

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING	Children, Adult, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING DATE:	14 <sup>th</sup> July 2020	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
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TITLE:	Food Poverty Action Plan Update	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
<p>List of attachments to this report:</p> <p>Appendix 1 B&amp;NES Food Poverty Steering Group Terms of reference</p> <p>Appendix 2 Case Studies</p> <p>Appendix 3 Draft Food Poverty Action Plan 20/21</p>		

## 1 THE ISSUE

**1.1** The process for taking forward the development of a Food Poverty Action Plan for B&NES was agreed with Children, Adult, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel on 28th January 2020. This included the formation of a local steering group to drive the work and support implementation. This report provides an update on progress, key achievements to date and presents a draft food poverty action plan for comment.

## 2 RECOMMENDATION

**The Committee is asked to;**

### **2.1 Proposal 1 comment on the Draft Food Poverty Action Plan 2020/2021**

## 3 THE REPORT

**3.1** The B&NES Food Poverty Steering group has met three times to date with its first meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020. As its inaugural meeting was at the start of the government lockdown period in response to the coronavirus pandemic the main focus was on understanding the challenges emerging for residents in relation to immediate food needs and provision of welfare support. The steering group has

provided a network for members to share information, co-ordinate activity and both offer and request support in adapting to a rapidly changing situation and growing demand locally. The Steering Group has agreed its Terms of Reference and a framework for structuring planning and action on food poverty locally (see Appendix 1).

3.2 Following a presentation by Andrew Forsey, National Director of Feeding Britain<sup>1</sup> the Steering Group agreed to formalise its relationship with the Feeding Britain network to access the benefits of;

- Membership of a growing national network of partnerships around the country from whom we can learn and with whom we can share our own innovation and best practice
- Support for funding of local projects with experienced bid-writers and possibilities of joint projects to increase traction with funders.
- A direct route of communication to government through the Feeding Britain trustees and their lobbying capacity to take forward aspects of the work that require legislation or national policy change.
- Access to, and possible involvement in the creation of, a growing body of credible research into food poverty and food insecurity and the complexity of solution-finding.

3.3 The members of the Steering Group, our colleagues in the Compassionate Communities Hub and local charities and community groups have seen significant increases in demand for support with food and income related issues over the last 3 months. A snapshot of this support is given below.

3.4 In March 2020 around 7,500 people were claiming Universal Credit in B&NES, by May 2020 this figure had risen to 13,122, a rise of approximately 75%. This will also mean an increase in children becoming eligible for free school meal benefits.

3.5 The Council welfare support team received 956 applications for financial assistance from April to mid-June and 580 awards were approved. Grants totalling £43,000 have been awarded of which £11,000 was for food and £32,000 on essential household provisions.

3.6 St John's Foundation have awarded 366 grants since January 2020 as part of their individual funding programme, totalling £204,000.

3.7 Citizens Advice have dealt with 2,493 cases during the lockdown period, predominantly these are cases involving benefit claims and entitlements and support with significant debt issues (see case study in Appendix 2).

3.8 Food bank usage in April 2020 compared with April 2019 has seen an average increase in demand across the south west of 124%. Keynsham Food Bank experienced higher level of demand than average for the same period and this is thought to reflect the strong local community co-ordination and awareness of local support. A new vegan food bank has also been set up covering BA1, BA2

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<sup>1</sup> <https://feedingbritain.org/>

and BA3 areas and 3 village larders were set up in the Somer Valley area by ward councillors and residents.

- 3.9 Fareshare SW are providing charities, schools and children centres throughout B&NES with wholesale food surplus to enable them to redistribute this to their service users. St John's Foundation have supported Fareshare SW financially to increase their provision and membership in B&NES, resulting in an additional 1.2 tonnes of food being distributed weekly in B&NES from 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Fareshare SW report providing the equivalent of 17,000 meals in B&NES since lockdown began.
- 3.10 Approximately 235 households have received food parcels each week since April via the 4 children's centres in B&NES, the children's social care team and the Compassionate Communities Hub. This totals approximately 3,055 food parcels provided during the period to date. Support with recipes and healthy eating advice has also been provided.
- 3.11 A local charity and business have jointly provided over 10,000 freshly cooked ready meals for adults and 5,400 children's meals to those most in need across B&NES. Wessex Water have also provided over 1000 cooked meals in addition to this. This donation of ready cooked food has been a welcome addition to the food offer and supported families and vulnerable individuals to have nutritious fresh meals that only require reheating. Freezer capacity to store food has been donated by several churches and grant funding has helped to purchase additional food storage facilities for some charities and children centres where needed.
- 3.12 A Food Finder information platform was set up by the Sustainable Food Partnership to enable people to see which local businesses are offering food deliveries, hot meals and takeaway during the lockdown.<sup>2</sup>
- 3.13 Charities and community groups including Mercy in Action, Oasis, Bath City Farm, Southside Family Project, Bath Area Play Project, Food Cycle, Age UK, BEMSCA, Community 67, Youth Connect, Square Hot Meal and Sporting Family Change have also been providing regular cooked meals and/or food parcels to their service users, collectively supporting approximately 750 households.
- 3.14 We had contact with 54 of the 81 B&NES schools with regard to their free school meal arrangements during lockdown. 15 of those 54 were providing food hampers / parcels / packed lunches, mainly through their school caterers with the rest providing vouchers. Few schools will be able to continue with the model of hampers/meal provision support over the summer break and we expect the voucher scheme to be used almost universally.
- 3.15 The Compassionate Communities Hub food team are currently contacting schools again to find out more detail about their school holiday plans. Bath and Somer Valley Food banks are also looking to support families via schools through the summer either by providing food direct to the school for distribution or food parcels direct to families.
- 3.16 There has of course been a vast amount of other support provided by individuals, communities, businesses and charities across B&NES that is not

