

Minutes of the themed meeting of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee held on 21 April

Hybrid themed meeting - Food Insecurity

Present

Welsh Food Advisory Committee (WFAC) members attending:

- Peter Price, Chair
- Alan Gardner
- Dr Philip Hollington
- Christopher Brereton OBE
- Georgia Taylor
- Dr John Williams
- Helen Taylor
- Jessica Williams

Food Standards Agency (FSA) officials attending:

- Julie Pierce – Director Wales, Information and Science
- Nathan Barnhouse – Director for Wales
- Sioned Fidler – Head of Communications, Welsh Language and Business Support
- Lucy Edwards – Business Manager
- Jonathan Davies – Head of Policy (Standards) and Consumer Protection
- Joanna Disson – Head of Social Science
- Sam Faulkner – Head of Strategy Unit
- Zena Lopez – Head of Strategy Delivery
- Andrew Brickett – Senior Strategy Adviser

Observers:

- Kerys James-Palmer - Head of Regulatory Policy, FSA
- Representatives from Shared Regulatory Services (Vale of Glamorgan)
- Torfaen County Borough Council

Presenters:

- Cian Sion – Wales Governance Centre, Cardiff University
- Professor Yingli Wang – Cardiff University
- Susan Lloyd-Selby – Trussell Trust
- Sarah Germain and Katie Padfield – FareShare Cymru
- Maureen Howell and David Lloyd-Thomas – Welsh Government
- Robbie Davison – Can Cook
- Ceri Edwards – Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Dr Charlotte Hardman – Liverpool University

1. Introductions and apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

2. Declaration of interests

2.1 No new declarations were made.

3. Chair's Update (Paper FSA 22/04/02)

3.1 The Chair provided an update oral on the March Board meeting.

4. Director's Update (Paper FSA 22/04/03)

4.1 The Director gave an oral update on the written report which summarised the key activities of the FSA in Wales since the last meeting on 3 February 2022.

5. Food Insecurity

5.1 Cian Sion, Wales Governance Centre, Cardiff University

Trends in the economy and cost of living: assessing the impact on households. The presentation detailed cost-of-living pressures, distributional impact on household finances and long-run trends in household incomes covering topics such as:

- the energy price cap and household spending on energy – the poorest 20% of Welsh households, on average, spent 12% of their income (after housing costs) on energy bills in 2019-20. Separately, the Welsh Government estimates that 12% of Welsh households were living in fuel poverty in 2018.
- Food price inflation – price increases for food items are up just under 6% compared to last year. If food prices emerge as a key driver of inflation this would impact the purchasing power of those on lower incomes. Consumer price inflation is set to peak at 9% later this year which is the highest level since the 1980s.
- Distributional impact of policy and price cap changes on households – energy price hikes and tax rises will leave Welsh households £315 a year worse off, even after measures to assist cost-of-living and tax rises are applied. Which means that lowest income households will see the largest reduction in their disposable income.

5.2 Joanna Disson, Head of Social Science, FSA

The presentation detailed cost-of-living, who is affected, shopping behaviours, eating habits and food safety.

- 42% of people have said that increased food prices are at the top of the list of their concerns.
- Lower incomes tend to buy more processed food and these items have had a disproportionately higher price increase than fresh foods.
- Across the UK, 1 in 7 households are experiencing food insecurity. Figures show that 18% in Wales are food insecure compared to 16% in Northern Ireland and 15% in England.
- Those who are experiencing food insecurity are: younger adults, low household income, not working, long term health conditions, children in household, living in more deprived areas.

- 65% of people who are food insecure are most likely to consider price/value for money above anything else.
- 19% of people who are food insecure have used a food bank/emergency food aid.
- In terms of eating habits and food safety, those who are in food insecurity are more likely to be purchasing food close to its use-by-date, therefore, more people are eating food past its use-by-date. These people are also less likely to be cooking from scratch and eating healthy meals.
- Of those who are food insecure, more than 9 in 10:
 - worried whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more
 - food they bought didn't last and they didn't have money for more
 - couldn't afford to eat balanced meals
- Of those who are food insecure, more than 5 in 10 had cut the size of their meals or skipped a meal and had eaten less than they thought they should
- Almost a third were hungry
- More than 1 in 5 had lost weight
- Around 1 in 6 didn't eat for a whole day

5.3 Professor Yingli Wang, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University

Food insecurity and current provisions for improving access to affordable fresh food within disadvantaged Welsh communities. The presentation gave an overview of food insecurity issues in South Wales, focussing on the access issue.

Professor Wang explained the causes and consequences of a food desert – areas where people do not have easy access to healthy and affordable fresh food and in particular, poor communities where people have limited mobility – a problem observed in both developing and developed countries. Dr Wang gave an overview of the different initiatives in place to help deal with food insecurity for example, meals on wheels for the elderly, school holiday food club for children, healthy start vouchers, community food cooperatives, mobile shops and charities.

Dr Wang explained the following barriers in access to food including institutional, policy, structure and supply. Dr Wang commented that in her experience there is no 'one size fits all' solution to food insecurity but success has been noted where community initiatives use food to bring people together and where there are collaborative efforts from multiple stakeholders.

