

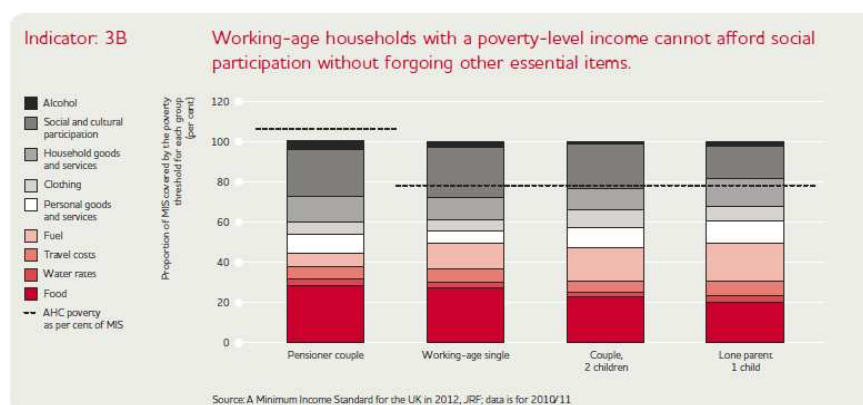
# Briefing paper on Food Poverty in Lewisham

## Executive Summary

This briefing paper on food poverty in Lewisham has been compiled to provide information on the causes, scale, consequences and current interventions relating to this growing problem.

In its recent paper *A Zero Hunger City*, the London Assembly defines food poverty as 'the inability to afford or access healthy food'.<sup>2</sup> This briefing paper is a local response to the issues highlighted in that report and other work that followed it.

Some people are 'squeezed' into food poverty over a prolonged period of time, others are 'shocked' - interventions should take account of both types of risk. Poverty-level incomes are insufficient to meet basic needs for working age households (see graph). Food is a flexible expense and is therefore often compromised.<sup>1</sup>



Affordability is determined by price and income. Access is determined by geography and income – travel to large supermarkets (which generally provide cheaper food) costs money. Skills in planning, budgeting, shopping and preparing food are also important, especially for those on a low income.

Issues of access and skill differentiate food poverty from “normal poverty”; a family with a low income but good skills and easy access to good value food may not experience food poverty. Conversely, those on low incomes with poor access and low skills are most at risk.

The precise extent of food poverty in Lewisham is currently not known since borough level data on its extent is not currently collected. This paper therefore uses a variety of methods to attempt to describe the scale of the problem, drawing on the following: a recent report on child hunger in London; Welfare Reform update from the Council's Benefit Service on the impact of welfare reforms; London Living Wage data; information on food banks in Lewisham; mapping supermarkets and location in relation to deprivation in Lewisham; a recent survey of older people and food poverty in London; qualitative data from residents and frontline staff (appendix 2). Although each method has its limitations and assumptions, a consistent picture of great need emerges. It is estimated that:

- The Greater London Authority report, *Child Hunger in London* reported that 21% of parents surveyed reported skipping meals so that their children could eat and 9% of children in London said they sometime or often go to bed hungry. If these figures were applied to Lewisham it is estimated that 19,000 parents in Lewisham skip meals so their children can eat and 6,000 children in Lewisham sometimes or often go to bed hungry<sup>3</sup>
- 24,000 people in Lewisham earn less than the London Living Wage, placing them at risk of food poverty. 4,000 earn less than the *minimum wage*, placing them severely at risk (appendix 1)
- Food banks report providing food to approximately 1,000 individual clients between October 2012 and May 2013, with both the number of distributions centres and those accessing them rising in recent months

- Key charitable organisations such as the Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam have stated that welfare reforms have increased the risk of (food) poverty. In Lewisham 9,301 households have been issued with a summons as a result of lack of payment of new council tax liabilities. Changes to the social fund mean that fewer people are eligible for help. 400 households are affected by the benefit cap, with 120 losing more than £100/week
- As of 18 September, there were 2,788 tenants in social housing across Lewisham affected by the bedroom tax. The most recent briefing does not indicate the projected cost to each household, although approximately 60% of households provided with accommodation by Lewisham Homes and Phoenix housing are in arrears. The numbers of people affected by the bedroom tax is falling.
- Six Lewisham wards do not have a supermarket. Three (Evelyn, Whitefoot and some super output areas of Grove Park) are highly deprived. Brockley and Ladywell, while more affluent, have some of the most deprived populations of older people. 500m is an accepted definition of access to a food source; under this definition, parts of these wards have poor access. Further work to better understand access to food in Lewisham is warranted
- A range of service providers (13) and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations working in Lewisham report an increase in the incidence of food poverty.

A poor diet has many serious consequences. These include increased risk of illnesses such as: cancer and heart disease, poor infant health, antisocial behaviour in children, loss of independence and increased falls in older people. Counter intuitively, a poor diet can also cause obesity (a phenomenon known as modern malnutrition) which contributes to diabetes and heart disease.

Some work is already being done to combat food poverty in Lewisham. Healthy Start, Free School Meals and Breakfast Clubs are all interventions targeted at children for example free porridge is now available in all schools covered by the catering contract and all 5-7year olds will have free school meals from 2014. Food banks with varying models of provision are increasing. Housing associations are starting to develop policies for tackling food poverty. The extent of provision by community and faith groups for elderly people is currently unknown.

