



**Resources and Public Realm  
Scrutiny Committee**  
7<sup>th</sup> February 2019

**Report from the Director of  
Performance, Policy and  
Partnerships**

**Update Report ‘The Use of Food Banks in Brent’**

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| <b>Wards Affected:</b>            | All  |
| <b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>   | Non-key  |
| <b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> | Open   |
| <b>No. of Appendices:</b>         | None   |
| <b>Background Papers:</b>         | One  |
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**1.0 Purpose of the Report**

1.1. This report provides an update of progress against the recommendations made by the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee Task Group as set out in their report about ‘The Use of Food Banks in Brent’. In November 2017, the task group made 36 recommendations for the council and other organisations including the NHS, foodbanks, the West London Business Alliance and the Department for Work and Pensions and central government.

**2.0 Recommendation**

The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee to review the progress made against the recommendations.

**3.0 Summary**

3.1. Overall the council has made good progress on recommendations where they have oversight. Recommendations for other organisations have been forwarded to the relevant teams and recommendations for foodbanks will be reviewed through the foodbank network. It should be noted that some

recommendations are more complex and ongoing work and good partnership working is required in order to fully implement them.

- 3.2 The Council will continue to work closely with its partners to mitigate the impact that surrounds food insecurity and related issues. There are already great initiatives and partnership working underway including the partnership work between the council and local food aid providers. Council services make regular referrals to food banks and provide welfare advice and guidance via the Employment and Skills Advisors at Sufra. Moreover, Sufra have placed food donation boxes on the ground floor of the Civic Centre, enabling regular donations from staff and visitors to the council.
- 3.3 The Health and Wellbeing Board, the Adult Safeguarding Board and Child Safeguarding Partnership will explore the issues in the context of neglect and maintaining good health.
- 3.4 The Policy and Scrutiny Team have a number of activities planned ahead which will require co-ordination amongst several services throughout the council and with partner organisations including food banks. The Policy and Scrutiny Team supported the facilitation of the creation of the network of food banks and its first meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019. The Policy and Scrutiny Team will provide further support by arranging training by the council's Regulatory Services on food safety. A mapping exercise is also underway to determine food aid providers in Brent which will help identify organisations for the food bank network.
- 3.4 The Food Bank Network is a key step that will enable the sharing of best practice and greater collaborative working between food aid providers and their partners. This includes the development of an offer for local food businesses to facilitate donations or in-kind assistance which the council can then promote via its communication channels and to the Park Royal Business Group.
- 3.5 The progress against all the recommendations are set out in the table below.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the outcome of this report.

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has a statutory right to make recommendations to Council, Cabinet and certain partner authorities e.g. Health bodies or crime and disorder bodies to which the recipient must have regard. The committee can make recommendations to other organisations if it chooses but in such a case the recipient organisation is not be under any obligation to take account of the recommendation.

## **6.0 Equality Implications**

- 6.1 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, s149 Equality Act 2010. The update report on 'The Use of Food Banks in Brent' demonstrates a commitment to that duty as it highlights the progress the council is making in order to have due regard to that duty.
- 6.2 The s149, Public Sector Equality Duty (outlined above) covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

### ***REPORT SIGN-OFF***

**Peter Gadson**

Director Performance, Policy and Partnerships

#### 4. Update on progress to date

4.1. There were 36 recommendations made to the council and a number of other organisations. The progress from the recommendations are below. Other recommendations have been forwarded to the relevant partners where appropriate.

