



Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee – supplementary agenda

Monday 27 November 2017 at 7.00 pm

Boardrooms 4/5/6 - Brent Civic Centre, Engineers Way,
Wembley, HA9 0FJ

Membership:

Members

Councillors:

Kelcher (Chair)
Davidson (Vice-Chair)
Aden
Colacicco
Crane
Ezeajughi
Mashari
Stopp

Substitute Members

Councillors:

S Choudhary, Daly, Harrison, Hylton, Kabir, Long and
Naheerathan

Councillors:

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Notes for Members - Declarations of Interest:

If a Member is aware they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest* in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent and must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If a Member is aware they have a Personal Interest** in an item of business, they must declare its existence and nature at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent.

If the Personal Interest is also a Prejudicial Interest (i.e. it affects a financial position or relates to determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission, or registration) then (unless an exception at 14(2) of the Members Code applies), after disclosing the interest to the meeting the Member must leave the room without participating in discussion of the item, except that they may first make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to the matter, provided that the public are allowed to attend the meeting for those purposes.

***Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:**

- (a) **Employment, etc.** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit gain.
- (b) **Sponsorship** - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of election; including from a trade union.
- (c) **Contracts** - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between the Councillors or their partner (or a body in which one has a beneficial interest) and the council.
- (d) **Land** - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.
- (e) **Licences** - Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.
- (f) **Corporate tenancies** - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which the Councillor or their partner have a beneficial interest.
- (g) **Securities** - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

****Personal Interests:**

The business relates to or affects:

- (a) Anybody of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management, and:

- To which you are appointed by the council;
- which exercises functions of a public nature;
- which is directed is to charitable purposes;
- whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy (including a political party of trade union).

- (b) The interests a of a person from whom you have received gifts or hospitality of at least £50 as a member in the municipal year;

or

A decision in relation to that business might reasonably be regarded as affecting, to a greater extent than the majority of other council tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the electoral ward affected by the decision, the well-being or financial position of:

- You yourself;
- a member of your family or your friend or any person with whom you have a close association or any person or body who employs or has appointed any of these or in whom they have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000, or any firm in which they are a partner, or any company of which they are a director
- any body of a type described in (a) above.

Supplementary Agenda

Item	Page
9 Community Access and Vulnerable People	1 - 18

This report provides analysis of access to all the residents of Brent including digital provision, as well as the factors which make some customers and users “vulnerable”.

10 Food Banks and Poverty Task Group Report	19 - 62
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This report presents the findings and recommendations of the task group review of food banks and poverty. The task group undertook this work due to the significant rise in food bank usage nationally and lack of a detailed picture of food bank usage across Brent.



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 <p>Brent</p>	<p>Scrutiny Committee 27 November 2017</p> <p>Report from Director of Resources</p>
For Information	
Welfare, Benefits and Customer Service provision for vulnerable residents	

Wards Affected:	All
Open or Part/Fully Exempt:	Open
No. of Appendices:	5
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	David Oates Head of Service (Benefits & Customer Services) david.oates@brent.gov.uk 0208 937 1931

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report has arisen from the concern that vulnerable residents may slip through Council services due to not meeting the various criteria and thresholds for help. It identifies the key factors that decide if a resident is “vulnerable” within the welfare and benefits functions that the Council delivers. It also seeks to compare these factors between different schemes and with other local authorities, where appropriate and / or possible.
- 1.2 In addition, the degree of scope for the Council to review or change its qualifying criteria within local schemes will be clarified, along with the processes and timelines for doing this.
- 1.3 Secondly the report provides an update on the former Community Access strategy (digital element), which has more recently been superseded by objectives within the Brent 2020 and Digital Strategy, and the remodelling of Brent Customer Services which was piloted during Summer 2017 and agreed by Cabinet on 13 November 2017.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note:-

- 2.1.1 The provisions currently made for “vulnerable” residents in various welfare and benefit schemes administered by the Council, how these compare with each other and with provision offered by other local authorities.
- 2.1.2 The scope and timescales for review and change of local welfare provision under the control of the Council
- 2.1.3 The Council’s changing customer service offer under the Brent 2020 and Digital Access Strategy.

3.0 Executive summary

- 3.1 The Council is responsible for the administration and delivery of both national welfare benefit schemes (Housing Benefit (HB) and various government welfare reforms) and a number of local schemes designed by the Council including: Council Tax Support (CTS), Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Local Welfare Assistance (LWA). There are a variety of allowances and exceptions allowed for certain claimant groups within each of these schemes which can be broadly interpreted as indicators of assistance available for “vulnerable” residents, although there is no uniform definition of vulnerability between the various schemes.
- 3.2 The national HB scheme has a wide range of provisions for “vulnerable” claimants however welfare reforms such as the Overall Benefit Cap and Bedroom Tax, are applied on top of the HB assessment, are cruder mechanisms with far fewer protections for claimants. The needs of vulnerable claimants affected by these welfare reforms are more likely to be addressed via the Council’s DHP and LWA schemes, though these generally cater for shorter-term needs.
- 3.3 The Council theoretically has wide discretion in the provisions it makes for local CTS, DHP and LWA, subject to some legislative stipulations, and Brent’s schemes offer amongst the broadest range of protections and eligibility for these various forms of help, when compared to other Councils’ arrangements, apart than those which have completely mirrored previous national provision within their local schemes. However in reality there are limits to the help which claimants can receive under these schemes and policies, as the Council has to consider the extent to which it can provide assistance / exemptions against the overall cost of scheme provision to the Council.
- 3.4 The Council’s CTS and LWA schemes will be considered for review during 2018. The DHP policy is reviewed annually but is dependent on a ring-fenced grant provided by the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) as well as on customer demand levels, which are likely to rise in 2018/19 due to the rollout of the Full Universal Credit (UC) scheme in Brent.
- 3.5 The Community Access Strategy agreed by Cabinet In October 2014 is no longer in delivery as this has been superseded by the Brent 2020 programme and the new Digital Strategy agreed by Cabinet in June 2017. Notwithstanding that the key aims of

the Community Access Strategy have been retained in Brent 2020 and the Digital Strategy, in particular the aim to ensure that residents are able to easily access services through digital channels and supported to use these wherever they can be expected to do so. Our most personalised support and help will be targeted to those who are most vulnerable, through face to face and telephone channels. It is clear that as our resources reduce, we cannot continue to stretch our resources to provide the same level of access choice to all residents, without adversely impacting on our ability to support those most in need.

- 3.6 Much has been done over the past 3 years to improve our digital offer for residents, with work completed on our Website and the creation of My Account, as well as services such as Parking which now has a comprehensive on-line offer. There are also many services that do not yet have a comprehensive digital offer and thus currently our residents may still be accessing these services through traditional channels. The Digital Strategy aims to develop on line access for all key services and thus facilitate a more consistent Brent access offer, with appropriate support and assistance available to those who may not feel confident using self service facilities or who are not yet familiar with them.
- 3.7 As new on-line / digital services have been implemented, equalities analysis have been carried out to evaluate the potential impact on protected / vulnerable groups and appropriate mitigation has been put in place to ensure that those residents are not adversely impacted. This has included the ability for all residents to use telephone access to order parking products such as visitor passes, help screens and simple videos to guide those accessing on line service via the web site, web chat facilities to enable quick enquiries to be raised whilst using on line facilities and the availability of face to face interviews or telephone support for those who are most vulnerable and unable to use digital channels.

4.0 **Detail**

National welfare benefits (delivered locally)

- 4.1 As a general point, there is no single definition of “vulnerable” in the Social Security or indeed other legislation, but this can be approximated by considering the differing legislative provision for various benefits and welfare restrictions from central government as well as local policy where applicable.
- 4.2 Also, although the Council only has the power to change the local schemes which it administers or its definition of “vulnerable” residents, it is useful to compare these with some national indicators of the same issues to compare with the Council’s approach where it does have discretion (see section 5).
- 4.3 The main national benefit administered by the local authority is **Housing Benefit (HB)**.
- 4.4 The HB scheme is relatively complex but in essence is a means test whereby the claimant’s household’s “minimum” needs (defined by allowances and premiums set by government) are compared with their income (subject to some disregards). If their

income is less than or equal to their prescribed needs, they receive maximum HB (itself subject to certain limits or caps); if their income is higher than their needs, the maximum benefit entitlement is reduced by 65p in every pound of “excess income”. This reduction is known as the taper.

4.5 A claimant’s needs are prescribed by a personal allowance for themselves and any partner or dependent children. In addition they receive additional allowances (“premiums”) if they are in certain predefined categories, namely:-

- Family premium
- Family premium (lone parent)
- Disability premium - Single person or couple rate
- Enhanced disability premium - Single / lone parent, couple or child rate
- Severe disability premium – Single or couple rate
- Disabled child premium
- Carer premium

4.6 While the Family and Carer Premiums effectively recognise the additional costs involved for those claimants who have dependent children, the various Disabled premiums give a reasonable approximation of the claimant groups that are considered “vulnerable” under the HB scheme. The detailed qualifying criteria for these premiums are shown in Appendix A. In this context, the vulnerability entitles the claimants to a greater “needs” allowance for comparison against their income; in other words they are able to receive more income before it exceeds their needs and the entitlement starts to be reduced by the taper.

4.7 Other national means-tested benefits work broadly the same way and provide similar allowances for claimants’ particular needs.

4.8 However, the government’s welfare reform programme since 2010 has entailed a number of further restrictions to (working-age) claimants’ benefits, pushing entitlements below the “minimum” needs prescribed in the existing legislation. (Pensioners are exempt from the cuts.) These cuts by definition are less discriminating than existing legislation but do contain various exemptions which themselves can be viewed as provisions for vulnerable claimants. These include:-

4.8.1 **Local Housing Allowance caps** – limits to the maximum amount of HB which claimants in the private rented sector can receive – no exemptions

4.8.2 **Social sector under-occupancy reduction (“Bedroom Tax”)** - limits to the maximum amount of HB which claimants in the social rented sector can receive if they have more bedrooms than they are deemed to need. There are limited exemptions for claimants –

- they are disabled and have an overnight carer
- they have a disabled child under 16 who is unable to share a room
- they are an approved foster carer who is between placements or newly approved

- they have a child away in the armed or reserve forces (if they plan to return to live with the claimant)
- if someone who normally lives with them is away for up to a year, and they intend to return and are away for particular reasons (for example, they are in hospital)

4.8.3 Further details of the conditions which apply to the exemptions are given in Appendix B

4.8.4 From the above it will be seen that the Bedroom Tax allows very few exemptions for “vulnerability”.

4.8.5 **Overall Benefit Cap (OBC)** – this limits the maximum combined entitlement of all the claimant’s welfare benefits (including HB) to £442 per week for couples and single parents, and £296 per week for single people living and claiming in London. (Lower rates apply in the rest of the country). Claimants are exempt from OBC if they, their partner or a child living with them qualify for any of the following benefits:-

- Working tax credit
- Attendance allowance
- Disability living allowance
- Personal independence payment
- Employment and support allowance (support component)
- Industrial injuries benefits (and equivalent payments as part of a war disablement pension or the armed forces compensation scheme)
- War widow or war widower’s pension

4.8.6 It can be seen therefore that exemptions from the cap are much stricter than the premium allowances applying within HB or other welfare benefit scheme provisions. It should also be noted that Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – another welfare reform which is gradually replacing Disability Living Allowance (DLA), has a far stricter eligibility test than DLA, and therefore fewer claimants receive it, meaning that fewer claimants are exempt from OBC under PIP than would have been under DLA.

4.8.7 **Universal Credit** – the government’s flagship welfare reform is in a number of respects less generous than the existing legacy benefits which it replaces, for example in its treatment of self-employed claimants or those who would currently be entitled to Working Tax Credit, as well as waiting periods for first payments and other aspects. In the context of this paper, the main welfare reforms to date, including LHA caps, Bedroom Tax and OBC, are all replicated within UC.

