

**HEALTH AND ADULTS
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Monday 1st December 2014**

PRESENT – Councillors O’Keeffe (Chair), H. Akhtar, K. Foster, Jacqueline Slater, Smith and Whittle

Also Present –

Dominic Harrison
Jessica Giles
Martin Eden

Director of Public Health
Dissertation student (Public Health)
Director of Culture, Leisure, Sport and Young
People
Head of Democratic Services
Scrutiny Support Officer

Ben Aspinall

Rebekah Mercer

RESOLUTIONS

22. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2014. Apologies were received from Councillor’s Riley, Brookfield, Hardman and Humphrys, Heather Taylor (Head of Service Committee Support) and Mark Rasburn (Chief Executive, BwD Healthwatch).

RESOLVED –

That the apologies be noted.

23. Minutes of Meeting held on 20th October 2014

RESOLVED –That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20th October 2014 be agreed as a correct record.

24. Declarations of interest in items on this Agenda

Cllr Kerimah Foster declared a personal interest on Agenda Item 4 ‘Food Poverty, Food Relief and Food Resilience’ (minute item 25). Cllr Fosters personal interest was declared as she collected food on behalf of the church and delivered it to the Food Larder, Darwen. The Director of Public Health informed the Committee that Blackburn Foodbank was the chosen charity of the Public Health Department.

25. Food Poverty, Food Relief and Food Resilience

The Committee was provided with the report ‘Food Poverty, Food Relief and Food Sustainability’ by Director of Public Health for their information. The Director advised the Committee that the salient message around food poverty

was; that it could not be separated from the issue of poverty itself, as the root causes were the same but the consequences were that individuals could not afford to feed themselves and their families.

The Director of Public Health highlighted that there was an estimated 13 million people who lived in poverty in the UK, and half of these were working families with a low income. The Director advised that it was important to note that in the last decade, the number of people in poverty that lived in private rented housing had doubled; and as many residents within Blackburn with Darwen lived in privately rented accommodation, a large percentage of residents that came under that statistic.

The Committee heard that the population of Blackburn with Darwen, as with many other deprived areas, was particularly susceptible to poverty. The Director of Public Health advised Members that in response to concerns that an increasing number of residents were experiencing food poverty; the Trussle Trust had developed the local infrastructure and co-ordination of 'Emergency Food for Local People in Crisis'.

Members were advised that since it opened in 2012, Blackburn Foodbank had built up over 100 volunteers and had 112 local agencies registered to issue food vouchers to residents in need.

The Director of Public Health informed the Committee that the Trussle Trust had begun to collate information from service users, including why they needed to use the food bank.

Members were informed that from this data, the main reasons identified for food crises were;

- Benefit delays
- Benefit changes and sanctions
- Low income
- Debt

The Director of Public Health indicated that there was a correlation between Welfare Reform and food poverty, and any gaps in the Welfare system left residents vulnerable. Members raised concerns that with benefits being paid a month in arrears, and new benefit sanctions in place, residents could wait up to 3 months before they received any money if there was a mistake with their application, by which point they would be in crisis. Members suggested that this aspect of Welfare Reform should be investigated with a view to lobby Government to make amendments to the Welfare System.

The Committee noted that to date, 14,382 people had received emergency food from Blackburn Foodbank. The Director of Public Health informed Members that alongside the Trussle Trust's Blackburn Foodbank, there were a number of other agencies throughout the borough that provided food to residents, such as Darwen Food Larder and Tauheedul Islam Foodbank.

Members enquired whether there were too many Foodbank outlets, and if it would be better if the number was condensed and the remainder be coordinated by the Council. The Director of Public Health advised that whilst there may be an opportunity for some Foodbanks to be better organised, encouraging the Community to help itself was paramount.

Concerns were raised by Members that Foodbank vouchers only provided the resident with 3 days' worth of food at any one time. Members felt that it was important to question what provisions were in place for residents when that food ran out.

The Director of Public Health informed the Committee that Foodbanks were crucial and critical in a crisis situation but long term, there was a need for people to access sustainable, healthy food.

Members enquired if there were Public Health concerns related to the type of food that was distributed by the Foodbanks, as much of the donated products were high fat foods. The Director of Public Health advised that the Blackburn Foodbank was looking to make arrangements for refrigerated storage areas which would allow them to collect and distribute fresh fruit and vegetables. The Director added that whilst it was highly desirable for healthy foods to be available; often those in food poverty were in need of the calories provided by high fat foods to survive.

