

## Eating Well Chapter

### What is a JSNA?

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) is the comprehensive assessment of the current and future health and social care needs of children and young people aged 0 to 19 (25 with SEND) and their families, with a focus on improving the health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities. There are nine individual chapters that comprise this JSNA.

A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) looks at all the information available around the current and future health and social care needs of populations in the local area. It will then use the data to inform and guide the planning and commissioning of health, well-being and social care services within a local authority. The implementation of recommendations will be overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

As part of the JSNA's development, we have ensured the following principles and values have been considered:

- Think Family
- Our Way of Working and trauma informed practice.
- Prevention, early intervention and avoiding escalation of need.
- The voice of children, young people and families is central to the design, delivery and evaluation of service provision.
- Strength-based, personalised service provision focussed on relationships.
- Integrated services which mean that families tell their story once and can easily access seamless support.
- Equality.
- Reducing inequality.

### Chapters Introduction

Cheshire West and Chester Councils 0-19 (25 with SEND) JSNA aims to bring benefits by identifying key health, wellbeing, and social care needs. Findings will help the Council and its partners to make more informed decisions about how we provide support and services to achieve the best outcomes for our children, young people, and their families/carers.

Each chapter has considered literature relevant to the assigned area of focus, drawing on this information to highlight key points that could contribute to findings and recommendations.

Although each JSNA chapter can be read as an individual report. Throughout every chapter, there were common themes relating to how we collect and analyse data particularly in relation to outcome information for certain groups; how inclusive and consistent messages are communicated and how we would like to do more coproduction and peer mentoring.

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## 1. Introduction

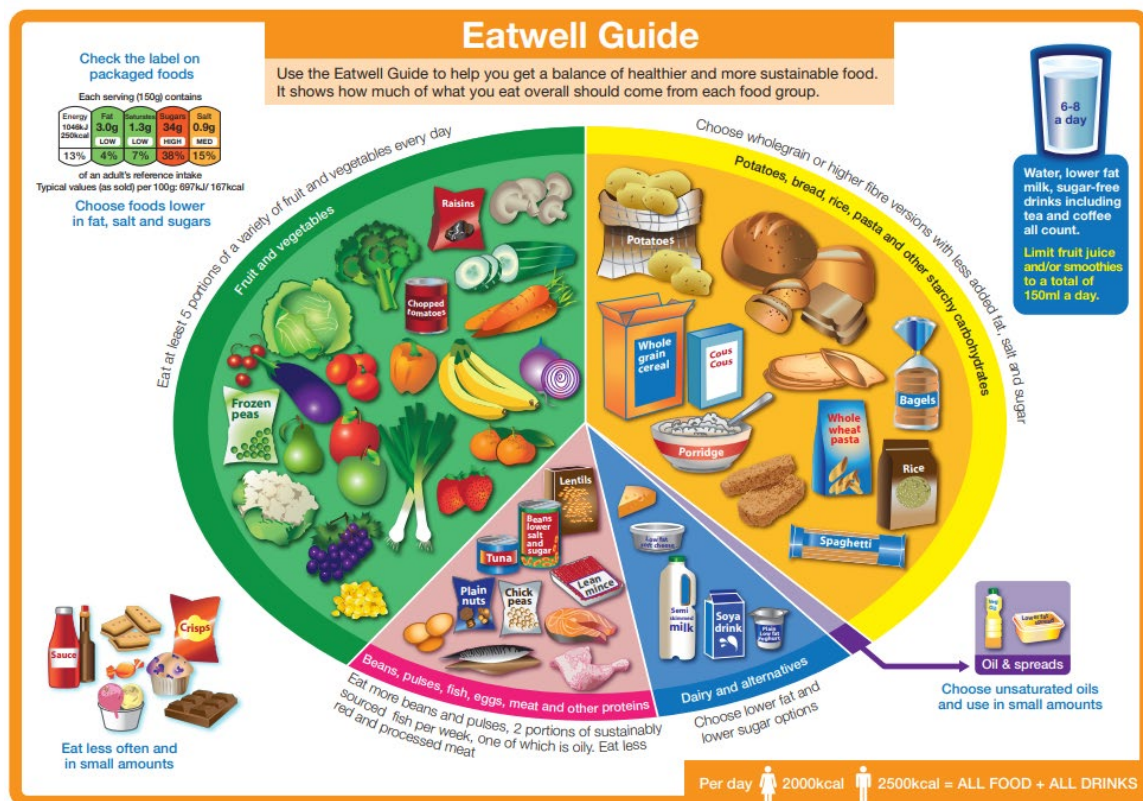
Eating a healthy, balanced diet during childhood ensures that children and young people receive the nutrients they need to grow and develop, supporting brain development and the ability to learn and achieve at school. A healthy balanced diet is supportive of good health

into adulthood and older age, reducing the risk of disease and early death. Further to this, the routine and social aspects around food, such as eating together as a family can have social and emotional benefits too<sup>i</sup>.

However, healthy, balanced diets are not the norm. People are now consuming more foods high in energy, fats, free sugars and salt. Much of our diets come from ultra-processed foods, and many people do not eat enough fruit, vegetables and dietary fibre such as whole grains. What we eat has become the biggest risk factor for preventable disease, taking a massive toll on our health, causing debilitating illness, and placing an unsustainable strain on the NHS.

### 1.1 Eatwell Guide

The UK Government advice on a healthy, balanced diet is presented in the UK’s national food model, the Eatwell Guide<sup>ii</sup>. The Eatwell Guide reflects the latest dietary recommendations and key public health messages. The Eatwell Guide applies to most people regardless of weight, dietary restriction/preferences or ethnic origin. However, it doesn’t apply to children under 2 because they have different nutritional needs. Between the ages of 2 and 5, children should gradually move to eating the same foods as the rest of the family. The proportions shown are representative of food consumption over the period of a day or even a week, not necessarily each mealtime.



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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The Eatwell Guide provides a visual representation of the types and proportions of foods needed for a healthy balanced diet to promote long-term health at a population level. The recommendations include advice to consume five portions of fruit and vegetables per day, wholegrain, higher fibre carbohydrates and lower fat, sugar and dairy options. The Eatwell Guide also recommends consumption of no more than 70g of red and processed meat a day, and replacing meat with lower fat, higher fibre proteins such as beans, pulses, fish and eggs.

Other recommendations include choosing unsaturated oils and spreads, limiting consumption of foods high in fat, salt and sugar, and drinking six to eight glasses of fluid every day.

In terms of children under two years old, the NHS recommends that infants from six months old should be introduced to a variety of foods which are included in the Eatwell Guide including fruit and vegetables, starchy foods such as bread, rice and pasta, milk, dairy and dairy alternatives, and protein sources including beans, pulses, fish, meat and eggs. Limiting free sugars and salt is advised, and variety is important, with repeated taste exposure shown to increase acceptability of foods, such as bitter vegetables for example broccoli or spinach.

### 1.2 5-a-day

Evidence from the World Health Organization shows that consumption of more than 400g of fruit and vegetables a day is associated with a lower risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers<sup>iii</sup>. Therefore, government advice for adults is to consume at least five 80g portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day. Despite the programme being known as '5 a day', the recommendation emphasises consuming at least five portions a day, implying that this is a minimum consumption recommendation. For children, portions are generally between 40 and 60g depending on age.

### 1.3 Free sugars

Free sugars are sugars that are added to foods or drinks, or found naturally in honey, syrups and fruit juices, they do not include sugars that are naturally present in intact fruits, vegetables or dairy products. Sugar in fruit and vegetables become 'free sugars' once the fruit flesh and skin is broken down, for example if they are pureed or juiced. Free sugars should be limited to 5% of the total energy intake (age 2 years and over). This means no more than 19g/day of free sugars for children aged 4 to 6; no more than 24g/day for 7 to 10-year olds; and no more than 30g/day for children from age 11 and adults.

