

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Director of Service Delivery

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Update on Food Poverty and Insecurity

Executive Summary

The Overview and Scrutiny task and finish group report of March 2019 about Food Poverty and Insecurity highlighted the issues surrounding food poverty in the Borough.

On 27 August 2019, the Executive agreed to the report's recommendations, and on 14 January 2020, the Director of Community provided an update to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) about the progress Community Services were making against these recommendations.

This report sets out a further update on the task and finish group recommendations and discusses the impact the Covid 19 pandemic and holiday hunger amongst families with children who receive free school meals during term time are having on many residents in the Borough.

Recommendation

That the committee

- note the continuing progress made to address the issues of food poverty and insecurity in the Borough.
- comment on any further actions they would like undertaken.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report updates O&S on the

- actions to address food poverty and insecurity identified in the March 2019 Task and Finish Group report (Appendix 1).
- subsequent report to O&S on 14 January 2020. (Appendix 2).

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 This Council has set out as one its priorities, supporting vulnerable and less advantaged members of our community. The underlying reasons for food poverty and insecurity are varied but most definitely have a heavy impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents. This is therefore something this Council wants to address as part of our commitment that Every Person Matters.

3. Background

- 3.1 The March 2019 Overview and Scrutiny task and finish group report identified a wide range of causes for food poverty and recommended ways to improve the immediate response for those in food poverty while longer-term solutions are pursued. The report identifies long-term solutions are unfortunately not easily or speedily implemented.
- 3.2 The subsequent 14 January 2020 O&S report set out the initial response to the formal recommendations of the task and finish group and how the Community Services team would build on the work carried out by communities, the third sector and some businesses already supporting many individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing food poverty.
- 3.3 The summary chart below captures the recommendations of the task and finish group, the updates reported on 14 January 2020 and the progress made to date.

Recommendation	Action reported on 14 January 2020	Progress made to date
Welfare Reform	The leader of the Council wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the impact of welfare reform changes	No further action taken following the letter being sent – but the impact of welfare reform continues to impact individuals and families. This is likely to increase following the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic
Recognition of food poverty as an issue requiring action	The Executive recognised the detrimental effect of low and insecure incomes is having and are committed to act. They requested Community Services lead the action plan for the Council.	Addressing food poverty and insecurity is a key priority work theme for Community Services. Since 14 January 2020, Covid 19 has impacted on how far the team have been able to progress certain work streams for food poverty and insecurity. This report details below how the pandemic welfare response Community Services have provided on behalf of the Council has supported people experiencing food poverty. (Section 4)

<p>The Council become an accredited real Living Wage employer</p>	<p>The Executive and Corporate Management Team (CMT) supported the contents of the food poverty report regarding the Real Living Wage issue and will monitor via the Future Guildford programme.</p>	<p>The real living wage is £9.50 per hour outside of London. Using the Council's standard 37 hour working week and 52 weeks per year this equates to an annual salary of £18,278. The lowest salary on the Council's pay and grading structure (Band 1/1A, Spinal point 3) is £18,586. This means that the Council pays the staff it directly employs the living wage.</p> <p>Agency temps are covered under the Agency Workers Regulations and required to be paid the same as our permanent staff after 12 weeks, so the same pay rates are used Casual staff that work in Play Development are below this pay level and to increase their rates would mean an increase in the running costs of the play schemes offered.</p> <p>Contractors Freedom Leisure do not pay at the Living Wage level and have estimated an increase cost of £300,000 per annum on the contract should they do so. Likewise, HQT at G-Live does not pay at this level either and their costs would increase circa £50,000 per annum were they to implement the Living Wage.</p> <p>When these contracts are re-procured in the future, the wage paid to contracted staff will need to be considered as part of any procurement exercise</p>
<p>Develop a Food Poverty Strategy and Plan</p>	<p>A collaborative approach to developing an action plan was agreed and that a food poverty strategy would form part of a wider community strategy following the implementation of Phase B Future Guildford.</p>	<p>The development of a food poverty strategy is part of the transition discussions currently happening as part of the Future Guildford Phase B programme. The leads for this work will be the Head of Strategy and Communications and the Head of Community Services.</p> <p>This report sets out work planned for food poverty support once restrictions around the pandemic are eased. Further detail below. (Section 5)</p>

4. The Impact of Covid 19 on food poverty and insecurity

- 4.1 The Covid 19 pandemic saw in March 2020 the need for clinically and extremely vulnerable people in our communities to shield. This meant they were unable to leave their homes and for those who did not have family to support them, resulted in many being unable to access food and medical supplies.
- 4.2 At the same time, the country went into its first lockdown and since then many people have been affected by furlough, unemployment and children unable to access free school meals due to school closure.
- 4.3 The pandemic quickly revealed how fragile circumstances for people can be and how rapidly anyone can suffer from food poverty and insecurity.

The committee has been updated by the Managing Director throughout the pandemic on this Council's response to Covid 19 - a significant part of which has been the in-house provision of food and medical supplies to our most vulnerable residents.

