



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

22ND JUNE 2022

FOOD RESILIENCE REPORT

REPORT OF DIRECTOR - PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION, AND COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH CLLR. ROBERT HARRIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an opportunity to review the support offered to residents who are experiencing food poverty, the work undertaken with partners to develop a strategic approach to food security and the progress made towards achieving a Sustainable Food Places Bronze Award plus plans for further development.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Cabinet note the content of the report.
- 2.2 Continues its support for developing Rhondda Cynon Taf as a 'Sustainable Food Place'.
- 2.3 Approves the submission of an expression of interest for a Sustainable Food Place Bronze Award.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food remains a challenge for poorer households across the County as in other areas of Wales. The [Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019](#) records that Rhondda Cynon Taf has the third highest lower super output areas (LSOAs) ranked in the 50% most deprived LSOAs in Wales. It is important therefore that we continue to work with partners to provide support to those who need it and work collaboratively to provide more resilience over the longer term.

- 3.2 It is widely accepted that the UK is currently experiencing the worst cost of living crisis for decades and research by academics at Cardiff University Business School led by Professor Huw Dixon and by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (UK Poverty Report 2021) indicates that poorer households will be more deeply affected as they spend a higher percentage of their income on food and energy costs than those in wealthier households. Evidence suggests that work is no longer a route out of poverty for many and over 50% of households in poverty in Wales have an adult that is working full-time. Just over 20% of employed people in RCT are not paid the Living Wage Foundation's 'Living Wage' (2018) making them more vulnerable to food poverty.
- 3.3 The Council and its partners are working to reduce pressures on households in the short-term while working towards a longer-term plan to improve resilience through the Sustainable Food Places (SFP) programme that aims to work across all aspects of the food system to solve social, environmental, and economic issues.
- 3.4 Achieving an SFP Bronze Award, for which an expression of interest has been submitted by January 2023, will evidence how the Council is:
- Establishing a broad, representative and dynamic local food partnership.
 - Building public awareness, active food citizenship and a local good food movement.
 - Tackling food poverty and diet related ill-health and increasing access to affordable healthy food.
 - Creating a vibrant, prosperous and diverse sustainable food economy.
 - Transforming catering and procurement and revitalising local and sustainable food supply chains.
 - Tackling the climate and nature emergency through sustainable food and farming and an end to food waste.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Support to access food formed an important part of the resident response during the Covid pandemic with the Council working with Welsh Government to identify those on the Shielded Patients List (SPL) who had no friends, family or support network to rely on for food shopping and were unable to book online shopping. At the height of Lockdown 1,653 SPL residents received weekly Welsh Government food parcels.
- 4.2 Over 80,000 community meals were successfully delivered during the pandemic to some of our most vulnerable citizens in our community, together with delivery of over 637 meals a week to shielding individuals within the County.
- 4.3 To support people with dietary requirements and people that required emergency food parcels, the Council established a Food Distribution Centre

which provided and/or delivered a total of 5,785 food parcels between 13th April and 26th August 2020.

- 4.4 In addition to the above, 32 deliveries were made to local Food Banks amounting to £14,951 of food products during the same time-period. The use of the Council's procurement team to source specific food products was identified as a particular benefit when certain food products were difficult to buy and consequently donations of these by the public reduced, affecting the ability of some local foodbanks to provide the boxes of products that would enable recipients to make suitable meals.
- 4.5 The infrastructure established during the pandemic to support residents remains in place and requests for food-related support through the Community Resilience Hubs have continued since the end of Lockdown although at a greatly reduced rate. 243 resident requests for support were received and responded to in 2021/22, of which 180 were for emergency food parcels, 9 for Meals on Wheels support, and 123 for support with shopping. (Some residents required more than one support option, for example an emergency food parcel and support to do shopping).
- 4.6 The focus on food support and the challenges facing foodbanks during the pandemic resulted in a Community Growing Solutions Network event facilitated by Interlink in July 2020 which was attended by a broad range of organisations including Council staff. It was agreed that there was a need to develop a more strategic approach to food poverty including the establishment of a Food Prosperity Network and a Food Response Pathway that have been successful in some other areas and which provides a more sustainable way ahead.
- 4.7 The support provided for foodbanks and community food organisations outlined below has been developed alongside this longer-term approach and each element forms an essential part of the Council's plan to improve food resilience.

