

**Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny  
Management Committee**

10 February 2019

Report of the Director of Governance

**Food Poverty Scrutiny Review Interim Report**

**Summary**

1. This report updates the Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee on the work carried out so far by the Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Sub-Committee established to investigate food poverty in the city.

**Background**

2. 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.
3. 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.

4. While gathering information for the Financial Inclusion Scrutiny Review the Task Group established by CSMC to carry out this work on the Committee's behalf began to investigate food poverty and learned that that food poverty is the result of a complex set of structural issues relating to but not restricted to problems of insecure, inadequate and expensive housing, insecure and low paid employment, insufficient social welfare provision, poor health, and an environmentally unsustainable food production and distribution system.
5. The Financial Inclusion Scrutiny Review Task Group had its final meeting on 13 February 2019 when it was agreed that issues around food poverty in the city 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 be considered.
7. A scoping report into food poverty was considered at the first meeting of the new Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny management Committee in June 2019 and after considering a second report in July 2019 the Committee agreed to ahead with the review and resolved to establish an Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Sub-Committee involving members of CSMC, the Health and Adult Social Care Policy and Scrutiny Committee and the Children, Education and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee (CEC).
8. CSMC also agreed the following remit:

**Aim:**

To understand the issues around the apparently increasing levels of food poverty in York

**Objectives**

- 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 and carry out an assessment of current service provision and sustainability
  - iv. Identifying opportunities to target activities at the lowest income households to more effectively prevent food poverty
9. The Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Sub-Committee, comprising Cllrs Fenton, Rowley (CSMC), Perrett (Health), Fitzpatrick and Hollyer (CEC) met for the first time in August 2019 when Cllr Rowley was elected Chair. Members considered the best way to take forward the review and agreed that initially they would like expert advice around food poverty and its causes and poverty in general.
  10. In September 2019 the committee met the Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at the University of York, a research fellow working on food insecurity at York University, who was also Chair of York Food Justice Alliance, and an Analysis Manager at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
  11. The committee noted that food poverty is poverty with **food poverty** being the inability to afford, or have access to, food to make up a healthy diet while **food insecurity** is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptably foods in socially acceptable ways.
  12. Food poverty in the city is growing partly as a consequence of many incomes being too low for families to eat adequately, along with fixed outgoings such as childcare needs, housing or extra costs as a result of illness or disability. Members were told poverty rates were rising and likely to continue to rise and the poverty gap – the gap between incomes of those below the poverty threshold and the threshold – had been growing consistently since 2010.
  13. The committee was reminded by the Emeritus Professor that we did not see the notion of food poverty in York before 2010 and there were no food banks in the city at that time. However, food poverty is now recognised in local communities in reaction to national reductions in welfare benefits and could potentially be attributed to the £30 billion cuts in working age social security since 2010 that are still being rolled out.
  14. The professor stated the roll-out of Universal Credit with delays and waits for payments, cuts in housing benefits, reductions in child tax credit and the working-age benefits freeze were impacting on vulnerable families, including those with working parents. Social security is an

important safeguard for an increasing number of working family members who find that work does not provide enough income to support their family because of the rising cost of living, low and insecure pay, low hours and zero hours contracts.

15. Some of those families find themselves trapped in high-rent accommodation and often have to use money from their food budget to pay household bills such as rent and heating. Council Tax and cuts in Council Tax Support can also have a detrimental impact on the budget of poorer families.
16. It was noted that while minimum income schemes were never high they provided a good safety net, but that was no longer the case as in-work poverty is on the increase, which appears to be a strange phenomenon because the minimum wage has been increasing faster than average wages. Anybody in employment would expect to be better off than being on social security, but the loss of in-work benefits is causing issues.
17. The committee recognised that most people cannot appreciate how people in poverty feel. There is a stigma to visiting a foodbank, and the vast majority of people in poverty do not use them, while many families do not like to claim free school meals.
18. To help move towards a permanent solution to food poverty there could be funding for welfare rights workers in foodbanks and community hubs to give advice and make sure that people coming to foodbanks are getting all their rights and entitlements.
19. Other suggestions were to build more social housing, fund free school meals for all primary schoolchildren and reduce the cost of the school day by discouraging expensive uniform requirements by schools. In addition Members felt that funding for the Welfare Benefits Unit and Citizens Advice York should be maintained to ensure full take-up of what benefits there are. The Council could also consider funding full Council Tax Support to non-pensioners who are on a low income or claiming certain benefits to pay their Council Tax bill.
20. In early October 2019 the Committee met City of York Council's Principal Neighbourhood Management Officer to gain an understanding of the context of the benefits system and what can be done to support groups who work with people on benefits.
21. Members were pleased to note that in York four community hubs had been established at Chapelfields, Foxwood, Tang Hall and Bell Farm, all

of which included food support as part of a wider programme of resident engagement and to promote financial inclusion.

