

Newham Health and Well-being Board

Report Title	We are Food Secure, Six-month Update
Date of Meeting	9 March 2022
Presented by	Andy Gold, Head of Food Strategy Public Health and Geeta Subramaniam-Mooney, Corporate Director Brighter Futures.

Background

Published August 2021, “We are Food Secure”, is the Borough’s holistic and joined up food security strategy.

The risk of food insecurity for residents and the need for a comprehensive approach remains high. The pandemic, Brexit, record inflation and national policy such as NRPF, benefits cap and universal credit are amongst factors effecting newham residents.

This update gives a snapshot of Newham’s work on food security. It shows a borough that:

- continues to work hard to keep residents food secure with practical action now - at scale, with co-ordination and co-production – council, VCFS, settings and residents
- Is working to deliver whole systems change
- Is campaigning and escalating for national asks

We Are Food Secure supports most of the eight pillars and many of the outcomes in Newham's Outcome Framework, including:

- 2.2e I have the best start in life
- 2.3e My school, college or other educational setting will help me to achieve my full educational potential
- 3 Poverty is eradicated in Newham and all of our residents having an acceptable standard of living
- 5.1d High streets and their neighbourhoods are heathy and inclusive in the services and amenities they provide

The strategy seeks interventions all along the life course and is Step 27 of the 50 Steps to a Healthier newham. As with all of our 50 Steps Priority 6 work it is about the 5As of Food and Health – Availability, Affordability, Awareness and Acceptance. These are also the 5As of Food Security.

Appendix A are slides to be presented March 9.

Appendix B is detailed update across key work streams

Key points

The challenges for residents that existed entering the pandemic, that have been so sharply highlighted since 2020, now merge on into a cost of living crisis. 50% of Newham children are estimated to be in poverty but even today, after a sharp increase of eligibility during the pandemic, only 30% are free school meal eligible. NRPF, the benefits cap and Universal Credit challenges have a disproportionate impact in Newham. A November snapshot saw 3118 households being supported by The Newham Food Alliance. Inflation is at a 30 year high at 5.5% but with evidence that affordable and essential food lines have seen much higher changes in price in supermarkets. December 2021 saw a 1.2% fall in wages in real terms. The impacts of Brexit – rises in cost and absences of foods – create particular concerns around culturally appropriate food. And rising fuel costs – already placing residents into a choice of heating or eating – are at risk of being worsened by international events.

In Newham there is work addressing the ongoing immediate need and alongside it work to change the system. This includes:

Massive practical action at scale, co-produced by partners in Newham to be as joined up and holistic as possible. Examples here include the Newham Food Alliance and Social Welfare Alliance – a package that makes sure we are getting the most out of our direct food support. Another is Eat For Free;

Work to get the largest draw down and best outcomes from statutory offers and grants, work and entitlements. Examples include Our Newham Money, Holiday Activities & Food, 0-5s Healthy Start Uptake;

Work addressing the key gaps and challenges – often unaddressed or misaddressed for too long in national thinking. Some of this work is making changes for wins now but there is also a focus here in finding ways to make lasting whole systems change. Examples here are 'We are Food Secure 11-19', Good Food Neighbourhoods work, the new 0-5s Food & Nutrition Working Group and the Migrant Community Action Plan;

The detailed report looks at the key actions within the strategy and examines the following areas in detail:

- The Newham Food Alliance - Over 30 VCFS, the council and The Felix project working together to provide direct food support. This network of food clubs and food banks uses more surplus than any other local authority in the UK. The total food the NFA makes available has a value to residents, at present rates, of over £7 million/year.
- Social Welfare Alliance - Training programme and development pathway to enhance the skills of all frontline workers and create better connectivity between Newham Council and voluntary, community and faith sector organisations. The SWA is critical to an NFA approach cited as “exemplar” by FareShare – ensuring direct food support is being used in addition to maximised statutory entitlement and wrap around support.
- Anti-Poverty Alliance – A strategic forum where VCFS, council and other partners can identify opportunities for transformational and progressive change. There are four key

areas: Money/Debt; Housing/Homelessness; Skills/Employment;
Wraparound/Family/People support

