

Food Poverty Action Aberdeen - Action Plan Update

Background

Food Poverty Action Aberdeen (FPAA) is a partnership of organisations providing support to individuals residing in Aberdeen and experiencing food poverty. The partnership collaboratively developed its refreshed Action Plan 2024 and has made initial steps in its implementation. This report gives details of actions already under way.

Context – Cost of Living update (extract from report to CFINE’s board)

Overview

The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 3.4% in the 12 months to February 2024, down from 4.0% in January.

The largest downward contributions to the monthly change in both CPIH and CPI annual rates came from food, and restaurants and cafes, while the largest upward contributions came from housing and household services, and motor fuels. This is against a backdrop of 19.2% food inflation in March 2023, which was the highest annual rate seen for over 45 years.

In March 2024, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee left the base rate unchanged at 5.25%.

UK Govt response - update

The UK Govt's final cost-of-living payment was paid in February 2024.

Scottish Govt Response - update

A temporary rent cap and evictions protections brought in by the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) Act 2022 came to an end as of 1st April 2024.

Aberdeen City Council Response - update

As part of its 2024-25 budget, Aberdeen City Council protected the Fairer Aberdeen Fund from potential funding cuts. In addition, £1m was allocated to the Anti-Poverty & Inequality Committee to tackle poverty in the city.

FPAA Actions in Progress – Update

Aim 1: Tackle the underlying causes of food poverty.

1.1 FPAA will establish a reference group of individuals who are or have experienced food poverty/insecurity with whom this plan will be shared for comment based on their 'lived experience'. The group would continue as a reference point as the plan is implemented.

A reference group of individuals with Lived Experience of poverty has been established and has met 6 times since January 2024. Terms of Reference for the group were drawn up, and the opportunity to take part was advertised to individuals accessing

emergency food and other support. A range of topics have been discussed, and the group has given valuable feedback on the FPAA Action Plan. Over the coming months, a report will be produced outlining the findings of the group, along with recommendations.

1.2 FPAA will establish formal links with ACC's Anti-Poverty Outcome Improvement Group (OIG) and Anti-Poverty Committee.

Following discussion with ACC officers, it has been agreed to bring elements of the FPAA Action Plan into the Anti-Poverty Outcome Improvement Group.

1.7 Develop dignified models of accessing low/no cost nutritious food through Community Food Pantries, Community Food Outlets, and FareShare Community Food Members.

CFINE continues to lead on the development of Community Food Pantries, Community Food Outlets (CFO) and FareShare support in the city. Through investment from ACC, CFINE is re-establishing its network of CFO's in the city, providing access to affordable fruit, vegetables and healthy snacks in community settings. A particular recent success has been setting up a CFO at the Vaccination Hub in the Bon Accord Centre.

1.9 Produce, update and promote a document outlining FPAA support services.

This document has been updated based on current information on support services in the city and, following feedback from the Lived Experience group, has been translated into an online map. The document has been shared throughout the FPAA partnership to enable ease of referral, and is available online on CFINE's website: <https://www.cfine.org/get-support/support-services-aberdeen-city>

1.10 Provide ongoing supply of surplus food to FPAA partners via FareShare.

CFINE, as the FareShare Regional Centre for the area, supplied 629 tonnes of food to organisations throughout Aberdeen in 2023-24. Of this, 392 tonnes was surplus or donated food. The balance was vitally needed purchased food made possible with investment from ACC. CFINE will continue to supply surplus food to partner organisations going forward and had made a request for additional funding for further purchases of food given the continuing increased demand for emergency food across the city.

Aim 2: Provide immediate crisis support is available for those affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

2.1 Establish an emergency formula pathway to ensure crisis support for infants.

As part of the cost-of-living funding allocated to CFINE in 2023-24, and following development work in partnership with ACC and NHS Grampian, an emergency formula pathway was successfully rolled out. This involves a referral system allowing Community Nurses and Health Visitors to refer individuals to receive a voucher which can be redeemed for cash for infant formula milk. It is hoped that further funding will be forthcoming to ensure this vital work can be continued.

2.2 Where cash-first interventions are insufficient, commit to providing access to emergency food with referral to wrap-around services.

FPAA partners have been on the front line in responding to the cost-of-living crisis. Demand for emergency food increased over the last year and remains stubbornly high. FPAA partners continue to offer emergency food parcel and crucially referral to wrap-around services, however there is concern about the level of demand outstripping supply of food, and CFINE has requested additional funding from ACC to purchase and distribute further supplies.