Practical recommendations for tackling food poverty have been made by the London Assembly in their Zero Hunger report (see section 7.1 for details). On 30<sup>th</sup> October 2013 the London Assembly Economy Committee chaired an informal follow up round table discussion of the issue. Lewisham Public Health team contributed to this discussion which resulted in a draft checklist for boroughs working towards Zero Hunger. Taken together, these recommendations should form the basis of the next steps towards preparing detailed and costed action plans for food poverty as part of the wider food and nutrition context in Lewisham.

## **1. Methods and Purpose**

This document was compiled using searches of current literature, routine data sources, existing work carried out by the Lewisham Public Health team on issues relating to food poverty and discussions with providers of services to Lewisham residents. A full list of references is provided at the end of this document.

The purpose of this paper is to:

- define what is meant by food poverty and how it differs from “normal” poverty
- briefly outline the principle causes and consequences of food poverty
- use various data sources to describe the possible extent of food poverty in Lewisham
- outline what is being done currently in Lewisham to combat food poverty with a view to assessing how this links with the London Food Board’s strategic responsibility for addressing food poverty in London
- lay the foundations for future development of action plans based on the Greater London Authority report on Child Hunger and London Assembly report on food poverty

## **2. Definitions and Implications**

Definitions of food poverty focus on issues of access, affordability and healthy food. The London Assembly defines food poverty as, ‘the inability to afford or access healthy food’<sup>2</sup>.

A GLA report on child hunger and food poverty in London, published in August 2013, emphasises the role of meal planning, budgeting, canny shopping and cooking in protecting families from food poverty.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the recent report *A Zero Hunger City, Tackling Food Poverty in London (March 2013)*, by the London Assembly states,

There is a correlation between food poverty and income poverty, but it is not entirely caused by a low income; careful budgeting, cooking skills – and chance – can keep a low-income family from food poverty.<sup>2</sup>

These definitions have practical implications for describing the scale of food poverty in Lewisham and for possible interventions. Issues of income, access to reasonably priced food and skills are key in attempting to minimise the impact of food poverty on Lewisham residents.

#### How Food Poverty differs from 'Normal' poverty

There is clearly an overlap between poverty and food poverty. However, as the above definitions make clear, food poverty is a function of poverty compounded by a lack of access to appropriate food and/or a lack of food-related skills and knowledge. Good access and skills are protective of food poverty when on a low income. However, if income is below a certain threshold, even good access and skills will not help.

#### Squeeze vs Shock

The GLA Child Hunger in London report distinguishes those who are squeezed into food poverty from those who are shocked into food poverty.

Being shocked into food poverty refers to an unexpected event or change that leaves a family unable to access or afford an adequate amount and the right type of food [...]  
Being squeezed into food poverty refers to how, over a period of time, a series of changes or events can take their toll on families struggling to access or afford an adequate amount of food.<sup>3, p21</sup>

This distinction has implications for how to tackle food poverty in Lewisham. Measures are required to ameliorate both short-term crises and longer term, deeply-rooted causes.

### **3. Causes of Food Poverty**

The determinants of food poverty are complex, ranging from global trends in food prices, national levels of poverty driven in part by policies on benefits and the minimum wage, local availability of healthy, reasonably priced food and individual income, skills and knowledge.

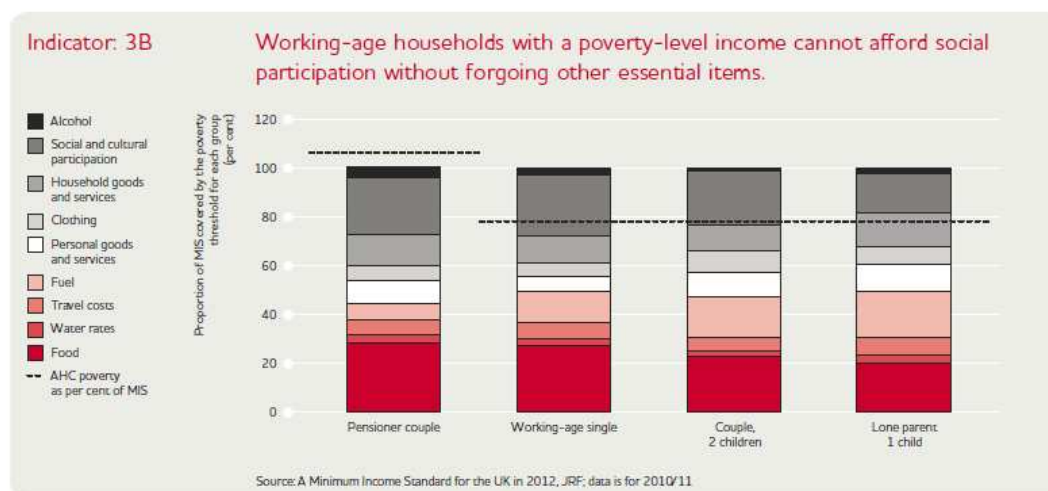
#### Food Prices

Food prices in the UK have risen faster than the rate of inflation since 2008, caused by a rise in commodity prices, exchange rates and the cost of oil<sup>4</sup>. At a local level, 'convenience' versions of supermarket chains, which have proliferated in recent years, charge almost 30% more for fresh fruit and vegetables than larger branches.<sup>5</sup> Shopping at supermarkets – and therefore gaining access to lower prices – requires transport, which is not always available to those on a low income. Since accessing supermarkets through online shopping requires a minimum spend and internet access, this method of shopping is not practicable for some people on low incomes.

#### Low Income

As Figure 1 shows, working age people on a poverty threshold wage earn less than the minimum income standard for the UK, meaning they have to make choices between a healthy diet and other essential activities.<sup>6</sup> Poverty-level incomes provide approximately 80% of necessary expenditure. Food expenditure is flexible so this is one area that families can make savings.<sup>7</sup> The current welfare reforms will reduce income for those in receipt of state benefits.<sup>8</sup> The impact of these reforms on Lewisham residents is described in section 4, below.

