YORK FOOD POVERTY ALLIANCE

Report to: City of York Council Scrutiny Committee

Review: financial inclusion in the city

Objective: to understand the increasing levels of food poverty in York.

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END HUNGER UK

Q1 BACKGROUND TO FOOD POVERTY IN YORK & CURRENT STATISTICS

SUMMARY

- **Around 1/5 (22%) of respondents to the YFPA Primary school parents' survey in York, have reported experiencing food poverty in the past 12 months.**
- **Both Food Bank use and informal community food aid usage are rising.**
- **There are over 30 organisations providing variations of food aid across York.**

1.1 The background to food poverty in York

York may appear to be a rich city with a booming tourist industry, but poverty is real – and growing - in the 9th most unequal city in the UK, in a climate where food prices continue to rise and incomes remain stagnant.

Over 17 times the numbers of people who access formal food banks, are estimated to be using some kind of independent / community food aid and one of the key indicators of food poverty is low intake of fresh fruit and vegetables (Independent Food Aid Network)

The York Food Poverty Alliance, a cross-sector group under the network of Good Food York, includes community organisations and cafes, the University of York, JRHT, York City Football Club Foundation and the City of York Council. It has been meeting quarterly since April 2018 and is determined to tackle the root causes of growing food poverty in York.

1.2 Mapping Community Food Aid

One of the preliminary pieces of work the YFPA completed was to map the existing community food aid on offer on York. This is also known as 'independent food aid' and typically projects require no formal referral processes. Some serve specific geographical communities only and others target particular demographics of people e.g. young children and families or people with mental health problems.

Since our database of organisations was drawn up in April 2018, contact has been made intermittently with managers of the organisations to review and probe further. Questions were asked about approximate usage of the service and to establish some further background e.g. "Did your organisation start-up with tackling food poverty as one of the main drivers?"

This will help us understand and report on some of the factors surrounding the emergence of food poverty as an issue in York.

Results

There are approximately 32 cross-sector organisations delivering a range of different versions of community food aid provision from traditional soup kitchens and the Edible York beds to the statutory food & advice projects and the ever-popular rise in volunteer/peer led Community Café model. Of these,

- 13 said food poverty was part of their rationale for setting up;

- 17 are open regularly (more than once a week);
- 12 are open one day per week;
- 25 have an open-access policy
- 7 serve targeted populations only (gender, age, area/based, disability, income.)

It is extremely difficult to measure unique users of food-aid by those who are experiencing food poverty at projects which are open on a continuous, all-inclusive basis or where food is embedded alongside other services.

The data we have available is from the weekly community cafes/informal food banks such as Red Tower, Planet Food, YourCafe / Luke's Larder, Bell Farm Community Assoc, Chapelfields and Foxwood Community Hubs and Lidgett Grove (n=7).

The numbers of weekly customers to each of these projects range from 35-70 meaning around 360 people each week use open-access café provisions across the city. This does not capture the full level of usage when you consider Chill in the Community CIC's informal food bank in Acomb, is also open 7 days per week.

Further work

This review of organisations is yet to be completed but thereafter our database will be adapted into a pocket-sized paper map to be distributed to people city-wide.

1.3 Available local statistics

1.3.1 York Food Bank, between April 1 – November 30, 2018, York Food Bank served 2623 people, 1008 were children. The previous full 12 months, April 1, 2017, to March 31, 2018, 4,262 people received food assistance from York Foodbank; of this, 1,647 were children.

1.3.2 York Financial Assistance Scheme - Food vouchers: contact Susan Wood, CYC

1.3.3 Food and Affordability Survey in Primary schools, York Food Poverty Alliance, Oct 2018-Feb 2019:

•The percentage of respondents that had ever used a food bank is 10.9%

•Over 1/5 (22%) said that "within the past 12 months, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more"

• 17% that said either fresh fruit or vegetables were the most unaffordable and over 1/5 (24%) reported that they only eat fresh fruit or vegetables either less than once a week or only 1-3 times a week.

•More than ¾ (76%) consider the most unaffordable foods to be protein products, either meat or fish.

•21% Have a total household income in the lower two income groups: either £1769/mth or less or £409/mth or less.

