Advice and information mapping
Summary Report

Food Exeter has been running a new project to identify and list the current support and advice offered to people experiencing poverty. The project aims to build understanding of what signposting, information, advice & advocacy services are offered in Exeter, share the findings and work with all organisations and groups offering advice, to identify ways to collaborate and make better use of existing resources.

The aim of this summary report is to start conversations around ways the current system can be improved. You can read the full report including the exact questions asked, all the data and diagrams here. 25 organisations from a variety of backgrounds (see full list in annexe) gave their views via a survey.

Current situation and challenges raised by the report
Below we highlight the survey main results, and the challenges raised by our findings.

Services offered
Most organisations offer advice on multiple themes, **with 64% of the respondents offering advice on food access and** 50% on housing and homelessness. Benefit access and debt advice were joined third with 40% of organisations offering help in each area. No responding organisation offered advice on mortgage.

The responses helped identify gaps in some of the services offered including around **one-to-one, ongoing, and personalised support,** lower-level **mental health support**, and the provision of **hot healthy meals delivery** to people shielding or unable to pick up food.

Access to advice and information
44% of the organisations responding offer their services to anyone who needs it/ asks for it, and 66% work with specific groups only, mostly focusing on families and vulnerably housed people.

Only 28% of organisations (7) request referral or self referral to offer their services, while another 28% request specific criteria (like age or location) and 37% of the respondents have no eligibility criteria in place. **Over 45% of the respondents said the referring/ signposting system could be improved in Exeter.**

The analysis of the responses also highlights that the majority of organisations providing support (the majority of this support being food access related) **do not request formal referral.** This might point to a lack of support beyond the provision of immediate food/ services.

Covid 19 impact

72% of respondents thought Covid 19 had changed the demand for their services: More than half of the organisations reported receiving higher demand since the start of the pandemic. **82% of the respondents expect the demand to increase in the next few months.**

Organisations reported a **change in the types of signposting requested during Covid:** they are increasingly seeing new entrants, people who have never previously needed any form of support and are not familiar with what exists and how to access it.

The analysis of the responses highlights that **the pandemic has created new challenges for organisations supporting people in Exeter,** especially with the reported increase of new people experiencing poverty and seeking support for the first time, and support accessibility. Most organisations report the benefit of face to face work, which has to be limited due to Covid. This change has reduced access to services for vulnerable people, especially people with chaotic lifestyles and people without access to the internet.

There is also a reported surge of people experiencing poverty and seeking support for the first time in their life. These new entrants tend to reach out via social media, and need to be supported quickly and immediately to prevent long term crisis.

Partnership work across the city

Over 90% of the responding organisations said they worked in partnership with other agencies. 58 individual organisations were listed as partners and 17 of these partners were mentioned more than once. Charities working to support homeless people, healthcare services and DCC services were cited the most often as partners.

The analysis of the responses highlights the **importance of partnership and agencies working together** to better share information. The respondents regularly point out the need for a place where agencies and service users can find updated information of what existing organisations offer, when and how to access it. Respondents also pleaded to '**avoid reinventing the wheel'** as there are databases and apps out there already.

Suggestions and recommendations

The suggestions and recommendations below are a summary of respondents' answers and reflections on the results by the working group that oversaw the creation of this report[1]..

Starting discussion on the Referral process

Referral is a complex problem with issues around GDPR and the need for a meaningful and integrated approach. The responses clearly highlight the need for further discussion around referrals to ensure underlying support needs are met and people can be helped to become more independent.

---

[1] The Working Group that collaborated in the creation of this report comprised Food Exeter, Exeter Food Bank, and St Petrocks

The working group recommends focusing future discussions on **consistent referral and support** between all organisations providing support, especially emergency food provision taking into account the following:
- Ensuring the right people are targeted
- Creating a meaningful referral process to the user and integrated in the service (like a support plan checklist)
- Taking the difficulties that some people have accessing advice into account.

Better partnership work: sharing information

The analysis of the responses show there is a **need for better information sharing**, possibly in the shape of a centralised location, for all information on what help is out there for service users and what each agency and organisation is offering. This centralised sharing platform should be used by both agencies and service users. It should be simple, and ideally it's more about improving what is already there than creating something new as it has been attempted multiple times before.

The responses as well as the working group recommendations suggest that **Pinpoint Devon could possibly take on the role of central information sharing platform.** The main issue is the updating of the information on the website, which could be improved by sending more regular and personalised emails to agencies to get them to update their information (Every 6 months as opposed to yearly for example). The working group also noted that the search function on PinPoint is confusing for service users and doesn't always point out the right services.

Better partnership work: sharing resources

The analysis of the responses show that some **organisations produce excellent resources, and these could be shared between all agencies better**. For example the signposting leaflet from Exeter Food Bank could be shared with all agencies, appear on every agency social media and printed versions could be available for walk-ins. This would ensure the same accurate information is available for anyone getting in touch with any of the agencies providing advice/ food etc. This would particularly benefit smaller organisations who might lack the knowledge or capacity to offer more in depth advice, and promote support beyond the initial service (e.g. food parcel), and a shift towards solving the underlying issue that has led people in their current situation.

There is a new **Advice Worker at Exeter food bank** who is doing some work on signposting at the food bank. The working group suggests that the Advice Worker's contact details could be shared with other food provision places, and if possible she could visit larders or support community based food supplies.

The survey results show a need for more discussions around better partnership work for organisations providing advice and information to people experiencing poverty in Exeter, from

referral process to information and resource sharing. The pandemic **has created new challenges for organisations supporting people in Exeter,** and organisations would benefit from sharing the ways they are adapting to the changing landscape created by Covid-19.

How will this report be used?

The Advice and Information mapping project started in autumn 2020, as a partnership between Food Exeter and the [Exeter Food Bank](#). Since then, Food Exeter has been [leading a new piece of work](#), funded by Devon Community Foundation, to explore ways to improve outcomes for people experiencing food insecurity in Exeter. This signposting report will inform current Food Exeter work on food insecurity as well as any other work with organisations and groups offering advice to people experiencing poverty, to identify ways to collaborate and make better use of existing resources.

List of organisations who answered the questionnaire

University of Exeter YMCA Homelessness Society
Cranbrook Town Council
LiveWest Housing Ltd
Exeter Street Pastors
Wonford Community and Learning Centre
Devon and Cornwall Police
Exeter Children's Centres - Action for Children
Exeter Vineyard Church
Isca Academy
Devon County Council
St Petrock's (Exeter) Ltd
Hot Food Project

CoLab Exeter
Inclusive Exeter CIC
Exeter Community Initiatives
Home-Start Exeter, East and Mid Devon
Clock Tower Surgery
Age UK Exeter
Citizens Advice Exeter
BCHA, Housing First
Libraries Unlimited
St Sidwell's Centre
Exeter Food Bank
Inclusive Exeter