



ADUR & WORTHING COUNCILS

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee
15 October 2020

Key Decision [No]

Ward(s) Affected: N/A

Discussions on Food Poverty

Report by the Director for Communities

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

1.1 This report provides an overview of the work being undertaken by the Councils relating to food and support for the vulnerable experiencing food insecurity.

1.2 This information will enable the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) to consider and question Officers on this work and any other issues connected that support the communities of Adur and Worthing.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee are recommended to note the contents of the report and consider if any further action or recommendations are required.

3. Context

- 3.1 As part of its Work Programme for 2020/21, JOSc have requested a report on Food Poverty issues. This follows on from the receipt of a scrutiny request from Councillor Bob Smytherman earlier in 2020 which highlighted concerns about the increase in food poverty and the use of food banks.

4. Background

4.1 Pre COVID

- 4.1.1 Pre COVID-19, toward the end of 2019, the Councils carried out a piece of design work, to find out more and better understand, what helps to make people and our local communities thrive. One strand of this work looked in more depth at food, and what barriers people experience to eating a healthy diet.
- 4.1.2 The team carried out in depth interviews with a range of people to find out about their experiences, and to listen to their stories, including people who had received help from emergency food providers, food bank volunteers and people who were above a healthy weight.
- 4.1.3 The insights gathered through the discovery phase of this project were collated into themes, which included:
- Agency and choice over which foods are provided is important to people as opposed to being provided with ready made packs. A great example of this is Worthing Homes Community House, which enabled people to choose their own food.
 - The facilities people have directly affects their ability to create healthy meals; a lack of storage or cooking facilities will make healthier options more difficult.
 - We are a product of our environment; experiences growing up can influence our beliefs around food - we heard it said more than once during interviews that as children they were told to 'clear their plate', and they still felt they should - even when they are already full!
- 4.1.5 As part of the Thrive work, we met and talked with volunteers of the local Food Banks and found out more about the vital service they provide. There were three main food banks that we worked with: Shoreham and Worthing,

which are both supported by the national Trussell Trust charity and Lancing and Sompting Churches Food Bank. In addition to these three, we also found an informal network within a neighbourhood in Worthing, with one energetic woman helping out people in her locality. The emergency food providers were patch based, working to meet the needs of their immediate local communities and were unconnected with each other.

4.2 COVID 19 and help with food

- 4.2.1 In March of this year, as we are all too well aware, the global pandemic due to COVID 19 forced the United Kingdom into a 12 week Lockdown. The Councils quickly brought staff and partners together to create a COVID Community Response Team to help anyone with Covid needs who did not have the support of friends or family.
- 4.2.2 We anticipated that food was likely to be a key issue: both for people unable to access food, and those unable to afford it. Whilst our partners at the County Council were responsible for those who were 'shielding', Adur & Worthing Councils developed a role of ensuring that no one else would fall through the net and be without food.
- 4.2.3 To help meet the anticipated sudden increase in the need for emergency food, and to support the existing food banks, a temporary Food Depot was established in the Assembly Rooms. We were concerned that the Food Banks may not have had enough supplies or volunteers to cope with the increase in demand, and we knew that there were days when some did not operate.
- 4.2.4 The majority of requests for support with food were from people who were unable to access food because they were isolating, or were fearful of going out. These people were helped to find supermarket slots and local food deliveries, or were connected with one of the volunteers who had signed up with the Councils to help, who went shopping on their behalf.
- 4.2.5 The remainder of the requests were for help with emergency food. During the 12 weeks of the Lockdown period, over 600 requests for emergency food parcels were received. The majority of these received a food parcel from the temporary food depot, with the remainder of the requests referred to the Food Banks and new Mutual Aid Groups that had set up.
- 4.2.6 The Councils supported the emergency food providers with supplies; many parcels were donated by supermarkets, particularly Morrisons and Tesco. Food surplus was also brought in and distributed by UKHarvest, the food

rescue and donation charity that delivers free cookery skills courses on behalf of the Councils. Other parcels were purchased via Crawley Borough Council which had established a reliable supply from Aldi Supermarket.

