

Cash First Project - helping Aberdeen residents navigate food insecurity through a cash-first approach.



How-to Guide

This guide offers more detailed information and advice for those who may be interested in adopting or adapting the initiative in their local area.

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Title	Cash First Project - helping Aberdeen residents navigate food insecurity through a cash-first approach.
Lead Organisation	Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations (ACVO).
All Organisations	ACVO partners.
Category	Established.
Poverty Impact	• Mitigation. • Improving service delivery. • Enhancing understanding.
Introduction to the Project	
The Cash-First Project initiative adopts a multi-agency approach in the fight against poverty, improving service access and sustainable routes out of poverty for residents of Aberdeen. The Cash First Project is a third sector initiative and is part of Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations (AVCO). The Project offers immediate financial grants to people who are struggling to afford necessities due to costs associated with rising living costs. The Project is funded by the Scottish Government and aims to promote service users' self-sufficiency, and to end over reliance on foodbanks.	

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Initial Idea

Who had the initial idea?	Alasdair Ross (ACVO Policy and Consultations Officer) and third-sector partners.
How did the idea for the project come about?	
The Test of Change Project was developed in line with Scottish Government Poverty related priorities. By bringing together local partners and their knowledge of existing systems, the initiative was designed to take a more preventative and coordinated approach to financial crisis, with the aim of reducing long-term dependence on food aid.	
Were plans informed by any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice from elsewhere?	Yes
Information regarding usage of foodbanks gathered from local foodbanks. Action plan developed with the Aberdeen City Council and Food Poverty Action Aberdeen	
Was anyone else involved in developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes
Amy Duncan, Alasdair Ross. 7 key third-sector organisations who deliver crisis support within Aberdeen City were involved in the development and delivery of the Cash First project. These included; Aberdeen Foyer, Instant Neighbour, Social Bite, Aberdeen North Foodbank (in partnership with Trussell and Citizens Advice Bureau), Alcohol and Drugs Action, CFINE and Aberdeen Cyrenians. Involvement also included Aberdeen City Council and was co-designed by 70 individuals with lived experience of poverty.	
Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes
Seventy individuals with lived experience were involved in the development of the project following success of the Scottish Government application. This allowed us to design the project in a way that safeguarded and ensured long-term impact for the demographic. Through involvement, they helped to co-design the trusted partner model to ensure support was in place from the beginning, a risk matrix to ensure the financial support was given in the most suitable manner based on their circumstances and allowed wider understanding of the barriers faced by the demographic, thus preventing engagement with early-intervention approaches.	

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Was funding required to support the development of the initial idea of the project?		Yes
How was the project funded?	The same funding was used to develop the idea, pilot the project, and then implement it.	
Which organisation provided funding?	Scottish Government.	
How much was required?	Scottish Government Cash First Pilot.	
What was the specific source of funding?	£200,000 (over 2-years).	
Were specific resources – other than funding - needed when developing the initial idea of the project?		Yes
Staff/Volunteer Time	Some staff time including the communications team, and 'non-core' staff were not fully covered by the original funding.	
Facilities / Workspace	N/A	
Equipment	N/A	
Local Knowledge	Local knowledge was gained through working with local foodbanks and crisis support services. Some knowledge was readily available through the City Council and ACVO, with more knowledge being gained throughout the Project by working with these organisations.	
Food and Drink	N/A	
Did any barriers have to be overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?		Yes
Amy Duncan felt the name Cash First could be misleading with some not initially understanding the objective of the project. She believes, due to this, that it is difficult for people to buy in to it as they do not understand the goal or intention of the project. Some Professionals believed the financial grants could possibly cause more issues for recipients if risk factors are not considered.		

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Did anything in particular enable development of the initial idea of the project?		Yes
People who had lived experiences of poverty and foodbank reliance helped those operating the project to understand the needs of people within these difficult situations. The consideration of these lived experience helped develop the initial idea as the financial grants seemed to be an appropriate measure to tackle these issues. Information gained from 'trusted partners' (such as local foodbanks) was also very important to adapt the project locally.		
How long did it take between having the initial idea and starting the project?	Six months.	
Who made the decision to introduce the project?	The Scottish Government.	

