



**EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**
21 October 2021

CABINET: 2 November 2021

Report of: Chief Operating Officer

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Gareth Dowling

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SUBJECT: FOOD INSECURITY

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To share with members the findings report following a research study into food insecurity within West Lancashire.
- 1.2 To recommend actions for implementation that will help tackle food insecurity within the borough in a dignified way, and help address the root causes.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 2.1 That the Committee consider the content of the report, and that the agreed comments of Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee be passed to Cabinet for consideration.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

- 3.1 That Cabinet note the minutes of Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee attached at appendix 3.
- 3.2 That Cabinet note the findings of the research study and agree to the implementation of the following opportunities, identified in section 5 of the report, to address food insecurity;
 - That the Chief Operating Officer nominates a senior officer within the Council to take overall responsibility for co-ordinating a response to tackling food insecurity in the borough.

- The establishment of a cross-sector food insecurity forum, led by a WLBC officer, to strengthen ties and support cross-sector co-ordination and that this forum commits to a sustainable and dignified approach to tackling food insecurity in the borough.
 - Where applicable, the Council and partners highlight the issues which cause food insecurity and their impact at both a regional and national level.
- 3.3 That Cabinet endorse the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Community Safety as Food Security Champion for West Lancashire, providing political leadership at both a local and national level.
- 3.4 That the newly established cross-sector forum, in consultation with the Food Security Champion, consider the other opportunities identified within the research report and where appropriate seek Cabinet / Council approval for their implementation.
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4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Council approved the commissioning of a study which would examine Food Insecurity within West Lancashire that would map the existing support available and inform potential development of preventative, sustainable and cost-effective solutions.
- 4.2 Following a tender exercise, Iconic Consulting were appointed and scheduled to commence work on the study in March 2020. However, due to the emerging issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions, it was agreed it would be prudent to postpone the study. At this time there were concerns about the consultant's ability to gather robust evidence of food insecurity, given the competing demands on stakeholder's time to assist and the atypical picture which was emerging in relation to families accessing food.
- 4.3 In September 2020, it was agreed with Iconic Consulting that the research should go ahead which involved the following tasks;
- A review of literature on food insecurity including the nature and extent of the problem, the characteristics of those experiencing it, and initiatives developed elsewhere to address the issue.
 - Analysis of local, regional and national data related to food insecurity.
 - A brief review of local, regional and national policy.
 - A mapping exercise to gather information on existing services in West Lancashire that seek to address food insecurity.
 - Consultation with 17 stakeholders including Councillors and senior staff from WLBC, and service providers in West Lancashire that seek to address food insecurity, including local foodbanks, welfare support, and other community and voluntary sector organisations.
 - Consultation with five West Lancashire residents with "lived" experience of food insecurity. The interviews gathered the residents' views and experiences of times when they have struggled to feed themselves or their families, and considered how people in their situation could be better

supported in the future. The residents volunteered to take part in the research following awareness raising by local third sector organisations supporting people experiencing food insecurity.

- A workshop with nine participants – three officers/elected members from WLBC and six representatives from local third sector organisations supporting people experiencing food insecurity and poverty. The workshop discussed the emerging study findings and potential opportunities to address food insecurity in West Lancashire in the future.
- An assessment of the costs and benefits of the potential opportunities identified during the study to tackle food insecurity. The assessment considered the economic, social and environmental costs/benefits.

4.4 In addition to the tasks listed in paragraph 4.3 Iconic Consulting held feedback sessions to share the draft findings. Sessions were held with the Communities Sector Open Forum, a communities group, established and supported by the Council, to help address the issues in our communities as a result of COVID-19, the Council's Corporate Management Team and a session was offered for members of the Council. The final findings report is included at appendix 1.

4.5 During the session with members of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Community Safety volunteered to act as the Food Security Champion and expressed a commitment to achieving the outcomes of the findings report.

5.0 KEY FINDINGS – THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

5.1 Some of the key findings from the study are highlighted below. Table 1 sets out the food insecurity estimates within the borough for 2018. These estimates have been identified using headline findings for the UK and applying them locally. The report highlights that food insecurity can be closely linked to fuel poverty, with people often having to make the difficult decision of 'heating or eating'. Data from the Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy 2021-24 shows that 11.5% or approximately 5,489 households were in fuel poverty in 2018 and this figure could be used as an approximation of the scale of the problem.

