

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING DATE:	11 December 2023	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Update on Food Insecurity in B&NES	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 B&NES Fair Food Alliance (BFFA) has been in operation since March 2020, (previously called the B&NES Food Poverty Steering Group) following a motion which was passed by B&NES Council in July 2019 requesting that a local food poverty action plan be developed for Bath and North East Somerset.
- 1.2 In February 2021 B&NES Food Poverty Steering Group members decided by consensus to change the name of the partnership to the B&NES Fair Food Alliance (BFFA) to better reflect a solution focused and collaborative approach to addressing food insecurity. Similarly, we have moved from using the term food poverty to a preference for the term 'household food insecurity' to describe a situation where people do not have means to reliably meet their needs for food of sufficient quantity, quality or variety in socially acceptable ways.
- 1.3 This report updates the panel on local levels of food insecurity and reflects on the local support offer and work of the B&NES Fair Food Alliance since its last report to Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing PDS panel (May 2022).

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel / Committee is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the work of the B&NES Fair Food Alliance and its progress on delivering the ambitions of the B&NES Food Equity Action Plan 2022 – 2025

- 2.2 Support the ambitions of the B&NES Fair Food Alliance by considering ways in which other Council and partnership strategy and policy can help to increase income equality and food security locally.
- 2.3 Cllr Ruth Malloy, as a previous Panel member was representing PDS panel on the B&NES Fair Food Alliance alongside Cllr Liz Hardman. Consider nominating an additional councillor to represent the panel on the B&NES Fair Food Alliance.

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 A recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)¹ has highlighted increasing levels of destitution in the UK since 2017. The JRF reports that destitution is no longer a rare occurrence in the UK, with 1.8 million households containing 3.8 million people affected by it in 2022.
- 3.2 According to the JRF² destitution denotes the most severe form of material hardship. People are considered destitute if they have not been able to meet their most basic physical needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed. Whilst those most likely to be affected are living in major cities they report a spread of destitution to wider areas and to different groups including families with children, older people, those with long term health conditions, migrants and people from some ethnic minority groups. When people were asked what they lacked, food was the most common answer, followed by heating, clothes and toiletries.
- 3.3 The JRF report states that ‘insufficient income from the social security safety net is the most significant driver of food-bank need’ and that benefit sanctions are also likely to become an increasing factor in the future.
- 3.4 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) report³ on energy and food insecurity during the winter of 22/23 identified renters, those who report moderate to severe depressive symptoms, those aged between 35 – 64 and those with annual income below £30,000 as more likely to be experiencing energy and food insecurity.
- 3.5 The B&NES Council annual resident survey (Voicebox) has asked questions on food insecurity since November 2019. The 2022 survey⁴ showed self-reported levels of food insecurity in B&NES have increased significantly. In 2021, 14% of respondents reported some level of food insecurity compared to 21% of respondents in November/December 2022.
- 3.6 Research carried out by University of Bath in 2022⁵ on behalf of B&NES Council identified that the main drivers of food insecurity for those accessing food banks and pantries locally was the same as elsewhere in the country and included low wages, insecure employment, problems with the benefits system and health issues.

¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2023>

² Destitution is defined as living on less than £95 per week for a single adult living alone, £125 for a lone parent with one child, £145 for a couple with no children and £205 for a couple with two children.

³

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/characteristicsofadultsexperiencingenergyandfoodinsecuritygr eatbritain/22novemberto18december2022>

⁴ <https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/strategic-evidence/document-library/voicebox-residents-survey-2022>

⁵ https://purehost.bath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/246477564/BANES_Food_Insecurity_Full_Report.pdf