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<sup>2</sup> <http://banesfoodfinder.org.uk/>

captured above. Further work is underway to map food provision across B&NES to better understand the impact of COVID 19 on food insecurity locally.

3.17 With the easing of lockdown restrictions some partners have seen a gradual decrease in demand for emergency food aid (some of the food banks and the Compassionate Communities Hub for example) as acute needs subside and people are supported with accessing financial support and debt advice. However, others continue to see their caseloads rise (e.g Mercy in Action) as they take referrals from local agencies for people who need additional support services.

3.18 In order to move to a more sustainable way of providing access to affordable food locally our children's centres and several charities are currently working up plans to set up local food clubs or pantries. This addresses concerns about creating dependency on, and the unsustainability of, free crisis food support, while offering a more dignified way to access affordable food with greater personal choice and autonomy. Each pantry will have a membership of around 50 households and will develop their own criteria for prioritising who can join.

3.19 These clubs/pantries will run on a membership model where households pay a small weekly subscription (£3.50) and in return can access £15 worth of varied groceries provided predominantly through Fareshare SW. Food clubs/pantries are being set up by the following;

- Bright Start Children's Centres (Bath, Radstock and Keynsham)
- St Martin's Garden School
- Weston All Saints Church
- Oasis
- Mercy in Action

3.20 We know that those families whose children are eligible for free school meals will now get the equivalent value of food vouchers (£90 to cover 6 week period) to help with purchasing food over the school holidays which is welcome news. However, we know for some this will not be enough to feed their family and that there will be others who fall outside of this eligibility but are still on very low incomes who will need additional support.

3.21 To mitigate the impact of COVID 19 on low income families we have partnered with Feeding Britain and St John's Foundation to launch a Holiday Food Grant Programme of £30,000 (£15,000 from both Feeding Britain and St John's) to support charities and statutory agencies to purchase food, equipment and other resources so that food can be an integral part of the support they provide over the summer period and into the future. Bath Rugby Foundation are also working with a range of local partners to fundraise for and plan holiday activities with food provision for families.

## **4 FOOD POVERTY ACTION PLAN**

4.1 Discussions have taken place with Steering Group members around specific themes outlined in the framework including identity and structure of the group, food for all priorities and barriers to income. Proposed priorities for action have been

incorporated into a draft action plan (see Appendix 3) and it has been agreed that ownership for delivery of these actions is led by three task groups;

- Income Maximisation
- Food for All
- Hear My Voice

4.2 These task groups will guide and develop the work and report back to the steering group at each meeting on progress, challenges and support needs.

4.3 The key areas around Data and Communications will be co-ordinated by Public Health in the short term with support from Steering Group members.

4.4 Addressing key drivers relating to poor social networks and adverse life experiences will require detailed discussion with existing partnerships such as the Early Help Partnership and the Compassionate Communities partnership. We hope to identify ways in which food insecurity can be identified earlier, develop training for frontline staff and volunteers and connect people to the provision of holistic local support, for example through the developing community hubs.

## **5 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

5.1 By developing a food poverty action plan B&NES Council, in partnership with a wide range of local stakeholders and partners, will strengthen collective action to support residents experiencing food poverty and through a focus on preventative action contribute towards addressing health inequalities longer term.

## **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

6.1 No additional resource implications at present.

## **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 CLIMATE CHANGE**

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

## **9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

9.1 None

## **10 CONSULTATION**

10.1 Information in this report has been provided by members of the Food Poverty Steering Group (see Appendix 1 for membership) and the draft action plan is a product of discussions and consultation with group members and other stakeholders since March 2020.

10.2 This report has been approved by the S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer

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<b>Background papers</b>	Report to Children, Adult, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel on 28th January 2020  <a href="https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=637&amp;MId=5543&amp;Ver=4">https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=637&amp;MId=5543&amp;Ver=4</a>
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