Q2: How local measurement might be improved - Recommendations

SUMMARY

- **The hidden levels of food aid usage are difficult to measure.**
- **Nationally, organisations such as the Food Foundation and End Hunger UK are lobbying the government to measure food insecurity.**
- **Locally, the York Human Rights City Network is working with YFPA to advocate the need for measurement to be improved.**

2.1 Quantitative measurement

All food aid providers would benefit from numerical measurement. York Food Bank (Trussell Trust) has an easier task of counting referrals hence they get included in headline reports and statistics gathering.

The two main barriers YFPA partners have identified that hinder the useful collection of numerical data from less formal provisions are: -

a) Difficulty in finding a mechanism to count people / unique users of food aid at projects which provide a 'hub' of services
b) Difficulty in identifying users who have/are or are at risk of experiencing food poverty first-hand at projects which are open-to-all and actively encourage universal access.

Recommendation 1: Questions to measure food insecurity and food bank use to be input into an appropriate statutory survey.

2.2. SOCIAL IMPACT

Chill in the Community CIC and Red Tower CIC have outlined many options in their reports, which demonstrate a social impact model of evaluation and useful tools for monitoring service usage. (See Appendix 1.)

Recommendation 2: A database to be created to distribute to all community food providers to be able to input their data under categorical headings, quarterly perhaps.

Recommendation 2.1: For an additional layer of measurement to capture the targeted population of those experiencing food poverty, an assessment of demographics needs to be developed such as that used by Fareshare (See Appendix 2.)

2.3 SOCIAL VALUE

Social Value Engine model: 4Community Growth are using this and have assessed Bell Farm Community Association's services (and their own projects to the best of our knowledge).

Recommendation 3: Roll-out Social Value Engine assessment to cross-sector projects city-wide.

2.4 QUALITATIVE MEASUREMENT

Recommendation 4: This method would be improved by identifying a baseline for qualitative data.

Many projects already collect qualitative data by way of professional observations, collection of personal narratives and quotations from service users / 'Experts by Experience' and ethnographic-style observations. The End Hunger UK campaign encourages the collection of personal narratives around food poverty and produced an exhibition which toured various places last Summer. Work was attempted to include York in the tour, but this didn't come to fruition.

YFPA is currently asking its members to contribute more to this data source by nominating a person to be interviewed e.g. a staff member/volunteer to get a narrative of anecdotal evidence/ observations /their perspectives as service providers.

Secondly, we are applying for funding to run a project which involves, from the outset, Experts by Experience in the strategy-formation and appropriate delivery of community food interventions.

Recommendation 5: Focus on the collection of evidence from 'Experts by Experience' in a range of different media, as suggested by, and in co-production with them.

Q3: The current role of crisis supports in York in mitigating food poverty

SUMMARY

- **Formal, referral-based crisis support is inadequate and inconsistent.**
- **A shift towards more inclusive, universal models of food aid within wider support services and inline with good practice on delivering a sustainable food economy, would be welcomed.**

3.1 York Food Bank

This is run by Trussell Trust, a national Christian organisation. The local branch is currently recruiting for a new manager and management has lacked continuity for the past 6 months. They operate through their four distribution centres across the city in Acomb, Tang Hall, Clifton, Huntington on a referral-only basis.

Whilst this service helps some people it does not help everyone. The York Food Poverty Alliance would advocate moving away from this model of food aid. It has been critiqued for its limitations on healthy, fresh foods and the fact many people it could help choose not to access a referral-only service which is stigmatised.

3.2 York Financial Assistance Service

This council service plays a similar but different role to the Food Bank and people can apply to one or both at the same time. You can be awarded a supermarket voucher but there is no restriction on what you buy with it. People are limited to a total of 2 awards per 12-month period, for food and/or other items, except if claiming after a disaster or benefit sanction which would not count towards the total.

In September, YFPA's partners gave feedback to a council representative from YFAS who was conducting a review. The feedback was that it is inadequate and underfunded. Whilst we welcome the review which has now been completed, we would like to see evidence that the new application process has a positive effect and whether this service has the capacity to really make a difference to people's lives.

3.3 Community Food Aid projects and York Food Poverty Alliance (established April 2018)

York Food Poverty Alliance works with groups, organisations and individuals in York to provide, monitor and support food aid provision and to strengthen their ability to reduce food poverty and tackle its root causes.

- **'Holiday Hunger' since July 2018**

Background:

School holidays can be particular pressure points for some families because of increased costs (such as food and childcare) and reduced incomes (such as loss of a free school meal, reduced working hours etc.). There is a growing body of evidence of a holiday experience gap - with children from disadvantaged families less likely to access organised out-of-school activities; more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health; and more likely to experience social isolation.

