

The experience of food insecurity in Bath and North East Somerset

Ms Fran Baber and Dr Leda Blackwood

University of Bath

July 2022



UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction.....	5
Food insecurity in the UK.....	5
Food insecurity in B&NES.....	5
The research	7
Research aims and method	7
Findings	10
What is driving food insecurity in B&NES and how has the pandemic contributed to the experience and the response?.....	10
What food is valued by community members?	12
How do people access affordable food in B&NES?.....	13
Practical strategies: shopping, storing and cooking	13
Social strategies: community connections.....	14
Using food support services.....	14
Limits to strategies and barriers that compromise their use.....	14
Food support services can help, but can't solve the problem	19
What influences community members' motivation to seek support and how can services shape their experiences?	21
Shame and stigma attached to food insecurity.....	21
The role of support agencies in shaping experience	22
Moving forward	27
Understanding and tackling the bigger picture.....	27
Acting locally: strengthening food support in B&NES	28
Community forum events: outcomes from discussions.....	29
Recommendations.....	32
References	34
Appendix A	36

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from research commissioned by Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) Council to examine food insecurity across the B&NES region. The findings will be used to strengthen and inform the B&NES Council Food Equity Action Plan for 2022-2025, which aims to *'identify and embed sustainable solutions to household food insecurity in B&NES'*.

The main drivers of food insecurity in B&NES, as elsewhere, include low wages, insecure employment, problems with the benefits system, and health issues¹. The COVID-19 pandemic compounded existing problems through disrupting access to affordable food². At the same time that local agencies saw increased requests for food bank vouchers, several food support services were forced to close or limit their operations. Some local organisations and charities responded with new food-related services and the B&NES Affordable Food Network and Community Wellbeing Hub were critical to developing a coordinated approach.

The research entailed interviews and focus groups with community members and community organisations, in which we explored challenges in accessing affordable food and experiences of food support services. We also conducted two community forums – one in Bath city centre and one in Midsomer Norton, for the purposes of sharing and validating the findings, and discussing future directions for tackling food insecurity in B&NES. In reading this report it is important to note that most of our community participants were connected to community-based organisations and / or had accessed food support services. Thus, we cannot speak to the experiences of individuals and groups who are not accessing some form of support in the community.

Key findings

Community members in B&NES value fresh and nutritious food. However, the healthy food they value is the food they find most expensive. Food support services do their best to provide good quality, affordable food, but some people still struggle to find appropriate items for their dietary and cultural needs. Organisations recognise the limitations and inconsistencies in what they provide, and many are taking steps to improve their offer. However, this can be hindered by limited resources, lack of storage facilities, and reliance on inconsistent or inadequate donations.

Community members employ various strategies to access affordable food. These include (a) practical strategies such as shopping for bargains, batch cooking and

¹ The Food Foundation, *Food Insecurity Tracking*, <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>

² Power M, Doherty B, Pybus K, Pickett K. How COVID-19 has exposed inequalities in the UK food system: The case of UK food and poverty. Emerald Open Research. 2020 May 13;2:11. doi: 10.35241/emeraldopenres.13539.2. PMID: PMC7219559.

using freezers; (b) social strategies such as seeking support from friends, family, or community connections; and (c) accessing food support services. There are, however, limits to how effective these strategies can be – particularly for those on low incomes - and their use is contingent on overcoming barriers. The key barriers people identified include personal and social factors such as resources, social and digital connection, and mobility; as well as structural factors such as availability of referral agencies, accessibility of affordable food outlets, and transport links.

Finding and accessing support requires motivation. For people experiencing food insecurity, motivation can be compromised by emotional challenges of stress, shame, and embarrassment. Struggling to afford food can feel like a personal failure, and people report feeling judged and humiliated by others because of the social stigma surrounding poverty and food bank use. Community organisations are striving to address this through providing a welcoming and non-judgemental environment in which people's preferences are respected, they are provided with agency and choice, and environmental concerns and social connections are emphasised.

Both community members and organisations called for change. Foremost in people's minds was the need to address the drivers of rising inequality and poverty and tackle the unsustainable food system. Considering the worsening economic situation, community organisations saw their challenges in terms of identifying underserved communities of need and reaching people before they reach crisis point. Critical to this is better resourcing and improved communication and cooperation between community services. Participants' suggestions also included improving education and raising awareness about poverty, nutrition, and the food system.

Recommendations

Based on our research findings and consultations through the community forums, we present five priority areas for moving forwards in building sustainable, resilient solutions to food insecurity in B&NES.

1. Support people's use of strategies for managing through:
 - a. Food-related knowledge and skills development in the context of limited finances and resources.
 - b. Improved local transport systems to ensure they work for people who are struggling financially and who have mobility issues.
 - c. Improved communication about the range of affordable food options and how to access them, with specific attention to digital and social exclusion and people's motivations to (dis)engage with support services.
2. Identify and address unmet need across B&NES through:
 - a. Clearer understanding of who is currently not accessing affordable food and why, with specific regard for groups who may be additionally vulnerable due to marginalisation, and social and digital exclusion (e.g., older people, homeless, ethnic minorities).

- b. Clearer understanding of places of unmet need with a specific focus on food deserts and on other affordances of contexts in which people live (e.g., cities, towns, and villages; private or rented homes; supported living and residential/nursing homes).
 - c. Co-design models for connecting people with affordable food and communication strategies with affected communities.
- 3. Support community organisations in their delivery of nutritious and affordable food through:
 - a. More sustainable and joined-up working within the region and partnering with adjoining local authorities to address boundary issues.
 - b. Developing a more holistic approach which links people with other non-food related services.
 - c. Sharing good practice around what constitutes dignity and respect, and engagement with users about what *they want*.
- 4. Improve nutritional value and diversity of affordable food available in B&NES:
 - a. Involve all parts of the food system, including supermarkets, support services *and* end users in development of a regional strategy.
 - b. Support more sustainable partnerships between local businesses, farms, allotments, and food support services.
- 5. Leadership from B&NES Council on being allies and advocates for those experiencing food insecurity:
 - a. Advocating for improved wages and a stronger safety net.
 - b. Challenging narratives and systems that blame and shame, and that contribute to social exclusion.
 - c. Educating the wider community about what food insecurity is, what contributes to it, and what needs to change.
 - d. Developing mechanisms to ensure that voices of people with lived experience of food insecurity are embedded in decision making and the development of strategies.

Introduction

Food insecurity in the UK

Food insecurity is defined as lacking ‘regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and / or lack of resources to obtain food’³.

Food insecurity is increasing in the UK. According to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), five million people across the UK (8%) were in food insecure households in 2019/20⁴. Statistics published by The Food Foundation in April 2022 stated that 13.8% of households (7.3 million adults) had experienced food insecurity in the previous month; almost half of households receiving Universal Credit and one in five households with children had experienced food insecurity in the previous six months; and household food insecurity levels had increased by 60% from the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic⁵.

Routine monitoring of national food insecurity levels is historically lacking in the UK; hence use of emergency food support is often used as a proxy measure⁶. In the financial year 2021/2022, 2.1 million emergency food parcels were given to people in crisis by food banks in the Trussell Trust network - a 14% increase compared to the same period in 2019/20⁷. Of these parcels, 832,000 went to children. Trussell Trust figures do not include all food parcels provided, as many are distributed by the numerous independent food banks and charities which are not part of the Trussell Trust network⁸. Therefore, overall uptake of emergency food aid in the UK is likely to be significantly higher.

Food insecurity in B&NES

Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) remains one of the least deprived local authorities in England. There are, however, two areas, Twerton West and Whiteway, which are among the 10% most deprived local areas in the country⁹. The highest-

³ Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, *Hunger and food insecurity*, <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

⁴ GOV UK, Department for Work and Pensions, *Households Below Average Income: an analysis of the income distribution FYE 1995 to FYE 2020*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2020>

⁵ The Food Foundation, *Food Insecurity Tracking*, <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>

⁶ Purdam, K., Esmail, A., & Garratt, E. (2019). Food insecurity amongst older people in the UK. *British Food Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-05-2018-0301>

⁷ The Trussell Trust, *End of Year Stats*, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>

⁸ Tyler, G. (2021), *Food Banks in the UK* (House of Commons Library), <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8585/CBP-8585.pdf>

⁹ Bath & North East Somerset Council, 2020, *Inequalities*, retrieved from <https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/your-council-and-democracy/local-research-and-statistics/wiki/socio-economic-inequality>

ranking food insecurity risk areas in B&NES are: Whiteway, Whiteway West, Twerton West, Twerton and Fox Hill North¹⁰. This is calculated by the University of Southampton food insecurity tool which estimates risk of household food insecurity across neighbourhoods in England using public data on benefits claimants, household low-income, mental health and educational qualifications¹¹. In January 2021, 7.1% of adults in B&NES experienced hunger, 11.2% struggled to access food, and 15.6% worried about not having enough food¹².