| No. | Recommendation  | Progress Update  |
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| 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. | The view of officers is that evidence gathered by the task group and its communications with the DWP over the course of its work was a powerful rebuttal of the DWP's position. There has not been the resource available since the task group reported to undertake a dedicated piece of additional work on this, though Customer Services has committed to collate relevant data to make this case to DWP.   |
| 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.  | <p>Referrals to foodbanks are made through the customer services team and Adult Social Care. Customer Services has historically made referrals to foodbanks and has recently begun to do the same with the Trussell Trust (Brent Food Bank). Customer Services records the name of the applicant and the number of clients per referral.</p> <p>Adult Social Care have a good partnership with foodbanks and referrals are usually made through the Learning Disabilities Team, Rehab and Reablement Team and Mental Health Service. The Rehab and Reablement Team are also a part of the NHS Food Aid scheme and hold a small stock of food parcels in the office to provide emergency assistance for residents.</p> <p>The Children's and Young Peoples Services (CYP) have not identified any referrals to foodbanks over September and October. CYP also anticipate that no referrals are coming from foodbanks and it is likely that statutory organisations are making them. The CYP Service will raise awareness of referring families to foodbanks with other organisations.</p> |
| 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   | Brent Council is a London Living Wage employer via the Living Wage Foundation. Council staff are paid the Living Wage or above with the exception of Level 2 Apprentices who start on the National Living Wage. The London Living Wage accreditation is being promoted to employers of the borough through the business rates bill letter and annual events in Living Wage Week. There are also communications to celebrate when accreditation is reached. However, uptake on the accreditation is limited across London including Brent despite the Business Rates Discount   |

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|     | willing to work to improve their family income but often have additional and complex needs.   | Scheme. This may be due to the nature of the Brent labour market, which consists of large health and social care, retail, hospitality and warehousing and logistics sectors. Employment and skills advisors also spend time in Sufra to offer support around employment and training to residents of Brent.  |
| 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   | No response received from the Department of Work and Pensions.   |
| 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 | The contract with Volunteer Brent ends on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2019 and there are currently no plans in place to provide an alternative service. However, Brent Council has a contract with Citizens Advice Brent to provide information and advice services to residents this includes casework. The provision of advice and support with court or appeal or tribunal cases. A number of other advice organisations are either sub-contracted or grant funded to provide advice and support to Brent residents across a number of areas including; welfare, benefits, housing immigration and employment. All the advice giving organisations have a pool of trained, knowledgeable and skilled volunteers working with services users. Sufra received funding in 2018 for AQS accreditation to provide information and guidance to services users. |
| 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                                 | No response requested from the Government.   |
| 7   | Given the scale of this problem and likelihood that need will increase, all local public sector organisations should develop an official  | The Customer Services Team has undertaken communication and actions to prepare residents and stakeholders for the impacts of the rollout of universal credit and to ensure a smooth handover. Crisis payments and discretionary housing payments will continue, along with   |

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|     | <p>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</p> | <p>referrals to foodbanks.<br/>The council and its partners will explore different ways to support the issues that surround food poverty. The Health and Wellbeing Board will explore issues in the context of maintaining good health. Furthermore, the Adult Safeguarding Board and Brent Child Safeguarding Partnership will also be exploring this in the context of neglect.</p> <p>There are a number of activities planned ahead that will require coordination amongst services including foodbanks. The Policy and Scrutiny team will play an active role in supporting some of these activities, which will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitating the creation of the foodbank network meeting</li> <li>- Arranging training by the council's regulatory services on food safety and exploring the feasibility of training around customer care</li> <li>- Promoting the use of foodbanks and their services to service users</li> <li>- Arranging visits to food banks by relevant council services</li> <li>- Agreeing an offer from foodbanks to businesses to facilitate donations and in-kind assistance</li> <li>- Arranging training by Housing Needs staff for food banks</li> <li>- Mapping food aid providers in Brent and encouraging them to join the network</li> <li>- Exploring the development of case management systems and approaches by food banks</li> </ul> |
| 8   | <p>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</p>                                    | <p>The council's regulatory services is able to provide training for food banks on food safety. Through the foodbank network, the Policy and Scrutiny team can explore the training that would be appropriate and feasible in terms of customer care. The Employment, Skills and Enterprise Team may be able to develop a bespoke training course on a relevant area of development. Organisations can also apply via the Brent Advice Fund for a capacity building grant to ensure organisations have the appropriate accreditation. CVS Brent also provides training on infrastructure needs i.e. fund-raising, governance, health and safety and GDPR amongst others.</p>   |
| 9   | <p>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</p>   | <p>Communicating the impact of universal credit has been a major focus for customer's services for a number of years. Customer Services are prepared to provide the Lead Member with relevant information should they wish to write to the Work and Pensions Secretary to outline the problems caused by universal credit and other welfare reform and request central government to formally track and monitor food bank usage.</p>   |

