



**Resources & Public Realm
Scrutiny Committee**
11th July 2017

**Report from the Chief Executive's
Department**

For Action

**Proposed Scope for Scrutiny Task Group on the use of Food
Banks in Brent**

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposed scope for the Scrutiny task group on the use of food banks in Brent. This task group has been requested by the Scrutiny members as there has been a noticeable increase in the usage of food banks, both in Brent and nationally.
- 1.2 The task group will look at Brent, London and the national picture, with a focus on understanding the issue and the current position of central government, local authorities and other public sector partners.
- 1.3 The purpose of the task group will be to analyse four key areas:

Understanding the drivers and scale of the problem

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

Policy and practice - Are food banks here to stay?

- Local, London and Nation Wide
- Local public sector partners – Job Centres, DWP, NHS, schools
- Private sector (food donators/suppliers)

The experience of the resident

- The food bank journey experience
- What support is provided
- Sustainable solutions

Public Perception

- Education
- Stigma and stereotyping
- Community integration
- Supporting your local food banks

- 1.4 The task group will review the local arrangements in Brent, national policy and guidelines and the views and opinions from local residents and businesses. The task group will also consult with experts in this field and other London boroughs which have been identified as leaders in this area.
- 1.5 The task group will review the four key areas; which it will seek to examine in the context of Brent, these are:
- 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 practise 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.
- 1.6 There is clear alignment with the priorities of the council as set out within the Borough Plan and the Brent 2020 Vision; with specific focus on:
- Supporting vulnerable people and families when they need it
 - Making sure that inequalities in the quality of life in different parts of the borough are tackled by a stronger focus on local needs
 - Building partnership – between local service providers and between local services and residents – to find new ways of providing services that are more finely tailored to individual, community and local needs

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members of the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee are asked to agree the scope, terms of reference and time scale for the task group on the Use of Food Banks in Brent, attached as Appendices A and B.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 With member consensus on gaining a better understanding, ensuring that the council has clear policy and is informed. Members of the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee requested a time-limited task group undertake a focused piece on the use of Food Banks in Brent. The proposed scope and terms of reference for this work are attached as Appendices A and B.

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Appendix A

The use of Food Banks in Brent Proposed scope for Scrutiny Task Group July 2017

Task Group Chair: Cllr Roxanne Mashari

Task Group Members: TBC

Time frame: Tuesday 7 November 2017

1. What are we looking at?

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. 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, churches, 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. But this perception masks high levels of deprivation and extremes of inequality. More than a quarter of Londoners live in poverty, 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 and educational attainment 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.

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

While there is no official measurement of food poverty or food insecurity, a range of 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.

2. Why are we looking at this area?

The task group is looking at this area because food banks use is increasing, largely due to benefit sanctions, delays and disputes with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The task group are also looking at this area because of the human impact food poverty is having on its communities. The task group would like to understand the scale and drivers of food poverty and food insecurity.

Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)

Brent members and officers are dealing with more and more cases of residents in financial crisis, largely in response to benefit sanctions, delays and disputes with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). When residents find themselves in these crisis situations their needs are assessed and referred to food banks. This is supported by the service user data provided by the food banks (Table 2.).

Direct impact on residents

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.

Understanding the increase in food bank use

The steady increase in use of food banks seems to directly correlate with the welfare reform changes. Such crises tended to be exacerbated by poverty and low pay, which are also direct causes for many to seek 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.

Local Context – Brent

There are three official food banks operating in Brent:

1. Brent Food Bank - The Trussell Trust Network, Neasden
2. Sufra NW London Food Bank (independent), Stonebridge

3. St Laurence Larder (independent – Church), Kilburn.

Individuals can only access the food banks via a referral. A referral can be made by a number of agreed local partners, which include a number of departments within the council. Individuals or families will need to contact 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.

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. The data below sets out the local context for Brent:

Out-of-work benefits claimants: There were a total of 5,260 residents in receipt of out-of-work benefits. This is 2.4% of the total resident population which is above the London and national average of 2.1%.⁶

Gross Weekly Pay: 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.⁷

The statistics below are provided by Sufra NW London, just one of the three official food banks in Brent. Many other organisations are providing food parcels in less formal arrangements.