Figure 1: Poverty level income does not allow for basic needs to be met<sup>6</sup>



### Availability/Access

As established above, access to reasonably-priced food is a determinant of food poverty. Access relates partly to income; a higher income makes the transport or delivery costs required to access better value supermarkets affordable and higher, local ‘convenience’ prices more bearable.

This means that for those on lower incomes, access is closely related to geography. If you lack the means for travel to a supermarket (or to shop online) you are forced to shop locally. If your local shops are expensive then you will be paying a “poverty premium”. This is one of the reasons that lower income families spend a greater proportion of their income on food (approximately 30%) than those of average income (12%).<sup>9</sup>

### Skills in Meal Planning, Shopping, Budgeting and Preparing Food

As mentioned above, an individual or family’s ability to plan meals, knowing where to shop, being able to budget and having the cooking skills to prepare food from scratch has a big impact on whether a family in poverty experiences food poverty.

This is confirmed by a report for the Food Standards Agency that shows that families where the main food provider lacked ‘better developed cooking skills’ ate less fruit and vegetables and drank more soft drinks.<sup>10</sup> Lower consumption of fruit and vegetables is linked to various poor health outcomes.

There is no data available on cooking, planning and budgeting skills in Lewisham. Work carried out by the Lewisham Public Health Department and various public and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector providers indicates that there is an appetite for classes teaching this sort of expertise. The Lewisham Public Health team is currently considering how it might evaluate the impact of such programmes more formally which will contribute to the development of the action plans.

## 4. Describing Food Poverty in Lewisham

Since data on food poverty in Lewisham is not currently collected a number of different approaches to attempt to describe the scale of the problem have been used. These approaches, their principal strengths and weaknesses and a summary of the estimates provided by each method are outlined in the table below,

Although the methods used below are varied and their use requires some assumptions, a reasonably consistent picture emerges with tens of thousands of people having to compromise on food and a smaller but extensive proportion going hungry.

*Table summarising methods used to estimate food poverty in Lewisham*

	Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	Estimated number affected in Lewisham
1.	Extrapolating data from August 2013 <b>Child Hunger in London</b> report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primary data</li> <li>Up-to-date</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inaccuracies in applying London-wide data to Lewisham</li> <li>No data on older people, just children and families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>42% (38,000) of Lewisham parents have reduced the amount of food they buy in the last year</li> <li>30% (27,000) of Lewisham parents likely to have bought less fruit and vegetables on a monthly basis due to the expense</li> <li>21% (19,000) of Lewisham parents skipping meals so their children could eat</li> <li>9% (6,000) of Lewisham children sometimes/often go to bed hungry</li> <li>8% (5,000) of Lewisham children likely to have had to skip meals due to lack of food</li> </ul>
2.	Using a recent Welfare Reform update from the Council's Benefit Service to outline the number of households with reduced income as a result of the welfare reforms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lewisham-specific data</li> <li>Up to date</li> <li>Provides information on families put at risk of poverty as a result of reforms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only provides estimate of impact of welfare reforms, not absolute poverty</li> <li>doesn't give information specifically on food poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25,000 households in Lewisham will have new or increased council tax liabilities (average impact £2.50/household/week). Of these, 9,301 households have been issued with a summons. A total of 3,327 cases have been referred to bailiffs with a further 2,878 cases referred to the Department for Work and Pensions for an attachment to the claimants on-going benefit entitlement.</li> <li>There have been 1,200 applications for short-term financial support since April (under the scheme replacing the previous national Social Fund scheme) with 435 successful awards.</li> <li>400 households have been affected by the benefit cap, with 120 losing over £100/week.</li> <li>As of 18 September, there were 2,788 tenants in social housing across Lewisham affected by the bedroom tax. The most recent briefing does not indicate the projected cost to each household, although approximately 60% of households provided with accommodation by Lewisham Homes and Phoenix housing are in arrears. The number of people affected by the 'bedroom tax' is falling.</li> </ul>
3.	Using <b>London Living Wage</b> data to estimate the number of Lewisham residents in work in receipt of the London Living wage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>London Living wage is an accepted definition of low income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>assumptions made in applying London data to Lewisham</li> <li>gives no information on geographical access to food, or skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>24,000 people living in Lewisham earn less than the London Living Wage</li> <li>4,000 people living in Lewisham earn less than the minimum wage</li> </ul>
4.	Numbers of people accessing food banks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>accurate data on those accessing food banks in Lewisham</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>likely to underestimate scale of food poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lewisham Food Bank: 372 clients (12/12-04/13)</li> <li>New Cross Food Bank: 450-520 families/week (10/12-05/13)</li> <li>Honor Oak: 119 unique clients (10/12-05/13)</li> <li>Whitefoot and Downham food +project : 165 clients (10/13 – 05/14)</li> </ul>
5.	Mapping deprivation and reasonably priced food sources to identify areas of low income and poor access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addresses question of food accessibility</li> <li>identifies areas where practical steps could be taken to improve access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>work in early stages and required further research</li> <li>variation in levels of income within lower super output areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Six wards (Brockley, Evelyn, Grove Park, Ladywell, Telegraph Hill and Whitefoot) have no supermarket</li> <li>Evelyn, Grove Park and Whitefoot have areas of deprived populations who are at risk of food poverty</li> <li>Telegraph Hill and Brockley, although more affluent in general, have deprived older populations who are at risk</li> </ul>
6.	2012 GLA survey of older people and food poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relatively recent, primary research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>data doesn't allow extrapolation to give prevalence/incidence in Lewisham</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An expected 2,600 people &gt;65 yrs malnourished</li> <li>majority of older people and those working with them believe that some older people struggle to afford healthy food</li> <li>Low income is a key factor</li> <li>Older people are accessing food banks, despite various barriers including access, knowledge and stigma.</li> </ul>
7.	Discussions with stakeholders in Lewisham to understand the extent of food poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>local, up-to-date information</li> <li>provides local context for more data-driven approaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>doesn't give a quantitative estimate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food poverty a significant issue in Lewisham</li> </ul>