An important part of the local response to food insecurity has been B&NES Council's creation of a framework for working collaboratively with local stakeholders and communities. This framework includes the B&NES Fair Food Alliance (50+ members from statutory and third sector organisations) and the Affordable Food Network which is a growing network of community-based organisations involved in providing access to affordable food. In addition, the Community Wellbeing Hub was set up at the start of the pandemic as a collaboration between B&NES Council, HCRG Care Group and local third sector organisations. The hub provides residents with a central place to access a range of support services including help with health, food, transport, employment and housing issues.

¹⁰ Available online at <https://www.mylocalmap.org.uk/iaahealth/> see also Smith D, Thompson C, Harland K, Parker S, Shelton N. (2018) Identifying Populations and Areas at Greatest Risk of Household Food Insecurity in England. *Applied Geography*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2017.12.022>

¹¹ Smith, D. M., Rixson, L., Grove, G., Ziauddeen, N., Vassilev, I., Taheem, R., ... & Alwan, N. A. (2022). Household food insecurity risk indices for English neighbourhoods: measures to support local policy decisions. *medRxiv*. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2022.04.06.22273530>

¹² Feeding Britain, (2021), *Bath & North East Somerset*, retrieved from <https://feedingbritain.org/location/bath-north-east-somerset/>

The research

In late 2021, B&NES Council commissioned the University of Bath to conduct research on the lived experience of food insecurity in the B&NES region, from the perspective of community members and community organisations or agencies providing support. The B&NES Fair Food Alliance and the Affordable Food Network provided advice and support in the development and conduct of this research which will be used to strengthen and inform the B&NES Council Food Equity Action Plan for 2022-2025.

Research aims and method

The research had two aims:

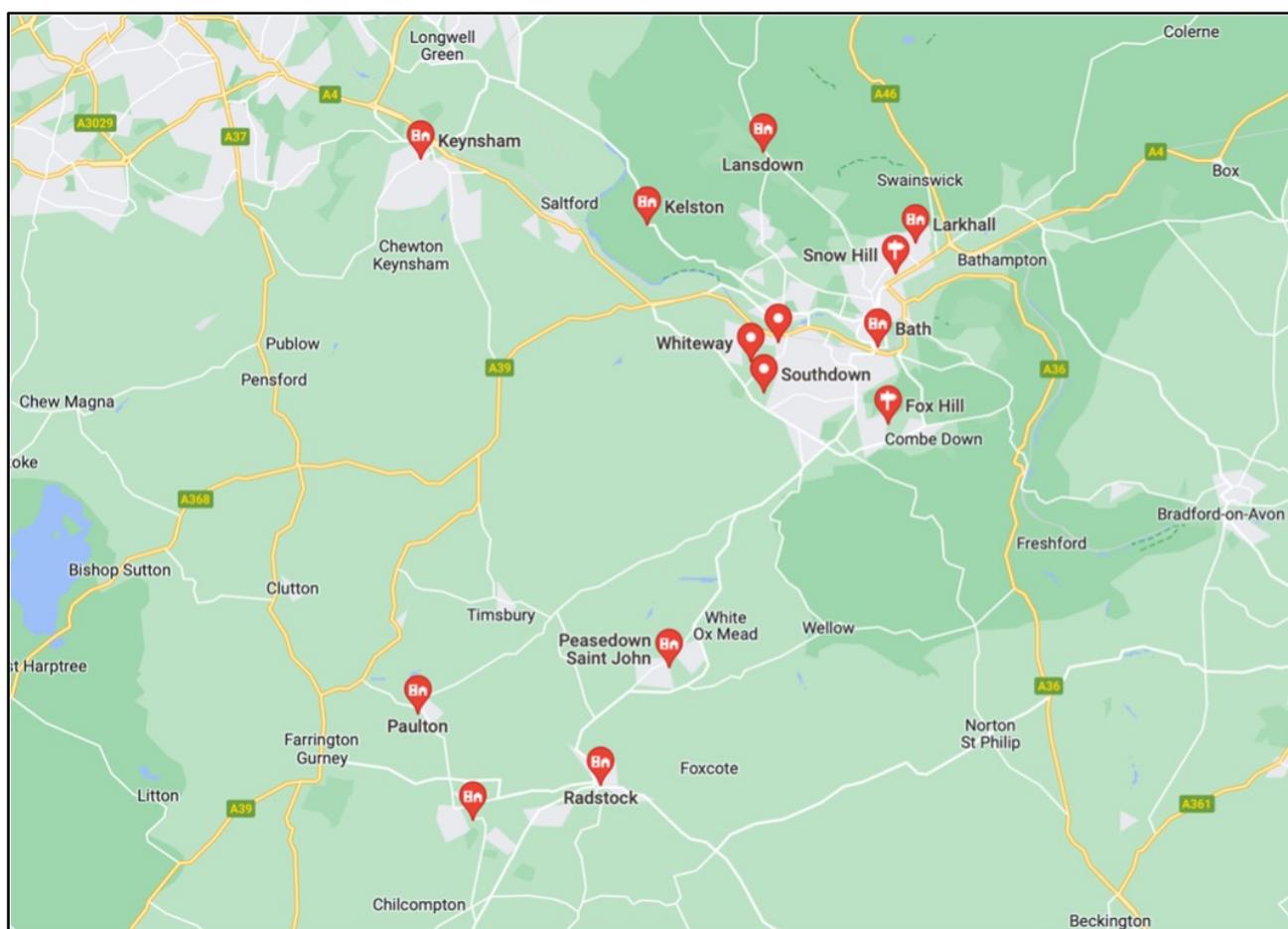
1. Understand the experience of food insecurity and of accessing food support from the perspectives of community organisations and community members.
2. Examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food insecurity and on the response of local organisations and agencies.

Field work research was conducted involving semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A semi-structured approach allows researchers to ask questions flexibly in response to participants' perspectives. The research was conducted from November 2021 to April 2022. Some interviews were conducted in person, and others were conducted remotely via telephone or videocall as appropriate. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed intelligent verbatim.

Community organisation perspectives: sample and recruitment

Interviews were conducted with 23 people (16 female, 7 male) from 18 organisations operating in rural and urban areas of B&NES. Recruitment was primarily via members of the B&NES Affordable Food Network, and included: food banks, pantries, and lunch clubs; charities for homelessness, older age and mental health support; community organisations for ethnic groups, older people and families; and welfare support, social housing, and crisis funding providers. A summary of participants from community organisations is shown in Appendix A and a map of organisations' geographical bases is shown in Figure 1. Throughout this report, 'organisation representatives' refers to paid staff who provided an organisational point of view, and 'food support workers' refers to front line staff or volunteers involved in providing food.

Figure 1: Map of community organisations' geographical locations



Community member perspectives: sample and recruitment

Interviews were conducted with 20 participants (12 female, 8 male) living in 12 different areas of B&NES. A focus group with 10 participants was also conducted. To minimise participant burden, full demographic information was not collected. However, interviews indicated participants were aged between 30 to 70 years, 10 participants were recruited from an ethnic community organisation, and all participants except two had direct experience of accessing food from a participating community organisation. Participants were recruited via the community organisations from our first round of interviews. The community organisations distributed research flyers to clients and contacts and the researchers attended food pantry sessions and lunch club groups to recruit community members in person. An element of snowball sampling was used where some community members gave flyers to friends or neighbours who expressed an interest in the study. All community members were given a £20 supermarket voucher to thank them for their participation.

Focus of the interviews

Interviews with community organisations explored the participant's role, the organisation's purpose, the offer or service provided, key client groups and areas of need, perceptions of how food insecurity is experienced in B&NES, connections with other organisations, impacts of the pandemic and priorities for the future. Interviews with community members explored what 'good food' means to them, the availability of affordable food in their area, their experiences of accessing food and awareness of support services. If participants had used food support services, or knew someone who had, this was explored in more depth. Interviews with community members also explored the impact of the pandemic and priorities for change in the future.

Data analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis¹³. During initial stages of analysis, transcripts were annotated to identify key areas of interest and develop codes. The researchers discussed a sample of annotated transcripts to refine initial ideas and develop a coding framework to analyse subsequent transcripts. All transcripts were coded in full and discussed between the researchers to develop themes reflecting the range of perspectives across the dataset.