5.0 Local welfare provision

Council Tax Support (CTS)

- 5.1 Since 1 April 2013 the former national Council Tax Benefit scheme (CTB) was abolished and all Councils were required to develop their own “Council Tax Reduction Schemes” for working-age claimants, with funding reduced from the previous CTB provision. These “Council Tax Reductions” are classed as Council Tax discounts rather than welfare benefits. The Council has wide flexibility to set its own scheme parameters within certain very broad requirements.
- 5.2 Most Councils, including Brent, chose to operate a variation on the former CTB scheme, with amendments sufficient to deliver the scheme with the reduced funding. In Brent’s case the main mechanism for achieving the financial reduction was the requirement that most claimants are required to make a minimum contribution of paying 20% of their Council Tax liability. Following that deduction, CTS is calculated in a similar way to HB, with a comparison of the claimant’s minimum “needs” and their income, however with a taper of 30% (30p in the pound) applied to any “excess income” above the needs allowance.
- 5.3 Brent has replicated the various premiums from the HB calculation in its CTS provision, and therefore provides similar protections in the basic calculation. However, the scheme also recognises a number of vulnerable criteria which exempt claimants from the minimum 20% contribution. These are listed in Appendix C and can be seen to be slightly more generous than the prescribed HB lists referred to earlier.
- 5.4 Brent’s CTS caseload can be broken down as follows:-

Scheme	Customers
Pension Age	9423
Working Age Vulnerable	6457
Working Age Employed	5898
Working Age Other	5500
Total Working Age	17855
All Claimants	27278

- 5.5 From the above table it can be seen that 6457 (36%) of Brent’s working age CTS claimants are classed as vulnerable. The Council does have the ability to revise its scheme as it sees fit and therefore could devise a scheme which provided greater protections, though this would obviously cost more and therefore require cuts to other working age provision within the scheme or from other Council services. (Pensioners are protected by a nationally prescribed scheme which the Council has no control over.) The Council must also pay appropriate regard to a variety of other legislation including the Public Sector Equality Duty and other specific requirements including incentivising work within any scheme design it considers.
- 5.6 Set against this, Councils are operating in an increasingly difficult financial context requiring ongoing service cuts and the potential to redesign CTS schemes to make further savings in expenditure or administration. Such demands can clearly put pressure on the amount of discount (or exemptions) provided to all claimants, including the vulnerable.

- 5.7 Almost all Councils' current CTS schemes are variations on the previous national CTB scheme, with a range of variations. The most widely adopted variation is that of requiring a minimum contribution from claimants, which has been adopted by 264 Councils. In truth, it is very difficult to design a scheme which delivers the original 10% cut in funding from central government (in 2013) without including this measure. Contributory amounts currently range from 0% to 45% nationally (0% to 33% in London). Exemptions vary from council to council, but most are variations on similar themes to Brent's, which in itself tends to be one of the more encompassing lists.
- 5.8 A breakdown of minimum contributions for current CTS scheme in London authorities is provided in Appendix D.

Discretionary spending

- 5.9 Brent Customer Services administers two discretionary funds which are for the alleviation of hardship for benefit claimants, not exclusively aimed at those affected by welfare reforms, but heavily utilised by those residents:-
- 5.10 The **Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)** fund has an annual government grant (which authorities may supplement with their own funds) to assist Benefit claimants (on HB or UC) who are experiencing hardship through housing-related costs. Priority areas are reviewed at least annually, with Lead Member oversight, and are aimed at encouraging desired claimant behaviour (eg seeking work) or as a safety net for the most vulnerable. Payments may be one-off (eg costs associated with moving to a more affordable property) or ongoing for prescribed periods (eg paying the shortfall in rent while the claimant undertakes a job brokerage course; or assisting a particularly vulnerable claimant to avoid homelessness).
- 5.10.1 The DHP scheme is not permitted to apply blanket rules and must consider each case on its own merits, however generally it has been developed to achieve the following core objectives:
- preventing homelessness
 - keeping families together
 - supporting the vulnerable and elderly in sustaining tenancies
 - enabling people to secure new sustainable tenancies
 - providing financial respite for people in short-term difficulty
 - incentivising people into and maintaining work
 - supporting people in education.
- 5.10.2 DHP's are primarily intended to assist with short-term needs associated with housing costs, though some longer-term needs are covered, subject to annual review. A significant proportion of the current expenditure covers awards made to incentivise attempts move into employment or move property (which obviously can also involve "vulnerable" claimants), but other awards made more specifically on grounds of vulnerability tend to cover such situations as:-

- **Social sector size criteria (Bedroom Tax):** DHP's awarded in relation to this cause of shortfall will primarily be made up of long term awards to disabled customers where a property that has been significantly adapted for disabled use or short term awards to enable people to search for alternative accommodation, look for lodgers or other solutions to such short-term issues
- **Serious / terminal illness:** People who have been diagnosed with a serious or terminal illness will fall into a vulnerable category and would usually be supported to remain in their property.
- **Pregnancy:** Those whose LHA (Local Housing Allowance) rate will shortly go up due to the birth of a child, and who at which point would receive an LHA equal to their liability.
- **Medical reasons:** For example, in the case of a couple, where they are unable to share a room because one of the couple needs a special bed which cannot reasonably be accommodated with just one bedroom and therefore the household requires an additional bedroom to the usual number allowed
- **Health issues:** People who have short-term health issues may be unable to move immediately or may need to be close to their current doctor/hospital whilst recovering. This could justify a short-term award to enable this person to stay in their property whilst recovering.
- **Exceptional Hardship:** Where a customer's circumstances do not fit into one of those prescribed, and having regard to the financial constraints imposed on Brent by the available funding, a discretionary award may be made by a decision maker where they consider that a customer's circumstances are exceptional and that significant hardship may result in not awarding a DHP.

5.10.3 Brent's 2017/18 DHP budget is £2.68M and is broadly expected to be spent as follows:-

Reason for DHP award	Amount (£)	% of budget
Bedroom Tax	£533,670	20%
Overall Benefit Cap	£1,067,338	40%
Other housing related initiatives	£266,835	10%
Employment related incentives	£266,835	10%
Other vulnerable reasons	£533,670	20%

Universal Credit (UC)	£10,000	< 1%
Total	£2,678,348	

5.10.4 It should be noted that most DHP awards (eg to claimants under the Bedroom Tax, OBC or “other housing” categories) will often be to claimants who would also be considered “vulnerable”. It should also be noted that DHP payments to UC claimants are currently minimal, however Brent is scheduled to go fully live with UC from August / September 2018 and a significant increase in demand on the DHP fund is expected as a result.

5.10.5 A link to Brent’s DHP policy for 2017/18 is provided in Appendix E.

5.11 Brent Customer Services also administers the Council’s **Local Welfare Assistance (LWA) scheme**. Similarly to CTS, this (non-mandatory) provision was delegated to local authorities in 2013 following the removal of the DWP’s Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants schemes. Brent introduced local variants on the former DWP schemes with the exceptions that its Crisis and Community awards are non-repayable payments rather than loans, and a number of changes to the conditions for entitlement.

5.11.1 LWA provides emergency payments to vulnerable residents in crisis situations or for large one-off costs (eg white goods). Its primary objectives are to:-

- help people in short-term need because of a crisis or emergency
- support vulnerable people in the community
- ease exceptional pressure on families

5.11.2 **Crisis payments** are awarded to cover short-term needs which prevent serious risk to the health and safety of a person or their family. They can also help with certain expenses in other emergency or disaster situations (such as fires or floods), for example, by replacing essential household equipment.

5.11.3 **Community payments** are primarily intended to help vulnerable people live as independent a life as possible in the community. They are generally made to cover the cost of furniture and white goods, connection and removal costs, minor repairs in certain types of accommodation, specific travel costs and some clothing and footwear (not school uniforms).

5.11.4 Residents in receipt of a wide range of welfare benefits (21 in total) are eligible to make a claim for a Crisis or Community Payment, subject to other qualifying conditions. The list of qualifying benefits and other conditions is shown in Appendix E.

5.11.5 DWP funded the LWA scheme for the first two years of its existence. The scheme now has no base budget but is currently being administered from reserves accumulated from underspends in the first two years. Current expenditure and administration costs are approximately £300K per annum which if maintained will enable current reserves to fund the schemes until the end of 2018/19. Options for delivering the scheme – or an alternative provision – beyond this are currently under consideration.

6.0 Customer Access / Digital Strategy and future Customer Services provision

- 6.1 As mentioned earlier in this report, Cabinet agreed a new Digital Strategy in June 2017 which aims to ensure that digital access becomes the channel of choice for residents accessing Brent services. Some Brent services have already developed a comprehensive digital offer and for these arrangements have been put in place to ensure that protected groups / vulnerable groups, are not adversely affected by these changes to access arrangements.
- 6.2 On 13 November 2017 Cabinet approved a formal change to the service model for Brent Customer Services which is responsible for many of the high volume transactional services for the Council, including Council Tax, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, Financial Assessments for Adult Social Care and concessionary travel applications (Blue Badges, Taxi Card and Freedom passes). Residents accessing these services will now be expected to use on-line self service facilities unless they cannot do so because they are vulnerable. Staff have been provided with guidance about residents who are likely to be considered vulnerable for example because of age, learning or physical disability, mental health and or literacy issue. However this guidance is not prescriptive and staff are encouraged to use their judgement to ensure that the appropriate level of support is made available to each resident.
- 6.3 These new arrangements were piloted by Customer Services between June and November 2017 and worked well, with significant reductions to the numbers of residents seen through traditional face to face interviews but concurrently a more responsive service to those who did need to see and officer face to face because of their vulnerability.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 As this report has shown, there is a wide variety of approaches within the national benefits system and local welfare provision as to what may be termed a “vulnerable” resident. On top of this, any resident reliant on the welfare system in the first place could be said to have some element of (at least) financial vulnerability.
- 7.2 The main Housing Benefit scheme, despite (or more accurately because of) its complexity, is quite well equipped to reflect and adapt to the particular circumstances of the claimant. Brent’s current CTS scheme similarly reflects and responds to a large range of potential vulnerabilities within its parameters.
- 7.3 However the adaptability of the HB scheme is undermined by the far cruder mechanisms of the Bedroom Tax and the Overall Benefit Cap, which are far less discriminating in their targets. A great deal of the Council’s DHP and LWA budgets are therefore spent in safeguarding vulnerable residents affected by these factors. This is likely to continue – and indeed be exacerbated – by the full rollout of Universal Credit in Brent during 2018/19.
- 7.4 At the local level, the Council’s CTS scheme is broadly within the mid-range of Councils which apply a minimum contribution scheme, but has a wide range of exceptions to this requirement for vulnerable claimants. The exceptions are broadly

in line with other neighbouring boroughs. The Council will, however, face difficult decisions in future if it needs to make further savings from the scheme, while still considering claimants' financial positions – not least vulnerable residents.

- 7.5 All Councils' CTS schemes must be agreed by Full Council by 31 January of the year preceding the year it will be administered in. In other words Brent's CTS scheme for 2019/20 must be agreed by 31 January 2019. Officers will be modelling potential scenarios for the 2019/20 scheme early in 2018.
- 7.6 The Council's DHP budget is subject to government funding which is usually notified to the authority in January for the following financial year. Councils may supplement this funding but Brent has rarely done this in the past. In 2018/19 there are likely to be significant new demands on the scheme if the rollout of Universal Credit continues as scheduled. In terms of access to discretionary payments, the scheme is potentially open to all residents that are in receipt of HB or UC and require assistance with their housing costs, however the majority of payments are necessarily short-term in nature due to the size of the budget and the level of demand. The DHP policy is reviewed annually between January and March.
- 7.7 The Council's Local Welfare Assistance fund is also potentially availability to almost all residents in receipt of welfare benefits, though again it is focussed on alleviating short-term need (for crises or larger one-off payments). This scheme is also likely to come under additional pressure (particularly for Crisis Payments) when the Full UC service is rolled out in 2018/19, and there are currently no plans for the sustainability of the scheme beyond approximately April 2019. This service will therefore need to be reviewed during 2018, and alternative funding provision found if it is to continue in its current form.
- 7.8 The Council's Digital Strategy will significantly change the way in which residents access Brent services with an increasing emphasis on digital self-service / assisted self-service. This will ensure that our most personalised support can be targeted to those who are most vulnerable and unable to use digital channels. There is already a wide range of support available to assist residents to use self-service facilities, including floor walkers in the Customer Service Centre, officers available to handle webchat enquiries for those using on-line facilities, assistance from voluntary and community groups who have been trained on the use of these facilities and self service facilities available in every library as well as the Customer Services Centre and through Voluntary and Community organisations.

Appendices

Appendix A – qualifying criteria for premiums in the Housing Benefit scheme
Appendix B - exemptions to the Bedroom Tax and Overall Benefit Cap
Appendix C – exemptions within Brent's Council Tax Support scheme
Appendix D – minimum contributions for CTS schemes in London boroughs
Appendix E – link to Brent's DHP policy and LWA scheme qualifying criteria

Report sign off:

ALTHEA LODERICK

Strategic Director of Resources.

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Appendix A – qualifying criteria for premiums in the Housing Benefit scheme

Disability Premium

You may qualify for the Disability Premium in your Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Housing Benefit if you are under the age when you qualify for Pension Credit (in couples the one who qualifies must be under Pension Credit age) and you receive:

- Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independence Payment at any rate
- Armed Forces Independence Payment
- Incapacity Benefit (long-term rate) or, in certain circumstances, at the short-term higher rate
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Working Tax Credit disabled worker or severe disability element
- a vehicle under the Invalid Vehicle Scheme or War Pensioner's Vehicle Scheme, or have a grant towards an invalid vehicle
- are registered as blind - or still treated as registered blind for 28 weeks after regaining sight
- are incapable of work or treated as being incapable of work for at least 364 days (196 days if terminally ill) or because you are protected by the 52 week linking rules (this particular rule does not always apply as other additional amounts are available linked to incapacity for work)

Enhanced Disability Premium

You qualify for an Enhanced Disability Premium if you are under the age when you qualify for Pension Credit (for couples the one who qualifies must be under Pension Credit age) and one of you receives Disability Living Allowance higher rate care component, Personal Independence Payment Daily Living component enhanced rate or Armed Forces Independence Payment. You can also qualify for an enhanced disability premium if you claim main-phase Employment and Support Allowance and receive the support component.

