

Report to Scrutiny Commission

Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission

Date of Commission meeting: 14 January 2016

Food Bank Provision in the City



Introduction and Overview

As part of The Leicester Food Plan Food Poverty is a main priority. The plan has a number of ambitions and commitments that relate to addressing food poverty.

LCC Revenues and Benefits (R&B) have led on the implementation of the food bank strategy which has been to improve co-ordination and development of the food bank system in Leicester City. R&B have commissioned a provider to develop food banks provision and support consistency across the network in the city. This has included updated research during 2015 to understand the nature of the food banks provision.

A thematic task group has been set up with Revenues and Benefits, Food Plan Project Manager and the Anti-poverty project manager to focus on meeting to commitments of the food plan as well as supporting provision to meet need.

Details of the current provision of food banks and the work taken to engage with the organisations delivering them have been outlined in a report produced by R&B and attached as **appendix 1**.

Current Activity and Priorities

An emergency food action plan has been prepared by Revenues and Benefits and this plan will focus on the following areas:

- To develop and implement an emergency Food Strategy
- To improved understanding of the demand / supply of emergency food
- To develop and support the Food Bank Network Group
- To improve understanding of additional services linked to emergency food providers
- To co-ordinate and expanding provision to respond to need.

There is recognition that the current increase in the food bank system is a response to a perceived need and how this is sustained will need to be considered.

Food Poverty Thematic Group

The aim of this group is to consider a strategic approach to inform and develop appropriate response to food poverty. It will meet to agree priorities for 2016 and consider how to support partners to develop and implement a strategic approach to address food insecurity. It will also oversee the emergency food action plan.

Focus will include considering sustainability of current provision; understanding need in order that response can be supported effectively so that it can meet the needs for emergency food and food insecurity.

Food poverty inextricably links into wider poverty issues so this work will need to form part of a collaborative approach alongside the anti-poverty strategic approach being developed by Leicester City Council.

The food Poverty Thematic group will report to the Public Health Lead Member by the beginning of February.

A report of the Food Plan is due to go to the Executive in Mid-February.

Leicester's Food Plan Overview and Connection with Food Poverty

Leicester's Food Plan has an ambition that is to work towards the eradication of food poverty – improving access to affordable, healthy food for all, whilst seeking to influence the underlying causes.

Other ambitions that relate to the food poverty or food insecurity issue within the plan are:

- To reduce food waste in businesses and households and encourage more redistribution of food, composting and recycling of packaging.
- To reduce obesity and diet-related ill health by supporting people to make healthier choices across all stages of life – raising awareness about healthy eating, encouraging breastfeeding, developing growing and cooking skills and improving access to fresh, healthy food.
- To bring people together through food projects - developing inclusive, resilient communities
- Sharing knowledge, experience and skills in growing and cooking and creating links with farms.

Current work relating to Food Poverty led by Revenues and Benefits Department and context to need

LCC Revenues and Benefits (R&B), LCC, have led on the work to respond to Leicester's' population currently needing access to emergency food.

Research carried out in 2015 by LCC Revenues and Benefit noted that:

- The number of food banks set up in Leicester over the past two years has doubled in correlation with the tightening of welfare reform benefit restrictions applied since 2013.
- Food bank provision has remained consistent with approximately 869 food parcels being distributed per week and half of those surveyed were struggling to cope with demand.
- 80% of food bank provision has food provided through FareShare

The research notes that Leicester is particularly vulnerable due to multiple indicators including:

- 44% of under 30s living on less than minimum wage,
- At least one third of children growing up in poverty
- 16.8% of adult population is long term unemployed, close to double the national average of 9.9%
- Residents in work earn an average of £399.10 per – far less than the £510 national average

These issues are recognised as key challenges for people to be able 'to acquire sufficient quantities and qualities of food' (1)

FOOD PLAN COMMITMENTS up until 2017

- 1 A bigger network of community food and horticulture projects, with at least 9 more projects supported; and more land under food production, with at least 3900m² of new allotment space provided.
- 2 A support programme available to schools – to help them achieve a whole school approach to healthy, sustainable food through their teaching, the running of the school and its community links.
- 3 More children choosing school meals, with at least 10% higher take-up of free school meals from key stage 2, in schools taking part in the support programme.
- 4 Increased support for women and their families to encourage an improvement in rates of breastfeeding and good infant nutrition.

Action Plan:

Implementation of the Food Bank Strategy

Appendix 1

Useful Information:

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: James Rattenberry, SDIO
- Author contact details: 0116 454 1616 James.rattenberry@leicester.gov.uk
- Date of Exec meeting: October 2015

1. Summary

1.1 The NCSIC requested and were provided in April 2014 with a report detailing the provision of food banks within the city and the work undertaken to identify and engage with the organisations. An update of this exercise has now been completed and recommendations put forward a Food Bank Strategy arising from the research findings as required by point 32 of the Food Plan (see appendix E).

