Orkney are driven by:

- The islands being off gas grid, leaving many residents reliant on expensive electric, oil or LPG heating.
- The poor quality of insulation and heating systems of many homes in the social rented sector. Partners believe that there is a lack of strategy and priority for tackling these issues.
- Despite extensive grant supported and private investment, continuing issues with insulation and heating systems in parts of the owner occupied and private rented sectors.
- The climate, with wind and low ambient temperatures requiring higher consumption than for similar housing stock elsewhere.

These high energy costs mean that Orkney has levels of fuel poverty which are amongst the highest in Scotland. Partners with lived experience reported people locally sitting in sleeping bags in their front room, or going to bed early in order to keep warm.

However, alongside these issues, Orkney continues to be a major source of renewable energy for the National Grid. Furthermore many of those on higher incomes have some of the lowest energy bills on the islands, living in highly insulated homes and sometimes having effectively gone off grid using solar panels, heat pumps, private wind turbines and storage.

Some of the benefits of local energy generation are being captured for communities through community development trusts investing profits from wind turbines in community activities and organisations, or in the case of Westray Community Development Trust, using some of those profits to provide a grant to each household on their island.

More generally, however, Partners believe that there is a lack of linkage between the agenda of those working on renewables and those working on fuel poverty, the former finding the latter disruptive to their main focus.

The recent rises in energy prices have made response to fuel poverty involving switching to cheaper suppliers, with significantly better deals unavailable for the foreseeable future.

The Working Group acknowledges that it is not the main vehicle for driving forward action on fuel poverty locally, and that work is underway on the development of a Fuel Poverty Strategy for Orkney, and that further work will be taking place over the next year on the development of a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy as a requirement from the Scottish Government.

The Working Group believes that the current cost of living crisis means that action on these issues is urgent, and that action needs to be at scale and comprehensive if the impacts of that crisis are to be significantly mitigated and large increases in fuel poverty are to be avoided.

Recommendation 4.3

Orkney community planning partners commit, before the next set of energy price rises arrive in October, to an approach to tackling fuel poverty which reflects the depth of the crisis ahead, is creative in looking to maximise use of all available resources and levers to mitigate the impact of price rises in fuel poverty in the short term, and to reduce fuel poverty in the medium to longer term, and is clearly set out in relevant strategies/ interim action plans.

This approach should include:

- *Social landlords making clear strategic commitments to tackling fuel poverty amongst their tenants and:*
 - *Investing in insulation and efficient heating systems for existing housing.*
 - *Ensuring that new build housing conforms with the highest insulation standards, reflecting the specific climate challenges posed to housing in Orkney.*
 - *Exploring options for individual and community micro generation working with, and learning from, community development trusts and private sector organisations.*
- *THAW expanding its work to engage with organisations working on climate change and renewable production, taking advantage of increased focus on the issue created by the cost of living crisis to tap into resources that may be available through the latter.*

Within this process, partners should engage with Development Trusts to explore how they might develop or expand their potential contribution to tackling fuel poverty.

Task 4.4 Increase access to affordable credit.

A key aspect of the poverty premium is the higher costs that people living in poverty often face when seeking to access credit. Credit options for people living on low incomes have also been reducing over the years as providers exit the market.

Orkney is currently served by Hi-Scot Credit Union which offers affordable credit and savings options, including to people in low incomes across the Highlands and Islands.

Recommendation 4.4

Increasing access to affordable credit through Hi-Scot Credit Union should be incorporated as a focus of local strategies targeted at poverty.

Theme 5: Reduce in work poverty through defining, and promoting the idea of, an Orkney Living Wage.

Why this theme?

Employment is often seen as the key to lifting people out of poverty, but current wage levels in the UK mean that many people in work still experience poverty. A key focus of anti poverty campaigners since the putting in place of the minimum wage has been to increase it to become a living wage, set at a point that ensures that people in work can meet their basic needs, include for food and energy.