The Director of Public Health stated that it would be beneficial to hold a wider scoping exercise to address food sustainability with the mind to develop a Council Poverty Strategy. The Director explained that other Authorities such as Manchester and London had a food strategy in place that dealt with a wide range of food issues which worked across portfolios, and suggested that this approach be adopted by Blackburn with Darwen.

Members felt that it would be helpful for a mapping exercise to take place to create a comprehensive list of emergency food provision in the borough and to look for correlations between Foodbank use and other community issues such as health and crime.

The Director of Culture, Leisure, Sport and Young People suggested to the Committee that administrative support should be provided to those who ran Foodbanks, and lists distributed of the essential items they required to be donated. Members suggested that it would be helpful for such lists to be publicised in the local media, particularly over the festive period.

It was reported that supermarkets had been approached to donate food that would otherwise have been disposed of. The Director of Public Health explained that many companies were happy to donate providing the process was correctly managed. He explained that this would be organised once the Blackburn Foodbank had moved to a bigger premises with better resources.

The Head of Democratic Services suggested to the Committee that representatives from the three main Foodbanks within Blackburn with Darwen and WRAP would be invited to the next meeting of the Committee, and that it would be beneficial for questions to be agreed in advance to allow Members to gain a full understanding of the services provided by these organisations with the aim to question what next?

Members raised concerns that the price of rented accommodation had increased and at a rate that had outstripped the increase in pay; which left residents even more vulnerable to poverty within the borough. It was suggested that this could be taken forward as a recommendation to lobby Government to freeze private rent.

At this point in the meeting, the Director of Public Health introduced Jessica Giles, a dissertation student from Blackburn College. He invited her to highlight for Members potential circumstances which would cause residents to fall into food poverty.

Jessica indicated that there were many reasons residents would turn to a Foodbank. She explained that the prevalence of zero hours contracts at a time when the Government had changed the minimum number of working hours from 16 to 21 per week before working tax credits could be claimed was a major contributing factor to food crisis.

Members heard that advertisement and education were areas in need of improvement; as residents were not aware of the location of Foodbanks, how to be referred to them and were often unaware of how to cook with the food provided to them.

Jessica advised that the location of Foodbanks was also an area of concern as many users would not have access to a car and the cost of public transport could become unaffordable.

The Committee was concerned that there was not enough promotion and education of healthy, sustainable foods. The Head of Democratic Services advised that the Clinical Commissioning Group had developed an App that was due to be rolled out to G.Ps, and that it would be worthwhile requesting that information about Foodbanks be included.

Members were informed that feeding a family on a low budget was extremely difficult and education was fundamental to make it possible. The Director of Public Health advised that as part of the department's initiatives to address access to food, a Lancashire sustainable food plan and Cook and Eat sessions had been developed and had begun to be implemented.

RESOLVED -

1. That the progress of Public Health lead work in relation to food poverty, food relief and food sustainability be noted.

2. That the Executive Member for Health and Adults undertake a wider scoping exercise to capture broader Council policies, commissions and provision with the potential to address food poverty and food sustainability agenda.

26. The Committee's Work Programme

The Head of Democratic Services advised Members that the Committee had two further standing meetings in the municipal calendar.

Members heard that any new work agreed at this meeting must have realistic targets in its ability to be completed by the final meeting of the Committee in March 2015.

The Committee was informed that a further task group to revisit 'Independence through Preventative Support' would be arranged and a list of recommendations be brought forward for the next meeting.

Members noted that the Committee had completed its work programme in the following areas; 'The effective delivery of nationally mandated Public Health Programmes', 'Reducing Health Inequalities in Vulnerable Communities'. However there was still outstanding work to be undertaken on the subjects of Obesity and Social Isolation and Loneliness.

The Head of Democratic Services indicated that it was envisaged that further work would be completed on the two topics of Obesity and reducing health inequalities in vulnerable communities, with recommendations to be presented to the meeting 9th March 2015.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Chair, Vice Chair, the Head of Service and the Head of Democratic Services meet to agree a list of draft Recommendations for circulation to the Committee.
2. That a further briefing be arranged with the Director of Adults Commissioning and Personalisation to discuss Independence through Preventative Support (social isolation and loneliness).

Signed.....

Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were signed

Date.....