Aim 3: Develop and promote cash-first alternatives to emergency food provision.

3.3 Pilot new cash-first interventions (e.g. the bid to the Scottish Government – however look at what can be done even if this bid is not successful).

ACVO was successful in its application for funding to the Scottish Govt to pilot cash-first interventions. A coordinator has been recruited and a delivery plan is being drawn up which will include engagement with FPAA partners.

Aim 4: Commit to measuring levels of food poverty in Aberdeen.

4.1 Establish a common approach to collecting and sharing data on emergency food provision across FPAA.

Initial discussions have been had involving the Health Determinants Research Collaborative and ACC officers, along with the FPAA Executive Group and a common set of questions are being developed to be rolled out initially with a sub-group of partners to establish a consistent base-line measure of food poverty in the city.

Aim 5: Campaign to raise awareness of food poverty, identifying potential solutions for policymakers and others.

5.1 Promote Fairer Aberdeen Fund (FAF) given its crucial role in supporting individuals, families, and communities facing poverty in the city, emphasising the significant Social Return on Investment for the Council. Campaign to protect FAF and increase the value of the fund.

An event showcasing the work of Fairer Aberdeen Funded partners was held at the Townhouse in February 2024, with a keynote speech from Peter Kelly of the Poverty Alliance, along with presentations and short films from partners. The event was well attended, including by elected politicians and civil servants. Further promotion and events will be planned in the coming months to ensure decision makers are aware of the vital work being undertaken through Fairer Aberdeen. The Fairer Aberdeen annual report was presented to the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee in March 2024, and the Council protected the fund in setting its 2024-25 budget.

5.4 Respond to Scottish Govt consultations on issues of food poverty.

In April 2024, FPAA provided a joint consultation response to the Scottish Government's Good Food Nation Plan, providing partners insight and experience.

Immediate Priority – Food Purchase

As noted above, some of the actions outlined in the FPAA Action Plan are already under way. Over the coming months, implementation will be driven in partnership, including with input from ACC. The FPAA Executive Group have identified an immediate priority for ACC as we work in partnership to implement the action plan.

- **ACC should consider investing in further funding food purchases (action 2.2).** The previous funding ended in March 2024, and front-line organisations supporting individuals and families through the cost-of-living crisis are facing a cliff edge. CFINE has made an urgent request for interim funding to this end. See below for more information.

Current Situation – Looming Food Crisis

Demand for support services, including emergency food, remains at record levels across the city. The delivery partners that CFINE supplies food to have reported consistently high numbers of individuals accessing support. The chart below illustrates the distribution of purchased food over 2023-24, showing it dropping off in March as the funding came to an end.

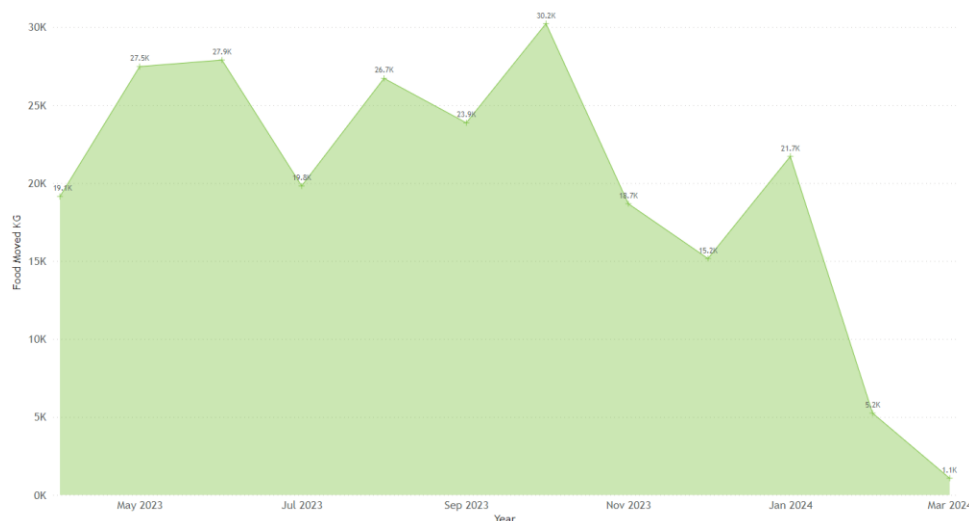


Fig 1.

