

## Exeter advice and information mapping Project brief

### What's this project about?

Food Exeter has spent the past two years researching and discussing the issue of food poverty with a number of local organisations. This culminated in a stakeholder workshop held in January 2020, to try and uncover one or more areas where collaborative action by some organisations might achieve a lasting and significant impact. One of the themes that emerged was around the advice offered to people experiencing poverty as the collective signposting<sup>1</sup> and advice services and roles across Exeter are fragmented and siloed.

The current crisis has accelerated the need for a review and understanding of the help available for people in poverty. Due to the ongoing Covid crisis, there is a strong likelihood of a significant increase in poverty in Exeter in the coming weeks and months. The changes in the benefit system, the end of furlough and job cuts are likely to create a perfect storm for people already struggling and might put thousands of people in a very difficult situation. The pandemic is also creating unexpected financial challenges for people who have never previously required support and have little or no experience of how to access it. Nationally, there is good evidence that improved benefits and other advice has a significant, positive impact on individuals experiencing poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Food Exeter has discussed this situation with some lead local organisations involved in signposting and advice to people experiencing poverty. There is broad agreement between us that:

- signposting<sup>1</sup> is a vital way to help people
- there is a serious capacity gap in provision across Exeter
- signposting and advice services and roles across the city are fragmented and siloed
- there is potential to improve this situation

As a result **we are leading a new project to:**

1. **Identify what signposting support services are offered in Exeter, who offers the advice and how.** This will include advice offered to people experiencing poverty and covering debt, benefits, housing, fuel, employment, food and housing, covering any activities or resources which help people experiencing poverty access information and/or personal support which ranges from supporting with an immediate crisis (e.g. knowing where to find free or cheap food), to supporting longer term change (e.g. through maximising household income through advice around access to benefits, debt and bills)
2. **Identify ways to better use or improve existing resources**
3. **Create some shared resources (maps, documents, research findings etc)**

This project is funded by grants [from Food Power](#) and [Exeter Food Bank](#)

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<sup>1</sup> We understand that signposting will mean different things to different agencies, and we are using this term as a general term in this document including:

- Information resources (including websites and leaflets)
- Assisted information (including signposting to other agencies or resources)
- Generalist Advice (where the organisation set out the options and implications for clients and they take the necessary action)
- Specialist Advice (whereby an organisation acts on behalf of the clients, with their consent)

<sup>2</sup> [For example, see this article by Age UK](#)

## What will be achieved by the advice and information mapping Project?

The project will cover signposting that deals with any aspect of life that creates poverty – housing, food, employment, fuel, debt, benefits issues etc.

By the end of the project, we would together have the following outcomes and outputs:

1. An **audit of the current picture of 'signposting' work** in the city ie who is giving what advice, to who, when and how. This will also include a description of the vocabulary used to describe different offers by the service providers.
2. **Views from front line staff and management** on gaps and duplication of provision and possible solutions for future improvements, focusing on better using existing resources
3. **Gathering examples of existing best practices** that could be built on or replicated, in Exeter and elsewhere
4. **Some quick wins** secured through the process of information sharing and discussion
5. An improved understanding of what everyone is doing and **increased buy-in to taking improvement work to a next level**

If the project is successful, we would hope that participants would together agree to a 'phase 2' which would seek longer term and systemic solutions.

## Proposed Approach

The project will be designed and managed in a collaborative way, with a small multi-sector Working Group supporting the Food Exeter consultant who will carry out the work. The proposed steps in the project are:

1. **Draw up list of stakeholders** – organisations and individuals within them who are engaged in signposting work – formally or informally
2. **Contact our stakeholders** to explain the project and get management support for becoming part of it. This first step will also help identify the best contact(s) in each organisation to complete the survey.
3. **Mapping exercise of current advice work**, also seeking to establish evidence for the gap between demand and provision and highlight duplication. This would be an electronic survey, and might include follow up phone interviews.
4. **Organise the mapping results** in the most useful way possible. It might take the shape of a table, a doc, a map etc.
5. **Present the results of the mapping** work to all participants, gather their reactions and views
6. Open an **in depth discussion based** on the findings, looking for:
  - o Quick win suggestions
  - o Agreement on where there are significant gaps /duplication, both in terms of amount of provision, provision by different client groups etc
  - o Any other issues emerging from the mapping exercise
  - o Future solutions and actions to improve things ie beyond quick wins
7. **Final report drawing all the work together**, shared with all relevant organisations
8. **If desired, start work on designing a 'phase 2' project to take forward solutions** arising from this first round of discussion.