

Food for vulnerable people in Covid-19 lockdown

Integrating wholesale supply

Briefing for local authorities, Local Resilience Forums and voluntary groups providing emergency food for large numbers of vulnerable people.



Photo credit: Bestway Group cash-and-carry, <https://www.bestwaywholesale.co.uk/>, which is working with the London Borough of Southwark to facilitate food for home delivery to 1,200 vulnerable people per week, potentially scalable to 4,000 per week. Indicatively, our estimates suggest that such schemes could feed up to 36,000 in London; over 400,000 across the UK; as one part of a scalable and strategic approach to food and vulnerability during Covid-19 and beyond.

sustain
the alliance for better food and farming

Rice
MARKETING
EXPERTS IN LOCAL & RETAIL

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Who is this briefing for?

This briefing aims to inform strategic emergency planners, local authorities, food partnerships, Local Resilience Forums and voluntary sector groups – especially those working in partnership to organise food provision – at large scale – for vulnerable people needing to self-isolate or stay at home during Covid-19.

This briefing does not address:

- Food for ‘shielded’ people – those with specific medical conditions eligible for a [government food parcel](#) if they cannot access food by other means.
- Prepared meal delivery for vulnerable people, although Sustain believes that [revitalised ‘meals on wheels’ services](#) could play an important role in the near future – not least for the large numbers of older people who will otherwise struggle to access adequate, nutritious and appropriate food.
- Inspiring smaller-scale community-based responses to food for vulnerable people during Covid-19.

Who compiled this briefing?

The author of this briefing (published 22nd April 2020) is:

- **Stephanie Rice**, founder of Rice Marketing. With over 30 years of retail experience in the food and convenience sector, Stephanie Rice provides marketing consultancy to a range of large food retail and wholesale businesses. She has been involved in several implementation projects of the London Food Strategy and works with Sustain's London Food Link network on the Good Food Retail project, improving access to healthy and affordable food for diverse communities.

With editorial support from:

- **Kath Dalmeny** chief executive of the charity Sustain: The alliance for better farming, whose members include the main UK food bank and charitable food aid distribution associations; advisor to the London resilience forum; member of the London Food Board; and participating in regional and national strategic groups advising on food for vulnerable people during Covid-19.

The scale of food need

The Sustain alliance is [calling urgently on government](#) – first and foremost – to put more money into the pockets of millions of economically vulnerable people via pensions, social security benefits and/or local authority welfare assistance schemes so that they can buy their own food; thereby also relieving local authorities, Local Resilience Forums and the voluntary sector to be able to focus on those most in need.

In every local authority area there are likely to be a very large number of people vulnerable for reasons other than the ‘shielded, clinically extremely vulnerable’ designation that triggers eligibility for a government food parcel. A very large number of vulnerable people will not be able to access the food they need due to:

- Too little money to buy food
- Personal crisis for reasons other than Covid-19 (e.g. debt, domestic violence)
- Delays or sanctions with social security benefits payments (noting that the estimated 1 million who have reportedly signed up for Universal Credit in March 2020 will need to wait five weeks for their first payment, receive a repayable advance, and be unexpectedly on a very low income)
- Health issues, disability or caring roles personally, or in the household
- Lack of friends, family or social support to help buy or collect food

Sustain’s strategic guidance on identifying vulnerable people and triaging need – with a suite of possible financial and food responses supported by government and local authorities – can be [downloaded here](#).

Wholesalers can help keep communities fed

If we can bring the scale of food need down to a manageable level through a triage system that mitigates economic vulnerability, then we have a chance of being able to feed the people who are most in need – those who cannot access food by any other means. A range of routes are important and none will work on their own. Feeding hundreds of thousands of people takes a diverse approach that makes the best of existing assets reaching diverse communities.

This briefing seeks to remind emergency food responders of the hugely important role that wholesalers can play in providing both a local and national solution. Wholesalers and cash-and-carries routinely support local communities, supplying affordable food to thousands of convenience stores, care homes, caterers and foodservice providers all over the country.

Wholesalers and cash-and-carries can help to help meet the huge demand for food for vulnerable people. As just one example, the London Borough of Southwark is already feeding 1,200 individuals a week with a home delivery system organised with the cash-and-carry Bestway, working with a local authority contract. Indicatively, if we were to scale such a system up, this system could feed nearly 36,000 customers in London alone, or more than 400,000 across the 350 local authorities in the UK.

