

**HOUSING AND COMMUNITY  
COHESION POLICY ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE**

**10 December 2024**

**Future sustainability of Community Larders**

<b>Timetable</b>	
<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Housing and Community Cohesion Policy Advisory Committee	10 December 2024
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	11 December 2024
Cabinet	18 December 2024

<b>Will this be a Key Decision?</b>	Yes
<b>Urgency</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Cabinet
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Anna Collier Head of Insight, Communities and Governance
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Orla Sweeney Policy, Partnerships and Inclusion Manager
<b>Classification</b>	<p>Public Report with Exempt Private Appendices</p> <p>The information contained within the identified appendices has been considered exempt under the following paragraph of part I of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972:-</p> <p>3 = Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)</p> <p><u>Public Interest Test</u></p> <p>It is in the public interest that this report be taken in private because it contains commercially sensitive information that would jeopardise the Council's investment position if it were to be publicly available.</p>
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

## **Executive Summary**

Maidstone Borough Council began work in 2021 to address health inequalities in its most deprived communities. The Council received support from the West Kent Health and Care Partnership (WKHCP) to explore the underlying contributory health conditions impacting the wide disparity in healthy life expectancy in the borough, working with local stakeholders to prioritise and focus including addressing diabetes and healthy weight. Using an evidence led approach the Council subsequently commissioned an organisation called Activmob to work with residents in Shepway to understand their experiences around food to understand what interventions may bring about health improvement.

Through this work, it was identified that food insecurity was one of the biggest concerns for residents. Grant funding was secured from the West Kent Health and Care Partnership health inequalities programme to establish a community larder in the area.

With learning from the Shepway Larder, a second Community Larder was established in Park Wood in July 2023. This was also funded by the West Kent Health and Care Partnership who also extended funding to include services provided by the West Kent GP Federation relating to diabetes including nutrition.

In September 2023 a third Community Larder was opened at Trinity utilising Government funding from the Household Support Fund (HSF).

The larders were designed to provide a long-term, sustainable approach to enabling food insecurity and to contribute positively to reducing health inequalities through advice and support for healthy eating and provide access to other support and advice. The wider benefits of the larders have been to reduce food waste and to provide opportunities for volunteering.

The larders have been delivered to date via funding from the WKHCP and the HSF. WKHCP funding has been reviewed and will not continue and HSF funding is limited and its future is uncertain. The Council therefore has to consider how if and how Community Larders can be made sustainable. The options are set out at paragraphs 3.1 -3.3.

## **Purpose of Report**

To consider the options and recommend the best option for the future sustainability of the Community Larders for Cabinet decision.

## **This report asks the Committee to consider the following recommendation to the Cabinet:** That

1. The options for the future sustainability of the community larders be considered;
2. A one-off investment in The Bread and Butter Thing, to ensure a sustainable larder provision (as outlined in Exempt Appendix 3), be agreed.

# Future sustainability of Community Larders

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The continued, sustainable delivery of the Community Larders will support delivery of the Council's current strategic plan priorities: Homes and Communities and A Thriving Place as well as supporting the emerging priorities of the revised Strategic Plan: Resilient Communities, Fairer Economy for People and Planet	Head of Insight, Communities and Governance
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	The report recommendations help deliver the cutting objectives: Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced and Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved alongside the emerging cross-cutting objective: Putting People and the Environment first.	Head of Insight, Communities and Governance
<b>Risk Management</b>	Please refer to paragraph 5.1 of the report	Head of Insight, Communities and Governance
<b>Financial</b>	The financial implications of the options set out in the report have been fully costed. One off funding was allocated with as part of the previous budget as part of the Preventing Financial Exclusion Strategy and Action Plan to support the sustainability of the larders. This funding would facilitate delivery of the preferred option set out in the report without the need for further investment. Continued delivery of the Larders in-house, without grant funding, would require and an ongoing, annual investment.	Head of Finance
<b>Staffing</b>	The implications for staff have been considered with each option. Staff have been briefed as options have emerged.	Head of Insight, Communities and Governance

