

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Cabinet – 20 November 2023

**Report Title**

Crisis Support 2024 - 2027

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

Yes

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

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**Wards Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

Crisis support services in Rotherham are currently delivered through a partnership agreement between the Council, FareShare, Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR) and LASER Credit Union. The ongoing level of demand together with available supplies of food has led to the need to develop a more sustainable crisis support system, with the aim of supporting people to move from being in crisis towards independence and resilience.

To develop the new model, including the elements funded by the Council, a co-design process has been followed, engaging with a range of providers and referring organisations. A key element of the revised wider model is ensuring it is aligned with holistic and wider support services, which would work to ensure that fewer people experience crisis on a repeated basis. This will be supported through a new referral system to better co-ordinate information for front line staff, offering a broader range of food types that make up crisis food parcels, flexible to the requirements of

different organisations and utilising a revised definition of crisis support to enable this.

Following approval of the recommendations within this report, bids would be invited from partner organisations to finalise the implementation details and to then deliver the model. This would be via service level agreements covering the years 2024/25 to 2026/27.

## **Recommendations**

### **That Cabinet agree:**

1. The future provision of crisis support and grant allocations of:
  - a. £60k for Crisis Loans.
  - b. £34k for infrastructure and transport to enable the supply of crisis food to foodbanks (Community Food Members).
  - c. £10k for supporting co-ordination of the Food in Crisis Partnership, collection and dissemination of data and provision of a referrals process.
2. That bids be invited from organisations to work in partnership with the Council, to finalise the implementation details and deliver the provision outlined at recommendation 1.
3. To delegate authority to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion to enter into a service level agreement with partner organisations to provide crisis support for the years 2024/25 to 2026/27.

## **List of Appendices Included**

Appendix 1 Initial equality screening (Form A)

Appendix 2 Carbon impact assessment

## **Background Papers**

None

## **Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

None

## **Council Approval Required**

No

## **Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## **Crisis Support 2024 – 2027**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 Crisis support (Local Welfare Provision), provided by the Council started in 2013 following abolition of the Government's Discretionary Social Fund. The current model for the provision of this support was agreed by Cabinet in October 2019 and commenced in April 2020.
- 1.2 The current arrangements funded by the Council are for the delivery of crisis loans, provision of food, and support for the Food in Crisis Partnership (FIC). The annual funding of £100k provides for three separate service level agreements to be entered into on an annual basis for:
  - Crisis Loans (£60k) currently provided via LASER Credit Union.
  - Infrastructure provision to enable a supply of ambient food to foodbanks (£30k), currently provided via FareShare Yorkshire. It should be noted that this does not include the costs of purchasing the food itself, but rather the underpinning infrastructure.
  - Support for co-ordination of the Food in Crisis (FIC) Partnership and collection and dissemination of data (£10k), currently provided via Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR).
- 1.3 During November and December 2022, the Council invited bids for the development of a new three-year SLA to operate from April 2023. However, no bids were received, with informal feedback indicating that this was linked with the crisis food element of the SLA. As a consequence, the existing SLA was extended by a year and is due to expire at the end of March 2024.
- 1.4 As part of this extension it was agreed that a new model would be developed through a codesign process to provide a more sustainable solution for crisis food and holistic support, which would work to ensure that fewer people experience crisis on a repeated basis. This would include the Council-funded elements of the model. Whilst this work was undertaken, food supply into the borough was maintained through additional Council funded investment by FareShare in ambient food provision.
- 1.5 This report details arrangements for service provision that includes the Council-funded elements delivered through an SLA, running from April 2024 to March 2027.

### **2. Key Issues**

- 2.1 **Demand for crisis food is nearly three times higher than when the current SLA was agreed**
  - 2.1.1 The overall scope for the current SLA was predicated on the continuation of the demand for crisis support seen in the preceding years, where monitoring returns indicated that demand had been relatively steady. However, just before the commencement of the SLA in April 2020, the country went into Covid lockdown and the scope and demand for crisis food and other support changed dramatically, resulting in nearly 20,000 food parcels being issued in

2020/21. This was an increase of 342% on 2018/19 figures, which was pre-Covid level. Additional government support for the purchase of food through organisations including FareShare ensured that the level of demand in Rotherham was met even at the height of the crisis.

2.1.2 As the level of demand caused by the Covid pandemic reduced, the rising cost-of-living generated additional pressures. This resulted in over 12,000 food parcels being issued in 2021/22 and 2022/23. Table 1 below shows both the number of parcels issued and number of households, based on those who received a first food parcel, from 2018/19 to 2022/23. 2018/19 represents the last full year with no Covid impact.