This premium can be included alongside the disability premium or severe disability premium.

Severe Disability Premium

The rules for whether you are entitled to a severe disability premium are complicated. For more information see when a severe disability premium may be added to your benefit award.

In brief, a Severe Disability Premium is awarded at the lower rate to single claimants where: Attendance Allowance, Constant Attendance Allowance, the middle or higher rate DLA care component, the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment or Armed Forces Independence Payment are received, and no one is entitled to Carer's Allowance (CA) for looking after you.

It is awarded at a higher rate to couples where:

- both members receive one of the benefits listed above; and
- no non-dependant aged 18 or over is living with them, for example a grown up child; and
- no one is receiving a payment of [Carer's Allowance \(CA\)](#) for looking after either of them.

If someone receives Carer's Allowance for looking after one member of a couple but not the other they may qualify for the lower rate of this premium. They may also qualify for the lower rate if one member of a couple meets the conditions above and the other is registered blind.

The Disabled Child Premium

If you are responsible for a disabled child under 19, or in certain circumstances under 20, you will get this premium if either:

- The child is getting Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
- The child is registered blind.

Appendix B - exemptions to the Bedroom Tax and Overall Benefit Cap

Overall Benefit Cap

The benefit cap is applicable to all working age benefit claimants unless they, their partner or any children that live with them, qualify for any of these benefits:-

- Working tax credit
- Attendance allowance
- Disability living allowance
- Personal independence payment
- Employment and support allowance (support component)
- Industrial injuries benefits (and equivalent payments as part of a war disablement pension or the armed forces compensation scheme)
- War widow or war widower's pension

Bedroom Tax

Bedroom Tax is applicable to all working age Housing Benefit claimants living in Social Rented Sector (ie Council or Housing Association) properties, unless:-

- they are disabled and have an overnight carer (only 1 spare bedroom is allowed)
- they have a disabled child under 16 who is unable to share a room
- they are a foster carer who has been approved by social services and is between placements or newly approved (for up to 52 weeks)
- they have a child away in the armed or reserve forces (if they plan to return to live with you)
- someone who normally lives with them is away for up to a year, if they intend to return and are away for particular reasons (for example, they are in hospital)

Appendix C – exemptions within Brent's Council Tax Support scheme

Council Tax Support

Under Brent's current scheme, all working age claimants are required to pay at least 20% of their Council Tax liability, unless they or their partner or any of their dependent children receive any of the following benefits, which will protect them (from paying the minimum 20% charge):-

- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment
- Carers Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit
- Employment & Support Allowance (Support Component ONLY)
- Armed Forces Independence Payment
- Disabled Person's Tax Credit
- Attendance Allowance / Constant Attendance Allowance
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Disabled Persons Reduction for Council Tax purposes
- War Disablement Pension
- War Widow's Pension
- War Pensioners Mobility Supplement

Appendix D – minimum contributions for CTS schemes in London boroughs

Name of Authority	Minimum % Council Tax Payable
Barking and Dagenham	25%
Barnet	20%
Bexley	20%
Brent	20%
Bromley	25%
Camden	0%
Croydon	15%
Ealing	25%
Enfield	26.5%
Greenwich	15%
Hackney	15%
Hammersmith & Fulham	0%
Haringey	19.8%
Harrow	30%
Havering	15%
Hillingdon	25%
Hounslow	8.5%
Islington	0%
Kensington & Chelsea	0%
Kingston	0%
Lambeth	15.86%
Lewisham	33%
Merton	0%
Newham	20%
Redbridge	20%
Richmond	15%
Southwark	15%
Sutton	17.5%
Tower Hamlets	0%
Waltham Forest	24%
Wandsworth	30%
Westminster	0%

For the London area, the above can be summarised, as follows:

- Minimum payment of 0% = 8 (25%)
- Minimum payment of above 0% up to 5% = 0 (0%)
- Minimum payment of 5% up to 10% = 1 (3.1%)
- Minimum payment of 10% up to 15% = 0 (0%)
- Minimum payment of 15% up to 20% = 9 (28.1%)
- Minimum payment of 20% up to 25% = 6 (18.8%)
- Minimum payment of 25% up to 30% = 5 (15.6%)
- Minimum payment of 30% up to 35% = 3 (9.4%)


Appendix E – links to Brent’s DHP policy and LWA scheme qualifying criteria

DHP policy: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/benefits-and-money-advice/claim-discretionary-housing-payment/>

LWA scheme: <https://www.brent.gov.uk/services-for-residents/benefits-and-money-advice/claim-local-welfare-assistance/>

LWA qualifying benefits:

- ☐ Income Support
- ☐ Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based)
- ☐ Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related)
- ☐ Pension Credit
- ☐ Working Tax Credit
- ☐ Child Tax Credit
- ☐ Universal Credit
- ☐ Disability Living Allowance
- ☐ Personal Independence Payment
- ☐ Armed Forces Independence Payment
- ☐ Disabled Person's Tax Credit
- ☐ Attendance Allowance
- ☐ Constant Attendance Allowance
- ☐ War Pensioners Mobility Supplement
- ☐ Severe Disablement Allowance
- ☐ Incapacity Benefit
- ☐ Employment and Support Allowance (support component)
- ☐ Disabled Persons Reduction for CTAX purposes
- ☐ War Disablement Pension
- ☐ War Widow's Pension
- ☐ Carer's Allowance

	Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee 27 November 2017
	Report from the Strategic Director of Performance Policy & Partnerships
The Use of Food Banks In Brent task group report	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	1
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Mark Cairns, Policy & Scrutiny Manager, mark.cairns@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report set out the findings and recommendations of the recent task group into the use of food banks in Brent.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee is recommended to endorse the report at Appendix 1 and the recommendations contained therein.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The task group made the decision to look at this area due to the significant rise in food bank usage nationally and lack of a detailed picture of food bank usage across Brent. Members were also concerned with the human impact food poverty is having on local communities and wanted to understand the scale and drivers of food poverty and food insecurity.
- 3.2 There are a number of issues which arise with the increased use of food banks. Concern was focused on vulnerable residents such as the elderly, disabled and children, for example the impact of hunger on children and young people's education. The task group also explored why individuals need to use food banks, and ways to tackle stigma associated with this. This included the impact of

welfare reform changes from central government, unemployment, rising costs of living and low pay. There also exists a varying degree of regulation, safe guarding and data collection across different providers.

- 3.7 The task group considers that the impact of welfare changes such as Universal Credit could be far reaching. It is vital therefore that the council and other local public sector partners put in place organisational arrangements that enable Brent to mitigate the impact Universal Credit as far in advance as possible.
- 3.9 The task group has made 36 individual recommendations, grouped into six discovery themes as follows.

Why people use food banks (triggers to financial crisis)

To ensure that the most financially vulnerable receive the support they need and do not fall through the gaps of the social support system. In response to increased use of food banks in Brent, the task group recommends the following:

1. The council should formally respond to DWP's assessment that delays in benefit payments or disruption are not a contributory factor to food bank use by allocating the time of a council officer to work with front line agencies to collect data that will demonstrate this link once and for all.
2. The Government should begin monitoring and recording food bank referrals centrally with immediate effect. In the meantime, the local DWP and council should take steps to formally record this data.
3. The Government, council and Mayor of London must accelerate efforts that aim to provide jobs at or above the London Living Wage as calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, create avenues for skills and training for the users of food banks. Many are willing to work to improve their family income but often have additional and complex needs.
4. Local DWP offices should make provision to visit food banks to assess the level of hardship these users face with a view to providing assistance with employment, benefits and skills and improving policy and practice.
5. The council's review of the Volunteering Brent contract in 2018 should consider support for a core group of trained volunteers able to accompany and advocate for vulnerable residents to DWP appeals, particularly for ESA cases. There is currently a need for this level of support but no adequate, coordinated provision.

Policy development

Adequate policies are developed locally and where possible pressure applied to central government policy makers for national policy and guidance.

6. The Government should develop a policy on food banks to acknowledge the increasing role they play in our communities. More and adequate funding should be offered to the food banks to support core service costs immediately while government develops more long term policies and solutions.
7. Given the scale of this problem and likelihood that need will increase, all local public sector organisations should develop an official policy on foodbanks within

the next six months, including the council, local NHS and DWP. This policy should formalise best practice in dealing with food banks and their users and seek joined up, targeted solutions to prevent and address hunger and chronic poverty in the borough. We recommend that the Council bring forward a policy for sign off by cabinet ahead of the extended roll out of Universal Credit.

8. Council services should assist food aid providers to comply with legislation by acquiring food safety qualifications for all staff and volunteers, to ensure guests and users receive food of an adequate standard. The council with CVS Brent should proactively offer and promote formal training on safeguarding, food safety and customer care be offered to food bank volunteers.
9. The council should take a proactive approach in highlighting the negative impacts of universal credit and welfare reforms on Brent residents. We recommend that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform write to the Secretary of State at the DWP outlining the problems caused by UC and other welfare reforms and request for central Government to formally track and monitor food bank usage.
10. We recommend that the Leader of the Council coordinate a response with other affected boroughs on universal credit and the increase in residents seeking emergency food assistance. The Leader should advocate for change in this area via the LGA, LEP, West London Alliance and London Councils and report back in writing to the Scrutiny Committee on progress within the next six months.
11. The council should explore how they can cut costs for foodbanks, for example, by covering the costs of waste and recycling removal, in recognition of the increasing scope and importance of the services that food banks provide to residents in the borough.

Working in partnership – public, private and voluntary sector

To ensure we make the most of the opportunities that working in partnership across the public and private sectors provide, the task group proposes working in partnership where possible across the borough.

12. Developing a sharing network for emergency food aid providers in the borough to support each other in good practice measures and a joint policy framework. This could possibly be supported financially by a consortium funding bid. Encouraging greater collaboration between food aid providers to avoid duplication and service overlap and joint promotion of services to similar target groups. We recommend that the council helps to facilitate the first meeting of this group within the next three months.
13. Ensuring relevant council departments share data and opportunities for collaborative working and referrals (for example, when families are moved into temporary accommodation such as B&Bs with limiting cooking facilities, officers should offer publicity material for our Community Kitchen as standard practice).
14. The council to coordinate visits for relevant teams to local food banks in order to better understand the scale and severity of need. At a minimum, these visits should include the housing, social care and benefits teams and include senior managers and directors.

15. The council should proactively use its influence to encourage more local food businesses to work in partnership with emergency food aid providers and reduce food wastage by making donations or providing targeted in-kind assistance. This should include permanent food bank collection stations in supermarkets, and greater opportunities for food bank shopping lists to be offered to shoppers. The Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills should report back in writing on progress within the next 12 months.
16. Council officers with specialist expertise to share knowledge on housing or benefits by delivering training for staff and volunteers of food aid providers (this could be part of the two volunteering days offered by the Council to its employees).
17. Local employers should ensure internal policies are in place, such as advance loans, to support their staff who may experience financial hardship to prevent the need for people in work to use food banks. West London Business (WLB) should initiate these conversations among members as well as the issue being formally raised as an agenda item at the next Brent Business Board. This could also be raised with appropriate pan-London/ national groups such as London First, CIPD and BITC.
18. Park Royal Business Group should host a meeting with the Brent food businesses and food banks to discuss a coordinated response to food bank food donations within the next six months. This meeting should also explore:
a) whether there is a particular online platform that should be recommended for food donations; and b) whether creative responses can be found to improving cold storage capacity in local food banks and distribution channels.
19. The council should resurrect its project with WLB and CVS Brent in creating a (or preferably identifying an existing) one-stop online platform for businesses to donate to local charities and causes. A proposal for this online platform should be brought forward to Cabinet within the next six months.
20. Brent and its partners should do all they can to ensure adequate spaces are available to food banks as guest numbers surge on a daily basis. The Council's property and regeneration teams should report to the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee within the next six months on the possibility of extra space for food banks, both in terms of floor space for services and off-site storage.
21. Food banks should offer holiday food parcels to children eligible for free school meals in line with the approach taken by St Laurence's Larder. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, along with the Strategic Director of Children & Young People and her department, should consider how they can facilitate schools to do the same.
22. The Strategic Director of Children & Young People and her department should discuss with schools opportunities for them to visit local food banks as per best practice led by Brent Trussell Trust Food Bank. The task group heard how this approach has helped to break down stigma and increase understanding of how food banks operate and the services they provide.

23. Brent mental health services should provide a named contact to local food bank managers and seek to develop closer working to tackle the numerous cases of low level and severe mental health issues presenting at food banks.
24. The council should nominate a member as a 'Food Champion' to oversee the implementation of the task group recommendations and provide coordination and political impetus behind driving solutions to food poverty and food bank usage across the borough. The Council should agree the number of hours of officer support the Food Champion is able to receive.

