

Full Council – 22 January 2018

Motion for Non Cabinet Member debate

This Council welcomes the findings and recommendations of the recent Resource and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee task group report into the use of food banks in Brent.

Given the scale of the problem of destitution and food poverty and likelihood that need will increase with the further roll out of Universal Credit this year, this Council recognises the need for local public, voluntary and private organisations to collaborate on the production of a proactive strategy to bring forward targeted interventions to prevent and address hunger and chronic poverty in the borough.

This Council notes the following findings of the task group:

- Food banks are playing, and will continue to play, an increasingly significant role in society. The corrosion of the welfare state has meant that food banks have had no choice but to step up to fill in the gap.
- 1.2 million food aid packages were given out by Trussell Trust food banks during the last financial year and this was the ninth consecutive year in which demand has risen.
- In Brent alone last year an estimated 5,636 people accessed food banks
- Major drivers behind food bank usage locally are benefit delays and sanctions, the current waiting period before benefits are paid, inaccessibility of services and low wages.
- Official figures do not capture the true extent of the problem across the borough; with many residents seeking assistance from religious organisations providing informal meals and food assistance.
- Locally, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) moved new single claimants over to Universal Credit (UC) in 2015 and have now advised full roll out of UC across Brent will happen in late 2018. It is likely that implementation of full UC will place further demands on local food banks and information / advice services.
- The use of food banks includes both people in and out of work.
- Statements from government ministers dismissing food bank use as a lifestyle choice of those who are unable to budget properly has influenced incorrect beliefs about food bank users. This has contributed to stigma, shame, and embarrassment for the people who need to use them.

Brent Council recognises the invaluable work undertaken by food bank staff, volunteers and donors. This Council formally extends its gratitude to all involved.

Councillor Roaxne Mashari
Welsh Harp Ward