



Evidence submission – Equality and Social Justice Committee

Submission by: Robbie Davison – Director, Well-Fed (Services) LTD and Jen Griffiths, Service Manager – Housing, Welfare and Communities

January 2023.

The following submission contains the information we would like to share for the Committee's consideration.

This submission covers:

- Food, diet and access to good food
- Beyond benefits advice: Creating services to enable people to better support themselves

Context:

The main element of this submission covers the creation, development, and services of Well-Fed. Well-Fed is a social business based in Shotton, North Wales. The business is unique to the UK. It produces and delivers fresh meals to people of all ages. In 3 years, Well-Fed has distributed over 500,000 free fresh meals to families in crisis. Well-Fed employs 23 people and is a real living wage employer.

Well-Fed was created out of a partnership between Flintshire County Council, ClwydAlyn Housing Association and the social enterprise, Can Cook

A primary aim of the Well-Fed partnership was created to specifically tackle poor diet and the linked poorer health conditions experienced by households who are on benefits or low wage.

The Well-Fed partnership works to link benefits advice to solutions that help people move away from their household crisis (we have focused our evidence on how this is enacted)

Well-Fed operates services guided by this statement.

'If people eat well, they cope well. If they don't eat well, they don't cope well' – we feed everyone well regardless of income levels.

The following facts and circumstances identify some of the cost of living (COL) issues and also wider hunger and food habit behaviours. Our submission focuses on how these circumstances can be changed/improved and how specifically the partnership has worked to improve them.

Food, diet, and access to good food:

- We all organise our days around the same food timetable. Breakfast, lunch, dinner. Imagine if this timetable was removed, which of course it is, for up to 1 million people a day across Wales. Our priority is to re-introduce meal-times to all households in crisis.
- Our approach is also to recognise the difference in approach necessary to engage with rural communities. Often approaches to rural settings are planned with urban methodology – we approach rural communities with rural solutions.

At home

- Most people never cook from scratch anymore. We estimate the figure is as high as 65% who never cook from scratch at any time in their lives.
- Over 70% of our calories from food are now due to eating processed/ ultra-processed food
- When people are in crisis, there are no food standards applied to food aid. This is a significant gap regarding public health
- Good food is now being priced out of the grasp of as many as 30% of households, with the default being more ultra-processed food
- Our experience: Less than 5% of people are eating 5 a day. If 5 a day was a target, it would cost £220 per month for a family of 4 to eat one good meal a day. This makes good food health unobtainable for up to a third of the communities we serve.
- We have noticed a rise of roughly 20% of people who were previously customers of our shops now relying on food aid. This rise is on top of the previous need, prior to the cost-of-living period.
- As a response, we have introduced a subsidy to assist people with the cost of eating well. We have created the subsidy from our own profits and a partnership with a progressive charitable foundation. In the next 12 months, we will sell 150,000 subsidised meals. This matters because;
- We must move people away from the over-reliance on charity to onto becoming contributors in their own wellbeing. Charging affordably for meals/food, protects health and promotes dignity. In addition, we must arrange a food aid response predicated on feeding everyone well – this can be done

Well-Fed interventions (Robbie Davison):

Well-Fed services include:

Commercially:

- Catering into care homes and schools
- Eat at home meal boxes to households

- In February 2023, we launch a region-wide meals on wheels service

Socially:

- Soups and Meals into Warm Hubs: We serve 16 hubs (500 people per week) across Flintshire.
- The FoodStore: Our alternative to food banks: Providing a fresh meals and staple goods. We provide 12 weeks support. 4 weeks free of charge, 4 weeks charged at £10 and the final 4 weeks charged at £15. Every week each household receives meals/staples to the value of £40 – we subsidise the difference. This service is provided door-to-door. This service is particularly relevant when looking to move people away from charity and onto good food options they pay for.
- Mobile Shops: We have 2 shops visiting rural/deprived areas providing shopping options where previously there were none. We sell freshly made ready meals to local people at £2 each and meals for a family of 4 for £4 – these prices are cheaper than any other outlet.
- Slow cooker training: We provide cookery training to 25 people per month. This training includes access to free fresh meals. Once the training is complete the former trainees convert to customers of our mobile shops.

Towards a food poverty solution:

- We are about to start work with Flintshire schools, becoming a provider of fresh school meals for primary school children. If we do this at scale, we commit to feeding every child (and their families) free of charge for as long as they are in crisis. Given Welsh Governments commitment to universal free school meals – our approach, if adopted across all primary schools, could stop all child hunger.

Beyond benefits interventions (Jen Griffiths submission)

To move beyond the regular benefits advice and support, we are continually looking to introduce services that help people fend for themselves. In doing so, we see access to good food as pivotal to people in crisis being better able to move on and act on the advice/support we give.

Good food services also enable our staff to engender stronger relationships based on trust and personal responsibility. Alongside, we realise that households, particularly in rural settings have major concerns regarding heating alternatives such as oil and bottled gas.

To connect with the most relevant COL problems and to bring our good food approach to life, we have devised a 3-stage approach to support our residents through this difficult time and help to alleviate loneliness and isolations within our communities.

Stage 1 - Older residents:

Our community centres within the sheltered schemes have opened every day from November 2022 to March 2023, so residents can meet up with friends and neighbours to

take part in social activities, as well as receive help and support from the 3rd sector agencies, CAB, Warm Wales etc.

We make sure refreshments, freshly made soup and a roll are available daily. In addition, we have installed fridges and fund free Well-Fed meals for residents to take away with them for their evening meal so they can continue to eat well at home.

Phase 2 – Rural areas:

Although many of the sheltered schemes have a community centre, we recognise not all do.

These schemes are in rural areas where residents may struggle to visit the shops, heat their home and use a more expensive source of fuel, such as oil and bottled gas.

We therefore work with Town and Community Councils and FLVC to understand what spaces/activities are already taking place in village halls, churches, community centres etc and how they can apply for funding to remain open to provide a safe, warm and welcoming space for residents to meet with others in comfort and spend some time with social activities, getting help and advice or perhaps just meeting friends and new people.

We also introduce the Well-Fed's mobile shop into areas where there is no existing shopping option. Residents can purchase all staple goods, measured/cost effective fresh veg bags, slow cooker bags and fresh ready meals. The slow cooker bags are recognised as an important tool for households to lower utility bills and eat healthy.

Phase 3 - Identifying gaps:

Throughout the work noted above, we are always looking to identify gaps. To do so, we work with the FLVC and 3rd sector organisations to understand what support is required.

As part of filling gaps, we plan to open two further community support hubs and to support families in six key areas, food poverty, fuel poverty, income maximisation, mental health, digital inclusion and employment.

In addition, we will support an increase of the Well-Fed's FoodStore service. This increase will be managed across 2023 to help families who would have usually attended a food bank giving them a choice on the food they eat, receiving fresh ingredients to cook meals themselves at home – this is particularly relevant in rural areas.

We hope the information/evidence is relevant and we look forward to discussing how we are looking to make people in Flintshire healthier, stronger and much more independent.

