

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING	Children, Adult, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING DATE:	15 th June 2021	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Bath and NE Somerset Food Equity Action Plan Update	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM/		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1: B&NES Food Equity Action Plan APR 2021 Appendix 2: B&NES Food Poverty Steering Group Terms of Reference Appendix 3: Food Poverty Action Plan Update (21/01/2021) – report for Full Council Appendix 4: Case study – Oasis Pantry (Affordable Food Network Member)		

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 This report provides an update on the development and progress of the B&NES Fair Food Alliance (BFFA) which was previously known as the B&NES Food Poverty Steering Group on delivering the actions set out in the action plan. The action plan was first presented to the Panel in July 2020. In this report we share progress to date, present our updated Food Equity Action Plan (see Appendix 1) and set out the ambition to move from crisis response to sustainable, affordable solutions to address household food insecurity.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to;

2.1 Proposal 1 Note progress since the last report (July 2020) and comment on the new refreshed Food Equity Action Plan and future priorities for the B&NES Fair Food Alliance.

Proposal 2 Consider how to promote inclusion of access to affordable healthy food in work with those who may be at risk of household food insecurity.

3 THE REPORT

3.1 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.

3.2 Food insecurity work in B&NES is led by the public health team and coordinated by a Health Improvement Officer (HIO). The HIO post was recruited as a 0.6 FTE, fixed term contract until July 2021. Recently funding has been secured from St John's Foundation to increase this to 30 hours a week and extend the post until July 2024.

3.3 The B&NES Fair Food Alliance (BFFA) has met six times since the first meeting at the start of the first coronavirus lockdown period in March 2020. The focus has been on understanding the challenges emerging for residents in relation to immediate food needs and provision of welfare support and supporting partners in meeting these needs.

3.4 The BFFA has provided a network for members to share information, co-ordinate activity and both offer and request support. Membership currently stands at over 60 members representing a range of statutory, third sector, education and independent organisations (see Appendix 2).

3.5 Our partnership with **Feeding Britain** continues to be fruitful. This national charity and network of similar alliances has been both a source of good practice examples for us to draw on and a platform for us to share our own successes. B&NES has been represented twice on Feeding Britain's national network webinars – once to share Bath Rugby Foundation's *Summer Break Out* scheme of holiday activity and food support, and on another occasion to present *CropDrop*, which is our local project redistributing abundant allotment produce to projects within our Affordable Food Network.

3.6 Feeding Britain are very effective at lobbying parliament on issues of national policy and legislation. They often ask for evidence to support this work and examples from B&NES have contributed to the authenticity of the case they can make. Successes include their contribution to the extension of the £20 uplift for Universal Credit payments. More detail of their campaigns and lobbying is available on their website.¹

3.7 While food insecurity was already an issue facing many households in B&NES prior to the pandemic, the past year has seen a significant increase in demand for support with food and income related issues. A report prepared for Full Council in January 2021 (see Appendix 3) documents a detailed account provided by BFFA members on increases in Universal Credit claims, crisis

¹ <https://feedingbritain.org/what-we-do/policies-research/>

financial assistance grants, provision of white goods, referrals to and use of local foodbanks and support with debt issues.

3.8 Our B&NES Fair Food Alliance has three key working groups feeding into it. **The Affordable Food Network (AFN)** meets monthly and invites all the fair food providers including food banks, food clubs, pantries, community cafes, larders and fridges to come together to build relationships, share good practice and work in partnership. The aim is to build a robust safety net, serving the whole B&NES area. This comprises community-led food support with wraparound services, signposting, and referral to help people meet their needs which are often complex associated with low income, social isolation, poor health, and family pressures. The Oasis Pantry, of one of our AFN partners, has shared a case study outlining the development and impact of the pantry including how being a member of the AFN has supported and enhanced their work (see Appendix 4).

