

REPORT TO: Health and Wellbeing Board

DATE: 10 July 2019

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health

PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Access to Healthy and Affordable Food in Halton

WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the key findings and associated recommendations of a comprehensive study to examine access to healthy and affordable food in Halton. An action plan to address these recommendations is attached to this board report at appendix 1. The Final study report accompanies this board report for reference.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) The Board note the report “Access to Healthy and Affordable Food in Halton” ;**
- 2) Board members support the implementation of the associated action plan; and**
- 3) Board members promote the report and its findings within their own organisations and use the findings to inform future interventions to improve food access.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The report follows a comprehensive study to examine food availability and the attitudes and experiences of residents. The study followed three key phases:

- Geographical mapping: Assessment of the location and quality of food outlets in relation to the local population.
- Community audit: An examination of the schemes and facilities that are available to support access to food and which could be used to support future interventions.
- Consulting the community: Assessment of the attitudes, experiences and opinions of residents in relation to food access through a survey and focus groups.

- 3.2 The study found that 77% of Households lived within 500m of a shop with a good availability of food. However availability of fresh fruit and vegetables in some areas was inadequate. Only 57% of households lived within 500m of a shop with a good availability of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- 3.3 There was no correlation between food availability and areas of deprivation or low car ownership. Some areas of deprivation had good food availability such as Windmill Hill whilst some of the areas of lowest availability are the least deprived and have the highest rates of car ownership.
- 3.4 Overall the study identified 3 local centre areas where retail provision could be improved to increase access to healthy food;
- West Bank, Widnes
 - Bechers, Widnes
 - Halton Brook, Runcorn

These areas were identified using the following criteria.

- High deprivation and low car ownership
 - Low availability of fresh fruit and vegetables
 - No alternative shops within walking distance
- 3.5 Halton's town centres of Widnes, Runcorn and Halton Lea have very good availability of food. Residents in the areas immediately surrounding the town centres benefit from this proximity. However those residents who live some distance from the town centres and don't have access to their own transport will pay a premium for their food at a local centre store or will be dependent on public transport to access the shops.
- 3.6 The study found a standard basket of shopping to provide a healthy balanced menu for a family of 2 adults and 2 children could be purchased for an average cost of £54 at a town centre location – whereas the average cost for the same shopping at a local centre store was £69.68 a difference of £15.68. This represents a 29% difference between town and local centre locations.
- 3.7 Overall 69% of universal credit recipients used a means other than their own car such as taxi, bus or walking to reach their main shop. This indicates low car ownership in the borough but also highlights how the cost of taxis or public transport limits the disposable income available to spend on food. Parents with infant children and older people also cited transport as a barrier to accessing sufficient healthy food.
- 3.8 70% of households live within 500m of a takeaway. The majority of takeaways are concentrated in Widnes and Runcorn Town Centres.

The study did not indicate high takeaway usage amongst residents. Only 15% of households use a takeaway once a week and only 4% of households use a takeaway greater than once a week.

- 3.9 Since 2012 there has been a 5 fold increase in Food Bank usage in Runcorn and Widnes. In 2017-18 a total of 5478 adults and children were provided with emergency food aid compared to 1162 in 2012. There was a noticeable spike in demand in 2013-2014 which coincided with the introduction of the benefits sanctions regime and the spare room subsidy. A further spike in 2016-2017 coincided with full implementation of Universal Credit in Halton.
- 3.10 Recipients of emergency food aid must be referred to the Food Banks by a referral partner who will issue a voucher for food aid. Referral partners must specify the referral reason. Analysis of referral reasons reveals that 57% of referrals are benefit related. The next largest referral reason is Low Income accounting for 16% of referrals.
- 3.11 In addition to the emergency food aid provided by food banks it is clear that some household require longer term support accessing sufficient food. Schemes such as the 11 o'clock club run by the Four Estates charity on Halton Brook redistribute surplus food from major caterers and retailers and at the time the report was written they had provided 1585 to 181 families in the Halton Brook area. This indicates residents across Halton would benefit from longer term support to access sufficient affordable food.
- 3.12 Food Poverty should be viewed as a spectrum that ranges from households that would go hungry without emergency food aid to households who have sufficient food to avoid hunger but do not have access to the foods that make up the components of a healthy balanced diet such as fresh fruit and vegetables.
- 3.13 The survey indicated that families on lower incomes frequently had difficulty affording enough food. Families with children were rationing their own meals as a means to ensure there was enough food for their household.
- 3.14 Overall the principle reason for households having insufficient food was lack of money this was cited by 68% of respondents. 21% of universal credit recipients reported they often or sometimes do not have enough money for food. Based on approximately 9,500 universal credit recipients in Halton this suggests as many as 1,900 individuals in Halton sometimes or often do not have enough money for food. 51% of universal credit recipients reported that in the last 12 months they had run out of food and did not have enough money to buy more and the same proportion reported that they had skipped a meal or reduced the size of a meal because they did not have enough food. This would equate to 4,750 individuals.

