



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: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	1
Background Papers:	N/A
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	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