



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 1: FOOD POVERTY

Rachel McGrath – Deputy CEO Northamptonshire community Foundation and facilitator of Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network – 14 January 2020

- Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network was convened in 2012 as part of the community leadership role of Northamptonshire Community Foundation when it recognised as a grant maker and funder an emerging trend of an increasing number of food banks and food aid providers applying for funds and the increase of local communities experiencing food insecurity
- During 2013 and 2014 the community foundation received £10,000 over the two year period to convene the network and support the strategy of the council to tackle poverty in Northamptonshire. Other key members of the network were also funded including Phoenix Resource Centre receiving £10,000 per year over two years to provide storage and transport support to sharing resources between food banks. This funding ended by 2015.
- Since 2016 Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network has strategically aligned with a network of food poverty alliances through the national End Hunger UK campaign and commits to campaigning, training and events. Local campaigns and events have included launching a Fair Deal for Kids appeal with Northampton Chronicle and Echo:
<https://www.northamptonchron.co.uk/news/how-can-8-400-northampton-children-be-living-hand-to-mouth-in-2018-we-relaunch-fair-deal-for-kids-campaign-1-8445606> , End Hunger UK campaign week, media and campaign training for network members, regular press releases of food insecurity, working in partnership with Oxfam to bring a food insecurity exhibition to Northampton: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQmEEjBUiSM> , promoting the findings of the Children’s Future Food Inquiry, working on a campaign with BBC Radio Northampton focusing on child food insecurity and a programme of events bringing in national charity and aid agencies to talk about policy and best practice to tackle food insecurity. Northamptonshire Community Foundation continues to fund members of the network and key food aid providers to deliver their services. The End Hunger UK Campaign seeks to raise awareness of food poverty and is supported by a coalition of

national charities and local food poverty alliances including Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network. It calls on the Government to do their part to address the root causes of food poverty and ensure public policy reduces rather than exacerbates food poverty. We also provide an online food aid directory. A recent campaign win is the commitment of the measurement of food insecurity by the Government. The first statistics are due for release in April 2020:

<https://www.endhungeruk.org/2019/02/27/campaign-win-uk-government-agrees-to-measure-household-food-insecurity/>

- **Government, councils, health bodies and other statutory agencies should play a central role in reducing food poverty in the UK. This should complement the role of the voluntary and community sector. Action by government, councils and others should address the root causes of food poverty and avoid unreasonable demands being placed on charities, faith organisations, volunteers and others responding to local need.**

What is food poverty or food insecurity?

The Department of Health defines food poverty as *'The inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet.'*

Food poverty currently affects 8.4 million people in the UK who struggle to get enough to eat. This includes many households with people in work, families with children, as well as older and disabled people.

It can affect children who lack free school meals during the holidays; parents on low incomes going without food so that their children can eat; working people whose low wages leave them struggling to buy healthy food; or older people unable to prepare meals without support.

What are the causes?

Hunger and unhealthy diets are symptoms of poverty. The root causes are the structural inequalities in household incomes and access to food. This includes low and insecure wages impacted by zero hour contracts and/or pay that does not reflect the minimum living wage; an inadequate welfare safety net; lack of access to affordable and healthy food.

The government must urgently address these inequalities. All households must have enough money to thrive, not just survive, through a living wage or an adequate welfare safety net, and healthy food should be more readily available and less expensive than unhealthy food.

Key local contributory factors identified by members of Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network on rising food insecurity and child food insecurity:

- Housing – particularly no of families in temporary accommodation, no of families in overcrowded accommodation eg family of 2 adults 2 children are now not classed as overcrowded if they live in a one bed flat. Many of our families live in these cramped conditions – how can this help family life?
- Universal credit – and the rise of food bank usage
- Long term impact on children – being raised in poverty with parents who are not supported and who are unable to offer aspiration
- Reduction in funding for essential services – CAMHS, Social care – thresholds getting higher so that more people are not getting any support
- Demise of services for families – closure of children’s centres, cuts to support voluntary organisations
- lack of services and that in our area it was really just us , Free2Talk and the schools
- Schools could play a role to encourage both local and national Government to take matter seriously---real lack of awareness
- Theresa May AS Prime Minster offer of policy to support those who are ‘just about managing’; instead the numbers have increased and many more people are struggling – people in work are in poverty. Nationally, there are not enough policies that are not accommodating people who are working but struggling.
- Locally, the issues around Surestart are still manifesting itself – many of the above low income families would use that agency for advice and consultation and also exacerbated by the whole cut to library services. Many projects have closed down or reduced their service offer which has a knock on effect.
- There’s an expectation that a voluntary organisation will be picking up a lot of this - they too are struggling to meet the needs.
- There is a lack of staffing resources and so there is a lack of collaborative problem solving between public services and charities.
- Brexit will add to the above pressure as policies stand and has overtaken the above issues relating to poverty.
- Universal credit, especially for people who had never had to budget for a month at a time and for the long first period when you first go on it.