The current national living wage is calculated by the Living Wage Campaign as being £9.90 per hour, against the Government's 'National Living Wage' of £9.50 per hour for over 23s.

The Orkney labour market has a number of specific features which may increase the risk of local people who are in work experiencing poverty:

- Many jobs available are part time and paid at the National Living Wage, rather than the 'real' living wage.
- Many jobs are in tourism or agriculture and are therefore seasonal, and sometimes casual.
- Many people rely on two or more jobs to make ends meet.

Alongside this, the 'Orkney premium' identified in the last section means that the hourly wage required for people to meet their basic needs in Orkney may be significantly higher than £9.90 an hour.

Task 5.1: Define an Orkney Living Wage

The headline figure for the Living Wage is a key campaigning and practical tool for organisations tackling poverty. Calculating such a figure for Orkney is therefore an immediate priority.

Doing so requires robust analysis of the additional costs of living on Orkney Mainland, and on the ferry-linked isles. Work has been undertaken by the Scottish Government on extra costs living in rural areas, including relating to fuel poverty.

Partners are also clear that the Living Wage interacts with a number of other aspects of people's experience of employment cannot be a complete solution to in-work poverty. These include the cost and availability of childcare, and work related transport costs.

Recommendation 5.1

Partners produce a calculation of the living wages required on Orkney Mainland and the ferry linked isles. This may be based on current Scottish Government research if that is sufficient to support it. If not, additional resources will be sought to commission more specific research.

Task 5.2: Consider Promotion a specific Orkney Living Wage campaign.

The setting and implementing of the National Living Wage is reserved to the UK Government, and Orkney Islands Council does not have the power to compel local employers to pay an Orkney Living Wage. The focus of an Orkney Living Wage Campaign would therefore be on promoting the concept, encouraging employers to commit to paying it and publicly sign up to do so, and accrediting celebrating those employers which do.

The Working Group also recognises the challenges for Orkney employers currently paying a living wage in the context of the current cost pressures on Orkney employers, and the challenges businesses are experiencing as the economic consequences of Brexit and the pandemic work their way through the system, which are in addition to longer standing pressures of running businesses/producing goods on Orkney.

Recommendation 5.2

The Working Group considers the potential impact of a campaign based on its work to calculate an Orkney Living Wage.

Theme 6: Contribute to changing public discussion and the local and national policy response to severe poverty and food insecurity by;

- Increasing public understanding in Orkney of poverty and food insecurity and the challenges fellow islanders are facing.
 - Involving more local people practically in tackling these issues.
 - Getting a clear commitment from local organisations to deliver the recommendations in this report.
 - Influencing wider policy debates on these issues and how they interact with the unique challenges facing island communities in Scotland and the UK.
-

Why this theme?

Negative perceptions of people in poverty, and perceptions that poverty is not a problem, or not a significant problem in an area, create barriers to tackling the issue.

Challenging these perceptions offers a way of tackling the issues of stigma and shame highlighted throughout the sessions as impacting on people experiencing poverty and severe food poverty, their experience of services and their willingness to seek help.

Doing so also lays the basis for encouraging more people to get involved practically in action on the ground to tackle severe food poverty. It is also part of the basis for influencing local organisations so that they fully commit to tackling poverty and severe food poverty.

It is critical that Orkney Food Dignity Working Group ensures that its particular perspective influences Scottish and UK wide policy making, so that progress in delivering the practical steps outlined in this report can be complemented by broader changes which reduce food poverty.

Task 6.1: Increase public understanding in Orkney of poverty and food insecurity and the challenges fellow islanders are facing.

Partners with lived experience are clear that negative and stigmatising attitudes to people in poverty and claiming benefits are still commonplace in Orkney, and can be seen in personal interactions and in discussions on social media. At the same time, the image that Orkney has of itself as providing a great quality of life was seen as generating apathy from the general public, and may act to discourage people who are struggling to cope from seeking support or speaking about their difficulties.