3.9 More **geographically localised networks** are also establishing in areas of greatest need. An initial meeting of a budding Somer Valley network in March 2021 was well received and will be followed up by another meeting in June. Another local network will be initiated in the Keynsham / Saltford area and a third will explore linking with the existing community network in the Twerton / Whiteway area in Bath. These locality networks can draw in community actors who have responded with mutual aid offers during the Covid-19 pandemic who would benefit from stronger connections with other local voluntary and statutory services.

3.10 The **CropDrop** project has been a particular success of the AFN and has been showcased in national and regional forums as an example of innovative good practice. It is now being replicated in at least five other areas around the country. The team of skilled and experienced volunteers who coordinate it are now planning for the 2021 growing season and are forging links with more growers and recipients including Bath Ethnic Minority Senior Citizens Association (BEMSCA) and the Social Prescribing scheme led by DHI.

3.11 The **Income Maximisation group** meets quarterly and has been chaired by St John's Foundation. It invites all those services and voluntary sector organisations who offer financial support, advice and guidance to share good practice and present a coordinated message to the public about where best to seek help with a diverse range of money-related challenges. The topics of pension credit uptake, fuel poverty and return to work support for women have been covered. Future meetings will focus on childcare costs and improving the local networking of provision of affordable goods and services including school uniform, furniture and furnishings, white goods, fuel and fuel efficiency.

3.12 These two sub-groups of the BFFA have been the key routes of distribution for a B&NES specific printed edition of Clean Slate's Food Magazine. This is especially important as a reliable information source about local services for people who are not digitally connected. A sample from the B&NES guide can be viewed on their website.²

² <https://quidsinpro.com/quids-in-guides/food-guide/>

3.13 The third key strand of our local work, **Hear my Voice**, aims to find effective and meaningful ways for the voice of people with lived experience of food insecurity to be heard and to guide the policy and practice response in B&NES. Initial discussions with Bath University in 2020 were developed into an ambitious application for research funding from the UKRI Transforming Food Systems programme. An outline bid was submitted in early April 2021 and is a collaboration between researchers from Bath, Cardiff, Reading and Hertfordshire Universities. If successful, the qualitative and quantitative multi-themed project will run over three years from April 2022.

3.14 In the meantime, the working groups are encouraged to bring the voice of the people they serve to inform on going work, setting priorities and the delivery of the action plan. As Covid restrictions are lifted and face-to-face meetings become possible again, more direct contact and feedback will be sought.

3.15 One of the challenges in coordinating the local response to household food insecurity has been a lack of detailed **local intelligence on mapping gaps and needs with community food provision** both geographically and in terms of specific socioeconomic groups in B&NES. Intelligence analyst support and insight on local data to inform our work on food insecurity has been difficult as colleagues have been deployed in response to Covid-19 over the past year. As some of these pressures begin to ease, we will be able to draw on this resource to help in planning future work and implementation of our Food Equity Action Plan.

3.16 Significant government funding of over £430K has been allocated to B&NES for the 2021/22 national **Holiday Activity and Food (HAF)** programmes across all the main school holiday periods. Bath Rugby Foundation built on their successful 2020 Summer Breakout programme to coordinate HAF in collaboration with other agencies for the 2021 Easter break, supported by £48K of 2020/21 government allocated funding. For four days of each week of the Easter break, two sessions per day were delivered (morning for primary age and afternoon for secondary age) at each of three sites across B&NES (Midsomer Norton, Keynsham and Twerton). Over the two-week holiday period, a total of 130 children (95 aged 5-11years; and 33 aged 12 to 16 years) attended the hubs on average almost 4 times equating to 499 attendances in total. Colleagues in public health are bringing together a steering group to manage and coordinate the commissioning of the HAF programme over the 2021/22 school year.

3.17 The **uptake of both Healthy Start Vouchers (HSV) and means-tested Free School Meals (FSM)** is low in B&NES. Current HSV take-up is 40-55% and the take up FSM by eligible children in 2019 was 79%. We are working with other members of the public health team to promote the recent increase in value of HSV from £3.10 to £4.25 and will continue to do so as preparations are made for the roll-out of digital application and vouchers in the Autumn.

