

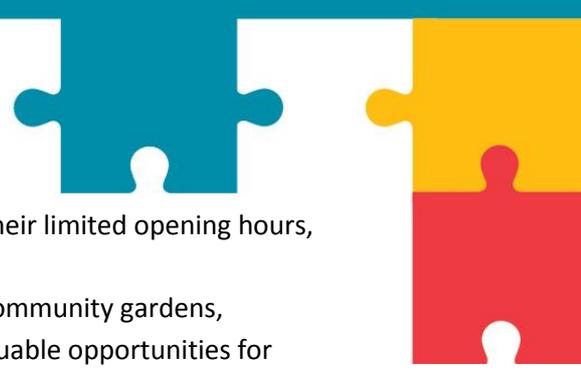
Research into Food Insecurity in Fife – briefing note

Background

The research was commissioned by Fife Health and Wellbeing Alliance to build a better understanding of food insecurity in Fife, and the range of initiatives in place to tackle it, in order to help inform the development of coherent policy on food insecurity in Fife. The research was carried out by Iconic consulting and published in August 2017.

Key findings

- Household food insecurity is defined as “the inability of one or more members of a household to consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food that is useful for health, in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that they will be able to do so”.
- The research estimates that at least 24,300 adults (16+) in Fife could be living in food insecure households. The actual numbers may in fact be higher, as approximately 45,400 people (adults and children) are income deprived in Fife.
- There is an inextricable link between household food insecurity and income-related issues including changes to the welfare system, rising living costs, increasing food and energy costs, low wages, and job insecurity. An increase in food insecurity is expected with the rollout of Universal Credit in Fife.
- Other factors that contribute to household food insecurity include limited availability of and access to retailers selling affordable, nutritious food; access to transport; access to cooking, storage and preparation facilities; and appropriate skills and knowledge relating to nutrition and the preparation of meals.
- As well as highlighting income deprivation, SIMD data illustrates that parts of Fife suffer from relatively poor access to services (including a retail centre).
- Food insecurity is personal and variable in nature; but some groups are more at risk of food insecurity than others. These largely mirror the key groups at risk of health inequalities, identified in Fife’s health inequalities strategy.
- Household food insecurity has a detrimental impact on health: poor diet is a risk factor for obesity, cancer, coronary heart disease and diabetes. However, some stakeholders and providers included in the study primarily see services as alleviating hunger rather than addressing health inequalities.
- There are eight foodbanks in Fife with outlets spread across 14 communities, and a range of other services and groups which provide food parcels in emergency situations. Due to different operating models and data recording mechanisms, it was difficult to compare statistics on foodbank usage precisely. The study estimates that Fife foodbanks provided approximately 12,100 food parcels to 22,300 adults and children in 2016 (although note that these figures include repeat users). However, international evidence indicates that only 20-30% of people who are food insecure visit foodbanks.
- Efforts to widen access to emergency food aid have included help with transport costs and collaboration with local partner organisations acting as foodbank outlets. These approaches tend to be developed on a local basis so vary across Fife.
- The research identified 22 community cafés operated by 18 organisations. Not all of those who use them may be experiencing household food insecurity; social interaction is the primary purpose of some community cafés. While the numbers using community



cafés were relatively small, this was at least in part due to their limited opening hours, and users' experiences were generally very positive.

- The study also identified 14 community growing projects (community gardens, allotments, and orchards) in Fife. Some of these provide valuable opportunities for volunteering, distribution of produce free or at low cost, community meals, advice and training.
- Existing services were well regarded by local people, although people with direct experience of household food insecurity had limited involvement in decision making. Gaps were identified in the reach and the number of people engaged. Most of the services reviewed were reliant on the time and goodwill of volunteers and the continued supply of food donations.
- Foodbanks have made efforts to ensure the nutritional content of food parcels, but the quality of food donated is variable. The research found variation in the degree to which foodbanks users were able to exercise choice or express preferences about the content of parcels.
- The Fife Community Food Project and its Food Champions training play a unique role in supporting and linking food initiatives in Fife.

Points to consider in developing food insecurity policy and practice in Fife

- Income-related issues should continue to be the main focus of approaches to combat household food insecurity in Fife, but approaches should also seek to address the other factors identified that contribute to household food insecurity, i.e. limited availability of and access to retailers selling affordable, nutritious food; access to transport; access to cooking, storage and preparation facilities; and appropriate skills and knowledge relating to nutrition and the preparation of meals.
- Overall, food initiatives in Fife contribute to reducing health inequalities. However, the link between household food insecurity and health inequalities should be more widely understood and should inform a more explicit focus on early intervention. Services should also consider the impact of food insecurity on the ability of people living with chronic conditions to manage their condition.
- Data about food insecurity is not currently gathered. Future evidence from the Scottish Health Survey will provide data on household food insecurity in Fife and across Scotland. It may also be worth considering how to routinely gather local information on the nature and extent of household food insecurity within Fife. This would put Fife at the forefront of evidence gathering in Scotland and could help inform future policy and practice.
- Work is needed to address inconsistencies and gaps in provision of services that mitigate food insecurity. In considering creative approaches to the issue, Fife should learn from good practice elsewhere (e.g. low-cost food outlets).
- In the longer term, increasing and scaling up initiatives such as growing projects, advice and practical cookery courses, and the development of community food hubs would align with national policy and the recommendations of the Dignity report.
- The Fife Community Food Project could in future play a key part in tackling household food insecurity, with a central coordinating role, and as provider of specialist advice and assistance.