### 1.4 Vitamins

The government recommends all children aged 6 months to 5 years are given vitamin supplements containing vitamins A, C and D every day. Babies who are having more than 500ml of infant formula a day should not be given vitamin supplements. This is because formula is fortified with vitamins A, C and D and other nutrients. Vitamin drops for babies and young children are available through Healthy Start for those who are eligible<sup>iv</sup>.

### 1.5 Adherence to nutritional advice and guidelines, and the impact on health

Research led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, in collaboration with the University of Oxford, found that people who adhered to any five or more of the Eatwell Guide recommendations had an estimated 7% reduction in their risk of dying early – the biggest contributor to this was consuming 5-a-day of fruit and vegetables consistently. Using data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey, the researchers also found that less than 0.1% of people adhered to all nine of the recommendation evaluated in the study, most adhering to three or four<sup>v</sup>.

A recent SACN report on 'Feeding young children 1-5 years' found that the current diets of young children in the UK do not meet current dietary recommendations for several nutrients, this included above average requirement of total calories, above recommended intake of free sugars, saturated fat, protein and salt, and below recommended intake of fibre.<sup>vi</sup>

One of the biggest health challenges we face as a nation is overconsumption of less healthy food and drink. Whilst not the only reason for increasing rates of overweight and obesity, it is a large contributor. A quarter of our reception age children and a third of our Year 6 children are overweight or living with obesity. It is estimated that on average, children who are already overweight or living with obesity are consuming up to 500 more calories than are required for a healthy body weight<sup>vii</sup>. Supporting a healthy weight is covered in more detail in the 'Healthy Weight' Chapter.

However, poor nutrition is about more than weight, nutrition is essential for good dental health and adequate growth. As with obesity, there are large discrepancies across deprivation groups with children in the most deprived group more than twice as likely to have tooth decay compared with those in the least deprived groups. This is covered in detail in the Oral Health chapter. Also of concern is the fact that our children are also becoming shorter. The UK is performing poorly compared to similar countries suggesting our children are not receiving the nutrition they need to optimally develop and grow<sup>viii</sup>.

### 1.6 Our food environment

What we eat has changed considerably over the past decades. We have gone from simple meals based around a few ingredients, to cheap, highly processed and palatable foods available 24 hours a day. The food system at a local, national and international level is broken, causing huge problems for the health of both people and the planet.

As a species, humans are predisposed to go for foods which are high in fat and sugar. Our bodies have not changed much since neanderthal days where food was scarce, and it was important to opt for fatty meat and high sugar fruits for calories and energy to carry out the next hunt. In modern times we still biologically crave these foods, but because food is so abundant in all forms and we eat much more frequently and are far less active than our ancestors, we do not need as much of the high fat and high sugar foods in our diet.

However, the food manufacturers produce food and drinks which will sell. There is huge market for cheap, ultra processed food which are high in fat and sugar as opposed to less processed and whole foods. Cooking from scratch and eating a healthy diet takes time, money and mental capacity. This is why health inequalities pertaining to poor diet are often seen in our least affluent population.

### 1.7 Impact of deprivation

The most deprived fifth of the population would need to spend 50% of their disposable income on food to meet the cost of the Government-recommended healthy diet. This compares to just 11% for the least deprived fifth. Added to this, healthier foods are over twice as expensive per calorie as less healthy foods and it is harder to buy healthy foods in deprived parts of the UK – there is also a higher density of fast food outlets in these areas.

Cheap, highly processed food and drink is not only easily available, accessible and affordable, but we are bombarded with clever advertising and marketing for these items. Research shows that a third (33%) of food and soft drink advertising spend goes towards confectionery, snacks, desserts and soft drinks compared to just 1% for fruit and vegetables, and only 7% of breakfast cereals and 8% of yogurts marketed to children are low in sugar.

More and more people are now experiencing food insecurity. Food insecurity is generally defined as the inability to reliable access sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. It

often involved concerns about the quality, variety and availability of food, as well as the ability to afford it. Food insecurity can result from various factors, including income constraints, rising food prices, limited access to healthy food options, and personal circumstances that affect an individual or household's ability to meet their dietary needs.

### 1.8 The role of educational and other settings

Schools and early years settings are encouraged to provide healthier foods throughout the day to promote a consistent message about healthy eating to children and young people. This means meals and other foods served should be nutritious and of good quality. For some pupils a school meal will be their only hot meal of the day and in 2015 the Government brought in School Food Standards<sup>ix</sup>.

School Food Standards are the rules that regulate the quality and nutrition of food served in schools. They are mandatory for all maintained schools and new academies and free schools in the UK. They apply to all food service on school premise up to 6pm, including breakfast clubs, break times, school lunches and after school food provision. They aim to help school cooks create imaginative, flexible and nutritious menus. The School Food Standards however are not monitored, it is the responsibility of each school to ensure adherence.

Universal Free School Meals were brought in for all infant children in 2013 to teach healthy habits, reduce food insecurity, break down social barriers and increase attainment. Children in families accessing certain benefits are also eligible for Benefits Related Free School Meals, this supports the pupil to eat during the school day and provides funding to the school to support disadvantaged pupils through Pupil Premium.

Early Years settings have a key role to play. Children's earliest experiences of food can shape lifelong habits and establish their long-term relationship with food<sup>x</sup>. Children and adolescents living with obesity are five times more likely to be living with obesity as adults than adults who were not living with obesity in childhood<sup>xi</sup>.

### 1.9 Chapter scope

The topic of eating well is vast. Therefore, the scope of this chapter was considered, with a revised scope developed as follows:

To review the existing offer within the borough and highlight opportunities to improve children, young people and families access to a healthy, affordable and accessible diet (including appropriate advice). The focus for this in particular relating to:

- The community food offer for families who are food insecure or experiencing financial challenges
- The provision of food and drink in educational settings and other places where children and young people spend time outside of the home
- The support available to help families to cook healthy, affordable meals
- The advice and guidance given by professionals to support families to eat well

## 2. Summary

A healthy balanced diet is crucial for health and development, however too many of our children and young people are missing out on the nutrients they need to give them the best

life-chances. There is some positive work taking place to support children and families to eat well, but there are also many barriers. The influence of the food and drink industry, food accessibility, availability and affordability as well as the current cost of living crisis all impact on the diets of our children and young people. Supporting educational and other setting where children and young people spend time is important, as is supporting community providers to provide healthy options. It is important to ensure consistent healthy eating messages and advice and also to work collaboratively to enable people to access healthy, affordable, sustainable food which they enjoy.

### 3. The diets of children and young people in Cheshire West and Chester

#### 3.1 Fruit and vegetable intake

Data is not collected at a local level for fruit and vegetable intake for children. We do however have data for adults which shows that for Cheshire West and Chester, 33.3% of adults meet the guidelines for five portions of fruit and vegetables per day. This is slightly above the England average of 32.5% and higher than the North West average of 29.3%.

At national level, less than 15% of school-age children meet the UK government's five-a-day target for fruit and vegetables<sup>xii</sup>, with almost a third of children ages 5-10 years old eating less than one portion of vegetables per day.

Vegetable consumption follows a strong income gradient, with the poorest 20% eating an average of one portion of vegetables less a day than the richest 20%. Although there has been a welcome drop in numbers of those in high income groups eating less than one portion of veg a day over the past decade, the same cannot be said for low-income groups, suggesting widening dietary inequalities.