<b>Legal</b>	A grant agreement will be required to take forward the preferred option and safeguard the longer-term sustainability of a larder offer.	Deputy Head of Legal Partnership
<b>Information Governance</b>	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes. However, dependent on the decision taken, it could result in review of the collection and processing of personal data or a need to explore the sharing of personal data. Should this be the case, the Information Governance Team will be asked to review the processing of personal data affected and the associated will be updated accordingly, including a data protection impact assessment or put in place a suitable data sharing agreement.	Head of Insight, Communities and Governance
<b>Equalities</b>	<p>Food insecurity was the biggest concern for residents in the Council's most deprived Communities. We recognise that the continuation of a larder offer will have a positive impact on disadvantaged groups.</p> <p>A revised EqIA would be completed to support the option taken forward to help ensure that Council considers any disadvantage that could be created with a revised model or offer and responds appropriately.</p>	Equalities & Communities Officer
<b>Public Health</b>	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	No impact identified	Head of Insight, Communities and Governance
<b>Procurement</b>	The procurement approach that has been taken is outlined in paragraph 2.25 to 2.35 of the report.	Head of Insight, Communities and Governance
<b>Biodiversity and Climate Change</b>	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and it has been identified that there are actions that will support delivery of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan.	Head of Insight, Communities and Governance

## **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. Community Larders are a type of social supermarket and form part of the food aid supply chain that has grown in England in response to austerity and a growing social knowledge of food waste. They are generally located in areas of deprivation that lack access to services and food. Their aims are aligned with local community needs but tend to address social issues such as loneliness, health and welfare as well as food provision.
- 2.2. In January 2023, Cabinet agreed that Poverty would be included as an additional, protected characteristic, as part of its Public Sector Duty under the Equality Act 2010. Those on low incomes and with certain protected characteristics are more likely to be paying extra costs for essentials, however, it is also important when considering the impact of Council decisions to look beyond preconceived ideas of poverty and disadvantage and consider the impact of poverty more holistically.
- 2.3. This was already recognised in its Financial Inclusion Strategy in 2021 which was revised in April 2024. This strategy included a commitment to make the Community Larders sustainable.
- 2.4. Food insecurity is wide ranging and is impacting over 7.2 million people in the UK. Food insecurity disproportionately impacts low-income households with children and disabled members. Those that experience food insecurity are at higher risk of chronic health conditions. Community Larders have become more prolific with the increase of 'working poor' and food insecurity. They differ from food banks in that food banks are emergency food provision and access is restricted to those that are in chronic food poverty. Community larders bridge the gap between emergency and mainstream food provision.
- 2.5. Community larders have economic, social and environmental goals and aim to give consumers more choice and dignity than may be offered at food banks. Although there are different operating models such as a subscription fee, pay at the point of service, or voluntary contribution, the ethos is that users are not passive receivers of charity. Successful models take a business approach to solve multiple issues of food surplus, food insecurity and social welfare.
- 2.6. Maidstone Borough Council has sought to take a proactive role in working with local partners and communities to address health inequalities in its most deprived communities.
- 2.7. In 2021, Maidstone formed a multi-disciplinary working group to look at inequalities in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy. For places with the poorest outcomes the group used a logic model process and working with stakeholders narrowed down the underlying conditions that it wanted to focus on, these included diabetes and healthy weight.
- 2.8. Taking an insight led approach, the Council commissioned Activmob, a social enterprise organisation that specialises in bringing together communities to capture "real life" insights, to work with local residents to understand their beliefs, behaviours and feelings around food. Through

this work, it was identified that food insecurity was one of the biggest concerns for residents in these wards and choice was extremely limited (a common factor associated with diabetes and weight management). As a result of this work, the Council secured grant funding from the West Kent Health Care Partnership (NHS) and established a food larder for residents in Shepway, opening in December 2022.