However, Partners felt that way that the pandemic and the cost of living crisis have put more people at risk of poverty, particularly fuel poverty, has resulted in raised awareness of the issue and has softened attitudes, in turn creating the opportunity to cement and promote these shifts in view with further work. Partners felt that personal stories and testimony are likely to be particularly effective in cutting through to the general public.

Recommendation 6.1

A public engagement initiative is established:

- *Building on the website created in the generation of this report, adding information and data on the extent and impact of food poverty in Orkney, capturing the stories of people affected, highlighting news stories of relevance and providing resources for people to use in discussion on the issues, and backed up by the creation of a strong social media presence.*
- *Encompassing a plan for Partners, other interested professionals, people with lived experience, and members of the general public, to be networked and supported as champions for awareness of, and action on, food poverty, using this report as a stimulus. This will include both formal engagement with community groups, including faith groups, community councils, tenant and resident associations, and*

informal social engagement, including on social media. This may be linked to the approaches focused on increasing access to services proposed under Theme 2.

- *Encompassing a plan for local printed and broadcast media engagement, initially around the release of this report, and then focused on the delivery of its recommendations, and on progress and issues relating to food poverty locally.*

Task 6.2: Involve more local people practically in tackling these issues.

Delivering the recommendations set out in this report cannot just involve professionals with a key focus on tackling food poverty. It will require people across society acting with understanding and compassion when engaging with people in food poverty professionally or socially, and taking decisions at work and in their community which take account of the needs of people in poverty.

Critically, it is also likely to require more people to volunteer for work which can benefit people in poverty, and more people to donate money and goods, not just food, to organisations working with people in poverty.

Recommendation 6.2

The Working Group website highlights practical ways in which the general public can help people facing food poverty, publicising volunteering opportunities, highlighting appeals for donations, both cash and in kind, and potentially providing a base for specific donation campaigns at particular times.

Task 6.3: Get a clear commitment from local organisations to deliver the recommendations in this report.

The recommendations of this report are far reaching, and their delivery will require the investment of significant time and financial resources within a real prioritisation of, and a real commitment to, action on food poverty.

Delivery will be taking place in a context in which the public and third sector are under significant resource pressure, and in which the necessary commitment is not always felt by Partners to have been present at councillor or council officer level, and in which it is expected that most new councillors will not themselves have lived experience of poverty.

The forming of a new Council administration provides an opportunity to focus on making food poverty a strategic priority.

Recommendation 6.3

This report is presented by the Community Wellbeing Sub Group to the Orkney Community Planning Partnership for, and is presented at a seminar to new and existing councillors as part of the former group's orientation to and other individual partners as required/requested.

Task 6.4: Influencing wider policy debates on these issues and how they interact with the unique challenges facing island communities in Scotland and the UK.

Partners are involved in a range of existing networks through which they can communicate with the Scottish and UK Governments, and seek to influence policy in a direction which will complement their local works, and reduce the core challenges that they face. This report, some of the research/analysis proposed in this report and the identifiability and cultural importance of Orkney as a specific community create opportunities to engage and to influence.

Recommendation 6.4

The Working Group establishes a sub group focused on communicating, directly and through and alongside others, key messages about food poverty in Orkney to the Scottish and UK Governments, and about the learning done through implementing the recommendations in this report. The early focus of this may be on the particular impact of the cost of living crisis on Orkney, and work done to calculate an Orkney Living Wage.

Acknowledgements from Nick.

I would like to add my thanks to all those who participated in the public session, and in the four working group consultations for their time, and the intelligence of their contributions. In particular, thanks to the people with lived experience who spoke so honestly and openly.

I would also like to thank consultants Edwina Lloyd and Meghan McEwen for their work on the first phase which collated so much valuable data of use in this report.

There is clearly real commitment and passion to tackle food poverty and insecurity in Orkney, which already makes a huge difference on the ground to people in difficulties.

I hope this report reflects that, and is a guide and stimulus to further action at a time when all hands are needed on deck in the face of a storm threatening all those with less.