### 1. GLA Report on Child Hunger in London

There is only one source of primary data on the scale of food poverty in London. In August 2013 the Greater London Authority published a report titled, Child Hunger in London – Understanding Food Poverty in the Capital, August 2013, based on research carried out by Ipsos Mori.<sup>3</sup>

According to the report:

- 42% of parents in London have reduced the amount of food they buy in the last year
- 30% of parents in London reported that they bought less fruit and vegetables on a monthly basis due to the expense
- 21% of parents in London reported skipping meals so their children could eat
- 9% of children in London said they sometime or often go to bed hungry and 8% of parents said their children had to skip meals as there was not enough food to eat

Applying these percentages to 2011 Lewisham census data, and assuming that the patterns observed in London are repeated in Lewisham, it is estimated that:

- 38,000 parents in Lewisham have reduced the amount of food they buy in the last year
- 27,000 parents in Lewisham are buying less fruit and vegetables because of the expense
- 19,000 parents in Lewisham have skipped a meal so their children could eat
- Between 5,000 and 6,000 children in Lewisham sometimes or often go to bed hungry due to a lack of food or have had to skip meals as there is not enough food to eat.

### 2. Impact on Income of Welfare Reforms in Lewisham

The general trend of welfare reforms is to reduce income derived from benefits<sup>11</sup>.

The financial impact of welfare reforms on Lewisham residents is summarised below, based on a Welfare Reform update from the Council's Benefit Service.<sup>12</sup> Since people receiving benefits are by definition already on a low income (and since it is established that food expenditure is an area where families can make savings), it is reasonable to state that these reductions are likely to have an impact on food poverty.

- 25,000 households in Lewisham will have new or increased council tax liabilities (average impact £2.50/household/week). Of these, 9,301 households have been issued with a summons. A total of 3,327 cases have been referred to bailiffs with a further 2,878 cases referred to the Department for Work and Pensions for an attachment to the claimants on-going benefit entitlement.
- There have been 1,200 applications for short-term financial support since April (under the scheme replacing the previous national Social Fund scheme) with 435 successful awards.
- 400 households have been affected by the benefit cap, with 120 losing over £100/week.
- As of 18 September, there were 2,788 tenants in social housing across Lewisham affected by the bedroom tax. The most recent briefing does not indicate the projected cost to each household, although approximately 60% of households provided with accommodation by Lewisham Homes and Phoenix housing are in arrears. The numbers of people affected by the bedroom tax is falling.

Quantifying the impact of these changes on food poverty is difficult because access and skills should also be taken into account alongside reductions in income.

Data from The Lewisham Foodbank confirms that benefit delay (33%), benefit changes (16%) and low income (14%) are key reasons given for people accessing food bank. Accessing a food bank is a reasonable proxy indicator of food poverty, especially given that the social stigma attached to using food banks means they are not always used when needed.<sup>3</sup>

It is likely therefore that many of the households identified above will experience food poverty as a result of these changes. It is reasonable to assume that households losing over £100/week due to the

benefit cap will be severely affected. It is also reasonable to assume that some of those households in arrears as a result of changes to council tax liabilities and the Bedroom Tax will be struggling to meet all the necessary expenses.

Conversations with some public sector frontline staff carried out to inform this paper confirm this, with those in receipt of single benefits thought to be particularly at risk of food poverty. Staff are concerned that Short Term Benefit Advances (administered by the Department of Work and Pensions) are themselves sometimes delayed. In their view, transient food poverty for those affected by welfare reforms was inevitable in some cases, despite the clear plans Lewisham Council has for helping many of those affected.

### 3. London Living Wage Data

The London Living Wage is an amalgamation of the poverty threshold wage (60% of median incomes) and a “Low Cost But Acceptable” standard of living, plus a premium of 15% to provide a buffer against “unforeseen events”. At the time of writing it is £8.80/hour.<sup>13</sup>

Using 2013 London Living Wage data it is estimated there are 24,000 people living in Lewisham that earn less than the London Living Wage and 4,000 earning less than the minimum wage (see appendix 1 for calculation). These estimates are based on the assumption that poverty is equally distributed in the capital. Given Lewisham’s deprivation, these numbers are likely to be an underestimate. As demonstrated above, those earning less than the London Living Wage are likely to have to compromise on food expenditure.

### 4. People Accessing Food Banks in Lewisham

The number of food banks and their use by residents in Lewisham is increasing.

Between October 2012 and May 2013 approximately 1,000 different clients had accessed the three sites\* in operation in Lewisham at that time (see table). Since then, a further three distribution sites have been added. Lewisham Food Bank opened a second site in July 2013. Two further distribution centres (not associated with Lewisham Food Bank) in Catford and Downham also opened in October 2013.