This briefing provides advice tailored in particular to London's local authorities and Local Resilience Forums, based on our experience of integrating wholesale supply into the Covid-19 emergency food response in Southwark. It also provides recommendations on what could be done to quickly scale up orders, availability and home delivery. The principles can be applied anywhere. It sets out key steps and considerations under the following headings:

1. Triage the need and define your customer
2. Keep it simple
3. Use the Crown Commercial Service Wholesale agreement for ambient food
4. Consolidate fruit, veg and chilled orders via wholesale markets and local markets
5. Work with wholesalers, cash-and-carries
6. Manage home delivery

This is a practical response, connecting existing assets, skills and resources in a sensible and cost-effective way. We believe that this process is hugely scalable and can make a real difference to feeding the vulnerable, not just now but in the future.

1. Triage the need and define your customer

The Sustain alliance has published strategic guidance to local authorities and LRF hubs on identifying and categorising vulnerable people, triaging needs and directing people to a suite of possible financial and food responses. This can be [downloaded here](#) and is based on good practice from the Royal Borough of Greenwich and Brighton & Hove food partnership, supplemented by insights from a range of other local authorities and Local Resilience Forum emergency food responders. The approach being implemented in Greenwich is the subject of a separate good practice briefing, which can be [downloaded here](#).

Rice Marketing has also produced the outline guidance (box below) to help plan the contents and options for supplying food and other everyday necessities (e.g. toiletries, nappies) for vulnerable people.

Any delivery of food and other necessities must reflect the needs of the end consumer. It would be counterproductive and a huge waste of resources if customers were unable to use the food that they have been given, so this is vital. The triage service in each borough or local hub has to have a way of identifying the food needs of their vulnerable customers.

CUSTOMER NEED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who have lost their income • People who are self-isolating • People who were previously suffering from food insecurity and/or financial insecurity • Shielded groups • Disabled groups • Marginalised groups • Children 	LIFE -STAGE / DIETARY / DEPENDENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single male or female • Family • Elderly • Disabled • Children • Vegetarian / vegan • Serious allergy (e.g. nuts; gluten free) • Babies • Pets
ETHNIC STATUS (some examples) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afro- Caribbean • Bengali • White 	COOKING SKILLS AND FACILITIES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can prepare nutritious meals • Limited cooking skills • Physically unable to cook • Limited access to kitchen • Only a kettle

2. Keep it simple

Rice Marketing advises having one standardised shopping list for vulnerable customers with some flexibility to meet individual needs. A sample of nutritionally balanced food parcel contents being provided by Greenwich CDA to vulnerable residents is included in Appendix 1. This has been adapted for use in Southwark, as a shopping list with weekly volumes that feed 1,200 vulnerable people, differentiated to take into account people's ability to cook and their facilities (list sample available on request).

In London, we recommend development of a template for London boroughs to use, with input from Olukemi Atijosan, Managing Director of Eagle Solutions Services Ltd to help advise on staples for diverse cultural needs, such as the Afro-Caribbean community. Each new customer should receive the template shopping list and tick what items they need as well as identifying anything else that they require. This can be fed back to the template list and included.

3. Use the Crown Commercial Service Wholesale agreement

Rice Marketing advises that London Council officers are able to set up new customer accounts with three major wholesalers – Bestway, Booker and Makro. This allows Councils to access wholesale stock at collect prices. The details are provided in Appendix 2. However the process that has been advised is not suitable for the volumes required and is not working at a practical level. Local depots are no longer accepting new customer accounts. Council staff are expected to walk to depots, choose the stock and get the stock back to depots, which can be impractical for volume orders such as 2,000 units of tinned tomatoes for one week.

In London, we recommend development of pan-London collaborative procurement so that very large volume orders can enable easy participation and deliveries. This can be facilitated by Defra and Crown Commercial Services, which can also offer customer validation for eligible local Councils to participate.

4. Consolidate fruit, veg and chilled food via wholesale and local markets

Wholesale and local markets are useful sources of fruit, vegetables and chilled food. Using the same template shopping list, we recommend that Crown Commercial Service quickly set up wholesale agreements with leading markets to provide cost-effective agreements for London Councils in the same way as for longer-life ambient food, as above. In London, this could involve, for example, New Covent Garden Market, Spitalfields and other local markets.

5. Working with wholesalers: Bestway case study

Bestway is the largest private cash-and-carry in the UK. They have a duty of care to their customers and their consumers. They have a key role to play in helping build a sustainable future for supporting vulnerable people to access the food they need, along with Booker and Makro, the UK's leading wholesalers.