<b>Crisis Food</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
Number of parcels	4,408	3,571	19,464	13,089	12,408
Number of households supported	1,044	809	1,574	1,527	2,660

Table 1: Number of food parcels provided, and households supported, 2018/19 to 2022/23.

2.1.3 The ongoing high level of food parcels being provided, has led to problems with supply meeting demand. Central to this issue is a reduction in the supply of surplus ambient (mainly tinned) food, particularly with regard to the rising cost of living and specifically rising food prices. To address this, Household Support Fund (HSF) monies have been allocated to purchase additional stocks between October 2022 and March 2024, which are meeting needs. However, the funding available is time-limited and is therefore not seen as a sustainable solution. It has also been recognised that one driver of continuing high demand is because the service that evolved during the pandemic of providing regular food parcels, rather than the pre-Covid crisis provision, has continued at many foodbanks.

2.1.4 Unlike for crisis food, the demand for crisis loans has reduced between the comparator years of 2018/19 and 2022/23 (see table two below). This may in part be explained by 2018/19 having a higher-than-average number of loans being provided.

<b>Crisis Loans</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2022/23</b>
Number of loans	466	350

Table 2: Number of crisis loans provided, 2018/19 and 2022/23 comparators.

2.1.5 Given the rise in demand for crisis food and the challenges faced in securing an appropriate food supply, the need to develop a wider sustainable model that meets need in the borough for those in crisis, without creating dependency, was one of the core issues considered through the co-design process for the new SLA that commenced in April.

## 2.2 **The landscape for crisis support in the borough has changed and more support is now available**

2.2.1 The landscape around food poverty has evolved since the introduction of crisis support. Food poverty now has a significant national profile. Many new initiatives have been launched including social supermarkets and others providing access to low priced food, often from surplus food sources.

2.2.2 Over the last five years, four social supermarkets have been established in the borough. In 2023 the Council invested c.£15k for each of the organisations to support their operations, as part of their journey to becoming sustainable organisations for a three-year period between 2023/24 – 2025/26. These are not crisis food provision but are often able to support people over the longer term. Some of the foodbanks in Rotherham are able to provide both crisis and ongoing support, but it is not always clear where crisis support ends and ongoing support begins.

2.2.3 In Rotherham, food poverty has also been addressed through tackling “holiday hunger” with the provision of vouchers to children who received free school meals in term time, to cover school holidays. In 2022/23, 134,370 vouchers were provided to 7,785 families across the borough. The Council also supports the provision of packed lunches for children participating in the Holiday Activities and Food programme during school holidays. The provision of food support has also been addressed in the context of the impact of the rising cost-of-living and the broader use of Household Support Fund.

## 2.3 **A co-design approach has been undertaken to develop the proposed new model**

2.3.1 The new model began to be developed in April 2023, using a workshop approach, to engage a wide range of organisations. This included those making referrals or providing linked advice, together with support services, those engaged in the supply of food and foodbanks providing front line provision. This enabled frank discussions about the challenges and presented a way forward to engage in producing a sustainable new model, that is in part funded by the Council through the c.£100k per annum SLA contribution. Following the workshop, working groups were established to take forward the detail as part of the co-design process.

2.3.2 The working groups, which were each chaired by a crisis support partner organisation and focused on the following issues:

- **The Referral Process** – this explored a more refined referral pathway in and out of food in crisis.
- **The Holistic Support Offer** – this explored how holistic support can be built into the emergency food offer at every step to prevent people from experiencing regular and repeat crisis.
- **The Food Offer** – this explored gaps in the food offer and developed options for solutions.

- **No Recourse to Public Funds** – this element intended to explore emergency food solutions for this particularly vulnerable client group.
- **Community Food Members** – this involved engaging with those delivering food in crisis, to ensure all provision was understood and captured in the process.

