



Fair access to food in Exeter

Food Exeter, final report, June 2019

Fair access to food in Exeter - the way forward

Food Poverty is on the rise in Exeter. Over the last two years there has been a 33% increase in demand for food parcels for children at Exeter Food Bank (EFB). Overall there has been a 25% increase in demand for food parcels from EFB over the last 2 years. EFB have been supplying on average 106 food parcels a week. In conjunction with these food poverty statistics, health indicators related to diet are also concerning. Almost 30% of children at age 10-11, and more than half of adults, are overweight or obese. Over a third of adults are not eating the recommended 'five a day' of fruit and veg and deprived Exeter wards host the highest density of fast food outlets (statistics available from Public Health Devon – Devon Food Poverty Dashboard 2018).

Strategic and community-based action is required to address food poverty in Exeter. Community-based services providing food, such as community cafes and social food enterprises that improve access to healthy, local food and food sharing, together with food education and reskilling, could all help in ameliorating the impacts of food poverty. These suggested community-based initiatives for positive action on food poverty require council support in order to establish sustainable, reliable services. However, for services and enterprises to be successful in addressing food poverty in Exeter, an alliance of partners working in this field, including Exeter City Council, needs to be formed so that best practices are shared and steps towards positive change can be established and implemented. By boosting preventive steps on food poverty and household food insecurity, fewer Exeter residents will experience crisis circumstances, which will not only support individuals but will also improve the wider Exeter community and economy.



“Food poverty creates detrimental impacts on health, mental health and ability to function within mainstream socio-economic systems. Both benefit issues and precarious employment can switch someone experiencing low income to become a vulnerable adult who requires additional services. These issues can trigger mental and general ill health, precarious accommodation, homelessness and food poverty.”

Rebecca Sandover, University of Exeter and Food Exeter trustee

"I lost my job and had no pay out at all. I had no money to travel to an interview for a new job. There is a 2-3 week gap before receiving benefits and our only income is child benefit and child tax allowance. I had easy access to the foodbank but it makes me feel horrible – I don't want to have to use it."

Foodbank interviewee

Our challenges and learning

It has been difficult to involve people with lived experience in our work to date. We had hoped that key community organisations could facilitate some of their service users to participate, but it seems that user involvement is not sufficiently developed or that we have not yet identified the agencies who could work with us on this. We recognised the need for some financial support for staff time to work on this and have been successful in raising funds to develop an experts by experience focused programme, which is linked to our community food hubs development work in Exeter.

We also struggled to build involvement from the local authorities, especially Exeter City Council and health authorities. A city councillor has very recently joined the Food Exeter Steering Group and had some success in encouraging her colleagues to attend the Summit. We aim to get more council officer involvement in the finalising of the Action Plan and the expanded Alliance.

Our key achievements and impact

Over the last 12 months we have been working to create a greater collective understanding of food poverty in Exeter and to develop a coordinated partnership response to tackling food poverty in the city. A key part of this process has been to develop an evidence base on what food poverty looks like in Exeter. We collaboratively gathered evidence with our partners by:

- Quick online survey for professionals for initial scoping of food poverty issues
- Interviews with Foodbank users
- Investigation of data indicative of food poverty in the city
- Working with Public Health to produce the Food Poverty Dashboard
- Mapping of existing food support and creation of a Google map
- *Fair Access to Food* workshop held in July 2018
- *Exeter Food Poverty Summit* in November 2018.

The Food Power project has enabled us to identify Exeter organisations willing to take steps to address food poverty issues in Exeter. This has enabled us to establish an emerging Food Poverty alliance. It also highlighted the need to engage with and learn from experts by experience in Exeter.

Our next steps

An outcome from our Food Power project has led us to establish a new project for Food Exeter to support the development of a number of Community Food Hubs in the city which may include cooking, buying, eating and growing together, all aimed at reducing food poverty and food insecurity, increasing community cohesion, and providing more access to nutritious food. This project will be led by Food Exeter working in partnership with existing community projects that already provide food-related activities. As part of this project we will also engage with people with lived experiences of food poverty through our Food Power funded experts by experience project in order to create grounded and effective action on food poverty.