Community forum events

Two community workshop events were held in April 2022, towards the end of the research; one in Bath city centre and one in Midsomer Norton. The purpose was to bring community organisations and agencies, community members, and the research team together in a collaborative space, to sense-check the research and engage attendees in broader discussions about addressing food insecurity issues. In attendance across both events were 10 representatives from B&NES Council, 22 representatives from community organisations/agencies, and 5 community members. Discussions were recorded by note-takers and attendees were encouraged to write their ideas on shared paper. Outcomes of these discussions are presented towards the end of this report.

¹³ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 11(4), 589-597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

Findings

In this section we present findings from the thematic analysis of all interviews combined (i.e., those conducted with community members, food support workers, and organisation representatives). We draw on the experiences and perspectives of all groups to address the following key questions:

- What do people think is driving food insecurity in B&NES and how has the pandemic contributed to the experience and the response?
- What food is valued by community members and how do people access affordable food in B&NES?
- What affects community members' ability and motivation to access food support and how can access be improved?

Where interview extracts are shown, '[...]' denotes unrelated material, and participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms throughout.

What is driving food insecurity in B&NES and how has the pandemic contributed to the experience and the response?

The main drivers of food insecurity in B&NES align with those identified elsewhere in the UK¹⁴. Interviews highlighted low or inaccessible benefits, low wages and insecure employment, debt, physical or mental health issues, the experience of trauma or addiction and sudden changes in circumstance, including those brought about by the pandemic.

We explored how the COVID-19 pandemic affected people in B&NES. Food shopping remained an 'essential' trip during lockdown restrictions, and some people were able to continue accessing shops and making use of food support services. Some community members, however, needed to adapt their routines and were faced with less choice, particularly if their usual food service had become inaccessible or closed completely. Shifting to online shopping was only an option for some, and reduced access to affordable cooked meals which had previously been provided in Bath city centre significantly impacted people without cooking facilities.

The pandemic brought significant loss of income for people whose jobs were affected by restrictions. As a result, agencies saw dramatic increases in requests for food bank referrals and new food support services were set up in local communities.

¹⁴ The Trussell Trust (2021) *State of Hunger*, https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/06/State-of-Hunger_Exec-Summary.pdf

“We had people coming to our scheme that would never normally have come to welfare support because they weren’t able to work because the industry was so affected – people like chefs, musicians, so many people that ran pubs were coming to us to go to the food bank.” [Dawn, organisation representative]

Also affected were households identified as previously *‘just managing’*. This included not just people on benefits and those previously considered the *‘working poor’* due to low wage and insecure employment. What was observed and especially salient for some, was *‘teachers and nurses’* needing to use food banks. Before the pandemic, people’s incomes and coping strategies were described as *just* supporting them each month, but unprecedented challenges of the pandemic were thought to have *‘tipped’* people into struggling to cope.

Several organisation representatives, however, commented that although the pandemic exacerbated food insecurity, it was important to remember this had already been a problem in B&NES.

“Food poverty was there well before Covid, but it’s only because of Covid now that people are starting to say ‘oh yeah’, but it’s been there for a long time anyway, that’s nothing new.” [Morgan, food support worker]

Food support services strived to remain open during lockdowns by adapting their operations. Some food banks and pantries moved to delivery services or outdoor take-away and collection systems. Representatives described challenges and benefits of these adjustments. Deliveries enabled organisations to reach isolated or vulnerable people and there were numerous stories of generosity and community support. However, restrictions also created problems around safety, social distancing, and access to volunteers. Several organisations lost contact with existing clients and struggled to provide support despite adjusted methods. Many lunch clubs were unable to continue, significantly impacting members’ access to food and socialisation. Staff and volunteers from these clubs did their best to support clients in the absence of normal services. Several described personally delivering food parcels to members and their wider community networks. When restrictions lifted, many organisations returned to normal operations, but some did not fully reopen, or needed to relocate. Some reflections on *‘lessons learned’* from the pandemic, are shown in Box 1.

Box 1: Lessons learned from the pandemic

Community organisations identified key lessons from the pandemic, which could inform improved services in the future.

- **Be ‘prepared’ for crisis: adopt a proactive approach (not reactive).**
- **Maintain regular contact with clients and members, where possible.**
- **Recognise and understand the organisation’s capabilities and what they can contribute, as well as any limits.**
- **Strengthen connections and improve communication within and between local agencies and other organisations – avoid working in isolation or competition.**

What food is valued by community members?

When asked what 'good food' meant for them, community members valued food which is fresh, healthy, tasty, and varied. Also important were the social aspects of sharing freshly cooked meals with others and wider concerns about the environmental impact of food production and surplus.

***"We all sit around together and eat that meal together, and that's really the most important time of the day, where we all sit around and share food."
[Kerry, community member]***

Community members emphasised wanting fresh fruit, vegetables, and healthy protein in their diet, rather than highly processed foods that are high in fat, salt, and sugar. Many participants expressed frustration about how the costs of many healthy foods, compared with unhealthy foods, limited their choices.

***"I think the saddest thing is that it's the fresh food that is the most expensive, so eating healthy which is what we want to do is actually very, very expensive."
[Daniel, community member]***

Of particular concern for parents in our sample, was the struggle to provide healthy options for children:

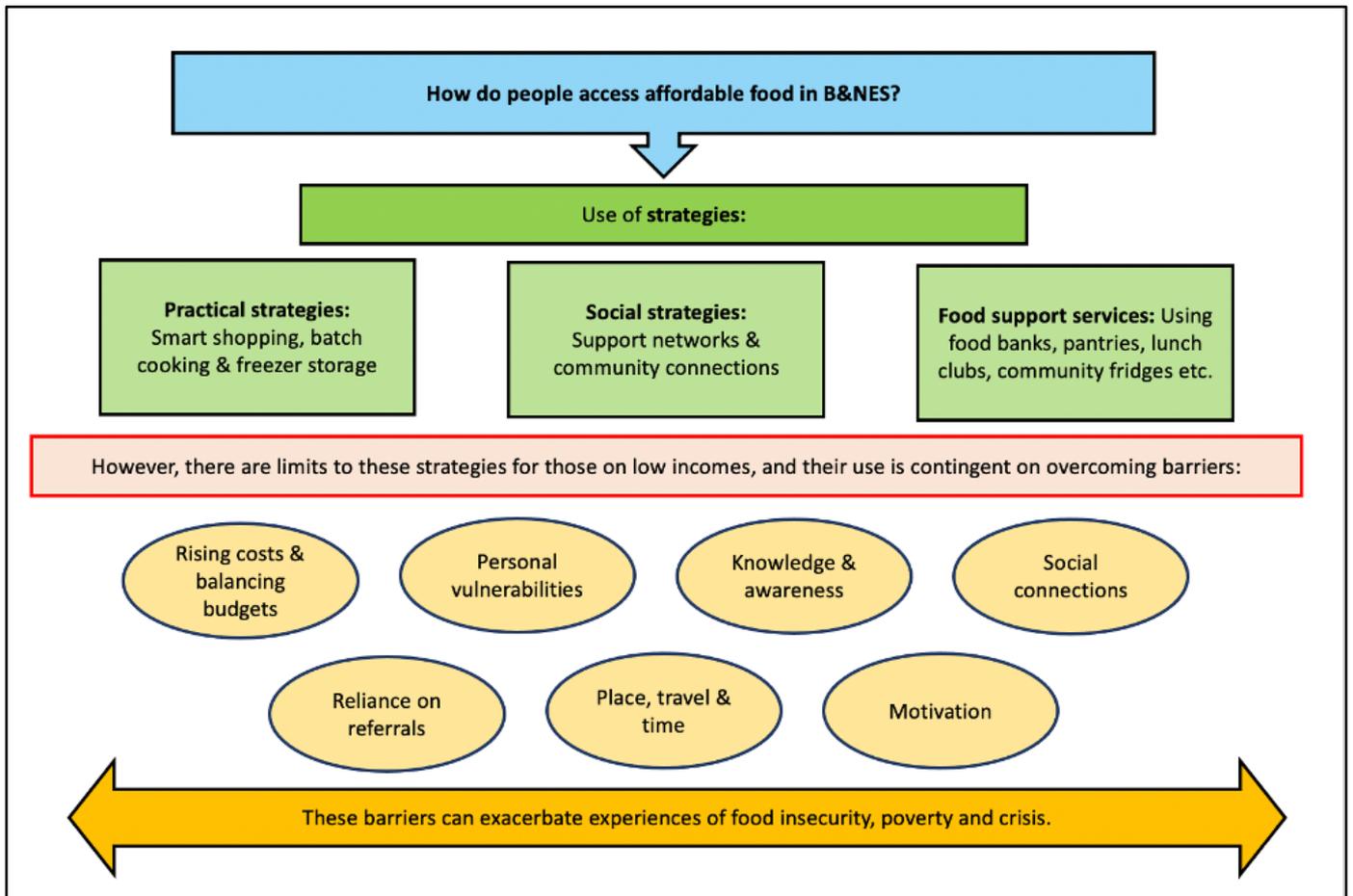
***"The most ironic thing, is that those choices that we want them to make, makes it difficult for us because they love fruit, they absolutely love all kinds of fruit, and we can't always give them those things, because actually it's cheaper to buy a packet of biscuits, than it is to buy a bag of apples."
[Kerry, community member]***

Thus, in our sample of people who were accessing food support services, there was not a lack of knowledge and awareness of what constitutes a healthy diet. People were keenly aware, and the critical issue was cost. Similarly, some of our participants had environmental concerns and wanted to choose foods that were organic and / or came from local independent sources but were unable to do so because of cost. A particular source of frustration was the amount of waste in the food system coupled with rising levels of food insecurity.

