

SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE			
<b>Report Title</b>	Food Poverty and Food Bank use in Lewisham		
<b>Contributors</b>	Director of Public Health		
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	<b>Item 6</b>	Date: 09.10.19

## 1. Purpose and summary of the report

- 1.1 This report provides data from the Trussell Trust relating to food bank users in Lewisham and some key reasons why food banks are accessed. A summary on the food banks in Lewisham, their location is also included. An overview of current work supporting tackling food insecurity is summarised, as well as the work opportunities to consider that will help to tackle the issue of food poverty locally.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the committee acknowledge the issue of food poverty in the borough and support the review of the food poverty action plans overseen by Lewisham's Food Partnership, as part of the Sustainable Food Cities approach to healthier and sustainable food.

## 3. Policy Context

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 In 2017, the Lewisham poverty commission was convened to understand and tackle the poverty found by residents and communities in Lewisham. The Commission agreed recommendations and actions for the Council and other local partners to alleviate poverty in Lewisham, mitigate against its negative effects and strengthen people's resilience. The Commission focused on four areas:
- supporting residents to access decent work;
  - tackling child poverty;
  - improving the local housing market; and
  - strengthening support within communities.
- 3.3 A briefing paper on food poverty (2014) attempted to describe the scale of food poverty in Lewisham with a picture emerging of tens of thousands of people having to compromise on food and a smaller but extensive proportion going hungry. The findings included estimated data showing that 19,000 parents in Lewisham skip meals so that their children can eat; and 6,000 children in Lewisham who sometimes or often go to bed hungry.

- 3.4 A small local study by Goldsmith's University of London '*Putting Food on the Table*' identified some reasons why local people were resorting to using Food Banks in Lewisham. Reasons highlighted were similar to the findings of other research and monitoring reports, such as those from the Trussell Trust 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.
- 3.5 The Mayor of London committed to measuring food security in London as part of London's Food Strategy. Food insecurity is defined as 'at times a person's food intake is reduced and their eating patterns are disrupted because of a lack of money and other resources for obtaining food'. Individuals and families that suffer from food insecurity can range from absolute poverty with no resources to working families struggling with low or unpredictable incomes.
- 3.6 Addressing food insecurity needs to consider both physical access to good food as well as affordability. 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. 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.
- 3.7 Lewisham developed food poverty action plans as part of the Sustainable Food Cities award scheme. Sustainable Food Cities uses a joined up approach to transform local food culture and food system. [Six key areas](#) are addressed including tackling food poverty, diet-related ill health and access to affordable healthy food. In April 2019, Lewisham achieved the bronze award, and now aims to work towards the silver award.
- 3.8 As part of the Sustainable Food Cities award programme, there is a Food Poverty Sub Group which consists of stakeholders including The Trussell Trust, Lewisham Homes, FareShare, Public Health, Chartwells.
- 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. Measuring Food Insecurity**

4.1 The UK government currently does not measure household food insecurity/food poverty levels but 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.

4.2 The GLA Survey of Londoners (2018/19) based on responses from 6,601 participants has shown high levels of food insecurity amongst adults and children living in London.

#### **4.3 Key findings from the survey:**

- Adult food insecurity: Around one in five Londoners (21%) – have low or very low levels of food security.
- Low food security was highest in City & East (31%) followed by Lewisham and Greenwich (24 %) and lowest in the constituency areas of Merton & Wandsworth (12 %) and South West (13 %).
- Children's food insecurity: 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.
- The majority of those experiencing low or very low food security are in work (60% working either full-time or part-time).
- Single parents (46%), Londoners in the lowest income quintile (44%), unemployed Londoners (40%), Black Londoners (39%) and disabled Londoners (34%) are most likely to experience low or very low food security.

- The poorest Londoners on the lowest incomes are also the most likely to have low food security. 62% of people with inadequate access to food owe money on a loan or credit agreement.
- Some groups of people are particularly vulnerable to not having money to buy enough food, which include single parents, unemployed people and disabled Londoners.
- Nearly half (45%) of Londoners living in low food security also reported to be socially isolated.

