



Putting food on the table

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO SUBSIST ON ST HELENA?

Introduction

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is contacted on average just over 3 times a week by people who cannot afford to meet their living costs. The underlying causes of this are manifold; the cost of imported goods, the world's most expensive electricity and comparatively low local wages all play their part as does the iniquitous household income policy which is thankfully now under review.

In evidence in a recent court case the then SHG statistician gave evidence that the cost of living on St Helena is 25% higher than that in the UK and the wages are approximately one third.¹

The UK and local General Elections and the coming of the long hoped for air access both signal changes for St Helena, changes which should improve to quality of life for everyone but which may increase the apparently widening gap between the better off members of our society and the poorer, more vulnerable.

Most of those that contact the EHRC do so because they have reached the point where they cannot afford to buy basic food and hygiene items needed to survive and maintain one's dignity. In recent weeks we have had cases where children are (on occasions) not attending school because there is no money to provide them with their packed lunch, there are people who once rent, utilities and payments for spectacles are deducted from their income related benefit have no money to buy rice or bread, let alone meat or fish. Making Ends Meet contribute to food and utility bills week in week out.

This is a situation which affects the dignity and worth of those living with poverty and debt and this make it a human rights issue. The EHRC have therefore attempted to answer the question how much does it cost to provide the basic food and hygiene requirements on St Helena.

Methodology

The EHRC will be the first to admit that none of us are trained or qualified statisticians, however we are all human beings, who live alone or in family units and eat, wash and function like everyone else. So used what we have, a total of more than 70 years' experience of living and shopping on St Helena.

1. We each made a list of all the relevant items we would need to feed ourselves and our families and keep clean.
2. Next we went through and removed all luxury items or duplicates (for example while some prefer red tea or green tea we only included black tea on the list as, although having a choice is nice – you only need one). See appendix 1
3. We established prices for the cheapest option on all of the remaining items on sale in Solomon's, Thorpe's and Rose & Crown as these three retailers have shops in the country areas and took an average of their prices at 1st September 2017.
4. A calculation was then made of the amount of each item on the list that would be used in one week by:

¹ Supreme Court of St Helena 21st February 2017

- a. A single person
 - b. A family of 4
 - c. A family of 6
 - d. An unemployed or retired couple
 - e. A couple with a baby
 - f. A single person with a baby
5. We then included an estimate of the cost of electricity and water based on information from Connect.
 6. We added in Government Landlord Housing rent as this is the cheapest, for those people in their own housing this would not be an unreasonable figure to cover very basic maintenance.
 7. Public transport costs for two trips to town for shopping were included but no allowance was included for home to duty or the cost of running a car.

Only the basic living items were included in calculating the living costs. Many items such as, medication, special dietary food, replacement household items and clothing were not included but could be determined as essential to live a comfortable life. (See appendix 2). We also excluded items which are important to health (cabbage and broccoli for example) but are just too expensive on anyone's budget.

These calculations do not include any child care cost, internet, telephone alcohol, tobacco, TV service or other entertainment.

Results

Even during the two-week period, we were working on this project and despite the fact there had not been a ship we found prices were increasing. The table below shows how much it costs to subsist on St Helena (column 1). Column 2 shows the current maximum Income Related Benefit (IRB) and Column 3 shows the maximum Basic Island Pension (BIP) available.

	Cost per week £	IRB ^(note 1)	BIP ^(note 2)
Single person	89.70	61.60	63.70
Family of 4	262.03	146.98	
Family of 6	290.74	190.10	
Retired/unemployed couple	118.93	97.50	127.40
Couple with baby	165.34	122.14	
Single person with baby	134.60	86.24	

Note 1 - In addition to the IRB claimants receive 100% payment of rent for Government Landlord House, up to £33.36 per week for private renting or 100% of the interest on the loan paid for the property they are living in.

Note 2 - The maximum Basic Island Pension after 30 qualifying years is £63.70 pw very few couples achieve this due to time overseas, or time unemployed 25 qualifying years is 75% of the full value of the pension £47.78 and 20 qualifying years is 50% of the full value of the pension £31.85. Less than 20 years does not qualify for Basic Island pension. All persons who are in receipt of Basic Island Pension will receive free prescriptions.

Comments

It is clear from these figures that anyone without savings who has to live for a protracted period of time on a BIP or IRB is going to be unable to make ends meet. As stated above nothing has been included in here for clothes so any additional purchase like school shoes, replacement kettle or medical bill is going to cause more problems for those already suffering real hardship.

In recent days' increases have been announced on water tariffs and medical charges which are not included in this calculation but will put greater pressure on very limited budgets.

It is hard to understand how we can achieve the goals in the 10-year plan of St Helena being

- Altogether Safer
- Altogether Healthier
- Altogether Better for Children and Young People
- Altogether Wealthier

when our most vulnerable cannot afford to maintain their homes and equipment, pay for prescriptions and medical tests or feed their children.

Appendix 1. List of products included where applicable

Apples	Fresh Tomatoes
Baby food	Fresh Tuna Fish
Baby Lotion	Hand Cream
Baby Milk Powder	Handy Andy/Jif
Baby Soap	Lettuce - each
Baked Beans	Margarine - 500g
Bananas	Milk
Beef	Nappies 6-12 mths (14 per pack)
Bin Liners	Onion (imported)
Black Pepper	Orange
Black Tea bags	Pear
Bottle Parsley/herbs	Plain White flour
Bread	Pumpkin
Carrots	Rent
Cereal - Corn Flakes	Salt
Cheese	Shortcake Biscuits
Chicken	Soap
Chicken legs	Soap Powder
Cooking Oil -	Toilet Rolls
Curry Powder -	Toothpaste
Deodorant - female	Transport
Deodorant - male	Water - .97p per unit
Dish Washing Liquid - Persil	White Rice
Eggs (6 only)	White Sugar
Electricity 30p per unit	
Fresh local Potatoes	

Appendix 2: Items not affordable and not included

Alcohol

Baby Shampoo

Beetroot pickle

Broccoli

Buns (fruit)

Cabbage

Cake

Clothing

Crisps

Custard

Entertainment

Family outings

Fresh Green beans

Garlic

Ginger

Ham

Hospital Expenses including scans and laboratory tests

Ice cream

Internet

Insurance of any kind

Jelly

Juice

Marmite/Peanut butter etc.

Meal out/takeaway lunch

Medication

Oxo's

Pasta

Peppers

Raisins or dried fruit

Replacement items, e.g. Kettle, Saucepan

Shampoo

Special dietary requirements

Sweet treats/chocolate

Taxi fares

Telephone

Television or DVDs

Tobacco

Tomato sauce

Vehicle costs