How do people access affordable food in B&NES?

Interviews with community members and food support workers provided insight into the various strategies used by community members to access affordable food (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Community members strategies and barriers to accessing affordable food



Practical strategies: shopping, storing, and cooking

Community members described carefully considered choices about where to shop and when; for instance, shopping in multiple supermarkets and at times when they know some items will be reduced in price. Community members also described ‘stock(ing) up’ on reduced-price items to store in freezers or cook in batches to make multiple meals. This strategy was thought to be well-suited to ingredients provided by food support services (e.g., community members describing making batches of soup and casseroles with fresh and tinned goods from local pantries). Planning meals in advance wherever possible, was also viewed as critical to saving money and reducing waste.

Social strategies: community connections

Calling on family, friends, and neighbours for assistance with meals, shopping, money, or transport is an important strategy people were using in times of need. So too was seeking help through community connections such as churches, schools, support workers and health services. As well as receiving support, it was clear in our interviews that some community members were *giving* support; for instance by distributing food they had collected from a support service.

“The donations from there help me and a lot of people because I take home the waste to give out to families in Peasedown that are struggling.” [Jennifer, community member]

Using food support services

The use of food support services is a key strategy for accessing affordable food. While some people access support ‘*as and when*’ needed, others routinely incorporate multiple services through the week to keep their food bills low. For many people, food support services have been a ‘*lifeline*’; particularly in light of additional challenges brought by COVID-19.

“If I hadn’t had the Pantry I would have really struggled because I don’t have a car and I would have been lugging two children to the supermarket and wouldn’t have had much money. I don’t know how I would have managed actually.” [Maria, community member]

“I get quite a lot for what I pay. I only pay £3 a week but it actually sees me through the whole week, so I’m not asking my housing officer for much since I’ve been using that.” [Maggie, community member]

Limits to strategies and barriers that compromise using these strategies

For those on low incomes, there are limits to how well the strategies described above can overcome food insecurity. Below are some of the contingencies and barriers described by our participants.

Rising costs, making choices and personal vulnerabilities

Community members described how balancing budgets for rent, energy, household items *and* food has become increasingly difficult with rising costs of living.

“We live in a world where the costs are increasing all the time, living costs are going up, and wage doesn’t increase with that. It means that things are just harder, and there’s nothing we can do. You can budget all you like but it’s still not going to be enough.” [Kerry, community member]

Budgeting can force people into making difficult choices. Some are choosing between paying for energy or food, a choice further complicated by costs associated with storing, preparing, and cooking food. Some are also choosing not to spend on leisure and engagement in everyday activities. Daniel speaks to the implications of this; of having to choose between food and activities that he believes are important to his children's wellbeing and development.

***"I felt like I was just trapped really. I was basically choosing food or my children's activity and I didn't want to just stop doing that, I didn't want to stop doing that for my children, I really didn't."* [Daniel, community member]**

Making these choices in the context of food insecurity can have significant emotional consequences. Participants highlighted a cycle where the stress and guilt of financial worries are aggravated by the ongoing need to cut back and miss out.

***"If you haven't got food, you're not able to do things like you were doing so you get more depressed, and I guess it's a circle."* [Jennifer, community member]**

There are additional challenges for people with complex needs or personal vulnerabilities such as health conditions or caring responsibilities which may make them housebound, isolated and / or less mobile. People in these groups may be living with fewer resources and greater support needs which can be costly. These vulnerabilities compound the effects of rising costs and reduce their ability to avail themselves of the strategies described above.

There are also numerous barriers that independently, and in interaction with a lack of financial resources, impact on people's ability to use these strategies effectively. These are unpacked in more detail below.

Knowledge and awareness

People can only access the affordable food they know about. Amongst some community members in B&NES, there is limited awareness of where and how to access affordable food.

***"I've got no idea who to go to, or ask where to get reasonably... or recycled, or cheap food, or food banks."* [Vicky, community member]**

A frequently raised issue was the increasing need to access information and services online. Organisations recognise that much information is digital; for instance, food pantries and lunch clubs are often promoted on social media or online community groups, and some people share food through online recycling apps. This presented two problems. First, community members reported that online information is not always easy to find:

“It was really hard to find information about other food banks and other pantries. There was so much different information, I still haven’t got to the bottom of it [...] there isn’t any one place to find out about where to access food, and I have really tried.” [Maria, community member]

Second, although social media and online promotion methods are useful, they are not available to community members who are digitally excluded. Older people and those on low incomes with limited access to the internet are groups that may particularly struggle to access information online.

“There’s something around for everybody if you look for it but some people haven’t got the internet. Some people don’t like using the internet, some of them haven’t got a smartphone. I hadn’t got a smartphone until a couple of months ago.” [Morris, community member]

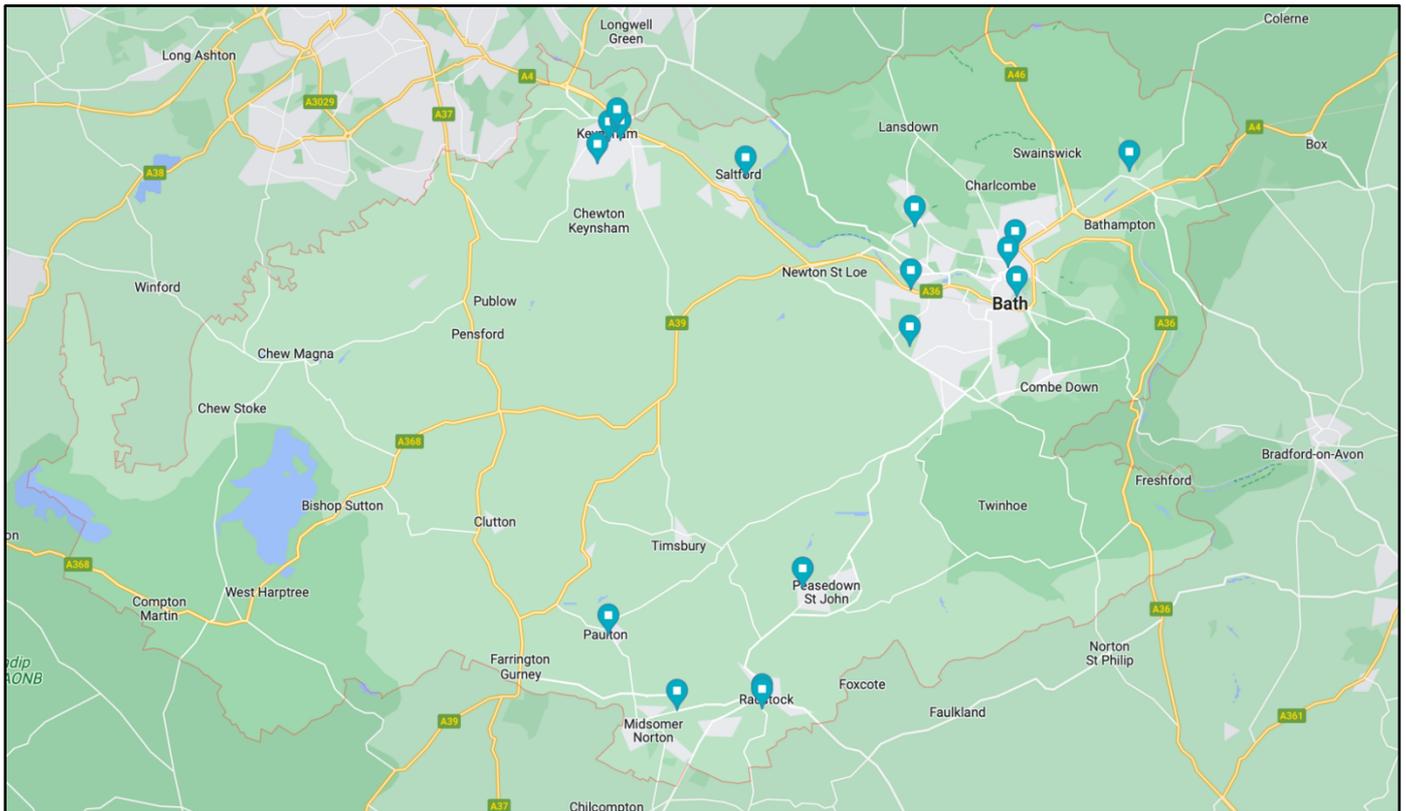
Organisation representatives and food support workers were acutely aware of the limitations of their organisations’ advertising strategies and of the barriers faced by some in the community in accessing information. Addressing this issue, however, was seen as a challenge for two reasons. First, many food support services are operated by charities and advertising requires resources. Second, some organisations fear that promoting their service too widely could lead to unmanageable levels of demand.