Using the connections made as part of the [Good Food Retail](#) and Wholesale projects (funded by Guy's and St Thomas's Trust and the Greater London Authority), Rice Marketing has connected the London Borough of Southwark with the Trading Director of Bestway cash-and-carry. As a result, Bestway recognised that the local depot route would not meet the needs of the local authority and has now set up a central co-ordination role to deal with all deliveries to vulnerable customers. They have agreed to offer free deliveries to nominated local depots. The agreed process is as follows:

1. Agree the range (currently based on latest availability information).
2. Assess delivery location and confirm servicing depot.
3. Bestway apply cash-and-carry floor collect price, but will provide delivery. This is Bestway's best price in the business across all customers.
4. Local authority places order by email and requests delivery date – day 1 for day 3 as a minimum. Agreeing a regular order and delivery date per week is the ideal.
5. Bestway confirm order and discuss/agree any substitutions.
6. Bestway deliver the order.
7. Payment for the order is at point 5 or it is possible to set up a BACS account where payment is required 7 days from order placement.

Rice Marketing is continuing to be connected with the senior team at Bestway who are co-ordinating the London response to ensure that there is consistency. There are plans to reach out to Booker in the same way to encouraging them to join the Good Food Wholesale project and to set up a similar process.

6. Manage home delivery

Southwark is fulfilling and delivering food to 1,200 people per week. They have re-deployed Council staff who would normally have been working on maintenance and who have their own vans to do the delivery work. These have been incredibly motivated. Deliveries will come into the Council depot to be re-distributed. There will be stocks of flexible items which can be called off when needed for individual food parcels. They have chillers, freezers and fork-lift trucks so are quickly able to put this process in place.

Southwark is confident that they could scale further to 4,000 deliveries per week and would be happy to link in with NHS Volunteers, Red Cross volunteers or others not yet been assigned roles, to help enable more home deliveries.

Contact Stephanie Rice, Rice Marketing via:
<http://ricemarketing.co.uk/contact.php>



Food parcel and meal deliveries are a lifeline for older and vulnerable people sheltering from Covid-19. Photo Credit: Peter Cziborra / Hertfordshire Independent Living Service (HILS)

What about meals on wheels for older people?

According to recent research by the Food Foundation, approximately [8.8 million people in the UK are aged over 70 years old](#), identified as at increased risk from Covid-19. Whilst many may be eligible for the government food parcel scheme for the shielded due to their medical condition, or may have the resources and connections to get through 12 weeks of full or partial isolation, lots of older people will inevitably struggle. Many will lack the money, family support, social services, physical ability or local volunteers to help them buy, access or prepare adequate food.

The Sustain alliance is arguing that it is time to revitalise neglected meals on wheels services; and to redeploy the many professional cooks, chefs and restaurant staff recently furloughed or having lost jobs due to Covid-19 social distancing measures. There are examples of existing services that could be scaled up with the right support, and lots of untapped goodwill and entrepreneurial energy in the dormant foodservice and hospitality sectors. We could re-open many of the nation's school and commercial kitchens to prepare Covid-safe and nutritious meals for struggling pensioners, regular contact with people who could ask about their well-being, and help them shield through months of Covid-19.

Read this blog to find out more about how local authorities, LRFs and funders could help: [British pensioners need meals on wheels to beat Covid-19](#).

Keeping diverse food shops and markets trading

Diverse food shops, retail bakeries and food markets are part of our nation's essential food infrastructure, providing affordable food for diverse communities close to where they live. They can be:

- A source of fresh, healthy, affordable food for the local community.
- An important source of local jobs for people in lower socio-economic groups.
- A crucial route to market for many smaller local food businesses and producers.
- A safe place to shop, if effective social distancing policies and the right support is in place.

During Covid-19, we need to keep our retail and wholesale food markets open. They need to operate safely and help customers and stall holders to follow social distancing rules. The Government clarified (23 March 2020) that food markets can stay open during the crisis (see [section 2](#), first bullet point). Guidance for traders has also been produced by several industry bodies including:

- NMTF (the national association for market and street traders, events retailers and mobile caterers) have produced [guidance](#) for all market operators and traders.
- NAMBA (National Association of British Markets) have launched an [information page](#) for trader updates on the latest guidance and announcements and have published their position [here](#).
- Farm Retail Association (farmers markets and farm retail) have published [guidance written by Growing Communities](#) on running a market safely.
- Farm Retail Association can support markets who may be considering online orders/delivery services; connect via [Facebook](#) for a helpful support pack.

Sustain and organisations such as [Rice Marketing](#) are helping markets, traders and local authorities to share good practice, follow official guidance and to champion local food businesses with policy-makers at local and national level. Rice Marketing is also supporting development of a coordinated scheme to help local food businesses participate in home delivery, keeping jobs and the local food economy alive.