5.4 Susan Lloyd-Selby, Trussell Trust

Susan explained that the Trussell Trust supports a network of over 1200 food banks across the UK. They campaign for change to end the need for food banks in the UK. In Wales, the charity supports 39 food banks across 112 centres to distribute emergency food parcels to people in financial crisis. The presenter informed that since 2016 the charity has seen a 35% increase in people using food banks with 1542 tonnes of food being distributed during 2021.

Susan explained how the Trussell Trust food banks work and how people are able to access emergency food aid including what is contained in a standard food aid parcel and that the trust is continually consulting with nutritionists to ensure that food parcels still meet the recommendations for emergency food provision. The committee were informed that evidence collected by the Trust shows that 93% of people referred to food banks in Wales in late 2018 or early 2020 were destitute, meaning they could not afford essentials such as heating or food.

5.5 Sarah Germain and Katie Padfield, FareShare Cymru

Sarah advised that FareShare Cymru is a small independent charity based in Cardiff but part of a wider network across the UK. FareShare takes surplus, edible, good quality food from the food and drink industry which would otherwise go to waste and sort and distribute to a network of

frontline charities and community groups. All have a premises check undertaken to ensure food safety regulations. From April 2021 – March 2022:

- 857 tonnes of surplus food was redistributed
- 3.5 million meals provided to vulnerable people
- 204 charity and community groups were supported
- 153 volunteers gave over 15,328 hours of their time (South Wales)

Sarah informed of the results of the FareShare UK Impact Survey 2021-22:

- 90% of the charities and community groups supported by FareShare say their services have been affected by the cost-of-living crisis
- More than 75% of these organisations have seen an increase in demand for their services in the past year
- Among the reasons given by these organisations as to why people are accessing their services:
 - 65% say it is because of increasing food prices
 - 52% say it is because of rising energy bills
 - Other reasons given were due to changes in Universal Credit (63%), unemployment (60%) and low pay (54%)

Sarah explained the impact that FareShare has. Without their current supply of FareShare food, 1 in 5 charities would close down, 75% of charities said that the food enables them to better engage with their customers and 77% of charities said that FareShare food has improved their clients' diet.

Katie informed that FareShare Cymru are currently working with 185 projects across Wales each week supporting people in need in their local communities. These include:

- Cooking projects, for example, breakfast, lunch and after school clubs which also provide social interaction, advice and wellbeing support.
- Pantry projects. Individuals can sign up as members for between £2.50-£5 per week and visit the pantry to select 10-15 items including fresh fruit and vegetables, chilled, frozen and dried foods. This promotes dignity and choice and also gives members access to wrap around services such as housing advice and money advice. Some pantries also offer courses in cooking and nutrition skills.
- Residential projects, for example, homeless hostels, rehabilitation centres, refuges can provide hot meals or access to food and cooking facilities.

5.6 David Lloyd-Thomas and Maureen Howell, Welsh Government

David informed that prices are rising at the sharpest and highest level since 1990, food is a leading factor in price increases. 90% of people affected, the poorest are being hit hardest. People respond in a way that takes them from a healthy nutritious diet to a less nutritious diet. Typical initial changes include

- a move to cheaper categories/own label
- buying less fresh produce
- people eat less/have smaller portions
- snacking more
- skipping meals
- people go into debt to buy food and retailers starting to offer credit schemes
- people seeking free food that is not always fit to eat

It's clear that the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis will be far reaching. Welsh Ministers are continually lobbying the UK Government to provide more for lower income and more vulnerable

households. Longer term, Welsh Government is focussing on lowering levels of income poverty through actions such as driving forward the fair work agenda, increased focus on skills and employability and in-work progression.

Maureen informed that WG Income Maximisation plan was published in October 2020. Actions included maximising benefit take up, reducing the cost of the school day and streamlining the welfare benefits system. WG are currently running a second national campaign to encourage people to claim the financial support to which they are entitled. Following a successful pilot they will be delivering further training sessions for front line workers, with the aim of delivering increased advice and support on welfare benefits through existing family support models such as Families First and Flying Start.

Since November 2021, WG have announced more than 380million funding to directly support households affected by the cost-of living crisis. They have launched a household support fund, targeted at families and most vulnerable. The biggest element of this is the Winter fuel support scheme, which provided a one off £200 payment towards fuel bills, so people didn't have to make the choice between heating and eating. Approximately 178,000 households benefitted from this. In February 2022 a further support package of £330million was announced. Funding a £150 cost-of-living payment for all properties within council bands A-D and to all households that receive support from council tax reduction scheme (not just A-D bands). A second fuel support scheme is planned for this autumn, currently looking at how to reach more households.