- Migrant Community Action Plan - Ensuring that we have as few residents as possible NRPF is critical to maximising residents in work, statutory drawdown and minimising who we need to support with direct food support.
- Our Newham Money - Maximising resident's access to entitlements, supporting residents into work. This team also lead on the management of key funds such as Mayor's Hardship Fund, where there has been innovative partnership with the NFA partnership, and The Household Support – administered for maximum impact.
- Holiday Activities & Food - Work to fill a key gap, the impact of school holidays on children's security. The team are building on a year when they worked at pace with schools and VCFS. In 2022 a carefully built procurement process focused on the next three years has a particular focus on the food element and joined up working with the NFA, SWA, Food Safety and our CVS Compost
- Eat For Free - Following on from UIFSM, the council funded Eat For Free scheme gives every 7 to 11 year old a free school meal. It ensures all primary meals in Newham are to a certified and inspected standard and asks all schools to participate in a whole school health programme. One of four universal schemes in the UK, but uniquely impactful on food security due to grant conditions, it has been cited as Community Wealth Building best practice for the way it anchors money.
- Early Years – Immediate impact is being made through the infant feeding support pathway, by children's centres linking into the NFA/SWA and with work to increase Healthy Start uptake. The new 0-5 Working Group Food & Nutrition Working Group is seeking to maximise the role of food in early years settings – both the meals and wider food literacy work.
- We are Food Secure 11-19 – The Shaping Places For Healthier Lives £300K grant won in 2021 has been dedicated to addressing food security in this age group. A group including partners from the Association of Young People's Health and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, are working to drive whole systems change with all key stakeholders.
- Good Food Neighbourhoods - Innovation and strategic thinking is focused on ensuring that no 15 minute neighbourhood in Newham is a food desert. Council teams in property services, strategic investment, planning (maximising local plan opportunities), markets and the implementation of TFL's no junk advertising policy are working together. Food growing is a particular opportunity and the upcoming allotments strategy is a chance to innovate and build on exciting work happening now that has been commissioned/grant funded. Also at work now, on the ground in our food deserts, are specialists in supporting local small business to develop the health of their offer.

To give a sense of the total scale, the work within the We are Food Secure strategy adds up to actions that are having an impact on residents lives worth circa £19 million this year.

Additional to this is the collective investment of partners in strategic change and work to move the whole system.

Response to the strategy and the work has been positive. Newham is now ranked joint 2nd out of 33 London councils in 2022's Beyond The Food Bank survey. In 2018 we were 22nd out of 33 councils. (We were also, in 2022, ranked joint 6th on the Good Food For All Londoners audit, having been 29th in 2018).

The 'We are Food Secure' strategy noted that "undernutrition and obesity are two ends of the scale highlighting a diet that is not providing the right nutrition for health." The strategy, and all of our work, is aimed at correcting a food system failing to meet the needs of our residents, hitting hardest those most vulnerable to food insecurity. This approach has been praised and cited by key partners and advocates in the field as "showing leadership", for "good practice" and for "collaborative and upstream" working.

Since We are Food Secure was published officers from across the work have been asked to share insight and support with other LAs and external partners across a range of forums. Profile has been given to the work and this has increased the opportunity to affect whole systems change by attracting leading local, regional and national expertise to support us and by enabling us to maximise and sustain stakeholder buy-in as we continue to work.

Measuring both need and progress will be critical as we set our goals and continue to move forwards. Newham Survey 2021 asked questions about food security for the first time, which gives us a clearer picture of what is happening in Newham and gives us a baseline measure to monitor progress against. The results will be available after the May election (likely to be June 2022).

Alongside this, we continue to look ahead and set strategic goals for a brighter future. In the process of assembling this update for We are Food Secure we have asked the question 'Where can we realistically strive to be in 5 years?' Goals include:

- Through escalation and case making, as anti-poverty allies, be benefiting from national change on policy that changes the ask locally - NRPF, benefits cap, universal credit.
- Be successful in seeing every child in England in receipt of a centrally funded free school meal. This will enable us to utilise some of the money that would be freed up to deliver work on food literacy and whole child development health work.
- Evolved as The Newham Food Alliance to be a driving force for Newham as a Sustainable Food Place – with a role in promoting Newham as a great food destination and a champion for food for people and planet.
- Continue to be an "exemplar" in how we use surplus food but with an increased focus on food clubs as part of a response to Climate NOW.
- In a food desert free borough with every 15 minute neighbourhood a good food neighbourhood.

Recommendations:

- Health and Wellbeing Board to note the actions in this paper.