

London Borough of Enfield

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting, 25th November 2021

Subject: Food Poverty Update

**Cabinet Member: Cllr Alev Cazimoglu
Executive Director: Tony Theodoulou**

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update on Food Poverty in Enfield

Relevance to the Council Plan

2. This report provides a brief summary of the work that is currently being undertaken in the borough to address food poverty. This report relates to some of the actions to address food poverty specifically highlighted in the Enfield Poverty and Inequality Commission and The Corporate Plan.

Background

3. There has been an increase in the number of organisations providing food support to residents in Enfield since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The highest demand for food aid is seen in the Edmonton Green, Jubilee and Haselbury wards.
4. The Enfield Food Alliance was established in November 2020 to create a more joined up approach to tackling food poverty through a network of food-aid support in Enfield.
5. Public Health has worked with the Enfield Food Alliance to create a Food Action Plan for Enfield which focusses on three areas of actions that can be taken to tackle food poverty: prevention, building resilience and emergency support. Development of a Food Action Plan for Enfield was a recommendation from the Enfield Poverty and Inequality Commission.

Main Considerations for the Panel

6. Since December 2020, over £120,000 has been provided to the Enfield Food Alliance members to provide food parcels, cooked meals and set up alternative models of food support for residents. This financial support has resulted in an increase in the provision of culturally appropriate foods at food banks and has contributed towards opening four Food Pantries in Enfield.

7. Despite the financial support provided to food-aid organisations, demand is still incredibly high and organisations are struggling to match the demand. Data from the Enfield Food Alliance shows on average 1500 households are accessing emergency food-aid each week in Enfield. Prior to the Food Alliance, data from the North Enfield Food Bank was the only measure of food-aid uptake in Enfield. For comparative measures, in the year 2019-2020 they supported roughly 48 households per week, this increased to roughly 100 households per week in 2020-2021.

8. There is a need to implement more robust data collection measures to gain a more in-depth understanding of the support mechanisms residents accessing food-aid need and where best to place and implement such resources. The depth of data collection varies amongst organisations within the Enfield Food Alliance. Organisations are being supported to adopt a more universal approach to data collection which includes the training and resources to do so.

9. From the data collected in Enfield, many people using food-aid struggle to afford to purchase food, pay rent and pay energy bills. The two main reasons cited for attending food banks are low-income and changes or delays to benefit payments. Language barriers have also been identified as a barrier to accessing appropriate local support. There is a need to ensure relevant support or services that can assist people living in poverty are accessible to those who speak limited English.

10. The majority of food-aid provided by the Enfield Food Alliance is 'emergency' food-aid that would ordinarily be accessed if someone were in a crisis however many families are accessing emergency food aid on a weekly basis. Emergency food aid is neither a sustainable nor dignified approach to food support. Those on the lowest incomes spend a greater proportion of their income on food¹. There is a need to increase access to affordable nutritious food for those on the lowest incomes in Enfield.

11. Action has been taken to increase access to affordable nutritious food for those on the lowest incomes through implementation of the Food Pantry model in Enfield this year. Food Pantry members pay between £3.50 - £4.50 per week and can select roughly £15-£20 worth of food. Pantries provide members with a choice of food; unlike a food bank where there is often little choice as provision of food is based purely on donations. Pantry membership fees are invested back into the Pantry and are used to purchase specific culturally appropriate foods members have expressed a desire for. Pantries seek to increase access to nutritious foods by stocking a range of healthier items alongside fruits and vegetables. An adaptation of Public Health England's 'Eatwell Guide' has been produced to support Pantry members and the wider community with healthy eating messages that are reflective of the diverse cultures within Enfield.

12. Pantries offer a more dignified approach to food support. Many families experiencing food hardship, value their dignity and self-esteem. Feedback from many Pantry members reflects they would rather pay a token fee for their food instead of completely depending on foodbanks and experiencing the stigma that can be associated with doing so. Effectively, Pantries provide a 'hand up' rather than a 'hand out.' The Pantry model reflects the Corporate Plan to 'sustain

strong and healthy communities' through prevention and early intervention measures to promote independent living and wellbeing.

13. Alongside provision of food, a key element of the Food Pantry model focusses on offering support with access to financial, housing, wellbeing and employment skills and advice. This includes the ability of Food Pantry staff to make direct referrals on behalf of Pantry members into Council teams such as the Welfare Advice and Debt Support team. This approach of additional supports reflects acknowledgment of the underlying causes of food poverty and the need to address these to support people out of food poverty.

