

BOROUGH SERVICES POLICY AND REVIEW PANEL

Meeting held on Monday, 14 September 2015 at the Concorde Room, Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr Barbara Hurst (Chairman)
Cllr A.R. Newell (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr A.M. Ferrier
Cllr C.P. Grattan
Cllr S.J. Masterson
Cllr M.J. Roberts

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Terry Bridgeman, Councillor David Clifford and Councillor David Welch.

8. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15th June, 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

9. FOOD BANKS

The Panel welcomed Mr. Jamie Beaton, Community Development Worker, Mrs. Jane Newton, The Larder, Holy Trinity Church, Aldershot and Mr. Mike Shea, Farnborough Foodbank, who had all been invited to attend the meeting to give an update on Foodbanks at a county and local level.

Mr. Beaton commenced by giving an overview of the report commissioned by the Bill Sargent Trust on the work of foodbanks in Hampshire. A seminar had been held in Winchester in July, 2015 which had been attended by representatives from foodbanks, housing associations, voluntary organisations and Officers and Members for local councils and the County Council. It was advised that, whilst Hampshire contained some of the most affluent areas in the United Kingdom, it had also experienced a remarkable rise in foodbank provision and use. It was reported that there were at least 20 foodbanks or similar projects in Hampshire, including some in a number of the wealthiest areas. The research in the report contained information from eleven foodbanks in the County from which workers, users and volunteers had been interviewed; therefore, it was a small scale study and the findings should be considered in that context. Users interviewed were of mixed gender and reflected users presenting with complex issues such as mental health issues, learning disabilities, physical health issues, and substance abuse.

It was noted that most users hit crisis point before asking for assistance, triggers included benefit delays, changes to benefits, jobcentre sanctions, reductions in working hours and prolonged periods of illness. Most people would cope, until that

final crisis trigger pushed them to ask for extra help, but users generally felt ashamed and embarrassed at having to ask. It was noted that budgeting was rarely considered an issue; most users, volunteers and workers had reported that, despite careful budgeting and frugal living, most users incomes, be it wages or benefits, had not provided enough to meet their basic needs

The Panel noted that benefits sanctions emerged strongly as a theme, within the report, as a tipping point for crisis. Stories, from users, suggested that individuals were ending up in crisis after being sanctioned as a result of unavoidable circumstances, such as prolonged periods of illness and hospitalisation. In addition to sanctions, some individuals were slipping through the safety net of support altogether due to the rigid rules and procedures of support agencies and a lack of flexibility or tailoring of support to individual circumstances. As a result, people could fall deeper into arrears, with rent and bills creating more debt. A lack of knowledge of entitlements might also be causing issues.

Foodbanks had a practical impact on users, often providing food packages to individuals who had gone for some time with very little or inadequate food. Users often suffered from low self-esteem, anger, frustration and a sense of helplessness, not knowing where they would find the money to feed their families. In some cases, individuals had no other support network than the foodbank and felt isolated and lonely.

The Panel was advised of the different ways in which individuals tried to avoid crisis, even though a few users regarded foodbanks as part of their regular landscape of support, most did everything they could to avoid needing food parcels. Several users commented on how they lived frugally and budgeted carefully, in one case, an individual had considered declaring themselves bankrupt, some actively sought work, and others sought to save whatever they could to help clear their debts. Often users wanted to give something back by volunteering to help at their local foodbank, others gave financial contributions once they were more financially stable.

It was reported that the use of foodbanks had increased in recent years but appeared to have plateaued in the last twelve months. An increasing number of families with children and people on low incomes had sought help and it had become common to see the “working poor” asking for help. As foodbanks had grown, some had extended their offer to include fresh food stuffs, toiletries and clothing and some had had to take on paid staff and were now renting or borrowing premises.

It was advised that most foodbanks operated on a voucher system or referral basis, meaning that most clients had to be approved before receiving help. Referral agencies included school staff, GPs and housing and welfare advisers. The relationship with Jobcentres varied across the County with some reported as refusing to issue vouchers and make referrals and others more willing to refer their clients. On occasions, foodbank workers would use their discretion and would help users who had not been referred or gave extra help to those in particular need. In addition, foodbank staff, when appropriate, would signpost clients to other sources of help.

It was noted that, whilst a foodbank could offer a lifeline in times of crisis, the help that could be offered was limited. There was little capacity for service users to resolve entrenched and long term problems and foodbank staff were aware of their limitations and had clear boundaries of what they could and could not do.

