



Report on the cost and availability of a Minimum Essential Food Basket

August 2022

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Introduction

The Consumer Council is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) established through the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order 1984. Its principal statutory duty is to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland (NI). The Consumer Council has specific statutory duties in relation to energy, postal services, transport, water and sewerage, financial services and food.

The Consumer Council advocate on behalf of all NI consumers to ensure that consumer rights and issues are at the forefront of policymaking. In order to do that, it is important that the Consumer Council are informed and have the necessary evidence base to influence and shape policy. Under food affordability and accessibility, The NI Order gives the Consumer Council powers to research and report on the issues or barriers NI consumers might face in accessing affordable, good, nutritious and enjoyable food, of a suitable quality and quantity to sustain an acceptable standard of living appropriate for all.

In January 2022, the Consumer Council commissioned Cognisense to undertake a pricing exercise with the overarching objective of gathering data on the cost and availability of a weekly Minimum Essential Food Basket (MEFB) for two household types across a range of settlement areas in both Mid and East Antrim, and Derry City and Strabane.

Specifically, the pricing exercise aimed to answer the following questions:

- How much does it cost to buy the contents of the basket in different retail outlets, and in different settlement areas in Northern Ireland?
- Are there any items from the basket that are not available from any of the outlets at the time of checking?
- Where is it most expensive to purchase the contents of the basket?
- Where is it hardest to access all of the items in the basket?

The items that made up the basket for each household type were influenced by a pilot study conducted by Safefood, in partnership with Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland and the Consumer Council ([The cost of a healthy food basket](#)). The basket contents are detailed in the Appendix of this report. In essence, the contents of the basket of goods are based on weekly meal plans, devised by members of the public who took part in focus groups in three locations in Northern Ireland back in 2015. Participants were asked to decide what different family scenario types should eat in order to meet their physical, psychological and social needs. This was then assessed by a nutritionist and minor adjustments were made to meet with healthy eating guidelines at that time. The meal plans (and the respective food baskets) represent what any person, regardless of their income, should have at a minimum level. It doesn't represent what all people can afford, or necessarily choose to have in their baskets.

The same research informed the two household types that were chosen: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age); and a pensioner living alone. The Safefood research comprised of four household scenarios:

- Two parent, two child (primary and secondary school)
- Two parent, two child (pre-school and primary school)
- One parent, two child (pre-school and primary school)
- Pensioner living alone

Of these household types, the Consumer Council chose the one parent, two children because according to Trussell Trust research¹, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 18% of those referred to their network of foodbanks were single parents. This is more than twice the rate of the general population. The pensioner living alone was selected because some in this category have less access to a private car and can find travelling to a larger supermarket more difficult, depending on the public transport links available in the area. In these cases, shopping can often be restricted to local convenience stores, which may impact price and choice.

Mid and East Antrim, and Derry City and Strabane were the Local Government District (LGD) areas selected as they both contain the range of settlement areas of interest, which are classified by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency as follows:

- Band B: large town, population greater than 18,000 people
- Band C: large town, population greater than 18,000 people
- Band D: medium town, population between 10,000 and 18,000 people
- Band E: small town, population between 5,000 and 9,999 people
- Band F: intermediate settlements, population between 2,500 and 4,999 people
- Band G: village, population between 1,000 and 2,499 people
- Band H: open countryside and small villages with population less than 1,000 people

In order to ensure representation of retail outlets, the sample chosen for the pricing exercise included the following: large national supermarkets, large/medium independent supermarkets, local convenience stores, small chains, and small independent stores.

The following section of the report describes the methodology used for the pricing exercise.

¹ [State of Hunger - The Trussell Trust](#)

Methodology

Prior to commencement of data collection, the Consumer Council secured permission for a total of 43 retail outlets to be included in the pricing exercise. A breakdown of these retail outlets by Local Government District (LGD) area, store type and settlement area is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Breakdown of retail outlets

| LGD | Number of outlets |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Mid and East Antrim | 19 |
| Derry City and Strabane | 24 |
| | |
| Store type | |
| Large national supermarket | 3 |
| Large/medium independent supermarket | 8 |
| Local convenience | 12 |
| Small chain | 9 |
| Small independent | 11 |
| | |
| Settlement area | |
| Bands B and C | 6 |
| Bands D and E | 13 |
| Bands F, G and H | 24 |

Throughout February and March, each of these retail outlets was visited by a member of Cognisense’s face-to-face data collection team, all of whom had received training in line with the Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (the definitive UK-wide standard for interviewing) and the Market Research Quality Standards Authority. During each visit, the following information was captured (via an electronic data collection device) for the items in the basket for each household type: size, brand, and price. In instances where the required item was unavailable, the same information was collected for a comparable item. If no comparable item was available, this was recorded.

To accommodate the preference for high quality meat products as identified in the aforementioned Safefood research, five butchers in each LGD area were also visited by members of the face-to-face data collection team. The purpose of these visits was to gather information on the cost of certain meat products from the basket (see Appendix). These visits were to obtain prices only – the process to determine item availability mentioned above was not employed as the small number of items for which prices were required were all available at each of the butchers visited.

In addition to the face-to-face data collection at the retail outlets and butchers, an online pricing exercise was conducted for a large national supermarket in each LGD area, bringing the number of retail outlets in the final sample to 45. Given the

tendency for this store type to be located in areas of higher population density, the online audit for Mid and East Antrim was attributed to the 'Band C' settlement type, whilst that for Derry City and Strabane was allocated to 'Band B'. It was necessary to collect information for these retail outlets via an online methodology as permission for an in-person visit was not forthcoming.

