

Bath & North East Somerset Council	
MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Health & Wellbeing Board
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	6 February 2025
TITLE:	Director of Public Health Report: Annual Report
WARD:	All
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM	
List of attachments to this report: Direct of Public Health 2023/24 Tackling Food Insecurity in B&NES	

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The production of an independent annual report on the health of the local population is a statutory requirement of Directors of Public Health. The focus of this annual report is on household food insecurity in Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES). This report describes the rising number of individuals in B&NES who are reporting that they sometimes or often have not had enough to eat and the impact of this on individuals' health and wellbeing and on society. It explores the drivers of food insecurity, including the impact of low income, adverse life experiences and breakdown in support networks. The report describes the coordinated action that is underway to tackle food insecurity in B&NES and it presents four recommendations. We ask that the Board consider the report and the recommendations and continue to advocate for action to address food insecurity in B&NES.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to;

- 2.1 Understand the position of household food insecurity for the population in B&NES and the recommendations made in the report to further tackle this.**
- 2.2 Consider how members can continue to advocate for action to address food insecurity through their roles and networks.**

2.3 Note the summary of progress on recommendations made in the previous DPH annual report.

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 Food insecurity is described by the Food Standards Agency as having access at all times to enough food that is sufficiently varied and culturally appropriate to sustain an active and healthy lifestyle. The experience of food insecurity varies and can range from compromising on quality and variety to reducing food intake or disrupting eating patterns.
- 3.2 Food has an impact on individuals at all stages of life, from the pregnancy and neonatal period through to older age. At all ages there is a reduction in immunity, worse mental and physical health and worse cognitive function. Within the household, food insecurity can disrupt family dynamics and necessitate actions such as borrowing money or selling possessions. At a societal level food insecurity disrupts learning and education, reduces productivity and participation, increases the need for health and social care, and prevents social and economic development.
- 3.3 Despite the UK as a whole being relatively food secure, a significant proportion of the population suffer from food insecurity. The University of Southampton's food insecurity tool identifies 3.9% of the B&NES population as living in areas which rank in the 20% at highest risk of food insecurity in England. This is equivalent to approximately 7,611 individuals. The Voicebox Survey 2023 showed an increase in those who either sometimes or often did not have enough to eat from 2% in 2023 to 5%, whilst the number who had enough of the kinds of foods they wanted, decreased from 76% to 66%. The latter value has been found by the University of Bath to be even lower in those who are receiving pension credits (51%).
- 3.4 The Trussel Trust has identified 3 key drivers of food insecurity, low income, adverse life experiences and a lack of informal support. These factors are exacerbated by limited availability of affordable, healthy and acceptable food. Research undertaken by the University of Bath found that the main local drivers reflected those seen elsewhere, namely low wages, insecure employment, problems with the benefits system and health issues.
- 3.5 Bath and North East Somerset has a wide range of food-insecurity-related activity. The Fair Food Alliance is critical in supporting and coordinating the work of B&NES Council, St John's Foundation and a wide range of partner organisations including local, national and international charities. The aim of the Alliance is to eliminate the need for crisis food intervention and significantly reduce the number of people living with all degrees of food insecurity.
- 3.6 At a civic level, the Council Economic and Corporate strategies and the development of the Local Plan, support key areas that impact on food insecurity including giving people a bigger say, sustainability and the climate, and economic development and good work for all. The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy also places an emphasis on listening to communities and working with them to build stronger places and focuses on the development of sustainable places. It also recognises the importance of skills, good work and employment

and the need for this to be fair and inclusive, providing a foundation for food security.

- 3.7 Achieving change across a population requires services that are effective and accessible. Those experiencing financial and food insecurity are supported by the Council Welfare Team, Citizens Advice B&NES, and the Community Wellbeing Hub. Food insecurity also has a significant impact on children and the Holiday Activities and Food programme provides an opportunity for children who are eligible for benefit-related free school meals to enjoy the company of others as well as receiving a nutritious meal. Alongside the Holiday Activities and Food programme, the B&NES Public Health team are working to engage more schools in the Affordable Schools Programme.
- 3.8 The report describes the wide range of community-level interventions that support individuals in B&NES. These range from emergency food provision to community-led growing enterprises. Many of these organisations hope to continue their work but also to achieve more, for example the Hive Community Centre would like to increase their offer to users to include benefits advice and mental health support and Grow Timsbury would like to expand to include a monthly ‘Share and Repair’ café.
- 3.9 The report sets out four wide-ranging recommendations that could assist in taking further action on food insecurity. These are:
- (1) Work effectively through the structure of the Fair Food Alliance to review and fulfil the ambitions of the Food Equity Action Plan and to broaden engagement.
 - (2) Raise awareness and recognition of and embed food security within the Children and Young People’s Plan.
 - (3) All partners to support progress on upstream determinants of food insecurity through advocating for action on the universal credit essentials offer, widening criteria for free school meals and opt-out for key benefits.
 - (4) Take forward the conversation with system partners about the development of a local food strategy for B&NES that contributes to addressing household food insecurity, as committed to in the B&NES Economic Strategy 2024-2034.
- 3.10 Finally, the report reflects on the recommendations made in the previous Director of Public Health Report and the progress that has been made against these and provides an updated list of public health indicators for B&NES.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The production of an independent annual report on the health of the local population is a statutory requirement of Directors of Public Health.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 The recommendations made in the report will primarily impact on the work of the Fair Food Alliance. Information on food insecurity in children will be reported into the Children & Young People’s subgroup.

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 This report describes the current situation with regard to household food insecurity in Bath and North East Somerset. An EIA has therefore not been carried out.
- 7.2 This report demonstrates the contribution poor access to good food has in perpetuating inequality and that the drivers of food insecurity affect groups unequally. It acknowledges that interventions being undertaken aim to reduce inequalities. The final chapter reflects on the recommendations from the previous Director of Public Health report and the progress that has been made against these including in tackling inequalities.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

- 8.1 The report recognises the close relationship that food security has with the environment through its description of good food. It acknowledges the work done by the Council and the Health and Wellbeing Board to promote the climate and ecological emergency and to help create sustainable futures, as well as the contribution that many of the organisations involved in food security make towards reducing food waste.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 9.1 None

10 CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Consultation was undertaken with Council teams and external organisations who have contributed to the report.

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Background papers	Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023-24
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