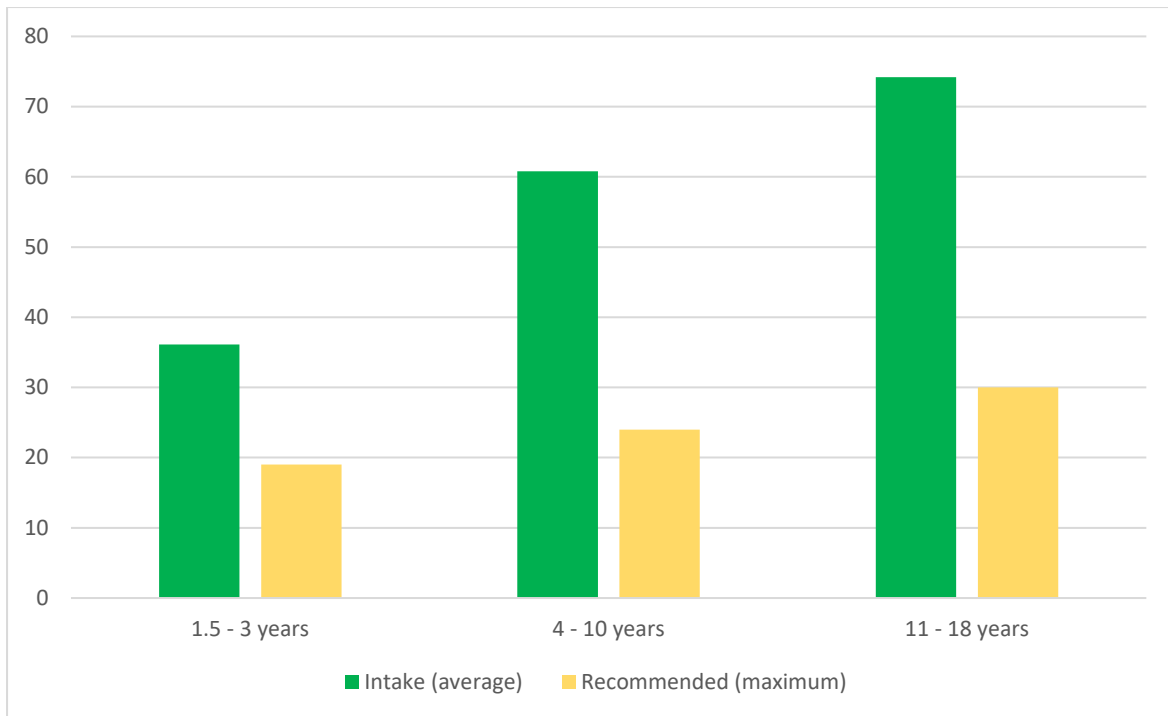
As referenced in the introduction, research by the University of Oxford showed that adherence to the 5-a-day guideline was the most important in increasing life expectancy amongst study participants, showing the importance of fruit and vegetables in the diet.

#### 3.2 Free sugar intake

The average daily intake of sugar of children has been shown to be over double the recommended level<sup>xiii</sup> with the majority of free sugars coming from soft drinks for all age groups. The latest National Diet and Nutrition Survey<sup>xiv</sup> shows the daily sugar intake of free sugars compared to the recommended maximum intake, by age. Chart 1 shows that for all ages, daily free sugar intake exceeds the maximum recommended intake.

#### **Chart 1: Daily intake of free sugars compared to the maximum recommended intake by age**

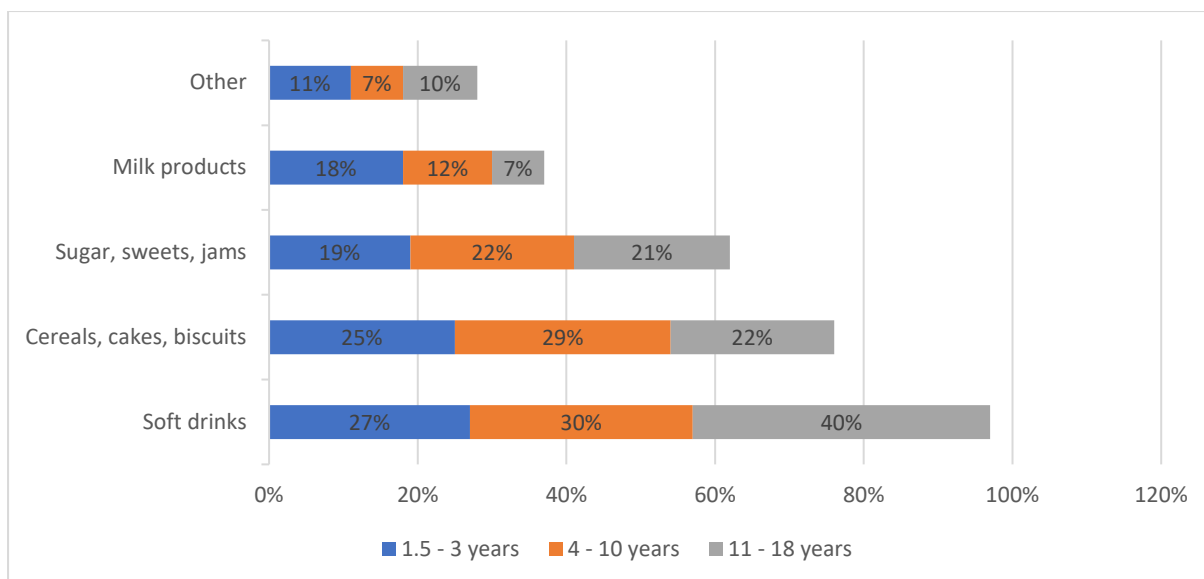




Source: National Diet and Nutrition Survey. Rolling Programme Year 9 to 11 (2016/17 to 2018/19)

Chart 2 shows the percentage of free sugar intake from different food and drink categories by age. For all age groups the largest contributor to free sugar consumption was soft drinks, followed by cereal, cakes and biscuits. It is however worth noting that this data is from 2016-19 and due to the Sugary Drinks Industry Levy many high sugar drinks have undergone reformulation in recent years, therefore the next National Diet and Nutrition Survey may show a reduction in consumption from the sugary drinks category.

**Chart 2: Percentage of free sugar intake from different food and drink categories by age**



Source: National Diet and Nutrition Survey. Rolling Programme Year 9 to 11 (2016/17 to 2018/19)

Data from the Source: National Diet and Nutrition Survey also shows that for the time period 2016/17 to 2018/19, saturated fat intake exceeded government recommendations for all age groups and further to this, mean fibre intake was below recommended levels in all age groups<sup>xv</sup>.

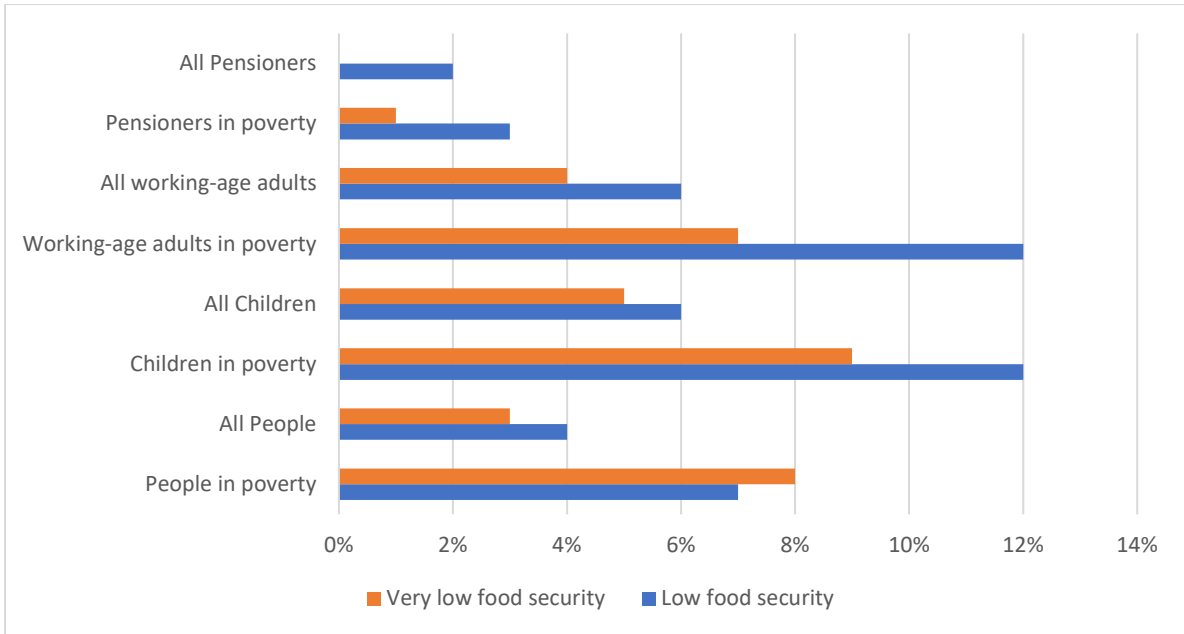
Longitudinal studies indicate that dietary quality declines as children enter adolescence<sup>xvi</sup>, with the consumption of sugary drinks increasing and the consumption of fruit and vegetables reducing<sup>xvii</sup>. As both diet and obesity have been shown to track from childhood to adulthood