Contact Rice Marketing via: <http://ricemarketing.co.uk/contact.php>. In London, local authorities and LRFs can join the boroughs sub-group of the London Food Board, meeting online weekly to share good practice: Liam.Weeks@london.gov.uk. For other parts of the UK, webinars and briefings on food and vulnerability will be shared via the [Food Power](#) newsletter and [Sustainable Food Places](#) newsletter. See the Sustain website for more links: www.sustainweb.org/coronavirus

Appendix 1: Typical contents of a Greenwich Food Box

These options are available in “single” or “family” size, depending on the size of the household.

Vegetarian Box	Meat Box	Ready Meal Box	Boil in the Bag Box
Tinned fruit Bananas Apples Satsumas Carrots Cucumber Green veg Onions Garlic Fresh tomatoes Tinned tomatoes	Tinned fruit Bananas Apples Satsumas Carrots Cucumber Green veg Onions Garlic Fresh tomatoes Tinned tomatoes	Bananas Apples Satsumas Cucumber Tomatoes Tinned fruit	Bananas Apples Satsumas Cucumber Tomatoes Tinned fruit
Loaf of bread Pitta bread or wraps Crackers Cereal Oats Pasta Rice Potatoes Noodles	Loaf of bread Pitta bread or wraps Crackers Cereal Oats Pasta Rice Potatoes Noodles	Loaf of bread Pitta or wraps Crackers Cereal Oats	Loaf of bread Pitta or wraps Crackers Cereal Oats
Eggs Baked beans Red lentils Chickpeas Veggie sausages	Eggs Baked beans Red lentils Chickpeas Tinned fish Minced beef Sausages	Baked beans Tinned fish (for non-veggies)	Additional tinned fish (for non-veggies)
UHT Milk Cheese Yoghurts Rice pudding or custard	UHT Milk Cheese Yoghurts Rice pudding or custard	UHT Milk Cheese Yoghurts Rice pudding or custard	UHT Milk Additional Cheese Yoghurts Rice pudding or custard
Vegetable spread	Vegetable spread	Vegetable spread	Vegetable spread
Biscuits Pesto Pasta sauce Curry sauce Vegetable soup Tea Coffee	Biscuits Pesto Pasta sauce Curry sauce Vegetable soup Tea Coffee	Biscuits Vegetable soup Tea Coffee	Biscuits Tea Coffee

The Greenwich Food Boxes are designed as far as possible with reference to the [Eatwell Guide](#) – the government’s guidelines on the balance of foods that make up a healthy diet. Download a briefing on Food for vulnerable people in Covid-19 lockdown: [Learning from Greenwich](#).

Appendix 2: Current Crown Commercial Service advice on registration with wholesalers

NOTE: See commentary in the body of this briefing on how we recommend this should be adapted by Crown Commercial Services, in agreement with the wholesalers and cash-and-carry businesses, to facilitate large-scale collaborative regional procurement by local authorities; free delivery to depots; and cost-effective volume and ordering using a standardised list, with some flexibility to meet customer needs.

Social Care Sector Departments - Registration Process: Bestway, Booker and Makro

Public Sector organisations operating in the Social Care sector that need to supply their local operating sites with household supplies, can email CCS at info@crownccommercial.gov.uk to request a validation letter that will allow them to access **Bestway, Booker and Makro** and collect supplies from their local depot.

Registration must be made in person and upon arrival the customer must show both their validation letter from Crown Commercial Service and their public sector identification. The customer will then be issued with a Day Pass.

Please Note: *The validation letter needs to be retained for subsequent visits. The retail store reserves the right to refuse entry and or limit the amount of supplies purchased in one transaction.*

Find your local branch

Details of your local branch can be found by visiting Bestways and Bookers depot/branch locator using the links below:

- Bestway Depot Locator: find your local cash-and-carry – 65 depots nationwide: <https://www.bestwaywholesale.co.uk/depot-locator>
- Bookers Branch Locator: <https://www.booker.co.uk/help/branchfinder.aspx>

Payment

Payment must be via government / business purchasing credit and / or debit card.

Other information

Bestway Depots: If you experience any issues at the depot, you should ask for the General Manager or his assistant who has been advised of this arrangement to supply via Bestway's internal 'Merlin' communication. Bestways Operations Director Ashar Rehman has signed off this process. Therefore if required please quote his name in reference to the above.

Booker Depots: If you experience any issues, please be advised you should ask the Reception or area manager of the depot in question to further validate the access. As we remain in these challenging times, the suppliers can make no guarantees on availability of products.

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