- 3.15 Overall 21% respondents and 32% of universal credit recipients reported that in the last 12 months they had been hungry because they did not have enough money for food. With regard to universal credit recipients this would equate to approximately 3,166 individuals.
- 3.16 The figures quoted in section 3.14 and 3.15 provide a useful indicator on the potential scale of food poverty in the borough but some caution is required with the figures due to the size of the survey sample not being representative of the population.
- 3.17 60% of universal credit recipients and 42% of respondents overall who had children in the household reported that in the last 12 months they had skipped a meal or reduced the size of their meal to ensure there was enough food for their children.
- 3.18 Unexpectedly, 61% of older people with children living in the household also reported reducing the size of their own meal to ensure there was sufficient food for their children. Because the number of respondents is small the results need to be treated with caution but it does suggest that some older people who still have dependent children at home are having to reduce the amount of food they eat to ensure other people in the household do not go hungry
- 3.19 The survey findings support the following recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Council's future development plans should consider options to improve retail provision in Bechers and West Bank in Widnes and Halton Brook in Runcorn.

Recommendation 2: The Council build on its existing work with partners such as the local housing trusts, CAB and Job Centre plus to provide advice, guidance and support to universal credit recipients to ensure they are maximising their benefit entitlement and also to help recipients avoid the circumstances that may result in a sanction.

Recommendation 3: Whilst the Trussell Trust food banks provide an essential service to those in acute food poverty - the Council and partners should investigate options to facilitate access to alternative surplus food schemes for all Halton residents who require longer term assistance with access to sufficient food. The 11 O'clock club on Halton Brook could be used as a model.

Recommendation 4: The proposed community shop should be supported by the council. The shop should be centrally located to facilitate access for all residents of the borough who require longer term assistance with access to food.

Recommendation 5: Currently 73% of eligible households take up healthy start vouchers. The council and partners should work to further improve this high level of uptake.

Recommendation 6: The Council's future transport plans could consider options to improve access to town centres for parents with infant children, older people and low income households.

Recommendation 7: The existing supplementary planning document on Hot Food Takeaways should be applied in relation to all new applications for change of use to prevent the over concentration and clustering of takeaways.

Recommendation 8: Develop a series of workshops and associated menus and recipe cards on preparing and cooking healthy food on a budget. The workshops should be available to all household in receipt of healthy start vouchers.

3.20 An action plan to address these recommendations has been produced and is set out at appendix 1 to this report. The plan also sets out observations made by departments in response to the report and reflects current and ongoing work relevant to the recommendations. It is acknowledged that some of the actions specified were initiated independently of the Food Access report.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 In general Halton has good availability of food. In most cases an individual's access to food is limited by personal circumstances such as income, transport and mobility rather than the physical location of shops.

4.2 Many of the economic circumstances that have given rise to the current concerns are national in origin. However the recommendations from the report reflect what could be implemented locally by the council and partners to help improve access to healthy and affordable food.

4.3 The Policy implications associated with each of the recommendations will be set out in subsequent detailed reports relating to the implementation of those recommendations

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The financial implications associated with each of the recommendations will be set out in subsequent detailed reports relating to the implementation of those recommendations.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Individuals experiencing chronic food poverty are at a greater risk of malnutrition. This can lead to serious health conditions such low birth weight in infants, inadequate growth and development in children, poor

mental function and a susceptibility to disease due to impaired immune function.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

The actions associated with recommendation 8 will improve food knowledge and awareness

6.3 A Healthy Halton

A diet that is high in fruit and vegetables can help prevent cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Over consumption of foods that are high in fat and sugar along with inadequate exercise can lead to obesity. Obesity is a cause of cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Implementation of the actions associated with recommendation 1 will help improve retail provision in areas with poor food availability.

The actions associated with recommendation 7 will help prevent the over concentration and clustering of takeaway food premises.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

The risks and benefits associated with implementation of each of the recommendations will be considered in subsequent detailed reports relating to the implementation of those recommendations

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The recommendations in this report are intended to improve access to healthy and affordable food for all residents. Specific issues in relation to the implementation of each recommendation will be considered in future detailed reports.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None.

Appendix 1

Food Access Report – Action Plan

	Recommendation	Proposed Action / Comments	Lead Department	Timeline
1	The Council's future development plans should consider options to improve retail provision in Bechers and Westbank in Widnes and Halton Brook in Runcorn.	<p>Halton Local Plan (Draft May 2019) sets out plans for the improvements to the retail facilities in West Bank, Widnes including the development of a new local centre.</p> <p>The Access to Healthy and Affordable Food report will be considered as material information in support of future development applications in areas that the report has identified as having low availability of fresh food.</p>	Planning Policy, Strategy and Development	<p>Current Delivery and Allocations Plan under review – latest draft May 2019</p> <p>Consideration of report as material information will be ongoing in relation to new applications</p>
2	The council build on its existing work with partners such as the local housing trusts, CAB and Job Centre plus to provide advice, guidance and support to universal credit recipients to ensure they are maximising their benefit entitlement and also to help recipients avoid the circumstances that may result in	<p>Feedback from Child and Family Poverty Group was that significant work is already being undertaken by the Council and partners to support low income households and reduce the impact of benefit delays and changes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HBC Discretionary support team provide food parcels to households in urgent need of food. Tesco and 	Benefits. CAB HHT DWP	Current and Ongoing

