



## Establishing a food poverty forum for Northern Ireland Food Forum Northern Ireland, final report, July 2019

### Bringing people together from across NI

Belfast Food Network discovered that there were two active food poverty networks in Northern Ireland. The All Ireland Food Poverty Network for statutory bodies and our Belfast based Food Poverty Working Group, which is a cross-sectorial group delivering a collaborative response to food poverty.

We asked frontline initiatives how we could add value to their work and most groups asked for greater connectivity with other groups.

As a result, we set up the Food Forum NI to provide a platform for the plethora of organisations across Northern Ireland which are currently tackling food poverty in isolation. Supported by Food Power, we are enabling greater collaboration across these diverse groups.

The Forum has agreed to work on the following as a matter of urgency: workout the true cost of welfare reform to the voluntary sector, including the cost of running food banks, value of food redistributed, advice/community sectors, mitigation package and social supermarkets. The figure will be worked out annually per capita from the initiation of the mitigation package. The figure will be used to lobby for budget reallocation, review of welfare reform and a statutory food strategy.

**“We are delighted to have the opportunity to share our learning across the province. The Food Forum NI is developing slowly in a very difficult climate, we are working hard to join up disparate voices and look forward to developing a plan that will help people affected by food poverty.”**

Liz Mitchell  
Chair, Belfast Food Network



## Our challenges and learning

Resource-related issues affect all of the current Food Forum members. It seems that most of the front line organisations are firefighting on minimal resources and are predominantly interested in their 'own patch', focusing on day-day issues, with little time for strategic thought or action. This means that it is difficult for members to attend regular meetings. Whilst NI is geographically small with 1.8 million people, it operates within an extremely diverse and convoluted system. Many activities are duplicated across sectors, townships and even organisations. The group is considering how to tackle these disparities.

## Our next steps

We hope to build the network over the next year by identifying frontline initiatives that work directly with experts by experience, as this is a new platform we are in the process of ensuring the right people are round the table.

Once the true cost of welfare reform is agreed, the Forum will develop a campaign that will be delivered in the New Year. It is hoped that the campaign will encourage greater involvement by experts by experience.

**“The Food Forum NI has the potential to provide a collective voice for third sector in Northern Ireland in deeply unsettled times, we look forward to developing a collaborative food poverty plan that will have a real impact on those affected by food poverty in the province.”**

David McAuley, Trussell Trust

## Our key achievements and impact

- Belfast Food Network has set up Northern Ireland's first third sector 'Food Forum NI' to develop a more cohesive voice for the sector.
- Food Forum NI provides a platform for collaborative working on food poverty across the province, whilst still in its infancy the Forum is developing a campaign to ring fence public funds to strategically tackle food poverty.
- We hope the Forum will become a leading body in the fight to eradicate food poverty.
- The Food Forum has enabled a disparate group of frontline initiatives to meet, share info, agree common issues and provide a platform to develop a more cohesive voice for the sector.
- As far as we are aware the Food Forum is the only platform for frontline initiatives to meet and collaborate.