- 3.7 Two further studies by the University of Bath in 2023 focusing on older people's food insecurity⁶ concluded that social connection, as well as health and financial resources, are key to reducing the risk of food insecurity amongst this group of residents.
- 3.8 A questionnaire to B&NES residents receiving pension credit in February 2023 showed that nearly half of respondents (46%) reported some degree of food insecurity over the past 12 months. 1 in 10 respondents sometimes or often didn't have enough to eat in the past 12 months and 23% said they had no one in the local area that they could depend on. Other groups of older people at risk of food insecurity include those just above the pension credit entitlement threshold and those under the state pension age (aged 55 – 66).
- 3.9 Nationally, Citizens Advice report helping more people than ever before in 2023. Numbers of people requiring help for energy/energy debt, charitable and food support, council tax arrears and homelessness peaked in March 2023 when nearly 125,000 people were supported. Whilst numbers have decreased slightly since then, just over 100,000 people were helped in the month of September 2023, higher than at the same point in any year from 2014.
- 3.10 The top three issues people present to Citizens Advice with currently are crisis support/food banks, energy support and benefit entitlements. In September 2023 nearly half of the people helped by Citizens Advice were in negative budget. This is where their necessary expenditure exceeds their income. Some groups are deeper in debt than others, including single parents, private renters, disabled people, ethnic minorities, the self-employed and, more recently, mortgage holders.
- 3.11 In B&NES, in August 2022, 8,956 households were in receipt of Universal Credit. In August 2023 this figure was 9,828. This represents an increase of 872 people or 9.7%.
- 3.12 Locally B&NES Citizens Advice supported 4,874 new clients during 22/23 as well as 3,222 repeat customers. From April – September 2023 they have supported 1,749 new clients and 2,079 repeat customers.
- 3.13 Most recent data estimates that 1 in 5 (20%) children and young people in B&NES live in relative poverty (after housing costs), amounting to some 6,500 children and young people aged 0 to 15.⁷
- 3.14 The numbers of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) in B&NES has risen year on year since May 2020, partly due to transitional protection which means that children eligible from 1st April 2018 will continue to be eligible to April 2025 even if their household income goes above the threshold for FSM in the interim period. 4671 children were eligible for FSM in Oct 23 which is 16.91% of children on roll in B&NES schools (inc nurseries and 6th Forms).
- 3.15 There are many families who are on low income but do not qualify for FSM. The challenge they face is the very low earned income threshold that currently exists as criteria for being eligible to a benefit related FSM under Universal Credit.

⁶ https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/document-and-policy-library?keys=&field_service_area_target_id%5B1871%5D=1871

⁷ [B&NES Strategic Evidence Base](#)

The earned income threshold is £7,400 per year, equal to £616.67 per month, if a claimant is on Universal Credit with a job.

- 3.16 In B&NES there are three Trussell Trust affiliated food banks operating from 10 venues in Bath, Keynsham and the Somer Valley. The table below show trends in their activity since 2017/18.

Period	Total number of food parcels given out
April 2017 – March 2018	6870
April 2018 – March 2019	7755
April 2019 – March 2020	9935
April 2020 – March 2021	9706
April 2021 – March 2022	7106
April 2022 – March 2023	9028

- 3.17 Locally food bank usage peaked in B&NES during 2019/20. Numbers dropped in 2021/22 which may be attributable to the amount of Government support available during this period. Numbers increased again during 2022/23. During 2023 local food banks report increasing demand, more complex need and new people attending who have never accessed crisis support before. University of Bath is now a referral agency into the food banks for staff and students should they need it. This reflects the reported challenges students face in meeting daily living costs due to increasing rent costs absorbing the majority of the average maintenance loan⁸. The food banks have also seen a drop in donations as people are less able to make additions to their weekly shops to put in the supermarket collections, which has depleted warehouse stores. Trussell Trust affiliated food banks report good support from the Trust to manage these pressures.

- 3.18 According to Citizens Advice, there are signs that policies brought in in April 2023 including the cost of living payments (delivered between April and May), benefits uprating and the National Living Wage increase have made a difference to demand for crisis support. However, the number of people helped with food bank referrals by Citizens Advice has been on an upward trend since May 2023.

- 3.19 Food supply and affordability has been affected by a number of factors over the past year including food price inflation (which has been particularly high for staple foods), household incomes not increasing in line with rises in household costs, a reduction in surplus food supply due to better waste management policies and drought and conflict affecting major food exporting regions. All these factors mean that access to affordable healthy food is increasingly difficult for those on low incomes.