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|     | 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 and West London Alliance and London Councils and report back in writing to the Scrutiny Committee on progress within six months.  | Customer Services are prepared to provide the Leader with any information should they wish to advocate in this way.  |
| 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   | Environmental Services is unable to resource the implementation of this recommendation to cover the cost of waste and recycling removal. Officers also express the concern that such a concession is not proportionate to the need of food banks and not doing so for other voluntary organisations would be unfair and potentially open to challenge.   |
| 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 | <p>The Policy and Scrutiny Team have undertaken the facilitation of the initial Food Bank Network on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019 chaired by the Food Bank Champion Cllr Roxanne Mashari and attended by Cllr Eleanor Southwood and four other emergency food aid providers in the borough.</p> <p>This Network enables the exploration and implementation of several other recommendations including training for volunteers and better partnership working with local businesses to facilitate donations and in-kind assistance.</p> |
| 13  | Ensuring relevant council departments share data and opportunities for collaborative working and referrals (for example, when   | Food bank referrals are part of the general response to mitigating welfare reform. There is considerable collaboration between council departments particularly Customer Services, Housing, Employment and Skills, Adult Social Care and Troubled Families.  |

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|     | 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)   | Housing needs have also indicated their intention to provide information in relation to the food banks to homeless households who are on low incomes or development on benefits as part of their initial assessments. Customer Services are open to incorporating specific advice and materials provided by the food banks and community kitchens, and this can be facilitated through the food bank network once developed. The food bank network can also support in collating and providing advice and materials for clients. |
| 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.  | A number of staff including those from Customer Services have visited food banks in order to better understand the scale and severity of need. The Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships has volunteered multiple times at Sufra and staff from Housing Support and Enforcement also volunteered at Sufra over the Christmas period. Additional visits can be co-ordinated through the Food Bank Network once established.  |
| 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 | The food bank network will allow for better partnership working, both with food aid providers and other organisations. Through the food bank network, food banks can be asked to work with local businesses to facilitate donations or in-kind assistance. The council can then promote this through its communication channels and to the Park Royal Business Group where many food business are based.   |
| 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   | Customer Services regularly provide training and briefings on benefits matters to partner organisations, including food banks. Training events on the Homeless Reductions Act and other housing related issues can be provided by the Housing Needs Service for staff and volunteers of food aid providers. This can be facilitated by the Food Bank Network.  |

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|     | 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 | <p>This proposal will be discussed with West London Business and other business membership groups to test employers' interest. It would likely require development and resource to conduct the creation, marketing and management of the scheme, which would need to be delivered by a business membership group in order to be owned and bought into by the business community.</p> <p>The CEO of West London Business suggests that a short advice note could also be added to the Brent for Business website and it could be raised as an item at the Brent Business Board for discussion.</p>                       |
| 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 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   | Council officers will make the suggestion to the Park Royal Business Group (PRBG). For this to progress, PRBG would need to agree to this being part of their annual event plan.  |
| 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   | No plans are currently in place to create a platform for Corporate Social Responsibility activity in partnership with West London Business and CVS. This would also have to be built into a future agreement with organisations providing support and assistance to the voluntary and community sector. An assessment to the cost and time required would need to be conducted and funding identified for delivery of the service/platform. The grant to the current provider ends 31 March 2019 and it is most likely dependent upon Cabinet approval that the Council will be retendering the grant for this service. |
| 20  | Brent and its partners should do all they can  | If there is clear demand for additional food bank capacity in Brent, an ask can be made to  |

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|     | 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               | developers locally in case they are able to provide any in-kind or low cost space as part of their social value offer. The council could assess whether it has any available properties within its ownership, and consider this case in relation to other plans or demands for the buildings.   |
| 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                          | Regular information about foodbanks and other relevant support will be sent out to head teachers and governors through their respective bulletins over December and January. The Children's and Young Peoples Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnership and Strategy will act as a main contact for schools.  |
| 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 | <p>The CYP Operational Director will be available to attend co-ordinated visits where appropriate. In addition, CYP Brent Family Front Door staff and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will be writing to local foodbanks offering awareness raising sessions in the new year.</p> <p>The foodbank network will also allow for better co-ordination and awareness raising of foodbanks and council services. Through the network discussions could take place about how partners could work together to breakdown the stigma and increase understanding of the services that foodbanks provide and how they operate.</p> |
| 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   | <p>The Mental Health Service has good partnership with local foodbanks. There is a named officer responsible for coordinating referrals, who has developed good working relationships with local foodbanks, making referrals for the past 12 months.</p> <p>The Brent Talking Therapy Steering Group will provide contact details of relevant organisations to food bank managers so that patients can self-refer for mental health support. These details will be shared via the Task Group's distribution list to food bank managers. Further support information can also be shared via the network.</p>                       |