22. All four hubs are able to offer bespoke services with universal access to help overcome difficulties within their own communities. Among the aims of each is to reduce social isolation within the local community by providing free or pay-as-you-feel food within a safe space, providing benefits advice to those who need it and reducing barriers to being able to access appropriate advice.
23. Member learned that in some instances the outcomes of this benefits advice had been significant and in one case an individual had received a one-off back payment of around £9,000 and a £3,000 per year increase in the uptake of benefits.
24. The hubs are effective because they are all community led, they have developed to meet community needs and are as sustainable as they can be. Peer support is particularly important at the hubs as a key is getting across the relevant information on benefits that could be available, and much of this is initially achieved by word of mouth. It was noted that a food offer created a more relaxed atmosphere in which people were more likely to open up and talk about more complex issues.
25. Further support is available at voluntary sector organisations such as Red Tower, which offers pay-as-you-feel hot lunches and a food shop – with no referral needed – as well as advice on issues raised. This is run by local volunteers and is attended by an average of around 65 people per session, including families.
26. A key element of Red Tower is that it connects with a very local community which is able to react to that community's needs for which peer support is important.
27. The Task Group also discussed possible venues for further community hubs, which could include libraries, children or community centres, faith based properties and other community cafes.
28. Members also suggested post school food provision could be looked at. A lot of schools have breakfast clubs but there could also be a need to provide something similar at the other end of the day.
29. In late December 2019 the sub-committee met the Advice Manager, Citizens Advice York (CAY), which, among many other services, issues food bank vouchers to enable people to access an emergency parcel of

three days' of non-perishable food from one of four Trussell Trust food banks in the city.

30. Members were told that there has been a definite increase in requests for food bank vouchers as people realise food aid is available to them. While using a food bank is quite embarrassing at first it is becoming the norm with the main priority being to get some food. People applying for food bank vouchers tend to be low income families, mainly with children.
31. From the people seen by CAY, universal credit is not the main problem, the biggest problem is low income. CAY also has a hardship fund which can be translated into Tesco or Asda vouchers as some people have other needs in addition to food.
32. At CAY everyone is triaged before any vouchers are issued. Some are regular returners, some are referred by the Council and other agencies and CAY staff make sure these people are aware that these vouchers are not an entitlement but are issued due to family circumstances. However, the Advice Manager said that he could not remember anyone being refused a food bank voucher in the past two-and-a-half years.

### **York Foodbank**

33. The Trussell Trust operates York four foodbanks in York that provide emergency supplies to people in need. They also signpost people to local agencies and charities who try to help them break out of poverty.
34. Foodbank sessions:
  - Monday – 11:00-13:00 – Gateway Centre, Front Street, Acomb.
  - Wednesday – 13:00-15:00 – Living Word Church, 189 Huntington Road.
  - Friday – 10:30-12:30 – Cornerstone Methodist Church, 119 Millfield Lane, Tang Hall.
  - Saturday – 10:00-12:00 – The Citadel (Salvation Army building), Gillygate.
35. In addition to providing food, York Foodbank offers support through a Peasholme Charity community advice worker dedicated to foodbank sessions, although this service is being reviewed. Foodbank clients are offered advice and support with issues such as contacting utilities providers, housing providers, and assisting with Personal Independence Payments (PIP) applications. Clients are also signposted to Citizens

Advice York for further advice and support while York Foodbank has contact with the Local Area Coordinators and one usually works at the Friday distribution session.

