Food theme: Evidence Sources and Options

Objective: To capture the current state of food and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis in the borough and make recommendations about what, if anything, can be done to improve the situation.

Definitions of food insecurity

The Food Foundation model looks at food insecurity through the lens of affordability and access to food using three linked criteria asking the question "Have you/anyone else in your household (in the last month or six months):

- had smaller meals than usual or skipped meals because you couldn't afford or get access to food?
- ever been hungry but not eaten because you couldn't afford or get access to food?
- not eaten for a whole day because you couldn't afford or get access to food.

The internationally recognised approach developed by the US Department of Agriculture definition uses six questions and a frequency metric for each of the statements with a timeframe of the last 12 months, the questions are:

Q1: The food that (I/we) bought just didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more.

Q2: (I/we) couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.

Q3: Did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

Q4: How often did this happen?

Q5: Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

Q6: Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

Key lines of enquiry

1. Having a clear and measurable definition of Food Poverty
2. Examining the causes of household food insecurity.
3. Measuring the impact of food insecurity in Wandsworth
4. Determining what the impact of COL crisis has been on food insecurity.
5. Exploring Community based solutions to improve the situation in Wandsworth.
6. Capturing the lived experience in Wandsworth (What are people doing, are they changing habits, how are people dealing with the COL impacts ,including health and wellbeing).
7. The health impact of the COL crisis, immediate impact on diet and longer-term health implications.
8. Mapping food provision in the retail /wholesale/manufacturing system in Wandsworth.
9. What recommendations would make a difference and what could the Council do (using the levers and powers they have Public Health /Planning)?
10. Who are the other players in the system, what additional powers and resources are required, what type of system change is required to make big shifts for Wandsworth communities?

Wandsworth Food system

14.2% of adults experience food insecurity in Wandsworth (36,930 adults), the 12th highest ranking across London.

26% of pupils in Wandsworth are known to be eligible for Free School Meals – ranking 13th highest of 32 London boroughs.

Uptake of the Healthy Start scheme in Wandsworth is 68% - ranking 7th out of London boroughs.

Using the Priority Places for Food Index most areas within the bottom five deciles across Wandsworth were in the west of the borough – covering most of Roehampton and some areas in West Putney and West Hill

Causes

- Russia's invasion of the Ukraine (impact of wheat/metals markets) .
- Pandemic related shortages causing price rises due to scarcity of products .
- Higher comparative UK inflation rate than European partners (Spain/France) and the USA .
- Impact of higher energy costs on food system (s they influence costs at all stages of food production and distribution).
- Brexit has been an aggravating factor as recruitment has dwindled in the more labour-intensive parts of food production, which often relied on workers from eastern Europe.
- The accusation that some retailers and food manufacturers are using inflation as an excuse to hike prices further than necessary.

Issues and Impact

- Increasing food insecurity and use of food banks .
- Moving on from food banks.
- Free school meal uptake and universality and the healthy start scheme .
- Food system and local infrastructure .
- Access to hot meals .

Long term ideas for further development

Interim Report :
Short term:

- Develop a Food Strategy for Wandsworth which includes: building community capacity, mapping food insecurity, exploration of new food supply options for focussed areas, support transition from food aid to food trade models, develop growing food projects.
- Looking at the value of a Healthy hospitality catering and retail charter based on best practice examples such as the Greenwich model.
- Create Healthy Start Champions within the community to support take-up of healthy start vouchers.
- Develop mechanisms to increase take-up of food support, including Free School Meals and Healthy Start vouchers.
- Explore the development of Meals on Wheels and home delivery system for people struggling to make their own meals.

- Develop lobby positions: the role of big six retailers in Food inflation, Universal free school meals.

Long term:

- Research and develop an approach that targets the diverse needs of Wandsworth communities including the:
- Mapping of affordable food provision
- Holistic solutions to support those in food poverty who may be facing other challenges related to low-income, for examples affordable food projects linked to Credit Unions.
- Mechanisms to support transition from food aid to food trade
- Procurement: supporting and nurturing local food businesses, based on best practice such as the Preston approach.

Food Theme – Options for Final Recommendations

Emergency welfare options

1. Healthy Start – adopt Food foundation policy positions
   - Increasing the value of the payments
   - Expanding eligibility for the scheme
   - Improving access and uptake
   - Supporting the scheme to meet its nutrition objective
2. Expanding Free school meals provision
3. Linking up Credit unions/advice and food provision
4. Use of Household support fund (advice/food bank transition)
5. Welfare provision of meals – meals on wheels, voucher schemes for cafes etc, emergency food voucher schemes – look into these

State actions/ information data gathering

1. Mapping affordable and all food provision- work with CFL and LGA to develop projects/template for mapping the affordability and availability of food, using Wandsworth as an example, and use this data to direct action on sustainable provision of food in food deserts, considering the location, clients, targets, demographic, differences in supermarkets etc.
2. Data on social and economic aspects of food supply and demand at a macro and micro level.
3. Regulating /lobbying supermarkets (mandating low-cost items in smaller stores /lobby for universal pricing across stores/areas)
4. Lobby position on healthy, sustainable, affordable public procurement of food (schools /prisons/hospitals /children's homes etc) , lobby for sustainable dietary guidelines for private sector (High street brands having something affordable and healthy on the menu)