## **5. Food bank use in Lewisham**

- 5.1 The primary source of data on food bank use in Lewisham is the Trussell Trust.
- 5.2 The Trussell Trust Food Bank Network has grown from 30 food banks operating in 2009, to over 420 in 2017, consisting of over 1350 distribution centres. The number of instances of people receiving emergency food parcels through the network has also grown from about 61,500 in 2010/11 to over 1.18 million in 2016/17 (The Trussell Trust 2017).
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 The Trussell Trust report a 20% increase in food bank use in Lewisham for the period of 2018- August 2019 compared with 2017/18.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 Data shows that residents living in the Bellingham, Perry Vale, Forest Hill, Sydenham and Crofton Park wards were issued the most food aid parcels.
- 5.7 Beneficiaries that accessed food banks the most were aged between 25-64 years old. The age group of child beneficiaries accessing food banks the most was 5-11 years old. (This information was from aggregate data at South London level)
- 5.8 Single people, followed by single parents' and families were the highest users of food banks. (This information was from aggregate data at South London level).
- 5.9 In-depth research on food bank use amongst over-65s hasn't been done. Anecdotal explanations from the food bank network suggest some pensioners may have support networks from friends and family (e.g. carers) that delay or prevent the need to be referred to a food bank, pensioners may also feel more reluctant to go to a food bank than other age groups.
- 5.10 Nationally, there is little consensus as to why food bank usage has increased so rapidly. Changes to social security are one commonly cited explanation. Food bank

usage increased concurrently with many changes to welfare and reductions in local authority budgets, and there is concern, and increasingly, evidence that these are linked.

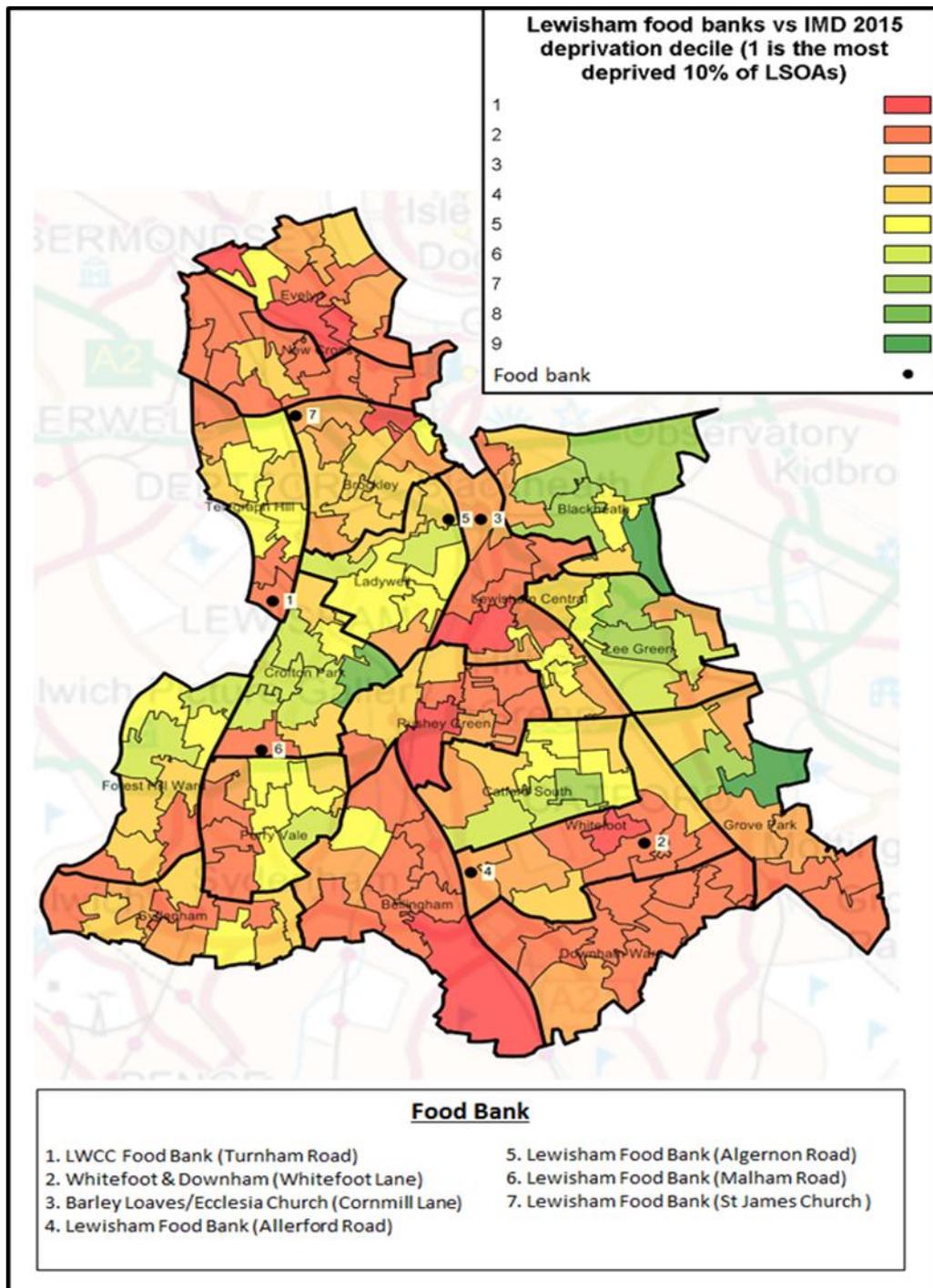
- 5.11 The crisis that triggers a food bank referral in Lewisham is recorded by Lewisham food bank. In 2018-19, low income, benefit delays and benefit changes were recorded as the top three reasons for referral to a food bank. These reflect the main reasons for referral reported by the national network.
- 5.12 The fast rise in demand for food aid, as reflected in routine data collected on food bank usage in the Trussell Trust Food bank Network, raises questions about how many people face insecure access to food and experience periods of going without food.