## 2.4 **Outcome of the co-design process: a preferred option for crisis support provision from April 2024**

- 2.4.1 The outcome of the co-design process supports the continuation of the wider model of crisis loans and food along with links to holistic and ongoing support, providing access to low-priced food and additional social and economic support. This approach seeks to meet crisis need, together with being able to refer to other support services and medium to long term help where needed. Importantly, a priority will be to support people to avoid repeat crisis need.
- 2.4.2 The preferred approach for the Council-funded elements of the model continues a single SLA, produced and entered into by the partners as a collective, rather than separate SLAs for different components. This builds on experience and good practice developed to date.
- 2.4.3 With the continuing provision of c.£100k per annum over the three-year period 2024/25 to 2026/27, the breakdown of funding would be for the following activity:
- £60k for the provision and administration of crisis loans.
  - £34k for the provision of infrastructure and transport for the supply of surplus food, but not for the direct purchase of food.
  - £10k for the provision of partnership functions including support for foodbanks and collection of data along with strategic links to other support provision and development of services.
- 2.4.4 At a headline level the make-up of the proposed activities comprising the new SLA appear unchanged from the SLA that is currently in place. However, this masks a number of revisions to the wider model including the crisis food element and the provision of partnership functions. These are that:
- A new referral system will be put in place, building on what works in other organisations, to help strengthen the co-ordination of food in crisis information.
  - A broader range of food types will be made available as part of the supply of crisis food provision, moving beyond the ambient goods in the current SLA, tailored to the capacity of different organisations to process different types of food.
  - To support people when they need it the most, thereby reducing the incidences of repeat crisis in the borough, more emphasis will be placed on the provision of holistic support.

- As a result of the above and to enable this to be delivered, there will be a renewed emphasis on the provision of food parcels to people in crisis, rather than on a regular basis.

2.4.5 Holistic support is seen as a critical component to preventing people experiencing regular and repeat crisis and is therefore at the heart of the proposed approach. For example, it goes beyond the provision of a crisis loan or food parcels and may include access to low-priced food and other support over a longer period. This could be through access to a social supermarket. It is recognised that not all providers involved in this agenda will be able to, or currently have the capacity to, provide a full range of holistic support. An improved referral process is therefore proposed as part of this approach to enable any organisation to provide some initial support and then make a referral within the model to other organisations as required, making the best use of their respective and complementary strengths.

## 2.5 **Crisis food provision to organisations that sign up to the Food in Crisis partnership**

2.5.1 The recommended approach from the co-design process, continues the arrangements for the supply of industry surplus food to CFMs for them to provide crisis food parcels to the community. As with the current SLA this would also continue the current arrangement whereby the Council is funding the provision of infrastructure and transport of this surplus food, rather than the direct purchase of food itself.

2.5.2 Within these arrangements it should be noted that the four social supermarkets in the borough do not currently provide crisis food parcels, but have the option to do so.

2.5.3 There would not be a direct SLA relationship between the Council and CFMs, with them instead signing up to the model to access the supply via the SLA partner. This provides for a streamlined set of relationships and enables flexibility for when / if an organisations ceases to provide support or new organisations are established.

2.5.4 As part of the wider model, a regular and sustainable supply would be allocated to all organisations that sign up to the FIC Partnership. This would include access to a full range of food including fresh, chilled, and frozen goods, but would be dependent on the ability of each individual organisation to handle and store such products.

2.5.5 Having explored different options for the provision of food and holistic support, the co-design is predicated on a four-tier model that is flexible to and reflects the strengths of the different types of organisations found in the borough. Some providers have already developed their offer including holistic and specialist support (e.g. advice provision or crisis loans) and others, such as foodbanks, may only provide crisis food.

2.5.6 The proposed four tier model from the co-design is set out below, which reflects the different roles played by different types of organisations in the borough.

Food – tier one:

- Provider of food parcels, signed up to the Food in Crisis (FIC) partnership.
- Provision of data in line with the FIC partnership.
- Referral pathways to holistic support.

Food Plus – tier two:

- Provider of food parcels, signed up to the FIC partnership.
- Provision of data in line with the FIC partnership.
- May host some delivery of holistic support.

Specialist Providers – tier three:

- Provider of food parcels, signed up to the FIC partnership.
- Provision of data in line with the FIC partnership.
- Host some delivery of holistic support – offer specialist services, working in depth with vulnerable groups that require long term case work.

Social supermarket / pantry model – tier four:

- The most sustainable model of moving people away from crisis support, working on the basis of individual members making a small contribution in order to gain access to a greater supply of food, that would usually exceed the value of their contribution.
- Social supermarkets can provide crisis food provision in addition to their existing provision, should they wish to do so.
- Provision of data in line with the FIC partnership.
- Referral pathways to holistic support.

2.5.7 Organisations would be able to move between the tiers with their progression supported. Should this proposed model move forward as part of the next steps (implementation), it would involve working with partners, to identify which tier they would form part of.

2.5.8 The food provided under the infrastructure and transport provisions of the SLA would be for members at all tiers of the Food in Crisis Partnership.