	<p>a sanction.</p>	<p>Asda are used for this service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• HBC Discretionary support team provide personal budgeting advice to clients referred by DWP• 2017-18 £394 K issued in discretionary housing payments• HHT provide welfare and money advice to tenants• Halton CAB provide comprehensive advice service to UC recipients including advice on applications and on dealing with payment problems and sanctions. <p>It is recognised that many of the factors influencing benefit delays and sanctions are due to national policy measures outside the control of the council. The Government have now introduced some measures that will reduce the “cliff edge” effect of payment delay when moving on to UC – this includes a reduction in time taken to issue first payment and provision for advance payments in the form of a loan. Although concern remains that repayment of loans risks placing claimants in debt and will require the ongoing support of the Council and partners.</p>		
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3	<p>Whilst the Trussell Trust food banks provide an essential service to those in acute food poverty – the council and partners should investigate options to facilitate access to alternative surplus food schemes for all Halton residents who require longer term assistance with access to sufficient food. The 11 O'clock club on Halton Brook could be used as a model.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CO-OP Food Share scheme. 2 Co-op shops in Runcorn providing surplus food Community Health Initiatives on Windmill Hill • Discussions ongoing with Co-Op to provide Grangeway Community Centre with surplus food • Community Development Department and Police have approached Recycling Lives with a view to establishing surplus food distribution scheme in Halton • Tesco Distribution Centre support Night Stop Communities North West • Fare Share make twice weekly deliveries to Halton Veterans association • Community Development team to meet with Fare Share Wirral and Merseyside to discuss extending distribution in Halton 	<p>Community Development Department</p> <p>Established community groups</p>	<p>Current and ongoing</p> <p>Current – in development</p> <p>Current – in development</p> <p>Current and ongoing</p> <p>Current and ongoing</p> <p>July 2019</p>
4	<p>Proposed community shop should be supported by the</p>	<p>Community shop and Onward Homes to open branch of community shop at a</p>	<p>Community Development</p>	<p>£300k capital investment</p>

	<p>Council. The shop should be centrally located to facilitate access for all residents of the borough who require longer term assistance with access to food.</p>	<p>central location at Halton lea in Runcorn. Facility will be open to all eligible Halton residents. The facility will retail food at a discount of up to 70% and will also provide community development initiatives by working with local people to develop life and work skills</p>		<p>secured, planning permission being progressed and aiming for the shop to be open by the end of 2019</p> <p>Connections between Community Shop and Halton partners underway to develop an understanding of the model, referral arrangements & recruitment opportunities</p>
5	<p>Currently 75% of households take up healthy start vouchers. The council and partners should work to improve this level of uptake</p>	<p>Halton currently has the highest uptake of healthy start vouchers in the UK.</p> <p>However it is recognised that those families who become eligible after the birth of a child may not realise they are entitled to claim. HBC Public Health to work on promoting scheme amongst all early years and pre-school settings (both public and private) to ensure take up of the scheme is maximised amongst</p>	<p>Public Health Early Years</p>	<p>August / September 2019</p>

		families who become eligible after the birth of child.		
6	The council's future transport plans could consider options to improve access to town centres for parents with infant children, older people and low income households.	The reports recommendation regarding public transport will be incorporated into the Local Transport Plan for consideration in future allocation of assisted transport budget. However the budget to date for supported bus routes (c £450k) is fully allocated. A limited door to door bus service is currently available for older people.	Transport co-ordination	Current Local Transport Plan runs 2011/12 to 2025/26 but is subject to annual review. March/April 2020
7	The existing supplementary planning document on Hot Food Takeaway should be applied in relation to all new applications for change of use to prevent the over concentration and clustering of takeaways	The existing policy relating to takeaways including over concentration and clustering is to be incorporated into Halton's Local Plan. This will raise the status of the current policy and ensure greater weight is given to the policy objectives during consideration of future development applications.	Planning Policy, Strategy and Development	Current Delivery and Allocations Plan under review – latest draft May 2019
8	Develop a series of workshops and associated menu's and recipe cards on preparing and cooking healthy food on a budget. The workshop should be available to all households in receipt of healthy start vouchers	Children's Centres operate "let get cooking classes" on a rolling programme each term includes use of left overs to prevent unnecessary food waste. The Community Shop proposed for Halton Lea will also provide a comprehensive programme of cooking, menu planning and budgeting courses for residents	Children's Centres Community Development Public Health	Current and ongoing Community shop scheduled to open end of 2019

		<p>based around food available through the shop.</p> <p>Extensive educational resources available on government's Change For Life website. Future public health interventions should look to utilise these existing resources rather than invest in a unique offer to Halton.</p>		<p>Ongoing in response to future initiatives.</p>
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