The user experience (Including the referral processes)

Service users and guest are treated with dignity and respect, by ensuring that referral pathways are regulated in a way that is inclusive and accessible to those who need to use food banks, particularly to those residents with access issues.

25. The council should facilitate a comprehensive mapping of the borough to determine all the local sources of dry food and cooked food available to those in the greatest need, and access routes. This would include food banks, community kitchens, places of worship, the voluntary sector, schools, etc.
26. Local statutory service providers, Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Children's Trust should make efforts to be aware of the food aid services available and actively propose that more GPs and schools register as referral agencies. Brent CCG and the Children's Trust should report on progress with this recommendation within the next 12 months.
27. The council should profile the work of food aid providers through its communications such as the Brent Magazine or on social media to assist in reaching vulnerable residents unfamiliar with available services.
28. Food banks should follow the example of Sufra food bank in providing a simple guide to food bank users on the range of support available locally on areas such as housing, skills, legal support and employment including relevant contact details.
29. Food banks should work towards formalising case management systems that provide better data collection and enable the development of a tailored action plan for each food bank user to help identify a pathway out of poverty. The council, CCG and local DWP should work with food banks to support the development of these action plans and case management systems.

Future models for food banks and community kitchens in Brent

In response to the Government's welfare reform agenda, the task group recommends the development of a robust network and future operating model, which considers a holistic approach and the wider community needs. There is a clear need for food banks to work together and rise to this challenge.

30. Organisations operating food banks consider changing the name from food bank which (unfortunately) carries a stigma and is limiting, to another name that reflects the multiple services they provide. This may encourage those people who do not come to the food bank because of the stigma, but have an essential

need, to take advantage of the multiple services that will benefit them and their families.

31. The council and its partners should consider how access to food banks and community kitchens are included in the development of the Brent Community Hub models.

General and best practice

To be a model for best practice by developing ground breaking strategies for working in partnerships with food banks and Community Kitchens.

32. The council should actively challenge the stigma associated with emergency food aid externally through positive media coverage and internally by assisting providers with training and support to offer a welcoming and compassionate service.
33. A joint education campaign should be developed and run by the Council and voluntary sector. This should include the educating guests about the impending roll out of Universal Credit in Brent and should be included in the work of food banks, kitchens, etc.
34. The quality of food used by the food banks should be monitored by food bank staff to make sure they met a legal standard. This will be both voluntarily donated and bought in by the providers.
35. The task group recommends a member development training session for councillors on dealing with residents in severe hardship and how to make food bank referrals.
36. Donations from individuals are also important, and the council should help publicise the types of donations that food banks need, such as the Trussell Trust and Sufra shopping lists.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications of the task group report itself. Any implications of implementation of its recommendations will be considered when these are presented to Cabinet.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications of the task group report itself. Any implications of implementation of its recommendations will be considered when these are presented to Cabinet.

6.0 Equality Implications

- 6.1 There are no equality implications of the task group report itself. Any implications of implementation of its recommendations will be considered when these are presented to Cabinet.

7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

- 7.1 The task group was made up of members of the committee and others, as well as expert advisors from relevant bodies including West London Business and the Child Poverty Action Group. It was also advised by the Trussell Trust. The consultation and views obtained throughout the group's work are detailed in the report.

8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

- 8.1 There are no human resources or property implications of the task group report itself. Any implications of implementation of its recommendations will be considered when these are presented to Cabinet.

Report sign off:

Peter Gadsdon

Director of Performance Policy &
Partnerships

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Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

The Use of Food Banks in Brent

Task Group Report November 2017

Cllr Roxanne Mashari (Chair)
Cllr Rita Conneely
Cllr Mary Daly
Cllr Ernest Ezeajughi
Cllr Aisha Hoda Benn
Cllr Sandra Kabir
Cllr Suresh Kansagra

Andrew Dakers
Sarah Greenwood
Imran Hussain
Anjum Klair

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1. THE CHAIR'S FOREWORD

Food bank numbers across the UK have risen dramatically within a short period of time. According to the Trussell Trust, over one million emergency three-day food supplies are distributed by their food banks nationally, but without centralised data gathering it is clear that this is merely the tip of the iceberg. In Brent alone last year an estimated 5,636 people accessed food banks.



Without regulation or direction from central government, a vacuum has appeared in this area of policy that this task group has sought to address.

Many local authorities like Brent find themselves in uncharted territory in relation to food banks. Alongside the absence of guidance for local authorities, the task group feels that there is room for improvement and external oversight with regards to safety, hygiene and safeguarding in many of the food aid providers locally.

The task group could not find any policy framework, or guidance outlining how local authorities should work with or alongside food banks.

This lack of understanding, policy and coordination presents a significant risk to public sector organisations, food banks and food bank users particularly as we approach the wider roll out of universal credit in 2018.

Time and again our task group heard of benefit delays, universal credit design problems, inaccessibility of services and sanctions driving ordinary people to extraordinary levels of desperation and destitution. We must be clear in our collective determination in Brent that our role as public and private sector bodies is to strategically tackle poverty and increase prosperity, not to *create* deprivation and poverty through our own policies. The fact that actions of publically funded bodies are a major driving force behind local food bank numbers is a cause for alarm and shame.

We cannot wait for the government to decide to take action when it comes to food banks, we must take matters into our own hands by demonstrating leadership and initiative to stem the tide of destitution and desperation. It is up to us to make sure that residents are not falling through the gaps of services and that there is a coordinated, preventative and interventionist approach.

This task group has brought to light some of the most talented, hardworking and visionary individuals who help run food banks and provide a unique and vital service that would not otherwise be provided. We have also witnessed heart-wrenching stories of neglect, desperation and abject poverty that have been both shocking and upsetting. What is clear is that this level of need and poverty must not be normalised or accepted.

It is time for all of us to take stock, to not shy away from the scale of the problem and to be nimble enough to respond to the shifting shape of provision for those in destitution, whether we agree with government policy in this area or not.

Our recommendations provide a blueprint for the first few steps in organising a coordinated response to this relatively new phenomenon and we will be holding local leaders to account over the next twelve months in order to translate policy and ideas into action that makes a difference on the ground.

I pay tribute to the Task Group Members: Cllr Ernest Ezeajughi, Cllr Aisha Hoda Benn, Cllr Mary Daly, Cllr Suresh Kansagra, Cllr Sandra Kabir and Cllr Rita Conneely as well as our expert advisors Andrew Dakers, CEO, West London Business, Imran Hussain, Director of Policy Child

Poverty Action Group, and Anjum Klair, Policy Officer, TUC. My thanks also to the Trussell Trust for their advisory role to the task group.

Particular thanks go to the food bank users who spoke to us so openly about their experiences. To the thousands of residents in Brent struggling to put food on the table, we say that we hear your voice, that you are important, that we are on your side and that you have nothing to be ashamed of.

Cllr Roxanne Mashari, Welsh Harp Ward

November 2017

2. TASK GROUP MEMBERSHIP



Cllr Rita Conneely



**Cllr Suresh
Kansagra**



Cllr Mary Daly



**Andrew Dakers,
CEO, West London
Business**



**Cllr Ernest
Ezeajughi**



**Imran Hussain,
Director of Policy
Child Poverty
Action Group
(CPAG)**



**Cllr Aisha Hoda
Benn**



**Anjum Klair, Policy
Officer, The Trades
Union Congress
(TUC)**



Cllr Sandra Kabir

Advisor to the task group: The Trussell Trust London Foodbank Network

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The task group made the decision to look at this area due to the significant rise in food bank usage nationally and lack of a detailed picture of food bank usage across Brent. The task group were also very concerned with the human impact food poverty is having on local communities and wanted to understand the scale and drivers of food poverty and food insecurity.

Food banks have come to represent a last line of defence against hardship. They are playing, and will continue to play, an increasingly significant role in society, and represent a very visible and direct way for members of the public to contribute to the relief of chronic poverty and hardship.

Brent adopted Universal Credit (UC) for new single claimants in March 2015 and will roll out full Universal Credit from August 2018. Food banks in Brent are currently operating at close to full capacity and all are extremely apprehensive about the impact of the full roll out of Universal Credit next year. The task group found evidence that the six week wait after assessment before any benefits are in place under the current Universal Credit structure is already pushing many people into financial crisis and all testimonies have suggested that this situation is set to become much worse with the full roll out.

There are a number of issues which arise with the increased use of food banks. Concern is focused on the vulnerable residents in our communities such as the elderly, disabled and children. Children and young people's education are known to suffer dramatically when they go to school hungry. We are also concerned with the lack of understanding of why individuals need to use food banks and tackling the stigma and stereotyping of individuals who need to rely on food banks.

Behind the numbers and the trends are a section of society who lack the resources to meet their basic needs. These families are in financial crisis and this can be a stressful and worrying time. For example:

- Families have to decide between heating their homes or feeding their children;
- People wake up each day to feelings of stress, uncertainty and insecurity;
- Children struggle to pay attention at school because they feel hungry, and a school lunch may be the only substantial meal of a child's day;
- This can trigger mental health issues or substance misuse; and
- Being hungry is a barrier to acquiring and sustaining employment.

The steady increase in use of food banks seems to directly correlate with the welfare reform changes from central government. Such crises tended to be exacerbated by unemployment, rising costs of living and low pay, which are all contributory factors in people seeking assistance. Food banks feel that they only have the capacity to deal with the logistics of feeding more and more people, with no time to advocate for changes that would eradicate the need for food banks in the first place. Food banks appear to be an organic, grassroots response to the impact of welfare reforms and cuts to public service provision and as such there exists a varying degree of regulation, safe guarding and data collection across different providers.

The panel was particularly struck that a borough that is home to 'London's kitchen' (Park Royal) has food banks running out of food. This brought into focus some of the practical challenges that need to be addressed. Much of Park Royal's food production is fresh food, which can be hard to secure, store and distribute safely without building the capacity of the cold food supply chain around food banks. However, the task group was pleased to discover that the Felix Project collects from Park Royal, distributing to several food aid providers locally. There is perhaps scope for learning from and expansion of this model.

The task group considers that the impact of welfare changes such as Universal Credit could be far reaching. It is vital therefore that the council and other local public sector partners put in place organisational arrangements that enable Brent to mitigate the impact Universal Credit as far in advance as possible.

The task group has made **36** individual recommendations, spread across the four key areas outlined in its Terms of Reference. The recommendations have been grouped into six discovery themes which the task group believes should form the basis of future engagement, partnership working and policy development plans with Brent's Food banks and Community kitchens.

1. Why people use food banks (triggers to financial distress)

To ensure that the most financially vulnerable receive the support they need and do not fall through the gaps of the social support system.

2. Policy development

Adequate policies are developed locally and where possible pressure applied to central government policy makers for national policy and guidance.

3. Working in partnership – public, private and voluntary sector

To ensure we make the most of the opportunities that working in partnership across the public and private provides, the task group proposes working in partnership where possible across all our Brent industries.

4. The user experience (Including the referral processes)

Service users and guest are treated with dignity and respect, by ensuring that referral pathways are regulated in a way that is inclusive and accessible to those who need to use food banks.

5. Future models for food banks and community kitchens in Brent

In response to the Government's Welfare agenda, the task group recommends the development of a robust network and future operating model, which considers an holistic approach and the wider community needs.

6. General and best practice

To be a model for best practice by developing ground breaking strategies for working in partnerships with Food banks and Community Kitchens.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Why people use food banks (triggers to financial crisis)

To ensure that the most financially vulnerable receive the support they need and do not fall through the gaps of the social support system. In response to increased use of food banks in Brent, the task group recommends the following:

1. The council should formally respond to DWP's assessment that delays in benefit payments or disruption are not a contributory factor to food bank use by allocating the time of a council officer to work with front line agencies to collect data that will demonstrate this link once and for all.
2. The Government should begin monitoring and recording food bank referrals centrally with immediate effect. In the meantime, the local DWP and council should take steps to formally record this data.
3. The Government, council and Mayor of London must accelerate efforts that aim to provide jobs at or above the London Living Wage as calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, create avenues for skills and training for the users of food banks. Many are willing to work to improve their family income but often have additional and complex needs.
4. Local DWP offices should make provision to visit food banks to assess the level of hardship these users face with a view to providing assistance with employment, benefits and skills and improving policy and practice.
5. The council's review of the Volunteering Brent contract in 2018 should consider support for a core group of trained volunteers able to accompany and advocate for vulnerable residents to DWP appeals, particularly for ESA cases. There is currently a need for this level of support but no adequate, coordinated provision.

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Adequate policies are developed locally and where possible pressure applied to central government policy makers for national policy and guidance.