### 3.3 Food insecurity

In Cheshire West and Chester, 18.4% of the population live in areas at highest risk of food insecurity<sup>xix</sup>. When applying this figure to the 0-19 population information from the 2021 census for each LSOA, this shows that in Cheshire West and Chester just over 20,000 of children and young people live in areas which are identified as being in the 20% highest risk nationally on the Food Insecurity Risk Index. Importantly, this accounts for 27.9% of the borough's children and young people, whilst for those aged 20 and over, 22.3% of the total population live in these areas. This shows that children are more at risk of living in an areas which are vulnerable to food insecurity compared to the general population.

At a national level, data shows that households with children are more likely to have low and very low food security regardless of whether they are experiencing poverty or not, compared to households without children. This is illustrated in chart 3. Inadequate nutrition in terms of less healthy food but also in terms of going hungry can significantly impact a child's mental and physical health, as well as their behaviour and motivation to learn.

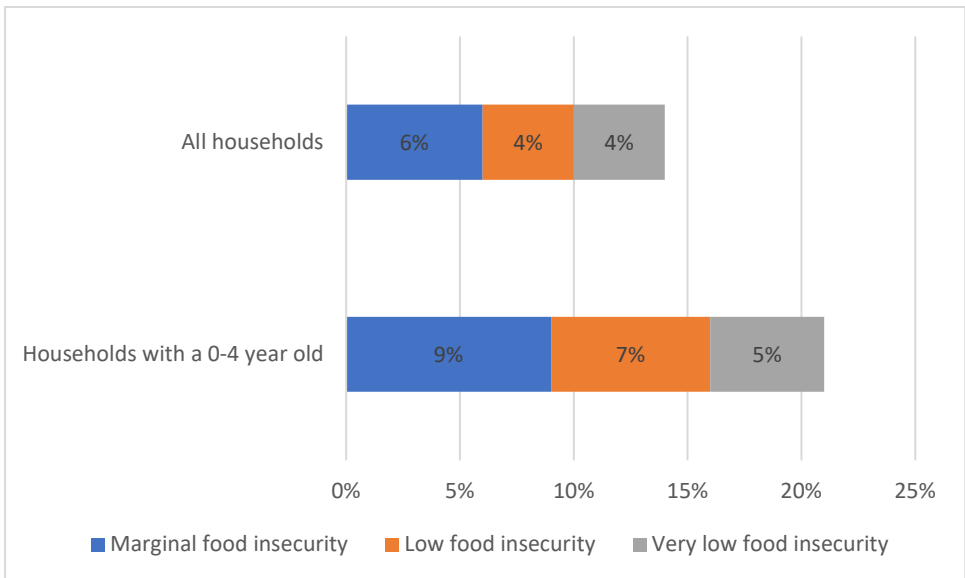
**Chart 3: Percentage of people in households with low and very low food security (People in relative poverty versus all people, 2021/22)**



Source: Food Foundation: Food Insecurity Tracking

Further to this, households with a very young child (age 0-4) are considerably more likely to experience food insecurity when compared to all households. 21% of households with a 0-4 year old are experiencing food insecurity compared to 14% of all households. This is illustrated in Chart 4.

**Chart 4: Percentage of households experiencing marginal, low and very low food insecurity compared to those with a 0-4 year old**



Source: Family Resources Survey

Worryingly, even before the child is born, food insecurity in the pregnant mother is associated with increased risk of low birth weight and birth defects, as well as gestational diabetes and maternal depression (both of which can impact on the health of the child) <sup>xx</sup>

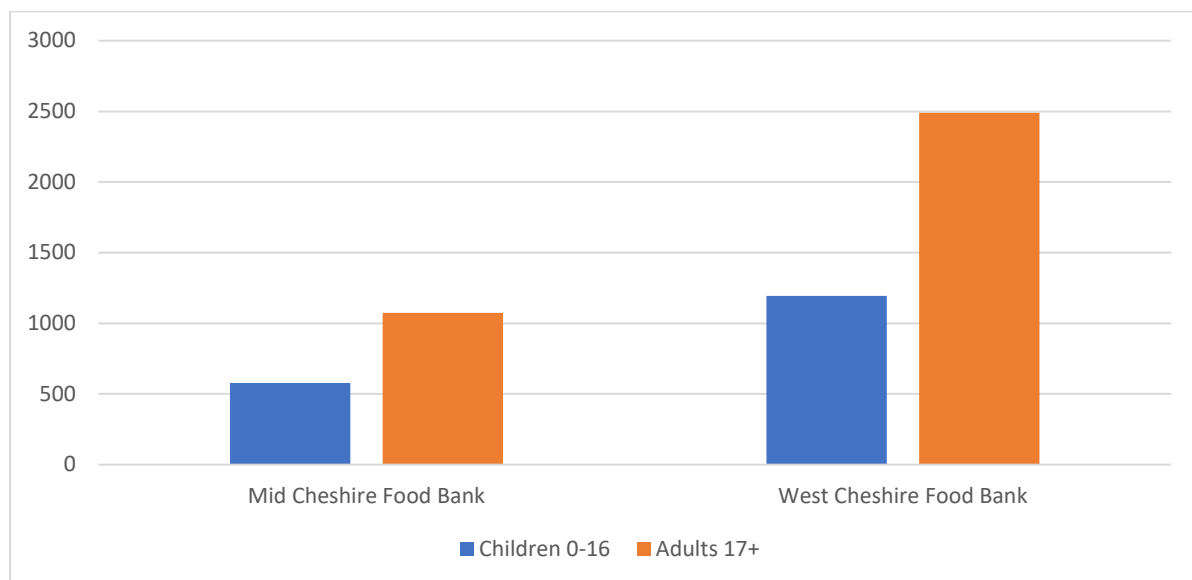
### 3.4 Food bank usage

Food banks are run by charities and have only existed in the UK in their current form for around twenty years. Organisations who run and coordinate food banks like the Trussell Trust and the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), say they intend food banks to be a temporary way to supply emergency food aid, not a long-term solution to household food insecurity. However, demand has increased year on year, with three million three-day emergency food supply parcels being given to people in need during 2022-23.

There are two main food banks serving Cheshire West and Chester residents – West Cheshire Food Bank and Mid-Cheshire Food Bank, with a third much smaller offer from Runcorn Food Bank which covers the Frodsham area.

Over the period 4 April to 30 June 2023?????, 5335 residents were supported with emergency food from the two main food banks. Of these 1771 (14%) were age 16 and under. Chart 5 shows the number of residents supported with emergency food parcels over a three-month period, split by age.

