

MAYOR & CABINET		
Report Title	Response to Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee on Food Poverty	
Key Decision	No	Item No:
Ward(s)	All	
Contributors	Director of Public Health	
Class	Part 1	Date: 11 March 2020

1. Purpose and summary of the report

- 1.1 This report provides details of the proposal to review and develop a new Food Poverty Action Plan for the borough and consideration of how it can be supported following the endorsement from the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Mayor and Cabinet support the proposals to develop a new food poverty action plans overseen by Lewisham's Food Partnership, as part of the Sustainable Food Cities approach to healthier and sustainable food and the governance arrangements.

3. Policy Context

- 3.1 In October 2019 a report on food poverty and food bank useⁱ was presented to the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee. The report included:

- 3.2 A summary of the levels of food insecurity in London and the borough:

- More than 2.3million Londoners live below the poverty line and the number of people experiencing deeper poverty (household income is 50% or less of median income or below the Minimum Income Standard) has increased over the past 5 years.
- The GLA survey of Londonersⁱⁱ (2018/19) found that low food security was highest in City & East (31%) followed by Lewisham and Greenwich (24 %). Around one in six (17%) parents in London have children living in low or very low food security. This equates to around 400,000 children.
- A briefing paper on food poverty (2014) attempted to describe the scale of food poverty in Lewisham. In 2014 the estimated data showed that 19,000 parents in Lewisham skipped meals so that their children could eat; and 6,000 children in Lewisham sometimes or often go to bed hungry.
- A local studyⁱⁱⁱ identified reasons why people were resorting to using Food Banks e.g. inadequate income due to low wages, reducing welfare benefits, unemployment, temporary loss of income due to work gaps, cash flow problems (for low income self-employed people), or benefit sanctions.

3.3 An escalating trend in Food bank usage across London and Lewisham based on data on food bank use from the Trussell Trust.

- The Trussell Trust food bank network distributed 166,512 three-day emergency food supplies to Londoners in 2018/19, a 24% increase from 2017/18.
- The Trussell Trust report a 20% increase in food bank use in Lewisham for the period of 2018- August 2019 compared with 2017/18.
- Trends suggest that the number of people issued food parcels by the Trussell Trust in Lewisham is almost two and half times higher than in 2014.

3.4 Impact on food poverty on children.

- More than a quarter of children under age 20 in Lewisham live in poverty (HMRC, 2014) and it is estimated that the number of income-deprived children in the borough is over 17,000 (2015).
- Children eligible for free schools meals (FSM) are further disadvantaged during the holidays due to the additional financial pressure on families.
- In Lewisham, there are currently 9369 children on record who are entitled to Free School Meals.

3.5 Method on how London boroughs are measured on what they are doing to improve household food security in the annual Beyond the Food Bank: London Food Poverty Profile report^{iv}.

- The report focuses on 10 areas that are within the influence and control of local councils, which they consider if acted on will improve health and reduce inequality across the capital.
- The policy areas included range from supporting breastfeeding, providing holiday food provision to promoting the London Living wage.
- Lewisham has consistently been in the top 5 boroughs in their actions to tackle food poverty.
- Examples of the local infrastructure and support to tackle food poverty in the borough which include:
 - London Living Wage
 - National Healthy Start Scheme
 - UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative
 - School Holiday Meal Provision in Lewisham
 - Fareshare London

(*For more details on the initiatives listed above please refer to appendix A)

3.6 The current food poverty action plan as part of the Sustainable Food Cities award scheme^v is overseen by a Food Poverty Sub Group which consists of stakeholders including The Trussell Trust, Lewisham Homes, FareShare, Public Health, Chartwells. The sub group is part of Lewisham's Food Partnership which operates as Good Food Lewisham.

3.7 The action plan is based on the indicators measured in the Beyond the Food Bank report. There have been some notable successes from the work of the partnership including:

- Sharing information on the social supermarket model that led to the development of the People's Supermarket on the Evelyn Estate formed in February 2019 following concerns related to food poverty on the estate.
- Members of the Lewisham Food partnership (Good Food Lewisham) worked together with no additional funding to deliver a holiday programme in 2018.