## 2.6 **Holistic support: supporting people to avoid repeat crisis**

2.6.1 The crisis food model and supporting people to avoid repeat crisis requires a holistic support approach looking at the whole person or family and their needs, linking them into the bigger network of agencies that can provide help. Having no access to food is often a symptom of broader issues that people may be facing.

2.6.2 Food in crisis is a necessary safety net and a temporary measure, but it cannot solve people's issues in isolation. People may need holistic support to



help address those broader issues and to help prevent them returning to crisis. For example, this can include someone in financial difficulty requiring debt advice from an organisation like Citizens Advice (CARD).

2.6.3 The four-tier model and referral process would facilitate an holistic approach with CFMs at the front line playing a critical role. Additionally, organisations that provide advice in the borough, such as CARD, have been involved in the process.

2.6.4 The current process for referrals differs from CFM to CFM, and from agency to agency. It is recognised that a central referral system would be beneficial to both receive referrals and to make them to wider holistic support offers. It is critical to delivering the new model that ensures that the full range of support is provided, rather than people remaining in a cycle of crisis need. CFMs signing up to agreeing to engage in the model would mean committing to using a new referral system.

## **2.7 Continuing to provide crisis loans**

2.7.1 The preferred approach continues the current crisis loans provision and criteria for access, which has proven effective over the last ten years in meeting a range of crisis needs. This involves a flexible approach to assessment of an individual's crisis and the financial support needed to resolve it. Crisis loans can be provided to purchase food, essential household goods (e.g., bed, mattress) and electrical goods (e.g., cooker, washing machine). Crisis loans can also be provided to pay urgent bills including the payment of / top up of essential utilities such as gas, electric and water. The list is not exhaustive or restrictive as an individual is assessed based on the crisis and how to resolve it.

2.7.2 The minimum amount of a crisis loan is £40, and the maximum amount is £120 although exceptions can be made to a maximum of £250 for purchase of essential furniture or electrical goods. Crisis Loans are interest free, there are no administration fees or credit reference searches. Like other loans, crisis loans are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Criteria covering eligibility include being a Rotherham resident, affordability of the loan and the application of other regulatory requirements.

2.7.3 Currently, crisis loans are provided by LASER credit union. Where crisis loans are provided by a credit union, it is a regulatory requirement that to access a crisis loan the applicant must be a member of, or become a member of, the credit union and have, or open, a membership account.

## **2.8 Supporting co-ordination of the Food in Crisis Partnership, collection and dissemination of data and provision of a referrals process**

2.8.1 The partnership functions would continue to support the work of the Food in Crisis Partnership to oversee the whole approach to crisis food and related support services. This includes work outside the parameters of crisis food including social supermarkets / pantries and other potential low-cost food provision.

- 2.8.2 The provision of the referral system and its use for collation of data from CFMs is also include. This would also incorporate the data about demand provided to the Council. The broader range of functions would include:
- Co-ordinating the information of 'food in crisis' provision for front line workers and provide information about crisis loans.
  - Providing a co-ordination point for appeals and donations.
  - Working with stakeholders to implement appropriate systems which will assist in clearer, more efficient, and co-ordinated pathways to provision (holistic support).
  - Identify and secure additional resources / funding to support the VCS members of Food in Crisis Partnership and CFMs.

## 2.9 **Proceeding to co-production, a new SLA and implementation**

- 2.9.1 In accordance with the Council's Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules, if the recommendations in this report are agreed by Cabinet, bids will need to be invited for partners to finalise the implementation details and to enter into a three-year SLA to deliver the provision.
- 2.9.2 It is likely that this final stage will require partnership working across a range of activity and organisations in order to provide the whole model, including the Council-funded elements. This will be achieved by the requirement for either a lead organisation to bid identifying the partner agencies engaged, or a joint partnership bid. A successful bid would also require participation of a partner of surplus food, in order to create a viable model.

## 3. **Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 3.1 Three options have been considered.
- 3.2 Option one is the preferred option. This would lead to the finalisation of the implementation details and to then deliver the provision outlined in sections 2.4 to 2.8. An SLA would be entered into with the partner(s) in receipt of grant support, allocating the annual budget sum of £104k.
- 3.3 Option two provides a fall-back provision should a partnership-based bid not be received, or a partnership agreement and SLA not be reached. This option maintains the three components of crisis loans, crisis food and the partnership function, but would provide for separate arrangements and SLAs. The crisis loans provision is a more specialist function in that it can only be delivered by an organisation registered with the Financial Conduct Authority. The partnership functions are most likely to be delivered by an organisation providing VCS infrastructure provision, given that the partnership function is predominantly an extension of that. It is likely, therefore, that if a partnership approach failed in relation to any component, it would be around the supply of food. This could be because no provider of surplus food participated in a bid, or that agreements between a food provider and CFMs could not be reached. In these circumstances, the option would be to provide small grants to CFMs, through a grant process agreed with and operated by the partnership functions provider. This would give CFMs some resource to

engage with providers of surplus food. SLAs would be entered into with the relevant organisations. To put this in context, given the current budget of c.£30,000 for this element of the SLA, this would equate to a grant of £2.5k each year if this was divided equally between CFMs.