**Chart 5: The number of residents supported with emergency food parcels by each of the food banks over a three month period, split by age**



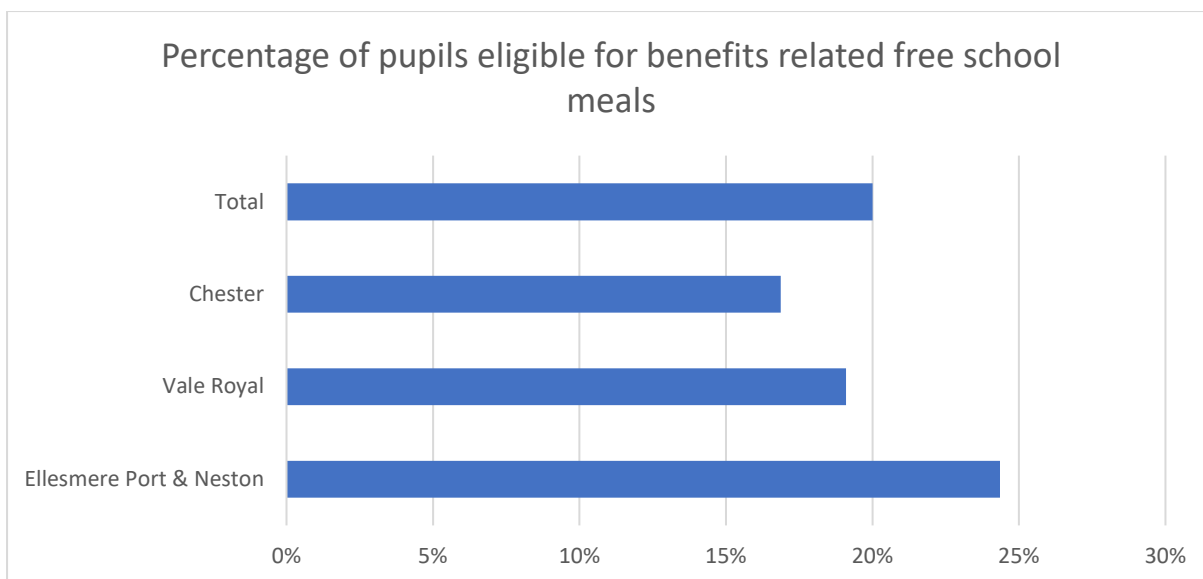
Source: Local data from West Cheshire Food Bank and Mid Cheshire Food Bank

### 3.5 Benefits-Related Free School Meals

Benefits-related free school meals are available to children and young people in household in receipt of certain benefits including Income Support and Income-Based Jobseeker’s Allowance.

Data from the most recent Census shows that in Cheshire West and Chester, 20% of pupils from Reception age upwards are eligible for free school meals. When comparing the percentage of eligible pupils across the three Local Strategic Partnership areas, Ellesmere Port and Neston have the highest percentage of pupils eligible for benefits related free school meals (chart 6).

**Chart 6: Percentage of pupils eligible for benefits related free school meals, split by locality**



Source: Census 2021

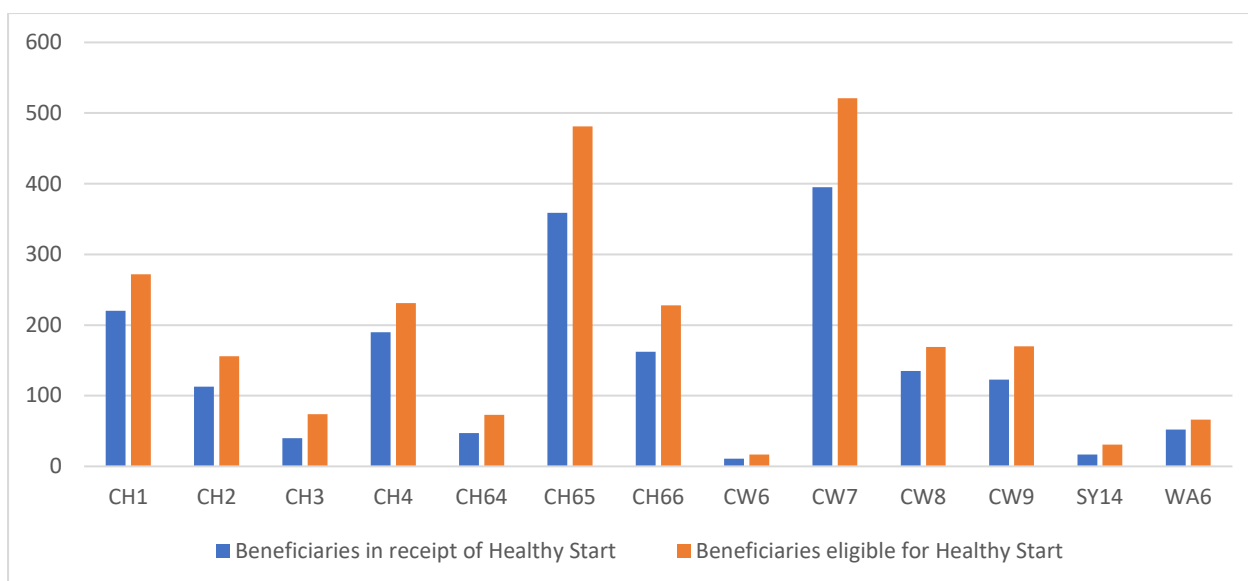
### 3.6 Healthy Start

Healthy Start is a government funded scheme to support low-income families with young children to buy milk and healthy food and to access free vitamins. The scheme has existed since 2006 in various forms and in 2022 moved to a digital scheme with the introduction of a pre-paid Mastercard. Healthy Start is a payment of £4.25 per week, per child from when the mother is 10 weeks pregnant until the child is four years old, with an increase to £8.50 from between birth to age one. Eligible families are required to apply for the Healthy Start scheme and on approval they receive a pre-paid Mastercard which can be used anywhere that Mastercard is accepted. The card is topped up monthly and can be worth over £1200 to the family per child.

The Healthy Start card can be used to purchase plain cow's milk, infant formula based on cow's milk, fresh, frozen and tinned fruit and vegetables, and fresh, dried and tinned pulses. Free vitamins are available to children up to four years and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

In Cheshire West and Chester there are 2489 families eligible for Healthy Start (correct as of November 2023). With 1864 families taking up the scheme, equating to 75%. This means that 625 families are not taking up the scheme which means more than £10,000 is going unclaimed with families across the borough each month. Chart 7 shows the number of families in receipt of Healthy Start versus those eligible, split by postcode district.

### **Chart 7: Number of families in receipt of Healthy Start versus those eligible, split by postcode district.**



Source: NHS Digital

Note: Postcode districts do not all fit the boundary of the local authority, therefore only those with more than 75% of postcodes in Cheshire West and Chester have been included.

#### 4. Evidence of what works

##### 4.1 National Policy

###### 4.1.1 Better Health - Healthier Families

Better Health - Healthier Families (previously Change4Life) is an NHS initiative which provides information and advice on eating, drinking and leading a more active life<sup>xxi</sup>.

###### 4.1.2 School Food Standards (2015)

A new set of standards for food provided in schools is now mandatory in all maintained schools and new academies and free schools, from January 2015. The standards aim to help children develop healthy eating habits and ensure they get the energy and nutrition they need across the whole school day<sup>xxii</sup>

###### 4.1.3 NICE Quality standard 94: Obesity prevention and lifestyles weight managements in children and young people

This guidance covers a range of approaches at a population level to prevent children and young people aged under 18 from becoming overweight or obese. It includes interventions for lifestyle weight management<sup>xxiii</sup>.