- 4.4 Community Services operated 2 food hubs at the Shawfield and Park Barn centres where food parcels were packed and delivered, and community meals provided. To minimise the impact of food poverty and insecurity the community meals criteria was expanded to include those who were homeless and those who were vulnerable and under 55 years old.
- 4.5 Table 1 demonstrates the amount of food parcels distributed across wards in Guildford and the food parcels distributed out of Borough as part of joint working with Waverley Borough Council under the Family Support programme and Care and Repair Hospital Discharge initiative.

Table 1: Food Parcels March 2020 – 12 March 2021

Ward	Amount of Food Parcels
Ash South and Tongham	440
Ash Vale	123
Ash Wharf	323
Burpham	99
Christchurch	68
Clandon and Horsley	99
Effingham	48
Friary and St Nicholas	604
Holy Trinity	306
Lovelace	77
Merrow	413
Normandy	222
Onslow	173

Pilgrims	92
Pirbright	32
Send	78
Shalford	327
Stoke	788
Stoughton	435
Tillingbourne	132
Westborough	1,145
Worplesdon	541
Out of Area	50
Total	6,615

4.6 In addition to the information in Table 1, it is important to note that

- 352 referrals were from School Link Workers:
- 2,335 food parcels were for families with children under 18 years old
- 4,293 food parcels were to adult only households

4.7 52,360 community meals were delivered to vulnerable people who would otherwise have been at risk of food poverty and greater ill health. Table 2 demonstrates the post code breakdown of community meals delivered across the Borough.

Table 2: Community Meals March 2020 – March 2021

Post Code	Amount of Meals Delivered
GU1	11,479
GU2	15,618
GU3	3,255
GU4	7,424
GU5	704
GU8	10
GU10	2,482
GU12	8,514
GU23	1,531
GU24	174
KT24	1,169
Total	52,360

4.8 In addition to the efforts of the Council to address issues of food poverty through the pandemic, many community groups have supported their vulnerable neighbours through food provision. The food banks have informed us the demand for their support increased.

- 4.9 Surrey County Council (SCC) acknowledged the importance of community and voluntary sector support in preventing food poverty during the pandemic. They provided an Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Suppliers to enable community groups and food banks in the Borough to continue their support.

GBC administered this grant for SCC and recipients of the grant are shown in table 3

Table 3: SCC Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Suppliers

Recipient	Amount Awarded
Guildford Lions	£2,500
St Mary's Church with Ash and Ash Vale Corona Virus Support Group	£5,000
Stoke Community Support	£17,000
North Guildford Food Bank	£5,000
Fairwood Helpers	£1,000
FLGCA	£800
St Martins Beehive Club	£ 600
Community Angels	£5,000
Ripley Corona Virus Support Network	£5,000
Shalford and Peasmarsh Community Support Network	£100
Salvation Army Guildford Corps Food Bank	£8,000
St Saviours Guildford	£3,000
Stoke Hospital	£750

- 4.9 Stoke Community Support has been an essential provider to families in need throughout the pandemic. Since April 2020 they have distributed 27,000 free frozen meals. They have seen an increase in referrals throughout the pandemic as families become more affected by hardship. They are currently supporting 170 families (500 people).

Holiday Hunger

- 4.10 Holiday hunger has become throughout the pandemic an issue that has attracted national attention. The closure of schools meant low income families faced increasing pressure because children were unable to access free school meals.
- 4.11 Schools and Surrey County Council are responsible for ensuring pupils are provided with alternative support, but this has varied across the Borough. Some schools have provided lunch clubs for children who were experiencing food poverty to access and others relied on the Government £15 voucher initiative. School Link Workers have been an essential resource in supporting these children.

- 4.12 Many local businesses when made aware of the issues surrounding holiday hunger offered support. GBC particularly worked with Positano restaurant, Mandira's Kitchen and Foodwise who provided free meals to distribute to families in need.
- 4.13 Holiday hunger will continue to be an issue for communities if families suffer financial hardship. In 2019, prior to the pandemic, 2688 low income families at risk of food poverty were identified in Guildford. This was the third highest Borough ratio in Surrey.

It is prudent to assume that the next data comparison given to the Department of Work and Pensions later this year will show a higher proportion of families in Guildford at risk of food poverty as financial hardship increases due to the consequences of the pandemic.

- 4.14 Although this Council has no direct responsibility or budget for free school meal provision, we will continue to support families in accessing help for holiday hunger via local business and community endeavours.

5. Future Work Plan

- 5.1 Community Services in response to the recommendations of the O&S task and finish group has an action plan in place to address food poverty and insecurity with the support of our community and 3rd sector partners. The pandemic paused many of the initiatives, but it is planned to resume activities as lockdown restrictions lift.
- 5.2 Table 4 sets out priority work streams for 2021 around food poverty and insecurity.