## **6. Food banks in Lewisham**

- 6.1 The Trussell Trust issue food parcels to people who are referred by local professionals such as children's centres, housing associations, welfare agencies and community mental health teams who are best placed to assess need. Referred clients can bring the voucher to their nearest food bank centre where it can be exchanged for a parcel containing a minimum of three days 'nutritionally balanced food
- 6.2 The Trussell Trust operate four food banks in Lewisham:
  - 1. Hope Centre (Forest Hill)-Open Wednesdays 1000 – 1200 and Fridays 1200 - 1400
  - 2. St James Church (New Cross)-Open Mondays 1200 – 1400
  - 3. Lewisham Tabernacle (Lewisham)-Open Tuesdays 1200 - 1400 and Thursdays 1200 - 1400
  - 4. Elim Pentecostal Church (Catford)-Open Saturdays 1000-1200
- 6.3 The Esther Community Enterprise run three food banks in Lewisham.
  - 1. LWCC Food Bank (Telegraph Hill)-Open Wednesdays 1900–2030
  - 2. Whitefoot & Downham (Whitefoot)-Open Thursdays 1900–2030
  - 3. Barley Loaves / Ecclesia Church (Lewisham Central)- Open Tuesdays 1930–2030
- 6.4 Food banks in Lewisham work alongside other local agencies that can provide long term support to help address some of the issues behind the reasons for crisis situations that people may face. Agencies include: Citizens Advice, housing support officers, children's centres, health visitors, social services and other local charities.

6.5 The location of food banks in Lewisham suggest that they are located near areas with the highest deprivation levels. Refer to image 1 below.

Image 1:



## 7. School Holiday Meal Provision in Lewisham

7.1 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). A briefing paper on food poverty published in 2014 estimated that:

- 19,000 parents have skipped a meal so their children in Lewisham could eat.
- Between 5,000 and 6,000 children in Lewisham sometimes or often go to bed hungry due to a lack of food or have had to skip meals as there is not enough food to eat. Children eligible for free schools meals (FSM) are further disadvantaged during the holidays due to the additional financial pressure on families.

7.2 In Lewisham, there are currently 9369 children on record who are entitled to Free School Meals

7.3 Research has shown that children who do not access enrichment activities and nutritious food over the summer holidays return to school several weeks, if not months, intellectually behind their peers who have accessed good food and activities.

7.4 Members of the Lewisham Food partnership (Good Food Lewisham) worked together with no additional funding to deliver a holiday programme in 2018. Meals were delivered to 9 sites and over the course of the week approximately 500 young people were provided with a hot lunch.

7.5 This year, a holiday meals programme was delivered by Lewisham Council, Youth First and Chartwells, who are the current school catering contractor. Approximately 8,500 hot meals, 3,500 packed lunches and ingredients were supplied over the six week period. 1965 individuals accessed a meal through this programme. This programme was funded using performance penalty monies from the schools catering contract.