- Housing - both NPH and private landlords and how many families we come across are living in conditions listeners would be shocked by for example people are now expected to use their living space as a bedroom so we have families with 2 young children in a one bed flat etc
- Effects of long term unemployment and also how difficult it is to start work when you know if you come off universal credit and the job then doesn't work out you will have to wait another 5 weeks for any payment to come through.

Key evidence and data

United Nations Philip Alston Report on extreme poverty in the UK 2019:

<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/41/39/Add.1>

Summary: The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, undertook a mission to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 5 to 16 November 2018. Although the United Kingdom is the world's fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Close to 40 per cent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have increased greatly; tens of thousands of poor families must live in accommodation far from their schools, jobs and community networks; life expectancy is falling for certain groups; and the legal aid system has been decimated. The social safety net has been badly damaged by drastic cuts to local authorities' budgets, which have eliminated many social services, reduced policing services, closed libraries in record numbers, shrunk community and youth centres and sold off public spaces and buildings. The bottom line is that much of the glue that has held British society together since the Second World War has been deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos. A booming economy, high employment and a budget surplus have not reversed austerity, a policy pursued more as an ideological than an economic agenda.

Poverty Report: <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/social-metrics-commission-2019-report/>

Summary: More than 14 million people, including 4.5 million children, are living below the breadline, with more than half trapped in poverty for years, according to a new measure aimed at providing the most sophisticated analysis yet of material disadvantage in the UK. The measure seeks to forge a fresh political consensus between left and right over how to define and track poverty, with the aim of encouraging better-targeted poverty interventions, and making it easier to hold politicians to account. It finds poverty is especially prevalent in families with at least one disabled person, single-parent families, and households where no one works or that are dependent for income on irregular or zero-hours jobs.

Children's Future Food Inquiry: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/childrens-future-food-inquiry/>

Summary: In a society that believes in compassion and justice, it is unacceptable that children's development is being restricted by the effects of poverty. The number of children experiencing symptoms of food insecurity, or whose family income is evidently insufficient to afford a healthy diet amounts to between 2.5 and 4 million; between 20% and 30% of all children in the UK. We cannot allow this to continue. One in three children (4.1million) are living in poverty in the UK. For their families to be able to afford the Government's recommended diet, they would have to spend an estimated 35% of their income on food, once their housing costs have been taken care of. This is not a realistic option, given the restrictive effects of the rising cost of living, prevalence of low-paid, insecure jobs, and the freeze on benefits. On average, after housing costs, households with children spend around 18% of their income on food. A proportion of children living in poverty experience food insecurity. UNICEF estimates on the basis of a small but nationally representative survey that 2.5 million (19%) British children live in food insecure households. This means that there are times when their household does not have enough money to acquire enough food, or they cannot buy the full variety of foods needed for a healthy diet. The devastating consequences Hunger is an extremely debilitating experience. It damages physical health. It is a cause of great personal distress. It is a social harm. Food insecurity brings profound anxiety and stress into family life which can trigger depression, aggressive behaviour in children, a sense of hopelessness, and overwhelming stress for parents struggling to give their children the best start. It affects children's school attendance, achievement and attainment: children who are hungry in class cannot concentrate or may be disruptive. In addition, the long summer holidays are estimated to result in weeks of learning loss for some children through a combination of social isolation, low levels of stimulation and activity, and poor diets. Food insecurity also affects the quality of children's diets, which brings increased risks of obesity and poor child growth. The magnitude and importance of childhood food insecurity requires systemic change, rather than short term, ad hoc projects.