Once data collection was complete, the information captured was collated, cleaned and analysed. When considering the appropriate cost for the basket items that typically last longer than a week (such as condiments), the approach detailed in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 respectively in each of the following Safefood research projects was adopted:

- [The cost of a healthy food basket](#)
- [What is the cost of a healthy food basket in Northern Ireland in 2016?](#)

When considering the meat products priced at butchers, the average cost for each item across the respective LGD area was calculated. As information regarding these products was also collected for the retail outlets, the total cost for buying the basket with meat products from a butchers, and the total cost for buying the basket with meat from a retail outlet was calculated.

In cases of product unavailability, the price was determined by the average cost of the item across the various stores within the relevant LGD area in which it was available.

In calculating the proportion of basket items that could not be obtained, only those items for which no comparable substitution could be sourced were considered to be unavailable. However, in order to provide a fuller picture of the process of shopping for the basket, the proportion of items available both with and without substitutions has been included in this report. For the purposes of the meat products priced both in retail outlets and at butchers, only the availability in retail outlets was factored into calculations.

When analysing differences in price by settlement area, certain bands were combined in order to increase the number of retailers from which data was drawn, thereby improving the robustness of the findings. The settlement areas were combined as follows: Bands B and C; Bands D and E; Bands F, G and H. Hereafter, for ease of reference, these bands will be referred to respectively as 'large towns', 'medium and small towns', and 'villages, hamlets and open countryside'.

Throughout the data collection and data analysis processes, all information was treated in a manner that complied fully with GDPR legislation and the Data Protection Act 1998.

The following section of the report details the main findings from the data collected.

Main findings

How much does it cost to buy the contents of the basket in different retail outlets and in different settlement areas in Northern Ireland?

Household: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age)

The average cost for the contents of the basket overall, by LGD area, by store type and by settlement area for a household with one parent and two children (pre-school and primary school age) is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Average cost of the basket: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age) household

| | Basket with meat from a butchers | Basket with meat from a retail outlet |
|--|---|--|
| Overall | £105.97 | £103.01 |
| LGD | | |
| Mid and East Antrim | £107.34 | £102.30 |
| Derry City and Strabane | £104.88 | £103.58 |
| Store type | | |
| Large national supermarket | £93.80 | £91.52 |
| Large/medium independent supermarket | £105.01 | £102.01 |
| Local convenience | £107.75 | £104.57 |
| Small chain | £107.89 | £104.30 |
| Small independent | £108.89 | £106.64 |
| Settlement area | | |
| Large towns | £101.90 | £99.23 |
| Medium and small towns | £104.88 | £102.10 |
| Villages, hamlets and open countryside | £107.92 | £104.77 |

The overall average cost for the basket for this household type was £105.97 if the relevant meat products were from a butchers, and £103.01 if the same products were from a retail outlet.

In terms of LGD, the average cost of the contents of the basket with butcher meat in Mid and East Antrim was £107.34, whilst in Derry City and Strabane it was £104.88. If the basket included meat from a retail outlet instead of meat from a butchers, the average cost in Mid and East Antrim was £102.30, whilst in Derry City and Strabane it was £103.58.

Regarding store type, the average cost of purchasing the basket with butcher meat from a large national supermarket was £93.80, from a large/medium independent supermarket it was £105.01, from a local convenience store it was £107.75, from a small chain it was £107.89, whilst from a small independent it was £108.89.

If meat from a retail outlet was included instead of meat from a butchers, the average cost of the basket from a large national supermarket was £91.52, from a large/medium independent supermarket it was £102.01, from a local convenience store it was £104.57, from a small chain it was £104.30, whilst from a small independent it was £106.64.

Looking at settlement area, the average cost of the basket with butcher meat in large towns was £101.90, in medium and small towns it was £104.88, whilst in villages, hamlets and open countryside it was £107.92. If meat from a retail outlet was included instead of meat from a butchers, the average cost of the basket in large towns was £99.23, in medium and small towns it was £102.10, whilst in villages, hamlets and open countryside it was £104.77.

The categories that made up the basket for this household, their average cost and the percentage of the overall basket for which they accounted are detailed in Table 3 overleaf.

Table 3: Cost and percentage of basket of each food category: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age) household

| | Basket with meat from a butchers | | Basket with meat from a retail outlet | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Average cost | Percentage of basket | Average cost | Percentage of basket |
| Breads and cereals | £13.41 | 13% | £13.41 | 13% |
| Coffee, tea and cocoa | £1.73 | 2% | £1.73 | 2% |
| Condiments | £1.85 | 2% | £1.85 | 2% |
| Dairy and eggs | £14.37 | 14% | £14.37 | 14% |
| Fish | £1.56 | 1% | £1.56 | 2% |
| Frozen | £2.54 | 2% | £2.54 | 2% |
| Fruit | £12.68 | 12% | £12.68 | 12% |
| Meat | £25.70 | 24% | £22.74 | 22% |
| Mineral water, soft drinks and juices | £1.80 | 2% | £1.80 | 2% |
| Oils and fats | £0.78 | 1% | £0.78 | 1% |
| Store cupboard | £6.01 | 6% | £6.01 | 6% |
| Sugar, jams and syrups | £1.65 | 2% | £1.65 | 2% |
| Treats | £8.97 | 8% | £8.97 | 9% |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | £12.91 | 12% | £12.91 | 13% |
| Total | £105.97 | 100% | £103.01 | 100% |

Meat accounted for the largest proportion of the total cost for both the basket that contained butcher meat (24%) and that which included meat from a retail outlet (22%). Meat, fruit, vegetables, dairy and eggs, and breads and cereals accounted for three-quarters of the total for both the basket that contained butcher meat (75%) and that which included meat from a retail outlet (74%).

