



**community  
food and health**

(scotland)

Fòcas Luchd-  
Caitheimh Alba  
Comhairle Luchd-caitheimh na h-Alba



**Consumer Focus  
Scotland**  
Scotland's Consumer Council

# meals and messages

a focus on food services for older people  
living in the community in Scotland



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# Context

**Scotland's population is changing in a fundamental way: it is increasing again after several decades of decline, and we are growing older.**

The number of people in Scotland of pensionable age<sup>1</sup> is projected to rise from 1.02 million in 2008 to 1.07 million in 2018. It is then projected to rise more rapidly, reaching 1.34 million in 2033. For those over 75, the projected increase is from 0.39 million in 2008 to 0.48 million in 2018<sup>2</sup>.

This has significant implications for public services. The Scottish Government estimates that around £4.5 billion is currently spent on health and social care services for those aged over 65, this is spending by both the NHS and local authorities and accounts for 14% of the total Scottish budget. If the demand for health and social care keeps pace with population growth and models of services remain the same, by 2016 health and social care services will require an additional investment of £1.1bn and an additional £3.5bn by 2031<sup>3</sup>.

Pressures of demographic change and a projected increase in demand for services are happening alongside the biggest reduction in public funding in a generation. Local authorities are facing a significant reduction in their resources from government and other sources, creating a major challenge of how to deal with the mismatch between increasing demand for services and reduced budgets.

While a traditional response to a harsh economic climate might be to either cut costs or restrict eligibility for services, the challenge today is to find ways to reduce the demand for services by addressing people's needs at an earlier stage in creative ways. We hope this report will contribute to current debates on the future of Scottish public services, for example through the work of the Christie Commission, and ensure that consumers are placed at the heart of decisions made about how Scotland responds to these challenges.



Current approaches to 'Reshaping Care for Older People' are looking to address this challenge. A key element of activity is the development, in line with older people's stated preference, of community based alternatives to residential and hospital based care<sup>4</sup>. Access to nutritious affordable food for older people in the community has an important part to play in this, as it is vital in the health and wellbeing of older people.<sup>5</sup> Older people living at home can face a range of barriers to accessing an appropriate diet and many rely on services to support them to do this.

This report outlines the main findings from a study by ODS Consultants commissioned by Consumer Focus

Scotland and Community Food and Health Scotland. The study included a survey of all Scottish local authorities, three community organisation commissioned case studies, and focus group activity and telephone interviews with older people using food services. The full report can be accessed on our respective websites.<sup>6</sup>

We recognise that in some areas the data is incomplete. This reflects the very real difficulties the consultants had in gathering information from some local authorities. There were problems in identifying a key contact within local authorities that could collate and provide the information as requested.





# Recommendations

## A focus on food

We recommend that the Scottish Government work with COSLA and other key partners to develop a benchmark for food services for older people living at home across all local authority areas in Scotland. In order to achieve this, the Scottish Government should:

- ▶ Set-up a working group bringing together key stakeholders and older people, to further this agenda, building links with appropriate policy and delivery mechanisms including the Scotland Excel community meals framework.
- ▶ Consult with consumers and key stakeholders to establish which groups this benchmark should apply to and what it should consist of.
- ▶ Support the development of an evidence base and sharing of good practice between local authorities.

We recommend that local authorities establish a clear strategic priority, and effectively carry forward plans, to provide a baseline range of food services for older people living at home in conjunction with third sector and community planning partners. In order to achieve this, local authorities should:

- ▶ Improve and standardise the collection and publication of data on service provision, cost and quality to better monitor and plan current and future levels of service with and across different geographical areas.
- ▶ Demonstrate and publish evidence of effective engagement with older people in the development and delivery of food services for older people living at home. Providers need to be able to demonstrate that consumer preference lies at the heart of decision making.
- ▶ Increase the priority to food provision for older people living at home in local health and community care planning frameworks.
- ▶ Establish a lead responsibility for food services for older people in their area
- ▶ Collect data on the outcomes that these services achieve for older people.



## Information

We recommend that local authorities:

- ▶ **Support the development and dissemination of local information on food services available to older people.**

We recommend that the Scottish Government facilitate the development and provision of appropriate up-to-date information on entitlement to, and the availability of, food services for older people living at home (in partnership with appropriate agencies). In order to do so, we recommend that the Scottish Government:

- ▶ Include this information when developing and taking forward plans for an online portal for Scottish public information. Ensure this information is added to the Care Information Scotland service, and raise awareness of this website and telephone helpline.
- ▶ Ensure that this information is also made available to those without online access. Work with Age Scotland, and others, to further promote and extend national telephone helplines and good quality local information.

## Increase capacity

We recommend that the Scottish Government ensure higher priority for funding for voluntary and community organisations providing food services for older people living at home in Scotland, in recognition of the importance of the current role they play in access to good food, and the potential they offer for future developments. In order to achieve this, we recommend that the Scottish Government:

- ▶ Ensure that ongoing support is available in line with the recommendations made by the Food Access and Affordability Working group in March 2011.
- ▶ Develop an evidence base in relation to food, nutrition and older people and ensure that opportunities to develop practice and build capacity are available and accessible across the country.
- ▶ Support and promote the involvement of social enterprises and the private sector, building on existing partnership arrangements, in addressing this agenda.