Place, travel, and time

Participants identified issues of place, travel, and time which affect access to affordable food. For Bath city centre residents, there is a wide range of shopping options, but access to cheaper supermarkets (e.g., Iceland, Asda, Aldi, Tesco) is limited. The city’s bigger stores are mainly higher-priced brands (e.g., Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, Sainsburys) and the small, convenience-style stores offer less choice and affordability. Meanwhile, residents in rural areas have limited choice of affordable supermarkets, convenience stores, and food support services, within walking distance or accessible by public transport. The map below shows the geographical locations of food support services in B&NES, which are listed on the B&NES Food Finder website¹⁵.

¹⁵ BANES Food Finder, Food Clubs and Pantries, <https://www.banesfoodfinder.org.uk>

Figure 3: Map to show food support services in B&NES, according to the B&NES Food Finder website



Limited local shopping options particularly impacts people with limited finances who may not have access to a car and for whom public transport may also be prohibitively expensive. In addition to expense, several people commented on the logistical issues created by rural public transport services that have poor connections and are infrequent and often unreliable. One food support worker highlighted how even the simplest journeys may be challenging for someone in crisis.

“At that point they’ve exhausted every avenue, every penny, so paying for public transport just isn’t really an option. But other people just for their own chaotic circumstances would struggle to get on a bus and to get to a certain location at the right time.” [Jackie, food support worker]

For many B&NES residents, it can be important to travel to Bath city centre in order to access agencies and support services and to meet specific ethnic or other dietary needs. Transport and parking, however, have become increasingly restricted and expensive. One community member from Keynsham commented that travelling to Bristol on public transport is easier than reaching central Bath. Others described making complicated journeys from rural or suburban areas into Bath and other towns, often catching multiple buses to source food. As well as being time consuming and costly, these journeys require energy and ability to transport bags of food home.

Limited time for shopping and accessing food support was also raised as an issue. Not everybody can visit multiple shops during the week to find bargains, or shop at specific times to find reduced-price items. Many food support services in B&NES have limited opening times and sometimes only operate for a couple of hours a week. This limits accessibility for community members who are unable to attend or cannot reach an alternative service.

“It’s not just down to people who are not able to work and that, it is working tax people now and obviously it needs to be out of hours and most things are within working hours, so that cuts out a lot of things straight away. [...] I can’t even think of one off the top of my head that isn’t within school timings.”
[Jennifer, community member]

Reliance on referrals

Some food support options (such as emergency food banks or vouchers) are only accessible via direct referrals from local government, health, or social care agencies. In B&NES, referral agencies include the Community Wellbeing Hub, the Council’s welfare support team, Citizens Advice Bureau, job centres or GP surgeries. Securing a referral, however, is inevitably influenced by the agencies themselves being accessible and able to respond. During the pandemic, agencies experienced considerable pressures to meet high levels of need, and one foodbank where need was known to be high, reported a decline in referrals.

“Because of Covid, the welfare support system crumbled, people were working from home, there were only phone appointments and because quite a lot of our clients have chaotic lives, if you like, it just meant they weren’t getting the support they needed because they weren’t accessing it.” ***[Susan, food support worker]***

Agencies in B&NES have recently moved to an online system for processing emergency food vouchers and food bank referrals. This system is thought to have improved the process for food support services and for those clients who can access digital ‘e-Vouchers’. Paper vouchers remain available for clients who require hard copies.

Social and community connections

The community members we interviewed frequently spoke of hearing about affordable food through ‘word of mouth’ from friends, family or neighbours, or connections with community organisations. This suggests that those who are more isolated and lacking connections may struggle to find and access support. There was also the suggestion that the degree to which food insecurity is visible and spoken about within a particular place or community of people may play a role. Thus, some observed that in more socio-economically deprived areas, asking for help can feel more acceptable or normalised because experiences of food insecurity and poverty

are understood and shared. However, experiences in Bath city centre or more affluent areas can be different. In these communities, food insecurity may be hidden and less recognised between residents. People may be less aware of support services and less likely to share their experiences with others.

The creation of vicious circles that undermine coping

In sum, our interviews suggested that community members may face significant barriers and often lack sufficient resources to overcome these barriers and avail themselves of the strategies identified above. In some cases, this results in a 'vicious circle' where lacking resources may lead to actions that further undermine people's ability to cope. For example, people who lack social resources cannot call upon support networks to help with money, food, or transport. To cut costs, they need to disengage from normal activities, which prevents them from participating socially and further weakens their community connections.

Food support services can help, but can't solve the problem

Whilst food support services were a vital part of our participants' strategies, they clearly have their limits. The variable nutritional value, inconsistency and unreliability of provisions were commented on by community members (and organisations).

"The food you're given is all processed, it's either in a tin or it is in a packet. If they give you a sauce for pasta, that is not healthy, it's full of sugar, and it's not the choices that you would make if you could." [Kerry, community member]

Some regular clients of services, such as those with weekly membership, had experienced inconsistent food supplies and found that fresh meat and dairy options are particularly difficult to find. Some have struggled to make meals from mismatched products, giving examples of unusual ingredient combinations like quinoa, artichokes, and celeriac. Inconsistencies mean clients cannot rely on the service for essentials and struggle to plan suitable meals.

Specific dietary needs and preferences

Some community members have special dietary needs and preferences that may be difficult to source. For example, products from food support services may not be culturally appropriate for people from ethnic or religious minority communities. This was sometimes attributed to a lack of awareness amongst local organisations and agencies. Also, clients with allergies, intolerances, or health conditions struggle to access appropriate foods which are typically more expensive in shops and less regularly donated to support services.

"Lots of tins of seed tomatoes, pasta, bread, but I'm lactose-intolerant. They've never got milk, as such, but I am lactose-intolerant, so I'm trying my

very best to get as much oat-y or milk alternatives as I can.” [Vicky, community member]

Despite these frustrations, community members understood that services typically rely on public and supermarket donations and felt that food support services are doing *‘the best they can’*. There was also reluctance to criticise with people commenting that they did not want to *‘seem ungrateful’*.

Organisation representatives and food support workers provided insight into the challenges of offering appropriate products. Across our interviews, there was clear recognition of the importance of providing nutritious food consistently and of the need to meet more diverse dietary needs. But two broad factors impacting this were raised. First, the offer differs between organisations depending on their purpose, organisational model, and infrastructure. For example, Susan explained that in the context of crisis, nutrition might legitimately take second place to hunger and energy.

“Nutritionally, it’s not brilliant, and Trussell Trust accepts that, but then again, it’s only supposed to be 3 days’ supply of food. [...] But if you look at the sugar content of baked beans, biscuits, tinned fruit all the rest of it, nobody could say it’s a healthy way, but it’s high in carbs and it’s energy food and it should help somebody out through a bad period.” [Susan, food support worker]

Trussell Trust food banks typically operate from church buildings with limited storage facilities, meaning they lack the capacity to provide fresh food. By contrast, some pantry-style services with fridges and freezers are geared towards meeting people’s needs over the longer term and prioritise affordable fresh fruit, vegetables, and protein.