Household: pensioner living alone

The average cost for the contents of the basket overall, by LGD area, by store type and by settlement area for a pensioner living alone is shown in Table 4 overleaf.

Table 4: Average cost of the basket: pensioner living alone

| | Basket with meat from a butchers | Basket with meat from a retail outlet |
|--|---|--|
| Overall | £59.60 | £59.18 |
| LGD | | |
| Mid and East Antrim | £60.63 | £58.38 |
| Derry City and Strabane | £58.77 | £59.82 |
| Store type | | |
| Large national supermarket | £50.98 | £49.14 |
| Large/medium independent supermarket | £59.75 | £59.35 |
| Local convenience | £60.78 | £60.27 |
| Small chain | £61.24 | £60.75 |
| Small independent | £60.65 | £61.24 |
| Settlement area | | |
| Large towns | £55.44 | £54.57 |
| Medium and small towns | £59.79 | £58.99 |
| Villages, hamlets and open countryside | £60.88 | £60.82 |

The overall average cost for the basket with butcher meat for this household type was £59.60, whilst the average cost for the basket with meat from a retail outlet was £59.18.

Regarding LGD, the average cost of the contents of the basket with butcher meat in Mid and East Antrim was £60.63, whilst in Derry City and Strabane it was £58.77. If meat from a retail outlet was included instead of butcher meat, the average cost of the basket in Mid and East Antrim was £58.38, whilst in Derry City and Strabane it was £59.82.

In terms of store type, the average cost of purchasing the basket with butcher meat from a large national supermarket was £50.98, from a large/medium independent supermarket it was £59.75, from a local convenience store it was £60.78, from a small chain it was £61.24, whilst from a small independent it was £60.65. If meat from a retail outlet was included instead of meat from a butchers, the average cost of buying the basket from a large national supermarket was £49.14, from a large/medium independent supermarket it was £59.35, from a local convenience store it was £60.27, from a small chain it was £60.75, whilst from a small independent it was £61.24.

With regards to settlement area, the average cost of buying the basket with butcher meat in large towns was £55.44, in medium and small towns it was £59.79, whilst in villages, hamlets and open countryside it was £60.88. If meat from a retail outlet was included instead of meat from a butchers, the average cost of the basket in large

towns was £54.57, in medium and small towns it was £58.99, whilst in villages, hamlets and open countryside it was £60.82.

The categories that made up the basket for this household, their average cost and the percentage of the overall basket for which they accounted are detailed in Table 5.

Table 5: Cost and percentage of basket of each food category: pensioner living alone

| | Basket with meat from a butchers | | Basket with meat from a retail outlet | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Average cost | Percentage of basket | Average cost | Percentage of basket |
| Breads and cereals | £2.81 | 5% | £2.81 | 5% |
| Coffee, tea and cocoa | £1.45 | 2% | £1.45 | 2% |
| Condiment | £0.74 | 1% | £0.74 | 1% |
| Dairy and eggs | £5.45 | 9% | £5.45 | 9% |
| Fish | £1.56 | 3% | £1.56 | 3% |
| Frozen | £1.08 | 2% | £1.08 | 2% |
| Fruit | £4.76 | 8% | £4.76 | 8% |
| Meat | £18.34 | 31% | £17.92 | 30% |
| Oils and fats | £0.07 | <1% | £0.07 | <1% |
| Store cupboard | £3.38 | 6% | £3.38 | 6% |
| Sugar, jams and syrups | £0.04 | <1% | £0.04 | <1% |
| Treats | £8.70 | 15% | £8.70 | 15% |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | £11.21 | 19% | £11.21 | 19% |
| Total | £59.60 | 100% | £59.18 | 100% |

Meat accounted for the largest proportion of the total cost for both the basket that contained butcher meat (31%) and that which included meat from a retail outlet (30%). Meat, fruit, vegetables, dairy and eggs, and breads and cereals accounted for 72% of the basket that contained butcher meat and 71% of that which included meat from a retail outlet.

Are there any items from the basket that are not available from any of the outlets at the time of checking?

Household: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age)

The average proportion of basket items available overall, by LGD area, by store type and by settlement area for a household with one parent and two children is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Proportion of basket available: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age) household

| | Without substitutions | With substitutions |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Overall | 48% | 77% |
| | | |
| LGD | | |
| Mid and East Antrim | 47% | 77% |
| Derry City and Strabane | 49% | 76% |
| | | |
| Store type | | |
| Large national supermarket | 72% | 95% |
| Large/medium independent supermarket | 50% | 77% |
| Local convenience | 49% | 79% |
| Small chain | 42% | 70% |
| Small independent | 39% | 72% |
| | | |
| Settlement area | | |
| Large towns | 52% | 88% |
| Medium and small towns | 49% | 72% |
| Villages, hamlets and open countryside | 46% | 76% |

If only the exact items that made up the basket were sought, the average proportion of products available overall was 48%. When substitutions were considered, the proportion of available items rose to 77%.

Regarding LGD, the average proportion of items available without substitutions was 47% in Mid and East Antrim and 49% in Derry City and Strabane – the proportion of items available increased to 77% and 76% respectively when substitutions were included.

In terms of store type, the average proportion of basket items available without substitutions was 72% in large national supermarkets, 50% in large/medium independent supermarkets, 49% in local convenience stores, 42% in small chains, and 39% in small independents.