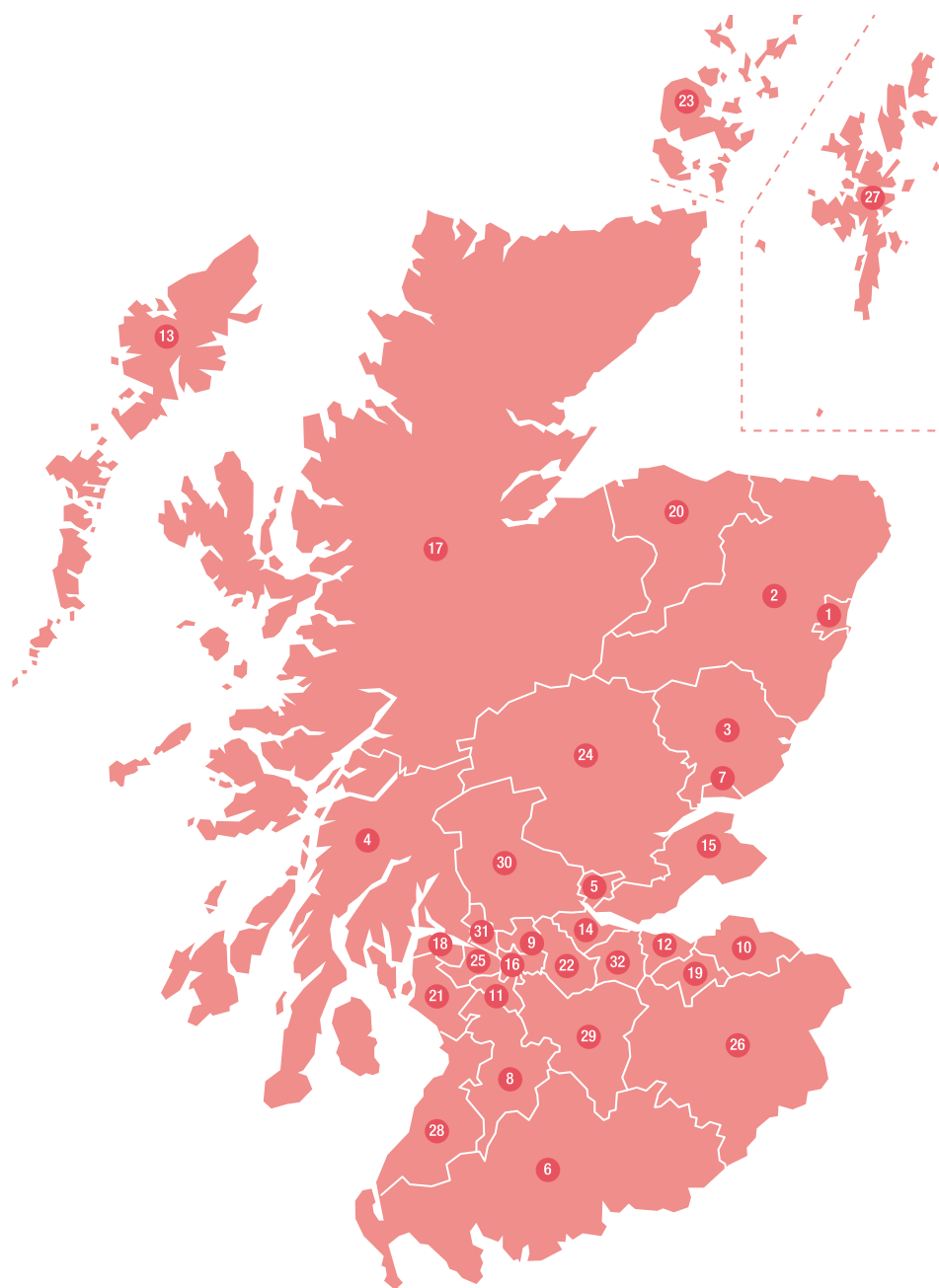



























## Access and availability


























We recommend that local authorities ensure ease and equity of access to and availability of, food services for older people living at home. In order to do so we recommend that local authorities:

- ▶ Remove the requirement for a formal social work assessment to gain access.
- ▶ Actively engage with community and voluntary organisations to identify gaps and mobilise community assets to address these gaps.
- ▶ Ensure higher priority for funding for community transport services, particularly those that serve rural and remote rural consumers, and for those with mobility requirements.
- ▶ Continue to support lunch clubs, which are particularly valued for the combination of food and opportunities for social interaction that they offer.





Area	Population of people aged 65 and over	Services
1 Aberdeen City	32,200	
2 Aberdeenshire	38,300	
3 Angus	21,500	 
4 Argyll & Bute	18,800	
5 Clackmannanshire	7,700	
6 Dumfries & Galloway	31,800	  
7 Dundee City	25,700	  
8 East Ayrshire	20,400	  
9 East Dunbartonshire	19,000	 
10 East Lothian	16,900	 
11 East Renfrewshire	15,600	
12 Edinburgh City	68,600	 
13 Eilean Siar	5,500	
14 Falkirk	24,300	
15 Fife	61,800	
16 Glasgow City	82,400	

Area	Population of people aged 65 and over	Services
17 Highland	39,900	
18 Inverclyde	14,200	 
19 Midlothian	13,000	
20 Moray	15,900	  
21 North Ayrshire	24,400	
22 North Lanarkshire	48,200	 
23 Orkney Islands	3,800	
24 Perth & Kinross	28,000	
25 Renfrewshire	27,800	
26 Scottish Borders	22,000	 
27 Shetland Islands	3,600	 
28 South Ayrshire	23,200	
29 South Lanarkshire	50,600	   
30 Stirling	14,800	  
31 West Dunbartonshire	14,600	
32 West Lothian	22,100	 








# Local authority services

**All local authorities were asked to give detail on each of the food services they provide – either directly or by commissioning an external organisation – and to provide an overview of the food services for older people in their area.**

Twenty-eight of the 32 local authorities in Scotland replied.

