



Embargoed until Midday on 5th September 2018

**90,000 CHILDREN IN NORTHERN IRELAND LIVE IN HOUSEHOLDS FOR WHOM
A HEALTHY DIET IS INCREASINGLY UNAFFORDABLE**

- Comparing the estimated cost of Public Health England's (PHE) 'Eatwell Guide' with household income shows that the bottom 20% of families in Northern Ireland would need to spend 37% of that income on food to meet PHE's Eatwell Guide.
- This is four times what the richest 20% of households in Northern Ireland would need to spend on food to meet PHE's Eatwell Guide
- 90,000 children in Northern Ireland are living in these households, earning less than £15,860, and are likely to be unable to afford a healthy diet as defined by the Government.
- 14.4 million households UK wide (half of all households in the UK) currently don't spend enough to meet the cost of Government's recommended Eatwell Guide.
- Widening inequality is leading to higher rates of childhood obesity in deprived areas of Northern Ireland with 23% of children being overweight/obese in Primary 1 increasing to 32% in Year 8.
- Findings strengthen calls for a national measurement of food insecurity and the need for further investigation into children's access to healthy food in the UK (led by the Children's Future Food Inquiry)

Wednesday 5th September – New analysis "[Affordability of the Eatwell Guide](#)" from independent think tank [The Food Foundation](#) finds that around 3.7 million children in the UK are part of families who earn less than £15,860 and would have to spend 42% of their after-housing income on food to meet the costs of the Government's nutrition guidelines, making a healthy diet most likely unaffordable. In Northern Ireland, families earning less than £15,860 would have to spend 37% of their after-housing income on food to afford the Eatwell Guide, affecting 90,000 children.

Comparing the estimated cost of the [PHE Eatwell Guide](#) (PHE's official guidance on what constitutes a healthy diet) to household income in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales shows that the poorest half of households would need to spend nearly 30% of their after-housing income on food to eat the Government's recommended diet, compared with 12% for the richest half of households.

This analysis comes as children in Northern Ireland return to school after a long eight to nine weeks break amid growing concerns over holiday hunger. The availability of free school meals during term-time will be a relief for parents who struggled to feed their children over the holidays.

The unaffordability of a healthy diet for low-income households is highlighted by higher rates of childhood obesity in deprived areas of the country. **Widening inequality is leading to higher rates of childhood obesity in deprived areas of Northern Ireland with 23% of children being overweight/obese in Primary 1 increasing to 32% in Year 8.**

The Food Foundation's food affordability research comes as the [Children's Future Food Inquiry](#) is [gathering evidence](#) from those who have witnessed or experienced children's food insecurity in the UK. With an estimated 3.7 million children in the UK living in households that likely cannot afford a healthy diet and record levels of childhood obesity, the parliamentary inquiry is joining calls for a [national measurement for food insecurity](#) and next year will present recommendations to policy makers in all regions of the UK including specific recommendations for Northern Ireland for understanding and tackling children's food insecurity.

Sharon Hodgson MP, Chair of the Children's Future Food Inquiry committee said:

“It has always been a great concern to me that so many children and families in the UK are at risk of going hungry, or going without a healthy meal each day. That is why I have campaigned for many years to change this, and why I am proud to Chair the Children's Future Food Inquiry committee, which is looking into this incredibly important issue.

“It cannot be right that 50% of households in the UK currently have insufficient food budgets to meet the Government's recommended Eatwell Guide. A healthy diet, which we know is important for our health and development, should not be unaffordable to so many people.

“I hope that the Government will look into this issue as a matter of urgency, in order to make eating a healthy diet more affordable.”

Pauline Leeson, CBE, Chief Executive of Children in Northern Ireland who are part of the Inquiry said:

“The absence of free school meals is even more important during holiday periods as family budgets are already stretched.”

“School holidays are an expensive time for families where there is financial strain on increased food budgets, childcare costs and paying for activities to keep children and young people entertained. Many parents are faced with the difficult choice of how to feed their whole family, with many parents going without in order to feed their children.”

“This analysis by The Food Foundation clearly highlights the need for Westminster and the devolved regions to listen to children, young people and their families to put in place strategies that will allow them to eat a healthy balanced diet no matter what time of year it is.”

“Children in Northern Ireland is delighted to be part of the Inquiry and ensure the voices of children, young people and their parents are heard even though we do not have a functioning Government at present.”

Anna Taylor, Executive Director of the Food Foundation, said:

“The Government's measurement of household income highlights the fact that millions of families in the UK cannot afford to eat in line with the Government's own dietary guidance. It's crucial that a coordinated cross-government effort develops policy that accounts for the cost of its recommended diet, and creates a food system that does not consign those on lower incomes to the risk of diet-related illness.”

Notes to Editor

Pauline Leeson, Anna Taylor, Sharon Hodgson MP are available for further comment.

Please contact:

Jo Ralling – 07770500858 / jo.ralling@foodfoundation.org.uk

Pandora Haydon – 07789712608 / pandora.haydon@foodfoundation.org.uk

Link to report: ["Affordability of the Eatwell Guide"](#)

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About the Children's Future Food Inquiry

The [Children's Future Food Inquiry](#) was initiated to hear directly from children, young people and those who live and work with them about children's experiences of food and how it affects their lives. An estimated 4.1 million children are living in poverty in the UK, but almost nothing is known about how many of these children experience food insecurity. At the same time children are suffering from record levels of obesity and it is worse in the poorest parts of the country. The Inquiry will particularly focus on children who are disadvantaged, and will

investigate this challenge in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and is spearheaded by a cross-party [parliamentary group](#). Share your knowledge of children's food insecurity with the Inquiry who are [gathering evidence](#) and sign up to the newsletter [here](#).

About Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)

CiNI represents the interests of its 160-member organisations providing policy, information, training, and participation support services to members in their direct work with and for children and young people. CiNI membership also includes colleagues in the children's statutory sector recognising that the best outcomes for children and young people are increasingly achieved working in partnership with all those who are committed to improving the lives of children and young people in NI. CiNI delivers holiday hunger projects throughout Northern Ireland ensuring children and young people are fed during the long school holidays. The project also incorporates elements of fun and learning to address the educational underachievement gap between those living in poverty and those not.

About the Food Foundation

The Food Foundation is an independent think tank that tackles the growing challenges facing the UK's food system in the interests of the UK public. This research was funded by the Children and Young People's Commissioner, Scotland.