###### 4.1.4 NICE Guidance 7: and preventing excess weight gain amongst adults and children

This guideline covers behaviours such as diet and physical activity to help children (after weaning), young people and adults maintain a healthy weight or help prevent excess weight gain. The aim is to prevent a range of diseases and conditions including cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes and improve mental wellbeing<sup>xxiv</sup>.

###### 4.1.5 OHID, Healthy eating: applying All Our Health

Part of 'All Our Health', the information in this training module is aimed at the general population and will help frontline staff promote the benefits of a healthy, balanced diet<sup>xxv</sup>.

#### 4.1.6 National Food Strategy – The Plan

The National Food Strategy contains recommendations to address the major issues facing the food system: climate change, biodiversity loss, land use, diet-related disease, health inequality, food security and trade. There are 14 recommendations included in the plan:

1. Escape the junk food cycle and protect the NHS

Recommendation 1: Introduce a Sugar and Salt Reformulation Tax. Use some of the revenue to help get fresh fruit and vegetables to low-income families.

Recommendation 2: Introduce mandatory reporting for large food companies.

Recommendation 3: Launch a new "Eat and Learn" initiative for schools.

2. Reduce diet-related inequality

Recommendation 4: Extend eligibility for free school meals.

Recommendation 5 Fund the Holiday Activities and Food programme for the next three years.

Recommendation 6 Expand the Healthy Start scheme.

Recommendation 7 Trial a "Community Eatwell" Programme, supporting those on low incomes to improve their diets.

3. Make the best use of our land

Recommendation 8: Guarantee the budget for agricultural payments until at least 2029 to help farmers transition to more sustainable land use.

Recommendation 9 Create a Rural Land Use Framework based on the three compartment model.

Recommendation 10 Define minimum standards for trade, and a mechanism for protecting them.

4. Create a long-term shift in our food culture

Recommendation 11: Invest £1 billion in innovation to create a better food system.

Recommendation 12 Create a National Food System Data programme.

Recommendation 13 Strengthen Government procurement rules to ensure that taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food.

Recommendation 14 Set clear targets and bring in legislation for long-term change.

#### 4.2 National initiatives

##### 4.2.1 Sustainable Food Places

Sustainable Food Places (SFP), supports local food partnerships to harness the diverse energies of the public, voluntary and business sectors along with citizens for a joined-up approach on food issues. Research shows that these food issues are often siloed. SFP champions the need for a coordinated, systems approach. Local food partnerships are now widespread across the UK with strongest representation in areas with high multiple deprivation. Food partnerships are playing a key role in driving the transition from traditional food poverty approaches such as food banks to long-term, sustainable, and empowering models.

#### 4.2.2 Magic Breakfast

Magic Breakfast are a charity supporting schools in high economic need to provide breakfast for pupils without cost to the family. They work with local authorities to feed children and help end child morning hunger for good.

#### 4.2.3 Food - a Fact of Life

Free resources for teaching young people aged 3-16 years about where food comes from, cooking and healthy eating. Food - a fact of life (FFL) is a comprehensive, progressive education programme which communicates up-to-date, evidence-based, consistent and accurate messages around 'food' to all those involved in education.

#### 4.2.4 Characteristics of good practice in teaching food and nutrition education to pupils with additional needs.

While the UK's different curricula and qualifications set out what children should be taught about food and nutrition, there is no other specific guidance on teaching food and nutrition to pupils with additional needs.

The guide has been developed by the British Nutrition Foundation's Education Team - a group of specialists with expertise in food education, teaching and nutrition science - through consensus-building exercises with primary and secondary school practitioners, awarding organisations, initial teacher training providers, and experts in supporting pupils with additional needs across the UK.

### 4.3 Local initiatives

There are many local initiatives which have been delivered in other areas to support healthier eating for families, the two below have been selected as simple projects which have shown to be effective in supporting the diets of families who engaged.

#### 4.3.1 PASTA – Lancashire County Council

PASTA is a fun, friendly activity programme where families can cook, play and spend time together.

It is for children aged five to eight and their families, including older and younger siblings.



PASTA runs once a week for a minimum of six weeks and is for families in specific wards in Lancashire.

It's a chance to:

- learn to cook easy, affordable meals
- get support and encourage your family to try healthy foods
- take part in fun physical activities
- socialise with other families

#### 4.3.2 Eat Well, Move More, Feel Better

A family led cooking and activity project taking place in Wythenshawe schools. The scheme was aimed at helping parents and children to reduce obesity in children. A YouTube video has been produced and can be viewed online.

### 5. Services in Cheshire West and Chester to support eating well in children and young people

#### 5.1 Sustainable Food Place Network Member

In October 2022, Cheshire West and Chester was successful at becoming a Sustainable Food Place. Working towards a number of key objectives to improve the food environment for all, the local delivery plan 'Food for All' is working to support the health of people and the planet by making sure food is affordable, accessible, sustainable and enjoyable. The West Cheshire Food Partnership is delivering on an action plan to improve food for all in Cheshire West and Chester.

As part of the Sustainable Food Place action plan, a 'Good Food Movement' is being developed to engage with residents about what good food means to them. This will drive forwards a Good Food Plan for the borough.

There are a range of support across the borough to support residents to eat well. Many of these are delivered in the community.

#### 5.2 The community food offer for families who are food insecure or experiencing financial challenges

There is a strong community food offer across Cheshire West and Chester. The Welcome Network has been coordinating support for community food groups across the borough since 2017. The Welcome Network offers a range of support and coordinates an interactive map (see below) detailing where residents can access food support. There are a number of very active community groups and charities who support residents to access both emergency and low-cost food.

Organisations including the Very Green Grocery and the Bread and Butter Thing support residents by redistributing surplus food. Both organisations operate different models but offer a weekly shop at a greatly reduced cost when compared to the supermarket. The two organisations also offer a wrap around service to support people in need of financial advice and health and wellbeing support.



### 5.3 The provision of food and drink in educational settings and other places where children and young people spend time outside of the home

#### 5.3.1 Schools

The majority of schools in Cheshire West and Chester use the council-owned company Edsential CiC to provide the school meals. Edsential have made strides to improve the nutritional value of the food and drinks offered to pupils over the school day, including reduced sugar desserts and water only at lunch times.

Whilst there isn't a clear and consistent picture, we are aware that a number of schools in the borough offer additional support for pupils and families outside of school meals, including free breakfast for all, on-site emergency food banks and parent cooking sessions.

#### 5.3.2 Early years settings

Early years settings must adhere to the Statutory framework<sup>xxvi</sup> for the early years foundation stage which states that:

- Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, they must be healthy, balanced and nutritious.
- Before a child is admitted to the setting the provider must also obtain information about any special dietary requirements, preferences and food allergies that the child has, and any special health requirements.
- Fresh drinking water must be available and accessible to children at all times.
- There must be an area which is adequately equipped to provide healthy meals, snacks and drinks for children as necessary.
- There must be suitable facilities for the hygienic preparation of food for children.

To support this the Government has published example menus to support providers in meeting the requirements of the framework<sup>xxvii</sup>

### 5.3.3 Youth zones

The council runs youth provisions across the borough. The service has made impressive strides recently to improve the food offer including increasing the number of freshly cooked meals and replacing sugary and salty snacks with fruit and vegetable options.

### 5.3.4 Summer provision

The Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF) provides children and young people who are entitled to benefits-related free school meals to holiday club provision over the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays. The HAF criteria states that a nutritious meal must be provided, preferably a hot meal. The local authority and Edsential who run the programme in Cheshire West and Chester have commissioned mandatory training for all providers on the nutritional requirements of the food offered, this is delivered by Food Active. Further to this, nutritional education activity booklet has been produced to support learning of healthy food for the children and young people.