Fifty-eight individual services were identified from the local authority survey. An extra 17 services were identified from local authority websites, but these have not been included in our analysis as we could not guarantee this information was up-to-date.

The services offered are:

-  Hot meals
-  Frozen meals
-  Lunch clubs
-  Shopping services
-  Assistance with meal preparation as part of personal care support.

From this survey it was found that:

- ▶ 13 local authorities provided one type of food service
  - ▶ 9 local authorities provided two types of food services
  - ▶ 4 local authorities provided three types of food service
  - ▶ 1 local authority provided four types of food service
  - ▶ 1 local authority provided five types of food service
- There is no uniformity of services across local authority areas, and while the majority of services offered cover the entire local authority area, some operate in a more limited geographical area.
- Hot meal delivery is the most common type of food service provided by local authorities. The majority of these local authorities do not also provide a frozen meal service.
- Approximately one-third of the food services are delivered directly by the local authority, with the remaining two-thirds commissioned from voluntary sector and private providers.
- ▶ 7 of the 16 local authorities indicated that they contract out their hot meal delivery service.
  - ▶ 10 of the 12 local authorities which indicated that they provide a frozen meal commission this out to an external provider.
  - ▶ 5 of the 10 local authorities who indicated that they offered a shopping service provide this in house.
  - ▶ Lunch clubs are supported in at least 10 local authorities. In most of these cases the clubs are run by voluntary organisations. Six additional local authorities indicated that lunch clubs are run in their area, but that they are independent of the local authority.

## Number of older people who receive a service

Local authorities found it difficult to detail the number of people receiving a service or the frequency of that service, so it is difficult to provide reliable figures on overall user numbers. From the information provided, there appears to be a vast difference between local authorities with, for example, one delivering 700 hot meals per day while another with a comparable population of people aged 65 and over provides 145 frozen meals.

## Choice and accessibility

Two local authorities offer both hot and frozen meals although it appears this may not represent a choice for older people. In at least two local authorities, frozen meals are supplied to older people living in more remote areas where there is no hot meals delivery.

There is greater choice in terms of the type of food on offer, with 15 of the 16 local authorities who indicated that they provided a hot meal delivery service able to meet a range of specific dietary needs. There is a very similar picture in frozen meal provision. There is less menu choice at lunch clubs supported by local authorities, although some offer a vegetarian option.

In all local authorities access to hot and frozen meal services is via professional social work referral. Some shopping services will accept self referral. Lunch clubs are more openly accessible, apart from those held in day centres.

## Consumer engagement

The majority of local authorities who responded indicated that they conduct an annual survey or questionnaire with their service users. For some local authorities, user views are also collected by a variety of other methods, including: user participation in trial menu tasting, stakeholder fora and representational groups and verbal feedback. Only one council stated that they do not carry out any regular data collection regarding levels of satisfaction with their food services.

## Cost

Local authorities were asked to detail the estimated total cost of their service per year, and the charge to the user for this service.

Not all of the local authorities were able to provide information on the costs of their service, and the different ways in which this information was reported made it difficult to interpret for the purposes of this research. However, from the information that is available, it is fair to say that the expenditure by local authority does not directly correlate with the population of people aged 65 and over of that area.

What people pay:

- ▶ The cost of a hot meal ranges from £1.23 to £3.42
- ▶ Frozen meals services range from £2 to £3, typically for a two course meal
- ▶ Lunch clubs prices range from £1.23 to £3
- ▶ Shopping services charge on average £3



## Quality assurance

All of the local authorities who responded use some form of quality assurance and nutritional guidelines. Eleven local authorities use the National Association for Care Catering Standards. Other local authorities use the Caroline Walker Trust guidelines, basic food hygiene training, cook safe, Health and Nutrition (Scotland) Act 2007 and build nutritional requirements into tender processes.

Four local authorities said that they are involved in the Scotland Excel National Framework contract for community meals which is out to tender at the time of writing.