With substitutions, the average proportion of available items was 95% in large national supermarkets, 77% in large/medium independent supermarkets, 79% in local convenience stores, 70% in small chains, and 72% in small independents. When looking at settlement area, the average proportion of available items without substitutions was 52% in large towns, 49% in medium and small towns, and 46% in

villages, hamlets and open countryside – the proportions of items available rose to 88%, 72% and 76% respectively when substitutions were included.

Without substitutions, the items from the basket with availability below the overall average are detailed in Table 7.

Table 7: Average availability of items without substitutions: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age) household

| Item | Brand | Size | Average availability without substitutions |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|--|
| Ham (slices) | Own/Generic | 5 pack | 47% |
| Ice-cream | Own/Generic | 2kg | 47% |
| Fromage frais | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 44% |
| Tuna (tinned) | Own/Generic | 160g | 44% |
| Chicken fillets | Own/Generic | 4 pack | 42% |
| Bagels | Own/Generic | 5 pack | 42% |
| Muffin (blueberry) | Own/Generic | 4 pack | 42% |
| Cake (small) | Own/Generic | 300g | 42% |
| Orange juice | Own/Generic | 1l | 42% |
| Leeks | Own/Generic | Single loose | 40% |
| Pre-packed chicken | Own/Generic | 180g | 40% |
| Yoghurts | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 40% |
| Mixed herbs | Own/Generic | 14g | 40% |
| Rice cakes | Own/Generic | 18 pack | 40% |
| Pineapple | Own/Generic | Single loose | 38% |
| Porridge | Own/Generic | 1kg | 38% |
| Garlic | Own/Generic | One bulb | 36% |
| Mince meat | Own/Generic | 454g | 33% |
| Go-Ahead bars | Go-Ahead | 5 pack | 33% |
| Garlic bread (slices) | Own/Generic | 10 pack | 33% |
| Wholemeal bread own | Own/Generic | 800g | 31% |
| Baps | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 31% |
| Rice | Own/Generic | 1kg | 31% |
| Stir-fry (fresh) | Own/Generic | 320g | 29% |
| Haddock fillets (frozen) | Own/Generic | 450g | 29% |
| Egg noodles (dry) | Own/Generic | 300g | 27% |
| Bacon rashers | Own/Generic | 10 pack | 24% |
| Poppadums plain | Own/Generic | 8 pack | 24% |
| Curry powder | Own/Generic | 80g | 24% |
| Mayonnaise | Own/Generic | 240ml | 24% |
| Olive oil | Own/Generic | 1l | 24% |
| Pancakes | Sunblest | 8 pack | 22% |
| Tomato puree | Own/Generic | 200g | 22% |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|---------|-----|
| Fromage frais | Own/Generic | 4 pack | 20% |
| Tomato ketchup | Heinz | 570g | 20% |
| Peas (Frozen) | Own/Generic | 1kg | 20% |
| Cheese low fat spread | Own/Generic | 250g | 18% |
| Pasta | Own/Generic | 1kg | 18% |
| Hot chocolate/cocoa | Own/Generic | 500g | 18% |
| Sausages stuffing | Own/Generic | 1 pack | 13% |
| Gravy granules | Bisto | 500g | 13% |
| Popcorn (microwave) | Butterkist | 3 pack | 13% |
| Raisins | Own/Generic | 1kg | 13% |
| Steak (stewing) | Own/Generic | 454g | 9% |
| Stir-fry sauce | Own/Generic | 180g | 9% |
| Cheddar cheese | Own/Generic | 450g | 7% |
| Pork pieces | Own/Generic | 454g | 4% |
| Milky Way | Milky Way | 14 pack | 2% |
| Monkey nuts | Own/Generic | 400g | 2% |

In the majority of cases, it was the specifics of the item (brand, size, cut of meat, etc.) that affected its availability. Store type was the most influential factor regarding availability, with large national supermarkets considerably more likely to have a higher level of availability in most instances.

Household: pensioner living alone

The average proportion of basket items available overall, by LGD area, by store type and by settlement area for a pensioner living alone is shown in Table 8 overleaf.

Table 8: Proportion of basket available: pensioner living alone

| | Without substitutions | With substitutions |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Overall | 48% | 73% |
| | | |
| LGD | | |
| Mid and East Antrim | 46% | 73% |
| Derry City and Strabane | 49% | 73% |
| | | |
| Store type | | |
| Large national supermarket | 75% | 95% |
| Large/medium independent supermarket | 51% | 77% |
| Local convenience | 48% | 73% |
| Small chain | 39% | 63% |
| Small independent | 39% | 69% |
| | | |
| Settlement area | | |
| Large towns | 51% | 83% |
| Medium and small towns | 47% | 69% |
| Villages, hamlets and open countryside | 47% | 72% |

If shopping for the exact items that made up the basket, the average proportion of available items overall was 48%, rising to 73% when substitute items were considered.

In terms of LGD, the average proportion of basket items available without substitutions was 46% in Mid and East Antrim, and 49% in Derry City and Strabane. In both LGDs, the proportion of basket items available increased to 73% when substitute products were considered.

Without including substitute products, the average proportion of basket items available at large national supermarket was 75%, at large/medium independent supermarkets it was 51%, at local convenience stores it was 48%, at small chains it was 39%, and at small independents it was 39%.

When substitute products were considered, the average proportion of basket items available at large national supermarkets was 95%, at large/medium independent supermarkets it was 77%, at local convenience stores it was 73%, at small chains it was 63%, whilst at small independents it was 69%.

Regarding settlement area, the average proportion of available items without including substitute products was 51% in large towns, 47% in medium and small towns, and 47% in villages, hamlets and open countryside. When substitute products were considered, the proportion of available items increased to 83% in large towns,

69% in medium and small towns, and 72% in villages, hamlets and open countryside.