Second is the issue of supply. Many services in B&NES pay for deliveries from FareShare Southwest who supply frontline services with surplus food from supermarket supply chains. The quality of fresh items from FareShare was generally described as satisfactory, but food support workers have limited say in the products they receive and often don’t know what will be delivered until it arrives. Similar issues were raised in relation to donations received directly from local supermarkets with implications for whether organisations can consistently support their clients. Some food support workers spoke of making additional supermarket trips to *‘top-up’* deliveries, and purchasing items to address dietary needs (e.g., allergen-safe items). Some appeared to be paying for this from their own pockets.

“There’s been weeks where we’ve been a bit light and I’ve gone out and bought sausages for example [...] because you want to and you need that food and you want to be able to give them all a similar pack and a similar offer for that many people.” [Laura, food support worker]

Food support workers also recognised the challenges of clients receiving unusual ingredients and several services try to provide recipe ideas to help clients make the

most of their items. Short turnaround times, however, can leave insufficient time for staff to review the delivery and prepare cooking instructions.

What influences community members' motivation to seek support and how can services shape their experiences?

Finding and accessing support requires motivation. For people experiencing food insecurity, motivation can be compromised by emotional challenges created by stress; indeed, many commented that when a situation reaches crisis point, mental wellbeing suffers, and motivation is hard to find.

"A lot of people's actual mental state, they're depressed, they're down, they don't have an appetite, they're not motivated to go out and get food." [Zara, food support worker]

For some people, the motivation to seek support eventually comes from a place of desperation. Where that point of desperation is will be different between people. For Tim below, 'sleeping rough' wasn't initially sufficient to overcome his pride in being 'above' needing support.

"Initially, when I was sleeping rough or on the fringe and not really having any money, I never used to go to the soups, I thought myself above and beyond it. Now I think, it is what it is, you know? It's a passage of life." [Tim, community member]

Shame and stigma attached to food insecurity

Reaching people before they are desperate was identified in our interviews as critical to outcomes; early support can prevent crisis. Pride was one of the most prevalent explanations in our interviews for why people might not access food support, with many speaking of shame and embarrassment experienced or anticipated. This was explained by several participants in terms of a sense of failure to meet internalised societal expectations of self-sufficiency and providing for dependants.

"We get up, go to work, and do what we can to provide for our family. And I think people probably struggle and think, well, I should be able to do it, why am I not managing this? And I think the problem is that maybe it's in our culture or something that we should go out to work and put food on the table." [Kerry, community member]

Some of our participants for whom the experience of food insecurity was relatively new, talked about feeling shocked to find themselves in a situation where they could not afford food. They reflected on having 'always worked hard' and on their belief that support services were for 'people on benefits', not people like them. There were two aspects to this. On the one hand, not wanting to take away from those who they

saw as having greater need; and on the other, discomfort with being associated with those who need food support.

“I’m too proud to go to a food bank because I don’t think I need it. I’ll leave that for people who are in dire needs as it were.” [Brendan, community member]

The notion that at least some of those who seek food assistance are stigmatised and so may be judged harshly and held accountable for their ‘moral’ failure, featured strongly in people’s accounts. This was in part reflected in concerns that distinctions might be made between those who are deserving of help and those who are undeserving. The fear of humiliation or judgement appeared to be particularly attached to receiving support from food banks.

“I was crying because I didn’t want to be doing it, there’s a lot of stigma stuff [...] I was crying and I was like – I didn’t feel good about myself that I couldn’t afford to eat.” [Anne, community member]

Both food support workers and community members themselves recognised their own participation in stigmatising others and reflected how their experiences with food insecurity had shifted their understanding. They described feeling less prejudice and more ‘*empathy*’ for people experiencing difficulties, and their assumptions about humiliation or judgement were challenged. There was also a sense that the pandemic has created an opportunity for stigmatic representations of food insecurity to shift. With so many people pushed out of work and into poverty, awareness and experiences of food insecurity increased across communities.

“People know people who’ve had to resort to food banks, somebody in their family, or a neighbour or a friend. So that stigma which was magnified by the media and Channel 5 endless programmes about ‘poverty porn’, I don’t find that so much, it seems to me now that people have a better understanding.” [Susan, food support worker]

However, one representative felt that whilst the pandemic created some shift in perceptions, this change had not been sustained and people still make an implicit distinction between those who are working and those who are not.

“In the pandemic people thought ‘well I need the help so I’m going to take it’, very much so. There wasn’t so much of a stigma. It’s more now that people have gone back to work or got a new job and then they’re struggling a little bit to receive the help because they don’t think that they need it, or think ‘at what level do I need that help?’” [Lesley, food support worker]

The role of support agencies in shaping experience

Interviews highlighted the importance of people’s experiences with referral agencies and providers of food support for motivation. Some agencies were perceived as contributing to experiences of shame and stigma through processes which humiliate and judge.

“Obviously the letters that come through are not great. Anybody knows from the DWP or from the local authorities and stuff sometimes they really need to get into their tone of voice a bit better and look at the way that they’re communicating with people.” [Hannah, organisation representative]

In crisis, people may require support from multiple agencies, and this can involve needing to provide evidence multiple times. Community members described how having to ‘*prove*’ or ‘*justify*’ their situation against eligibility criteria can feel demeaning as well as reinforce narratives that only certain people are entitled to support.

“I think it shouldn’t discriminate. If there’s a need and you feel your family needs some help, there shouldn’t be criteria or hoops to jump through. It should be, if you have a need there’s no questions asked, because it’s hard enough for people that are struggling to say, ‘I’m struggling.’ I think sometimes you feel, oh, there is help but it’s not for me, or how do you get that, how do I access that?” [Kerry, community member]

By contrast, participants also talked about positive experiences and provided insight into the kinds of organisational practices that provide reassurance and encouragement to continue accessing support, rather than perpetuating feelings of judgement.

Creating a welcoming environment and treating people with dignity

Many community members spoke of being put at ease by the friendliness and generosity they encountered. Food support workers also emphasised their efforts to be respectful and to create a friendly, welcoming space.

“It becomes part of a regular weekly community activity and a gathering [...] it’s a really friendly place to come, and that really helps to just de-stigmatise it.” [David, food support worker]

Whilst this was clearly important to community members, it wasn’t a salve; the feeling of shame can be deep rooted and difficult to shift.

“The venue that I went to they were really nice, but even when people are nice that can make you still feel not very good about yourself.” [Anne, community member]

With this caveat, below we identify some of the practices that organisations are using which may ameliorate people’s sense of shame through restoring a sense of moral worth, competence, and agency.

Providing a non-judgemental and discrete experience

Some food support workers spoke explicitly of the need to distance their approach from practices people will have encountered with statutory organisations such as the

DWP. Representatives spoke of the importance of using respectful language and creating a non-judgemental environment with *'no questions asked'*.

"We don't quiz people, we don't expect people as I said to justify why they're there, there's no justification needed. If somebody wants to tell us what's going on in their life, we're there to listen, we're not there to judge." [Jackie, food support worker]

They also described addressing clients' particular sensitivities and needs, including the ability to remain anonymous and be discrete.

"We work really hard to make people feel comfortable. We'll meet people outside if they're really nervous about coming in. We'll ask them what they need to make this a good experience for them." [Helena, food support worker]

"I like what they've done with this community cupboard thing, because it's hidden round the back somewhere, so people can't watch you accessing and judge it." [Garry, community member]

Community pantries and fridges were viewed by some as more conducive to providing anonymity and discretion (as well as solving the problem of limited opening times). Some did, however, raise challenges such as the association of community pantries and fridges with faith-based organisations, which might deter some community members. And again, although a favoured approach, the objective of providing a sense of anonymity can be difficult to achieve.

"They've got a community larder, you just drop off and pick up, it's open air, it's under a canopy outside the church and that's a great resource, but then I've had people say 'I won't go there because everyone will be able to see me pick stuff up'." [Karen, organisation representative]

Providing choice

Financial difficulties can mean a loss of control which affects people's sense of competence and agency; as we become more dependent on others, we are less able to make choices in our own lives.

"You're forced into a situation where you actually don't have many choices and your sense of control over things, or even just simple things like buying your shopping, that becomes now not a choice really. It does seem really unfair when you work really hard." [Kerry, community member]

Both community members and food support workers spoke of the inevitable constraints on choice (e.g., models that are for emergency/crisis; community organisations' infrastructure; and dependence on donations). And there was a sense from community members that one can't or shouldn't complain.

“It wasn’t fantastic and it wasn’t some of the food we would have chosen, but you know when you’re hungry and you’ve got no money you’re grateful of anything to be honest. You do become less proud.” [Daniel, community member]

But both organisations and community members were mindful of how this can be challenging for clients, both logistically and emotionally. And across the range of organisations, efforts were being made to address this.

