

I am writing to you from Conwy Food Partnership, regarding the Access to Food Inquiry being held on 2nd February. I am not attending the session, however I'd like to submit some written evidence, please see below:

Barriers

I reached out to our county food support initiatives and had the following response: "Those who are unable to work (due to health issues) but are not yet of pensionable age seem to be chronically short of funds, more support is needed to enable part time work without significant loss of benefits. We have about 10 calls a month from people who have unexpected need, usually this is caused by errors in UC or delays in benefit payments. Many callers literally have no money at all and are expected to wait several weeks for financial support. They then get into debt and so even when payments start, they are constantly in difficulty because of debts accrued. This makes sustainable strategies impossible to establish and a chronic cycle ensues."

It is often difficult for volunteers running food poverty initiatives to think about more sustainable approaches as they are low on capacity and just trying to meet an immediate need. Promoting cash-first approaches and creating a system where receiving a food parcel is a real last resort, and something that is used to support somebody *while* they obtain financial help, rather than a cycle that they end up stuck in, is something that is really essential. Our Welfare Rights team often get calls from families who are a few days away from having their benefits paid in, but just do not have enough money to last that few days. Why are benefits not enough to last for the timeframe that they're intended to, why are there delays, and is there anything in place to bring payments forward in emergency situations, to prevent them falling into food poverty? These are all things that should be considered when looking at how to tackle food poverty in a preventative way.

Good practice

Abergele District Foodbank, part of the Trussell Trust, operates a foodbank, a community shop and 'The Hive' – a support hub where different agencies come in to give direct advice to clients around benefit entitlement, housing, financial advice, etc. Since they've started running the community shop, they've been able to utilise the Hive to help service users move from the foodbank and start using the community shop, where users use a little for the items that they pick up. Not only does the advice that they receive help service users to address issues in their lives, it also means that they move away from relying on emergency

food aid and into better supporting themselves. We have found that in many cases where people are able to pay a little, they want to, in order to feel like they're giving something back – having the option to do so helps preserve the dignity of those individuals. It would be great to have more models like this, but the challenge at local level is getting groups to come around to the idea that this is achievable, and supporting them to diversify their operation – something that isn't always achievable to groups that don't have paid staff.

Sustainability

Emergency Food Aid funding is really helpful, but our county foodbanks have come to rely on it, and most end up just spending it on food and essential items, and then needing more a few weeks later. The grant criteria in its current form allows for this, could there be another funding round, or specification of a percentage of the Emergency Food Aid funding, that is just for sustainable projects, e.g. community kitchens, social supermarkets, wrap-around support drives. This could be done at a local level, but would work better and face less resistance if it was backed nationally. This would strike a balance between still offering emergency food support for those that need it, but also encouraging groups to think more sustainably. More support and guidance for groups that want to transition from a food bank into a food pantry/social supermarket (paid model) would also help us to give out funding in this way.

Advocacy for more land for community growing (something that is also difficult to achieve at a local level) would be appreciated too. Larger community growing spaces would mean that more fresh, locally grown food was available for little to no cost, they would also create outdoor opportunities and promote community cohesion.

Many thanks in advance.

Cofion cynnes / Kind regards

Liz

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Lles Cymunedau / Community Wellbeing

Gwasanaethau Integredig Oedolion a Chymuned / Integrated Adult and Community Services

Gwasanaethau Gofal Cymdeithasol ac Addysg / Social Care & Education Services

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol CONWY County Borough Council