

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD			
Report Title	Voluntary and Community Sector Response to Poverty, with a Focus on Food Poverty		
Contributors	Tony Nickson, Voluntary Action Lewisham Dr Roger Green, Goldsmith's College, University of London.	Item No.	12
Class	Part 1	Date:	3 July 2014
Strategic Context	Food poverty and insecurity are becoming increasingly visible in Lewisham, affecting the diet, nutrition, mental health and wellbeing of its citizens. These issues are of central concern to Lewisham's Health & Wellbeing strategy and are reflected in its strategic priorities.		

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform the Board about independent community responses to poverty in the Borough, with a focus on food poverty; to present findings from Goldsmith's College researchers on the use and operation of Food Banks in the Borough; and to invite the Board to support a 'food summit' to bring together community members, public and voluntary services to address food poverty in Lewisham and identify ways to improve support and co-ordination of voluntary and community action in this area of need.

2. Recommendations

Members of the Health and Wellbeing Board are recommended to:

- Acknowledge the issue of food poverty in the Borough, as indicated by the experiences of local voluntary and community organisations and initial research findings presented;
- Support and endorse a discussion, to be initiated by VAL and partners, with all key stakeholders, including food bank users, to discuss approaches towards solutions to food poverty and insecurity and further investigate why people are increasingly accessing food banks and other food distribution points, with the aim of improving co-ordination and effective support for voluntary action locally in addressing food poverty in the Borough.

3. Strategic Context

- 3.1 Lewisham's Voluntary and Community Sector has been an active contributor to the development of Lewisham's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

3.2 The strategy recognises that:

“Voluntary and Community organisations and groups across the Borough provide extensive depth and reach into our communities and through their work provide intelligence on community needs, have knowledge about issues that affect health and wellbeing and represent the voice of our communities”.

3.3 Lewisham’s Health & Wellbeing Strategy recognises healthy eating as a key determinant of health and wellbeing. The JSNA articulates the complex interaction of social exclusion, unemployment and poverty that can lead to vicious circles of isolation, exclusion and inequality that impact on mental health and wellbeing – also a key priority for the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

3.4 Lewisham has one of the highest rates of child poverty nationally. 17,900 children in Lewisham live in poverty, according to the 2013 Health profile for Lewisham, published annually by Public Health England. Lewisham has some of the most deprived areas in the country – and according to the various measures of multiple deprivation, parts of the Borough are becoming more deprived on these indicators. The research that supported Lewisham’s Better Start bid shows that in some areas, almost 40% of households are in poverty.

3.5 The Sustainable Community Strategy priorities can be found here:

<http://www.lewishamstrategicpartnership.org.uk/docs/SummarySCS.pdf>

3.6 The Health and Wellbeing Strategy can be found here:

<http://www.lewisham.gov.uk/myservices/socialcare/health/improving-public-health/Pages/Health-and-wellbeing-strategy.aspx>

3.7 The JSNA can be found here:

www.lewishamjsna.org.uk

4. Background

4.1 The numbers of people accessing food banks nationally are increasing. Recent estimates indicate that over 4.7 million people are now in food poverty in the UK. The Trussell Trust, which runs over 400 food banks across the UK, has seen a 170% rise in people accessing Trussell Trust food banks in the past 12 months to a figure of nearly 350,000 people. Whereas the Church Action on Poverty/Oxfam report estimated that 500,000 people in the UK were in receipt of food parcels (2013). In Lewisham, the Trussell Trust reports a fourfold increase in Food Bank usage, with numbers growing from 600 for April 2012 to April 2013 to 2600 between April and December last 2013 (Trussell Trust statistics)

- 4.2 The Centre for Community Engagement Research, Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies (STaCS), Goldsmiths, University of London has undertaken a small scale local study to explore and understand the growing issues of food poverty and food banks in the London Borough of Lewisham.
- 4.3 There are three food banks and several distribution points currently operating in Lewisham, along with a number of other organisations that are not food banks but distribute food and provide meals in the borough. Mounting anecdotal evidence from the community suggests that the increase in the number of people experiencing hunger, financial hardship and accessing food banks in Lewisham and across the UK is greater than even the Trussell Trust figures would suggest. (Cooper, and Dumbleton, 2013).
- 4.4 The aim of STaCS' small scale qualitative study is to enable Voluntary Action Lewisham and its partners to gain a better sense of the experience and impact of food poverty in this part of South East London and to support their work with communities across Lewisham who are experiencing financial and related difficulties.