36. At Trussell Trust foodbanks people are given three days' supply of emergency food via a voucher system. Care professionals such as health visitors, social workers and CAY, can issue vouchers which can be redeemed at one of the four York foodbanks.
37. If someone attends a Trussell Trust foodbank more than three times in a six month period, they are put in touch with local agencies and charities to make a plan to help that person get back on their feet. Recent evidence from a wide range of Trussell Trust foodbanks showed that 49% of foodbank clients only needed one foodbank voucher in a year to help them break out of crisis. Only 15% of people needed more than three food vouchers in a year.
38. In 2018-19 York Foodbank processed 1,729 vouchers to help 4,026 people, including 1,502 children, although Trussell Trust does not claim these are unique users, only the numbers given three days' food, which is the measure of volume. Figures for the current year are not available, but projections indicate they will be similar to the previous two years.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Vouchers</b>	<b>Adults</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Total</b>
2018/19	1,729	2,524	1,502	<b>4,026</b>
2017/18	1,738	2,618	1,647	<b>4,265</b>
2016/17	1,406	2,036	1,343	<b>3,379</b>
2015/16	1,395	2,022	1,259	<b>3,281</b>

39. Annex 1 gives a detailed breakdown of York Foodbank total voucher figures for the past four financial years, the wards from which clients came, the total number of clients in families by adults and children, and includes the crisis type.

### **Red Tower**

40. In January 2020 Cllr Fenton and the Scrutiny Officer visited Red Tower, a Community Interest Company which incorporates a food offer into creative and social activities as well as having specialist advisers on hand on a regular basis.

41. It is run by local people and encourages community participation through three main strands, a café, food shop and craft activities, and while the food offer is the main reason many people started going to Red Tower companionship and crafts have become increasingly important attractions.
42. Red Tower collects surplus food from retailers such as Tesco, Waitrose and Morrisons which it uses to provide a pay-as-you-fee<sup>1</sup> food shop and café every Monday between 11.30am and 2pm. The average attendance is around 60 people every Monday although this rises to around 80 during half term and holidays when families visit with their children. On the day of our visit 59 people attended.

**“It’s brilliant. It has really saved my life”  
– one older lady and Red Tower  
regular.**

43. The number of visitors to Red Tower continues to increase. When the project first started a lot of wall walkers stopped to visit the café, now the vast majority of users are local people rather than visitors and they are staying longer because of the social attractions.

**“My week is divided into two events” –  
69-year-old retired man who lives  
alone. “Monday is Red Tower,  
Thursday Planet Food at Bishopthorpe  
Road. My financial situation is not good  
and so I need to supplement my diet. I  
have got a bag of food, which is  
helpful. I have a loaf of bread so that is  
my daily bread until Thursday.”**

44. At Red Tower on the day of our visit an adviser from Citizens Advice York was there and CAY attends at least once a month, as do Healthwatch, My Sight, Ward Councillors, York Learning, York Older Citizens Advocacy, while the Council’s local area coordinator tries to come every week and the Police and BID Rangers are regular visitors. Such access is important to CAY as many of the people offered advice

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<sup>1</sup> Pay-as-you-fee means that there is no set price on the food provided. People can make a donation of whatever they can afford.



would not visit West Offices.

**“I love coming to The Red Tower on a Monday. I use the pay-as-you-feel shop upstairs and I enjoy doing the crafts. Everyone is really friendly and very welcoming” – Red Tower regular**

45. The project is able to offer free health checks and advice, budgeting advice and benefit and debt advice.
46. Despite many visitors having financial difficulties, the sense of community generated at Red Tower is evident.

**“I have come here to pick up some food for someone else who needs it,” – a pensioner on pension credit. “I believe in helping your neighbours out. They are working poor and can’t really get to places like this. The good thing about this place is that you don’t need a referral like the food bank.”**

47. And news of the success of the Red Tower model is spreading with people visiting from other parts of the city on a regular basis.

### **Visits to a Foodbank and Community Hub**

48. The Ad Hoc Sub Committee has agreed that two members will visit one of the four Trussell Trust foodbanks in the city and two others will visit one of the community hubs to gather information from people who use these services. These visits will be reported once this work has been completed.

### **Corporate Review**

49. Since this review began, other scrutiny committees indicated an interest in undertaking a piece of work around poverty in relation to their own remits.
50. CSMC agreed at its November meeting that rather than individual scrutiny committees independently picking up different aspects of

poverty, it makes sense to look at poverty as a whole, with each scrutiny committee focusing on a separate element of poverty to feed into a final corporate report to be drafted by CSMC in late summer.