Indicator	UK Figures	West Lancashire Estimates
<u>Households</u> experiencing food insecurity	9.8%	4,580 households
<u>Households</u> experiencing severe food insecurity (severe = skipping meals, experiencing hunger)	2.8%	1,310 households
Children aged under 16 living in food insecure households	11.0%	2,175 households

Table 1 - Food Insecurity in West Lancashire (pre – COVID-19)

5.2 Cabinet will be aware that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on food insecurity and poverty throughout the UK, brought about by furlough, job losses, welfare dependence and mental health;

- The Food Foundation reported that food insecurity **quadrupled** during the first lockdown in spring 2020.
- The Trussell Trust reported an **89%** increase in foodbank use in April 2020 and 100,000 people using foodbanks for the first time.
- Independent foodbanks reported an increase in usage of **177%** in May 2020

5.3 During the pandemic the three established foodbanks in the borough Skelmersdale, Ormskirk and Digmoor Community foodbank together with the Brichwood Centre provided a total of 10,522 emergency food parcels from the start of July to the end of December 2020. This equates to an average of 405 parcels per week.

5.4 Some of the drivers that lead to food insecurity will not come as a surprise, and include the following;

- Commonly, the benefits system
- Debt
- Addiction
- Family breakdown
- Challenging life experiences e.g. eviction, divorce
- Adverse work experience e.g. redundancy, reduced hours
- Ill-health
- Lack of informal support from friends and family

6.0 OPPORTUNITIES TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY

6.1 Section 4 of the research study sets out the findings of a mapping exercise which details the existing support available across the borough to address food insecurity, this includes emergency food aid, community food shops, community cafés and kitchens, community growing spaces and welfare services.

6.2 The mapping exercise, together with consultation with local stakeholders and the consultant's knowledge of initiatives in other areas have informed Section 5 of the study, which identifies potential opportunities to address food insecurity in West Lancashire. These opportunities have been presented under the following headings;

6.2.1 Influencing policy at a national level

- WLBC and partners highlight the issues which cause food insecurity and their impact at a regional and national level.

6.2.2 Strategic actions for West Lancashire

- Improved co-ordination and co-operation
 - Establishment of a cross-sector forum, led by WLBC, to strengthen ties and co-ordination.
 - The forum commits to a sustainable and dignified approach to tackling food insecurity in the borough.
 - An existing senior officer of the Council takes overall responsibility for co-ordinating a response to tackling food insecurity.
 - A WLBC councillor takes on the role of Food Security Champion, providing political leadership at a local and national level.

- Funding for organisations
- Funding for individuals

6.2.3 **Local initiatives in West Lancashire**

- Person-centred rapid response team to support new referrals / service users, to identify and address the root causes of food insecurity and build in a proactive referral policy
- Extension of the Café Birchwood approach in other areas to provide a dignified and engaging means of support
- Development of additional access points for emergency food to address geographic gaps outside of Ormskirk and Skelmersdale and limited opening times
- Extension of community food shop network including rollout of joined-up services such as Village Food Club that address underlying causes
- Expansion of the community growing spaces and development of a scheme to use produce from space including Burscough Community Farm
- Enhance links with the local agricultural sector to improve the supply of affordable, locally grown food
- Encourage the use of third-party waste reductions approaches such as the OLIO app, which enables free distribution of perishable foods to divert to landfill

6.3 A number of the above opportunities could be implemented relatively quickly and without the need for additional resources. These have been identified in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 of the report and it is recommended that these are implemented as a priority. It is also recommended that the newly established cross sector forum, in consultation with the Food Security Champion, review the other opportunities identified within the findings report and progress them as appropriate.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The proposals will result in a co-ordinated approach to food insecurity across West Lancashire, helping residents to access healthy food and looking to address the root causes so that we can support a more sustained approach.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 It is expected that the proposals outlined for implementation will have some resource implications, however these will be met utilising existing resources.

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 The research study highlights the impact and scale of food insecurity in the borough. Failure to act and implement the initiatives presented will mean that the root causes of food insecurity will not be addressed.

10.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Food insecurity and poor nutritional intake can significantly impact on an individual's health and wellbeing. The research identified that stress, depression and anxiety associated with food insecurity affect more than half of households who are referred to foodbanks. Children who grow up in food insecure homes are more likely to have poor health and worse educational outcomes compared to children growing up in food secure homes.
- 10.2 The recommendations look to provide a co-ordinated approach to food insecurity within West Lancashire in a dignified manner and help address the root causes.
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Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report

Appendices

1. Appendix 1 – Food Insecurity in West Lancashire – Iconic Consulting
2. Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment
3. Appendix 3 – Minutes of Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee – To follow