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Early Development

Was there a pilot project or feasibility study or test of change?	Yes, this is a pilot study.
What did the Pilot Project involve?	
The Pilot Project: • Examined how the referral system could be best designed and implemented. • What impact the Project would have on the target population. • The Project was implemented in a small case study population and explored if the Project could be rolled out to a wider demographic and population groups. • Data sharing agreements were implemented in a joined-up approach to tackling individual Poverty and understanding poverty barriers through a shared data pool.	
Who was responsible for the Pilot Project?	
The Scottish Government (GC Insight) and locally, ACVO.	
Were those with lived experience of poverty among those involved in the design or delivery?	Yes
People who had lived experiences of poverty and foodbank reliance helped those operating the project to understand the needs of people within these difficult situations. The consideration of these lived experience helped develop the initial idea.	
Was funding required to support the Feasibility study.?	No
Were specific resources – other than funding - needed for the Feasibility study?	No

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Was the Feasibility study. evaluated?	Yes
The Pilot Project was evaluated by GC Insight nationally and ACVO collected both qualitative and quantitative quarterly data obtained from the Cash First Project Team locally. Data was also collected from trusted partners, foodbanks, etc. via survey methods and collated. The evaluation can be accessed here: https://www.gcinsight.co.uk/news-views/cash-first-towards-eliminating-the-need-for-food-banks-in-scotland/. This is the mid-project report, not the final SG report. The SG report does not compare impact or delivery amongst partners and will not be wholly accurate for the experience in Aberdeen.	
Was there evidence from the Feasibility study that confirmed that it was working / it would work?	Yes
The Pilot Project was evaluated by GC Insight nationally and ACVO collected both qualitative and quantitative quarterly data obtained from the Cash First Project Team locally. Data was also collected from trusted partners, foodbanks, etc. via survey methods and collated. The evaluation can be accessed here: https://www.gcinsight.co.uk/news-views/cash-first-towards-eliminating-the-need-for-food-banks-in-scotland/. This is the mid-project report, not the final SG report. The SG report does not compare impact or delivery amongst partners and will not be wholly accurate for the experience in Aberdeen.	
Who made the decision to continue with the project beyond the Pilot?	
ACVO and local partners.	
Was the design of the project proper modified following the Feasibility study?	Yes
Some administrative changes were implemented following the Pilot evaluation in line with comments made. There was an initial underspend for the Flexible Crisis Fund during the development of the project. In yr 1 we had to spend more within the first 5 months of delivery than in the remaining 10 months of year 2 as we were unable to carry funding forward.	

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Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

Are potential users referred to your Initiative.?	Yes
Trusted partners can refer eligible clients to the cash first project through completion of a referral form. The referral form is in depth and covers all circumstances affecting the individual to ensure all needs can be considered and met through the funding. Organisations out with the partnership can signpost eligible clients into trusted partners to ensure they get the same opportunities for support. The referral is then brought to a weekly panel meeting to assess the referral utilising professional understanding and local knowledge in a multi-agency decision making model in deciding on how best to support the individual.	
Are there ways, other than referral, that are used to make potential users aware of your Initiative.?	Yes
Leaflets, posters in foodbanks, and public service delivery venues.	
What is the most common way through which users typically access your Initiative.?	
Trusted partner referral and word of mouth from this are the most common ways that service users are referred to the Project.	
Do you take steps to keep in touch / reach out to users?	No

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Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>delivering</u> the project?	Yes
Service user feedback guides the Project delivery.	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project or in project <u>governance</u> ?	No
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved <u>in any other aspect</u> of the project?	No

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Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

Who is responsible for managing the project?	
- Amy Duncan. - Maggie Hepburn, Chief Executive Officer of ACVO.	
Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?	Yes
Not specified.	
What proportion of the manager's overall workload is given over to this project?	
About half of it.	
Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group?	Yes
Who is involved?	ACVO, Aberdeen City Council, and 'Trusted Partners' (which include local foodbanks and other organisations tackling poverty in Aberdeen).
How does it work?	A monthly group meeting with ACVO was used throughout the project. This included service design, frequent partner updates of service delivery, hearing lived experience voices and collating data and then adapting the project. Additionally, these meetings would be used to manage funds and assess the efficacy of the project. Advice from 'Trusted Partners' was gained on a regular basis within these meetings and through partner evaluation surveys.
Are any other governance arrangements in place to review strategy and performance?	Yes
Quarterly reports. Memorandum of understanding and privacy agreement.	