3.8 In addition the impact of Brexit on household food purchases with potential rise in food prices may exacerbate the level of food insecurity in the borough and further reduce the accessibility of healthy food. The issue of food poverty was discussed at the Brexit Co-ordination Group meeting in October as part of Lewisham's Brexit Action Plan.

3.9 Lewisham's Corporate Strategy 2018-2022, sets out the borough's ambitions through seven corporate priorities, with several priorities relating to the issue of food poverty. The seven corporate priorities are:

- Open Lewisham - Lewisham is a welcoming place of safety for all where we celebrate the diversity that strengthens us.
- Tackling the housing crisis - Everyone has a decent home that is secure and affordable.
- Giving children and young people the best start in life - Every child has access to an outstanding and inspiring education and is given the support they need to keep them safe, well and able to achieve their full potential.
- Building an inclusive local economy - Everyone can access high quality job opportunities, with decent pay and security in our thriving and inclusive local economy.
- Delivering & defending: Health, Social Care and Support - Ensuring everyone receives the health, mental health, social care and support services they need.
- Making Lewisham greener - Everyone enjoys our green spaces and benefits from a healthy environment as we work to protect and improve our local environment.
- Building safer communities - Every resident feels safe and secure living here as we work together towards a borough free from the fear of crime.

4. Developing a new Food Poverty Action Plan for Lewisham

4.1 Tackling and addressing food poverty in the borough needs a whole systems approach, including taking preventative steps to address the wide range of structural issues that contribute to food insecurity as well as emergency food provision.

4.2 It is recognised that food poverty is closely linked with and as a result of other issues including fuel poverty, low pay, social deprivation, housing and there needs to be an emphasis to incorporate tackling food poverty into other existing strategies and initiatives the wider issues.

- 4.3 A range of partners are already engaged in the process but there is a need to widen the reach to include decision makers and statutory services that can work together to find solutions across multiple fronts, delivered by multiple stakeholders.
- 4.4 The suggested governance arrangements are to provide regular updates to the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee and the Whole Systems Approach to Obesity project board. Each action having a named lead that would report to a strategic steering group. A specific cabinet post for food justice could be beneficial.

5. The proposal

- 5.1 Hold an initial food summit with a wide range of stakeholders chaired by an elected member in mid-May 2020.
- 5.2 Supplement the existing data sources to build a local picture by:
- Mapping food retailers with areas of deprivation and benefit claims data.
 - Conducting surveys and focus groups of individuals (subject to funding).
- 5.3 Establish a working group to consider potential opportunities to address food poverty:
- Agree how the issue of food poverty will be measured, as there are no currently agreed measures in Lewisham. (In April 2020 a national index of food insecurity is to be incorporated into the annual Family Resources Survey run by the Department for Work and Pension (DWP), with the data available in March 2021).
 - Develop a system using validated questionnaires to identify and support those at risk.
 - Use the Beyond the Food Bank Survey to guide local actions and priorities.
 - How to provide dignified solutions that enable people to contribute towards their food costs.
 - Consider expanding models such as the People's Supermarket.
 - Continue raising awareness of the Healthy Start Scheme, Lewisham Free Vitamin D Scheme and the UNICEF Baby Friendly initiative.
 - Explore ways in which holiday meal provision can be funded across the borough.
 - Work on increasing the uptake of free school meals.
 - Widen the free school meal offer to all children of families with no recourse to public funding (NRPF)
- 5.4 Work on improving cross-service communication across Lewisham and develop tailored interventions aimed at supporting the following groups of people that can be at a higher risk of food poverty.
- Pregnant women

- Children and young people
- Elderly people
- Refugee and Asylum seeking and newly arrived migrant communities'
- People experiencing homelessness
- People reliant on universal credit and benefits as their main source of income
- The 'working poor'

5.5 The working group to oversee the development of a draft action plan by August 2020 with stakeholder consultation in September. The final food poverty action plan to be submitted to the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee on the 4 November.