“We would rather talk through what they want, what they don’t want, what they like, what they don’t like, allergies and things like that. It isn’t a one size fits all. [...] You can’t expect somebody just to eat something because they’re hungry.” [Jackie, food support worker]

Importantly, several food support workers commented that when provided with complete freedom of choice, rather than take too much – which was sometimes the concern – people often took too little. This was understood as arising from people not wanting to deprive others in need. This was echoed by community members who expressed guilt about taking food.

“It’s people saying ‘I don’t want to take too much because I want to make sure there’s enough for everybody else’, and that’s phenomenal when you see that.” [David, food support worker]

“I felt I didn’t want to take it in case it meant someone else wasn’t having it.” [Kerry, community member]

Reframing acceptance of support in moral terms

Several organisations use pro-environmental messaging about ‘reducing food waste’ and ‘making use of donations’ to encourage people to take food. They find this effective in shifting clients’ moral perceptions from being ‘helped’ to being ‘helpful’.

“I always say to people who are really either embarrassed about going to the food bank - it’s a way of making sure that food is used because that food otherwise would be wasted or would be going to landfill.” [Dawn, organisation representative]

“I’ve noticed that when people wouldn’t generally be happy to take food from anybody, they’ll suddenly go ‘oh well when you put it like that, I can do my bit to save the planet’.” [Zara, food support worker]

The effectiveness of this strategy lies in its alignment with shared values around the environment and with the frustrations about food waste raised by community members. However, one food support worker felt it was important not to hide the purpose of food clubs and pantries:

“We don’t disguise the fact that this is still a food insecurity and food inequality project, it’s not an environmental project at its heart. It’s a great secondary benefit, we can tweak it and we can turn the volume up when we are talking to people about it, but actually the bottom line is that that’s not what it’s for. And we don’t disguise that from our members, but it can make them feel a lot better about coming here.” [David, food support worker]

Another common approach is to incorporate a transactional element. Paying or donating something for food helps restore clients’ sense of moral worth by creating a significantly different experience to receiving a free ‘handout’.

“If I didn’t pay anything I wouldn’t go there. Right or wrong I need to justify in my own mind and say okay, well at least I’m paying £3 towards it and it’s just a place that gives a good deal but if that was free I wouldn’t use it. Again, it’s just that stigma to it.” [Brendan, community member]

For some, the transaction was also important in terms of supporting their local organisation and keeping it running. Others were appreciative that payments remained relatively flexible and staff would happily waive the cost if a client could not afford the fees. This inclusive, welcoming approach further contributes to atmospheres of respect and generosity.

“It’s wonderful and you know days if you don’t have that extra pound, you can pay the next week. You know you respect them because of their caring attitude.” [Patricia, community member]

Facilitating social connections

When people experience financial and mental health crises it is often accompanied by loss of social connection. The emotions of shame and felt stigma can exacerbate this; people disengage for fear of judgement. Several of the food support services were explicitly facilitating connections by providing spaces for people to sit, chat, and build supportive relationships.

“It’s also a place where people, many who are on their own so to break that isolation and to come out and make friends, it’s also reconnecting during a time when you’re feeling lonely or you’ve had a bereavement and the club offer lots of support.” [Toni, food support worker]

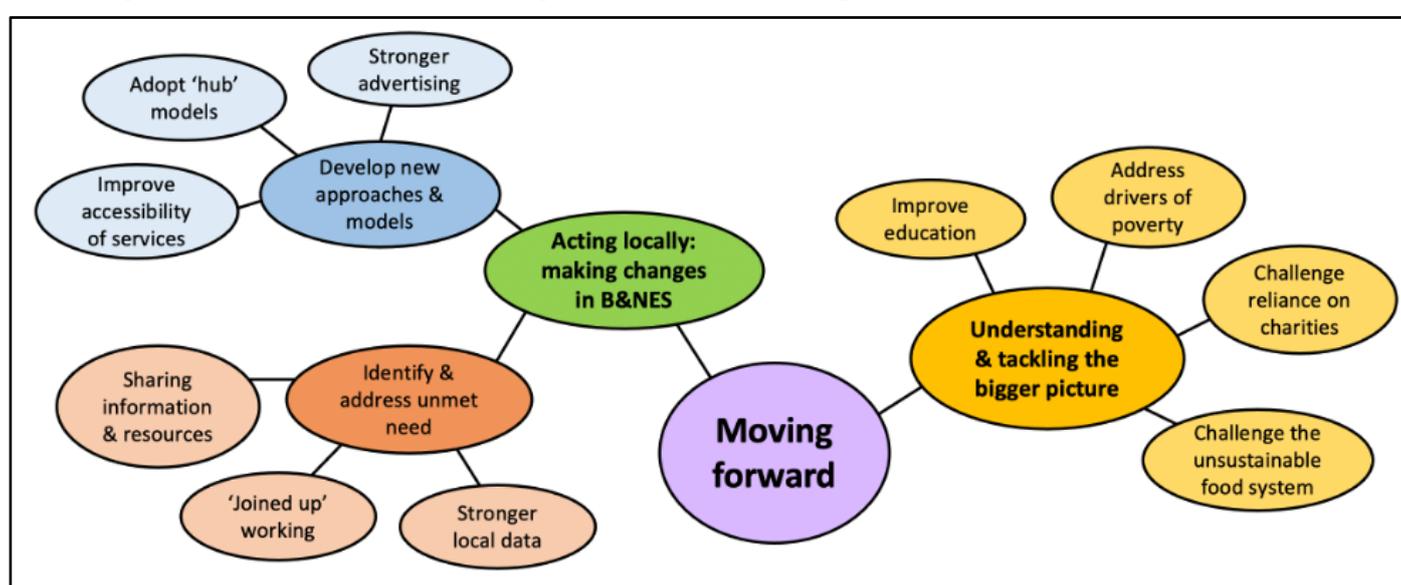
For some community members, the social aspect was viewed as just as important as the food itself. People spoke explicitly about the importance of meeting people who share common experience and of the development of mutual support. Thus, it was viewed as important to shifting people’s view of themselves and creating a sense of community and collective empowerment.

“This is a safe place to come to where you’re not going to get judged, and there are other people who are experiencing issues of one degree or another. So again, they’re not going to judge you, so you’re not alone, there are other people.” [Stephen, community member]

Moving forward

Interviews with community members and organisations explored their priorities for improving access to affordable food. Suggestions included structural and systemic changes to tackle the ‘bigger’ picture, as well as acting locally in B&NES. Key themes are shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Key themes for moving forward in improving access to affordable food



Understanding and tackling the bigger picture

Firstly, many organisation representatives and food support workers wanted to see national-level change around political and economic drivers behind growing levels of poverty. More specifically, some expressed support for the need for a cash first approach and income-based solutions to food insecurity.

Secondly, and related to this, misgivings were expressed about the charitable sector having taken on the responsibility of the government in supporting people affected by food insecurity. The effects of austerity, Brexit and the pandemic were expected to endure, and participants wanted to see less reliance on charities in ameliorating these effects.

“How did that happen? We’re supposed to be making ourselves redundant! The whole idea of food banks was a stop gap. The whole point wasn’t that they should become part of the fabric of social services and welfare support, and yet they are.” [Susan, food support worker]

Alongside this, however, was the belief that *'there's always going to be a need'*. For some, this meant the immediate priority was less focused on becoming obsolete and more on being able to strengthen their organisation's response through more consistent, reliable funding.

Thirdly, both community members and organisations prioritised challenging the unsustainable food system. Whilst some – mainly organisational representatives – spoke of the problem of surplus food being regarded as a solution to poverty, others wanted to see stronger partnerships between the two systems. A range of additional suggestions were made by community members and food support workers such as penalties for supermarket waste and better connections between farms, allotments, and food support services to improve access to fresh produce and reduce waste.

Finally, a universal theme across all groups was the importance of education. There were three areas where education was seen as needed. The first was increasing knowledge and skills around nutrition, cooking, and budgeting. The second was raising awareness about the drivers and consequences of food insecurity and challenging stigma. The third was raising awareness about the current unsustainable food system and promoting economic and environmental sustainability.

Acting locally: strengthening food support in B&NES

The priorities raised for the local level largely focused on addressing the barriers to access identified earlier in this report. For instance, both community members and organisations prioritised (a) stronger advertising and promotion through diverse means; (b) improved access to foods that meet dietary, cultural and nutritional requirements; (c) improving public transport networks and establishing services in more localities, particularly outside of Bath.

In addition, there were two interrelated areas of activity that were considered critical: (1) addressing unmet need in the B&NES region; and (2) developing new approaches for providing food support in diverse settings.

