

Adults and Health Committee

Date of Meeting:	27 September 2021
Report Title:	Notice of Motion 'Right to Food'
Report of:	Nichola Thompson, Director of Commissioning
Report Reference No:	AH/28/21-22
Ward(s) Affected:	All wards

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. On 22 June 2021 a notice of motion was submitted to Council calling the 'Right To Food' to be incorporated into the 'National Food Strategy'. This notice of motion included asking the Chief Executive, Lorraine O'Donnell to write to Henry Dimbleby to further this request to support the notion that the 'Right to Food' should be incorporated into the National Food Strategy. This report aims to provide further information on that request and includes a current position regarding food poverty and inequalities in Cheshire East.
- 1.2. The content of this report contributes to the following strategic aims of the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25:
 - 'Reduce health inequalities across the borough' by working with partners to address issues associated with poverty.
 - 'A Collaborative way of working with partners to support communities to achieve their full potential'. Working in partnership with community-based providers to inspire confidence and develop resilience.
 - 'Reduce impact on the environment' by addressing food waste and sustainability.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To consider if Chief Executive, Lorraine O'Donnell, should write to Henry Dimbleby to incorporate the 'Right to Food' movement into the 'National Food Strategy' by emailing foodstrategy@defra.gov.uk.

- 2.2. Acknowledge the services and provision in Cheshire East which address and prevent food poverty and food insecurity.
- 2.3. To agree that the Council should develop its own Right to Food Strategy that meets local anticipated need over the next 4 years which aligns to the Corporate plan.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. To update the Adults and Health Committee on how the Council has responded to the rising needs around food poverty during the pandemic and to respond to the notice of motion made on the 22 June to full Council.
- 3.2. To demonstrate by working together with residents and partners to support people and communities to reduce health inequalities across the borough we can collectively ensure food poverty does not become prevalent across the borough.
- 3.3. To recognise that although the Council has supported communities to prevent food poverty with various schemes during the last 12 months it is important that we develop a strategic approach that is local.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. Not to write to Henry Dimbleby to incorporate the 'Right to Food' movement into the 'National Food Strategy'

5. Background

National Food Strategy

- 5.1. The National Food Strategy is an independent review of England's entire food system and seeks to achieve a food system that enables people to access 'safe, healthy, affordable food; regardless of where they live or how much they earn' and provides a series of recommendations to achieve this vision (source: [National Food Strategy](#)). The review was conducted in two phases by Henry Dimbleby, lead non-executive board member of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In July 2020 Part One of the report was published, which became an urgent response to the issues of hunger and ill health raised by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the trade and food standards issues created by the end of the EU Exit transition period. Part Two takes a close look at how the food system really works, the damage it is doing to our bodies and ecosystem and makes suggestions on interventions to prevent these harms.

The Right to Food Campaign

- 5.2. The 'Right to Food' campaign was launched in November 2020 by Ian Byrne, MP for Liverpool West Derby. Ian partnered with Merseyside organisation 'Fans Supporting Foodbanks' (a joint initiative between rival

Liverpool F.C. and Everton F.C. supporters) and submitted an Early Day Motion to parliament which was supported by 59 cross-party MPs. The campaign aims to make access to food a legal right for all and seeks for “Right to Food” to be enshrined into legislation in Parliament. The Right to Food Campaign states that food banks are a sticking plaster over a gaping wound and that systemic intervention is required to tackle it. The campaign calls for the following:

- **Accountability:** There should be legislation enshrined in law to place new responsibilities on authorities to ensure everyone has access to food.
- **Accessibility:** Food needs to be practically in reach for everyone by way of wage and benefits levels, pricing, direct provision, or a combination of all three.
- **Adequacy:** food must be sufficient in quantity, safety and nutritional content.
- **Availability:** there must be sufficient production, supply and distribution of food.

The Right to Food Campaign makes a number of initial recommendations for the government to implement, including universal free school meals, expanding the use of school kitchens to become ‘community kitchens’, becoming more transparent in benefit and wage calculations, ensuring food security and providing independent enforcement.