6. The Government should develop a policy on food banks to acknowledge the increasing role they play in our communities. More and adequate funding should be offered to the food banks to support core service costs immediately while government develops more long term policies and solutions.
7. Given the scale of this problem and likelihood that need will increase, all local public sector organisations should develop an official policy on foodbanks within the next six months, including the council, local NHS and DWP. This policy should formalise best practice in dealing with food banks and their users and seek joined up, targeted solutions to prevent and address hunger and chronic poverty in the borough. We recommend that the Council bring forward a policy for sign off by cabinet ahead of the extended roll out of Universal Credit.
8. Council services should assist food aid providers to comply with legislation by acquiring food safety qualifications for all staff and volunteers, to ensure guests and users receive food of an adequate standard. The council with CVS Brent should proactively offer and promote formal training on safeguarding, food safety and customer care be offered to food bank volunteers.

9. The council should take a proactive approach in highlighting the negative impacts of universal credit and welfare reforms on Brent residents. We recommend that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform write to the Secretary of State at the DWP outlining the problems caused by UC and other welfare reforms and request for central Government to formally track and monitor food bank usage.
10. We recommend that the Leader of the Council coordinate a response with other affected boroughs on universal credit and the increase in residents seeking emergency food assistance. The Leader should advocate for change in this area via the LGA, LEP, West London Alliance and London Councils and report back in writing to the Scrutiny Committee on progress within the next six months.
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Working in partnership – public, private and voluntary sector

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13. Ensuring relevant council departments share data and opportunities for collaborative working and referrals (for example, when families are moved into temporary accommodation such as B&Bs with limiting cooking facilities, officers should offer publicity material for our Community Kitchen as standard practice).
14. The council to coordinate visits for relevant teams to local food banks in order to better understand the scale and severity of need. At a minimum, these visits should include the housing, social care and benefits teams and include senior managers and directors.
15. The council should proactively use its influence to encourage more local food businesses to work in partnership with emergency food aid providers and reduce food wastage by making donations or providing targeted in-kind assistance. This should include permanent food bank collection stations in supermarkets, and greater opportunities for food bank shopping lists to be offered to shoppers. The Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills should report back in writing on progress within the next 12 months.
16. Council officers with specialist expertise to share knowledge on housing or benefits by delivering training for staff and volunteers of food aid providers (this could be part of the two volunteering days offered by the Council to its employees).
17. Local employers should ensure internal policies are in place, such as advance loans, to support their staff who may experience financial hardship to prevent the need for people in work to use food banks. West London Business (WLB) should initiate these conversations among members as well as the issue being formally raised as an agenda

item at the next Brent Business Board. This could also be raised with appropriate pan-London/ national groups such as London First, CIPD and BITC.

18. Park Royal Business Group should host a meeting with the Brent food businesses and food banks to discuss a coordinated response to food bank food donations within the next six months. This meeting should also explore: a) whether there is a particular online platform that should be recommended for food donations; and b) whether creative responses can be found to improving cold storage capacity in local food banks and distribution channels.
19. The council should resurrect its project with WLB and CVS Brent in creating a (or preferably identifying an existing) one-stop online platform for businesses to donate to local charities and causes. A proposal for this online platform should be brought forward to Cabinet within the next six months.
20. Brent and its partners should do all they can to ensure adequate spaces are available to food banks as guest numbers surge on a daily basis. The Council's property and regeneration teams should report to the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee within the next six months on the possibility of extra space for food banks, both in terms of floor space for services and off-site storage.
21. Food banks should offer holiday food parcels to children eligible for free school meals in line with the approach taken by St Laurence's Larder. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, along with the Strategic Director of Children & Young People and her department, should consider how they can facilitate schools to do the same.
22. The Strategic Director of Children & Young People and her department should discuss with schools opportunities for them to visit local food banks as per best practice led by Brent Trussell Trust Food Bank. The task group heard how this approach has helped to break down stigma and increase understanding of how food banks operate and the services they provide.
23. Brent mental health services should provide a named contact to local food bank managers and seek to develop closer working to tackle the numerous cases of low level and severe mental health issues presenting at food banks.
24. The council should nominate a member as a 'Food Champion' to oversee the implementation of the task group recommendations and provide coordination and political impetus behind driving solutions to food poverty and food bank usage across the borough. The Council should agree the number of hours of officer support the Food Champion is able to receive.

The user experience (Including the referral processes)

Service users and guest are treated with dignity and respect, by ensuring that referral pathways are regulated in a way that is inclusive and accessible to those who need to use food banks, particularly to those residents with access issues.

25. The council should facilitate a comprehensive mapping of the borough to determine all the local sources of dry food and cooked food available to those in the greatest need, and access routes. This would include food banks, community kitchens, places of worship, the voluntary sector, schools, etc.
26. Local statutory service providers, Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Children's Trust should make efforts to be aware of the food aid services available and

actively propose that more GPs and schools register as referral agencies. Brent CCG and the Children's Trust should report on progress with this recommendation within the next 12 months.

27. The council should profile the work of food aid providers through its communications such as the Brent Magazine or on social media to assist in reaching vulnerable residents unfamiliar with available services.
28. Food banks should follow the example of Sufra food bank in providing a simple guide to food bank users on the range of support available locally on areas such as housing, skills, legal support and employment including relevant contact details.
29. Food banks should work towards formalising case management systems that provide better data collection and enable the development of a tailored action plan for each food bank user to help identify a pathway out of poverty. The council, CCG and local DWP should work with food banks to support the development of these action plans and case management systems.

Future models for food banks and community kitchens in Brent

In response to the Government's welfare reform agenda, the task group recommends the development of a robust network and future operating model, which considers a holistic approach and the wider community needs. There is a clear need for food banks to work together and rise to this challenge.

30. Organisations operating food banks consider changing the name from food bank which (unfortunately) carries a stigma and is limiting, to another name that reflects the multiple services they provide. This may encourage those people who do not come to the food bank because of the stigma, but have an essential need, to take advantage of the multiple services that will benefit them and their families.
31. The council and its partners should consider how access to food banks and community kitchens are included in the development of the Brent Community Hub models.

General and best practice

To be a model for best practice by developing ground breaking strategies for working in partnerships with food banks and Community Kitchens.

32. The council should actively challenge the stigma associated with emergency food aid externally through positive media coverage and internally by assisting providers with training and support to offer a welcoming and compassionate service.
33. A joint education campaign should be developed and run by the Council and voluntary sector. This should include the educating guests about the impending roll out of Universal Credit in Brent and should be included in the work of food banks, kitchens, etc.
34. The quality of food used by the food banks should be monitored by food bank staff to make sure they met a legal standard. This will be both voluntarily donated and bought in by the providers.
35. The task group recommends a member development training session for councillors on dealing with residents in severe hardship and how to make food bank referrals.

36. Donations from individuals are also important, and the council should help publicise the types of donations that food banks need, such as the Trussell Trust and Sufra shopping lists.

5. INTRODUCTION – SCOPE OF THE TASK GROUP

Background

Food Poverty: The inability of individuals and households to obtain an adequate and nutritious diet, often because they cannot afford healthy food or there is a lack of shops in their area that are easy to reach.¹

Food Insecurity: The limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g. without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies).²

Food Banks

Nationally food banks have been opening at an extraordinary rate in austerity Britain. New research by the Independent Food Aid Network, featured in The Guardian newspaper on the 29th May 2017, revealed that there were at least 672 independently run food banks operating across the UK. When including the Trussell Trust, this figure rises to approximately 2000 food banks operating in the UK, but this does not include informal food parcel distribution by social welfare charities, children's centres, religious organisations, housing associations, hospitals and other groups.

London is often seen as an affluent city, and an engine of wealth-creation for the rest of the UK. However, this perception masks high levels of deprivation and extremes of inequality. More than a quarter of Londoners live below the poverty line, and of these the majority live in families with at least one person in paid work. In the past decade, as wages have fallen in real terms and living costs have risen, the number of people in working poverty has increased by 70%. Almost a fifth of jobs in London pay below the London Living Wage, the amount needed to live a modest but decent life.³

Food poverty is part of this darker picture, there are now food banks in almost every community, from the East End of London to the Cotswolds. Food poverty can be defined as the inability to afford, or to have access to, the food needed for a healthy diet.⁴ It is also important that people can access food in a way which is dignified and socially acceptable.⁵ When people struggle to feed themselves adequately and nutritiously, it undermines health, educational attainment and employment, and ultimately adds to pressure on services. Food insecurity is an alternative term, which in particular illustrates people's uncertainty about being able to provide for themselves and their families.

While there is no official government measurement of food poverty or food insecurity, a range of available data indicates the scale of the problem. 1.2 million food aid packages were given out by Trussell Trust food banks in London during the last financial year and this was the ninth consecutive year in which demand has risen. These figures are often described as the tip of the iceberg given the high number of households in poverty and likely to be experiencing food insecurity. For example, 9% of children in London say they sometimes, or often, go to bed hungry.⁶

Food Bank Users - 'Guests'

Food bank and community kitchen users are referred to as guests, this is to reinforce a fundamental ethos to both users and volunteers. Guests are welcome and treated with dignity and respect.

¹ Food Standards Agency

² The Food Foundation

³ Trust for London / New Policy Institute (2015) London's Poverty Profile 2015

⁴ Department of Health

⁵ E. Dowler (2012) The Future of UK Household Security, University of Warwick

⁶ Beyond the Food Banks, London Food Poverty Profile, Sustain, 2016

Questions

The review considered the following questions in four key areas:

Understanding the drivers and scale of the problem

- How and why referrals are being made?
- How many referrals are made?
- Where are referrals made?
- How are these being monitored?

Policy and practice - are food banks here to stay?

- What is the local, London and nationwide picture?
- What are the local public sector partners policies (Job Centres, DWP, NHS, Schools, and GP's)?
- What is the role of the Private sector (food donors/suppliers)?

The experience of the resident

- What is the food bank journey experience?
- What support is provided to users/guests?
- What are the sustainable solutions for food banks?

Public Perception

- How are stakeholders being educated on food banks?
- Is there stigma and stereotyping associated with food banks?
- How are the wider community integrated into the work of food banks?
- How do we support our local food banks?

Aims

The aims of the review set out at the start of the investigation were as follows:

- Gain a clear understanding of the triggers for food bank usage, with specific focus on welfare reform and the DWP. Through the review the task group would look to make recommendations based on evidence with a view to improve processes and reduce delays in welfare payments to reduce the demand for food banks.
- Establish if there is a link between austerity policies and welfare reform; and the increased use of food banks. Through the review the task group would look to make recommendations regarding a lobbying strategy for one or more welfare reforms.
- Gain understanding and transparency of the local and national policies and strategic direction regarding the use of food banks. Through the review the task group would look to make recommendations for government (local, regional and national) to agree a strategy on the need and use of food banks. This may also be done through lobbying.
- Identify any gaps in current working model and together with local partners, make recommendations for a collaborative approach to working with and supporting food banks.
- Establish best practice for local authorities to work in agreement with food banks. Through the review the task group would look to make recommendations where appropriate, that would allow the council and local partners to operate in a way that is conducive to the service that food banks offer.
- The council is in an informed position to make good choices regarding food poverty and its position on welfare reform.

6. METHODOLOGY

As part of this review the task group invited relevant partners to contribute through discussion groups, meetings, phone interviews and visits. Primarily, the task group started by collecting information about the current operations of food banks and understanding triggers to food bank usage. This included meetings with many food bank operators and food bank guests/users.

The task group then met with council officers to discuss and understand Brent's profile in relation to food banks, the council's referral processes, policies and data collection.

The task group held themed discussion meetings with referral partners which reflected a key areas of the review. The task group interviewed local business groups and consulted leading figures in the public sector. Given the focus on identifying good practice outside of the borough, the group consulted with the LB Ealing, LB Lewisham, LB Croydon, LB Southwark and LB Barnet.

Groups of participants

Service Users: Group 1

- Guest/Service Users:
 - From across all the Brent food banks/Community Kitchens

Partners: Group 2

- Relevant Council Departments:
 - Welfare and Benefits
 - Brent Housing
 - Children Centre's
- Brent Food Banks:
 - Brent Food Banks - Trussell Trust network
 - Sufra NW London
 - St Laurence Larder
 - Granville Community Kitchen
- Brent partners:
 - Citizens advice Brent
 - NHS/CCG
 - Schools
 - Job Centre Plus
- Private sector (Local):
 - West London Business
 - Tesco
 - Asda
 - Marks & Spencer
 - Park Royal Business Group
 - FSB Brent Business

Partners: Group 3

- The Trussell Trust

- Independent Food Aid Network
- Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming
- Members of Parliament (MP's)
- Mayor's Office - Food Poverty
- Local Government Association (LGA)
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
- Local Authorities:
 - LB Bexley
 - LB Croydon
 - LB Ealing
 - RB Kensington & Chelsea
 - LB Lewisham
 - LB Southwark
 - LB Tower Hamlets
 - LB Wandsworth

*A full list of participants of the task group's work can be found in section 10 of this report

7. POLICY CONTEXT

7.1. Brent

Local Context – Brent

There are three food banks and a number of community kitchens operating in Brent:

1. Brent Food Bank - The Trussell Trust Network, Neasden (Referral)
2. Sufra NW London Food Bank and Kitchen (independent), Stonebridge (Referral for food bank, walk-in for kitchen)
3. St Laurence Larder (independent – Church), Kilburn (Walk-in)
4. Granville Community Kitchen, South Kilburn (Walk-in).