5. SUPPORT FOR FOOD BANKS AND COMMUNITY FOOD ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 In October 2020 the Council Leader announced £10,000 of funding to support RCT foodbanks. In consultation with the four main Foodbanks, it was felt that the funds could also go a long way to support community food groups. A simple online application process was quickly established, in line with other RCTCBC Community Support Grant Schemes and all known food providers within our communities were alerted to the grant availability. The fund was boosted by a further £10,000 from Trivallis who had successfully applied for funding from the Welsh Procurement Alliance. Applications of up to £500 could be made up to 3 times in a year.
- 5.2 20 community organisations accessed this fund in 2021/22, 14 of whom made multiple applications. Each group completed a monitoring form identifying

number of beneficiaries and volunteers involved in their programme. In total 806 people/families benefitted from their support and 85 volunteers were involved in the work.

- 5.3 The Food Support Fund has been an efficient way to support residents with food security. It has been greatly appreciated by community groups and residents alike. Community groups have particularly appreciated the ease and speed of accessing the grant and being able to claim funding up front. The approach taken fits in well with the Neighbourhood Network and Community Resilience Hub model where we are building capacity and supporting communities to help themselves. For a relatively modest investment we have been able to directly support a huge number of residents which has eased pressure on Foodbanks. Examples of some of the projects supported include:
- Bonding Through Real Action - Food bags provided much needed support for families and individuals through the half term holiday. 50 bags of fresh fruit, vegetables and unperishable items were provided to families/individuals on the Bryntirion Estate.
 - Cynon Valleys Organic Adventures - The money was used to purchase seeds and compost/soil to grow vegetables for the community. A wide range of vegetables were planted and the food was distributed to community members who came into the project for a warm drink, a chat and to pick their own vegetables.
 - Newydd HAPI Project - Newydd ran a Christmas Hamper project for tenants and the wider community. Over 40 hampers were delivered to individuals and families going through financial difficulties over the festive period. Each hamper included ingredients for meals to last 7 days (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) as well as recipe cards and bespoke video guides on how to make the meals.
- 5.4 In April 2022 an additional £22,000 was allocated to the Food Support Fund by the Council from the Welsh Government's Household Support Fund. This will continue to provide much-needed funds for community food organisations to support residents at a time when the cost-of-living crisis is impacting more families.
- 5.5 The Council has also allocated £28,000 from the Household Support fund to the 4 main local foodbanks to meet the increased demand for their services. The support provided by the Council's Procurement service remains in place and bulk orders continue to be made on behalf of foodbanks.
- 5.6 Foodbanks and other community organisations are also provided with period dignity products from the Council's allocation under the Welsh Government's Period Dignity Grant.

- 5.7 Other forms of support have also been provided, for example, the Council refurbished the former Riverside Day Centre and it was transferred over through the Council's Community Asset Transfer programme to Pontypridd Foodbank on favourable lease conditions to meet their need to find a permanent location to support residents in the local area.
- 5.8 At the peak of the lockdown period, the Council had 25 school-based hubs operating, including 4 special schools and 2 PRUS with over 200 vulnerable children accessing the hubs on a daily basis. All children accessing the hubs had a free lunch and breakfast provided along with transport where that was identified as a barrier to access provision.
- 5.9 Free breakfast provision was reinstated early to support pupils in our primary schools for those in need and assisted our communities and parents/carers to get back to work.
- 5.10 In addition the Council ran a School Holiday Enrichment Programme in a range of 15 mainstream and special school settings over the summer holiday period of 2021 securing a grant of over £150k to deliver the programme and the Council funded a further summer provision in an additional mainstream setting. The SHEP programme provided a safe, supervised place for pupils to socialise with one another, receive a nutritious breakfast and lunch and participate in sports, education and craft activities. This scheme has been particularly important for our vulnerable children and their families as we continue to support our Communities through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5.11 Big Bocs Bwyd is another example of a successful community project. It is a project based in 9 of our schools (with a 10th coming on board this summer) aimed at ensuring that children and their families have access to food on a 'pay as you feel' basis. This ensures that some income can be generated by the project to reinvest in the Big Bocs Bwyd but also where parents may be unable to afford full price products, they can access these at a reduced or no cost basis. The Big Bocs Bwyd unit is a refurbished storage container fitted with shelving and fridges to create a 'shop front' with a separate smaller container used to store produce. The schools source food surplus from Fareshare Cymru and through local shops and supermarkets. They are also linking with organisations such as allotment societies and growing their own produce on school site. The children of the schools are actively involved in the Big Bocs Bwyd and growing elements with explicit links to the 4 purposes of the Curriculum for Wales.
- 5.12 Through pooling together a number of external grants, Council funds and the contribution from Trivallis, food banks and other community food organisations/initiatives were provided with direct funding of just over £80,000 worth of capital and revenue funding in 2021/22. Additional external funding has been made available for 2022/23 with the result that there will be £206,402 (£154,357 revenue, £52,045 capital) of direct funding to invest in

immediate solutions to resident needs and to further develop the longer-term approach to developing RCT as a Sustainable Food Place.