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny

2.1 To note the impacts and trends highlighted in the report and comment on initial findings if appropriate;

2.2 To consider the recommendations arising from the report as the basis of the Council's Food Bank Strategy as required under the citywide Leicester Food Plan.

3. Supporting Information

Background

3.1 The number of food banks set up in Leicester over the past two years has doubled in correlation with the tightening of welfare reform benefit restrictions applied since 2013. In 2014/15, 2,525 households were affected by under-occupancy (the 'bedroom tax') and 296 were made subject to the Benefit Income Cap. In 2013/14, the last full year for which statistics are available, 16,545 sanction decisions were made against JSA and ESA claimants in the city – over 300 per week - removing benefit entitlement those affected for between four weeks and three years.

3.2 Further demand is anticipated in the medium term – the government are committed to welfare cuts of £12bn per year by 2020, some 28% of the working age welfare bill. Manifesto commitments include further reducing the Benefit Cap to £23,000 per year, removal of Housing Benefit entitlement for those under 21 and additional restrictions on EEA national claimants.

3.2 Leicester is particularly vulnerable due to multiple indicators of deprivation, including:

- 44% of under-30s in Leicester are living on less than the living wage, and one third of children are growing up in poverty, amongst the highest level in the country with the national average being 27%;
- Residents have a life expectancy of 79.4, as opposed to the national average of 81.1;

- 16.8% of the adult population is long-term unemployed, close to double the national average of 9.9%;
- Residents in work earn an average of £399.10 per week, far less than the £510 per week national average – according to the Office for National Statistics, residents also have the lowest rates of disposable income in the UK.

Summary of provision

3.3 The research exercise consisted of semi-structured interviews with staff at all operational food banks, followed by a questionnaire survey completed by 102 food bank users sampled on the basis of each site's average weekly distribution. Research was focussed around providers of emergency and surplus food distribution. A separate project into hot food provision is also being undertaken in partnership with Neighbourhood Services and the Food Plan Coordinator.

3.4 25 food banks were identified as operational at the time of the research, with a further 2 having opened subsequently. Whilst the number of food banks had reduced from 32 in early 2014, level of provision had remained consistent with approximately 869 food parcels being distributed weekly and half those surveyed were struggling to cope with demand. Comparable studies in other major cities identified 20 food banks in Nottingham and Coventry, and 7 in Derby.

3.5 Food bank clients are generally not travelling far to access emergency food. Half of those not using their closest food bank are accessing city centre sites, some of which offer more specialist help, working with groups such as new immigrants, people affected by HIV and women involved in prostitution.

3.6 As in the previous survey, some 80% of respondent organisations were wholly or predominantly reliant on Fareshare deliveries, although many were not entirely satisfied with the service and were seeking viable alternatives such as independent food drives or other organisations offering similar services. Faith groups are a significant contributor with regard to food, facilities and other support.

3.7 Most food banks provided some form of additional support, which was often vital to clients. Benefits advice and form-filling were the most in-demand forms of support, due to the complexities of the benefit system and difficulty understanding official letters. These services vary in terms of professionalism, with some offered by experts and others more informal. Some food bank staff members attempt to help clients in any way possible, regardless of their knowledge.

3.8 Other support services accessed by food bank users predominantly involved housing and benefit services, although a third of those did not consider them to be constructive. 18% had accessed money management services, although over half did not find them useful. IT support and language skills were the least accessed services with only 4%, although these are felt to be particularly beneficial to the sample with regard to employability. Of the small number who did access these services, none found them useful. A third of those surveyed had not accessed any support services.

3.9 No uniform demographic was established in the survey – respondents were from a wide array of backgrounds and with a diverse range of reasons for access, presenting difficulties with formulating policy and anticipating changes. However, the most common form of income was Jobseekers Allowance (33%) and the majority were either single or members of small households. Whilst some 72% of respondents were white, asylum

seekers and refugees were over-represented (15%).

3.10 The information provided a clear picture of the uneven distribution of the food bank provision in the city, particularly in relation to ward boundaries and areas of deprivation. A full list of food banks and lunch clubs in the city (not for wider distribution) is included in Appendix B.

Issues & Risks Identified

3.11 Most food bank staff had little knowledge of surrounding food banks, and further signposting and mutual support was sparse. Likewise, food bank clients were often unaware of what else was available in their area. However, the development of a Food Bank Network Group chaired by Leicester CharityLink (LCL) and funded by Leicester City Council has proved highly productive with regard to information sharing, and developing relationships around food, services, resources and equipment.

