

Food Access in Oxford: a case study of Cutteslowe

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Background

Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire Trading Standards' award winning food poverty mapping work culminated with the provision of a shopping bus for older people in Cutteslowe. A food action group was set up involving Oxfordshire County Council Trading Standards, Sure Start, East Oxford Healthy Living Initiative, Oxford City and Cherwell Vale Primary Care Trusts. These stakeholders wanted to establish where 'food poverty' existed in the County by means of mapping, and if so, what impact this was having on the local residents.

Mapping

Access to food in the area was mapped using Food Access Radar Tools. Using this tool, Cutteslowe was identified as a potentially 'food access poor' area. The following are some socioeconomic statistics from the area:

- 21% of people have access to a car
- 22% of the population are elderly
- 4.6% of the population are income deprived
- 10.3% the population are unpaid carers.

The distance to the nearest food shop for residents living in the area is 1.8km away. The public transport on the major roads around Cutteslowe is good but the service inside the area is poor. The group identified as being most likely to have difficulty accessing food are older adults. Further investigation was conducted to find out the extent of problems with food access:

1. An informal group discussion about food access, attitudes and cost of a particular basket with Cutteslowe Seniors.
2. A questionnaire relating to the basket of food.
3. A 3 day food diary.

This investigation showed that all of the older people (seniors), shopped at the Supermarket but that access was still an issue. The Food Action Group suggested a host of possible options to the seniors in terms of addressing these issues. However, despite the options proposed, the seniors were insistent on going to the shops themselves. The social aspect of the weekly shopping trip was highlighted as their motivation.

Solutions

A minibus was organised to bring the seniors to the local Sainsbury's on a weekly basis. It picked them up from a central point and dropped them back at their homes for the cost of £1. The project has been very effective.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

Workshop participants were asked to contemplate the following case study and to consult with the person next to them about potential responses.

Imagine you are a 70 year old elderly person, living on your own, without access to a car. The local supermarket is not accessible by foot and there is a very infrequent bus service to the supermarket. How would you get to the supermarket?

Responses

- Check if the store has a delivery service
- Bulk buy
- Check if there are any local community transport options available i.e. taxi sharing scheme
- Food sharing with neighbours
- Growing your own food

Participants shared their experiences of working on food mapping projects:

- Mary Gilson from Hastings and Rother PCT spoke about a food mapping exercise she undertook looking at the availability of foods in the locality and identifying food desert areas.
- Anne Mihe from FSA Scotland referred to a sentinel mapping study of healthy food retailing in Scotland. The objective of the research was to provide an independent and systematic evaluation of access in terms of availability and affordability of a selected range of food items, thus providing information to improve understanding of any structural constraints or limitations that might make it difficult to achieve a healthy diet.

The following are some conclusions from the general discussion which took place between participants at the workshop.

- There is no such thing as a 'one size fits all' approach to addressing food access issues. Interventions need to be tailored to the needs and the demographics of the local community
- It is difficult to measure success in these types of projects as the outcomes are often qualitative rather than quantitative. This can make it difficult to attract funding.
- It is important to try and engage with retailers in terms of food access issues. It was recommended to approach those at a senior level within the retail organisation and to approach suggesting a partnership opportunity rather than a funding opportunity.
- Purchasing power is very important to retailers and could be used as a negotiating tool.
- Access to transport is a huge issue for the elderly and one of the main contributing factors to accessing a healthy, affordable food.
- The weekly shopping trip is considered a very important social occasion for the elderly.
- Elderly people need to be assertive about their needs and use their collective voice.