- 2.9. The Community larder was designed to support independence and offer a long-term, sustainable approach to food security as opposed to responding to crisis which would be the role of a food bank. The objectives were to:
- Improve food security and reduce food waste.
  - Contribute to reducing health inequalities through access to advice and support.
  - Provide access to other support including finance and debt management and support financial inclusion.
- 2.10. They were also intended to offer wider benefits to health and being through volunteering and building connectivity in the community.
- 2.11. Ongoing work was undertaken with Activmob who evaluated the project at Shepway. The learning from the Shepway Larder was taken forward and a second Community Larder was established in Park Wood in July 2023. This was also established with grant funding from the West Kent Health Care Partnership (NHS).
- 2.12. In September 2023 a third Community Larder was opened at Trinity utilising Government funding from the Household Support Fund. The development of this larder in High Street was data led, responding to a shift of known areas of deprivation, with High Street now known to be one of the most deprived wards in the borough.
- 2.13. In order to ensure that the Community Larders deliver the desired project outcomes, in April 2024, the Council included in its Preventing Financial Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan, a commitment to make the Larders sustainable.
- 2.14. As part of this commitment the Council agreed as part of its 2024/25 Budget that funding would be allocated to the Community Larders for this purpose. The first £139,000 is unringfenced government grant, comprising New Homes Bonus and the Funding Guarantee, be used for one-off support to financial inclusion and food larder services, The remaining amount would come from either Recovery and Renewal or Business Rates Pool Reserve.

### **Current Model**

- 2.15. The operating times and locations of the three Community Larders are shown below.
- 2.16. Within the current model customers pay a small contribution of £3 per session and can choose up to 10 items of food, distributing store cupboard

food, refrigerated and frozen items alongside fruit, vegetables, and bakery items.

	<b>Operating Hours</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Funding</b>
<b>Shepway Community Larder</b>	Tuesday and Thursday 10am – 1pm	Golding Homes Community Hub, Northumberland Road	West Kent Health and Care Partnership (NHS)
<b>Park Wood Community Larder</b>	Wednesday and Friday 10am – 1pm	Rosemary Graham Centre, Somner Walk	West Kent Health and Care Partnership (NHS)
<b>Trinity Community Larder</b>	Tuesday and Thursday 1.30pm – 4pm	Trinity, Church Street	Household Support Fund (Central Government)

2.17 Specific data has been collected as part of the conditions of grant funding for Shepway and Park Wood which illustrates the current usage. The data in the table below is for the most recent reporting period, Q3 2024/25:

<b>Q2 2024/25 (July-September)</b>	<b>Park Wood</b>	<b>Shepway</b>
Membership	303	501
Number of Visits	771	984
Weight of fresh food	3431 kgs	4830 kgs
Weight of store cupboard items	3139 kgs	3370 kgs
Number of shopping bags (5kg)	1314	1640
Signposting to support services	24	16
Household Support Fund applications	14	5
Data on intervention/outcomes	N/A	N/A

2.18 Trinity Larder has been funded from the Household Support Grant. The community it serves tends to be more transient and the user needs can be different to the other two larders. Collecting data in the same manner as at the other larders has not been possible to date. The table below provides a high-level overview of the current offer and demand.

<b>Trinity</b>			
<b>(August to October)</b>	<b>AUGUST</b>	<b>SEPTEMBER</b>	<b>OCTOBER</b>
<b>Membership *</b>	N/A	N/A	584
<b>Number of Visits</b>	255	211 (3 weeks only)	370
<b>Total Number of shopping bags</b>	510	422	740

2.19 If the service was to remain in house, a review would be undertaken, including a review of data collection and reporting to manage performance and ongoing need.

## **Staffing and Operations**

- 2.20 A structure chart can be seen at appendix 1. A Senior Project Co-ordinator oversees all three larders as well as running the Shepway Larder. Park Wood has one full time Co-ordinator and a team of volunteers to support the day to day running. Trinity previously had a fixed term project co-ordinator, but it is currently overseen by existing staff. There is one administrative support post employed one day a week. These posts are fixed term and are funded from the NHS and Government grants. In addition, there two zero-hour posts to cover staff holidays. Additionally, the larders are heavily supported by volunteers from the local community. The volunteer pool is approximately 43 across the three larders.
- 2.21 Trinity Community Larder is hosted at Trinity House, a Council owned building. Park Wood had Shepway are hosted by Golding Homes who provide two rent-free venues. Golding Homes have expressed their desire to continue to support a larder provision with venues in Park Wood and Shepway but the certainty of a longer-term venue is not guaranteed.
- 2.22 The larders have been stocked using grant funding, which has paid for food deliveries from FareShare family foodbank. Staff purchase food from supermarkets and wholesalers. Surplus food that would have otherwise gone to waste is collected every day from supermarkets and restaurants. Collections are made in the mornings and evenings.
- 2.23 The Project Co-ordinators have built up positive relationships with a range of organisations in each of the areas and are in receipt of donations of both money and food. For example, schools have donated food as part of their Harvest Festival donations and surplus stock has been redistributed to food banks, local churches and community groups.