## 5.4 The support available to help families to cook healthy, affordable meals

### 5.4.1 Healthy Start

Healthy Start is a Government scheme to support families low income to purchase healthy food and milk for children under the age of four and from 10 weeks pregnant. There are a number of community providers who accept the Healthy Start card, which helps families by making the weekly amount go further. A multi-stakeholder working group is delivering an action plan to increase the number of families accessing the monetary support.

### 5.4.2 0-19 Service

The 0-19 Starting Well service offer a range of sessions for families to attend including:

- introducing solid foods (parent workshops)
- budget cooking or fussy eating offer
- family learning groups
- messy play groups (to support fussy eating)

### 5.4.3 HENRY

Practitioners across the borough are trained to deliver HENRY: Healthy Families from the Start and HENRY: Healthy Families Growing Up. The HENRY programme is an evidence based 8-week course to support parents to embed healthy behaviours into the home and daily routine. Practitioners also offer one-off workshop sessions covering topics such as 'cooking on a budget' and 'fussy eating'.

### 5.4.4 Koala North West

Koala NW provides a range of services for families with children aged 0-11 years. They are currently funded in Ellesmere Port to deliver the Starting Young/Healthy Lifestyles Project. This programme is open to any family with a child aged 0-5 years old living in Ellesmere Port. Supporting parents and carers, in establishing a healthy eating and active way of life for the whole family. Encouraging children, and promoting healthy habits for life. We cover the following with families:

- Making healthy choices
- How to exercise with little ones

- Cooking family meals
  - How small changes can make a big difference
- They also provide healthy food and cooking equipment when families need it.

#### 5.4.5 West Cheshire Food Bank – Cash First Project

West Cheshire Foodbank has been piloting a "Vouchers for Families scheme". Grant funding has enabled West Cheshire Foodbank to work in partnership with selected referral partners who support families with children in the communities. The approach offers a supermarket grocery voucher as an alternative to a referral for a Foodbank parcel. This gives dignity, choice and flexibility to an emergency need for food. The flexibility allows families to buy food which is culturally and diet appropriate, and means they can choose fresh and healthy ingredients, with no stigma. It is also much more efficient for agencies and reduces the demand of Foodbanks. The approach is being evaluated by the University of Chester.

#### 5.4.6 Community and voluntary sector

Cheshire West and Chester has a thriving community and voluntary sector, with many community organisations supporting residents around food, whether that is providing emergency food parcels, or running lunch clubs, after school clubs or cooking sessions.

### 5.5 The advice and guidance given by professionals to support families to eat well

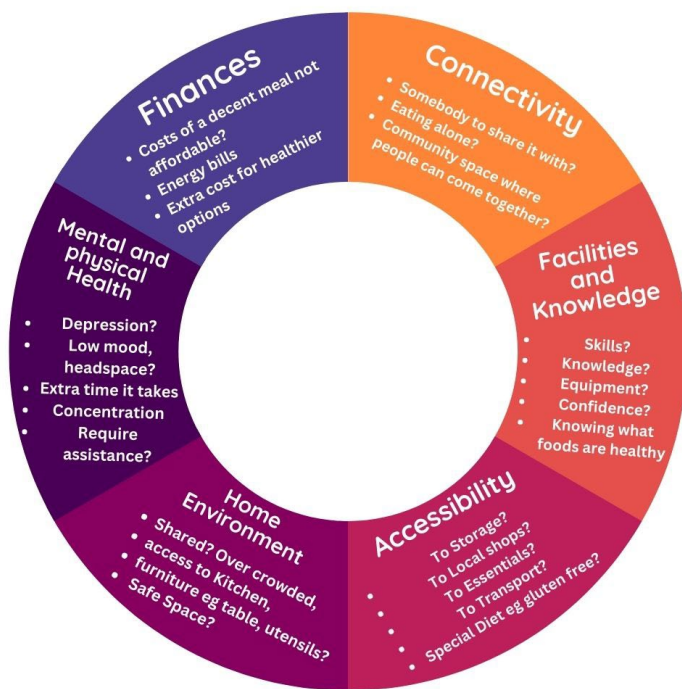
#### 5.5.1 Beans on Toast Training

A group with lived and living experience of food insecurity have developed a half day training Food Poverty Awareness training. This is helping to raise awareness amongst the community, health and public sectors around the issues of food insecurity. Awareness of the challenges of eating well may help services adapt or be more aware of the impact of rising food and energy prices, especially for people on low or fixed incomes.

## 6. Lived experience

### 6.1 Beans on Toast Lived Experience Group

Beans on Toast are a group of volunteers with lived and living experience of food insecurity who work closely with the Welcome Network, Poverty Truth Advisory Board, food banks and Cheshire West Voluntary Action's specialist food infrastructure project to explore the key ingredients for all to have decent meals in West Cheshire. The concept of a decent meal is based upon Nourish Scotland's (2018) dignity principle of have "the power to make choices about what, where, when, how and with whom you eat". The below list of key ingredients was created for the community sector, local authority, health partners, and other key stakeholders to reflect on when making decisions and designing policies in order for them to be informed by the voices of local people with lived experience of food insecurity.



@Beans on Toast

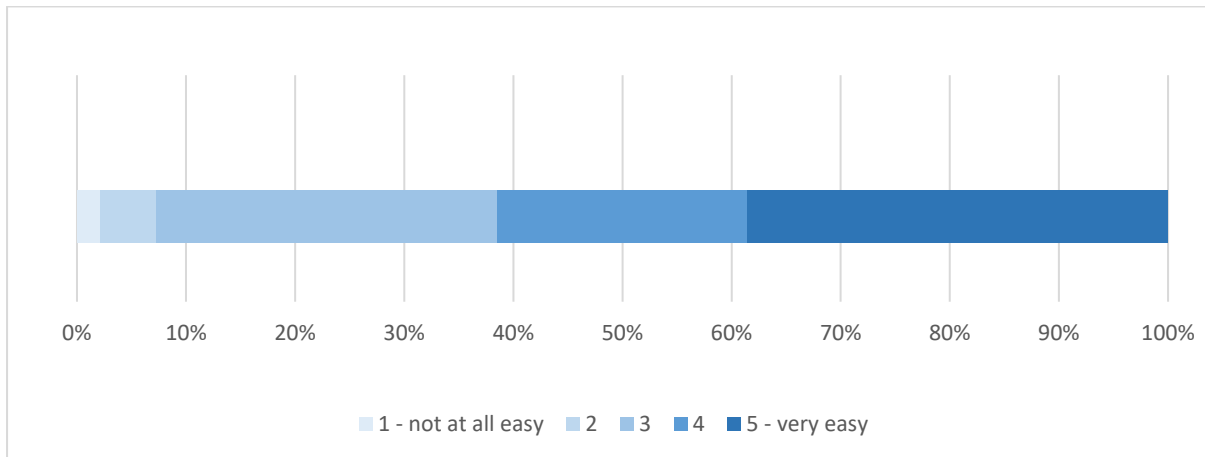
Source: Beans on Toast

## 6.2 Holiday Activity and Food Programme Survey 2023

In a survey of 135 parents and carers of school age children who attended the Holiday Activity and Food Programme in Easter 2023, 39% said it was 'very easy' to ensure their children has a healthy, balanced diet. Out of the remaining 61%, 23% said it was 'easy', 27% said it was 'neither easy nor not easy', 9% responded 'not very easy' and 1% of respondents selected 'not at all easy'. (See chart 8).

The children were eligible for the programme if they were in receipt of benefits-related free school meals or had Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND).

**Chart 8: Survey question which asked ‘How easy do you find it to ensure your children have a healthy, balanced diet?’**



Source: HAF Survey Easter 2023

For those who left a comment to support their answer, regardless of the answer they chose, many cited cost as a barrier to eating a healthy, balanced diet. A number commented that normally it was very easy to provide healthy food, but with rising costs this had become more of a struggle. There were also a number of responses relating to fussy eating and also to sensory issues which can lead to picky eating / food avoidance. A number of respondents commented that whilst their child(ren) liked highly palatable foods such as chicken nuggets, they made sure they provided healthy, balanced meals the majority of the time.

