

Claire Milne Food Poverty Project

The bigger picture – acting locally, thinking nationally

Planning policy in the UK - how local projects can benefit from knowledge of national policies relevant to food poverty.

This workshop will explore the role national government policies - and planning policy in particular - play in shaping the availability and accessibility of healthy affordable food.

Sustain and the Food Poverty Project

The **Food Poverty Project** is working to eradicate inequalities in diet-related ill health. By tackling the underlying causes of food poverty, we aim to ensure that everyone in the UK has access to healthy, affordable food – regardless of their income, age or social exclusion.

The Food Poverty Project coordinates and supports England's only network committed to tackling the injustice of food poverty among the UK's disadvantaged communities. Along with its individual members, the **Food Poverty Network (FPN)** currently consists of some 300 food projects working to improve the nutrition, health and wellbeing of their local communities. The Food Poverty Project provides vital support to these local projects through, for example, a quarterly newsletter, publications, information, events, and the Food Poverty Project database. The Food Poverty Project is developing long term solutions to remove the burden of food poverty from disadvantaged communities.

The Food Poverty Project is part of **Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming**. Sustain advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local levels.

Objectives

Participants will:

- 1) Understand about how national Government policies are relevant to food poverty and tackling food poverty at the local level.
- 2) Understand how linking to national policies relevant to food poverty can increase access to funding and sustainability for your project.
- 3) Understand how national planning guidelines influence the availability and accessibility of healthy affordable food at the local level.
- 4) Learn about other national charities that are campaigning to improve national planning policies.
- 5) Feel motivated to learn more about other national policies relevant to tackling food poverty.

Diet related ill-health costs the NHS some £6 billion every year - little surprise considering four million people in the UK can't obtain a healthy diet. This is an outrage in a country as wealthy and developed as the UK. Food poverty is about wellbeing and social justice, and how food is provided has huge implications for both our local and global environments.

Acting locally, thinking nationally

There exists no one-size-fits all solution to food poverty; as a locally experienced problem it requires locally specific solutions. However, it is central government that determines the enabling environment for these local solutions to food poverty. It is therefore essential that community food projects understand the role national government policies play in shaping their work and how best to influence them. For example, the success of projects working to improve school meals relies heavily on Government policy on catering contracts and nutritional guidelines. This is why Sustain campaigned for the Government to introduce a Bill to ensure healthy school meals, cookery lessons and healthy food skills in schools and an end to junk food advertising to children and to vending machines in schools. Without these national policy changes, local attempts will struggle to succeed.

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Sustainable integrated approaches

What's more by linking the work you are doing to Government policies and targets you can increase your chances of funding and sustainability. Many community food projects start life on a shoe string budget and as a community response to issues that have arisen, or gaps in the local provision of healthy food. As a result projects are often not well placed (in terms of time and resources) to expand their work or integrate into local government policy. For example, with the right know-how projects could potentially get their work included in Local Area Agreements and similar work plans allowing them to be commissioned for their services by the public sector. In doing so they would have more long term, secured funding and be able to better demonstrate the public health benefits of these community projects, the benefit of which we have all been aware of for years! What's more, reaching out within the community to develop the broadest and most effective partnerships will enable projects to broaden and strengthen community ownership, embed solutions within local government policy and develop sustainability in the long term.

Food Poverty

Food poverty is now well documented¹ and can be defined as "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so".²

Access to healthy food

People's access to healthy food is influenced by four main factors:

Accessibility – people's physical access to healthy food, which tends to be determined by the number and types of local shops and an individual's ability to reach them.

Availability – people's opportunities to purchase healthy food, which tends to be determined by the type of food stocked by local shops.

Affordability – people's ability to afford a healthy diet. In 2004, 1 in 5 (11.3 million) people in the UK were living in poverty³ and it would cost the 6.7 million people on benefits in the UK 40-50% of their income to obtain a 'healthy' diet'.⁴

Awareness – People's lack of knowledge, awareness or skills to cook healthy meals, which tends to be determined by government and media attitudes and approaches to healthy and unhealthy food.