Table Showing Number of Clients Accessing Lewisham Food banks 2012/14

Foodbank (Model of Delivery)	Number of clients	Period of time
*Lewisham Food Bank (Trussell Trust)	372 different clients (feeding 903 people)	December 2012 - April 2013
*New Cross Food Bank (FareShare)	450-520 families collect food weekly	October 2012 - May 2013
*Honor Oak Community Centre (Esther Community Enterprise)	119 different clients	October 2012 - May 2013
Whitefoot and Downham Community Food+ project (Matthew Tree Project)	165 different clients (feeding 398 people)	October 2013 – May 2014
Elim Pentecostal Food Bank (Trussell Trust)	unknown	-

Although accurate, up-to-date data on the precise numbers of people accessing food banks in Lewisham is not available, those running distribution centres at the present time indicate that their use is increasing.

Eligibility criteria differ for each organisation. It is possible that some people are accessing food banks inappropriately. However, the cohort interviewed for the Child Hunger in London report made it clear that the stigma attached to food handout meant they did not make full use of this service, even when eligible.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, using the numbers of people accessing food banks is likely to underestimate food poverty in Lewisham.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>i</sup> This quote from a Lewisham Provider illustrates this stigma well. “We have also offered them {vouchers} to a few clients who had no food or money but turned down the offer of “second hand food”!

Some recently reported reasons for food bank use are listed below:

- benefit changes or delays
- falling / low income
- rent increases / council tax payments / bedroom tax
- People with no recourse to public funds in need of help
- Pensioners with large utility bills
- unemployment
- debt

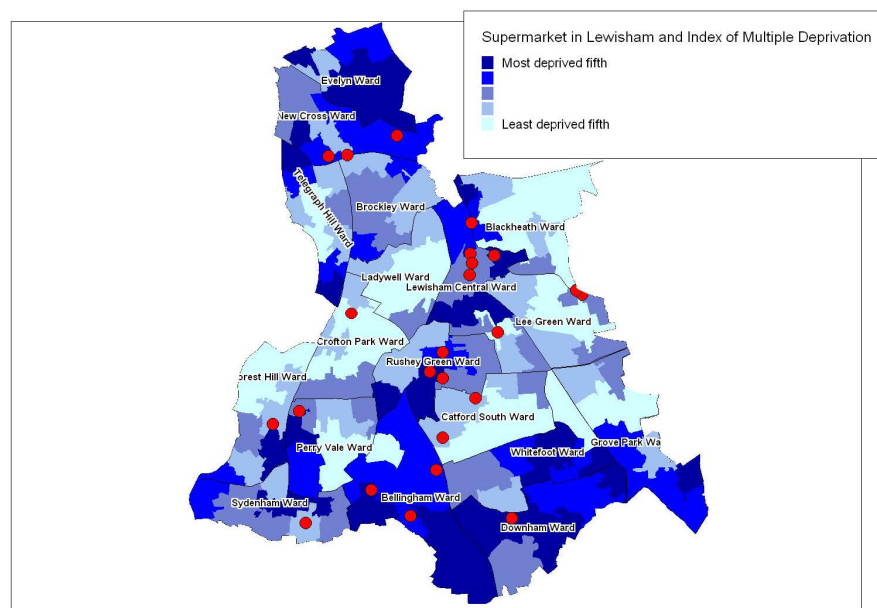
### 5. Geographical Access to Reasonably Priced Food

The location of reasonably priced food sources is particularly important for those on a low income.

Although a detailed study is beyond the scope of this briefing paper, some preparatory work has been carried out to discover whether there might be areas of Lewisham where access to supermarkets is difficult. 500m is considered a reasonable distance to travel when shopping on foot.<sup>14</sup> As the map below shows, there are six wards in Lewisham without a supermarket (Evelyn, Brockley, Ladywell, Telegraph Hill, Grove Park and Whitefoot). Some residents these areas will be further than 500m from a supermarket and could therefore be said to have poor access.

Evelyn and Whitefoot are recognised as areas of deprivation. However, Telegraph Hill and Brockley, while less deprived in general, both have very deprived populations of older people (ranking 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> in the borough). This work highlights that certain populations in Lewisham have poorer access to food because of where they live, an important consideration when designing interventions to improve food poverty. Given that Lewisham is a deprived borough, further detailed work on the location and price of food sources for Lewisham residents might be warranted.

### Map of Wards and Location of Supermarkets in Lewisham (Source of supermarket location: Google)



### 6. GLA Survey of Food Poverty in Older people<sup>2</sup>

In November 2012, the GLA surveyed 32 local Age UK branches and 33 borough-based older people's forums in London. 25 organisations responded to the survey, representing contact with at least 41,000 people.

Data from the survey indicates that a proportion of older people find it harder to afford healthy food. Some groups struggle because of a lack of income (for example those from ethnic minorities who have paid insufficient National Insurance contributions). Other barriers to healthy food include lack of access and information.



The survey found:

- 64% said that older people had found it harder to afford enough healthy food.
- 58% stated that older people regularly struggled to buy affordable healthy food in local shops
- 21% said that more people are accessing food banks than a year ago
- 83% said that older people are accessing food banks because their pension or income is not sufficient
  - 58% said this was because they have to pay other bills
  - 41% said this was because their benefit payments were insufficient
- 79% identified older people not knowing about food banks as a barrier to accessing them
- 64% said older people did not feel comfortable going to food banks
- 43% thought that older people did not know how to be referred to a food bank
- 29% said the food bank was hard to get to

There is a lack of data on food poverty in older people in London and no specific data on Lewisham residents. The table below shows the areas of deprivation for older people in Lewisham (which do not necessarily correspond to the most generally deprived boroughs) highlighting areas that might benefit from intervention for this population.

