

Scotland Excel

To: CEOMG

On: 6th May 2020

Report by Chief Executive Scotland Excel

Covid-19 - Scotland Excel Food Category Update

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the CEOMG of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Scotland Excel food category. It summarises the Local Authority response to support households who may experience barriers in accessing food. It will also outline current Scotland Excel contract arrangements, including ongoing activity and support. Please note, regularly updated information can be found via the Scotland Excel “Covid-19 Newsroom” and the members area of the Scotland Excel Website.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 18 March 2020, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government announced a £350 million package to support communities affected by COVID-19. This includes a £70 million Food Fund to put in place support for those who would otherwise be unable to access food through the usual routes.
- £30m of the Food Fund is initially being made available to Local Authorities for structured public sector responses working with local resilience partnerships to support households who may experience barriers in accessing food.
 - Up to £30m has been set aside for a UK-wide programme to procure and deliver food for those who are unable to leave their homes due to being at highest clinical risk, known as the shielded group. This is currently being managed through the Scottish Government and DEFRA.
 - £10m has been set aside for investment in third sector organisations that are responding to food insecurity both at a national and local level.

Allocation formulae for the £30m Food Fund portion of this investment, aimed at Free School Meal provision and non-shielded people at risk, has now been agreed with COSLA for distribution to Local Authorities.

In order to reach the people most at risk, action needs to be coordinated by Local Authorities, usually via local resilience partnerships, and should involve people from all sectors, including community food organisations and local businesses.

2.2 Households who may experience barriers to accessing essential food items

These include but not limited to:

Shielded Group

- those who are clinically at high risk and are required to stay at home, known as the shielded group

Health barriers

- those who have COVID-19 symptoms, or live with someone with symptoms, and are required to stay at home temporarily
- those who are vulnerable and are required to be particularly stringent in following social distancing.

Socio-economic barriers

- those who are financially at risk, including families whose children are eligible for Free School Meals, low income households and those who have recently lost employment.
- those who are marginalised, may have complex needs and may be less engaged with public services.

3. Ensuring Access to Food

- 3.1 Central government and Local authorities are striving to meet the needs of the various households requiring additional support in sourcing food, in a variety of different ways.

Shielded Group

It is estimated that around 120,000 people in Scotland have been identified as being within the Shielded Group. Those that do not have a local network of family and friends to drop off provisions can opt to receive a shielding package. The packages contain items such as coffee, tea, pasta, tinned goods, cereal, potatoes, two types of fruit and other basic supplies such as toilet roll.

The UK government has partnered with national food distributors (Brakes and Bidfood) to get these supplies to people's homes. Packages will be delivered to people's doorsteps, with all drivers following the latest Public Health guidance.

This contract is between the Scottish Government and the national distributors and is not related to Scotland Excel frameworks. However, Scotland Excel will work with Local Authorities and the national distributors to support in the delivery of these parcels where required. The costs for these packs will come from the £30m that has been set aside for a nationally procured programme to deliver food for those who are unable to leave their homes.

Free School Meals

Figures show that 140,000 free school meals have been distributed in Scotland since the start of lockdown. It was previously estimated that there are around 120,000 children who are eligible for this service, so these figures show the high level of support being provided to vulnerable families during this pandemic.

Meals are being provided either via direct bank payments, vouchers for supermarkets, home deliveries or at schools (where still open). This shows the flexible approach implemented across Scotland is working and Local Authorities are reaching those who are most vulnerable. This is a positive picture for Scotland and is due to the work being undertaken by Local Authorities.

The £30m of the Food Fund that is initially being made available to Local Authorities is intended to be used to fund the provision of school meals.

Other Vulnerable Groups

The largest group that Local Authorities are now supporting is those who are vulnerable and are required to be particularly stringent in following social distancing. Local authorities are providing this support in addition to the national support already available for people who have received letters advising them to shield.

Local Authorities are taking a variety of different approaches to support these vulnerable people within their communities. These include ordering a variety of different food from the distributors on the Scotland Excel food frameworks to be delivered to central distribution points. Items are then repacked into individual food packs and delivered to vulnerable households.

To assist with community feeding, Brakes are now offering ready-made 'Care' boxes that can be delivered to Local Authority central hubs at a cost of £30 per box. Brakes' aim is to alleviate pressure from Local Authority operations by reducing the manpower required to pack individual food packs. These boxes are available to order now but can only be ordered through each Local Authorities Brakes account manager and ideally, they require 7 days' notice as the packs are in high demand.

The 'Care' boxes are a separate offering to the 'Shielding' packs and are aimed at supporting Local Authorities in providing for the vulnerable within communities not captured by the 'shielding' list.

A supplier on the Scotland Excel frozen foods framework has also developed a convenient concept that delivers a nutritious hot meal in the form of a pre-portioned roast dinner. This is supplied frozen in bags which can be decanted onto a microwavable/oven-ready dish for reheating.

The £30m of the Food Fund that is initially being made available to Local Authorities is intended to be used to fund this additional support.

4. Issues and Observations

- 4.1 Scotland Excel is aware that there have been some initial issues with supply from the food distributors on its frameworks. Suppliers have been inundated with requests for retail pack sizes which are not common within commercial food services. For the limited range that they hold, current demand exceeds a normal annual forecast. There were early concerns that stock issues may arise due to Local Authority demand being similar to DEFRA's requirement and being de-prioritised, however the UK Government have confirmed this is not the case.

Distributors have extended their normal supply base to secure stock for local authorities. For some high-volume products, suppliers have a lead time of greater than 7 days, and this should be considered when councils are planning their order requirements.

Scotland Excel will continue to work with Local Authorities to forecast their needs and would ask that the Chief Executives support this requirement. It is appreciated that this might be a difficult task in these ever-changing times but recognises that distributors will fail to provide certain items unless they are able to have predicted volumes of what is required in the coming weeks.

- 4.2 After questions from one local authority Chief Executive, Scotland Excel Account Managers have contacted all local authorities to ascertain the current food related solutions in place and to offer any assistance required.
- 4.3 Scotland Excel will continue to have input into the fortnightly Public Sector Food Forum meetings to ensure the requirements of Local Authorities are being raised with Scottish Government. Scotland Excel will continue to share the outcome from this forum with member councils.
- 4.4 Scotland Excel will continue to work with Scotland Food and Drink to identify opportunities for Scottish Manufacturers to work with framework distributors to support Local Authority requirements. To date, this has proved very positive and has included a new relationship between Brakes and Baxter's to provide tinned goods for shielding packs. Scotland Food and Drink are also using

contacts within the Scottish Government to ensure that all manufacturers are giving distributors full support to meet Local Authority needs.

These discussions have led to consideration on national versus local supply and this is something that Scotland Excel will be taking into consideration for future generations of the food frameworks.

4.5 Scotland Excel will work with distributors to agree timelines for schools reopening and restarting deliveries. Scotland Excel will work with Local Authorities and distributors to ensure that sufficient notice of schools reopening is given, and forecasts are put in place to reduce the risk of supply shortages. Local Authorities may need to consider short term changes to school menus if some items are in short supply.

4.6 Local Authorities should also consider the potential financial impact of the current changes to spending patterns. Local Authorities currently receive sole supply rebates on the Groceries and Provisions framework which are paid retrospectively at the end of each framework year. Where spend has dropped this may have an impact on supplier rebates and community benefits.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Members of the CEOMG are invited to note the contents of this report.