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Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

To the best of your knowledge, is the project aligned with national and/or local anti-poverty strategies and priorities (e.g., local authority or health board priorities)?	Yes
The project is aligned with strategies from the Scottish Government and Aberdeen City Council.	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this anti-poverty strategy?	Yes
Aberdeen City Council has been attempting to reduce strain on services like foodbanks.	
Is the project part of any other strategy?	Yes
Aberdeen City Council Community Planning.	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this anti-poverty strategy?	Yes
The reporting of Project data and analysis of such has proved beneficial for the Project in relation to informing project delivery.	
Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment?	No

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Funding

Is funding used to support the work?	Yes
If no funding was used, would work benefit from funding?	Yes
Has external funding been secured to support the work?	No
Is future funding from the same external source a possibility?	Yes
Which organisations might provide funding?	Aberdeen City Council. The Robertson Trust.
Is future funding dependent on achieving pre-agreed outcomes or outputs?	No
Has a specific sum been secured from your organisation to support this work?	Yes
How much funding was secured?	£200,000,
For how long has funding been secured?	Two years.
Is future funding from your organisation a possibility?	Yes
Is future funding dependent on achieving pre-agreed outcomes or outputs?	Dependent on the project's delivery and impact.
What are these conditions?	• Reduced reliance on foodbanks, 92% reduction in reliance this month, but no specific threshold set. • Supported more people than initially expected. • Increased access to wrap around support.

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What are the future - longer-term - prospects for this work if existing funding sources were no longer available?

The project would have to seek alternate funding from the Cost-of-living Fund and other potential sources.

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Staffing and Resources

Do existing staff from your organisation contribute toward the work of this project?	Yes
Role: - Maggie Hepburn, Alasdair Ross. Finance team: Assist with distribution of funding to service users and reporting. - Communication Team: media promotion of Project.	
Are existing staff from the host organisation paid extra (for example, taking on extra hours) to contribute toward the work of this project?	No
Have additional paid staff been employed to contribute toward the work of this project?	No
Are volunteers involved in delivering the project?	No
Are specific resources – other than staff/volunteer time and money - needed to support the delivery of the project?	No
Are any of the resources needed to deliver the project provided in-kind, rather than budgeted from project funds?	No
Were new IT systems, additional software, or upgrades existing software (databases, Apps) required to deliver this project?	No
Was additional training – for staff or volunteers - required to deliver this project?	No

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Do you – or other organisations - collect data on the project for monitoring or evaluation purposes?	Cash First data from ACVO is shared with Aberdeen City Council (Community Planning) for the LOIP and Food Poverty Action Aberdeen for their action plan but no additional data is collected by them.
Is there baseline data to describe what things were like before the start of the project?	Yes
Food Poverty Action partners collected data on foodbank use which the Cash First Project utilised as baseline data.	
Is the difference that the project is making measured or monitored by the host organisation?	Yes
Who within the host organisation is responsible for monitoring the impact of the project?	Cash First Project.
How often is the impact of the project monitored or measured by the host organisation?	Quarterly reports are sent to the Scottish Government with monthly reports utilised for local outcome improvement plans.
What methods, techniques or strategies are used by the host organisation to measure the impact of the project?	Not specified.
What information is collected by the host organisation about the project?	