51. All the scrutiny committees have now agreed to become involved in this Corporate Review and their work is continuing. This review on food poverty will now feed into the Corporate Review.

### **Consultation**

52. In gathering information for this review the sub-committee has consulted:
  - An Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at the University of York;
  - A research fellow working on food insecurity at York University who is also a former Chair of York Food Justice Alliance;
  - An Analysis Manager at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation;
  - City of York Council's Principal Neighbourhood Management Officer;
  - The Advice Manager at York Citizens Advice;
  - The Project Coordinator of York Foodbank;
  - In addition Members have visited Red Tower and are to visit one of the Trussell Trust foodbanks and one of the community hubs to gather information from people using these services,

### **Initial Analysis**

53. Food poverty has been defined for the purpose of this review as poverty with the inability to afford, or have access to, food to make up a healthy diet.
54. 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.
55. 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.

56. Food aid provision in York can be divided into two separate models. The first model can be characterised as targeted assistance. An example is the Trussell Trust, which runs four foodbank distribution 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.
57. 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, often 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.
58. Figures provided by York Foodbank showing the primary reasons for referral to a Foodbank during the period April 1 2018 to March 31 2019 found the top four referral reasons, from a total of 1,729 vouchers issued, were:
- Low income – 553 vouchers
  - Benefit changes – 306 vouchers
  - Benefit delays – 254 vouchers
  - Debt – 179 vouchers
59. Data shows an increase in demand for Foodbank services in recent years, which have been attributed to changes to the benefits system and in particular the transition to Universal Credit.
60. Given this link between changes in the benefits system and an increase in demand for food aid, it is likely that further increases will be seen in forthcoming years. The Department for Work and Pensions intends 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.

61. The Council plays a significant role in the city in services which alleviate poverty and prevent recourse to food aid. These are directly delivered services and funding of external delivery. For City of York Council, provision which could alleviate poverty and prevent 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
62. Since the start of the Council's community hubs project in 2017, the number of people now attending the hubs is in excess of 200 a week. More than 9,000 meals have been served and shared and 5,460kg of food from supermarkets has been redistributed.
63. By aligning Citizens Advice York activity with the community hub offer CAY has been able to support more than 200 clients with more than 380 issues resulting in excess of £210,000 income gain.
64. Community volunteers involved in running the community hubs have expressed a commitment to the continuation of existing community hubs and there is a clear desire to further develop their offer and reach. Volunteers recognise the difference that the approach is making to the lives of local residents.
65. The residents attending the community hubs have welcomed locally based services and activities and noted the difference this has made to their lives. Aside from the food offer and the positive outcomes with personal finance such as benefits and budgeting advice, many hub users

credit them with increasing social interaction and giving them something to look forward to each week.

66. A common theme of all the community hubs has been a basic food offer on a free of pay-as-you-feel basis and 'food shops' utilising food donated by retailers. The benefits of this have been three fold: forming part of a welcoming offer; helping household finances go further and creating a social setting where people feel relaxed and supported by peers and the wider communities.

### **Options**

67. Having considered the information provided in this report Members can:
- i. Note the content of this report and await the draft final report once the review has been concluded;
  - ii. Identify any other areas, in addition to the planned work detailed in paragraph 49, which need to be investigated by the sub-committee to conclude this review;

### **Council Plan**

68. This report is linked to several priorities in the Council Plan 2019-2023 including Well-paid jobs in an inclusive economy; A Better Start for Children and Young People; Good Health and Wellbeing; Safe Communities and Culture for All and An Open and Effective Council.

### **Risks and Implications**

69. There are no risks or implications associated with the recommendations in this report. Risks and implications arising from the recommendations in the review final report will be addressed accordingly.

### **Conclusions**

70. This review is ongoing and conclusions will be drawn once all the information has been gathered.

### **Recommendation**

71. Having considered the information in this report Members are asked to:
- i. Note the contents of the report and await the draft final report once the review has been concluded;

- ii. Identify other areas, if any, which the sub-committee might wish to investigate in order to conclude the review.

Reason: To inform Members of the progress of the Scrutiny Review into Food Poverty.

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

## Annexes

Annex 1 – York Foodbank data.

## Abbreviations

BID – Business Improvement Area

CAY – Citizens Advice York

CEC – Children, Education and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee

CSMC – Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee