Responses to food poverty in Belfast

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Aims of BFN Food Poverty and Health Working Group

• Increased access to affordable healthy food in Belfast

• Fewer people experiencing food poverty in Belfast

• Place food poverty on the policy agenda
• Multiagency partnership established to assess and tackle full range of issues
• Living wage being promoted
• Relevant agencies providing rapid referral to hardship funds and emergency food aid
• Relevant staff trained and able to advise on accessing healthy foods and skills training
FPWG - Short term outcomes - 2

- Healthy weight services being provided – healthy diet and physical activity promoted
- Efforts being made to maximise uptake of social food provision
- More healthy options available in shops, takeaways, vending machines, catering settings
- City working to prevent food deserts and food swamps
Previous surveys show:

• **2009 - 15% of NI households were at risk of food poverty** (IPH, Living Costs and Food Survey)

• **2012 – 29% have ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ skimped on food so that others in the household would have enough to eat** (Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey of Living Standards in NI, ESRC).

• **2013/14 - 7% reported not having eaten a substantial meal in the last 2 weeks due to a lack of money** (NI Health Survey, DHSSPS; 2014)

• **2014 - in NI from 11% in 2010 to 32% in 2014 who said the cost of food was most common barrier to eating healthily** (FSA, Food and You survey)

• **NI has some of poorest nutritional habits in UK** (National Diet and Nutrition Survey 2008/09-2011/12)
Enough is Enough food poverty scoping exercise

- Collate data on food banks/food support
- Explore reasons behind increase
- Overview of initiatives
- Identify gaps/opportunities
- Foundation for city-wide action plan in partnership with C&V and statutory sectors
Enough is enough conference
23 March 15 at City Church
Food banks in Belfast

3 Trussell Trust
6 Independent

11,697
people in NI received three days’ emergency food in 2013 – 2014 from Trussell Trust food banks

▲ 489%
over the previous year

4,338
people fed by 5 independent food banks in 2014
“I visited a food bank four times as I had my brother staying with me and found it hard to support him and my child. They were very helpful and understanding of my situation and helped me in more ways than one.”

(Food bank client, Belfast)

“I feel embarrassed about having to receive food parcels however my food parcels were delivered (through a local advice centre) so I didn’t have to physically see anyone.”

(Food bank client, Belfast)
The most common reasons for visiting a food bank in Belfast are:

- Low-income
- Benefit delays, cuts, and sanctions.

Other reasons include debt, unemployment, homelessness, mental and physical health problems, and having no access to public funds.
“It just takes one thing to go wrong. We had a family here before Christmas and the mother was working. Her car broke down so that ate her money up and she had nothing left to fix the car, to get out to work, to earn money. She was in a vicious circle with no money for food.”

(Advice worker, Belfast)
Some Other Key Findings

- Demand for emergency food
- Nos. of working people using food banks
- Demand for food parcels from families with young children
What do organisations in Belfast provide people with?

- 36 distribute food parcels, either through a food bank or independently
- 26 run courses on nutrition/cooking skills/healthy eating on a budget
- 19 regularly provide free cooked meals
- 6 provide low-cost cooked meals (e.g. through a community café)
- 2 provide un-cooked food at low cost
Community Gardens

14 organisations in Belfast run or participate in community gardening projects.

Belfast City Council also runs 12 community gardens and 6 allotments.
Redistribution of surplus food

Fareshare provides a wide variety of surplus food to charities which in turn provide free/low cost cooked meals.

Foodcloud facilitates the safe donation of surplus produce from food businesses to charities in their local area via an app to text message system.

SOS Bus NI also picks up surplus food from supermarkets and distributes it to various charities and refugee centres across Belfast.

138 tonnes of surplus food distributed to make 330,000 meals

Between August 2014 and December 2014, FoodCloud redistributed 660kg of surplus food from businesses in the East Belfast area to charities – the equivalent of 1650 meals for people in need.
Members of the Food Poverty and Health Working Group

- Advice NI
- Belfast City Council
- Belfast Health Development Unit
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
- Belfast Healthy Cities
- Business in the Community (NI) (FoodCloud)
- East Belfast Independent Advice Centre
- FareShare
- Food Standards Agency
- Ligoniel Improvement Association
- Newtownbreda Food Bank
- Public Health Agency
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
- Storehouse
- The Conservation Volunteers
- Ulster University
Executive summary, slides, audio recordings and video from the Enough is Enough conference 23 March 2015 are available on the IPH website at http://www.publichealth.ie/events