People in extreme financial hardship can access an emergency discretionary assistance fund when needed with additional funding of £15million. To help combat holiday hunger and provide access to free activities for children, the free school meals provision was extended over Easter, Whitsun and Summer holidays. 2022 Summer of Fun provides free activities and free food, where appropriate, for ages 0-25. Free school meals for all primary school children rollout starts in September 2022 which upon completion will mean that an additional 160,000 children in Wales will have free school meals. In 2019-2022 WG invested £11million in specific initiatives to help to tackle food poverty. In 2022, WG allocated further £3.9million towards food poverty and will be holding a food poverty roundtable in May to discuss what the approach should be, and this will influence how funding is invested to have the maximum impact possible.

5.7 Robbie Davison, Can Cook, Well-Fed

An alternative solution to food poverty. The company have taught around 16,500 people to cook at home and within the food aid space have distributed over 400,000 free fresh meals. The company is in a formal partnership with Flintshire County Council and ClwydAlyn housing association, to try and tackle food poverty and ensure everyone within the region has access to good food. The company takes surplus food and uses a centralised production kitchen to turn it into meals. Commercially the company caters for schools, nurseries and care homes and they also sell meal boxes. Socially the company operates a food store which is an alternative food bank, this allows families to choose their meal kits and provides ingredients and recipes to help them cook at home.

To move people away from a reliance on emergency food aid, the first 4 weeks are free, and the cost then increases to £10 and then £15 over a 12-week period. The company also operates 2 mobile shops that visit rural areas to provide fresh produce where there are no local shops. The vehicles also sell 'ready' meals that cost no more than £2. The company has the capability to cater for different dietary needs and allergens. The company are also catering for 80 Ukrainian refugee households for 3 months, these will be based around traditional Ukrainian recipes.

5.8 Ceri Edwards, Caerphilly County Borough Council

Ceri explained that prior to budget cuts, many Local Authorities (LA's) had health improvement teams working amongst public protection teams but focus then shifted to Statutory delivery work. Work was done with local groups in encouraging them to work in community allotments to grow and distribute food amongst communities. Social lunch clubs were also set up and encouraged to provide access to healthy and nutritious food but also help with health and wellbeing. They have developed a Healthy Options award scheme to work with the catering sector to make menus more nutritious and healthier. This also tied into the predecessor to the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. In many LA's some of this work is now being resurrected.

Ceri explained that the impact and response to the pandemic has meant that LA officers have been redeployed to various other workstreams. LA's have been heavily involved in delivering food parcels and medication to shielding/vulnerable households and operated busy schemes to lessen isolation of vulnerable people. Whilst schools were closed and through school holiday periods staff delivered packages out to homes for those children registered for free school meals. They also managed school hubs for children of key workers, providing childcare and nutritious meals. Breakfast clubs and school wrap around care is now starting to be reinstated. LA's have ensured safeguarding food supply chains and ensuring food is distributed safely and hygienically to consumers. LA's have supported food banks and community initiatives. There has been an increase in the number of food banks and community food services operating. LA's also provide other advice services to those who are seeking emergency food aid vouchers and are working with other partners, for example, the Trussell Trust to provide this wrap around advice services. Positive feedback has been received on these partnerships.

5.9 FSA Strategy Team, Andrew Brickett and Zena Lopez

The presentation covered food affordability from an FSA perspective and covers first steps of thinking from evidence to scope the FSA's involvement. Andrew advised that food affordability cuts across the three pillars of the new strategy and whilst food affordability is not an FSA policy lead, we can ensure we are generating and publishing evidence of wider consumer interests around the cost of food. The presentation detailed how consumers are changing their behaviours. Those in low food security are less likely to possess the means to store, cook and freeze safe food, and have less trust in current UK food safety, hygiene, and standards. People are behaving differently because of experiencing food insecurity. How can the FSA ensure our advice supports them?

Zena explained that the FSA are starting to think about what support can be provided using the strategy roles to understand how and where the FSA can act more effectively. Zena gave examples of what the options could be in the FSA's role as 'Evidence Generator' detailing what is currently done and what the ambitions are going forward. The team have put together some planning principles that are subject to Board agreement but will help to scope what can be done and where.

5.10 Dr Charlotte Hardman, Liverpool University

Dr Hardman gave an overview of research that she has been undertaking in understanding the behaviours of those who experience food insecurity. Dr Hardman explained that unhealthy foods are three times cheaper than healthy foods and the poorest 10% of UK households would need to spend 74% of their disposable income on food to meet the Eatwell Guide costs. This is compared to only 6% in the richest 10%. Obesity among children aged five is 2.2 times greater amongst the most deprived communities compared to least deprived.

Dr Hardman gave an overview on the psychology of eating, explaining that eating is much more than just responding to a biological need, other factors are mood and eating to cope. There is a well-established link between socio-economic disadvantage and higher levels of stress and

mental health problems. Charlotte explained that in her research to better understand the drivers of food choice and eating behaviour in people experiencing food insecurity she has used a mixed method of quantitative surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews.

6. Committee discussion

6.1 The committee noted the significant increase in demand for emergency food aid and commended the work of the charities presenting in helping to tackle this. The committee discussed how the FSA could, within its remit, assist in this area of work and there was discussion around consumer messaging on use-by, best-before and freezing foods.

7. Any other business

7.1 Members noted that the next themed meeting was to be held on 14 July at the FSA office in Cardiff.