

APPENDIX C

Scrutiny request

Issue - Food Poverty - Food Poverty Action Plan

Request from - Councillor Bob Smytherman

Public interest - The Trussell Trust has recently published the first report of a three-year State of Hunger study commissioned in partnership with Herriot-Watt University and Asda's Fight Hunger Create Change partnership. The research aims to provide a robust evidence base on the drivers of household food insecurity and to recommend informed, effective policy interventions to address the root causes.

Score = High

Ability to change -

- The number of food parcels distributed across the UK increased from 61,000 in 2010/11 to 1,583,000 in 2018/19. During this period the UK economy has slowly recovered from recession and employment is at record levels, yet the decade has also been characterised by low wage growth, austerity and significant changes to the welfare system
- Certain demographic groups are at a higher risk of food insecurity: young people, working-age people in poor health, working-age people living alone, lone parents and social renters. Conversely, couples, people in full-time employment and pensioners have a lower risk
- The report presents clear evidence that economic hardship and welfare reforms have driven the increase in foodbank usage over the last decade. Policy recommendations mainly concern improving welfare provision, particularly reducing the five-week wait for universal credit (UC) and benefit sanctions. The authors also call for better emergency welfare assistance.

Score = High

Performance - This scrutiny request is not about the poor performance of a Council service.

Score = N/A

Extent - The Trussell Trust is the charity that runs 60 per cent of UK foodbanks. The research has indicated that the number of food parcels it has distributed increased from 61,000 in 2010/11 to 1,583,000 in 2018/19. Yet there is no clear correlation between broad economic trends in the UK and the rise in foodbank use. The rise in foodbanks started to accelerate as the economy was beginning its slow recovery from recession. Over the last decade there has been no dramatic decline in real wages (although real wages have yet to return to pre-economic crash levels). The material wellbeing of the average household has not reduced, and employment has risen steadily through the decade. This has led government ministers and some commentators to claim that foodbank use is influenced by supply (namely the increased availability of foodbanks) rather than by demand factors (economic hardship). This research is intended to provide a robust evidence base on the drivers of food insecurity, from which authoritative policy recommendations can be made for Adur and Worthing.

Score = High

Replication - I am not aware that the outcome from this research is being considered by anyone else in Adur and Worthing.

Score = High

Expected Outcomes - I hope the report will make a series of recommendations for policy change to address the underlying causes of household food insecurity and foodbank use in Adur & Worthing.

The main proposals are:

- Review the general level of working-age benefits, which have fallen significantly in real terms since the benefits freeze
- Review the operation of the benefits sanction regime and assessments for health, disability and work capability which are sometimes applied harshly and inconsistently
- Recommend Government removal of the five-week wait for UC, which drives much foodbank usage in our area, and has particularly harsh impacts on households in long-term poverty, those unable to access support from family and friends and those with multiple and complex needs
- Change the approach to deductions from benefits to repay 'debts' or overpayments and introduce shared protocols between agencies so that overall deductions are manageable for claimants
- Extend access to key workers for those with multiple and complex needs and mental health issues to help them navigate the system and access the support that is available
- Reinstate national provision of emergency welfare assistance or introduce national minimum standards for local schemes.

Finally for Adur and Worthing to have our own Food Poverty action plan taking evidence from key local stakeholders such as Worthing Soup Kitchen , Community House, Trussell Trust , Jubilee Food bank and Salvation Army.

In addition the Committee should take evidence from Head Teachers , Social Services , Children & Family Centres and Churches and Faith Groups to gather the best possible evidence base for the review.

Does the proposed review link with the Council strategic objectives or does the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee have the ability to influence and/or add value on the subject?

Platform 2 - Thriving people and communities - Supporting stronger, participative and resilient communities.

The two thrusts of the proposals in this request (relating to food and support for vulnerable people to navigate help) are areas that the Councils are investigating and are developing some work as part of this Platform. For example the work around food poverty is something that has formed part of a review that has been undertaken between Wellbeing and Housing and between Wellbeing and the Sustainability Manager about establishing a food network, alongside trialling a piece of design work around food. The Councils are also beginning to look at vulnerability.

Score = High

How could this review be undertaken? Report to JOSC or JOSC Working Group set up to investigate the issues. Invitation to the local DWP Manager to attend JOSC.

**Recommendations from Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Chairmen/Vice-Chairmen:-**

That this issue be added to the JOSC Work Programme for 2020/21 and that JOSC receive a briefing report from Officers on the issues to a meeting in the Summer 2020.