## **Wraparound services**

- 2.24 Maidstone Community Larders have partnered with other charities and organisations who provide in-house services and support during operating hours, including (but not limited to) on site Dietary and Diabetes support, Involve Social Prescribers, Fusion Healthy Living Centre, We Are With You (Bereavement Charity), Digital Inclusion and Dogs Trust.
- 2.25 It should be noted that the Dietary and Diabetes support has now been withdrawn in line with the cessation of grant funding.

## **Cost of Service**

- 2.26 The annual cost of the larders is outlined at Appendix 2. It has been confirmed that the West Kent Health Care Partnership (NHS) will not be renewed. The Household Support Fund will continue for an additional 6 months.
- 2.27 It is estimated that the existing larder model can remain operational until the end of the current financial year. The annual running costs thereafter would be approximately £155,166.40.



## **Future Sustainability**

### Outsourcing

- 2.28 A supplier engagement exercise was undertaken in January 2024 to seek expressions of interests from charities and community interest companies to partner with the Council to continue delivery of the Maidstone Community Larder. There were two interested parties at stage one in this process.
- 2.29 A second stage of the supplier engagement exercise was conducted and closed on 19 February 2024. This stage was to clarify responses and request some additional information. No responses were received in the final stage.
- 2.30 Having completed a two stage supplier engagement exercises with no outcome, the Council looked at alternative solutions. It identified an organisation called The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT) providing affordable food to support people on low income in over 90 community locations across the UK.
- 2.31 The TBBT model and proposal can be seen at exempt appendix 3.
- 2.32 In March 2024, the Council sought authorisation to single source The Bread and Butter Thing to run the Maidstone Community Larders. This authorisation was granted on 27 March 2024 by the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
- 2.33 The Council had delayed moving forward with this offer because a local community organisation indicated that they would like the opportunity to explore putting in an offer. This offer has since been withdrawn due to viability and risk.
- 2.34 An investment to ensure the future sustainability of the larders was included as part of the 2024/25 Budget.

### In House

- 2.35 The minimum cost of delivering the service in house would be £155k per annum. As illustrated at Appendix 2, with the grant finding and financial donations the larders to date have 'broken even'. The investment that was made as part of the 2024/25 Budget to ensure the future sustainability of the larders was one-off funding only and there is not permanent budget to keep the budgets running indefinitely.
- 2.36 In terms of the food provided by the larders, this currently comes from food donations and surplus food collected daily from supermarkets and restaurants. This is supplemented with food purchased from Fareshare (family food bank) and shop bought food from supermarkets and wholesalers. This buying of food is a significant expense after staffing costs and does not represent a good balance of produce to ensure a healthy lifestyle. As outlined at paragraph 2.9, the Community larders were designed to support independence and offer a long-term, sustainable

approach to food security as opposed to responding to crisis need which is the role of a food bank.

- 2.37 A review of the current larder model would be required to ensure that a sustainable long-term offer was deliverable. To achieve this, the objective of improving food security and reducing food waste would need to be addressed. Food would need to primarily come working directly with supermarkets, factories, farms and growers to help reduce food waste and provide a more sustainable offer to residents.
- 2.38 A review would also need to address the longer-term risks associated with the venues at Park Wood and Shepway currently being provided free of charge. These venues are not guaranteed in the longer term. Data collection is another area that requires review. As referenced at paragraphs 2.17-2.19, data collection and robust reporting is needed to manage performance ongoing need. A review of the larders may require an additional investment or a shift in priorities to ensure that an in-house offer meets objectives.

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### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 To continue to deliver the Community Larders in-house.

Continuing to deliver the larders in house would require an annual on-going investment of £155k which has not been budgeted for. As outlined in paragraphs 2.35-2.40, the current model would also require a significant review in order to provide a sustainable offer that improves food security and reduces food waste. Work would need to be undertaken to establish links with local suppliers and growers. A review would likely require an additional investment or a rebalancing of priorities.