Extent of the problem

Healthy food is a human right and the indignity of food poverty is inexcusable in a country as wealthy and developed as the UK. Furthermore, the consequences of a poor diet are not only a threat to our nation's health, but to our nation's economy: at a time when the Department of Health is facing financial crisis, diet related ill-health is costing the NHS some £6 billion every year. This is more than double that of tobacco use and twice the amount due to transport accidents. It is also responsible for about 10% of deaths in the UK⁵. This is little surprise when you consider that some four million people in the UK can't obtain a healthy diet - an outrage in a country as wealthy and developed as ours.

Those who are disadvantaged in society and those who are poorest are at greatest risk of ill-health and have the lowest intakes of fruit and vegetables⁶.

Identifying the problem: food mapping

There exists no one-size-fits all solution to food poverty: as a locally experienced problem it requires locally specific solutions. Furthermore, the key to ensuring that local government is *able* to prioritise food poverty, and to ensuring involvement from all relevant stakeholders, is collecting hard evidence of the problem and demonstrate how solving it would serve to meet various local government targets.

¹ See Dowler, E. (2001) *Poverty Bites*. London: Child Poverty Action Group; Leather, S. (1996) *Making of modern malnutrition: An overview of food poverty in the UK*. London: The Caroline Walker Trust; Watson, A.(2002) *Hunger from the Inside: the experience of food poverty in the UK*. Sustain, London; Hitchman, C. et al.(2002) *Inconvenience food: The struggle to eat well on a low income*. London: Demos.

² Riches, G. (1996) *Hunger, food security and welfare policies: Issues and debates in first world societies*, paper presented to Nutrition Society Summer Meeting June 1996.

³ Defined as an income below 60% of the national average
ONS 2004/05

⁴ Family Budget Unit 2001

⁵ Rayner, M (2005) *The burden of food-related ill health in the UK*. Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health

⁶ Department of Health. (1998) *Nutritional Aspects of Development Cancer*. 48. London, The Stationary Office.

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Food mapping is a simple and comprehensive way of gathering this necessary evidence. Food mapping can and should be both quantitative and qualitative. Local people's lived experiences and opinions must be central to determining the changes needed within a community. However, deliberately or accidentally, this is often overlooked in the formal decision making process, but community food mapping seeks to address this.

Community food mapping (CFM) takes the approach that local people are experts on their own lives, so their expertise should be the starting point for any changes that are made. It uses qualitative rather than quantitative information and involves a range of participants, including policy-makers, community workers and, importantly, social excluded groups.

The Food Poverty Project has therefore begun to compile a UK-wide catalogue of food mapping work. This information will be used to persuade Government that it must ensure food mapping takes place across the board throughout the UK, as its first step to tackling food poverty and diet-related ill health.

Activity – Government policies relevant to tackling food poverty

National planning guidelines

'Food poverty' is undoubtedly at its worst in 'food deserts' - areas where people's health and wellbeing is severely disadvantaged by where they live because it is almost impossible to buy healthy food at reasonable prices without private transport⁷. Although this term has been contested in academic literature⁸ and in recent research challenging its impact on health⁹, food deserts do remain a reality for many communities.

'Planning Policy Statement 6' (PPS6) sets out the Government's current policy on planning. Over time planning policy has promoted out and edge of town retail development, resulting in almost all supermarkets locating outside town centres, and therefore out of the reach of those without private transport. As a result - and receiving vast media coverage - small shops and markets in town centres have been forced to close at alarming rates due to the competition from the ever growing number of supermarkets, a phenomena now known as Ghost Town Britain.

Currently however town-centre development is also being promoted however, this is now resulting in supermarkets' aggressive entry into the convenience sector which is having an extremely detrimental effect on disadvantaged consumers' health because by catering for the demand for convenience by cash-rich, time-poor consumers, these convenience superstores do not offer a full range of products. Instead shelf space tends to be dominated by high-value, processed convenience foods. Not only are disadvantaged consumers who are often time and cash poor are often unable to afford to do the majority of their shopping at these more expensive convenience superstores¹⁰, but they are also unable to get to cheaper and/or healthier shops because these may have been pushed out of the market by competition from the convenience superstores.