## Gaps in services

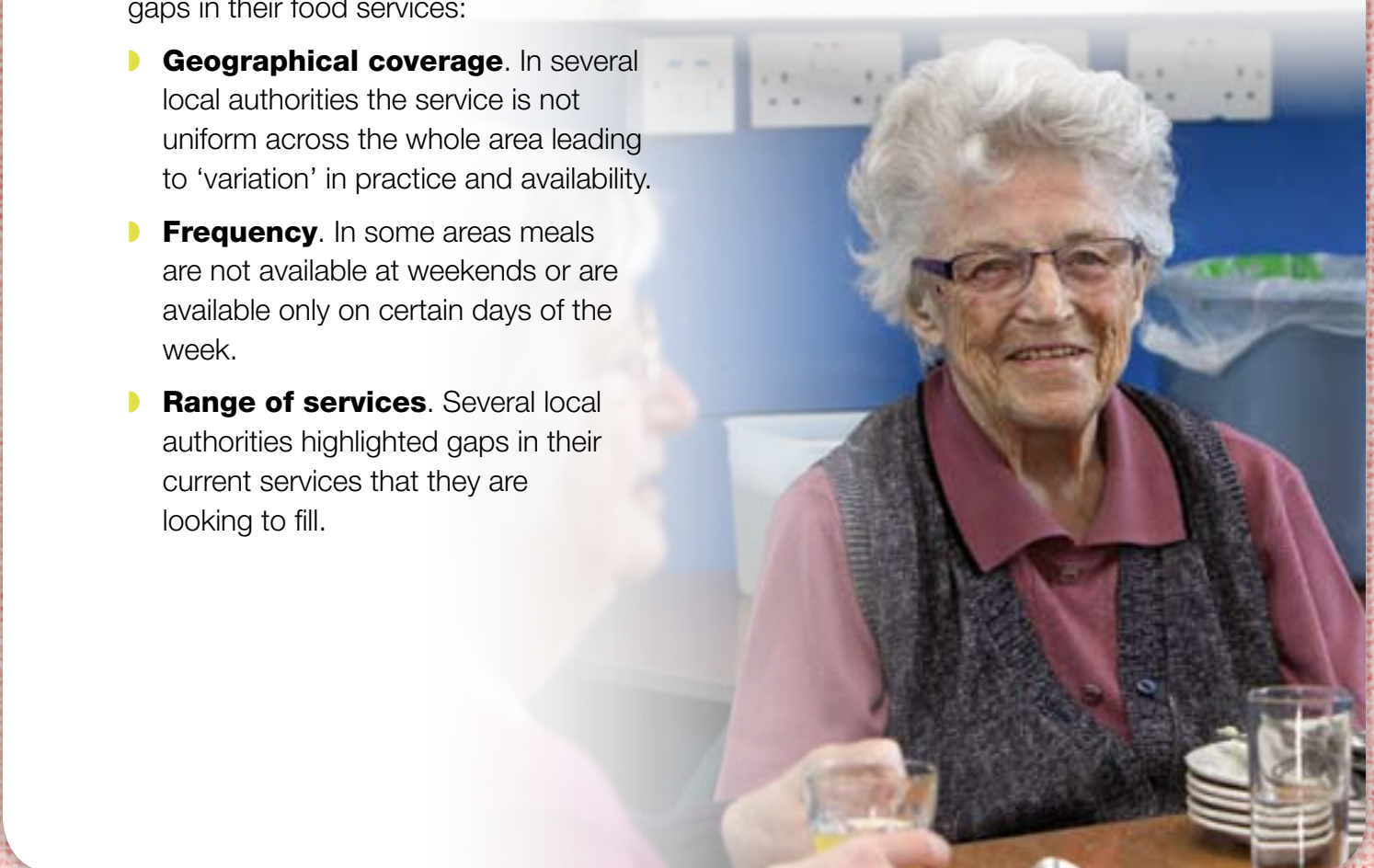
Local authorities identified the following gaps in their food services:

- ▶ **Geographical coverage.** In several local authorities the service is not uniform across the whole area leading to 'variation' in practice and availability.
- ▶ **Frequency.** In some areas meals are not available at weekends or are available only on certain days of the week.
- ▶ **Range of services.** Several local authorities highlighted gaps in their current services that they are looking to fill.

## Service changes

Almost half of local authorities who responded have made some changes to their services in the last year. In some areas this has led to an increase in service e.g. the introduction of a shopping service, frozen meals to cover weekends. In others, frozen meals have replaced hot meals, prices have increased and the subsidy has been withdrawn from community based lunch clubs.

A number of local authorities indicated that they are planning changes to food services. This includes: six local authorities that are talking to older people to help inform a review of the service and one local authority that is working with voluntary sector partners to work out new ways of delivering food services.



## Examples of good practice identified by the local authorities

Local authorities were asked to identify any good practice examples in their area, and a few of these examples are listed below.

- ▶ East Dunbartonshire council provides four weeks of free hot meal delivery as older people are discharged from hospital.
- ▶ The Food Train<sup>7</sup> was listed as an example of good practice by both West Lothian and Dumfries and Galloway councils.
- ▶ Orkney Islands Council provides training to home carers as well as cookery books for wholesome meals that can be made in 15 minutes.
- ▶ South Lanarkshire council has begun a 'nutrition in later life' collaborative training programme. Home Care staff have been attending a one day course to extend their skills in providing the best nutritional care to people living alone in their own homes.
- ▶ Fife council *'is exemplary in providing a seven day hot meal delivery service 363 days per year, with meals provided for all dietary types and requirements. Menus are prepared with assistance from a NHS dietician to ensure minimum nutritional values, and meals are checked routinely to ensure quality standards are met'*.  
(Service provider, Fife)





# Consumers views of the services

**Older people's views on the services they receive were gathered via focus groups and interviews carried out in different local authority areas.**

Sixty-two consumers were involved in focus groups held at local authority supported lunch clubs. Twenty-one telephone interviews were undertaken to gather views of users of hot and frozen meal deliveries, shopping services and personal care services. The findings of this study should be viewed as indicative of wider consumer views rather than representative of all older people in Scotland. The real strength of this research

lies in the fact that these voices are rarely heard.