Table 1.

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

Table 2.

Reasons for Food Bank Usage - Priority Group	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%

⁶ NOMIS May 2017

⁷ NOMIS 2016

Table 3.

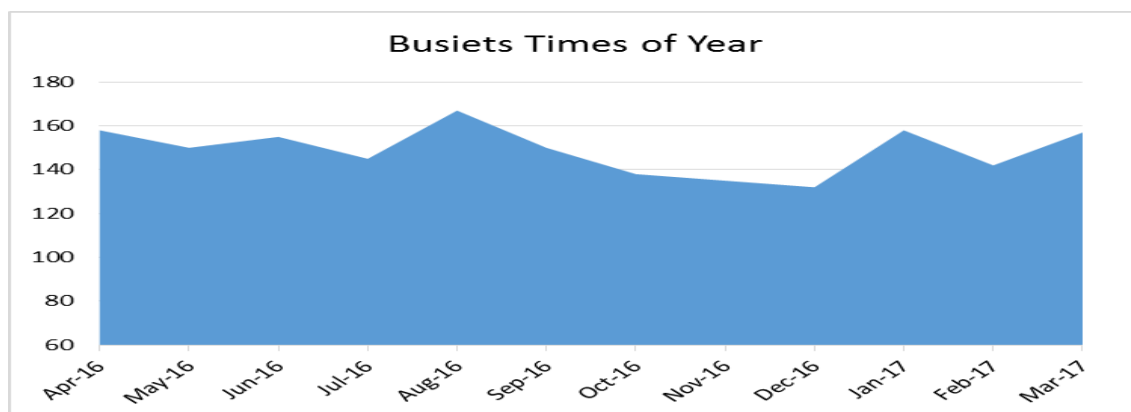
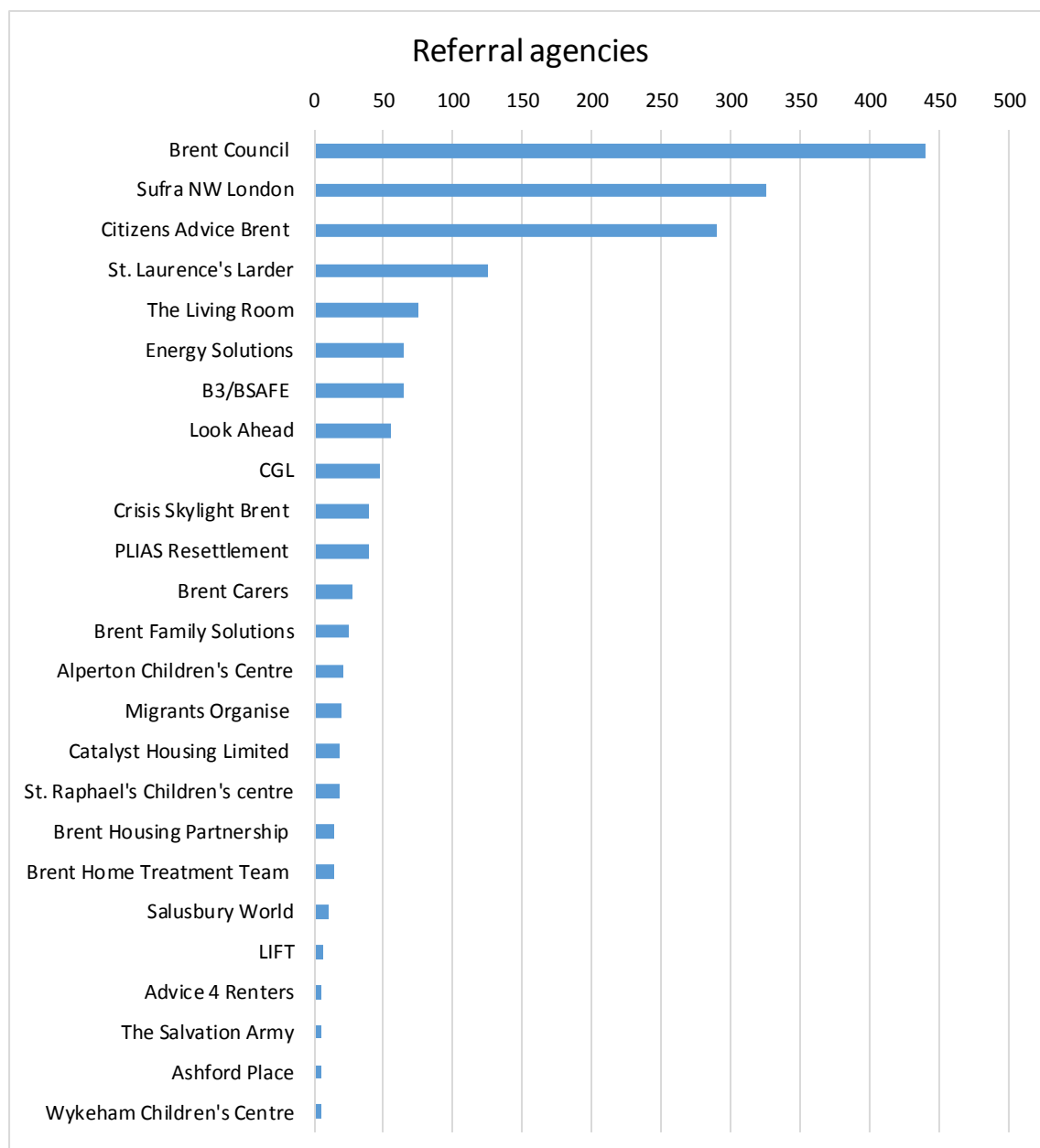