### 6.3 Focus Groups with Children and Young People

During the Summer term of 2023, a number of focus groups were held with children and young people to get their thoughts on what it meant to eat well. Sessions were held with young people at two high schools (20 students) and three primary schools (27 students).

The key stage 2 children (primary) were asked what they should eat and drink to be healthy, there were a range of answers with the majority stating water, followed by fruit, then juice then vegetables, milk and salad. They were asked how often they ate fruit and vegetables, 12 pupils (which is less than half) said they ate fruit and veg every day, 11 responded twice a week. Yet when asked what a healthy lunch at school would be, the majority answered vegetables and fruit. When asked what they ate at school for lunch, 18 responded to say they ate a school meal, the remaining nine took a packed lunch. All children ate breakfast before school, stating a range of items including cereal, toast and pancakes. When asked if it was easy to eat a healthy diet, half of the children responded yes and the remaining half responded no.

The key stage 3 children (Year 8) were also asked a similar set of questions. The vast majority said that they ate fruit and vegetables every day. When asked what they ate before school eight young people responded to say that they ate nothing before school. The remaining pupils reported eating a range of items including cereal, toast and fruit. When asked what they ate for lunch at school, the majority responded that they ate a hot school meal, several took a packed lunch. Five reported eating nothing and six said they ate items including

chocolate, crisps and fruit. When asked what a healthy lunch at school would be, the majority answered vegetables and fruit, followed by salad, pasta and a balanced meal.

### 6.3.1 Poverty Truth Commission 2019

In 2019, children and young people were engaged as part of the West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission. Focus groups and activities were run with students in Winsford high schools. The following issues were highlighted in regard to school meals:

- The high school children often find that they do not have enough money with the allowance to get enough food during the day.
- One student said for an example that she would buy a panini at the morning break as she is hungry, and this would cost her £1.90, she then does not eat for the rest of the day as she cannot get anything else with the remaining 40p.
- All of the students said that they feel low on energy by the end of the day, and they believe not having enough nutritious food contributes to this.
- The young people do not feel there is enough choice. An example of this was wraps which contain just two small pieces of chicken and the food not being of good enough standard.
- The primary school children have to pay £1 a day if they need to attend breakfast club, the high school are able to get toast and milk for free if they arrive before the first bell.
- There are also issues around the time it takes to queue to get food, this takes away time from their social and recreational time. This also adds to what is available when they finally make it to the front of the line.
- The unfairness of the costs of school meals.
- Some young people thought that others were more of a priority.
- The school canteen wouldn't give them a menu but the young people also have issues with menu restrictions.
- They discussed that Academy's seemed to have it worse in terms of profit for outside caterers.
- There is no choice with the free school meals pass
- Meal deal is £2.50 daily which is over the amount given
- Friends buying for others

Solutions:

- All of the young people thought a meal deal would be helpful.
- Make paying more simple by being cashless with a fingerprint or code
- There could be packed lunch bags for school trips with their name on to collect
- Activities and meals during holidays, which would prevent ASB, e.g. holiday clubs to hang out and chill at the school but not classrooms.
- Promote health

## 7. Identifying needs and gaps

Much of the data available on the diets of children and young people is available at national level. For example, whilst we don't have local data, fruit and veg intake is low across the country, it would be useful to understand this at a local level.

Whilst a welcome financial benefit to many, the value of Healthy Start is low, not even covering the cost of a tub of formula.

Support for families is in place for those who are eligible, for example free school meals and Healthy Start, but due to the criteria many families who are also struggling to provide healthy, balanced meals are missing out. It is vital to increase the number of families who are working to afford adequate food for their families.

There is a need to understand on a school by school basis the food offer they are able to provide to their pupils and families, including free breakfast clubs, food banks on school premises etc. Providing support and promoting shared learning and good practice.

There are concerns regarding the food offer for young people in high school. The food offer is generally seen as poor and at a time when children's diets tend to move towards less healthy options, it is a key time to ensure that the options available to young people are supportive of their health.

Dietary preferences start young. Work needs to be undertaken to ensure that food offered in educational and care settings is nutritious and varied. This also needs to be widened to include community settings and events.

Across the board too many children have poor diets, particularly those in deprived areas – whilst we can generalise why this is the case, it is important to keep leaning from our lived experience to understand the specifics for cohorts and communities.

There needs to be long term support for families in temporary accommodation. In Autumn 2022 there were six families in temporary accommodation (in hotels), this is now at 39 families (Autumn 2023). Some families have no access to cooking equipment which makes it hard to cook/eat on a budget, other families are sharing kitchens.

## 8. Conclusion

Children both locally and nationally are not eating diets which are supportive of their health. This is worrying in terms of later life but also has implications earlier in life when it comes to academic performance and life chances. Supporting our children and young people to eat well is a key priority for the West Cheshire Food Partnership and this needs to take a multi-pronged approach, working with a plethora of stakeholders. Whilst the scope of this chapter was refined significantly due to the topic of food being incredibly broad, there are still many needs and gaps identified, with related recommendations detailed below.

## 9. Recommendations

9.1 Take a whole systems approach to meet the ambition that to everyone in West Cheshire having access to affordable, healthy, sustainable and enjoyable food to make a decent meal.

- Continue the deliver on the West Cheshire Sustainable Food Place action plan; work towards bronze sustainable food place accreditation.



- Use the vision of the ‘food for all’ plan to ensure that the work contributes to everyone in West Cheshire having access to affordable, healthy, sustainable and enjoyable food to make a decent meal.
- **Work across departments and partners to ensure a joined-up approach** to supporting our children and young people to eat well, in terms of access, availability and affordability, but also provision at events, in educational and care settings and also regarding skills and knowledge.
- **Make use of existing national guidance and resources** to develop a resource pack for professionals who are working with children and families.
- Use the opportunity of the new Family Hubs to ensure healthy eating information and support is embedded in the service offer in line with the minimum expectations set out in the guidance.

#### 9.2 Improve the provision of food and drink in educational settings and other places where children and young people spend time outside of the home

- Use the planned school food sub-group of the West Cheshire Food Partnership to:
  - Equip schools to disseminate their own packed lunch policy to ensure the food being consumed by children bringing packed lunches to school is in line with the school food standards.
  - Consider what can be done to enable high school children who wish to, to buy a healthy hot meal (both with FSM allowance but also make sure there is enough availability and choice).
  - Support **positive messaging and learning about healthy food** in school settings.
  - Support schools to adhere to the School Food Standards; support school to have a strong school food policy.
  - Understand the free breakfast club provision across schools and explore options to expand this within available funding opportunities.
- Work with early years settings to ensure awareness of the requirements around healthy, balanced meals and snacks. Co-develop resources and support as required.
- Work with the Good Food Movement element of the Sustainable Food Place Action plan to work with groups of children and young people to understand ‘what does good food mean to you’ and some of the barriers they face to eating well. Co-produce resources with young people to support healthier eating.

#### 9.3 Work across partners to continue to improve the community food offer for all residents across the borough

- Take learning from the Holiday Activity and Food Programme and the positive work by the Youth Zones to develop a community resource for healthier catering and nutritional education.
- Work with partners across the borough to consider opportunities to offer a universal school holiday food and activity club offer to families, working with the existing Holiday Activity and Food programme
- Use the West Cheshire Food Partnership to host a planned **working group on food and nutrition for the very young**, supporting positive introduction to first food practice.
- Use the 'Vouchers for Families scheme' evaluation from the University of Chester to share learning from the pilot project and consider rolling out similar approaches with other agencies.
- Develop a joined-up approach to support families in temporary accommodation

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