



Healthier Communities Select Committee

Report title: Cost of Living and Lewisham Food Justice Action Plan

Date: 1st November 2022

Key decision: No

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors:

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Outline and recommendations

This report provides an update to the Healthier Communities Select Committee on the Council response to the increasing cost of living including the Lewisham Food Justice Action Plan, which outlines four key areas of focus to tackle increasing food injustice in Lewisham as part of a whole system approach.

Members of the Healthier Communities Select Committee are recommended to:

- Note and comment on the draft Food Justice Action Plan

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

2 February 2022 – Food Poverty Summit

28 June 2022 – Good Food Lewisham Network Meeting

20 June 2022 and 28 July 2022 – Food Justice Action Plan (FJAP) development workshops 1 and 2

30 September 2022 – Draft FJAP sent for consultation

6 October 2022 – Draft FJAP to Community Services Directorate Management Team for comment

12 October 2022 – FJAP consultation workshop

1 November 2022 – Update report to the Healthier Communities Select Committee.

18 November 2022 – Updated Food Justice Action Plan published

1. Background

- 1.1. The cost of living has been increasing across the UK since early 2021. The annual rate of inflation was the highest it has been since 1982 in July 2022, affecting the affordability of goods and services for households. This is a national issue facing all parts of the UK, arising from a number of national and international factors.
- 1.2. The Council's response to this crisis is proportionate given the current financial constraints and the need to make budget cuts. Lewisham's response to the Cost of Living crisis builds on existing support already in place for residents.
- 1.3. Food injustice is one of the biggest challenges facing Lewisham. Local food banks and other crisis food provision groups are reporting a steep rise in demand post-COVID, combined with a decrease in food and financial contributions as the cost of living crisis intensifies.
- 1.4. Local partners involved in food banks and food justice are reporting a large increase in demand for emergency food aid as households are struggling to cope, as well as a reduction in cash and in-kind donations. Citizens Advice Bureau data shows referrals nationally to food banks has doubled compared to mid-2021. Lewisham Foodbank currently supports 173 households with 370 beneficiaries.
- 1.5. In February of this year, stakeholders from across the public, voluntary, community and faith sectors came together, at the Food Poverty Summit, to discuss how to tackle food injustice across the borough. Stakeholders recognised that tackling and addressing food injustice requires a whole systems approach and proposed developing a joint Food Justice Action Plan (FJAP).
- 1.6. Lewisham Council's Public Health Team is facilitating the development of this collaborative FJAP with the implementation due to be overseen by a Lewisham Food Justice Alliance.

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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Members of the Healthier Communities Select Committee are recommended to:
- Note and comment on the draft Food Justice Action Plan.

3. Policy Context

- 3.1. In March Lewisham Council agreed to become a Right to Food borough and join the Right to Food campaign. Additionally the Council agreed to work with stakeholders to develop a new Local Food Action Plan as part of manifesto pledges made earlier this year.

4. Lewisham Council response to the Cost of Living crisis

- 4.1. Recognising the potential impact of the Cost of Living Crisis in Lewisham, the Executive Management Team (EMT) requested a research task group to be convened, made up of key services from across the organisation and facilitated by the Insight Team. The purpose of this research group is to investigate the effects of the cost-of-living crisis on Lewisham residents and services as it builds.
- 4.2. The objectives of the cost-of-living research task group are:
- To identify key issues of concern affecting residents or services, including unmet needs.
 - To develop support for decision-making and intervention planning, for example evidence and models that help with prioritisation.
 - To produce briefings for wide internal distribution based on these discussions.
- 4.3. A focus is being placed on supporting the development of action, and to identify and address barriers to action. The Senior Responsible Officers overseeing the Cost of Living research group are Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director Children Young People) and Catherine Mbema (Director Public Health).
- 4.4. The Lewisham Cost of Living programme covers the following areas for action:
- Food justice programme
 - Energy advice and fuel poverty support
 - Income maximisation
 - Debt triage
- 4.5. Recognising the scale of the Cost of Living crisis, Lewisham Council has been working with partners through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) following agreement from partners to work on this crisis together. Partners have committed to work with the Council to develop a Warm Welcome initiative. This initiative will bring together a network of community assets in Lewisham, including libraries, to provide welcoming community spaces for residents over the winter period.

5. Food Justice Action Plan

- 5.1. The draft Food Justice Action Plan (FJAP) has been developed with a number of stakeholders and partners in Lewisham and a PowerPoint summary of the draft plan has been appended to this report.

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- 5.2. Using the feedback from partners at 2 workshops and the Food Poverty Summit, four key areas of focus have been identified and ranked in terms of their priority:
 - *Taking action to prevent Lewisham residents experiencing food injustice*
 - *Ensure babies, children and young people have access to nutritious, sustainable and culturally appropriate sources of food throughout the year*
 - *Co-ordinate resources, capacity and expertise to maximise the support available to those in crisis*
 - *Promote and develop “Money First” approaches to crisis prevention and support*
- 5.3. Each of the areas of focus in the plan have multiple aims. Each aim has specific and actionable tasks to ensure that they can be achieved.
- 5.4. Each of the tasks has been given a timescale for implementation, either short (1 – 3) months, medium (6 -12 months), or long (1 – 2 years+). On page 31 we have highlighted the tasks for early action which can be acted on immediately and achieve early progress with.
- 5.5. The FJAP is now in the stakeholder consultation stage. The first draft of the FJAP has been sent to over 30 organisations involved in the plan development with a request for feedback on 20 specific questions along with any general comments.
- 5.6. A consultation workshop has also been run with stakeholders to seek additional feedback and input from partners.
- 5.7. The insight from the workshop along with the returns from the consultation document will be collated and analysed by the Lewisham Public Health Team and used to update the FJAP in order to publish the final updated document in November 2022.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1. There are no significant financial implications of this report.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1. There are no significant legal implications of this report.

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1. Food injustice affects specific groups disproportionately. Therefore this work is likely to have greater impact in these populations. The groups below are at higher risk of food injustice:
 - Black/African/Caribbean/Black British households
 - Households with low income
 - Households with children
 - Households with one or more disabled people

9. Climate change and environmental implications

- 9.1. There are no direct climate change and environmental implications, however fuel

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poverty could have an indirect implication upon these factors.

10. Crime and disorder implications

10.1. There are no crime and disorder implications of this report.

11. Health and wellbeing implications

11.1. Food injustice has significant and wide ranging detrimental impacts on physical health across all life stages. For example babies are more likely to be born at a lower birthweight which increases the risk of developing diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and obesity later in life. On the other end of the spectrum older adults suffering from food injustice have more frequent and longer hospital stays with increased fragility.

11.2. It is not only physical health that is affected though as food injustice can have devastating effects on individual's mental health and social wellbeing. Depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation are seen at an increased rate in those experiencing food injustice.

12. Report author and contact

12.1. Dr Catherine Mbema, Catherine.mbema@lewisham.gov.uk

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