Table 4.



3. Legislation and Government Policy

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is the governing body that oversee food banks; there is only EU legislation that food banks need to adhere to. EU food hygiene law 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.

4. What are the main issues?

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.

However the following concerns relate to the main issue of food poverty and food bank usage:

Welfare sanctions, delays and disputes

It is felt that 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.

No clear 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.

Working across partners

Across the borough there are a number of organisations from across both the public and private sector 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.

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 scale of the problem or how to tackle this issue.

5. What should the review cover?

There are four key areas that the review will focus on:

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?

- Local, London and Nationwide
- Local public sector partners – Job Centres, DWP, NHS, schools
- Private sector (food donors/suppliers)

The experience of the resident

- The food bank journey experience
- What support is provided?
- Sustainable solutions

Public Perception

- Education
- Stigma and stereotyping
- Community integration
- Supporting your local food banks

6. How do we engage with the community and our internal and external partners?

As part of this review the task group will invite service users, relevant council teams and partners to get involved, through workshops, public group discussions and one-to-one interviews.

Service Users: Group 1

- A sample of service users:
 - From across all the Brent food banks
 - Who need to use food banks for different reason
 - Who represent some of our most vulnerable groups

Partners: Group 2

- Relevant Council Departments:
 - Welfare and Benefits
 - Brent Housing Partnership
 - Children Centre's
 - Children's Social Services
 - Adults Social Services
- Brent Food Banks:
 - Brent Food Banks - Trussell Trust network
 - Sufra NW London
 - St Laurence Larder
- Brent partners:
 - Citizens advice Brent
 - NHS/CCG

- Schools
- Job Centre Plus
- Private sector (Local)
 - West London Business,
 - Tesco
 - Asda
 - Park Royal Business
 - FSB Brent Business

Partners: Group 3

- The Trussell Trust
- Independent Food Aid Network
- Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming
- House of Commons (HoC)
- Mayor's Office - Food Poverty
- Local Government Association (LGA)
- Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
- Best Practice Local Authorities:
 - LB Lewisham
 - LB Lambeth
 - LB Greenwich
 - LB Islington

7. What could the review achieve?

The review will strive to:

- 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 practise 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.

Appendix B

THE USE OF FOOD BANKS IN BRENT MEMBERS TASK GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

A. CONTEXT

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. 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, churches, housing associations, hospitals and other groups.

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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.⁹ It is also important that people can access food in a way which is dignified and socially acceptable.¹⁰ When people struggle to feed themselves adequately and nutritiously, it undermines health and educational attainment 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 measurement of food poverty or food insecurity, a range of 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.