7.6 Approximately 50% of beneficiaries were from schools with very high (more than 50%) FSM eligibility.

## **8. Local Infrastructure and Support to Tackle Food Poverty**

- **The People's Supermarket**

8.1 The People's Supermarket on the Evelyn Estate was formed in February 2019 following concerns related to food poverty on the estate. Residents were reporting to having to make a choice between feeding themselves and their family, heating their home, purchasing necessary items such as school uniforms and paying their rent.

8.2 The People's Supermarket offers an affordable way to ensure families are eating and eating healthily. It is something that residents want to be a member of as it also provides additional support and an opportunity to socialise with the community.

8.3 Food/stock at the People's Supermarket is provided by Fareshare on the day and on additional days where surplus stock is available. The opportunity to receive surplus

stock, in addition to the weekly shop, is put out to members through a WhatsApp group. This means most days members have access to food.

- 8.4 Members pay £3.50 a week and receive approximately £30 worth of food, they can also stock up on sanitary projects which are donated.
- 8.5 The store is run entirely by volunteers with admin support from Lewisham Homes. Members have shared information they may not feel comfortable disclosing to Lewisham Homes staff, these include safeguarding and welfare concerns (e.g. domestic violence, lack of cooking facilities). These concerns are picked up by Lewisham Homes and the members are supported.
- 8.6 The People's Supermarket allows members to socialise, making friends and improving community cohesion on the estate.

- **Fareshare London**

- 8.7 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**

- 8.8 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.

- 8.9 In addition specific vitamin preparations for mums to be, new mums and children under 4 years old, are offered via the scheme. Lewisham Council's public health team jointly with the NHS Lewisham CCG commission the universal Lewisham Free Vitamin D Scheme. Therefore, making multivitamins available to all new mums and children under 4 years of age.
- 8.10 Since April 2019, all women booking their pregnancy at University Hospital Lewisham have been issued one bottle of multi-vitamins containing vitamin D. Women are advised to collect subsequent bottles of vitamins from a range of participating pharmacies.
- 8.11 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.

- 8.12 Lewisham Council's Public Health team promote the Healthy Start Scheme locally and provide training to Health Visitor, Midwifery and Children's Centre teams.
- 8.13 Public Health together with the markets team have started working on a pilot to recruit market fruit and vegetable stall holders to accept Healthy Start vouchers.
- 8.14 Nationally and London wide the take up rate for the Healthy Start Scheme is declining. Only 52% of those eligible are accessing the Healthy Start vouchers in Lewisham, therefore there is an opportunity to increase access to all eligible families.
- 8.15 The Draft London Food Strategy includes a commitment from the Mayor to increase the uptake of Healthy Start vouchers across London so that 80% of those eligible receive the vouchers (Mayor of London, 2018).
- 8.16 The draft strategy also reported that increasing uptake could boost London's healthy food economy by £2.5 million a year and improve the nutritional health of pregnant women and new families on low incomes.
- 8.17 Current estimates suggest that in Lewisham £312,000 of Healthy Start vouchers are unclaimed annually

- **UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative – Lewisham**

- 8.18 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 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.
- 8.19 Lewisham has the highest rate of exclusive breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks when compared with its statistical neighbours across London and England.
- 8.20 Lewisham has achieved the prestigious UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative Stage 3 (full) accreditation for both community and maternity services
- 8.21 Many women who want to breastfeed do not get the support they need and the impact of this on poor households who struggle to afford costly formula milks is greater.

- **London Living Wage**

- 8.22 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.

## **9. Opportunities to Tackle Food Poverty in Lewisham**

9.1 The following are potential opportunities for further work to address food poverty in Lewisham:

- Work with the Lewisham Poverty Commission to plan and align actions
- Develop a system using validated questionnaires to identify and support those at risk
- Agree how the issue of food poverty will be measured, as there are no currently agreed measures in Lewisham
- Use the Beyond the Food Bank Survey to guide local actions and priorities
- Update the Lewisham's Food Poverty Action Plan
- Agree a structure to coordinate local initiatives addressing food poverty
- 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

## **9. Equalities Implications**

9.1 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.

9.2 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.

9.3 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.

## **10. Environmental Implications**

10.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

## **11. Conclusion**

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](mailto:Gwenda.Scott@Lewisham.gov.uk)

## 12. References

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.

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Beyond the Food Bank: London Food Poverty Profile

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

London Food Poverty

[https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/final\\_london\\_food\\_strategy.pdf](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/>

Sustainable Food Cities

<http://sustainablefoodcities.org/>