Free holiday clubs are a response to this issue and evidence suggests that they can have a positive impact on children and young people and that they work best when they provide consistent and easily accessible enrichment activities, for more than just breakfast or lunch, and when they involve children (and parents) in food preparation. (Source: DfE.)

York food and activity clubs summary - July 2018 to January 2019:

- **2930 meals served & over 285 food bags given out** between 13th July and 7th January 2019.
- 9 'Holiday Hunger' projects totalling **67 food club sessions.**
- **29 out of 45** respondents (64%) agreed or strongly agreed that it was **harder to make ends meet during the school holidays** than during the school year.
- **82%** respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they **spend more on food during the school holiday** than during the school year.
- **Almost half**, (47%) agreed or strongly agreed that they **sometimes find themselves without enough money for food** during the school holiday.
- **One third of people (31%)** responded that within the past 12 months, **the food they bought just didn't last** and they didn't have money to get more.
- **48%** of families with school-age children were in **receipt of Free School Meals.**
- For a **Case study** of good practice (See Appendix 3)

3.4 Soup kitchens / homelessness projects

There are at least 7 soup kitchen projects operating in York aimed at the homeless population. These are not suitable for families, so we do not have data on their potential to mitigate child and family food poverty.

Q4: A range of options for the Council and its partners to improve the city-wide response to food poverty in York.

SUMMARY

- **YFPA is developing a Food Poverty Action plan to be launched by the end of April 2019.**
- **YFPA held focus groups to gather ideas for change from 'experts by experience' and members of the public.**
- **The key areas of work needed to tackle the root causes surround low incomes and benefits support.**

4.1 York Food Poverty Action plan – DRAFT proposals

- Real Living Wage: CYC to lead the way in paying all its outsourced supply employees the Real Living Wage and to promote the uptake of this wage to other sectors city-wide.
- Financial Assistance: a better and larger package of services to be developed to include increased promotion of Free School Meals and Healthy Start vouchers.
- Food Aid: continue to support and monitor informal food aid provisions, especially those that offer successful models of advice + food provision schemes *whilst* developing a Food Bank exit strategy at the same time.
- Government action on welfare reform i.e. 'Fix Universal Credit'

4.2 Focus Group summary findings, January 2019

4.2.1 Themes

i. Management strategies on a low income: *Shopping, budgeting and cooking; use of Social Security*

ii. Macroeconomic and policy context: The lived experience of changing circumstances

4.2.3 Participant recommendations:

i. **Universal credit reform**

The need for (urgent and meaningful) reform to Universal Credit was discussed emphatically and at length by participants in the Acomb focus group. There was a need for greater claimant dignity and autonomy within the system; for more consistent and accurate interaction with staff processing claims and payments; and for the reassertion of a claimant's right to receive Universal Credit/welfare benefits.

ii. **Improved access to healthy, cheap and seasonal food**

Among participants, there was a widely held desire for improved access to seasonal, cheap fruit and vegetables – for instance, from a new large and affordable indoor market or independent retailers. According to more than one participant, such improved access was contingent upon a better and cheaper public transport system or the improved availability of affordable parking in York. Cheaper prices for healthy items was also thought important within the 'big supermarkets'.

iii. **Expansion/development of and improved access to sociable, inclusive, open-access food aid**

A significant minority of participants recommended the further development of open-access food aid, such as community cafes and informal Pay-As-You-Feel food stores.

"We need more community cafes. Ones that are large and welcoming enough for families."
Female, Tang Hall

However, according to one participant, the further continuation of community cafes was contingent on financial support from the Local Authority (rate relief). One participant recommended improved food provision for children during the school holidays.

iv. Other recommendations cited by a minority included:

a. Housing: Implementation of rent controls to reduce housing costs.

b. Provision of education about cooking on a budget.

c. Awareness-raising about the reality of food poverty in the UK:

"I honestly despair at the fact that we have food poverty in such a rich country – it's obscene." (Female, online)

d. Re-orientate Local Authority priorities in York away from tourists towards residents, including a reconsideration of parking costs and re-evaluation of food prices in restaurants.