5. Voluntary Sector Response to Poverty: Food Poverty in focus

- 5.1 In response to increasing food poverty, local communities in Lewisham have organised effectively very rapidly. In less than 2 years, voluntary and community organisations have set up seven 'Food Bank' outlets, run by different groups across the borough. In addition, many more voluntary and community groups are providing other kinds of support with providing food (such as hostels, day centres, community cafes) that does not appear in Food Bank use statistics.
- 5.2 Faith-based social action has been a significant driver in the development of food banking nationally. In Lewisham, food banking is provided by both faith groups and non-faith independent local activism. Different models are employed, from vouchers obtained via referral agencies, to non-voucher queuing systems and word-of-mouth referral, to low cost purchasing with no referral or voucher system. Volunteers are essential for the operation of all the centres in the Borough.
- 5.3 All Food Bank providers in Lewisham contacted in the research considered their action in providing free or low cost food to Lewisham citizens to be an emergency response, and most see it as a strictly temporary one. However, the need for emergency food support appears to be growing, and there is concern that what was intended to be a stop gap response will become a more permanent feature of welfare provision in the Borough.

- 5.4 Centres are valued by users as points of social contact and advice, as well as for emergency food provisions, and organisations are now responding ad hoc by providing advice services on site; by referring to other services through networks; and by setting up self-help and education schemes, such as allotment development and healthy eating education.
- 5.5 Other activity undertaken by voluntary and community organisations (other than the direct provision of food via a Food Bank) focuses on education, access to cheap, fresh or home grown food, and on building self-reliance (activity includes food co-ops, a pensioners buying co-op, community gardening/allotment scheme, basic education on 'how to shop').
- 5.6 The small local study by Goldsmith's University of London *Putting Food on the Table* has identified some of the reasons why local people are resorting to Food Banks in Lewisham. Reasons highlighted are similar to the findings of other research and monitoring reports, such as those from the Trussell Trust. Inadequate income is a major feature - 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. Some have found themselves without income for several weeks. Rising prices of daily items and higher household fuel bills were also reported as factors forcing a cut-back on expenditure on food. Stories of personal despair and helplessness frequently accompany reports of these difficulties.

6. How do we respond?

- 6.1 VAL, with STaCS at Goldsmith's, proposes to hold a borough-wide discussion (a Food Summit?) of all key stakeholders, including food bank users, to discuss the question of food poverty and insecurity, and why people are increasingly accessing food banks and other food distribution points, and invites the Health and Wellbeing Board to endorse and support this initiative.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications currently identified. There are likely to be costs associated with holding the discussion proposed in 6.1.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 8.2 Members of the Board are reminded that under Section 195 Health and Social Care Act 2012, health and wellbeing boards are under a duty to encourage integrated working between the persons who arrange for health and social care services in the area.

9. Crime and Disorder Implications

9.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

10. Equalities Implications

10.1 The impact of food poverty and insecurity impacts on health inequalities across all equalities groups. The Health and Wellbeing Strategy recognises that health inequalities impact on some groups to a greater extent than others.

10.2 From the limited study undertaken by STaCS at Goldsmiths, initial findings show that the ethnicity of food bank users varied between the 3 main food bank providers, and indicate that not all of Lewisham's communities are being reached through this activity. Further work on the extent of poverty among different communities is needed, and should support discussions in the proposed 'Food summit'

10.3 An Equality Analysis Assessment (EAA) has not been carried out. Ethical permissions for community research were obtained by STaCS report authors under University of London protocols.

10.4 The proposed 'Food Summit' will be an opportunity to address the impact on the 9 protected characteristics and Equality Obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

11. Environmental Implications

11.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

12. Conclusion

12.1 Food poverty is becoming increasingly visible nationally and locally. Voluntary and community organisations in Lewisham have organised rapidly to address this need. Local centres are becoming a focus not only for emergency food provision but also for social contact and access to advice and support services for those with multiple needs. Support for voluntary action to alleviate food poverty in the Borough will benefit from co-ordination of support services, including advice and other professional and statutory services across the Borough. A multi-stakeholder discussion, to be initiated by VAL and partners, is proposed, with the aim of improving co-ordination and effective support for voluntary action locally in addressing food poverty in the Borough. The Health and wellbeing Board is asked to endorse and support this initiative.

Background Documents

<http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats> (as accessed May 2014)

Eastlondon lines website – stats from Trussell Trust:

<http://www.eastlondonlines.co.uk/2014/04/the-rise-of-the-foodbank-6500-eastlondonlines-residents-have-been-forced-to-visit-foodbanks-in-last-year/>

(as accessed May 2014)

Cooper, N. and Dumbleton S. (2013) *Walking the breadline. The scandal of food poverty in 21st century Britain*, Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam.

and Oxfam. <http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/walkingthebreadline/info/report/walkingthebreadlinefile>

Cooper, Purcell, & Jackson, *Below the Breadline*, Church Action on Poverty, Oxfam GB, Trussell Trust 09 Jun 2014

<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/below-the-breadline-the-relentless-rise-of-food-poverty-in-britain-317730>

Lewisham Health Profile 2013:

<http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/item.aspx?RID=127142>

If you have any difficulty in opening the links above or those within the body of the report, please contact Kalyan DasGupta

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