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Number of users	Yes
Profile of users	Yes
Experience of users	Yes
Outcomes for users	Yes
Anything else	No
Has the data that has been collected by the host organisation been used to adapt the way the project works?	Yes
Data is collected on all aspects of the Project and analysed to find gaps in service delivery and to identify what is working well and what is now. Data collected also informs service users wrap around support access, amendments to referral forms and service user outcomes.	
Has an external organisation been employed to formally evaluate the project?	Yes
Who conducted the evaluation	GC Insight.
Details of the evaluation	Cash-First Programme: Interim Evaluation, published by the Scottish Government. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-interim-evaluation-cash-first-programme-updated/pages/6/

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What were the key findings from the evaluation	• The interim evaluation reported 4,809 interactions between April and December 2024. These were interactions rather than unique recipients and it is noted that these could include repeat users or members of the same household. • A total of £195,530 was distributed through Cash-First payments during April -December, 2024. • The project is reported as engaging 79 referral partners, establishing 16 new referral pathways, and engaging 156 additional services and organisations. • Among the 73 people surveyed, 70% had used a foodbank before receiving Cash-First support. This is in comparison to 30% of people surveyed reporting that they had used a food bank after receiving Cash-First support. However, the pilot evaluation warns that the reported reduction in food bank usage may be reflective of recent Cash-First assistance, rather than a sustainable reduction of food bank usage. • The evaluation also found that of those surveyed, 91% felt they had been treated with dignity, 81% felt less worried or stressed, and 79% had preferred the Cash-First support provided over visiting a foodbank. • It was too early however, to determine the programme's longer-term impact. • The evaluation did identify that continued investment and consistent access to wrap-around support was important to sustaining early indicator outcomes.
Has the data that has been collected from this evaluation been used to adapt the way the project works?	No

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Is there an intention to employ an external organisation to evaluate the impact of the project in the future?	No
Is there an intention to undertake your own formal evaluation in the future to estimate the impact of the project?	Yes

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Impact

To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?		Fully met.
What difference has the project made?		
- The Project has helped to reduce over- reliance on foodbanks for 92% of The Cash First Project users. - The Project has helped service users receive tailored support and streamline service delivery and wrap around support provision. - Funding received by the Project was used to help aid service users in financial crisis and aid individuals into finding sustainable employment.		
Have conditions or demand changed since the project was introduced?		Yes
The demand increased for the project as word of mouth spread. The project became more trusted throughout its implementation, which also created more demand.		
Has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand?		No
There were instances where the funding was insufficient to meet the demand of the project. Lack of funds was the only difficulty, with the rest of the project's infrastructure being able to handle the strain.		
Has the project changed through time?		No
What changed	The Project is constantly changing in line with the review of service delivery as instructed by service user and trusted partner feedback.	
Why has it changed	Changes were developed through recipient experience to ensure funding worked in line with future applicants needs. Additionally, following the first couple of months of project delivery, the partnership identified the need for further questions within the referral form surrounding individuals experience of debt, housing circumstances etc to ensure decision making and support offered was in line with recipient need.	

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Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?	Yes
There has been an increase in cooperation between 'trusted partners', with these organisations gaining more knowledge about one another and are able to refer individuals. And a reduction in silo working between partners.	
In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?	Yes
• The Project has helped to mitigate the risk of homelessness amongst some service users. • Transport barriers have been mitigated through an increase in finances. • Helped to reduce debt burden. • Increased access to further education, training and employment. • Improved family wellbeing and household income.	

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Learning from Experience

What is working well?	
• Reduced risk of homelessness. • Improved family lives/ relationships. • Ending reliance on foodbanks. • Ability to have breathing room to plan for future.	
What, if anything, is working less well?	
The end of the time-limited funding caused problems for some of the 157 recipients involved. Some recipients reported an over reliance on the payments for helping them to pay for food and other essentials. When the payments stopped, participants reported a return to using foodbanks and other avenues of crisis support. This was most common amongst recipients whose only income was Universal Credit, which they reported did not cover their monthly living costs, but they were not entitled to any further welfare support.	
What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners?	
• Instead of focusing on a single aspect of poverty (i.e., food poverty, fuel poverty), there should be a holistic approach. • (With the right approach you can) help build rapport and trust between service providers and service users. • Service users feel more understood which aids longer term outcomes rather than short term solutions.	
Are there plans to develop or expand the project in the future?	Yes
• Hoping to continue the Project and increase cooperation between partner organisations and trusted partners within Aberdeen. • Increase access to funding streams. Increase demographic range and population scope.	

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How easily do you think this project could be replicated in another setting?

Easily replicated with an understanding of the wider range of Cash First Projects operating across Scotland.

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