Without substitutions, the items from the basket with availability below the overall average are detailed in Table 9.

Table 9: Average availability of items without substitutions: pensioner living alone

| Item | Brand | Size | Average availability without substitutions |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------|--|
| Tomato ketchup | Own/Generic | 460g | 47% |
| Ice-cream | Own/Generic | 2kg | 47% |
| Tuna (tinned) | Own/Generic | 160g | 44% |
| Leeks | Own/Generic | Single loose | 40% |
| Yoghurts | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 40% |
| Baked beans (tinned) | Heinz | 150g | 40% |
| Mixed herbs | Own/Generic | 14g | 40% |
| Oven chips (frozen) | Own/Generic | 1.5kg | 40% |
| Lentils | Own/Generic | 500g | 38% |
| Pears (tinned) | Own/Generic | 410g | 38% |
| Red onion | Own/Generic | Single loose | 36% |
| Garlic | Own/Generic | One bulb | 36% |
| Mince meat | Own/Generic | 454g | 33% |
| Cake (small) | Own/Generic | 250g | 33% |
| Rice | Own/Generic | 1kg | 31% |
| Spaghetti | Napolina | 500g | 31% |
| Peppers | Own/Generic | Single loose | 27% |
| Ham (slices) | Own/Generic | 125g | 27% |
| Grapefruit | Own/Generic | Single loose | 24% |
| Curry sauce | Own/Generic | 500g | 24% |
| Mayonnaise | Own/Generic | 240ml | 24% |
| Coffee | Own/Generic | 200g | 24% |
| Custard cream | Own/Generic | 200g | 24% |
| Porridge | Flahavans | 500g | 22% |
| Broccoli (frozen) | Own/Generic | 900g | 22% |
| Sweetcorn (frozen) | Own/Generic | 1kg | 22% |
| Peas (Frozen) | Own/Generic | 1kg | 20% |
| White fish (frozen) | Own/Generic | 520g | 20% |
| Hot chocolate/cocoa | Own/Generic | 500g | 18% |
| Cheddar cheese | Low Low | 160g | 16% |
| Gravy granules | Bisto | 500g | 13% |
| Steak (stewing) | Own/Generic | 454g | 9% |
| Wholemeal bread | Harvest Pride | 400g | 9% |
| Baps | Own/Generic | 1 loose | 9% |

| | | | |
|---------------------|-------------|-----|----|
| Sugar | Silverspoon | 1kg | 9% |
| Mushy peas (frozen) | Lockwoods | 1kg | 4% |

The specifics of the item (brand, size, cut of meat, etc.) affected availability in most cases. Store type was the most influential factor regarding availability, with large national supermarkets significantly more likely to have a higher level of availability in the majority of instances.

Where is the most expensive to purchase the contents of the basket?

Household: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age)

The average cost for the contents of the basket by LGD area, by store type and by settlement area for a household with one parent and two children (pre-school and primary school age) is shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Average cost of the basket: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age) household

| | Basket with meat from a butchers | Basket with meat from a retail outlet |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| LGD | | |
| Mid and East Antrim | £107.34 | £102.30 |
| Derry City and Strabane | £104.88 | £103.58 |
| | | |
| Store type | | |
| Large national supermarket | £93.80 | £91.52 |
| Large/medium independent supermarket | £105.01 | £102.01 |
| Local convenience | £107.75 | £104.57 |
| Small chain | £107.89 | £104.30 |
| Small independent | £108.89 | £106.64 |
| | | |
| Settlement area | | |
| Large towns | £101.90 | £99.23 |
| Medium and small towns | £104.88 | £102.10 |
| Villages, hamlets and open countryside | £107.92 | £104.77 |

In terms of LGD, it was more expensive to buy the contents of the basket with butcher meat in Mid and East Antrim than in Derry City and Strabane, with respective average prices of £107.34 and £104.88. However, it was slightly cheaper to buy the basket with meat from a retail outlet in Mid and East Antrim (£102.30) than in Derry City and Strabane (£103.58).

The most expensive store type from which to purchase the basket with butcher meat was a small independent (£108.89), followed by a small chain (£107.89), a local convenience store (£107.75), a large/medium independent supermarket (£105.01),

then a large national supermarket (£93.80), which was considerably less expensive than the other store types.

A similar pattern can be observed with regards to the average price of the basket with meat from a retail outlet, with a small independent (£106.64) store being the most expensive, whilst a large national supermarket (£91.52) was the least expensive by a significant margin. The average price from a large/medium independent supermarket, a local convenience store and a small chain was £102.01, £104.57 and £104.30 respectively.

Looking at settlement area, it was more expensive to buy the basket with butcher meat in villages, hamlets and open countryside (£107.92) than it was in medium and small towns (£104.88) and in large towns (£101.90). This was also the case regarding the basket with meat from a retail outlet, with £104.77, £102.10 and £99.23 the respective average prices for villages, hamlets and open countryside, medium and small towns, and large towns.

Household: pensioner living alone

The average price for the contents of the basket by LGD area, by store type and by settlement area for a pensioner living alone is detailed in Table 11.