5.6 Dissemination and implementation of the plan in November 2020.

6. Equalities Implications

6.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

6.2 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

6.3 The Council considers the role of the third sector as crucial in the delivery of these functions and the wider promotion of equality. As local, community led organisations members of the third sector are well placed to identify, and address, specific needs and the council considers this an important role for the sector.

6.4 Inequalities in food poverty persist in relation to deprivation age and pregnancy. The new food poverty action plans aims to reduce inequalities by developing tailored interventions for these population groups.

7. Environmental Implications

There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

9. Financial implications

9.1 There are no financial implications at this stage.

10. Crime and Disorder Implications

10.1 There are no crime and disorder implications.

11. Conclusion

11.1 There is some good work taking place across Lewisham to increase food security. In capturing this activity and increasing opportunities for networking and awareness raising, both in the identification of those in need and, of the activities available, establishing an updated food poverty action plan and strategy is the next step in developing a strategic approach to addressing food poverty and ensuring fair, sustainable food provision in the borough.

If there are any queries on this report please contact Gwenda.Scott@Lewisham.gov.uk

12. References

ⁱ Report of Food Poverty and Food Bank use in Lewisham

<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s68125/06FoodBanksSSCSC091019.pdf>

ⁱⁱ GLA survey of Londoners <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/survey-of-londoners-headline-findings>

ⁱⁱⁱ Goldsmith's University of London 'Putting Food on the Table'

^{iv} Beyond the Food Bank: London Food Poverty Profile

<https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpoverty/profile/>

^v Sustainable Food Cities <http://sustainablefoodcities.org/>

Children's Future Food Inquiry <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Childrens-Future-Food-Inquiry-report.pdf>

Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: The profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain.

https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/07/OU_Report_final_01_08_online2.pdf

London Food Poverty

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/final_london_food_strategy.pdf

London Poverty Profile 2017 <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/londons-poverty-profile-2017/>

Appendix A

- **Fareshare London**

Fareshare redistributes surplus food from the food industry to charities which turn it into meals to support vulnerable people. It raises awareness with local organisations, corporations and businesses on the quantity of surplus food available, as well as encouraging them to become a member of Fareshare and to source /supplement their food supply from the surplus. Fareshare London based in Deptford supports 224 charities and community groups across the capital.

- **National Healthy Start Scheme**

Healthy Start is the UK wide food welfare scheme that provides food vouchers and free vitamins to young and low income pregnant women and families with children aged up to 4 years. The scheme offers eligible women and families' vouchers worth £3.10 a week (or £6.20 for a baby in the first year) to spend on:

- Cows' milk
- Plain fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables
- First stage infant formula milk

The Healthy Start scheme has been reported by both healthcare professionals and families to play a vital role in ensuring access to nutritious food, improving diets, and lessening the strain on household budgets.

Nationally and London wide the take up rate for the Healthy Start Scheme is declining. Only 53% of those eligible are accessing the Healthy Start vouchers in Lewisham, therefore there is an opportunity to increase access to all eligible families.

Current estimates suggest that in Lewisham £312,000 of Healthy Start vouchers are unclaimed annually

- **UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative – Lewisham**

Breastfeeding protects both the short-term and long-term health of both mother and baby, and is a more cost-effective way to feed a baby than buying infant formula.

Breastfeeding is a free, natural, renewable, safe resource which helps to minimise any effects of environmental exposure.

Breastfeeding helps alleviate many of the health inequalities seen within communities. The milk of a mother from a deprived background is just as good as the milk of a mother living in affluence.

Lewisham has the highest rate of exclusive breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks when compared with its statistical neighbours across London and England.

Lewisham has achieved the prestigious UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative Stage 3 (full) accreditation for both community and maternity services.

- **London Living Wage**

Lewisham is a living wage accredited borough and this provides opportunities to work with other employers and contractors to pay the living wage, thus increasing household income levels.