- 3.4 Option three would discontinue the current crisis support arrangements. This would deliver a budget saving of c.£100k per year. Whilst crisis support is a wholly discretionary function and the budget can be withdrawn, it is likely that an impact assessment would identify that people with protected characteristics would be disproportionately impacted, should this option be pursued. There would inevitably be a disproportionate adverse impact on low income and vulnerable households. For these reasons, this option is not recommended.

#### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 The preferred model has been produced through a co-design process. This has involved workshop sessions with provider and referrer agencies along with the establishment of working groups to take forward components of the co-design. Additionally, direct engagement with CFMs has taken place to ensure that all organisations have been engaged and have participated in determining how the new model can work.

- 4.2 Detail of the engagement is covered in section 2.3 of the report.

#### **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 The new SLA will need to be operational from 1 April 2024 to secure continuity of provision.

- 5.2 Key dates include:

- By the end of November, advertising for bids for lead and key partners to take forward the implementation details leading to a new SLA by end of November.
- Evaluation and selection of key partners before Christmas.
- New SLA completed by end of January 2024.
- Launch of new model and provision, early March 2024.
- Commencement of SLA, 1 April 2024.

#### **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

- 6.1 A budget of c.£100k per year is available for the provision of crisis support.

- 6.2 The invitation for bids and selection of partner organisations would be in accordance with the provisions of Section 12 (Grants to Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations) of the Council's Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules. The Council's standard VCS service level agreement would be used for all SLAs entered into.

- 6.3 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the grant activity described in this report.

## **7. Legal Advice and Implications**

- 7.1 The Council has the ability to provide support for people in need through various provisions including S. 1 of the Localism Act 2011 (c. 20) (Local authority's general power of competence); S. 17 of the Children Act 1989 (c. 41) (Provision of services for children in need, their families and others) among other provisions.

## **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

- 8.1 There are no HR implications arising from this report.

## **9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

- 9.1 Many vulnerable families with children are helped through crisis provision. In 2018/19, arising from the 4,408 food parcels provided, 5,867 people were fed with 1,696 recorded as being under 18 years. In 2022/23, arising from the 12,408 food parcels provided, 15,148 people were fed with 4,376 recorded as being under 18 years.

## **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

- 10.1 Crisis support provides for the most vulnerable people in society, many of whom will also have protected characteristics.
- 10.2 Maintaining support for crisis provision mitigates against adverse impacts arising from a number of circumstances that affect people including cost of living pressures and unexpected demands. The recent range of organisations providing food in a diverse community, supplied through crisis support further assists addressing inequalities.
- 10.3 Anonymised data covering the ethnicity, gender and where available disability will be provided to monitor demand and usage of the services. This will help, as part of the review process, to identify and address any equalities issues throughout the period of the agreement and that the relevant protected characteristics are fully addressed.

## **11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change**

- 11.1 There are no direct impacts for CO2 emissions or climate change.

## **12. Implications for Partners**

- 12.1 The recommended option furthers the objective of partnership working through the provisions of the Rotherham Compact, engaging with the voluntary and community sector.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

- 13.1 There are two key areas of risk.

- 13.2 The principal risk is that a partnership approach is not achieved either because no bid is received to that effect, or completion of an SLA is not achieved. To mitigate this risk, an option two has been prepared which is set out in paragraph 3.3.
- 13.3 The secondary risk is that the budget of c.£100k per year proves to be inadequate to achieve the agreed outcomes. This risk would most likely materialise if the supply of surplus food could not meet demand and the purchase of food needed to be considered. Options to mitigate this risk include the allocation of additional resources, including what may be available through external funding streams, some reprofiling of the provision to bring the services within the allocated budget, or a combination of the two.

**14. Accountable Officers**

Fiona Boden, Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence.

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	<b>Named Officer</b>	<b>Date</b>
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	06/11/23
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	06/11/23
Assistant Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	06/11/23

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