Table 11: Average cost of the basket: pensioner living alone

| | Basket with meat from a butchers | Basket with meat from a retail outlet |
|--|---|--|
| LGD | | |
| Mid and East Antrim | £60.63 | £58.38 |
| Derry City and Strabane | £58.77 | £59.82 |
| | | |
| Store type | | |
| Large national supermarket | £50.98 | £49.14 |
| Large/medium independent supermarket | £59.75 | £59.35 |
| Local convenience | £60.78 | £60.27 |
| Small chain | £61.24 | £60.75 |
| Small independent | £60.65 | £61.24 |
| | | |
| Settlement area | | |
| Large towns | £55.44 | £54.57 |
| Medium and small towns | £59.79 | £58.99 |
| Villages, hamlets and open countryside | £60.88 | £60.82 |

Regarding LGD, it was more expensive to buy the contents of the basket with butcher meat in Mid and East Antrim (£60.63) than in Derry City and Strabane

(£58.77); however, the cost of the basket with meat from a retail outlet was slightly cheaper in Mid and East Antrim (£58.38) than in Derry City and Strabane (£59.82).

In terms of store type, it was most expensive to purchase the basket with butcher meat at a small chain (£61.24). The next most expensive was a local convenience store (£60.78), then a small independent (£60.65), a large/medium independent supermarket (£59.75), and then a large national supermarket (£50.98), which was markedly cheaper than the other store types.

It was most expensive to purchase the basket with meat from a retail outlet at a small independent (£61.24), followed by a small chain (£60.75), a local convenience store (£60.27), a large/medium independent supermarket (£59.35), then a large national supermarket (£49.14), which was the least expensive by a considerable margin.

With regards to settlement area, it was more expensive to buy the basket with butcher meat in villages, hamlets and open countryside (£60.88) than in medium and small towns (£59.79) and in large towns (£55.44). This was also the case regarding the basket with meat from a retail outlet, with the average cost in villages, hamlets and open countryside (£60.82) more expensive than in medium and small towns (£58.99), and in large towns (£54.57).

Where is it hardest to access all of the items in the basket?

Household: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age)

The average proportion of basket items available by LGD area, by store type and by settlement area for a household with one parent and two children is shown in Table 12 overleaf.

Table 12: Proportion of basket available: one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age) household

| | Without substitutions | With substitutions |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| LGD | | |
| Mid and East Antrim | 47% | 77% |
| Derry City and Strabane | 49% | 76% |
| | | |
| Store type | | |
| Large national supermarket | 72% | 95% |
| Large/medium independent supermarket | 50% | 77% |
| Local convenience | 49% | 79% |
| Small chain | 42% | 70% |
| Small independent | 39% | 72% |
| | | |
| Settlement area | | |
| Large towns | 52% | 88% |
| Medium and small towns | 49% | 72% |
| Villages, hamlets and open countryside | 46% | 76% |

With regards to LGD, there was little difference in the average proportion of basket products available without substitutions, with 47% of items available in Mid and East Antrim, and 49% available in Derry City and Strabane. It was a similar situation when substitutions were considered, with the average proportion of available items 77% and 76% for Mid and East Antrim and Derry City and Strabane respectively.

However, there were notable differences in availability in terms of store type. The hardest places to access the basket items without substitutions were small independents (average availability: 39%) and small chains (average availability: 42%), which were behind local convenience stores (average availability: 49%) and large/medium independent supermarkets (average availability: 50%) – the average proportion of items available at large national supermarkets (72%) was considerably higher than at each of these store types.

A similar pattern emerges when substitutions were considered, with average availability lower at small chains (70%) and small independents (72%) than at large/medium independent supermarkets (77%) and local convenience stores (79%) – each of these store types had an average level of availability much lower than at large national supermarkets, at which the vast majority (95%) of basket items were available.

In terms of settlement area, the average proportion of available basket items without substitutions was slightly lower in villages, hamlets and open countryside (46%), and in small and medium towns (49%) when compared to large towns (52%). The differences were more pronounced when substitutions were considered, with the

average proportion of available items notably higher in large towns (88%) than in villages, hamlets and open countryside (76%), and in medium and small towns (72%).

Household: pensioner living alone

The average proportion of basket items available by LGD area, by store type and by settlement area for a pensioner living alone is detailed in Table 13.

Table 13: Proportion of basket available: pensioner living alone

| | Without substitutions | With substitutions |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| LGD | | |
| Mid and East Antrim | 46% | 73% |
| Derry City and Strabane | 49% | 73% |
| | | |
| Store type | | |
| Large national supermarket | 75% | 95% |
| Large/medium independent supermarket | 51% | 77% |
| Local convenience | 48% | 73% |
| Small chain | 39% | 63% |
| Small independent | 39% | 69% |
| | | |
| Settlement area | | |
| Large towns | 51% | 83% |
| Medium and small towns | 47% | 69% |
| Villages, hamlets and open countryside | 47% | 72% |

Looking at LGD, the average proportion of basket items available without substitutions was slightly lower in Mid and East Antrim (46%) than in Derry City and Strabane (49%); however, when substitutions were considered, there was no difference in average availability between the LGDs (both 73%).

In terms of store type, the hardest places to access the basket items without substitutions were small independents (39%) and small chains (39%), where average availability was significantly lower than in local convenience stores (48%) and large/medium independent supermarkets (51%) – the average proportion of available items for each of these store types was much lower than in large national supermarkets (75%).

When substitutions were considered, the average proportion of available basket items was lower in small chains (63%) and small independents (69%) than in local convenience stores (73%) and large/medium independent supermarkets (77%) – the

average proportion of available items was markedly higher in large national supermarkets (95%) than in any other store type.

Regarding settlement area, the average proportion of available basket items without substitutions was lower in villages, hamlets and open countryside (47%), and in medium and small towns (47%) when compared to large towns (51%). The differences in average availability were more obvious when substitutions were considered, with 69% of items available in medium and small towns, 72% in villages, hamlets and open countryside, and 83% in large towns.

The following section of the report details conclusions that can be drawn from the main findings.