Individuals can access some food banks via a referral while others offer a walk-in service. A referral can be made by a number of agreed local partners, which include a number of departments within the council such as the Welfare and Benefits team, Housing and Children and Young People Services. When individuals or families are accessing services and it is clear there will be a financial shortfall, officers will make a referral to the food banks. Alternatively those who appear to be in need will be signposted to one of the partners who will assess their need, and make a decision on whether they are eligible to access the food bank. This is done by issuing food vouchers that can then be redeemed at one of the food banks. Organisations or individuals can become official food bank referral agencies by contacting the individual food bank and requesting training and accreditation.

Across the borough there are a number of organisations from both the public and private sectors who interact with the food banks, either via a supporting or service providing capacity. Each partner is working in a silo with one or all of the food banks in Brent. This can lead to duplication and misuse, but more importantly there are missed opportunities to share information, resources, best practice and generally working as a cohesive group.

The data below sets out the local context for Brent in light of available data:

The Trussell Trust are able to produce data using their network but this does not include other food banks, so there is no official method of collecting, collating and reporting data of overall food bank usage in Brent. Between January 2017 and August 2017 the Brent Food Bank redeemed a total of 1,403 vouchers, this was up from 1,043 over the same period in 2016, an increase of 34.5 percent. The greatest number of guests come from Harlesden, Stonebridge and Willesden Green. The largest numbers of guest referrals fulfilled were referred by Brent Community Law Centre, Brent Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) and the Willesden Probation Trust. There were 13 referrals which came from the Wembley Job Centre Plus.

Figure 1. Brent Food Bank

	Jan-Aug 2016	Jan-Aug 2017
Total Number of Vouchers redeemed	1,043	1,403
Total Number of Recipients	1,920	2,288

Figure 2. Brent Food Bank

	Jan-Aug 2016	Jan-Aug 2017
Adults	1,312	1,762

Children	608	526
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- Out-of-work benefits claimants, September 2017: There were a total of 4,860 residents in receipt of out-of-work benefits. This is 2.2% of the total resident population which is above the London and national average of 2.0%.⁷
- Gross Weekly Pay, 2016: The average gross weekly pay for Brent residents is £550 a week, this is below the London average of £632 per week but slightly above the national average of £541 per week.⁸

The statistics below are provided by Sufra NW London, another of the four official food banks in Brent. The data has been collected using the Sufra referral form. The task group learned from the Brent Multifaith Forum that there are many other religious organisations providing food parcels in less formal arrangements.

Figure 3. Sufra NW London

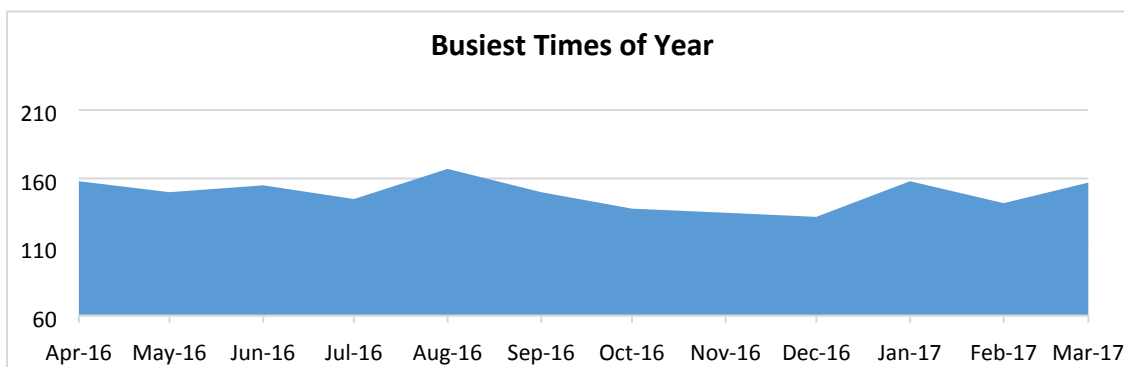
	2015-2016	2016-2017
Total Number of Food Parcels	1,760	1,764
Total Number of Recipients	3,716	3,779

Figure 4. Sufra NW London

Reasons for Food Bank Usage - Priority Group April 2016-March 2017*	Number	%
Individuals awaiting payment of benefits	676	42.40%
Individuals not eligible for statutory benefits	172	10.80%
Low-income, working families	168	10.50%
Refugees / Asylum seekers	122	7.70%
Individuals/Family Members with disability or long-term illness	115	7.20%
Individuals whose benefits have been disrupted (including those sanctioned)	106	6.70%
Individuals with a history of drug/alcohol abuse	102	6.40%
Victims of domestic violence, abuse and/or crime	50	3.10%
Ex-Offenders	45	2.80%
Individuals who have not applied for benefits	38	2.40%

**Sufra collect data on the number of households who identify with the following statements. This is an OPTIONAL question, and these figures should be considered as the minimum number who fall into each category. Households may fall into more than one priority group.*

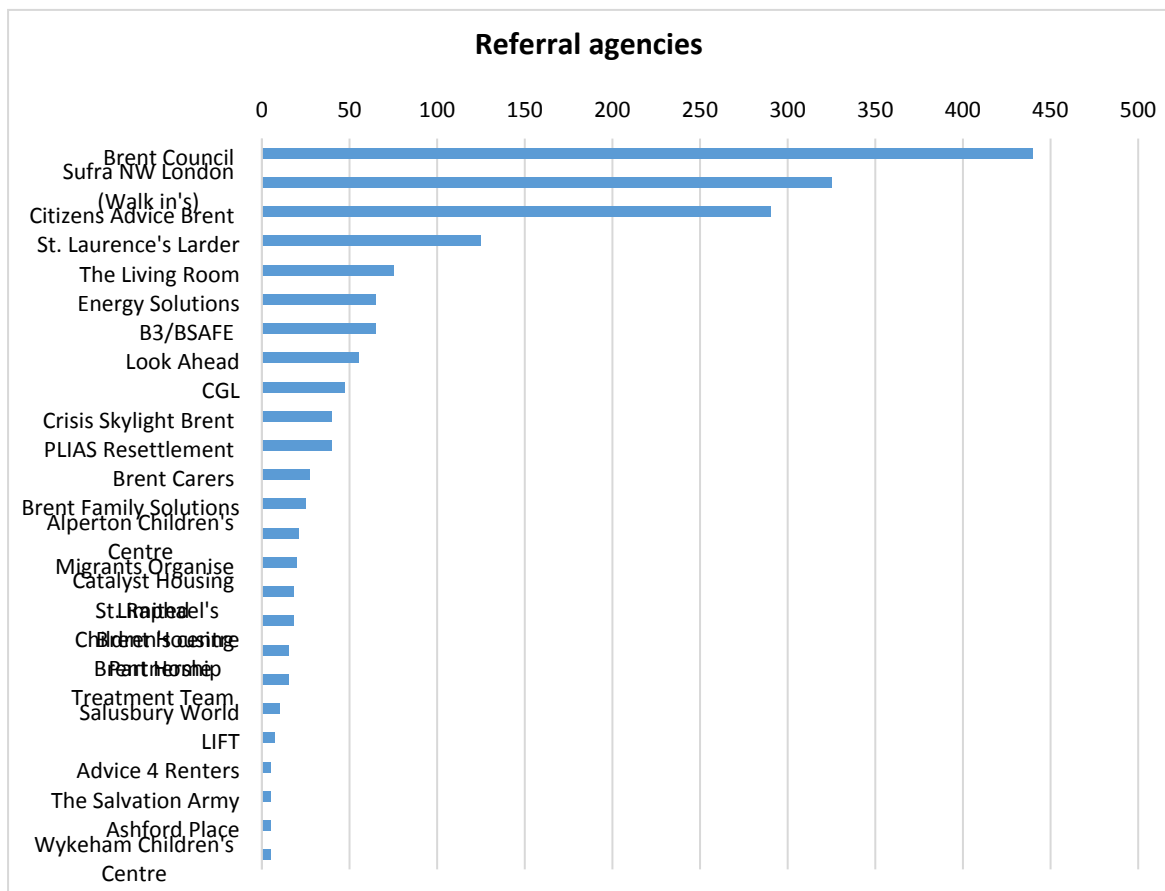
Figure 5. Sufra NW London



⁷ NOMIS May 2017

⁸ NOMIS 2015-16

Figure 6. Sufra NW London



7.2. National Picture

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) produces regulations which impact upon food banks⁹. EU food hygiene law also requires the registration of those operations or activities where food is supplied - whether given away free or sold for some form of monetary or other return – which are deemed to be: ‘undertakings, the concept of which implies a certain continuity of activities and a certain degree of organisation’. In England, registration is with the local authority environmental health departments.

There is no other legislation or policy that relate to food banks. The guidance will be reviewed in June 2018 although the FSA welcomes feedback from users at any time.

Nationally, over 2016-2017 the Trussell Trust data reveals that benefit delays and changes remain the biggest cause of referrals to its food banks, accounting for 43 percent of all referrals (26 percent benefit delay, 17 percent benefit change) a slight rise on last year’s 42 percent. Low income has also risen as referral cause from 23 percent to 26 percent.

Main concerns nationally relating to food poverty and food bank usage:

Welfare sanctions, delays and disputes

The Department of Work and Pensions’ welfare sanctions, delays and disputes are the number one reason why people need to access food banks; this is supported by data from food banks on the reason why people are accessing their services.

Universal Credit (UC)

The impact of a six week waiting period for a first Universal Credit payment can lead to food bank referrals, debt, mental health issues, rent arrears and eviction. These effects can last even after people receive their Universal Credit payments, as bills and debts pile up. In areas where Universal Credit has been rolled out Trussell Trust food banks saw a 17% increase in referrals.¹⁰

Low Income and Wages

A rise in zero hour contracts and falling real wages has led to a growing numbers of people on low incomes turning to food banks. The average yearly wage is £1,200 lower in real terms than it was in 2008¹¹. The UK is one of few developed countries where wages have fallen since the 2008 crisis. People are seeing prices go up, but wage packets are not keeping pace.

No clear national policies

There are also concerns as to the fact that there is no clear direction from central government regarding food banks. Many local authorities like Brent find themselves in uncharted territory in relation to food banks and there are no policies on a local or national level. Alongside no clear guidance for local authorities, there is very little formal guidance or standards for the food banks themselves. However it should be noted that the European Union has recently published guidance.¹²

Recording and sharing of data

There are organisations such as the Trussell Trust who are able to collect some information, which show a worrying increase in the usage of food banks. However, with no central collection, it is difficult to ascertain the true scale of the problem or how to tackle this issue.

⁹ Food Law Practice Guidance, 3.2.6.2, Registration of Food Establishments - Food Banks

¹⁰ Early Warnings: Universal Credit and Food banks

¹¹ TUC ONS Annual survey of hours and earnings April 2016

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/fw_eu-actions_food-donation_eu-guidelines_en.pdf

8. KEY FINDINGS

8.1 Understanding the drivers and scale of the problem

Understanding Drivers

In order to understand food bank usage the task group sought clarification on triggers to food bank usage. The task group made a number of visits to the Brent food banks and community kitchens to learn from food bank operators and users/guests. The task group quickly established that financial hardship was the main driver and for many this was triggered by changes to welfare policies and benefits. Reductions to the amount of benefits, sanctions by JCP and delays in receiving benefit payments were cited as being the main issues.

The task group found the other significant driver to food bank use was low income, even though in employment; wages are very low, meaning that once household bills are paid, there is no money left to buy food. £73 a week on benefits is not enough according to the council's Welfare and Benefits team – 'People are struggling to meet costs on that'.

The task group consulted with the central Department for Work and Pensions Central Analysis Division and was told *"As the DWP does not own a policy on food banks, this work is something we would politely decline involvement in"*. However the regional team were able to engage with the task group and discuss matters on a local level. The council's Welfare and Benefit team noted that local teams lack powers and authority to make any major changes or decisions. They can provide 'a band aid rather than addressing the main problems'

The local Job Centre Plus (JCP), had started to make and track referrals to food banks from April of this year. However, they felt that the statistics that were coming out of the food banks did not match up to their own statistics. The JCP did not feel that there was any correlation between their data and the increase in food bank usage in Brent. JCP felt that there was no method to confirm what users/guests stated as their main reasons for using food banks services was correct. The JCP also felt that users/guests may be confusing the different types of sanctions and benefit reductions, for example with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), where a medical certificate may have run out and a new one has not been filed with JCP, resulting in all the claimant's benefits being stopped.

