
**Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny
Management Committee**

8 July 2019

Report of the Assistant Director of Communities and Equalities

Food Poverty Scrutiny Review Scoping Report

Summary

1. This report proposes a focus for the Food Poverty Scrutiny Review agreed at the 10 June 2019 meeting of the Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee (CSMC). Members of the Committee are asked to agree a suitable remit for a scrutiny review and identify the most cost effective actions City of York Council can take to minimise food poverty within the city.

Background

2. A Food Poverty Scrutiny Review Scoping Report was considered by this Committee on the 10 June 2019. The Committee requested that further work was conducted to define the focus of the review. The previous administration's CSMC proposed food poverty as a potential topic for a more detailed scrutiny review.
3. During the previous administration, CSMC agreed to carry out a scrutiny review into Financial Inclusion in York with the aim of understanding the impact of Universal Credit on the city's citizens and the activities being run to promote Financial Inclusion.
4. In September 2018 CSMC agreed an initial remit for the review. However, in November 2018 CSMC considered a request that a 19 July 2018 Motion to Council on Food Poverty be added to the review remit. This was agreed and the following objectives were added:
 - i. To understand how the above issues are linked to apparently increasing levels of food poverty in York, including work on the following:

- the background to food poverty in York including any available local statistics and how local measurement might be improved;
 - the current role of crisis support in York in mitigating food poverty;
 - a range of options for the Council and its partners to improve the city wide response to food poverty in York.
5. The Financial Inclusion Scrutiny Review Task Group had its final meeting on 13 February 2019 when it was agreed that issues around increasing food poverty in the city were complex and this should be the subject of a separate piece of work which could be picked up by the new administration after May's elections.
 6. The review recommendations were agreed by Executive in March 2019 and these included a recommendation to the new administration that a deeper scrutiny review into the causes of and responses to food poverty is considered, taking into account key elements of the York Food Poverty Alliance report.

Consultation

7. This report was written in consultation with officers from teams across the council engaged in work to reduce poverty.

Analysis

An overview of food poverty in York

8. There is no official measurement of food poverty in the UK. The UK government has adopted a relative measure of household poverty, defining households within income of 60% below the median as being poor.
9. Tackling food poverty can be divided into preventative measures, which seek to increase household income amongst low income families, through tools such as encouraging claiming of statutory benefits, and remedial interventions, such as providing food aid.
10. The previous scoping report identified that food aid provision in York can be divided into two separate models.
11. The first model can be characterised as targeted assistance. An example is the Trussell Trust, which runs four distributions centres in the city on a referral-only basis. Individuals are referred to the Foodbank

from a variety of agencies which have identified that the individual is unable to buy food for their family. The referring agencies will also provide advice to the individual to support the underlying cause of their poverty, for example helping them to establish a benefits claim or providing them with Financial Conduct Authority regulated debt advice, if they report household debts.

12. The second model of food provision has grown rapidly in recent years and is delivered by community groups across the city. Models vary, but are often characterised by being universal access, offering social and emotional support in addition to food aid and making use of food diverted from waste. The universal model means this provision is not targeted purely at people in crisis or meeting the definition of households in poverty. This means that the social value created by these projects accrues in several areas, for example alleviating food poverty, reducing social isolation and reducing food waste.
13. Analysis carried out by the Foodbank of the primary reason referral to a Foodbank for the period April to September 2017 found the top three referral reasons, amounting to two thirds of all reasons:
 - Low income 26.52%
 - Benefit delays 24.71%
 - Benefit changes 17.90%
14. Data also shows significant use among families. Between April 1st and November 30th 2018, York Foodbank served 2623, of whom 1008 were children. The previous year 1647 children had used the service out of a total 4262 people.
15. The data shows significant increase in demand for the services of the Foodbank. Increases in Foodbank use over recent years have been attributed to changes to the benefits system and in particular the transition to Universal Credit.
16. Given this link between changes in the benefits system and increase demand for food aid, it is likely that further increases are seen in forthcoming year. DWP intend to transition remaining legacy benefits claimants to Universal Credit between November 2020 and December 2023. In York an estimated 5,600 individuals claiming housing benefit, approximately 3,500 with children, are due to transition. This period of 'managed migration' has potential to cause significant new demand for food aid within the city.

17. The Council plays a significant role in the city in services which alleviate poverty and prevent recourse to food aid. These directly delivered services and funding of external delivery. For City of York Council provision which alleviate poverty and prevents use of food aid include:

- Promotion of the take up of statutory benefits (for example Council Tax Benefit)
- Provision and promotion of discretionary benefits and grant for households in crisis (for example Discretionary Housing Payments and the York Financial Assistance Scheme)
- Promotion of the take up of Free School Meals
- Promotion of the take up of early years places for 2 and 3 year olds (many of which offer meals as part of the entitlement)
- Promotion and provision of training and education to increase skills, increase employment and support individuals to secure higher paid work
- Support to advice providers to support individuals to maximise household income and access crisis support

Options

18. It is likely that the further migration of benefits claimants to Universal Credit is likely to create significant demand for food aid, unless additional preventative measures are introduced.

19. It is suggested that the scrutiny review focus on preventative measures which can be taken to prevent demand for food aid within the city reaching unsustainable levels.

20. It is suggested that the review focus on the follow:

- i. Identifying indicators and measures for York to monitor the impact of food poverty
- ii. Identifying areas of best practice within these activities
- iii. Identifying opportunities to coordinate activities to increase impact
- iv. Identifying opportunities to target activities at the lowest income households to more effectively prevent food poverty

21. Given the high proportion of children using food bank provision. It is proposed that preventative measures aimed at households with children are prioritised by the committee. Focus areas could be:

- Take up of Free School Meals
- Take up of Council Tax Support

- Commissioned services which support benefits take up
- Promotion of the take up of early years places for 2 and 3 year olds

22. Potential areas to investigate include:

- The introduction of a swipe card system at All Saints secondary school, which has minimised stigma associated with free school meals
- Take up rates for CTS and work carried out to promote claiming CTS
- Take up rates for early years places for 2 and 3 years olds in areas of deprivation within the city and work carried out to promote take up

Council Plan

23. .Work to prevent food poverty is central to delivering the first goal of the Council Plan 2015-19 'A Prosperous City for All'.

Implications

24. **Financial** There are no financial implications

- **Human Resources (HR)** There are no HR implications
- **Equalities** There are no equalities implications
- **Legal** There are no legal implications
- **Crime and Disorder** There are no crime and disorder implications
- **Information Technology (IT)** There are no IT implications
- **Property** There are no property implications
- **Other**

Risk Management

25. There are no known risks.

Recommendations

26. Members are asked to consider the contents of this report, and consider recommending areas for future work by this Committee or an Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee.

Reason: To inform Members of opportunities to help tackle food poverty.

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Report Approved

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report