The services were generally welcomed by the people who use them. Many people rely on the food services and have little alternative. What also came through strongly is that older people are reluctant to complain or make a fuss, and that they are grateful for whatever service is provided.



## Hot meals

Hot meal deliveries are valued for the variety of food on offer, providing meals that people said they could no longer make for themselves. Users also consider them to be excellent value for money.

***'You get variety, one day it might be stovies, or sausages or it might be fish. It's a good wee meal – it's never the same two days running'.***

(Male, 75+)

The fact that they are delivered is a source of social contact and reassurance for many older people who receive them.

***'I know that if anything happens to me, if meals on wheels can't get an answer at the door, then there will be someone checking on me'.***

(Female, 65-75)

Two of the older people in receipt of a hot meals service said that they had certain dietary or medical requirements, but had not shared these with staff as they didn't want to make a fuss.

***'I haven't told anyone because I don't get them (specific food) every day. I just eat a wee drop and throw the rest away'.***

(Female, 75+)



## Frozen meals

Three older people were asked about their frozen meals service, and mixed views were expressed. Some were happy with the choice, quality, price (around £2), and flexibility of delivery times. However, there were some negative comments about portion size and the accuracy of some of the cooking instructions.

***'The instructions on the rice pudding say cook for 6 minutes, but if you do, it is still freezing cold'***

(Male, 75+)

One consumer stated that he is not able to eat certain things for health reasons, but he has not mentioned this to his service provider.

***'I'm not to eat some vegetables. I haven't mentioned it to them – I don't want to make a fuss'***

(Male, 75+)

In one of the case study areas, older people who had used the frozen meals service felt that they should only be used as a standby and are not suitable for the longer term as 'they all taste the same'.







## Shopping services

Shopping services are a grocery shopping support service for older people, assisting and enabling them to live at home independently for as long as they are able. A grocery shopping list is collected, and the food is purchased and delivered at an arranged time. Shopping services are provided by voluntary organisations and by local authorities.

Nine consumers were interviewed; six of these were users of the Food Train. All those interviewed praised the reliability of the service, both in terms of collecting the shopping list and delivering the food, and in the volunteers arriving at the same time each week. The shopping services were further praised for their value for money, and for their ability to allow people to remain 'in control'. Older people tended to be referred to the shopping service to avoid them having to carry heavy shopping, and the service was considered a long term solution to their health issues.

For those consumers using a shopping service, comments on quality and variety of food had a lot to do with the supermarket that was used, and perceptions of which supermarket is better. There was evidence that consumers were reluctant to complain about the service.

***"Sometimes I feel helpless – neighbours no longer care about elderly people and so when they arrive on a Monday morning it gives me peace"***

(Female, 75+)

***"It's not what I would pick but I've not said anything"***

(Female, 75+)

***"The Food Train helps me to be as independent as I can be, for as long as I can be"***

(Male, 75)

***"I don't like the food from XXXX but they would have an awful problem trying to keep everyone happy"***

(Female, 75+)





## Lunch clubs

In five out of six lunch clubs visited, members praised the quality of the food, the perceived good value for money and nutritional value. In one there were more critical comments about the food on offer. In this lunch club some members had chosen the vegetarian option as it was felt to be better than the meat option. While there is a different meal in most lunch clubs each week, there is little choice on the day.

The social benefit of lunch clubs is clear, and the opportunities they offer for these older people to get together with people of their own age was expressed as highly valuable.

***'It's for the companionship as well as the novelty of having someone else cook'***

**(Female, 65-75 years old)**

Some local authority supported lunch clubs closed during the school holidays, as school kitchens are used to prepare meals. No alternative is offered at these times. Transport was provided for older people to attend three of the six lunch clubs. For those who used the transport services, it was said that this was essential in order for them to attend.

Those interviewed at the lunch clubs were not in receipt of any other food services, demonstrating their importance for the users.

The older people interviewed at lunch clubs had general concerns about public sector budget cuts, fearing that this could lead to the clubs being disbanded.





# Case Studies

Three local community organisations in very different parts of Scotland were commissioned to develop case studies to look at the range of different food services provided by voluntary and community organisations in their area. These case studies were designed to supplement the local authority and consumer research by providing a more detailed picture of food service provision within an urban, a rural and a remote rural setting respectively. A summary of each case study follows, with full versions included in the research report<sup>8</sup>.

## The case studies show:

- ▶ There is a wide range of different food activities within communities that provide support to older people. These include: breakfast clubs, lunch clubs, services targeted at specific minority ethnic communities, cooking classes, allotments and 'grow your own' projects, food co-ops, outings and trips that include meals, healthy eating and nutrition advice.
- ▶ The amount of work that volunteers put into developing and running these activities. This includes sitting on management committees, running fundraising events, as well as cooking, serving meals and clearing up after lunch clubs. Many volunteers are older people themselves.
- ▶ The fragility of many of the organisations, including one where volunteers are buying the food so that a club can run. There is very real concern about the withdrawal of the small amount of funding that makes initiatives viable, and also how to replace volunteers as they move on.
- ▶ The vital importance of community transport and volunteer drivers to the success of lunch clubs and shopping services.
- ▶ The fact that the social aspects of many of the activities are as important as the food.