Conclusions

- Overall, for a one parent with two children household, the average cost of the basket with meat from a butchers was £105.97, reducing to £103.01 if the meat was purchased from a retail outlet instead.
- The corresponding basket prices for a pensioner living alone were £59.60 and £59.18.
- For both household types, the basket prices at large national supermarkets were significantly cheaper than at any other retail outlet.
- Typically, the cost of the baskets for both household types rose as the size of the retail outlet decreased.
- Location had a bearing on the basket prices for both household types, with the cost increasing as the settlement area became more rural: the costs were cheapest in large towns, followed by medium and small towns, then villages, hamlets and open countryside.
- In terms of availability, 95% of the required basket items for both household types were accessible (with substitutions) at large national supermarkets – considerably higher than at any other retail outlet.
- The availability of basket items for both household types was markedly higher in large towns than in any other settlement area.
- Interestingly, despite being more rural, availability (with substitutions) of the required basket items for both household types was higher in villages, hamlets and open countryside, than in medium and small towns.

Appendix – Minimum Essential Food Basket Items

Contents of the Minimum Essential Food Basket for one parent with two children (pre-school and primary school age)

| Category | Item | Brand | Size | Quantity |
|---|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|----------|
| Fruit | Bananas | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Fruit | Apples | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Fruit | Pears | Own/Generic | 4 pack | 1 |
| Fruit | Grapes | Own/Generic | 1 pack | 1 |
| Fruit | Melon | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Fruit | Pineapple | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Fruit | Salad tomatoes | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Mushrooms | Own/Generic | 300g | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Broccoli | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Carrots | Own/Generic | Cost per kg | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | White onions | Own/Generic | Cost per kg | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Garlic | Own/Generic | One bulb | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Leeks | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Celery | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Lettuce | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Cauliflower | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Cucumber | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Potatoes | Own/Generic | 2.5kg pack | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Stir-Fry (fresh) | Own/Generic | 320g | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Milk (semi-skimmed) | Own/Generic | 2l | 2 |
| Dairy and eggs | Cheddar cheese | Own/Generic | 450g | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Cheese low fat spread | Own/Generic | 250g | 1 |
| Meat | Ham (slices) | Own/Generic | 5 pack | 1 |
| Meat | Pre-packed chicken | Own/Generic | 180g | 1 |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------|---|
| Dairy and eggs | Fromage frais | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Fromage frais | Own/Generic | 4 pack | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Yoghurts | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Flora spread | Flora light | 500g | 1 |
| Meat | Pork pieces | Own/Generic and Butcher | 454g | 1 |
| Meat | Chicken fillets | Own/Generic and Butcher | 4 | 1 |
| Meat | Mincemeat | Own/Generic and Butcher | 454g | 1 |
| Meat | Steak (stewing) | Own/Generic and Butcher | 454g | 1 |
| Meat | Bacon Rashers | Own/Generic and Butcher | 10 | 1 |
| Meat | Sausages | Own/Generic and Butcher | 8 | 1 |
| Meat | Sausages stuffing | Own/Generic and Butcher | 8 | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Eggs | Own/Generic | 12 pack | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Wholemeal bread | Kingsmill | 800g | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Wholemeal bread own | Own/Generic | 800g | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Baps | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Bagels | Own/Generic | 5 pack | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Pancakes | Sunblest | 8 pack | 1 |
| Treats | Muffin (blueberry) | Own/Generic | 4 pack | 1 |
| Treats | Cake (small) | Own/Generic | 300g | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Porridge | Own/Generic | 1kg | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Weetabix | Weetabix | 24 pack | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Cornflakes | Kellogg's | 500g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Stir-fry sauce | Own/Generic | 180g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Tomatoes (tinned) | Own/Generic | 400g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Tomato puree | Own/Generic | 200g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Baked beans (tinned) | Own/Generic | 415g | 1 |
| Fish | Tuna (tinned) | Own/Generic | 160g | 4 |
| Breads and cereals | Rice | Own/Generic | 1kg | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Pasta | Own/Generic | 1kg | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Spaghetti | Own/Generic | 500g | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Egg noodles (dry) | Own/Generic | 300g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Poppadums plain | Own/Generic | 8 pack | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Soup Mix | Own/Generic | 500g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Gravy granules | Bisto | 500g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Stock cubes (beef) | Oxo | 12 pack | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Stock cubes (chicken) | Oxo | 12 pack | 1 |

| | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------|---------|---|
| Store cupboard | Curry powder | Own/Generic | 80g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Mixed herbs | Own/Generic | 14g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Salt | Own/Generic | 750g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Pepper | Own/Generic | 25g | 1 |
| Condiment | Mayonnaise | Own/Generic | 240ml | 1 |
| Condiment | Tomato ketchup | Heinz | 570g | 1 |
| Condiment | Brown sauce | HP | 255g | 1 |
| Oils and fats | Sunflower oil | Own/Generic | 1l | 1 |
| Oils and fats | Olive oil | Own/Generic | 1l | 1 |
| Coffee, tea and cocoa | Tea bags | Punjana | 80 pack | 1 |
| Coffee, tea and cocoa | Coffee | Nescafe | 200g | 1 |
| Coffee, tea and cocoa | Hot chocolate/cocoa | Own/Generic | 500g | 1 |
| Mineral water, soft drinks and juices | Orange squash | Mi Wadi | 1l | 1 |
| Mineral water, soft drinks and juices | Orange juice | Own/Generic | 1l | 4 |
| Sugar, jams and syrups | Sugar | Tate & Lyle | 1kg | 1 |
| Sugar, jams and syrups | Jam (raspberry) | Own/Generic | 454g | 1 |
| Food products not elsewhere categorised | Peanut butter | Own/Generic | 340g | 1 |
| Sugar, jams and syrups | Jelly (cube) | Hartley's | 1 | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Plain flour | Own/Generic | 1.5kg | 1 |
| Treats | Cream crackers | Own/Generic | 300g | 1 |
| Treats | Rich Tea | Own/Generic | 300g | 1 |
| Treats | Milky Way | Milky Way | 14 pack | 1 |
| Treats | Popcorn (microwave) | Butterkist | 3 pack | 1 |
| Treats | Rice cakes | Own/Generic | 18 pack | 1 |
| Treats | Go-Ahead bars | Go-Ahead | 5 pack | 1 |
| Fruit | Raisins | Own/Generic | 1kg | 1 |
| Treats | Monkey nuts | Own/Generic | 400g | 1 |
| Treats | Crisps | Walkers | 6 pack | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Garlic bread (slices) | Own/Generic | 10 pack | 1 |
| Frozen | Peas (Frozen) | Own/Generic | 1kg | 1 |
| Frozen | Haddock fillets 4 (frozen) | Own/Generic | 450g | 1 |
| Frozen | Ice-cream | Own/Generic | 2kg | 1 |