- 4.2.7 The surplus food brought in by UKHarvest included fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy products. Rather than donate this to the food banks, which did not have adequate storage facilities, the surplus food was donated to cafe Montague to help feed the people temporarily housed in the Chatsworth.
- 4.2.8 Through making the referrals for emergency food, we developed our relationships with the different emergency food providers and offered to bring them together to see if there was benefit to sharing information and experience between them. Through Community Works, the Community and Voluntary Infrastructure organisation the Council funds to support the sector, we provided a space and supported them to meet for the first time in April.
- 4.2.9 The group consists of all the main food banks, including the newer ones such as Worthing Vegan and Fishersgate Food Banks, and two of the larger Mutual Aid groups which provide food as well as other community support. There are also groups delivering related projects, such as We Are Food Pioneers and Turning Tides. Since the first meeting, the group has met every fortnight with good engagement from all partners. They have had wide ranging conversations, made plans, shared ideas, projects have supported and partnered with one another, shared contacts and feedback, set up shared approaches and linked people in to other support available.
- 4.3.0 A successful funding bid to the National Lottery of £50,000 toward the developing food partnership is being distributed to the emergency food providers for them to spend where they each need it most; it has also gone toward food projects: 'Batch' and 'Cook and Share', both delivered by local organisation We are Food Pioneers. Partners have shared the needs of their different projects and the communities they serve and built a common understanding of how best to develop what will have the greatest impact and more importantly, be sustainable. Part of this funding will go toward a shared premises. This was originally intended as storage, but has developed into an ambitious project to do much more than the original depot intended.
- 4.3.1 Some of the emergency food projects are developing much needed participatory and holistic approaches. Food poverty is usually an indicator of other wider issues such as: employment, housing or mental health. There are interesting and ambitious ideas emerging. For example, one project is developing a 'National Canteen' to feed working people in town facing food

poverty - where workers and people in need eat alongside one another a healthy and simple meal and pay what they can, and possibly take home an emergency food parcel at the same time, or help out in the food depot as a volunteer and chat to someone at the Volunteer Centre.

- 4.3.2 Community Works has been working on the Councils behalf with partners across the system to share the aims of the Food Partnership - both in its current form and also to set out longer term objectives. A core group of people is starting to form who will become part of a wider steering group. This will include food banks, food projects, green spaces projects, AWC Sustainability Officer and an officer from the Communities and Wellbeing Team, plus representatives from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).
- 4.3.3 An experienced and passionate coordinator has recently been recruited with a portion of the funding to facilitate the network and to build on the development that has been achieved so far. There is a shared vision to hold the first expert user panel through a zoom call initially to get feedback from different beneficiaries on their experiences of using the food banks. Some projects have secured further match funding to develop elements of the work begun within the partnership.
- 4.3.4 The Covid crisis has acted as a catalyst for these developments in our communities around food and helping each other. There is much potential to build on this, to support and facilitate communities helping themselves and to link this across the business with key areas of sustainability, employment and wellbeing.

5. Engagement and Communication

- 5.1 Engagement and communication with emergency food providers, Mutual Aid Groups and other Voluntary and Community Sector organisations is ongoing. See 4.2.3 above regarding the new Food Partnership which the Councils have supported and facilitated. The Council is represented at each Partnership meeting to share information and provide an opportunity for participants to find out more about what the Councils are doing. The JOSOC Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen have been consulted on the proposals contained in this report.

6. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Councils have the power to do anything to facilitate or which is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of their functions.
- 7.2 Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides a Local Authority to do anything that individuals generally may do (subject to any current restrictions or limitations prescribed in existing legislation).
- 7.3 Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a Best Value Authority to make continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Background Papers

Scrutiny request to Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 25 June 2020

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

The fragility of the food supply chain and the importance of locally sourced food has been highlighted during the community response.

2. Social

2.1 Social Value

The pandemic has led to additional small groups and organisations forming as our communities respond to the crisis to help each other. This participative approach can be nurtured by the Councils and built on to help meet people's changing needs as we move forwards.

2.2 Equality Issues

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on some communities and this will be reflected in the Communities and Wellbeing Team Business plan moving forward.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

No specific issues

2.4 Human Rights Issues

No specific issues

3. Environmental

There are no implications for the management, custodianship and protection of our natural resources

4. Governance

- Our Social Economies
 - - promoting the health & safety of our places
 - - Exploring place based solutions
- Services and Solutions for our Places
 - - using customer insight to develop more customer-centred services
 - - utilising the expertise in our communities