Table 4: Community Services Food Poverty Work Streams April – December 2021

Work Stream	Achieved to date	Future Actions	Dates
The Community Fridge at Park Barn	The Community Fridge launched in 2019 at the Park Barn Centre but was paused during the pandemic	Reopening of Fridge. Community Transport to collect donated food from local supermarkets. Kings College Students will oversee the upkeep of the Fridge	Reopening April 2021 Review progress July 2021
Supporting other venues to provide community fridges	St John's Church at Stoke voiced interest in a community fridge	Resume discussions with St John's and help with set up and community	April 2021 with a review of progress July 2021

	<p>Guildford Philanthropy pledged support in funding fridges in community spaces</p>	<p>implementation</p> <p>Scope other venues interest across the Borough – harnessing support from parish councils</p>	<p>Scoping exercise to begin May 2021. Review of progress August 2021</p>
<p>Renaming of the Park Barn Centre to The Hive</p>	<p>A plan is in place to begin a relaunch of the centre as an intergenerational space community hub where support for individuals can be accessed</p>	<p>Relaunch event at the centre with all support services available</p>	<p>July 2021 (Covid restrictions permitting)</p>
<p>Thrive at the Hive donation project</p>	<p>The community donate quality preloved clothing, household items and toys so anyone in need can access essentials on a 'pay as you feel' basis.</p> <p>The scheme has been up and running since 2019 and deliveries have been made to people in need throughout the pandemic.</p>	<p>Reopen Thrive at The Hive for visits.</p> <p>Awareness campaign to community and 3rd sector partners so more people can access what is available.</p> <p>Create mobile Thrive at the Hive hubs throughout the Borough so all communities can access the project</p>	<p>June 2021 (Covid restrictions permitting)</p> <p>Review December 2021</p>
<p>Encourage Community swap shops</p>	<p>A community swap shop has been operating in Ash</p>	<p>To create community driven swap shop events around the Borough that can support local people to help neighbours access items they need</p>	<p>Scope venues and community need in June 2021</p> <p>Review progress in December 2021</p>
<p>Guildford Food Poverty Forum</p>	<p>Contacted community groups and voluntary partners who support food poverty initiatives</p>	<p>Create a local forum that will coordinate community groups and agencies to support people experiencing food poverty with the aim of working in partnership and pooling of resources.</p> <p>Prepare and deliver a food access plan</p>	<p>First meeting June 2021 with action plan identifying roles, responsibilities and milestones</p> <p>Review December 2021</p>

		to identify the barriers to accessing affordable and nutritious food and actions to address them	
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6. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Food Poverty and insecurity is not discriminatory. All are potentially vulnerable to the impact of low and insecure incomes. The pandemic has shown how personal circumstances can change very quickly even for those on high incomes.

We will seek to help all in need irrespective of their characteristics.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 Covid 19 has had a severe impact on the Council's finances. We have been able to support our communities who have experienced food poverty and insecurity throughout the pandemic via our general fund and government grants.

- 7.2 As lockdown and Covid restrictions relax, the financial impact on our communities will become evident and it is likely that some people will be in greater financial hardship than ever before. We do not have the budget to support people with food parcels beyond lockdown and the financial responsibility for addressing holiday hunger sits with Surrey County Council.

SCC have indicated that they will pass a further tranche of grant money to help support the essential supplies to people who are vulnerable and self-isolating which when received we would look to administer to the voluntary sector and community groups so they can provide further support.

In prioritising the food poverty and insecurity workstreams for community services means that our staffing resources are utilised without any extra expenditure.

- 7.3 The voluntary sector is an important partner in any community work, and they are experiencing pressure as funding sources deplete. Now more than ever, intelligent and coordinated partnership working alongside utilising community groups and building on the community spirit shown throughout the pandemic will be paramount in ensuring we continue to support our communities.

- 7.4 In fulfilling the task and finish group recommendation around the Real Living Wage, the Real Living Wage is now £9.50 per hour outside of London. Using the Council's standard 37 hour working week and 52 weeks per year this equates to an annual salary of £18,278. The lowest salary on the Council's pay and grading structure (Band 1/1A, Spinal point 3) is £18,586. This means that the Council pays the staff it directly employs the living wage.

7.5 When we re-procure our contracts in the next two to four years, the wage paid to contracted staff will be considered as part of any procurement exercise

8. Legal Implications

8.1 There are no implications directly arising from this report.

9. Human Resource Implication

9.1 There are no Human Resource implications

10. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

10.1 Our approach to addressing food poverty and financial insecurity encourages communities to contribute to community fridge schemes in the borough as well as our Thrive at The Hive pre-loved project. Our hope is to influence behavioural changes that lead to a reduction in food waste and unnecessary landfill.

11. Conclusion

11.1 Following the O&S task and finish group report on food poverty, this Council is committed to prioritise Community Services workstreams to address the issues of food poverty and insecurity in partnership with other agencies and community groups. The recommendations of the report set out a direction by which we can mitigate the impact low and insecure incomes have on some members of our community.

11.2 The pandemic has only served to highlight the effect food poverty and financial insecurity can have and the speed at which people's lives can change for the worse. Our response to the pandemic alongside that of community groups has shown that we can work together to help residents of Guildford. The Community Services work plan and the priority given to food poverty and insecurity reflects the Council's commitment to vulnerable communities and our belief that Every Person Matters.

Background Papers

None.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Report of the Food Poverty Task and Finish Group, March 2019

Appendix 2: O&S Report, 14 January 2020