



Brent

Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

The Use of Food Banks in Brent

Task Group Report November 2017

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. THE CHAIR'S FOREWORD | 1 |
| 2. TASK GROUP MEMBERSHIP | 3 |
| 3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 4 |
| 4. RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 6 |
| 5. INTRODUCTION – SCOPE OF THE TASK GROUP | 11 |
| 6. METHODOLOGY | 13 |
| 7. POLICY CONTEXT | 15 |
| 7.1. Brent | 15 |
| 7.2. National..... | 18 |
| 8. KEY FINDINGS | 19 |
| 8.1 Understanding the drivers and scale of the problem | 19 |
| 8.2 Policy and practice - are food banks here to stay?..... | 21 |
| 8.3 The experience of the resident | 26 |
| 8.4 Public Perception..... | 29 |
| 9. CONCLUSION..... | 31 |
| 10. PARTICIPANTS, REFERENCES AND APPENDICES | 32 |

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.

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 limited 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 |
|-----------------|-----|-----|

- 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

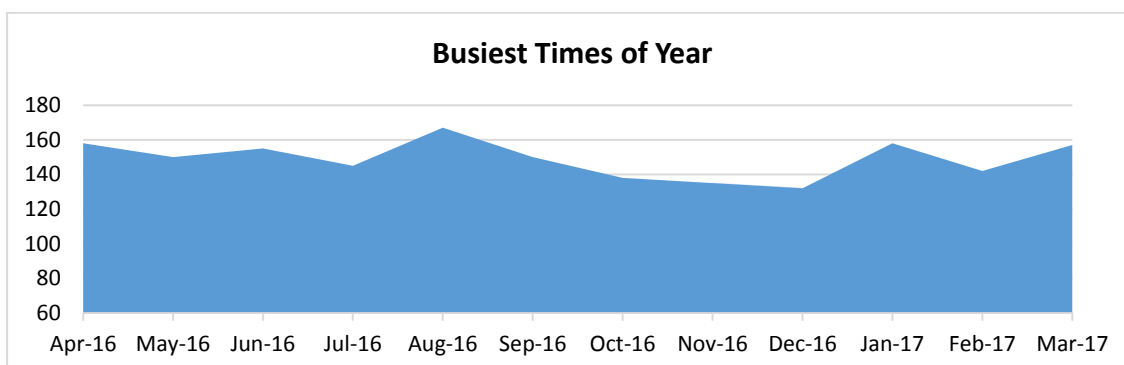
| | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Total Number of Food Parcels | 1,760 | 1,764 |
| Total Number of Recipients | 3,716 | 3,779 |

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.

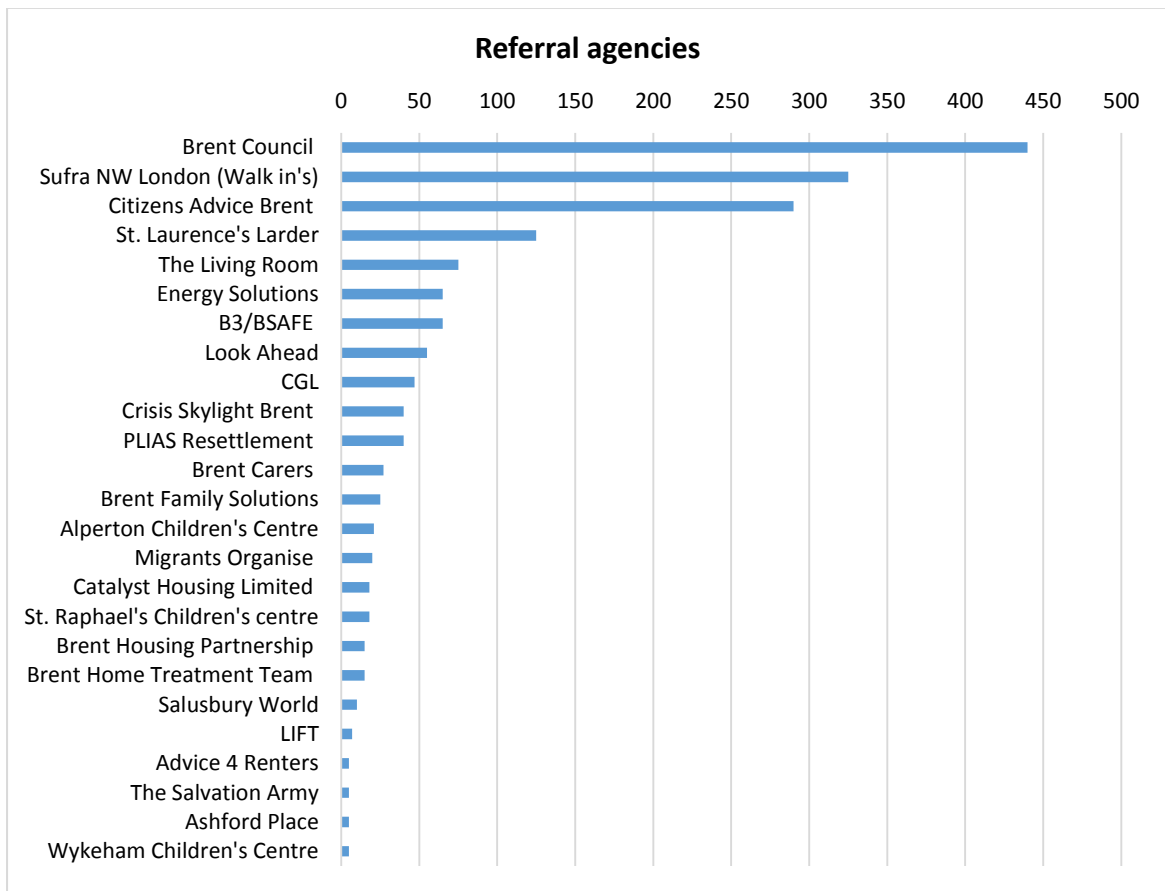
Figure 5. Sufra NW London



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 polices 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 utmost 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:

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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