Scaling Up Civic society/ Political Economy & the Wandsworth System

1. Wandsworth to join the sustainable food places network and create a local food committee for Wandsworth.
2. Developing co-operatives/markets - Detailed recommendations on how to support VCS to bring the end of food banks

      a. Piloting food co-ops, small/street markets, pop ups setting up and mobile markets, street markets, mandating stalls etc, how do you encourage raw food?
3. Procurement and social value (securing additional culturally appropriate affordable food projects)

Democracy

1. Developing a sustainable food place network for Wandsworth.
2. Local food council /committee.
3. City wide approach to utilizing green spaces, growing your own.
4. Having and institutional voice to share ideas and initiatives between the community and system players.

Best practice to look into further:

Strategy

- Food system strategy (create a whole system strategy).
  - o Mapping out local access to affordable and free food (Coventry)
- Inclusive economy capital (Oldham) : making the most of local assets and resources, including local purchasing, supporting local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and working with the community and voluntary sector.
- Local food partnership (Lewes)

Community/local food provision

- Developing community food hubs for people experiencing moderate food insecurity.
  - o These could be linked to Community Development – linking to Credit Union.
  - o Developing community kitchens (aka London Community kitchen).
  - o Mobile Food pantry (Kirklees).
- Emergency Food Crisis Fund (Brighton) and Food voucher schemes.
- Food pantries (Food club): Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency.
- FOOD (Food On Our Doorstep) Clubs (Nottingham)>
- Food Hub which empowers over 60 Voluntary and Community Sector (tower hamlets)
- Merton's Community Fridge Network

Benefits offer

- Universal FSM (Southwark/Tower Hamlets) + free school uniform (Islington)
- Automatic enrolment for FSM (Sheffield)

Systems theme : Foundational Liveability (Commission meeting 23//08/2023)

How Wandsworth can get more local social innovation for household liveability benefits

Q 1: What does Wandsworth directly control? Because there has been no stock transfer you have > 15,000 social housing tenancies, and you commission adult care ….

Q2: What can Wandsworth convene? Which intermediary organisations have the values + capability + network connections which makes them soft targets whose buy-in can make a difference

Q3: How do we give citizens voice and agency in the process of social innovation?

Then
- **Action 1**: bring senior council officers + intermediary reps together to build shared understanding of the liveability objectives + get them to set their own priority issues for household benefits via better services or extending the range of services in short or medium term thinking at sector and/ or locality level; as in the Foundational Alliance's 2023 housing action conference which decided retrofit + supply chain skills and tenant voice and agency; through discussion with experts and consultants distributed round the tables.

- **Action 2**: identify short run projects which are within the existing envelope of powers, management capability and financial resources; e.g. domiciliary care reform within existing revenue budget is much easier than residential reform requiring cap ex; get buy in from a coalition of the willing within and between organisations prepared to become an alliance for change: create 'just do it' task and finish delivery teams as in Network 2025 which brings together health boards + LA public health + housing associations to deliver on innovations which reduce health inequalities and incidentally build trust

Concepts : The aim (end vision) is **rebuilding liveability** in a country where low incomes cannot be abolished, free low incomes from the disadvantages of poverty/ make low incomes more liveable . through " **adaptive reuse**" ie gradualist approach of work arounds starting from where we are at:; this is **Not the big picture vision** of a different future but ways of working which engage system or place specifics and deliver meaningful improvement.

Approaches
- **Starter policies** playing on fairness + making connections: eg free school meals for primary children or real living wage for English care workers or establishing social insurance as hypothecated tax (equivalent of wedge policies for radical right)
- **Stealth policies** for public good in areas of confusion eg changing tax thresholds + benefit tapers so the system is less predatory for the low paid
- **Switch policies** are about empowering other actors to do what the central state cannot.

  - Empower trade unions by repealing anti –union legislation and encourage trade union organisation;

  - Empower bottom up initiative + social innovation at the lower levels of multi level politics; in the mayoral cities + Wales + Scotland so top down meets bottom up.

Practical Examples

- Ferment of non-governmental actors doing social innovation from Clwyd Alyn Housing Association on food deserts to Health Boards doing "grow your own" work force development.

- Local Authorities + Welsh Government: Gwynedd is tackling care reform; Welsh Government has experimented with new ways of working with stakeholder deep dives on afforestation and towns .

- Welsh Government is now going to review all its policies, starting with food and care. The review template has 3 objectives on liveability, the FE provider base + sustainability.

    o "To achieve liveability for households through safeguarding residual income and developing foundational services" ,

    o Through three ways of working: Engage system or place specifics, get evidence, mobilise alliances for change inside and outside government .

- The Welsh do not have a prefigurative model but have started out on a narrow pathway