# Case Study

## North East Edinburgh



This case study provides detail on the wide range of food services available in an urban area in north east Edinburgh and explores older people's views on these services. Around 14,700 older people aged 65 and above live in these areas (Leith, Craigentinny, Duddingston, Portobello and Craigmillar) representing 16 per cent of the total population.

A key issue identified is that in general, older people had a limited knowledge of the range of food services available in their area. They felt that there were relatively few food services available for them. Those that had knowledge of some food services commented that they were 'referral only' or were too expensive.

Older people were keen that food services are acknowledged as an important part of care services for older people.

Non statutory food services in north east Edinburgh are divided into six different types, as discussed below.

### Providers with a food and health focus

Six organisations were identified as offering a range of different services ranging from cooking classes (including classes for older men and intergenerational cooking sessions) to supporting people to grow their own food, talks on healthy eating and nutrition and lunches for special occasions.

### Community cafes

Six community cafes operate in the area.

All are open to the whole community and are used by older people. Some offer special deals or smaller portions at reduced rates and one specialising in Punjabi food has three older people who volunteer in the cafe. There are also a number of commercial cafes and food outlets in the area that older people rely on.

### Food co-ops

There are three food co-ops in the area, each running once a week on a week day morning. One is investigating the idea of a shopping service and another is based in a sheltered housing complex.

### Services providing a meal

There are eleven services which provide a meal as part of their service, though this is not their primary focus. These range from projects specifically for those who are frail, or with dementia, to services for people with a learning disability, affected by homelessness or mental health issues. Individuals usually need to be referred to these services.



## Services for people from minority ethnic communities

Not all of these services are in north east Edinburgh, but it is the experience of the researchers that people will travel across the city to access these services. Five different organisations provide services for members of the Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Mauritian, Jewish and South Asian communities.

This case study was prepared by **Pilmey Development Project (PDP)** and **The Edinburgh Community Food Training Hub**. These two organisations working together combine a wealth of experience and knowledge around food and health among older people in Edinburgh.

## Lunch clubs

Seven lunch clubs operate in the area. They mostly run in churches and housing associations and are supported by voluntary organisations and Edinburgh City Council. These vary in operating frequency, with some running five days a week and others once a week.

For further information please contact **Anne Munro** on **[annemunro@btconnect.com](mailto:annemunro@btconnect.com)** or at **0131 553 2559**



# Case Study

## Moray



**This case study explores social eating opportunities for older people in Moray. Moray is a predominately rural landscape, though most people live in the main towns of Elgin, Lossiemouth, Buckie, Forres and Keith. There are other smaller communities scattered throughout Moray, several in remote and rural locations.**

In April 2010, the local authority withdrew subsidies from all older people's lunch clubs in Moray. Clubs were informed that the price of meals would need to rise from £2.10 to £4.25 and that clubs could continue if they became constituted groups with registered membership. The case study looks at the various ways in which communities across the area reacted and adapted to these changes mobilising the assets they had available.

### **Change of venue:**

- ▶ Portgordon Lunch Club moved to the village hall and two committee members now provide the meals on a voluntary basis. Other members undertake non cooking tasks. To avoid waste, meals are pre-booked and more than 20 people attend each week. Transport is provided for those who need it and other informal, low level support can be given to members who may be going through difficult times.
- ▶ In Forres, the pensioners' luncheon group 'Bite and Blether' moved to a local church hall, employing the cook from the community centre to make the meals. The group received small amounts of financial support from various organisations and advisory support from the local Community Support Unit and Age Scotland.

- ▶ In both Tomintoul and Lossiemouth the lunch clubs moved to private venues. In Tomintoul the club meets in a hotel in the centre of the village with transport provided by the local Dial-a Bus. In Lossiemouth the committee looked around for alternative venues and agreed on a local restaurant which provides a two course meal twice a week as well as meals for special occasions. Transport is organised by the club using the local Senior Citizens Trust bus.

### **Change of service and/or provider:**

- ▶ In Knockando, there was no one initially able to take on a leadership role and the lunch club closed until the church elders set up a pilot home bakes tea, open to all, as a drop in once a week run entirely by volunteers. This service is currently only available during the spring/summer months.
- ▶ In Aberlour, the lunch club accepted the increase in meal costs through the local school, and now use the school community room for an hour after the meal for additional activities.
- ▶ In Elgin, community centre staff running the coffee bar decided they could continue to offer pensioners meals in the dining room of the community centre, which has increased the service to three days a week.



### What was needed for success?

- ▶ dedication and commitment of volunteers
- ▶ strong committee and chair
- ▶ availability of appropriate alternative venue
- ▶ staff in the alternative venues able to offer help
- ▶ accessibility for older people, both in terms of disabled access and the provision of community transport
- ▶ support to become a constituted group
- ▶ fund raising activities, and in one case financial support and support from a local businessman

### Concerns expressed by consumers:

- ▶ For some, there is now no choice of meals and additional costs mean that members can now only afford one meal a week rather than the two they had before.
- ▶ Sustainability, as there are no younger users coming on board.
- ▶ Numbers of volunteers, and for the future of their service if the chairperson had to withdraw.
- ▶ In one group people eat their meals fairly quickly and leave and additional activities that have been offered have not been taken up.