Wider National picture on food poverty

- 5.3.** A briefing published by the Government’s Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in April 2021 defines food poverty, or ‘food insecurity’ as a household who cannot acquire ‘an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in a socially acceptable way’ (source: [Food Poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals \(30.04.21\)](#)). The briefing describes the national picture, reporting that in 2019/20 5 million people were in food insecure households, which rose to 7 million during April to September 2020, demonstrating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The effect of Covid-19 is evident in the demands on emergency food provision, with UK Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) reporting a 126% increase in the number of parcels distributed by food banks between February 2020 and May 2020. In addition, around 302,000 pupils became “newly eligible” for free school meals during the pandemic.

Cheshire East picture on food poverty

- 5.4.** A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) (Appendix 1) conducted by Cheshire East Social Action Partnership (CESAP) engaged with a range of providers across the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector to understand the level of food inequality in Cheshire East, specifically addressing the sustainability and connectivity of food banks. Local food banks reported a 110% increase in demand for

emergency food parcels in financial year 2020/21 compared to 2019/20 (which is akin to national findings). The JSNA found that reasons for using food banks include low income, delays in benefit claims and mental health issues, with many of the food banks reporting that their clients are presenting with increasingly multiple and complex needs.

- 5.5.** Cheshire East Council, in partnership with groups and organisations across all three sectors, have invested heavily to respond to the increase in food inequality caused by the pandemic. This is explored below:

Cheshire East Emergency Assistance Scheme (EAS)

An in-house core service which provides a safety net for people in crisis, providing access to emergency food, fuel and other essentials. In the financial year 2019/20, 150 food-related referrals were processed. In the same period during 2020/19, 148 referrals were made. EAS was not impacted by the pandemic due to the rapid mobilisation of People Helping People. EAS provides an annual grant to 8 food banks in Cheshire East to enable sustainability and maintain their ability to respond quickly to requests. The funding offered is dependent on demand and a number of food banks chose not to accept the monies offered to them.

People Helping People (PHP) / Shielding

A service established in response to the pandemic, aimed at channelling volunteer resource and community-based activity to meet the needs of vulnerable and isolated people. PHP provides access to a range of basic requirements, particularly food, with volunteers undertaking supermarket shopping and facilitating access to community-based food provision. PHP was available to anyone who classed themselves as vulnerable, with over 4000 residents of Cheshire East benefitting from the service between April 2020 and March 2021. 88% of referrals required a food-related intervention, all of whom were matched with a volunteer or community-based activity to meet their needs, with many relationships becoming sustainable so support was ongoing. Due to the success of the PHP model, the management of shielding (Clinically Extremely Vulnerable) people did not require high financial investment into direct food parcels.

Community Covid Response and Recovery Fund

A scheme set up in July 2020 to channel central and local government funding into the VCFSE sector to build on existing community-based services and kickstart new services where needed. A total of £278,334 has been allocated to 58 food-based providers between July 2020 and today. This funding was provided by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), a total of £326,000 was awarded to the Council. All beneficiaries are subject to a monitoring procedure and provided with support to ensure their service is sustainable and demonstrates impact.

Covid Winter Grants Scheme (CWGS) – Appendix 2

A programme funded by DWP to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children, particularly those affected by the pandemic. The scheme ran from 1 December 2020 until 16 April 2021 and provided 41,627 food vouchers to young people and families. The CWGS was superseded by the Covid Support Grant Scheme (CSG) which has the same eligibility requirements and has provided 10,760 vouchers since 17 April 2021.

Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) – Appendix 3

A government scheme aimed at providing support for vulnerable children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals. Enables access to provision over school holidays, giving children the opportunity to eat a healthy meal, engage in physical activity and learn about health and nutrition. Cheshire East received a total of £881,340 to commission activities over Easter, summer and Christmas holiday in 2021. During the Easter holidays, 463 children attended HAF funded holiday club sessions. Throughout the summer holiday, there are a further 1900 spaces available.