6. SUSTAINABLE FOOD PLACES

- 6.1 Alongside the developments highlighted above, the Council applied in December 2020, to Sustainable Food Places for a Development Grant to begin the conversations with key partners and communities and to establish the RCT Food Network. In January 2021, the Council was chosen as one of just four successful applicants across Wales. The Development Grant was deliverable within 6 months and its objectives have been achieved.
- 6.2 In May 2021 a virtual event on Zoom was arranged and facilitated by Interlink. 82 individuals signed up for the event. There was a clear commitment & agreement across Rhondda Cynon Taf that a strategic approach to food was required. The main action called for by partners at the event was to appoint a specialist Sustainable Food Places Co-ordinator to drive this forward.
- 6.3 In October 2021, a successful application was made to become a Sustainable Food Places Member and for a contribution to the Co-ordinator's cost. The award was £10,000 per annum for 2 years. The Sustainable Food Coordinator was appointed in November 2021.
- 6.4 The work undertaken on developing RCT as a sustainable food place has been significant. The partnership has identified local needs and agreed a workplan while the Council has been able to allocate funding from a range of sources to support the implementation of the plan. Recent developments include:
- Terms of Reference and Information Sharing agreement drafted.
 - Public Health Wales added as a member of the Steering Group alongside Fareshare, Interlink, Bryncynon Strategy and the Council.
 - Six key themes agreed and working groups established.
 - Financial support has been provided to source equipment and establish the infrastructure for community pantries. (Pantries and pre-paid purchase cards reduce the reliance on, and stigma attached to using Foodbanks.)
 - A successful pilot programme to encourage older people to try more climate friendly meals, reducing meat quantity by half but keeping a similar protein content through addition of non-meat proteins, has been implemented at Gilfach Goch centre.
 - 120 slow cookers have been purchased from the Welsh Government's grant to community hubs. Cookery classes are being planned to ensure that people who are most disadvantaged can access learning opportunities to enable them to produce nutritious meals on a budget – on completion of the learning programme they will be able to keep the slow cookers to use in their homes.
 - Cooking hobs have been provided to community groups who support residents to develop cooking skills.

- A programme of face-to-face events has been undertaken to facilitate communication and collaboration amongst community projects. Two events have been held, 22/02/2022 at The Feel-Good Factory and 24/05/2022 at Meadow Street Community Garden.
- A Food Pantry subgroup of the network has been established via an event held in conjunction with Purple Shoots on 4th April 2022.
- Community Support Steering group partners have worked together to design a resident support leaflet, ensuring residents are aware of how to access support and entitlements.

6.5 Work is ongoing to spread the awareness of the Healthy Start Voucher scheme. Healthy Start is a means-tested programme designed to improve the health of low-income pregnant women and families on benefits and tax credits. It enables pregnant women and children over 1 and under 4 years to have 1 voucher worth £4.25 each week to help buy some basic foods. Children under 1 can get 2 vouchers each week (£8.50). Women and children in receipt of the vouchers can also get vitamin coupons to swap for free Healthy Start vitamins. FareShare have now included information on how food support projects can accept Healthy Start vouchers. However, more work is required to increase take up in RCT for eligible families, as recent UK Government developments which moved the process to online, has caused a reduction in uptake from 52% to 32% in RCT. Ensuring that all eligible families receive these vouchers will go some way to mitigate the impact of rising costs on families.

6.6 It is also important to note that Council's Community Meals Service continues to support those in need, providing a hot meal during the week and chilled meals on the weekend to vulnerable and elderly residents. We currently provide over 500 meals a day. The 2022/23 price of a two course, nutritious meal is £4.05, which represents good value for money.

6.7 Working with Community, Voluntary and Third Sector organisations as well as internal services, developments are continuing to support public bodies to make land available for food growing, green prescribing & access to green space for health and wellbeing.

7. FREE PRIMARY SCHOOL MEAL PROVISION

7.1 The Council continues to make very good progress towards implementing the first phase of the Welsh Government's commitment on free school meals (FSM) for all primary aged children. We have 97 Primary Schools of which 87 currently have full production kitchens and 10 with dining centres, where food is transported to a servery at the school site. To improve the quality of the dining experience in those schools without a kitchen, we have an ambitious annual rolling programme to remove these dining centres and in 2022, we have programmed to convert three of the existing dining centres into production kitchens. This investment builds upon a continued investment programme over the past ten years in school kitchens.

7.2 We have 19,451 pupils on roll in the primary phase and we currently provide only 7,650 meals (8,946 pre-pandemic) in total to this age group. In the first phase of the Universal Primary FSM programme, there are 7,768 pupils in Reception – Year 2 of which only 3,106 pupils currently are provided with a school meal. Therefore, meeting the challenge of providing all children in primary school with a meal has required the Council to prepare a strategic plan to meet the logistical challenges.