This case study was prepared by **Moray Handy Person Services**. Since the beginning of 2011 they have been working with **Moray Community Health and Social Care Partnership** on the one year, LEADER funded, 'Connect Project'. This will help to build up social networks for older people, particularly in rural areas.

For further information please contact **Jane Cotton** on **manager@morayhandypersonservices.org.uk** or at **01343 543 490**



# Case Study

## Western Isles



This case study explores the food services available for older people in the Western Isles (Lewis, Harris, North and South Uist and Barra). The population of the Western Isles is estimated at 26,500, with 23% over pensionable age.

Run by community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprise organisations, the projects detailed below offer an invaluable and wide range of food and support services for older people in a remote rural community.

### Transport and shopping services

- Run by voluntary organisations: *Bus Bharraidh* provides a flexible, accessible approach to transport needs. The driver and escort services have proved to be a vital link for members of the Barra community in order to do daily or weekly shopping trips.
- Run by social enterprises: *Tagsa Uibhist* provides door-to-door transport provision, befriending services and shopping support. *Third Sector Hebrides Dial a Bus Service and Befriending* enables users to get their own shopping, and support is given when getting on and off the minibus with this shopping. The befriending service is where trained volunteers offer assistance to over 65s to do their shopping, or visit for a social relationship to those who are otherwise housebound.

### Lunch clubs

- Run by voluntary organisations: *Retirement Centre* holds a lunch club every Thursday. The food is provided and cooked by a core of volunteers on a rotational basis. The local council provides funding to transport members to and from the venue.
- Run by community volunteers: *Afternoon Lunch Club* (Ravenspoint, Kershader and South Lochs) volunteers on a rota provide food for an average of eighteen members over 65 on a fortnightly basis. Attendees pay £3.00 and the women who do the organising and cooking donate the shortfall. This group is experiencing significant problems with meeting the cost of transportation for users. One of the users said:

***“It is a lifeline, I live on my own and if I didn’t go to the lunch club I would not be meeting up with people all week. Just to simply sit and have lunch with someone else is great, much better than being on my own”.***



## Services aimed at a particular group

- Run by voluntary organisations: *Over 50's Men's Health Lunch Club* offers a twice weekly lunch club and a Saturday home cooked takeaway meal. This lunch club is not just about the eating of food; it is about nutrition for health benefits, a social interaction opportunity and support staff can signpost to other agencies.

## Services providing a meal run by community volunteers

- Senior Citizens Groups* – for some, food is donated or purchased from fundraising event monies and prepared and served by younger members of the community at events such as Burns Suppers, Christmas parties and ceilidhs. In other communities there are grow-your-own projects and food demonstration nights, providing opportunities to prepare and taste different foods and learn about nutritional values.

- Salvation Army* – an average of 20 users between the ages of 65-80. A breakfast and lunch club is offered 51 weeks of the year. The food for the lunch is locally sourced if possible. The service is very aware of the need to offer good nutritional value to its users and aims to ensure users receive a range of fresh fruit and vegetables with their meals. It also works in partnership with other organisations, assisting with food services across the community.

This case study was written by the **Cearns Community Development Project**, which aims to promote and improve the health and well being of the inhabitants of the Cearns by drawing together a cross section of supportive agencies, and to promote social welfare of the community by encouraging community participation, learning and self-development.

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# What makes a good food service?

Older people involved in the case studies gave some clear messages as to what they would want from a good food service. Key elements identified are:

- ▶ **Accessibility** – all barriers in terms of physical access, assessment, transport and technology have been removed. Good information is available on what is available in local communities. Local community based services are important to reduce transport costs particularly in remote rural areas.
- ▶ **Cost** – the service is affordable and good value for money.
- ▶ **Choice** – the service is available when needed and is able to step in for short periods of time if needed due to bad weather or ill health. The service is able to be flexible and provide for different requirements, dietary or otherwise. Essentially a person centred service.

- ▶ **Sociability** – the service offers the opportunity of social contact. This might be with the person delivering the service or the opportunity to meet with others to eat as at lunch clubs.
- ▶ **Reach** – organisations and individuals delivering the service are skilled in reaching the most vulnerable and excluded.

Other potential developments identified include:

- ▶ Community based 'drop ins'.
- ▶ Low cost home delivery services from supermarkets.
- ▶ Specific services targeted at older men or older women.
- ▶ A telephone helpline.
- ▶ Simple written information on what is available locally to give to older people, carers and families.





# Conclusions

- ▶ Local authorities provide a range of food services for older people living in the community. These include hot meals, frozen meals, lunch clubs, and assistance with shopping and meals preparation.
- ▶ However, there is significant inconsistency between local authorities in relation to the provision of, access to, information about or price of food services offered to older people.
- ▶ Local authorities appear not to have a clear overview of the food services available in their area. Respondents were unable to provide a clear picture of the number of users accessing their services, the frequency with which these users access their services or the costs to them of providing the service. Without this information, it is impossible to ascertain whether services are providing value for money or achieving the desired outcomes for consumers.
- ▶ Information on food services available within a local area cannot be found in one place, leaving older people, their families and advisors unaware of what might be available locally and what their entitlements are.
- ▶ The services are generally welcomed, valued and relied upon by the people who receive them – most of whom have no alternative. Lunch clubs are particularly valued for the opportunity to get out of the house and eat with others.
- ▶ There is an understandable reluctance among users, who are a relatively ‘silent’ group of consumers, to complain about food services. Much more effective engagement with users is needed, and providers need to be able to demonstrate that the evidence of consumer preferences lies at the heart of decision making.
- ▶ Case study material reveals a wealth of activity within local communities involving food and older people. Much of this supplements local authority services and relies on significant volunteer effort and local fundraising. Funding for these activities is fragile and must be sustained. Especially as relatively small amounts of funding can make such services viable.
- ▶ Access to most food services requires a professional assessment which is resource intensive for local authorities and can be a very real barrier to access for the consumers who most need these services.

