

North Ayrshire Food Forum

October 2020

AUTUMN UPDATE

from George Kyle and Rhona Arthur

It's been a very challenging time for us all. We realise it's been some time since we met, however food and growing has been integral to our daily work. We wanted to share some of the good things which have been happening during the lockdown period and we know many of you have been leading and strengthening the community response. We'd like to thank everyone involved in food provision over the recent months and to look at what we do next. The NA Food Forum is very much part of our today and tomorrow thinking. Fiona Pow and a lot of our colleagues have been working very hard with Craig Crosthwaite and the foodbank partners to ensure our supplies and also to plan for the longer term. We hope you will be able to attend a virtual meeting later in October.

COVID-19

The North Ayrshire emergency food response in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was an incredible effort. Community hubs were established in 6 localities, comprising of multi-agency teams, and the two community-led hubs at Fullarton and Vineburgh. Their role in the food system has been to manage calls from the public and provide support for the distribution of North Ayrshire Foodbank emergency food parcels, larder packs (basic items such as bread, milk and eggs) and signpost to local food provision, such as hot food or online delivery services. The response from the foodbanks has been phenomenal!

Community organisations have been leading the preparation of freshly prepared ready-meals, soups and sandwiches for those who are unable to prepare food themselves. This offers some variety and choice and provides a nutritional and balanced diet for households. Organisations directly supporting the community hub food system include the North Ayrshire Foodbank, Café Solace in the Garnock Valley, Fullarton, Vineburgh, Pennyburn and Whitlees Community Associations.

As the situation worsened, North Ayrshire Council very quickly developed a plan to initially support children entitled to free school meals – and their families – through the weekly delivery of food packages containing fresh meat, vegetables and dairy products along with other household essentials. Demand peaked at 2300 community food bags and 2500 free school meals per week. The freshness of the food and base ingredients was strategically chosen to support our role as an early adopter of the Public Health Reform Diet and Healthy Weight and Whole Systems Approaches. This was led by Facilities Management, Building Services and Housing teams and the referrals, including the Shielded Group, 'triaged' and signposted by the Contact Centre and Community Hubs.

NORTH AYRSHIRE FOOD SYSTEM

We are currently working on a North Ayrshire Food System with North Ayrshire Foodbank and our community organisations to develop networks of community fridges, pantries, larders, community supermarkets and food coops in line with a more sustainable approach to food with dignity. This will be an underpinning element of the Community Wealth Building Strategy.

Funding has been provided for partners to offer a variety of community-led food provision with a range of ownership and participation models. There will be further announcements in Challenge Poverty Week, starting on 5th October.

Delivering support on the islands needed a different approach, particularly in the event of ferries going off for a 72 hour quarantine period. The Council worked with local businesses to ensure that a local voucher system could be delivered.

The Shielded Group were supported by a multi-agency team and with the support of the Ayrshire Civil Contingencies Team and the Pan-Ayrshire Ayrshire and Arran NHS team, the data team, HSCP, Contact Centre and Community Hub. This team directed any needs to Scottish Government food parcel service and provided support when the system missed a delivery. The holiday hunger response, usually a holiday club Wrap, Run and Fun, was replaced for some in the childcare hubs for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Those not attending the childcare hubs received a food voucher.

FOOD GROWING STRATEGY

Also in progress is the Food Growing Strategy for North Ayrshire. The NA Food Forum already recognises the importance of allotments and food growing and the links to the NA Food System are a natural development. There are examples of excellent community managed sites and we know that food and growing can be powerful tools. They bring people together and help to reduce social isolation. There are many fantastic community groups and projects in North Ayrshire. Some are running amazing food based initiatives. The Food Growing Strategy is on the Council website and will be formally considered later in the year.



RIGHT TO FOOD

During the summer North Ayrshire Council responded to Elaine Smith MSP's consultation on proposals to enshrine the Right to Food in Scots Law. The recent pandemic emergency phase has highlighted food insecurities and exposed fragilities in the food system which in normal times very many of us take for granted. The lived-experience of many of our communities, however, is that access to food is a constant source of anxiety. Although a right to food exists in universal human rights, there is no local legal context.

North Ayrshire Council welcomed the proposal as it provides food security for everyone and links with public health, fitness and wellbeing this will contribute to the improvement of diet and subsequently, a healthy weight. The proposals also provides an opportunity for fuller consideration about food growing, economic recovery, working conditions in the food industry, transport and distribution, land ownership, animal welfare and a sustainable environment within the context of food production and networks.