- 3.2 Provision of a community larder through the Bread and Butter Thing.

The TBBT have an established offer, supporting low-income households and making use of surplus food that would otherwise go to waste. The funding for this purpose was agreed as part of the 2024-25 Budget. Making a one-off investment in TBBT supported by a grant agreement would increase the current larder offer and provide a sustainable larder provision for Maidstone residents.

- 3.3 Close the larders.

Once the grant funding has been spent the three larders would close. However, the grant funding and allocated investment that has been made so far was to help ensure a sustainable offer in the longer term. Food insecurity continues to impact Maidstone communities and disproportionately impact low-income households.

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### **4 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The proposal for TBBT offers the best opportunity to meet the original objectives of the community larders and ensuring its future sustainability. The proposal will maintain the existing larder provision as well as expand the current reach by adding two additional wards. In the longer term TBBT will look to establish a regional base in Kent, working with other districts and the local food supply chain.
  - 4.2 TBBT has established close links with supermarkets, factories, and farms to redistribute surplus food, food that often ends up going to waste because it is wrongly labelled or there is too much of it. Their ethos is to create routes out of poverty and create resilient communities.
  - 4.3 The Council has already allocated a sum of money to support this action and this commitment has been outlined in its Preventing Financial Exclusion Strategy. The investment would be supported by a grant agreement. The Council would want to ensure the sustainability of the Community Larders for 5 years with its investment with an external provider. As part of an agreement there would be a viability review in year 3. TBBT would require a one-off investment as detailed at exempt Appendix 3 would enable the Community Larders to become sustainable within a 12-month period.
  - 4.4 Closing the community larders has not been recommended as food insecurity has not diminished and the community larders are to be well used. Continuing to deliver the larders in-house has not been recommended because the cost of delivery has not been budgeted for and is not viable and would be reduced offer than TBBT can offer. To bring it up to the same level would also require additional investment beyond the current cost.
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## **5 RISK**

- 5.1 Food insecurity impacts over 7.2 million people in the UK and disproportionately impacts low-income households with children and disabled members. National and local data insight identifies that financial exclusion is prevalent and needs to be addressed. Increased financial exclusion has negative consequences for some of the Council's statutory service areas, particularly homelessness. Not responding to financial exclusion increases the risk to the Council in terms of its ability to meet a growing, local need. The Council included Poverty as a local protected characteristic as part its Equalities Impact Assessment process. This forms part of its Public Sector Duty under the Equality Act 2010 and ensures that the financial impact of the Council's decision making is considered for all residents.
- 5.2 Access to healthy food options improves health outcomes. Supporting a sustainable larder offer demonstrates the council continued commitment to improving health inequalities. It also supports is emerging Food Strategy. TBBT has established close links with supermarkets, factories, and farms to redistribute surplus food, food that often ends up going to waste.

- 5.3 TBBT could decide that its model is not viable in Maidstone. The risk to the Council's investment would be managed with the provision of a Grant agreement.
- 5.4 There is also a risk with regards to the longer-term use of the larder venues. The Council would be proactive itself and in supporting a new provider in establishing links with alternative organisations and groups in the Community.
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## **6 CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

- 6.1 None
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## **7 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 7.1 If the preferred option is taken forward, once approved by Cabinet discussions will begin with TBBT.
- 7.2 Community Larder staff are on fixed term contracts and would be supported by Human Resources in the final month of their contracts to find other employment within the organisation if feasible and appropriate.
- 7.3 If the Council was to proceed with The Bread and Butter Thing, a Grant Agreement would be put in place. The Council would want to ensure the sustainability of the Community Larders for 5 years with its investment with an external provider. As part of an agreement there would be a viability review in year 3.
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## **8 REPORT APPENDICES**

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

Appendix 1 – Current staffing model

Appendix 2 - Maidstone Borough Council Community Larders – summary of cost and expenditure

Appendix 3 - The Bread and Butter Thing Proposal (Part 1 and 2) (Exempt)

Appendix 4 – Comparison of Maidstone Community Larder model and TBBT (Exempt)

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## **9 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None