Other councils that the task group consulted with stated they their local JCP were also making referrals and were in fact the major referral partner ahead of the council. The task group feel that the local DWP can build on their work in this area and that the central DWP could do more to coordinate a coherent, national approach with formal policies and guidance. In the view of the Welfare and Benefits team, central government changes coming through the pipeline 'will make things harder' as the DWP is 'bureaucratic and centralised and there is no room for discretion'. The team have concerns about DWP's 'ability to administer things', and the 'JCP, however well intentioned, are up against the central system'.

The All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, found that more than half of all food bank referrals could be attributed to the benefits system. Other drivers included the additional costs that arrive with each school holiday, low and irregular wages, and disproportionately large utility costs for those in financial hardship.

Understanding the Scale of the problem

Understanding the scale of this issue is more difficult to ascertain, mainly due to the disparate and sporadic way data is recorded and shared. The task group heard that due to increased service demand and most emergency service provision being dependent on volunteers, there may not be the resources or capacity to take on adding more responsibilities, such as formal data collection and monitoring. Brent adopted Universal Credit for new single claimants in March 2015

and will roll out full UC from August 2018. Food banks are currently operating at full capacity and all are extremely apprehensive about the impact of the full roll out next year. The six week wait before any benefits are in place will push many people into financial distress.

Demand and users are not uniform amongst food banks. However the implementation of Universal Credit (UC) has particularly affected single people. Those in work on low wages, people with mental health issues, and victims of domestic violence are also key groups making use of food banks. The task group feel that our economy is far too dependent on low-paid, insecure work and our welfare system is becoming increasingly harsh and difficult to navigate. If we are to end reliance on food banks, then we need to tackle low pay and insecure work, benefit payment delays, and ensure that welfare is being used to protect the most vulnerable.

Recommendations

1. The council should formally respond to DWP's assessment that delays in benefit payments or disruption are not a contributory factor to food bank use by allocating the time of a council officer to work with front line agencies to collect data that will demonstrate this link once and for all.
2. The Government should begin monitoring and recording food bank referrals centrally with immediate effect. In the meantime, the local DWP and council should take steps to formally record this data.
3. The Government, council and Mayor of London must accelerate efforts that aim to provide jobs at or above the London Living Wage as calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, and create avenues for skills and training for the users of food banks. Many are willing to work to improve their family income but often have additional and complex needs.
4. Local DWP offices should make provision to visit food banks to assess the level of hardship these users face with a view to providing assistance with employment, benefits and skills and improving policy and practice.
5. The council's review of the Volunteering Brent contract in 2018 should consider support for a core group of trained volunteers able to accompany and advocate for vulnerable residents to DWP appeals, particularly for ESA cases. There is currently a need for this level of support but no adequate, coordinated provision.

8.2 Policy and practice - are food banks here to stay?

Policy

The task group consulted with many levels of policy makers both locally, regionally, and nationally. The task group was keen to liaise with central government departments and non-government organisations that work to support the most vulnerable people of our society.

Whilst all responded to the task group and appreciated the importance of its work, it was difficult to move forward with reviewing the policy area of this work, as there is little to no policy available. In fact the task group could not find any organisation, including Brent Council with any policy or guidance for working with or alongside food banks. Food banks officially became an addition to our high street and communities in 2004, to date there are no strategies, policies or guidance nationally or otherwise.

The task group consulted with MP's for Brent and MP's with a vested interest in food poverty. Tulip Siddiq, MP for Hampstead and Kilburn, felt that we have seen deep and sustained cuts to welfare, along with stagnating wages and a punitive freeze to public sector pay. At the same time, we have seen a marked increase in the use of food banks. We are the sixth richest economy in the world and yet there are over a million people in the UK using food banks.

Locally, there do seem to be many local arrangements made between food banks and different teams within local authorities and other public sector organisations, established via the referral partner agreements. As not all food banks and specifically community kitchens use referral vouchers, there are varying degrees of formality to their relationships, engagement and support.

Food and faith

Faith is, in many cases, a major driver and inspiration for food aid provision - for example, the Shirdi Saibaba Temple in Wembley has made a pledge that no one within a 5km radius of the temple should go hungry. As a large proportion of food banks and community kitchens either started in or are run by religious groups, at the beginning of this work the task group were concerned that this might be a barrier for some people who needed to access food in a borough as diverse as Brent. However all of the food banks and community kitchens that the task group engaged with during this review were open to everyone regardless of religious denomination. The task group is clear that there should be no faith-related obligations, questions or interventions with food bank users at any stage of their food bank visit. The task group recognises the positive inspiration that faith brings in offering services to those in destitution and the extensive financial and logistical effort made by local religious institutions and organisations in this regard.

Regulation

Many food banks and community kitchens operate in informal settings and this raised some questions regarding how these can be regulated and standards of operation made more formal to provide greater assurance regarding the safety and well-being of all food bank users..

Due to the complex needs of many of their users, food bank volunteers would benefit from a basic level of training on food hygiene and safeguarding to help them identify any problems and, where appropriate, refer cases on to relevant support agencies.

Are food banks here to stay?

When asked if food banks are here to stay some food banks felt that food banks and community kitchens have developed an array of services, some more than others. The services provide progression routes for people in crisis through advice, training and employment support. In this regard, some food banks are 'replacing' many services previously provided by the public sector. The future of the food bank model is one that is fully integrated with existing service providers as part of wider strategy for neighbourhood renewal. The Trussell Trust stated that 'If you didn't have food banks you'd have riots, food banks are like a pressure valve'.

Others felt that whenever there are people suffering there will always be places like food banks who will respond to help those most in need. There was however, broad agreement that food banks should not become normalised and should only be the very last line against chronic food poverty and hunger. Food banks stated that while they wish to continue helping people with what are often hugely complex problems in their lives, a most pressing issue is how to reverse the rapid growth in the numbers of people being pushed towards hunger by problems with the benefits system, large and unexpected demands on the family budget, and low and irregular wages. The Trussell Trust stated 'what we're seeing now is people with nothing' and compared their situations to a 'trap door'.

The council currently makes referrals only to Sufra, due to a relationship that has built up organically over time. While there are benefits to this relationship which it would be beneficial to maintain, it does mean that there is not a strategic, coordinated approach which makes use of, for example, the Trussell Trust and Granville Community Kitchen. A Brent policy on food banks would help achieve this. There is inconsistency in the referral practices of the food banks in Brent. Without insisting on uniformity, it would be beneficial for food banks to establish a degree of coordination and consistency in their referrals. It would also be positive for food banks to increase the numbers of agencies from which they will accept referrals, and the number of official referral routes.

Users and guests felt that the services were a lifeline and without them, their families would be going hungry. It was also felt that this was a place that they could get help with housing issues and problems with their benefits. Many users felt that the food banks and community kitchens are also places where they can socialise and see a friendly face, particularly as the number of council-provided community spaces have decreased due to significant reductions in central government grants.

The Private Sector

The task group believe that private sector philanthropy could play a more strategic role in assisting food banks to provide for their users. Options include surplus food donated by the numerous food producers in the borough, and other in-kind support (e.g. additional storage space for food banks, and lawyers to provide pro bono legal advice as currently happens at St Laurence's Larder), as well as cash donations. Businesses should be encouraged to do so.

Donations from individuals are also important, and the council should help publicise the types of donations that food banks need, such as the Trussell Trust shopping list. One major retailer told the task group that they donate food (and volunteer) in support of a wide range of food banks across the UK via the *neighbourly.com* social media platform. It is clear that private sector businesses are using online platforms and the council should investigate options for a Brent online portal to make it easier for the private sector to donate.

Marks and Spencer stated that donations are only constrained by the amount of surplus food they generate and whether it can be safely donated. There are no budget restrictions applied to these donations. The task group recognise that this might not be the case for all private sector organisations. When asked what would make it easier for companies to support food banks, specifically on fresh food, the task group were told the ability to maintain an unbroken temperature-controlled supply chain (cold chain) during transportation and storage.

The task group also sought confirmation from local private sector partners that internal policies were in place to support their own staff who may experience financial crisis and need support. Marks and Spencer told the task group that staff are paid above the national living wage. They also qualify for discounts off products (including food) and have access to short-life food at heavily discounted prices. In addition, they also provide access to a colleague Welfare helpline which is confidential upon request and can provide help and assistance across a range welfare concerns.

The Trussell Trust told the task group ‘that for the first time food stocks in London and Brent are running low’. The CEO of West London Business, stated: “One part of London where food banks shouldn’t be running out of food is here in Brent. Park Royal is known as ‘London’s Kitchen’ and it is on our doorstep. However the challenge would seem to be building the cold storage supply chain in/out of food banks so that surplus fresh food can be utilised.”

The Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD)¹³ highlights the following benefits for the private sector in partnering with food banks:

- Donations provide a life line to struggling people and families in need
- Reduction in disposal or reworking costs
- Stops the negative environmental impacts from food disposal and reduces carbon footprint
- Helps to create a positive CSR / communications benefit and can support brand loyalty
- Engages colleagues – it can generate a great sense of community and there are often further engagement opportunities from working directly with the charity e.g. volunteering, team building etc.
- National food banks often provide the security of product traceability controls
- There can be a tax benefit when donating goods¹⁴
- Can provide a single channel for charitable donations replacing multiple ad-hoc requests

The IDG also highlight the following considerations for private sector organisations in partnering with food banks:

- Do you have clear internal guidance to make it easy for the decision to donate to be made?
- Are you the owner of the product and authorised to donate it?
- Has your company’s ‘reduce to clear’ policy been followed prior to donation?
- Is donating food going to reduce any income you may be generating from animal feed sales?
- Do you want to communicate your actions internally or externally?
- Does the charity partner fit with your Company’s CSR policy or ethics? e.g. what is your position on political groups or religious groups
- Your company should develop an agreement with the organisation receiving food. This might cover:
 - Details of all parties involved
 - Purpose of the agreement
 - A description of the condition of food to be donated
 - Any special requirements you have for storage and transport, for example
 - The conditions of use of products by the recipient
 - Liability: who is responsible for the food and at what point
 - Indemnity: This needs to be agreed and clearly explained.

Recommendations

6. The Government should develop a policy on food banks to acknowledge the increasing role they play in our communities. More and adequate funding should be offered to the food banks to support core service costs immediately while government develops more long term policies and solutions.
7. Given the scale of this problem and likelihood that need will increase, all local public sector organisations should develop an official policy on foodbanks within the next six months, including the council, local NHS and DWP. This policy should formalise best practice in dealing with food banks and their users and seek joined up, targeted solutions to prevent and address hunger and chronic poverty in the borough. We recommend that the Council

¹³ <https://www.igd.com/articles/article-viewer/t/food-banks/i/16107>

¹⁴ <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/businesses/giving/gifts-in-kind.htm>

bring forward a policy for sign off by Cabinet ahead of the extended roll out of Universal Credit.

8. Council services should assist food aid providers to comply with legislation by acquiring food safety qualifications for all staff and volunteers, to ensure guests and users receive food of an adequate standard. The council with CVS Brent should proactively offer and promote formal training on safeguarding, food safety and customer care to food bank volunteers.
9. The council should take a proactive approach in highlighting the negative impacts of universal credit and welfare reforms on Brent residents. We recommend that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform write to the Secretary of State at the DWP outlining the problems caused by UC and other welfare reforms and request for central Government to formally track and monitor food bank usage.
10. We recommend that the Leader of the Council coordinate a response with other affected boroughs on universal credit and the increase in residents seeking emergency food assistance. The Leader should advocate for change in this area via the LGA, LEP, West London Alliance and London Councils and report back in writing to the Scrutiny Committee on progress within the next six months.
11. The council should explore how they can cut costs for foodbanks, for example, by covering the costs of waste and recycling removal, in recognition of the increasing scope and importance of the services that food banks provide to residents in the borough.
12. Developing a sharing network for emergency food aid providers in the borough to support each other in good practice measures and a joint policy framework. This could possibly be supported financially by a consortium funding bid. Encouraging greater collaboration between food aid providers to avoid duplication and service overlap and joint promotion of services to similar target groups. We recommend that the council helps to facilitate the first meeting of this group within the next three months.
13. Ensuring relevant council departments share data and opportunities for collaborative working and referrals (for example, when families are moved into temporary accommodation such as B&Bs with limiting cooking facilities, officers should offer publicity material for our Community Kitchen as standard practice).
14. The council to coordinate visits for relevant teams to local food banks in order to better understand the scale and severity of need. At a minimum, these visits should include the housing, social care and benefits teams and include senior managers and directors.
15. The council should proactively use its influence to encourage more local food businesses to work in partnership with emergency food aid providers and reduce food wastage by making donations or providing targeted in-kind assistance. This should include permanent food bank collection stations in supermarkets, and greater opportunities for food bank shopping lists to be offered to shoppers. The Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills should report back in writing on progress within the next 12 months.
16. Council officers with specialist expertise to share knowledge on housing or benefits by delivering training for staff and volunteers of food aid providers (this could be part of the two volunteering days offered by the Council to its employees).
17. Local employers should ensure internal policies are in place, such as advance loans, to support their staff who may experience financial hardship to prevent the need for people

in work to use food banks. West London Business (WLB) should initiate these conversations among members as well as the issue being formally raised as an agenda item at the next Brent Business Board. This could also be raised with appropriate pan-London/ national groups such as London First, CIPD and BITC.