- 3.20 The B&NES Council Welfare Support team are now supporting significantly more clients compared to pre pandemic levels in 2019. The team have logged 3668 applications for support in 23/24 financial year to date. During the same period in 2019 the team had logged 2265 applications. In addition to this level of activity the team is also administering the Household Support Fund totalling £1.934 million, during 23/24.

⁸ <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/10/26/student-rents-now-swallow-up-virtually-all-of-the-of-the-average-maintenance-loan-as-market-reaches-crisis-point-in-affordability/>

3.21 The **Household Support Fund** is being used to provide the following support to local residents during 23/24.

- £800,000 of **Free School Meal Vouchers** for all school holidays including half term periods up to Easter 2024 holiday at £15 per FSM pupil per week
- £250,000 contribution to Citizens Advice **Fuel Voucher scheme**.
- £50,000 allocated to **Care Experienced Young People** in B&NES. This is being managed by the Care Experienced team and awards are being made to clear rent arrears, make payments to clients and purchasing household items.
- £350,000 **Crisis Payments** to households in B&NES.
- £400,000 has also been allocated to provide a **Winter Support payment** scheme

3.22 From January to December 2023 St John's Foundation estimates it will have distributed £195,000 to B&NES residents through its **Crisis Programme**. This is a slight reduction on 2022 of around £30,000 which they attribute to the availability of additional support from Council Welfare Support. The majority of grants given out are for housing needs including white goods and furniture. St Johns is also jointly funding a pilot project with Curo to ensure those with new social tenancies have access to key essentials on moving in.

4 LOCAL ACTION ON FOOD INSECURITY

4.1 The **B&NES Fair Food Alliance** (BFFA) provides the governance and structure to drive the strategic direction and co-ordination of food insecurity work locally. Its overall aim is to ensure that everyone living in B&NES can reliably afford and access suitable food to meet their needs for energy, nutrition, and social and cultural connection, with dignity and without resort to emergency food aid. The work of the Alliance is informed by the Food Ladders approach developed by Sheffield University⁹ which aims to move away from crisis emergency support where people are given food and money as one off support towards more sustainable solutions which focus on building resilience within individuals and communities and focusing on building relationships, support networks and longer term solutions to food insecurity.

4.2 The Alliance membership includes representation from local, regional and national charities with a focus on food insecurity and financial wellbeing including Feeding Britain, Fare Share South West, St John's Foundation, the Trussell Trust, Clean Slate and Citizens Advice. Council departments including welfare support, public health, youth services, business and skills and children's services are also represented.

4.3 The Alliance oversees the work of three task groups focusing on affordable food, income maximisation and hearing the voice of those with lived experience of food insecurity (see image below).

⁹ <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research/features/food-ladders>

B&NES Fair Food Alliance



AFFORDABLE FOOD
NETWORK



HEAR MY VOICE



INCOME GROUP



- 4.4 In July 2022 Council endorsed the **B&NES Food Equity Action Plan 2022 – 2025**¹⁰ which was developed by the Fair Food Alliance. Below is a summary of some of the activities of task groups and members supporting delivery of the aims and objectives of the Food Equity Action Plan.
- 4.5 The **B&NES Affordable Food Network (AFN)** has run a number of food supply workshops over the past year to help members to work together to address supply, storage and distribution issues in the network. During 2023 the AFN has welcomed a new Curo-run pantry in Westfield, and a Community Kitchen enterprise supporting the Holiday Activities and Food programme, lunch clubs and cookery skills workshops in collaboration with other network members. However, some projects are no longer in operation. Penny's Pantry in Batheaston and the Vegan foodbank have closed. Food supply issues continue to be a focus, with attention currently on sourcing affordable purchased stock and preparing for the Christmas period. Surplus and donated food do not meet need and there is increasing pressure on network members to adjust business and funding models to stay afloat. An estimated 4,200 people a week benefit from the services of this network and the wraparound support offer continues to develop around money, health and skills building.
- 4.6 **Fare Share South West** provides wholesale surplus food to 26 projects in B&NES. This includes the 10 food bank outlets, 7 community cafes, 7 food clubs/pantries and 2 community fridges. Between 1 September 2022 and 31 August 2023 Fare Share South West redistributed a total of 128 tonnes of food into B&NES. Of this 119 tonnes was allocated to projects working with children and families. The estimated retail value of this food is over £402,000 with 39% fruit and vegetables, 19% potatoes/rice/pasta/bread and 14% dairy and other alternatives.
- 4.7 During 2023 **B&NES Crop Drop** increased the number of allotments sites it now works with to eight and the number of projects receiving surplus produce to nine in total. The group work with local allotment sites and with local farms through the Avon Gleaning network to maximise the number of projects receiving surplus produce throughout B&NES. They now also work very constructively with ROOTS allotment sites and their generous growers. In 2024 they plan to work with Bath Allotments association to connect more allotments with food projects on the East side of Bath.