B. PURPOSE OF GROUP

A Council Members' task group chaired by an elected member and coordinated by a council Scrutiny officer was set up in July 2017. Sponsored by the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee, the aim of task group is to collate, review and evaluate evidence gathered from various sources.

This includes the Brent food banks, service users, Brent council's welfare and customer Services, Children's and Adult's social care teams. The review will also consult with Brent

⁸Trust for London / New Policy Institute (2015) London's Poverty Profile 2015

⁹ Department of Health

¹⁰ E. Dowler (2012) The Future of UK Household Security, University of Warwick

partners, both local and private sector, such as BHP, schools health, Asda, Tesco and Park Royal Business.

The task group will also engage with national charities and specialist non-government organisations (NGO). Local business groups and central government organisations which include visit to, Local London Assembly (Mayors office), London Councils, Local Government Association (LGA) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), will also be invited to participate.

It will be vital for the task group to consult with other local authorities, specifically the London boroughs of Lewisham, Lambeth, Greenwich and Islington, who have been singled out for their good work.

The objectives will be to:

1. Liaise with stakeholders to gather evidence.
2. Use reviewed evidence to inform findings and recommendations for reducing food bank usage and mitigate the impacts on Brent residents.

C. AIM & OBJECTIVES

Aim of the task group is gain a better understanding of the triggers and drivers for the use of food banks, in particularly the rise in usage rate. With this knowledge the task group can make recommendations to that will help in reducing rates and mitigate negative impacts on Brent residents.

AIMS

The aims of the task group form four main themes

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?

- Local, London and Nationwide
- Local public sector partners – Job Centres, DWP, NHS, schools
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The experience of the resident

- The food bank journey experience
- What support is provided?
- Sustainable solutions

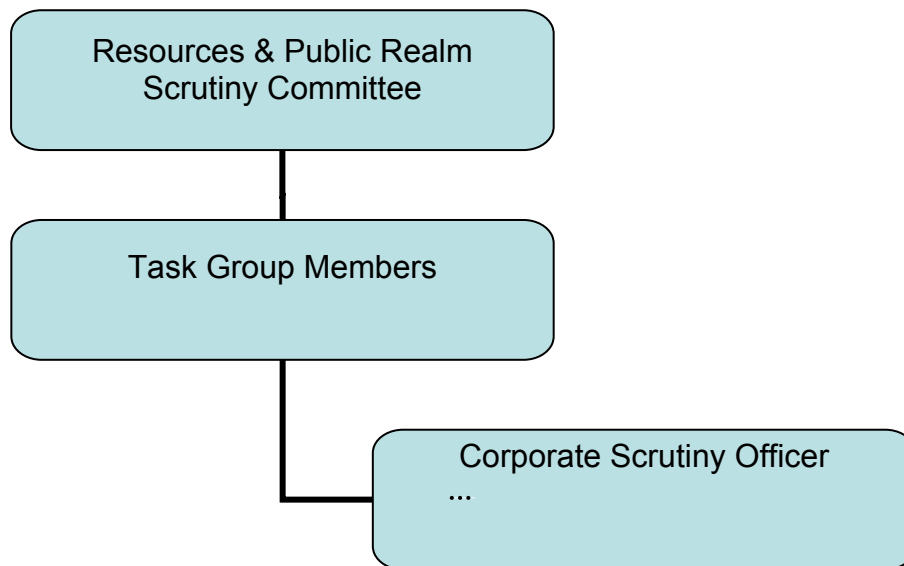
Public Perception

- Education
- Stigma and stereotyping
- Community integration
- Supporting your local food banks

OBJECTIVES

- 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.
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- 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 practise 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.

D. GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY



E. MEMBERSHIP

1. Cllr Roxanne Mashari (Chair)
2. TBC
3. TBC
4. TBC

Kisi Smith-Charlemagne – Scrutiny Officer

Other key stakeholders would be invited as appropriate.

F. QUORUM & FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

There should be at least 2 members present at each meeting. A minimum would be the Chair, and another member of the task group. The task group will meet twice per month or approximately every two weeks with sub meetings held between the chair and the Scrutiny Officer as required.

G. DATE OF REVIEW

Start: July 2017

End: Scheduled for presentation to the Scrutiny Committee on 7 November 2017.