18. Park Royal Business Group should host a meeting with the Brent food businesses and food banks to discuss a coordinated response to food bank food donations within the next six months. This meeting should also explore: a) whether there is a particular online platform that should be recommended for food donations; and b) whether creative responses can be found to improving cold storage capacity in local food banks and distribution channels.
19. The council should resurrect its project with WLB and CVS Brent in creating a (or preferably identifying an existing) one-stop online platform for businesses to donate to local charities and causes. A proposal for this online platform should be brought forward to Cabinet within the next six months.
20. Brent and its partners should do all they can to ensure adequate spaces are available to food banks as guest numbers surge on a daily basis. The council's property and regeneration teams should report to the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee within the next six months on the possibility of extra space for food banks, both in terms of floor space for services and off-site storage.
21. Food banks should offer holiday food parcels to children eligible for free school meals in line with the approach taken by St Laurence's Larder. The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, along with the Strategic Director of Children & Young People and her department, should consider how they can facilitate schools to do the same.
22. The Strategic Director of Children & Young People and her department should discuss with schools opportunities for them to visit local food banks as per best practice led by Brent Trussell Trust Food Bank. The task group heard how this approach has helped to break down stigma and increase understanding of how food banks operate and the services they provide.
23. Brent mental health services should provide a named contact to local food bank managers and seek to develop closer working to tackle the numerous cases of low level and severe mental health issues presenting at food banks.
24. The council should nominate a member as a 'Food Champion' to oversee the implementation of the task group recommendations and provide coordination and political impetus behind driving solutions to food poverty and food bank usage across the borough. The Council should agree the number of hours of officer support the Food Champion is able to receive.

8.3 The experience of the resident

The food bank Journey

The task group were very interested in experiencing the food bank journey, from signposting, and referral, through to going to the food banks and community kitchens for a hot meal. The task group were keen to feel first-hand what the users and the guests experience at food banks. The task group felt that overall, food bank users are treated with respect and attention and this was supported by what users and guests had informed us. Food bank users explained that being treated with compassion and respect helps to alleviate the initial fear of using food bank services.

However some users did state that they have attended food banks where this is not always the case, which supports the task groups earlier recommendations relating to training and working together as a network. Users and guests stated that as regular users they know where most of the food banks and community kitchens are located throughout the borough, however food banks open and close and it would be useful to them and new users if there was a list that they could look to see when and where in the borough they can access a hot meal or food support on any given day.

St Laurence Larder stated that 'People don't need a voucher to enter, this is what people have had all their lives – being turned away'. The task group recommends that food banks adopt best practice in accepting initial approaches by users without a formal referral in order to minimise trauma for anyone approaching a food bank in the borough for the first time.

Support Provided

In addition to food assistance, food banks can offer other forms of support, such as a safe and warm place to spend time. Some food banks provide toys for children, an "edible garden", cookery classes and haircuts; sometimes a volunteer will accompany a user when they have been referred to another service. The task group felt this was particularly helpful, and options for Volunteering Brent to offer a similar service should be explored.

All the food banks and community kitchens visited by the task group offer their guest's clothes, St Laurence's Larder also offers guests the use of a shower. St Laurence's Larder and the Trussell Trust also provide a laundry service. St Laurence Larder's offers food packs during the summer holidays for pupils of a neighbouring school who qualify for free school meals, who will not be able to access those meals. The Child Action Poverty Group told the task group that 'by 2021 – 5.1 m children are set to be living in poverty'. The task group feels that all food banks should offer summer holiday food packs on a similar basis to the above; and the council's Children & Young People's Department should consider how it could encourage this to be implemented by schools.

Food bank users/guests expressed how welcoming, engaging and supportive the food bank staff have been, which has allowed them to build trust and strong relationships with their users/guests and local community. The task group believe that it is of the upmost importance that key frontline public services which deal with users and guests build relationships with food banks, so that they can advise them and keep open channels of communication in relation to clients. This would include children and adults social care services, benefits and housing services. This should be part of the council's policy on food banks. Other public services, such as GPs and the DWP, should do the same, so that all of these services are aware that their clients are having to use food banks.

Where individuals are being referred to food banks on multiple occasions (e.g. three) this should be recognised as a cause for concern, and trigger specific focused casework by a range of relevant agencies, such as the DWP, the NHS, adult and children's social care, the council's benefits team, etc. The council currently records the numbers of referrals it makes to food banks,

however this is done by different teams and it is not collated and used to inform any decision making.

Sustainable Solutions

The task group, like many, wish that food banks did not exist; or at least there would be no need for them to exist. The main role for local and central government should be to address the underlying reasons that lead to people being forced to use food banks, by implementing recommendations set out in this report and reports which came before it like the Feeding Britain Inquiry conducted by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger, Chaired by the Rt Honourable Frank Fields MP.

In April 2014, the APPG commissioned an inquiry into the extent and causes of hunger in the United Kingdom. The Inquiry received four hundred submissions and took oral evidence from hundreds of food banks in Birkenhead, Cornwall, Salisbury and South Shields. Additional evidence was gathered through a series of hearings in the House of Commons. The Inquiry's report, Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, was published in December 2014 (Appendix 1).

The corrosion of the welfare state has meant that food banks have had no choice but to step up to fill in the gap. Food banks have had to evolve from simply supplying food packages to providing additional services and support, such as welfare and housing advice, food training, hot meals, washing facilities, often in very small cramped and unsuitable spaces. The Brent food bank is extremely small, with only space to hold five users/guests at once, however they still try to accommodate those who need it the most and a hold legal advice clinic in a very small staff office, there is no space for any privacy. Both Sufra and St Laurence's Larder are struggling for space with Sufra having to rent an additional space for their food supplies.

Food banks are on our highstreets and in our communities, they are helping our most vulnerable and the experience of users at food banks could be improved if there was more physical space on their premises. Public or private sector organisations could help with this, by making storage space available to food banks. In addition, food banks should plan to try to meet their needs for additional space.

Recommendations

25. The council should facilitate a comprehensive mapping of the borough to determine all the local sources of dry food and cooked food available to those in the greatest need, and access routes. This would include food banks, community kitchens, places of worship, the voluntary sector, schools, etc.
26. Local statutory service providers, Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Children's Trust should make efforts to be aware of the food aid services available and actively propose that more GP's and schools register as referral agencies. Brent CCG and the Children's Trust should report on progress with this recommendation within the next 12 months.
27. The council should profile the work of food aid providers through its communications such as the Brent Magazine or on social media to assist in reaching vulnerable residents unfamiliar with available services.
28. Food banks should follow the example of Sufra food bank in providing a simple guide to food bank users on the range of support available locally on areas such as housing, skills, legal support and employment including relevant contact details.
29. Food banks should work towards formalising case management systems that provide better data collection and enable the development of a tailored action plan for each food

bank user to help identify a pathway out of poverty. The council, CCG and local DWP should work with food banks to support the development of these action plans and case management systems.

8.4 Public Perception

Educating others on Food banks

The task group feel that food bank usage for many is a secret, and heard anecdotal accounts from users describing their first experiences with food banks. One user described physically trembling before entering, simply because she was scared of what the action signified for her. Others were extremely embarrassed at having found themselves in a situation where they had to accept this level of charity.

The task group found that unless directly impacted by food poverty or hunger, the average person has no idea how food banks operate, there is a lot of incorrect information being circulated and people are fearful. The task group were told stories of being treated in a way that made them feel ashamed by other frontline services with attitudes that made them feel embarrassed and just expected more from the food banks.

Stigma and Stereotyping

Although research has repeatedly emphasised the link between food bank use and welfare reform over the past five years, policy makers have disagreed nationally that there is connection between the two. Statements from central government dismiss food bank use as a lifestyle choice of those who are unable to budget properly. This has influenced incorrect beliefs about food bank users and has contributed to stigma, shame, and embarrassment for the people who needed to use them. As a result, people have postponed asking for food bank support until they were truly desperate.

Community Integration

Many of the food banks and community kitchens have worked hard to develop strong links in the community to raise food donations, provide volunteers and make referrals. It is the key to developing services that are truly needed and wanted by the community. This is especially helpful when dealing with the stigma and stereotyping of food bank users/guests, as these are now places of community activities and offer a variety of community services. Even more important is the trust food banks and community kitchens are able to build with the wider community, reaching many vulnerable groups that the council would have no obligation to support.

Supporting our Local Food Banks and Community Kitchens

Over 90% of the food distributed by food banks and community kitchens is donated by the public and is why food donations are absolutely vital to the ability to give everyone referred to a balanced and nutritious supply of food. Without goodwill, foodbanks and community kitchens would find it difficult to operate. Giving sustenance to those who are desperate is one of the most fundamental of kind acts, and helping each other is where local communities can come together to make a huge difference.

Volunteers are almost as crucial as food donations, without volunteers there would be no one to collect, organise and redistribute the food donations. Volunteers also need to be patient and non-judgemental and communities all over the country including Brent have responded to the call. According to the Trussell Trust, approximately over 40,000 people across the UK volunteered with a foodbank in 2015/16.

The task group feel that more can be done to encourage additional support from our communities not only for food donations, but also volunteering; especially relating to advice for complex benefit, housing and legal issues. Suitable premise and storage spaces as mentioned earlier in the report come at a premium and are stopping some food banks from evolving into spaces which can provide a holistic community services for those who need it.

Recommendations

30. Organisations operating food banks consider changing the name from food bank which (unfortunately) carries a stigma and is limiting, to another name that reflects the multiple services they provide. This may encourage those people who do not come to the food bank because of the stigma, but have an essential need, to take advantage of the multiple services that will benefit them and their families.
31. The council and its partners should consider how access to food banks and community kitchens are included in the development of the Brent Community Hub models.
32. The council should actively challenge the stigma associated with emergency food aid externally through positive media coverage and internally by assisting providers with training and support to offer a welcoming and compassionate service.
33. A joint education campaign should be developed and run by the Council and voluntary sector. This should include educating guests about the impending roll out of Universal Credit in Brent and should be included in the work of food banks, kitchens, etc.
34. The quality of food used by the food banks should be monitored by food bank staff to make sure it meets a legal standard. This will be both voluntarily donated and bought in by the providers.
35. The task group recommends a member development training session for councillors on dealing with residents in severe hardship and how to make food bank referrals.
36. Donations from individuals are also important, and the council should help publicise the types of donations that food banks need, such as the Trussell Trust and Sufra shopping lists.

9. CONCLUSION

Food banks and community kitchens offer a vital service to the most vulnerable people that is not available anywhere else. Whether we think they should be in operation or not, they are currently needed to feed people who have fallen through the gaps in our social services and we all have a responsibility to ensure people are not going hungry.

The next steps for food banks, local government and their stakeholders are in not only raising awareness to the hidden secret of food poverty in twenty firstcentury London, but also in convincing central government policy makers to take action to mitigate this unfolding crisis.

We need to provide robust evidence on: the key drivers of food bank use; and, crucially, what works to prevent people being persistently vulnerable to hunger and reliant on food banks.

The task group believes that this report provides a range of important recommendations which, when implemented, will lead to improved outcomes for the borough.

We look forward to seeing these changes in action.

10. PARTICIPANTS, REFERENCES AND APPENDICES

Participants

Food Banks and Community Kitchen's	Brent Food Bank – The Trussell Trust
	Granville Community Kitchen
	St Laurence Larder
	Sufra NW London
	Tavistock Hall Food Bank
London Borough of Brent:	Welfare and Benefits Team
	Housing Team
	Granville Children's Centre
	Public Health Brent
Members of Parliament (MP's)	Frank Fields, MP and co-chair of All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the UK
	Tulip Siddiq, MP for Hampstead and Kilburn
Non-Government Organisations	Independent Food Aid Network UK (IFAN)
	Sustain: The Alliance for Better Food and Farming
	The Prince's Trust
Brent Partners	Brent Job Centre Plus
	The Brent Schools Partnership
Business Groups	Marks and Spencer
Other Local Authorities	LB Bexley
	LB Croydon
	LB Ealing
	RB Kensington & Chelsea
	LB Lewisham
	LB Southwark
	LB Tower Hamlets
	LB Wandsworth

References:

The task group referred to a number of sources in the course of its work. These include:

1. Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom December 2014)
2. Food Standards Agency
3. The Food Foundation
4. Trust for London / New Policy Institute (2015) London's Poverty Profile 2015
5. Department of Health
6. E. Dowler (2012) The Future of UK Household Security, University of Warwick
7. Beyond the Food Banks, London Food Poverty Profile, Sustain, 2016
8. NOMIS May 2017
9. NOMIS 2015-16
10. Food Law Practice Guidance, 3.2.6.2, Registration of Food Establishments - Food Banks
11. Early Warnings: Universal Credit and Food banks
12. TUC ONS Annual survey of hours and earnings April 2016

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