- 5.6.** In addressing food poverty / insecurity, there is a vast amount of locally delivered community based provision and social value commitments from private sector partners which are not accounted for in the analysis above. Examples include a community café who modified their service to provide meals on wheels for a nominal fee, a community supermarket who channel surplus food to those in need and a private catering business who used their own resources and expertise to deliver healthy meals to those known to be isolating in their local community.

Next steps

- 5.7.** We recognise we are only now starting to understand the indirect impact of Covid-19 in relation to food poverty. As a Council it is important that we develop a strategic direction to how we can combat a potential increasing need and sustain some of the short-term provision we have put in place over the last 12 months. By developing a Right to Food Strategy we will greater understand the voice of local people, we will have a greater knowledge of how initial and future anticipated need can be met and we work over a greater period aligned to the Council's Corporate plan on how we can prevent the root causes that bring about food poverty.

6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1.** This report has been compiled with information provided from internal and external stakeholders to accurately assess the current position regarding food poverty and inequalities in Cheshire East. A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) analysed food bank provision by engaging with partners in the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector.

- 6.2.** Cheshire East benefits from a multitude of services, organisations and groups who aim to address food poverty. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has encouraged these stakeholders to become more connected and collaborative, resulting in better engagement and partnership working.

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

- 7.1.1.** There do not appear to be any substantive legal implications arising from the notice of motion referred to above. In principle, what is proposed is a gesture of support, involving no financial or other commitment on behalf of the Council aside from asking the Chief Executive to write to Henry Dimbleby supporting the initiative.

7.2. Finance

- 7.2.1.** As this is not a decision at this stage (only a recommendation to consider) there are no financial implications or changes required to the MTFS as a result of the recommendations in this report.
- 7.2.2.** If the decision is to be taken to support the incorporation of the 'Right to Food' movement into the 'National Food Strategy' then the implications would need to be considered across the Council and brought back through the appropriate governance processes for approval.
- 7.2.3.** It is worth noting that many of the schemes in section 5 are temporary schemes linked to Covid grants and funding, so will only be in place for the specific time periods that the grants are linked to.
- 7.2.4.** The development of the Council's own Right to Food Strategy would not have any financial implications, as the strategy would be developed through existing teams and resources.

7.3. Policy

- 7.3.1.** The National Food Strategy is an independent review of England's entire food system, which has been developed over a number of years and contains a suite of recommendations to prevent inequalities and reduce harm to our eco system. Cheshire East Council intend to understand the context upon which these recommendations can be implemented locally, with a view to developing local policy to address food poverty.

7.4. Equality

- 7.4.1.** The Right to Food campaign, the National Food Strategy and the work done by Cheshire East all aim to reduce inequalities.

7.5. Human Resources

- 7.5.1.** Staffing resource implications could be a factor if Cheshire East Council embeds locally the aims the right to food campaign intends to achieve.

7.6. Risk Management

7.6.1. The initial risk is the political connotations the Right to Food campaign may imply.

7.7. Rural Communities

7.7.1. Rural and Urban food poverty is addressed by the Right to Food campaign, the National Food Strategy and the work done by Cheshire East Council locally.

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

7.8.1. Children and young people's needs are addressed by the Right to Food campaign, the National Food Strategy and the work done by Cheshire East Council locally.

7.9. Public Health

7.9.1. This report seeks to analyse and understand interventions related to food poverty in Cheshire East, with a view to highlighting health inequalities within our borough. The intelligence gathered will be used to develop a local multi-agency approach to addressing these inequalities.

7.10. Climate Change

7.10.1. Recommendation 3 of the National Food Strategy states 'make the best use of our land'. This describes the need for reform in the use of farmland, investment in sustainable food production and development of ethical trade policy. These recommendations may influence local policy to achieve aims around carbon emissions and nature restoration.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Katy Ellison - Senior Community Development Officer 07976 767757 Katy.Ellison@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Food JSNA Appendix 2 – Covid Winter Grants Scheme impact report Appendix 3 – Holiday Activity Fund impact report
Background Papers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Notice of Motion request• National Food Strategy – Independent Review for Government• Right to food campaign