Contents of the Minimum Essential Food Basket for a pensioner living alone

| Category | Item | Brand | Size | Quantity |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Fruit | Bananas | Own/Generic | Single loose | 3 |
| Fruit | Oranges | Own/Generic | 4 pack | 1 |
| Fruit | Apples | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Fruit | Grapefruit | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Fruit | Salad tomatoes | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Mushrooms | Own/Generic | 250g | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Carrots | Own/Generic | Single loose | 7 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Peppers | Own/Generic | Single loose | 2 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | White onions | Own/Generic | Single loose | 3 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Red onion | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Celery | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Lettuce | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Garlic | Own/Generic | One bulb | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Cabbage | Own/Generic | Single loose | 1 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Leeks | Own/Generic | Single loose | 4 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Cucumber | Own/Generic | Single loose | 0.5 |
| Vegetables, including potatoes and tubers | Potatoes | Own/Generic | 2.5kg pack | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Milk (semi-skimmed) | Own/Generic | 2l | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Cheddar cheese | Low Low | 160g | 1 |
| Meat | Ham (slices) | Own/Generic | 125g | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Yoghurts | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Flora spread | Flora light | 500g | 1 |
| Meat | Chicken roast | Own/Generic and Butcher | Small | 1 |
| Meat | Pork Chops | Own/Generic and Butcher | 1 | 2 |
| Meat | Mincemeat | Own/Generic and Butcher | 454g | 1 |
| Meat | Steak (stewing) | Own/Generic and Butcher | 454g | 1 |

| | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------|---|
| Meat | Bacon rashers | Own/Generic and Butcher | 8 | 1 |
| Meat | Sausages | Own/Generic and Butcher | 8 | 1 |
| Dairy and eggs | Eggs | Own/Generic | 6 pack | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Wholemeal bread own | Harvest Pride | 400g | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Baps | Own/Generic | 1 loose | 1 |
| Treats | Cake (small) | Own/Generic | 250g | 1 |
| Treats | Apple pie | Own/Generic | 1 | 1 |
| Treats | Bun/pastry | Own/Generic | 1 | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Porridge | Flahavans | 500g | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Weetabix | Weetabix | 24 pack | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Tomatoes (tinned) | Own/Generic | 400g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Baked Beans (tinned) | Heinz | 150g | 1 |
| Fish | Tuna (tinned) | Own/Generic | 160g | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Rice | Own/Generic | 1kg | 1 |
| Breads and cereals | Spaghetti | Napolina | 500g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Curry sauce | Own/Generic | 500g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Lentils | Own/Generic | 500g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Gravy granules | Bisto | 500g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Stock cubes (beef) | Oxo | 12 pack | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Mixed herbs | Own/Generic | 14g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Salt | Own/Generic | 750g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | Pepper | Own/Generic | 25g | 1 |
| Condiment | Mayonnaise | Own/Generic | 240ml | 1 |
| Condiment | Tomato ketchup | Own/Generic | 460g | 1 |
| Store cupboard | White sauce | Colman's | 25g | 1 |
| Condiment | Vinegar (brown) | Own/Generic | 568ml | 1 |
| Oils and fats | Sunflower oil | Own/Generic | 1l | 1 |
| Coffee, tea and cocoa | Tea bags | Punjana | 80 pack | 1 |
| Coffee, tea and cocoa | Coffee | Own/Generic | 200g | 1 |
| Coffee, tea and cocoa | Hot chocolate/cocoa | Own/Generic | 500g | 1 |
| Treats | Pears (tinned) | Own/Generic | 410g | 1 |
| Sugar, jams and syrups | Sugar | Silverspoon | 1kg | 1 |
| Treats | Plain digestives | Own/Generic | 400g | 1 |
| Treats | Custard cream | Own/Generic | 200g | 1 |
| Frozen | Oven chips (frozen) | Own/Generic | 1.5kg | 1 |
| Frozen | Broccoli (frozen) | Own/Generic | 900g | 1 |
| Frozen | Mushy peas (frozen) | Lockwoods | 1kg | 1 |
| Frozen | Peas (frozen) | Own/Generic | 1kg | 1 |

| | | | | |
|--------|--------------------------|-------------|------|---|
| Frozen | Sweetcorn (frozen) | Own/Generic | 1kg | 1 |
| Frozen | White fish 4 (frozen) | Own/Generic | 520g | 1 |
| Frozen | Ice-cream | Own/Generic | 2kg | 1 |