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| 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        | A Food Champion has now been nominated. Cllr Roxanne Mashari will chair the foodbank network and oversee the implementation of the recommendations through the Network.   |
| 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  | This is currently being undertaken by the Policy and Scrutiny Team. Relevant organisations identified through the mapping exercise could also be invited to join the network.   |
| 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 | Information about foodbanks and accessing support will be sent out to head teachers and governors through their respective bulletins over December and January. The Head Teachers Bulletin will also highlight how schools can register as a referral agency. The Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships & Strategy, Children and Young People Service, will be a main contact for queries from schools. The Health and Wellbeing Board will explore the issues surrounding food banks in the context of maintaining good health. Brent Children's Trust and NHS Brent CCG also report to the Health & Wellbeing Board when working with Public Health on health promotion/ illness prevention. |
| 27  | The council should profile the work of food aid providers through its communications  | The council's communications team has issued tweets on social media and ran a prominent 'Food for thought' feature on food banks in the December edition of The Brent Magazine which  |

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|     | such as the Brent Magazine or on social media to assist in reaching vulnerable residents unfamiliar with available services   | coincided with the roll-out of Universal Credit in Brent. This feature was also promoted on social media and in other channels such as the council website and 'YourBrent' e-newsletter. |
| 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  | This recommendation can be discussed at the Food Bank Network once established and progressed where appropriate.   |
| 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  | Once established, the Food Bank Network will allow its partner agencies to discuss case management systems in more detail. This will also align with the Financial Inclusion Strategy.   |
| 30  | Organisations operating food banks should 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. | This recommendation can be discussed at the Food Bank Network once established and progressed where appropriate.   |

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| 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.  | <p>The core Harlesden Hub team have been set up to make client referrals to Sufra. Harlesden Hub has established close links and client referral pathways with the Harlesden Weekly Fresh Foodbank, run from Tavistock Hall.</p> <p>Sufra was a key partner in the prototyping of the Hub model in Central Middlesex Hospital in early 2018. Local partners, including foodbanks, will continue to be engaged as the hub model is expanded to new locations, ensuring the hub offer is tailored to local needs.</p> |
| 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                  | <p>The communications the council has issued on food banks has actively challenged the stigma associated with emergency food aid and encouraged people to seek help from a number of registered foodbanks including Sufra NW London, Brent Foodbank, St Laurence's Larder, Open Kitchen and the Granville Community Kitchen.</p> <p>The Policy &amp; Scrutiny team will also be exploring the feasibility of commissioning customer care training for food banks.</p>   |
| 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 | The council's preparations for the introduction of Universal Credit have involved trainings and briefings for all relevant partner organisations including food banks. Due to resource limitations, this work has mainly provided partners with all the information and support they require to support and educate their clients.  |
| 34  | The quality of food used by 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 providers.  | Good practice measures can be shared and discussed through the Food Bank Network once established.  |
| 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   | This session was held on 17th April 2018, with participation by Cllr Roxanne Mashari (the chair of the task group), the council's Director of Performance, Policy & Partnerships, Brent Foodbank, Sufra NW London, St Laurence's Larder, Granville Community Kitchen, and the council's Head of Customer Services. Materials from the session were distributed to members afterwards.   |
| 36  | Donations from individuals are also  | As mentioned above under recommendation 27, the council's Communications team helps to  |

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|     | important, and the council should help publicise the types of donations that food banks need, such as the Trussell Trust and Sufra shopping lists | promote local food banks, and encourages those who are able to make food donations. Donation boxes from Sufra are also placed on the ground floor of the Civic Centre, enabling regular donations from staff and visitors to the council. |