Addressing unmet need requires organisations having the knowledge and confidence to respond. However, this is currently impacted by data, resource, and capacity issues. Representatives called for stronger local data and intelligence about food insecurity, and more *'joined up'* communication and working across the Affordable Food Network. Specific suggestions included building *'one big B&NES database'* for sharing information and providing access to a shared pool of volunteers to enhance capacity.

The B&NES Community Wellbeing Hub was hailed by many organisational representatives as a success in providing a central location for a range of services and developing stronger working relationships between organisations. Several people suggested the adoption of more local 'hub' models along these lines. It was

also suggested that this approach could be expanded to physical hubs which incorporate food support within a shared facility of services. Offering multiple services through a 'single point of access' increases accessibility and de-stigmatises support by reducing the need to interact with multiple agencies.

“If you can create a community where people don't have a stigma and can feel comfortable and they know what to expect, then word gets out and then it starts to become a sort of a magnet for people to come to, so then you have conversations, you're reaching out to people.” [Andy, organisation representative]

However, participants recognised that hub models may not fit all communities, and different approaches may be needed depending on the location.

Community forum events: outcomes from discussions

The community forum events were a valuable opportunity to share preliminary research findings and encourage open conversation about addressing food insecurity in B&NES. B&NES Council outlined priorities for their Food Equity Action Plan and the researchers shared an update on the research process and findings. Following the presentations were world café-style sessions, where attendees shared ideas and comments in relation to three discussion questions:

1. How do we have conversations with people we are already connected to?
2. How do we reach the people we are not connected to?
3. How do we change wider narratives around food insecurity?

Ideas from discussions at both events were combined and key examples are presented for the three questions below. This data is presented to provide additional ideas and priorities raised by community members and organisations.

Discussion: 'How do we have conversations with people we are already connected to?'

Key suggestions focused on maintaining direct contact with members and clients, training and diversity considerations for staff and volunteers and strengthening relationships between organisations and agencies.



Discussion: 'How do we reach the people we are not connected to?'

Key ideas and comments focused on identifying key groups, advertising and promoting services, and making support more accessible to those in need.



Discussion: 'How do we change wider narratives around food insecurity?'

Key suggestions focused on approaches to tackle the bigger picture including reframing language and messaging, improving education and awareness, and challenging the food system.



Recommendations

The findings from our research conducted with people who are providers and / or users of the food support system provided some direction for the development of several key recommendations. Our recommendations below involve acting in both the short and longer term to build a sustainable, resilient strategy for addressing household food insecurity in B&NES.

1. People experiencing food insecurity are not necessarily ignorant of nutrition, nor are they necessarily lacking in budgeting and food preparation skills. However, they face unique challenges around being able to eat with very limited resources and choice. More can be done to support people's use of strategies for managing, including:
 - a) Knowledge and skills development to effectively store, prepare and cook nutritious food in the context of limited finances and resources.
 - b) Improved local transport systems (including public and private) to ensure they work for people who are struggling financially and who have mobility issues.
 - c) Improved information dissemination about the range of affordable food options and how to access them, with specific attention to issues of social and digital exclusion and to people's motivations to (dis)engage with support services.
2. There is believed to be considerable unmet need across B&NES. Many people may be struggling but not currently accessing support and there are various factors influencing this. A strategy is needed which involves:
 - a) Developing a clearer understanding of who is currently not accessing affordable food and why, with specific regard for groups who may be additionally vulnerable due to marginalisation, and social and digital exclusion (e.g., older people, homeless, ethnic minorities).
 - b) Developing a clearer understanding of places of unmet need with a specific focus on food deserts and on other affordances and challenges of different contexts in which people are living (e.g., cities, towns, and villages; private or rented homes; supported living and residential/nursing homes).
 - c) Co-design communication strategies and models for connecting people with affordable food, with affected communities.
3. Community-based organisations need continued support in their delivery of nutritious and affordable food; indeed, organisations can be cautious about creating demand that they cannot meet. The work of the B&NES Fair Food

Alliance and Affordable Food Network provides a strong base from which to build, including:

- a) Supporting a more sustainable and joined-up approach between organisations and agencies within the region and working in partnership with adjoining local authorities to address boundary issues.
 - b) Developing a more holistic approach which links people with other non-food related services.
 - c) Sharing good practice around what constitutes dignity and respect, and engaging community members in what they want from their experience, such as supporting opportunities for social connection.
4. There are problems with the nutritional value and diversity of affordable food available in B&NES. This can only be partly solved by food support services, and current provisions are not meeting community members' needs. A system-wide strategy is needed that:
- a) Involves all parts of the food system, including supermarkets, support services and end users. Improvements need to be developed and implemented across the whole region.
 - b) Supports more sustainable partnerships between local businesses, farms, allotments, and food support services. Several successful arrangements already exist, but these could be expanded to accommodate a broader range of locations and dietary needs.
5. Leadership is needed from B&NES Council, Fair Food Alliance, and the Affordable Food Network around being allies and advocates for those experiencing food insecurity. Specifically, leadership is needed around:
- a) Advocating for improved wages and a stronger safety net.
 - b) Challenging narratives and systems that blame and shame, and that contribute to people being excluded not only financially, but also socially.
 - c) Educating the wider community about what food insecurity is, what contributes to it, and what needs to change.
 - d) Developing mechanisms to ensure that voices of people with lived experience of food insecurity are embedded in all decision making and the development of strategies.

References

1. The Food Foundation, Food Insecurity Tracking, retrieved from <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>
2. Power M, Doherty B, Pybus K, Pickett K. How COVID-19 has exposed inequalities in the UK food system: The case of UK food and poverty. Emerald Open Research. 2020 May 13;2:11. <https://doi.org/10.35241/emeraldopenres.13539.2>
3. Dowler, E. A., & O'Connor, D. (2012). Rights-based approaches to addressing food poverty and food insecurity in Ireland and UK. *Social science & medicine*, 74(1), 44-51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.08.036>
4. Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, Hunger and food insecurity, <https://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>
5. GOV UK, Department for Work and Pensions, Households Below Average Income: an analysis of the income distribution FYE 1995 to FYE 2020, retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2020>
6. Purdam, K., Esmail, A., & Garratt, E. (2019). Food insecurity amongst older people in the UK. *British Food Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-05-2018-0301>
7. The Trussell Trust, End of Year Stats, retrieved from <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>
8. Tyler, G. 2021, Food Banks in the UK (House of Commons Library), retrieved from <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8585/CBP-8585.pdf>
9. Bath & North East Somerset Council, 2020, Inequalities, retrieved from <https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/your-council-and-democracy/local-research-and-statistics/wiki/socio-economic-inequality>

10. Smith D, Thompson C, Harland K, Parker S, Shelton N. (2018) Identifying Populations and Areas at Greatest Risk of Household Food Insecurity in England. *Applied Geography*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2017.12.022>
11. Smith, D. M., Rixson, L., Grove, G., Ziauddeen, N., Vassilev, I., Taheem, R., ... & Alwan, N. A. (2022). Household food insecurity risk indices for English neighbourhoods: measures to support local policy decisions. *medRxiv*. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2022.04.06.22273530>
12. Feeding Britain, 2021, Bath & North East Somerset, retrieved from <https://feedingbritain.org/location/bath-north-east-somerset/>
13. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 11(4), 589-597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
14. The Trussell Trust, (2021), State of Hunger, retrieved from https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/06/State-of-Hunger_Exec-Summary.pdf
15. B&NES Food Finder, Food Clubs and Pantries, retrieved from <https://www.banesfoodfinder.org.uk>

Appendix A – table of community organisation participants

Name (pseudonym)	Role	Location
David	Food support worker	Radstock
Pat	Food support worker	Radstock
Laura	Food support worker	Radstock
Lesley	Food support worker	Twerton
Zara	Food support worker	Bath
Susan	Food support worker	Radstock
Toni	Food support worker	Newbridge
Morgan	Food support worker	Newbridge
Nicki	Food support worker	Midsomer Norton
Jackie	Food support worker	Bath
Roy	Food support worker	Bath
Helena	Food support worker	Bath & Whiteway
Karen	Organisation representative	Bath
Michael	Organisation representative	Bath
Andy	Organisation representative	Radstock, Keynsham & Bath
Josie	Organisation representative	Radstock, Keynsham & Bath
Julie	Organisation representative	Odd Down, Keynsham & Bath
Hannah	Organisation representative	Bath
Lorna	Organisation representative	Bath
James	Organisation representative	Bath
Matthew	Organisation representative	Bath
Carl	Organisation representative	Bath
Dawn	Organisation representative	Bath