*Table showing deprivation rankings for older people in Lewisham, by ward*

Ward name Rank 1 = worst	Evelyn	Bellingham	Downham	New Cross	Whitefoot	Lewisham Central	Grove Park	Sydenham	Telegraph Hill	Brockley	Rushey Green	Perry Vale	Blackheath	Forest Hill	Ladywell	Catford South	Lee Green	Crofton Park
Older people in deprivation (%)	44.4	34.3	31	41.6	28.2	33.4	24.6	28.3	36.2	36.1	27.5	27.1	24.6	22.4	25.2	19.8	21.9	25.3
Worst 5 ranking	1	5		2					3	4								
Pensioners living alone (%)	42.5	44.5	44.5	40.6	38.1	41.6	39.2	41.5	27.3	41.4	35.8	36.3	41.8	34.5	30.7	26.3	38.1	34.3
Worst 5 ranking	3	1	1			5							4					

There is some data on malnutrition in older people in Lewisham. The Zero Hunger report state that “malnutrition affects over 10 per cent of older people aged 65 and over”.<sup>2</sup> Lewisham has 26,000 people over the age of 65, thus it would be expected that approximately 2,600 to be malnourished.<sup>15</sup>

### 7. Qualitative Work with Stakeholders

In the course of preparing this briefing paper qualitative information was gathered from key agencies working with people experiencing or at risk of food poverty in Lewisham. Views were sought from health workers, public sector frontline staff and those in the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector. A selection of quotes is given in Appendix 2.

The exercise confirmed the existence of both transient and long-term food poverty among Lewisham residents and highlighted some key themes:

- issues connected to benefit delay or sanctions
- low income
- people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

## **5. Consequences of Food Poverty**

### Consequences of Poor Nutrition

One consequence of food poverty is that people reduce spending on healthy foods.<sup>3</sup> A diet low in fruit and vegetable intake is associated with stroke, ischaemic heart disease, colorectal cancer, gastric cancer, lung cancer and oesophageal cancer.<sup>16</sup>

Although counterintuitive, obesity is often linked to a poor diet. The National Heart Forum toolkit for Nutrition and Poverty states that, “the combination of obesity and a diet dominated by sweet, salty and fatty foods with too little fruit and vegetables and fibre is known as modern malnutrition. It is

more common in those from lower socioeconomic groups.”<sup>17</sup> Being overweight is responsible for a significant burden of disease, causing diabetes, heart disease and strokes.<sup>16</sup> .

Lewisham has high rates of obesity and deprivation. Compared to other London boroughs, Lewisham has the 9<sup>th</sup> largest proportion of its population in the most deprived quintile<sup>18</sup> and above average obesity.<sup>19</sup> Obesity and the health consequences of a poor diet are likely to be exacerbated by the impact of food poverty as described in this paper.

As mentioned above, malnutrition is a significant issue among older people, a tri-borough taskforce in Lewisham, Southwark and Lambeth has been established to address the issue.

Other consequences of poor nutrition include:

- loss of independence and increased falls and fractures in older people
- low birth weight leading to increased mortality and morbidity throughout childhood, and increased risk of cardiovascular disease in adult life
- increased incidence of stillbirths and neural tube defects (such as spina bifida)
- increased dental caries in children
- link between poor nutrition and anti-social behaviour at school<sup>17</sup>

#### Social Implications of Food Poverty

The GLA report on Child Hunger in London makes a case for a broad range of consequences of food poverty, over and above poor nutrition. It states:

[the] stigma associated with free school meals, trouble concentrating at school on an empty stomach and the inability to invite friends home for dinner as key issues affecting the social and health implications of living with hunger. Equally, the ability to build family bonds diminishes if families aren't able to sit down to eat together. Families and children living in food poverty are typically not able to engage in other activities such as school trips and occasional treats, with household income focused on essentials.<sup>3, p8</sup>

## **6. Initiatives to Combat Food Poverty in Lewisham**

The following section outlines the various measures already in place to combat food poverty in Lewisham.

### **Children and Young People**

#### Healthy Start scheme

Healthy Start is a UK-wide government scheme which aims to improve the health of pregnant women and families on benefits and low incomes. The scheme provides eligible families<sup>ii</sup> with vouchers which can be used to buy milk, fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables and infant formula. The vouchers are worth £3.10 a week and typically the benefit amounts to around £900 to cover the period during pregnancy to when a child reaches their fourth birthday.

Lewisham data indicates that 73.8% of eligible families are registered on the scheme. This is similar to London (74.9%) but lower than England (77.2%) (Dec 2012). On average this equates to 5,500 children and 1,500 women in Lewisham benefiting from the scheme on a quarterly basis.

Beneficiaries are also eligible for free Healthy Start vitamins. In Lewisham a universal vitamin D scheme was launched in November 2013 which means that all pregnant women, post natal women for one year and all children under 4 will be eligible for Healthy Start vitamins.

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<sup>ii</sup> Those eligible for Healthy Start are as follows: pregnant and under 18; women more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under 4 and she/ family receives one of the following - income support/income-based Jobseeker's Allowance/income-related Employment and Support Allowance/ Child Tax Credit (but not Working Tax Credit unless the family is receiving Working Tax Credit run-on only) AND an annual family income of £16,190 or less (2013/14); Pregnant women or those with a child under four claiming Universal Credits may also be eligible.