Additionally PPS6 also determines, for example the number of fast food take aways an area has. This clearly has serious implications for the health and wellbeing of the local community.

What's more, PPS6 is not legally binding and only exists as guidelines which means that, whilst the local community is supposed to be consulted, Local Authorities are often steamrolled into making decisions not in the best interests of the community. What's more,

Supermarkets are able to use Section 106 – 'planning gain' – to get their own way in planning applications. Section 106 allows for businesses to pay compensation for losses to the community resulting from their development. This is being used by supermarkets to steamroll cash strapped Local Authorities into making decisions not necessarily in the best interests of the local community. For example, an extra out of town Sainsburys was agreed to because the supermarket agreed to pay for bus station development.

Planners are simply not aware of the impact that the decisions they make have on the health and wellbeing of local communities. We need to work together to raise this awareness among them.

⁷ Wrigley, N. (2002) "Food deserts" in *British Cities: Policy Context and Research Priorities*. Urban Studies, 39, 11, 2029-2040.

⁸ e.g. Cummins, S. and MacIntyre, S. (2002) "Food deserts" – evidence and assumption in health policy making. *BMJ*, 325, 436-8.

⁹ e.g. Cummins, S. et al (2005) *Large scale food retailing as an intervention for diet and health: quasi-experimental evaluation of a natural experiment*. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 59, 1035-40.

¹⁰ Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) 'Bringing Britain Together', 1998

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Competition Commission Inquiry into the Grocery Market

We currently have an amazing opportunity to influence the Government's planning policy. Thanks in large part to demands from the Food Poverty Project, Friends of the Earth (FoE) and other voluntary organisations, the Government has finally agreed to investigate the impact supermarkets are having on UK consumers. The Government announced in May that the Competition Commission (CC) will be carrying out a Government Inquiry into the grocery retail market based on evidence from various stakeholders, including the Food Poverty Project.

The Inquiry has been agreed to because supermarkets stand accused of, among other things:

- 1) Manipulating local planning policies (which prevent local communities from deciding on retail development in their area).
- 2) Unfair pricing strategies (including higher prices being charged in convenience stores, making food more expensive for disadvantaged communities reliant on small shops).
- 3) Building up significant land banks (buying and holding – rather than developing – land for future development or use, which prevents other retailers from setting up shop).

The CC has so far treated consumers as a homogenous group without attending to the specific problems faced by disadvantaged consumers. For example referring to consumers' choice of local shops in terms of driving distances – ignoring the fact that, for example, nearly half of all Londoners have no car.

The CC has now agreed to consult The Food Poverty Project so as to ensure that the voices of disadvantaged communities are heard – we will be fighting hard to ensure this amounts to more than mere lip service.

For the latest information, please visit: www.tescopoly.org or www.competition-commission.org.uk or

Activity – How is national planning policy affecting your community's access to healthy affordable food?

Changes are needed to national planning policy?

The Food Poverty Project Attached is currently working alongside other organisations, retailers and planning experts to unpick the exact changes necessary. The Food Poverty Project's submission to the Competition Commission which details some of the changes needed to current planning policy.

Among other things the Government must ensure that:

- PPS6 becomes legally binding to prevent local authorities being steamrolled by commercial interests
- Disadvantaged communities are meaningfully consulted and vested with sufficient powers to shape retail development in their community.
- Local Authorities conduct community food mapping to identify areas without adequate access to healthy affordable food.
- Small shops and markets in town centres are protected.

Watch this space to find out how you can help to ensure Government makes these and other necessary changes happen.

What can you do now?

- 1) Contact Planners at your Local Authority and tell them about how planning is impacting on the health and wellbeing of your community.
- 2) Fill in the Tescopoly action card and send it to your MP and the Competition Commission to make sure it protects the small shops and high streets vital to the health and well being of disadvantaged communities.