APPENDIX 1

Chill in the Community CIC's monitoring activities:

Play & picnic scheme

Numbers attended

Volunteer hours

Meals served

Kg food consumed

Number of food collections / Kg of food can be translated into meals

Qualitative / observations / personal narratives

Package: food + support (coaching, budgeting, cooking advocacy)

Families helped per week compared to over the holidays

Individuals supported with benefits advice

Sessions delivered

Pay as you feel café, informal food bank & 'Pay it Forward'

Meals/drinks paid for

Food parcels distributed

Numbers of individuals accessing

APPENDIX 2

Extract From:
Fareshare's COMMUNITY FOOD MEMBER APPLICATION FORM

[Please give details of the group(s) targeted by the project:

Who are your main client group(s): Tick all that apply

Homeless men	☐	Client with drug and alcohol problems	☐
Homeless women	☐	Mental Health	☐
Rough sleepers	☐	Physical health problems	☐
Homeless 16-25 yrs old	☐	Schoolchildren - primary school	☐
Single homeless people	☐	Schoolchildren - secondary school	☐
People at risk of Homelessness	☐	Young people (16-25)	☐
Women	☐	Adults (26-64)	☐
Ex-offenders	☐	Older people (64+)	☐
Asylum seekers	☐	other	☐
Families	☐	if other, please specify: _People on low-incomes/Benefits____	

Client Group Details

What proportion of your client group falls into each of the following living situations? Please give a percentage estimate.	Sleeping rough	
	Hostel	
	Housed (vulnerable)	
	Other	
Which age range does your client group belong to? Please tick appropriate box.	Children (under 16)	
	Young adults (16-25)	
	Adults (26-64)	
	Older people (65+)	

	No specific age range	
How many clients on average do you serve-deal with on a daily basis? Please tick appropriate box.	0 – 25	
	25 – 50	
	50 – 75	
	75 – 100	
	100 – 125	
	125 – 150	
	150+	
Is this a regular client group?	Yes	
	No	
Please estimate the percentage of male:female clients you serve on a daily basis.		

APPENDIX 3

PART 1: HOLIDAY HUNGER PROJECT CASE STUDY – SUMMER 2018

PARTICIPANT: **RED TOWER CIC**

1. HOW / WHO BY?
Managed by: Red Tower CIC and Rosie Baker (local volunteer.)
Partners: City of York Council, York Food Poverty Alliance/Good Food York, Walmgate Community Association.
Food provision: Donations collected from Morrison's, Coop, Olivia's Bakery, Bettys & Taylors and Edible York.
Finances: £429 received from a CYC Ward Budget grant, of which approx. £102 was used on this particular project. An additional £70, initially included in this budget was spent instead by the York Food Poverty Alliance to advertise the full Holiday Hunger programme being carried out across all venues.

2. WHY / WHO FOR?
One of the ward councillors where the Red Tower is situated, Guildhall Ward, brought the issue of food poverty to the table at the July 2018 council meeting. Her motion sought to get food poverty monitored, taken seriously and for measures for its reduction to be worked towards and it was passed unanimously. Guildhall ward is rated low, 3/21 of the city wards on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation; 16.8% of children are in child poverty. The nearby residents and some social housing communities surround the Red Tower and its lush gardens. Following its recent renovations after serious flooding, the Red Tower's revived mission is to open its doors more regularly as a community hub and "bring this historic building to life by offering an inclusive, welcoming space for creative, learning and social activities, run by local people, encouraging local and wider community participation."

3. WHAT HAPPENED / WHAT WAS ON OFFER?

A volunteer project coordinator, Rosie Baker, was recruited by the Red Tower to run the project. Other volunteers were sourced through the Red Tower's existing group, through Rosie's contacts and organically via people offering their time. The cafe opened every Monday for 7 weeks. It filled a gap in the Holiday Hunger programme as there was no other food aid provision scheduled for Mondays. On offer were fresh, healthy lunches of salads, sandwiches, pastries and fruit and a pack-up lunch for every child. Additionally, home-made or donated cakes and biscuits were served, and people were advised on healthy amounts. Also served teas, coffees and juices. There were Pay-As-You-Feel signs up and volunteers gestured to the donations box when people wanted to contribute. All the takings were used by the Red Tower CIC for its overheads and own project aims.

Every week a ‘Food 4U Shop’ operated upstairs in the tower displaying the produce that couldn’t be made into lunches for people to take a bag of groceries home; the suggested donation per bag of food was £1. Volunteers talked to people about the value of the otherwise ‘free’ food and encouraged people to share what was there/think about how to use it best to limit the journey towards waste.
Craft activities for children and advice-giving were provided by the council staff if people needed it on at least 2 of the weeks. Toys and games were provided every week by the venue.