3.12 Some deprived areas of Leicester have no emergency food provision in their area. Detailed scoping has been carried out in association with our Local Welfare Provision partners Leicester CharityLink (LCL) provided in Appendix C – using these findings, LCL intend to set up two new food bank locations close to Saffron and Beaumont Leys wards.

3.13 At present there is very little provision at weekends, with only two food banks providing this service – however this is subject to change as two new planned sites intend to offer weekend support.

3.14 Staff members reported that some food bank users are unable to cook with basic ingredients because they lack the knowledge required. This limits the foods that food banks are able to supply to these clients, and sometimes means they are not supplied with sufficient amounts of food.

3.15 Food bank staff generally had very little knowledge of Universal Credit, and following discussion were concerned about its effect on the service and their ability to cope.

Recommendations

3.16 On the basis of the research and survey summarised above, the following recommendations are made in respect of the Council's Food Bank Strategy:

- To continue to survey and monitor the emergency food demand and provision in the city;
- To continue to monitor the emergency food demand and provision in the city for the weekend/bank holiday periods. Where there is fluctuation consider what action may be necessary;
- To continue to offer support and facilitate the network achieve collaboration and partnership working across the provision;
- To develop effective solutions to support this group with their emergency food needs and support inter scheme sharing and re-distribution of surplus food through the Food Network Support Group (FNSG);
- The Food Network Support Group (FNSG) to plan, develop, implement and

monitor a robust referral scheme between providers and referral agencies;

- To survey and review user cooking skills, cooking facilities and affordable fuel to inform FNSG to plan, develop, implement and monitor a training and support package to assist and enable this client group to understand western food, develop their cooking skills, provide recipes to cook the food they receive thus reducing food waste and developing the household skills making the food provided sustainable;
- To facilitate the FNSG understand the client group and their specific needs through awareness training;
- To develop effective solutions to support this group with their emergency food needs;
- To explore and develop the opportunity for food providers to formally refer clients on to support groups where applicable;
- To develop and deliver an effective awareness and communication programme for claiming and understanding Universal Credit with particular focus in the sector around advice and support available in the city;
- To develop and deliver an effective awareness and communication programme advice and support available in the city;
- To raise awareness of emergency food support in the city for the public whilst providing reassurance to the sector around demand.

4. Financial, legal and other implications

4.1 Financial implications

No new resource implications are raised. Issues around monitoring are already covered via arrangements with SWAP, Leicester Charitylink and our participation with the Food Network Support Group, which is a voluntary body made up of food bank volunteers.

Training and support needs are covered through a pre-existing agreement with Public Health. Universal Credit and welfare reform training are provided to food banks as part of wider stakeholder awareness scheduled. Possible pilot around cooking skills is covered through Local Welfare Provision and is part of the ongoing procurement process.

Colin Sharpe, Head Finance (Skills & Enterprise)
City Development & Neighbourhoods
4081

4.2 Legal implications

There are no apparent legal implications arising from this report. I understand that most of the recommendations save for the Pilot Cooking Skills Training, will be delivered internally by the Council.

The Pilot Cooking Skills Training forms part of an ongoing procurement, as such this

particular aspect of the project will be subject to the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (“Regulations”) and the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules. The client department must work directly with the Council’s Corporate Procurement Team (“CPT”) to drive the procurement process in compliance with the Regulations.

Any collaborative working may need to be formalised through a Partnership Agreement. Further legal advice should be sought.

Mannah Begum, Solicitor (Commercial, Contracts & Capital)
Legal Services
Ext 1423

4.3. Climate Change implications

No - the most significant climate change implication from this report is around the prevention of food waste going to landfill. Where food is landfilled, the decomposition process leads to methane being generated – which is a powerful ‘greenhouse gas’. So wherever the goal of alleviating food poverty can successfully be combined with reducing food waste, there could be positive implications for preventing climate change. FareShare provides a good example of this in action, whereby the food supplied by the organisation to food banks is surplus food from supermarkets and food companies that would otherwise have been sent to landfill.

Cooking skills courses can also fall within this category by helping families to reduce food wastage at home (although it should be noted that the vast majority of Leicester’s household food waste is separated at the ‘Ball Mill’ and doesn’t go to landfill).

Louise Buckley, Senior Environmental Consultant,
Environment Team
Ext 2293

4.4 Equality Impact Assessment

None

4.5 Other Implications

(You will have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate any which apply?)

None

5. Background information and other papers:

6. Summary of appendices:

Appendix A

Food Bank Consultation 2015 statistics and analysis

Appendix B

Scoping & Demand analysis conducted with Leicester CharityLink

Appendix C

Food Bank Survey 2014 summary findings

Appendix D

Leicester Food Plan

7. Is this a private report? No

(If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)