¹⁰ <https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/document-and-policy-library/bnes-food-equity-action-plan-2022-25>

- 4.8 During 2022/23 a new provider Activate was commissioned to deliver the **Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme**, working with local providers across B&NES to deliver free places at holiday clubs for children and young people in receipt of free school meals during Easter, Summer and Christmas.
- 4.9 The HAF programme engaged a total of 2,314 unique children and young people across the 5,920 attendances to 476 clubs and activities including outdoor education, sports camps, drama, singing, cycling proficiency, technology activities and trips including bowling, cookery classes and theme parks.
- 4.10 The **Healthy Start** programme provides a pre-paid card to enable people to purchase milk, fruit, vegetables, pulses and vitamins. It is available to those on a low income who are more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under 4 years. In B&NES take up is currently in the top quartile at 74%, which is above the national average of 68.4%. Work is ongoing to continue to maximise take up of this key benefit.
- 4.11 The **B&NES Affordable School Programme** aims to increase understanding of the barriers and challenges faced by pupils and families who are living in financial hardship and to help schools make positive changes to policies and practice that alleviate these. Schools are provided with training and a suite of B&NES resources that will help them review their existing practice, identify the impact on their whole school community and develop creative ideas for making school an inclusive environment. This will include a review of uniform and equipment needs, bullying policies, engagement and attainment, school trips, additional educational opportunities, support and advice for families, fund raising and school social events.
- 4.12 Despite the many other pressures upon them, to date 35% of B&NES state schools have engaged with the programme and are actively seeking to make their provision affordable for all families. In January 2024 Public Health will be writing to all B&NES state schools to invite more of them to join our Affordable School Programme.
- 4.13. The **Pathways from Poverty** model, developed by Feeding Britain, involves placing specialist advice workers into community-led food projects to help resolve some of the wider issues that households are facing when they receive help with food. The advice workers build trusted relationships with households in these familiar settings, and can then provide expert support around benefits, debt, budgeting, housing, energy, or employment.
- 4.14 During 22/23 the Pathways from Poverty pilot programme in B&NES supported 167 people to access £73,361 via Citizens Advice B&NES and Clean Slate Ltd wrap around support within food banks and food clubs/pantries. This intervention provided debt relief and increased income for clients. This local programme has now received additional three-year funding from the Trussell Trust to enable Citizens Advice to continue to provide this support in B&NES food banks. A business case to develop this support offer to more affordable food projects in B&NES is in development.
- 4.15 The **Income Maximisation group** has focused its efforts on raising awareness of safer credit and illegal lending during 2023. They have worked with the England

Illegal Money Lending Team¹¹ to deliver training to 86 frontline staff from 25 different departments and agencies to date. The training raises awareness of loan sharks, how they operate and the support available to people who owe money to them. Further training and promotion of support will be offered with a focus on learning disabilities, dementia care and farming communities. The group are also working with Great Western Credit Union to look at ways of supporting people to save and borrow safely. The group is exploring local development of the Food Savers model which has been successful in Bradford and Leeds¹².

4.16 According to **Feeding Britain**, the Pathways from Poverty approach, remains hugely successful in maximising incomes and addressing the underlying causes of hunger in households that seek help. The feedback they have received from projects across the country suggests advice services are largely under resourced, struggling to meet additional need, struggling to recruit advice workers, and face uncertain or short-term funding arrangements. Cases being handled have become more complex and time consuming, with up to six different issues in play for one household, rather than a single benefit or debt-related issue which in previous years could have been resolved more quickly.