Purchased food distributed by CFINE, finishing in March 2024.

By contrast, the following chart shows a sustained increase in demand for emergency food from CFINE's food bank. This imbalance of supply and demand is of serious concern. At current levels, the short-term provision of food will simply not keep up with the level of demand for the service, with the result being increased hunger and poverty. This is just one example of the situation unfolding across the city.

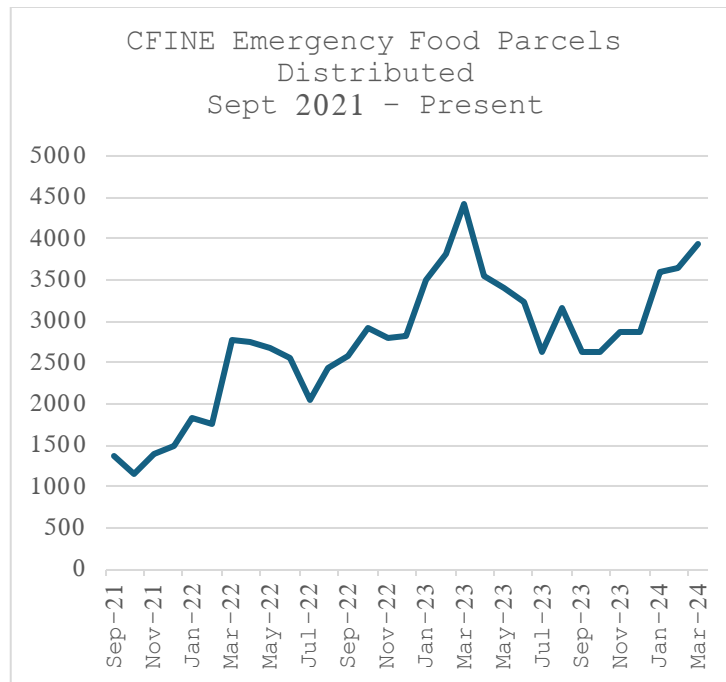


Fig 2. Sustained increase in demand for emergency food.

Feedback from partners:

“The food that we received from the city funding was one of the vital ways we could keep our food parcels consistent and give enough food for at least 3-4 days. Unfortunately, without the food purchases from CFINE, it is likely that we will have to reduce the size of our food parcels, as we see increased demand. The Cost-of-Living crisis is sadly far from over and many of our clients are choosing between heating their homes, keeping their lights on, and buying food. Mental health is declining because of these daily stressors and a food parcel can improve not only physical health, but mental health, as it can be a relief to know that food is available when everything else feels chaotic.” –Instant Neighbour.

“The fruit and veg supplied to the Cubby encouraged members to eat healthy. We found if it was available people were taking it and cooking healthy meals. Without that support from CFINE we find it difficult to provide healthy options due to our limits, so we struggle and our members struggle.” – Cummings Park Community Centre

“On behalf of Cairncry Community Centre I would like to appeal for your continued food support. Our community centre is based in the heart of our community which serves many residents living in poverty. The area is ranked within the worst 10% of Deprivation (SIMD). We provide food to approximately 50+ every week. There has been a huge increase as many working families are now seeking food support. Sadly, our foodbank is now extremely low which is forcing us to issue only 3 items per person. We are desperate for the food support.” - Cairncry Community Centre

The Council Must Act

We welcome the £1m fund to be allocated by the Anti-Poverty and Inequality Committee towards tackling poverty. We understand that the External Advisors to the Committee will be involved in determining how the money is spent and on what.

CFINE has made an early request that a proportion of the funding be made available to purchase emergency interim food supplies to be distributed throughout the city. This is essential to offset the looming cliff-edge as the 2023-24 purchase ends, at a time of sustained increased demand.

Crucially, this decision must come as quickly as possible to avoid a potential disaster for dozens of frontline organisations who are at risk of being swamped by demand for emergency food. CFINE supports these organisations with access to surplus food too and is actively looking at how to increase this level of support, however given the dire situation being faced by individuals, families and communities, purchasing food is the only viable option in the short term.

Request

CFINE, as lead partner of FPAA and FareShare Regional Centre for the area, requests that consideration be given to providing interim emergency funding for the purchase of food, and that this be extended in the coming months to ensure individuals and families receive the vital support they need.