### Early Years

Pre-schools are offering a wider range of foods at breakfast after having noticed that some children are arriving feeling hungry. Children Centre staff, who have attended the *Eat Better Start Better* training programmes on the National Voluntary Food and Drink guidelines for Early Years in England are better equipped to improve parents' and carers' cooking skills and build their knowledge on age-appropriate nutrition. Two providers are currently offering healthy eating cookery programmes to parents/carers and their children.

### Breakfast clubs

The Zero Hunger report states that 71% of London teachers say children are coming to school hungry, with 44% saying the number has increased slightly. The London Assembly advocates for Breakfast Clubs, saying they "are part of the solution. Breakfast clubs in London schools often play a dual role, offering breakfast to children who for a number of reasons have not eaten at home, and early morning childcare, which is particularly helpful for working parents."<sup>2</sup>

The majority of primary schools in Lewisham that are part of the school catering contract provide breakfast clubs. Of these 55 schools, 41 operate breakfast clubs run by schools or the school catering company and 14 do not have breakfast clubs. Pupils at these schools also have access to free porridge for breakfast delivered by the school caterer. A survey has gone to all primary schools which include a question on breakfast clubs to determine the provision in all schools; the results are not yet available.

### Free School Meals

For those on a low income a free school meal "provides great relief to the family's food budget".<sup>3</sup> As the table below shows schools in Lewisham have an average uptake of free school meals of 82% in primary schools, 80% in special schools and 69% in secondary schools. Planned legislation means that free school meals will be provided to all children between the ages of 5 and 7 years from September 2014. Nonetheless, there are clearly children who are eligible for free school meals who are not taking up this valuable resource.

	Daily Total Pupils	Daily Total FSM Eligible Pupils		Daily Total FSM Uptake			Daily Total Pupils Eating Paid Meals		Daily Total Pupils Eating Packed Lunch	
		Daily	% of Roll	Daily	% of Roll	% uptake	Daily	% of Roll	Daily	% of Roll
<b>Primary School</b>	17,841	4,818	27%	3,963	22%	82%	6,788	38%	4,790	27%
<b>Special Schools</b>	610	317	52%	253	42%	80%	174	28%	85	14%
<b>Secondary Schools</b>	7,847	2,189	28%	1,503	19%	69%	1,167	15%	0	0%

### Older people

Given that there are 26,000 people over the age of 65 in Lewisham, that Lewisham is a deprived borough, and information covered elsewhere in this report indicating that older people struggle to access and afford food, it is likely that there is a great deal of unmet need with regards to food poverty for older people.

Of those that are eligible for adult social care a small proportion choose the option for a meal service. There is limited information available on food provision for older people.

### Food Banks

At the time of writing there are six known distribution centres operating as food banks in Lewisham. In general they are open once a week for two hours, with the exception of the New Cross Food Banks which is open five days a week for several hours.

1. The Lewisham Food Bank operates two sites in Malham Road (Forest Hill) and Algernon Road (Lewisham). They supply three days' worth of emergency food via a voucher system, signpost clients to other agencies and deliver if needed.
2. The Honor Oak Community Centre food bank has one distribution centre in Turnham Road and is run by a faith group. This food bank does not use vouchers and is open a couple of hours per week.
3. The New Cross Food Bank reports having 10% of local Deptford and New Cross households on its books.
4. A Trussel Trust food bank launched 5<sup>th</sup> October 2013 from Elim Pentacostal Church, Catford.
5. The Whitefoot and Downham Community Food + project launched on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2013 and is based on the Matthew Tree Project, this model is not based on emergency food provision but is a longer term intervention to support people to move out of food poverty.

## **Welfare Changes**

There are a number of schemes underway to assist those affected by the welfare reforms which may have an impact on food poverty.

### **Hardship scheme**

£100k has been made available to support households affected by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and suffering exceptional hardship. Qualifying criteria include households where the claimant is disabled or they are responsible for a disabled child, a lone-parent with a child under the age of 5 or someone over 50 years of age and long-term unemployed.

### **Local Support Scheme (replacing National Social Fund)**

In 2013/14 there were 12,000 applicants to the National Social Fund in Lewisham. There were 2,450 applications to the replacement Local Support Scheme in 2013/14 with 745 awards. Applications have been rejected either because candidates did not meet the eligibility criteria or because there was an underlying entitlement to a Short Term Benefit Advance this is administered by the DWP. Lewisham is in the process of reviewing the policy and exploring opportunities to align policy and delivery approaches across Lewisham, Lambeth and Southwark.

### **'Bedroom Tax'/Under Occupation**

Work being led by a group of officers from housing benefit, housing needs, Lewisham Homes and Phoenix) are continuing to work to support residents to find solutions to manage under occupation.

### **Benefit Cap**

Customers that require short-term financial support to manage the changes are being invited to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). So far there have been 141 have been awarded DHP. Approximately 124 of those most affected by benefit cap (ie standing to lose more than £100/week) are being offered more intensive support to manage the changes.

## **Social Housing**

A number of housing providers are addressing the issue of food poverty, for example Lewisham Homes (the largest social housing provider in Lewisham) is developing mechanisms to address food poverty faced by residents. They are currently working with Lewisham Foodbank and provide a small number of emergency parcels to residents. They are keen to work with partners across the borough as their front line staff and 'involved residents' are increasingly reporting food poverty / food insecurity is an issue in the properties they manage. Phoenix Housing (the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest social housing provider) reports referring clients to local food banks and is in the process of collating information on food poverty among their residents.

## **7. London Assembly recommendations**

These recommendations will be used as a basis for developing future detailed action plans to address food poverty as part of the wider nutrition and food context in Lewisham.