4.17 The Alliance works closely with the Feeding Britain network to provide evidence, case studies and examples of good practice to inform suggested improvements and changes to national policy and legislation. Key areas that the Feeding Britain network is currently lobbying for include;

- Working to agree funding allocation and extension of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme beyond 2024
- Piloting automatic registration for those eligible for free school meals and the healthy start programme
- Raising awareness of the link between Universal Credit deductions and the need for food banks and continuing to push for a further easing of the rate of deductions from Universal Credit.
- Calling for an Essentials Guarantee¹³, alongside the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which asks for Universal Credit payments to at least cover the cost of essentials such as food, household bills and travel.

4.18 The Alliance continues to work to influence the agenda of wider Council and partner strategies to raise awareness of the importance of access to affordable healthy food and financial wellbeing to health and wellbeing and economic prosperity of the area. Food security, living wage and access to good jobs, are included in the draft B&NES Economic Strategy. This is a welcome development and commitment to addressing income inequality and the sustainability of our local food system.

4.19 Priorities for the Fair Food Alliance in the coming year include;

- Gaining a better understanding of the food and financial wellbeing needs of young people living away from home (18 – 25)
- Developing the local safer credit and savings offer

¹¹ <https://www.stoploansharks.co.uk/who-we-are/>

¹² <https://foodsavers.org.uk/>

¹³ https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/guarantee-our-essentials?_ga=2.34542561.1994691723.1699953190-1634871596.1699953189

- Expanding wrap around financial support in local food projects
- Recruiting more schools to the Affordable Schools programme
- Increasing uptake of key entitlements such as Healthy Start and Pension Credits.

4.20 The work of the Alliance supports delivery of local priorities and strategies including B&NES Council Corporate Strategy¹⁴ with its key focus on improving people's lives and core ambition to focus on prevention, and the B&NES Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy¹⁵ with its focus on addressing health inequalities and creating compassionate and healthy communities. The Alliance will continue to look for opportunities in the development of local and sub regional strategies and policy, including housing, planning, transport, health improvement and climate and nature emergency to contribute to the financial wellbeing and food security of all local residents including those on low incomes, and with no recourse to public funds¹⁶.

5 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Through the Food Equity Action Plan, B&NES Council as part of the B&NES Fair Food Alliance will support residents through seeking to prevent, reduce and mitigate against the effects of experiencing household food insecurity and thereby take preventative collective action to address health inequalities longer term.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

6.1 Funding for a 3yr fixed term post to co-ordinate the delivery of the B&NES Food Equity Action Plan has been received from St John's Foundation. This post sits within the Council Public Health team (Aug 2021 - July 2024). A proposal to continue this post for a further 3 years has been provided to St Johns. The BFFA does not have an operational budget. Funding for the continuation and/or development of projects within the Action Plan will be the subject of separate business cases/funding bids as required.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

8 EQUALITIES

8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has previously been carried out for the B&NES Food Equity Action Plan 2022 – 25¹⁷.

9 CLIMATE CHANGE

¹⁴ <https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/document-and-policy-library/corporate-strategy-2023-2027>

¹⁵ <https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/document-and-policy-library/joint-health-and-wellbeing-strategy>

¹⁶ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9790/>

¹⁷ <https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s73624/Appendix%202%20-%20BNES%20Food%20Equity%20Action%20Plan%20EIA%20April%202022.pdf>

9.1 This work has the potential to contribute to achievement of carbon neutrality as part of a wider focus on food and food systems in B&NES which aims to reduce food waste and increase access to fresh, seasonal local produce.

10 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

10.1 None

11 CONSULTATION

11.1 This report has been approved by Cllr Alison Born, Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Liz Beazer, Senior Finance Manager, B&NES Council.

Contact person	Cathy McMahon cathy_mcmahon@bathnes.gov.uk and Milly Carmichael Milly_carmichael@bathnes.gov.uk
Background papers	B&NES Food Equity Action Plan 2022 – 2025 https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/document-and-policy-library/bnes-food-equity-action-plan-2022-25 B&NES Food Equity Action Plan report to Council July 2022 https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=272&MId=5494&Ver=4
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	