In making our recommendations we have tried so far as possible to have regard to the current economic climate and its impact on the provision of public services. What must not be forgotten, however, is that the current economic climate also has a real practical impact on individuals. We are concerned that as the recession impacts on public sector budgets, some providers may view support for low level preventative services (such as food services), and consumer engagement, as activities that can be reduced or discontinued. However, we would argue that these are more important than ever in this context. We would also point out that giving greater priority to these services may lead to savings in relation to other public services in the longer term, in helping people to remain independent within their own homes.

# Methodology

Consumer Focus Scotland and Community Food and Health (Scotland) commissioned ODS Consulting to carry out a national study to:

- ▶ Build a picture of the range and extent of food services provided for older people over 65 living in communities across Scotland, with a particular focus on those who are most vulnerable.
- ▶ Explore the consumers' view on these services.
- ▶ Identify gaps in current provision.

The study used a number of methods to gather the information:

- ▶ A survey sent to all 32 Scottish local authorities asking about their food provision for older people.
- ▶ Discussion with 83 service users across different services.
- ▶ Case studies carried out by local organisations in three different local authority areas.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Working age is 16-59 for women and 16-64 for men until 2010; between 2010 and 2020 working age becomes 16-64 for women. Between 2024 and 2026 working age for both men and women becomes 16-65 and changes again, in two further steps, to 16-67 by 2046.

<sup>2</sup> General Registers Office for Scotland 2008. <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/projected-population-of-scotland-2008-based/projected-population-of-scotland-2008-based-publication/j1125001.htm>

<sup>3</sup> SPICe. 2011. Key issues for the Parliament in Session 4.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government. 2011. Reshaping Care for Older People: A Programme for Change 2011-2021 [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/care/reshaping/programme](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/care/reshaping/programme)

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Healthy Eating, Active Living: An action plan to improve diet, increase physical activity and tackle obesity (2008-2011) [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/20155902/10](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/20155902/10) and Recipe for Success: Scotland's National Food and Drink Policy [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/25133322/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/25133322/0)

<sup>6</sup> Community Food and Health (Scotland) [www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk](http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk) and Consumer Focus Scotland [www.consumerfocus-scotland.org.uk](http://www.consumerfocus-scotland.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> The Food Train provide shopping services in West Lothian and Dumfries and Galloway [www.thefoodtrain.co.uk](http://www.thefoodtrain.co.uk)

<sup>8</sup> ODS Consulting. 2011. Food Services for Older People in the Community. For access, please see our websites.



**Community Food and Health (Scotland)** aims to ensure that everyone in Scotland has the opportunity, ability and confidence to access a healthy and acceptable diet for themselves, their families and their communities. We do this by supporting work with and within low-income communities that addresses health inequalities and barriers to healthy and affordable food.

Barriers being addressed by community based initiatives are:

**Availability** – increasing access to fruit and vegetables of an acceptable quality and cost

**Affordability** – tackling not only the cost of shopping, but also getting to the shops

**Skills** – improving confidence and skills in cooking and shopping

**Culture** – overcoming ingrained habits

Through our work we aim to support communities to:

- ▶ identify barriers to a healthy balanced diet
- ▶ develop local responses to addressing these barriers, and
- ▶ highlight where actions at other levels, or in other sectors are required

We value the experience, understanding skills and knowledge within Scotland's community food initiatives and their unique contribution to developing and delivering policy and practice at all levels.

**Consumer Focus Scotland** is the independent consumer champion for Scotland. We are rooted in over 30 years of work promoting the interests of consumers, particularly those who experience disadvantage in society.

Part of Consumer Focus, our structure reflects the devolved nature of the UK. Consumer Focus Scotland works on issues that affect consumers in Scotland, while at the same time feeding into and drawing on work done at a GB, UK and European level.

We work to secure a fair deal for consumers in different aspects of their lives by promoting fairer markets, greater value for money, improved customer service and more responsive public services. We represent consumers of all kinds: tenants, householders, patients, parents, energy users, solicitors' clients, postal service users or shoppers.

We aim to influence change and shape policy to reflect the needs of consumers. We do this in an informed way based on the evidence we gather through research and our unique knowledge of consumer issues.

**[www.consumerfocus-scotland.org.uk](http://www.consumerfocus-scotland.org.uk)**



**Fòcas Luchd-  
Caitheimh Alba**  
Comhairle Luchd-caitheimh na h-Alba



**Consumer Focus  
Scotland**  
Scotland's Consumer Council

[www.consumerfocus.org.uk](http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk)

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**community  
food and health**

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