### **7.1 London Assembly Zero Hunger Report recommendations**

A series of recommendations for local authorities, schools and emergency food aid organisations has been produced by the GLA's as part of their Zero Hunger City report<sup>2</sup>. These are listed below as a basis for further discussion among key stakeholders.

#### London boroughs

**There should be a food poverty action plan led by borough Health and Wellbeing Boards. A food poverty link worker should be designated in all London boroughs.**

Boroughs' food poverty action plans should cover:

- how the particular characteristics of a borough should shape the drivers of, and response to, food poverty, for example if the risk is more widespread or focused on more specific pockets;
- the current response to food poverty and gaps in support
- a systematic approach to provision of information, advice and signposting across all emergency food aid sites, including a clear 'triage' process for priority groups, including repeat users
- brokering support for food aid projects in areas including project management, storage costs and training for volunteers in dealing with different client groups
- assessing how community meals, dining clubs and other community-based projects can assist in addressing food poverty among older people in London
- promoting, expanding and integrating community-based food buying schemes into the wider response to food poverty
- maximising registration and take-up among all children who are entitled to free school meals, as a minimum, and exploring ways to deliver universal school meals.

#### Schools

**Every school governing body should have a plan to identify and address hunger in schools throughout the school day and to support families in food poverty.**

This plan should include:

- engagement with the local borough's food poverty link worker;
- addressing hunger among children by ensuring availability of a free breakfast, using Pupil Premium monies if necessary, and maximising registration and take-up among all children who are entitled to free school meals.
- using Pupil Premium monies to provide after-school cooking activities
- advocating for action to address the needs of hungry children during the school holidays.

#### Emergency food aid organisations

**Emergency food aid organisations should regularly analyse their client breakdown and proactively seek out groups that face barriers to accessing emergency food aid, including older people. Food aid organisations should identify ways to systematically triage service users and liaise with statutory authorities to ensure people can access the support to which they are entitled.**

For example, data from food bank clients indicates that older people are not accessing food banks in the numbers that would be expected given the risk of food poverty among this group. There are certainly specific reasons why food banks are by their nature less accessible to older people; therefore models for reaching this group should be explored and successes shared.

**Report produced by the Lewisham Public Health Team, June 2014**

Robert Marr (Public Health Speciality Registrar)

with contributions from Livia La Camera (Specialist Dietician for Children) & Gwenda Scott (Healthy Weight Strategy Manager)

## **Appendix 1: Calculation of Poverty-Level Wages in Lewisham**

Almost 700,000 people in work in London earn less than the London Living Wage (44% of part-time workers and 10% of full-time workers).<sup>20, p1</sup> Of these 700,000, 112,000 are paid less than the minimum wage.

2011 census data gives a London population of 8,173,941 and a Lewisham population of 275,885, or 3.38%. Assuming an equal distribution across London we can estimate:

- 24,000 people living in Lewisham earn less than the London Living Wage
- 4,000 people living in Lewisham earn less than the minimum wage

Both these groups could reasonably be said to be living in poverty, with those earning less than the minimum wage on a particularly low wage. Although this data does not tell us about geographical access to food, or food-related skills, it is reasonable to suggest that many of these people are at risk of food poverty, and that this risk is highest in those earning less than the minimum wage.

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## **Appendix 2: Quotes from People involved with those suffering from Food Poverty in Lewisham**

*Home visit is now fully embedded ..... Through this practice, we have uncovered a wealth of acute needs but poverty is indeed profound". (Pre-School Manager)*

*We have noticed that since April a lot of the service users have been requesting food to take home with them at the end of sessions". (Community Project worker for marginalised adults)*

*Had a patient the other day benefits had been stopped but didn't know as generally went straight into bank left her no money at all no food for her or son for whole weekend. I advised her of foodbank but also no money to get there! (GP)*

*White English woman in mid 50s with disabled son. Both she and son had issues with ESA and income support. At the point LH staff became involved neither had eaten for the past few days apart from a tin of beans and a packet of biscuits which they had shared. Provided with in-house food parcel while supported to resolve benefits issues. (Lewisham Homes)*

*We are having to use food banks across our services as benefits are being delayed and women are being sanctioned. This is becoming the norm. We are also having to provide more food resources if the food bank is closed. (Refugee worker)*

*Mrs C – Early 40s, black and minority ethnic with 9 year old daughter. ESA sanctioned due to hospitalisation. When discharged from hospital after hysterectomy benefits not reinstated due to lack of 'evidence' and physically unable to go to offices to resolve issues. Neither she nor child had food so Salvation Army sent food round to help with food while LH staff supported her to resolve benefit issues". (Lewisham Homes)*

*Food poverty is a big issue with our clients. We are registered with a foodbank (malham rd) and have given out vouchers. Low income, poor housing equals a poor diet on the whole". (Family Nurse Partnership)*

*We do see mothers with No recourse to Public Funds who are very limited as to what they can buy. Recently my staff nurse met a mum at 29 catford hill where there are quite a lot of families with NRPF who said she has to walk around and offer to clear up at parties in public halls to get left overs for her 3 children..." (Health visitor lead)*

*A male user collapsed at Lewisham Library. Staff helped him up and to a chair and asked if he was OK. He said that he hadn't eaten for three days. (Libraries Staff)*

*Another user attended a council event where there were light refreshments laid on. He was there at the end of the event when staff started clearing away left over food. He politely asked if it was possible to fill a "doggy bag" with some of the leftovers because it was a few days until he would receive his pension and he was hungry". (Libraries Staff)*

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