7.3 A parental consultation (e-form) has been designed to estimate the demand for meals in the Autumn term and capture the reasons preventing parents taking up the FSM offer. We will also capture dietary requirements and include links to our special diet procedures. A new menu has been created and food suppliers have been notified of new products to enable forward planning with manufacturers. The new menu will commence and be trialled during June in order to identify and resolve production issues before the demand for meals increases in September 22. The majority of our food suppliers used in the production of School and Community Meals are based locally in South Wales. Rhondda Cynon Taf are working in collaboration with neighbouring Local Authorities and is a member of the WLGA Food Group that is centrally looking at procurement routes to market that will benefit local Welsh supply chains and the foundational economy of Wales.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

8.1 There is no requirement for an equality and socio-economic impact assessment.

9. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There is no requirement for a Welsh language impact assessment.

10. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

10.1 There is no requirement for a consultation in relation to this report. It should be noted however that the work undertaken, and the resources allocated to support food resilience has been in response to needs identified by communities and partner organisations, and that a wide variety of organisations are involved in the work to establish RCT as a Sustainable Food Place.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

11.1 Food resilience is supported from a variety of external grants and Council funding. The role of the Sustainable Food Coordinator (GR10 post) is partly funded through the Sustainable Food Places grant (£20,000 over 2 years) with the remainder being allocated from the EU Transitional Support (Revenue) Fund.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

12.1 There are no legal considerations aligned to this report.

13. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

13.1 The work undertaken as part of Sustainable Food Places aligns to each of the 3 Council Corporate Priorities:

- Ensuring people are independent, healthy and successful.
- Creating places where people are proud to live, work and play.
- Enabling prosperity, creating the opportunity for people and businesses to be innovative, entrepreneurial and fulfil their potential and prosper.

13.2. Facilitating and supporting the development of programmes to increase food resilience meets the following Well-being goals:

- Prosperous Wales – increasing the skills of the population to produce and prepare healthy food locally will reduce the carbon footprint and improve the environment.
- A resilient Wales – growing more food locally will have a positive impact on biodiversity and the resilience of local communities, helping them to develop the skills they need to help themselves and their communities.
- A healthier Wales – people's physical and mental wellbeing will be supported through adopting a healthy and nutritious diet. Activities supported by the Food Prosperity Network include teaching people how to cook and grow food thereby improving their health and wellbeing.
- A more equal Wales – ensuring that people have more secure access to food will reduce inequalities in our communities including inequality in relation to healthy life outcomes between poorer and more wealthy residents. Healthy diets and appropriate access to food can also improve school performance for pupils and reduce sickness absences from work as good food is essential for brain and organ health.
- A Wales of cohesive communities – engaging people in activities such as volunteering to support community groups who provide food support and participate in growing solutions will increase.
- A globally responsible Wales – adopting a more sustainable approach to food and reducing food poverty will contribute to creating a more globally responsible Wales.

13.3 The work related to Sustainable Food Places adopts a long-term approach to tackling food poverty, improving the environment and creating and improving diet and health, while recognising that it is important to continue to provide immediate relief to those experiencing food insecurity in order to prevent harm. It involves close collaboration and involvement from a wide range of organisations, from very small community groups to larger third sector and

public service organisations. The Network that has been developed is democratic and advice and feedback provided in relation to identifying resident needs and potential solutions is listened to and acted upon in line with resource availability.

14. CONCLUSION

- 14.1 The experience of Covid highlighted how vulnerable a wide range of residents were to food insecurity. During that period, foodbanks experienced a significant increase in demand for their services and dealt with individuals and families who had never previously relied on them. The current cost of living crisis is having a similar effect, impacting employed people as well as those who are unable to work. It is important therefore that the Council works closely with foodbanks, community organisations and the third sector to support those who are need – meeting their immediate needs through short-term solutions, while developing a plan that will provide a more resilient and sustainable food system over the longer-term.
- 14.2 This report has documented the support and resources provided by the Council to foodbanks and community support organisations, the positive impact on residents and the funding being made available for the coming year to address immediate needs. The report also outlines the notable progress being made towards ensuring free school meals to primary school age children.
- 14.3 Significant progress is being made to support the longer-term plan that will ensure RCT progresses along the journey to becoming a Sustainable Food Place. The first steps along this journey have already been taken with the establishment of the Food Prosperity Network, the Sustainable Food Places Steering Group and its work plan. The next significant step would be the achievement of the Sustainable Food Places Bronze Award which, if achieved, would recognise that the County was meeting each of the 6 criteria of the programme.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background papers

None

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Community Services Scrutiny Committee

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