4. WHAT WENT WELL?
Outdoor well-being: The garden was enjoyed by customers young and old every week; in the beautiful sunshine mainly and even in the downpours (children literally dancing in the rain.)
Inclusion: Elder neighbours enjoyed a sit-down, a hearty lunch and others to chat to; Some neighbours who had not been keen on the project to begin with, came to eat at the cafe by the end of the holiday period; People of minority ethnic origin came to the cafe.
Alleviating hunger: There was enough tasty, varied food for everyone – volunteers included – every week. Left-over food was taken away by volunteers to feed people at home.
0-Waste: In total approx. 785kg of food was intercepted before being sent to landfill. All recyclable products and waste food were collected for proper disposal by a local compost expert.
Volunteer experience: 1 intern, 1 coordinator (Rosie piloted her own cafe-concept), 2 staff from the CIC and 13 other volunteers repeatedly contributed their time, resources and enthusiasm. They appeared to benefit, get along well and enjoy it.

5. WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED / ANY CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME?

- More planned activities for children to have a go at: although free play and running was very much valued & enjoyed, this would be especially necessary in times of less clement weather.
- Seek donations of protein-based foods from the supermarkets as all protein on this project was purchased using the ward money budget.
- More engagement from the volunteers towards the customers would be beneficial: to talk to them about any food insecurities to educate about using food that’s still edible; to befriend as appropriate and for research purposes, to collect narratives from ‘experts by experience.’

6. FEEDBACK FROM CUSTOMERS
a) What kind of feedback was collected?
YFPA evaluation forms (x20) and verbal feedback from customers.
……
……

b) Evidence of feedback:

Personal narrative

"I volunteered at the Red Tower because I wanted to gain experience & contribute to a project that reduces food waste & provides low-cost healthy food. My son has been eligible for FSM since I left my ex over a year ago and having only managed to get minimum wage / 0-hours / term-time only or P/T self-employed work since then, I claim universal credit, which just about makes ends meet! I had much less income during the summer holidays and my main concern was buying decent, healthy portions of protein for my son and myself (I'd rather not feed him re-formed chicken or low meat-content sausages just because they're cheap!) Being part of Red Tower meant I knew he'd have access to ample cheese/egg/tuna sandwiches & loads of fresh fruit 'n' veg. He had so much fun playing outdoors there each week & regularly asks when the next community café is on. I was able to take surplus food home to store, use economically & share with neighbours who I knew needed it too. There were of course cafe-goers seeming much more in need than we were. But the inclusivity & non-judgemental atmosphere for everyone is something you don't get out in society much elsewhere."

…… … "Fantastic idea. We are on holiday in York with our 4 children. We stopped in for a cup of tea and a juice for the children. It was a welcome break. We struggle to afford a mainstream cafe, so this was a real treat."

……

- Feedback from a member of the visiting community / venue management / resident's association:

"Many thanks for everything you have done to make the pay-as-feel cafe a success / Following the resounding success of the pay-as-feel cafe it would be good to promote the York Food Poverty Alliance and hopefully organise similar projects in the future." (Walmgate Community Association.)

PART 2: ONGOING CASE STUDY

With the support of 4CommuityGrowth and a team of volunteers, Red Tower's journey is being tracked and celebrated from its origins as a pilot school holiday-only PAYF cafe, to a full food + advice Community Hub for local residents.

Holiday Hunger 29th October 2018 (part of week-long half term provision)
Numbers: 17
Feedback: Ruth Potter from OCAY was there and got more potential users of her services than she did when she ran some stand-alone events at the Red Tower. It shows the basic idea of a PAYF meal and shop with advice available, if people want it, will work better together than splitting it into two events.

Autumn Monday Events – hot lunches, shop, crafts & advice
Dates: 5/11/18 – 17/12/18
Numbers: 32 average
Open every Monday until 17 December, Community First Credit Union came every week and some free craft workshops.

January 2019 onwards – supported by 4Community Growth
This is the advice and support programme in addition to the PAYF cafe and shop:

Weekly
The Credit Union and the Guildhall Local Area Co-ordinator

Fortnightly
Craft workshops run by community artist Kat Wood.

Monthly
Healthwatch, Older Citizens Advocacy York, North Yorkshire Police Service with the York BID Rangers. To add: a benefits advice session.