3.18 **Eligibility thresholds for both HSV and FSM** are based on very low earned income of £7,400 a year. There are many families who are just above this threshold and in need of support but miss out on these initiatives. As illustration, B&NES FSM Service rejected 367 claims to benefit related free school meals during the period 7.6.20 to 18.4.21 using the DWP ECS service that local authorities use to check claims. Other benefits including tax credits stop at the point of application for Universal Credit (UC) but FSM and HSV don't

start until the UC claim is approved and are then not backdated. UC claimant numbers have increased by around 3000 since the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020 and a significant proportion of those are families with children. The current minimum 5-week wait for UC can leave families in a distressing financial vacuum.

3.18 While helping people to reduce outgoings without compromising their standard of living is crucial, increasing income is also essential and meets our aim of a cash-first approach to tackling household food insecurity. To this end we are currently scoping options for adoption of, and possibilities for encouraging an increase in the number of employers who offer, the **Real Living Wage (RLW)** in B&NES.

3.19 The impact of household income insecurity is multi-faceted and affects not only access to affordable nutritious food but also other necessities of life. A useful model for **'Poverty proofing the school day'** has been developed by schools in NE England. Development of an audit tool for schools based on this resource has been included in the refresh of the B&NES Children and Young People's Plan 2021-2024 and we will work with colleagues in education, and with schools to produce this audit tool.

3.20 The direction of travel of the BFFA and the refreshed Food Equity Action Plan reflects the how the focus is moving from emergency food aid via foodbanks, through the diverse network of community support with their developing offers of wraparound support, to **integrated locality networks and one-stop-shop hubs**, and ultimately towards the vision of contributing to eliminating food insecurity. What is now an Affordable Food Network could become or link to an 'Affordable Living Network' including support around other aspects of household budgets affected by poverty as outlined above.

3.21 In taking forward the action plan the BFFA is seeking to **prevent the creation of a two-tier food shopping experience** where people living on low incomes are increasingly using separate, membership-based affordable outlets which are out of the mainstream. However, when affordable food is core to the offer of other aspects of social and health support, it can have a meaningful impact on pervasive issues of social isolation, community cohesion and health inequalities. The BFFA aims to strike the balance between targeted and universal approaches to tackling household food insecurity and its causes.

3.22 We also recognise the fundamental place and importance of food in everyone's life; not just for the calories and nutrition that sustain us physically, but also for the social connection that can be created around its growing, harvesting, preparing, cooking and eating together. These are activities that deeply nourish us and can positively impact on wider influences on health like physical activity, social connection, community cohesion and mutual aid. Food insecurity also impoverishes these experiences in people's lives too. With this in mind, we would like to see an **assessment of access to healthy food universally included** wherever people encounter health, social care or voluntary agencies that are addressing complex needs.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 By developing a 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.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

5.1 No current resource implication currently. The application to UKRI for research funding, as detailed above (3.13) includes reference to the 'in-kind' support from B&NES as an active partner and co-creator of the research. This would comprise up to two hours a week of HIO time (3.2) to facilitate introductions and liaise with the research team if the application is successful.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

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

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 While the experience of household food insecurity is something that can affect anyone, the evidence shows that some sections of the community can be particularly vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity. The BFFA members are conducting an Equality Impact Assessment in order to:

- Consider how the B&NES Food Equity Action Plan is targeting support to the most vulnerable groups in our area
- Highlight and address barriers that some groups might face in accessing support

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 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.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 None

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 Information in this report has been provided by members of the B&NES Fair Food Alliance (see Appendix 2 for membership) and the action plan is collectively owned and produced by the alliance.

10.2 This report has been approved by Chief Financial Officer -Nominated report clearance officer

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Background papers	Children, Adult, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel 14th July 2020 Full Council Report January 21 st 2021
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	