14. At present, there are over 100 members accessing food pantries on a weekly basis in Enfield. There are four Food Pantries located in the East of the borough in the Lower Edmonton, Edmonton Green and Enfield Lock wards. A fifth Food Pantry will open inside Enfield Town Library in early 2022. Pantry location has been determined through a combination of level of local deprivation, areas with limited existing food-aid support and access to suitable and affordable building space to house a Pantry.

15. Food poverty is affected by a number of financial and wellbeing factors therefore it is imperative to ensure a 'more than food' approach is taken. Providing food alone will not tackle food poverty.

16. Working in conjunction with the Independent Food Aid Network, the 'Worrying About Money' leaflet has been developed for Enfield. The leaflet allows people facing financial crisis to quickly see the available advice and support options in Enfield and how to access these services. The aim of the leaflet is to reduce the need for emergency food aid by helping people access any existing financial support they are entitled to and seek advice on income maximisation as a 'cash first' response to food insecurity. The leaflet has been shared widely with schools, food banks and community groups across Enfield. The Worrying About Money leaflet supports recommendations 24 of the Enfield Poverty and Inequality Commission to 'extend access to benefits advice, support around debt and good credit'.

17. Steps have also been taken to provide food aid-organisations with skills and knowledge relating to welfare, debt and financial advice so they can provide effective signposting and support to the communities they serve.

18. The Enfield Food Alliance has raised the issue of access to permanent buildings as a concern. Many operate out of temporary locations and rely on the goodwill of local churches or other organisations to access building space. With the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, many of the spaces are being reclaimed and put back to their original uses. A need for centralised hubs that can be used for food access and food storage have been voiced by the Enfield Food Alliance.

19. Public Health have acted on these concerns and are in the process of supporting the Enfield Food Alliance to create a food hub on the Snells estate in Edmonton that will support access to food alongside financial and wellbeing advice services. In addition to this the Food Hub will house a community kitchen, one of the recommendations from the EPIC report, that will be used to provide cooking classes and skills workshops for local people.

20. Through a campaign of targeted promotion to families eligible to receive Healthy Start vouchers, there has been a 9% increase in voucher uptake in Enfield since targeted promotion of the scheme began in February 2021. Enfield now has a Healthy Start voucher take up of 59% which is higher than London average of 58%. Healthy Start vouchers (worth £4.25 per week) increase access to fruit and vegetables for eligible families on low incomes. Additional targeted campaigns will take place in early 2022 to further the increase in uptake of vouchers and support recommendation 25 from the Enfield Poverty and Inequality Commission which states 'the Council should promote the take up of local people's full benefits entitlements.'

21. Through Government Covid grants, since December 2020, the Council has been able to provide vouchers to families in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) to cover the additional costs of food during the school holidays. Vouchers and food have also been provided to families who are not in receipt of FSM but have been identified by schools as vulnerable. The Household Support Grant will be used to provide vouchers for families of pupils entitled to FSM over the coming Christmas, February and Easter breaks. Given the diverse range of ethnicities across Enfield, the provision of cash or vouchers over food parcels allows families to purchase foods they are familiar with and know how to cook and is in keeping with the wider 'cash first' approach of income maximisation in addressing food poverty.

22. The Government funded Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme ran over the Easter and Summer Holidays in 2021 and will operate over the coming Christmas Holidays. The programme provides children with a meal, physical activity and nutrition education daily and provides access to holiday clubs that for many low-income families would be impossible to access otherwise. So far, over 3000 children have attended the HAF programme in Enfield. The Chancellor's autumn budget confirmed a funding commitment to extend provision of the HAF programme over the next three years.

Conclusions

23. Enfield is currently providing a heavy 'emergency' food-aid response via food banks. There is a need to move away from an emergency food response and provide more sustainable and dignified approaches to tackling food poverty and increase access to affordable nutritious food for those on the lowest incomes.

24. There is a need to implement models and systems within the local community that increase access to financial and wellbeing support at touch points accessed by residents experiencing food poverty e.g. schools, GP's, community groups.

25. Continued financial support and wider support from within the Council (e.g. access to affordable building space) are needed to effectively address food poverty in Enfield.

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Appendices

Background Papers

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

1 <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/FF-Broken-Plate-2021.pdf>