

Overview and Scrutiny Report

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Director of Community Services

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Food Poverty

Executive Summary

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) submitted their report on the issue of Food Poverty and insecurity in the borough to Full Council on 23 July 2019. The Executive responded formally, indicating agreement to the report's recommendations, on 27 August 2019.

This report sets out a series of actions already undertaken to progress the recommendations of the Food Poverty report produced by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation

That the committee notes the initial progress made to address the issues of food poverty and insecurity in the borough and comment on any further actions they would like undertaken.

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report updates O&S on the actions agreed by the Executive to progress the recommendations set out in the Food Poverty Report produced by the Food Poverty Task and Finish Group.

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 the impact on individuals is something we want to see avoided.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee report is both thorough and comprehensive. A copy is set out in Appendix 1. The report identifies a wide range of causes for food poverty, which in turn is a result of low and unpredictable incomes for some in our community. The report recommends ways to improve the immediate response for those in food poverty while longer-term solutions are pursued.
- 3.2 The report was considered by Council on 23 July 2019 who noted it with concern. Likewise, the Executive responded formally to the report on 27 August indicating agreement to the recommendations whilst acknowledging that unfortunately, there are few if any simple solutions to the issue, but we still need to act.
- 3.3 Communities, the third sector and some businesses are already supporting many individuals at risk and for which the Council is extremely grateful. Key to our response is acknowledging and working alongside the support mechanisms already in place.
- 3.4 We are seeking to build on the significant amount of work already carried out by others in our borough and are working in partnership with those already trying to mitigate the impact of low and unsteady income on our communities, one of which is food poverty.

4. Initial Response to the Food Poverty Report's formal recommendations

- 4.1 The Lead Councillor for Community Health, Support and Wellbeing alongside the Food Poverty Working group and the Council's Community Wellbeing team is coordinating the Council's action plan to progress the food poverty report's recommendations. Each recommendation is considered below:

4.2 Welfare Reform

The Leader of the Council has written to Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to express her concern for the impact some of the welfare reform changes are having on individuals and families. (Appendix 2)

4.3 Recognition of food poverty as an issue requiring action

The Executive fully recognise that for some in our community, the effect of low and insecure incomes is having a real impact. The Executive is committed to take action to mitigate the impact this has on individuals and families and has requested the Community Services directorate lead on the action plan for the Council.

4.4 The Council become an accredited real Living Wage employer

The O&S manager in his report to Executive on 27 August 2019 highlighted to the Executive the issues around the Council becoming an accredited real Living

Wage employer and the effect this will have. The report explains that the Council has committed in its Pay Policy to pay the real Living Wage, but is not accredited.

The Executive has noted that

- The Council pays the real Living Wage to all established posts and fixed term contracts. Other arrangements are in place for casual workers, interns, apprentices and staff who have been transferred into the Council under TUPE.
- The current Real Living Wage for those outside London and over 18 years is £9 per hour. The percentage of Council staff earning below the Real Living Wage is 0.5 per cent.
- An issue of accreditation with the Real Living Wage Foundation is that contractors that we use are also required to pay at this level. This may affect the future Freedom Leisure contract and possibly G-Live, as well as future building and maintenance contracts. The FISH play scheme costs may also increase with any increase to pay rates.
- Any future contracting out of Council services may be impacted by accreditation. For example, the Future Guildford transformation may consider contracting out the Council's directly provided services and accreditation could impact on that and possibly affect the restructure.

Corporate Management Team (CMT) has supported the contents of the food poverty report with regard to the issue of accreditation with the Real Living Wage Foundation as a statement of intent. However, it is not currently quantifiable with our current contractors and CMT will monitor via the Future Guildford programme.

4.5 Develop a Food Poverty Strategy and Plan

It is vital to the lead Councillor for Community Health, Support and Wellbeing that we work in partnership to address the issues of our communities in relation to food poverty and insecurity and for this reason; we are pursuing a collaborative approach with our partners in developing a strategy and action plan.

The lead councillor has met with the Food Poverty working group to seek their practical suggestions for the action plan and we have reached out to the parish council clerks who are a vital network of support when addressing some of the needs of our rural communities.

Since 27 August 2019, we are

- a) Developing the Park Barn Centre into a community hub resource for the community - providing access to practical support they may need.

- b) Developing a borough wide donation scheme to support less advantaged people suffering from food poverty and financial insecurity.
- c) Creating a mobile hub that will take a selection of these donated items out into the communities so people can access on a pay as you feel basis in conjunction with the Dignity Principles. From this approach, we are hoping that communities will then feel empowered to begin running for themselves a local pantry or mobile hub for their neighbours. An example of this is in Ash where one member of our community started supporting the community wellbeing team with our swap shop initiative and has now opened a local pop up shop - taking the initiative to a new local level.
- d) Coordinating a food insecurity forum for the borough that will meet in February as many partners are waiting for funding streams to be confirmed
- e) Updating our website and using social media platforms to enable communities to access information of current provision of food aid that is accessible and to be aware of existing initiatives that help residents in hardship. This includes publication of the full food poverty report.

In the upcoming months, we will be

- Running development and training sessions on food poverty and insecurity for councillors. The Executive recognises that Councillors who are well informed on the wider issues around low and insecure incomes will facilitate decision making around this matter.
- Addressing food poverty and insecurity via the Aspire and Health and Wellbeing governance board and Guildford health and wellbeing strategy. In doing this we will be engaging with external experts whenever possible and be able to develop local measurements of food poverty and insecurity.
- Following the forum of food providers meeting in February, we can prepare and deliver a formal food access plan to identify the barriers to accessing affordable and nutritious food and actions to address them – including the possibility of altering food voucher forms, removal of the three-visit cap and the creation of a self-referral form.
- With council colleagues, reviewing the remit of the Mayor’s Local Distress Fund and the application process and criteria for the council’s Local Council Tax Support Hardship Fund.

5. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.1 Sadly, all are potentially vulnerable to the impact of low and insecure incomes. Whilst most in our community are not immediately at risk, circumstances can very quickly change even for those on high incomes.

5.2 Our response will seek to help all in need irrespective of their characteristics.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no immediate significant financial implications flowing from this report, but in delivering the initiatives requested, some expenditure will occur.

6.2 It is possible that in ensuring contractors pay the Real Living Wage in order to achieve accreditation with the Real Living Wage Foundation, there will be significant financial implications on the council budget.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 There are no implications directly arising from this report.

8. Human Resource Implication

8.1 There will be some implications in terms of staff time developing an action plan in consultation with stakeholders. At this point, we will look to resource this work by reprioritising other work carried out by the Community Wellbeing team.

8.2 As the action plan is developed it will become clearer the extent of the impact this work area will have on other projects.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The Executive welcomes the report produced by the Overview and Scrutiny task group and expresses its appreciation for the time and effort put into producing it.

9.2 The Executive agrees food poverty and insecurity is an issue of concern and has asked the Community Services directorate to work with partnership agencies to action the recommendations in the food poverty report in order to mitigate the impact low and insecure incomes have on some members of our community.

10.1 Background Papers

10.1 None.

11. Appendices

Appendix 1: Report of the Food Poverty Task and Finish Group [excluding appendices, full report is available here:

<http://www2.guildford.gov.uk/councilmeetings/documents/s14624/Item%206%201%20-%20Food%20Poverty%20OS%20Task%20and%20Finish%20Group%20report.pdf>]

Appendix 2: Letter from Leader of the Council