The Report had identified that accommodation had become an issue for most foodbank providers and eight of the eleven interviewed had mentioned this as an issue. It was noted that food was being stored in various places including shipping containers, rented space and, in one case, a vacant shopping centre unit.

The Panel was informed that the general consensus was that foodbanks would be required in Hampshire for many years to come, if not permanently. Interviewees suggested that a form of social breakdown might be to blame for the need and sited fragmentation of family life and traditional roles, and the disappearance of basic skills such as cooking and budgeting as contributing factors to the breakdown. When posed with a question about the future of foodbanks in Hampshire, a number of questions were raised, including:

- What role should foodbanks in Hampshire play in the wider network of social support?
- Should relationships with statutory and voluntary agencies become closer?
- Should foodbanks collect and share more data so that it is possible to understand trends and challenges on a county-wide basis?
- Given the strong view among foodbank workers that need will continue and may grow, were Hampshire's food banks equipped to sustain their work?
- Do foodbanks have the capacity and resource to cope with unexpected demands?
- Do foodbanks need a better understanding of the current and emerging policy context

The Panel discussed the report and commented on the size of the study and the need to acquire more data, to gain a better picture of the situation in the county and at a local level.

Mrs. Newton addressed the Panel on the working arrangements of "The Larder", which was run from the Holy Trinity Church, Aldershot. It was advised that The Larder was the only foodbank provision in Aldershot since the closure of the Kings Church, which had provided a similar service. The Larder had been operating for the last 7–8 years and worked on a referral basis only. Food came via donations from the Church and from local schools, especially at harvest time, and had been stored in a cupboard in the Church Hall.

It was noted that all parcels were hand delivered to individuals and currently 3-4 parcels a week were being distributed to each client. Clients were generally single men and couples with mental health or drug and alcohol issues. On occasions, referrals had been made for people from the Nepalese community and food parcels had been prepared to meet their dietary requirements. It was advised that most clients were regular users and came back again and again due to ill health or financial issues.

The Panel was advised that there were three people running The Larder at the present time, but Mrs. Newton would be taking a step back in the future due to other commitments. The Panel discussed the need for foodbank provision in Aldershot and the huge undertaking by volunteers and space requirements to provide a sustainable provision.

Mr. Shea talked to the Panel about the Trussell Trust Farnborough Foodbank provision. It was advised that 3,356 families in both Farnborough and Aldershot had received 33,000 meals during 2014, this equalled three meals a day over a three day period for each person in the family. It was noted that the Trust had tried to set up a satellite branch in Aldershot, but unfortunately it hadn't got the support it required to run effectively, therefore the Farnborough Foodbank served a small number of residents in Aldershot as well.

The donated food was stored at the Brownings Barracks, Aldershot, the building had no refrigeration facilities so only non-perishable food stuffs were stored. It was noted that Costco had donated a lot of fresh fruit and cakes on Fridays, which were then distributed to users on the same day.

The Trust had started a number of initiatives to support a wider range of needs, these included:

- Eat Well Spend Less Course – sponsored by Unilever, this included cookery classes, supermarket psychology and budgeting
- Kitchen Starter Packs – collection of household goods for people being housed for the first time
- Cold Packs - aimed at the homeless population who had no provision to heat/cook food
- Kettle Packs – aimed at users in bed and breakfast accommodation with access to a kettle and/or microwave only
- Clothing Packs – The Trust held a store of children's clothes for those in need

It was advised that the lease on the Brownings Barracks had been for seven years but it was stressed that an exit strategy needed to be determined as the demand for foodbank services was likely to increase in the future. The Panel also discussed the lack of provision in Aldershot and the need to provide support to hard

to reach groups across the Borough. The complex issues surrounding the involvement of the Jobcentre would be considered at the next mid cycle meeting.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Beaton, Mrs Newton and Mr. Shea for their contribution to the meeting.

10. BOROUGH SERVICES BUDGET PORTFOLIO

The Panel welcomed Ms. Amanda Fahey, Head of Finance, who attended the meeting to report on the Budgets within the Panels portfolio to assist in identifying future items for the work programme.

The Panel noted the statutory and discretionary budgets and were also advised on regulatory services which were picked up elsewhere by other Panels or Committees, such as Hackney Carriages. After some discussion, the Panel identified the following items as potential items for future agendas:

- Pollution and Environmental Control – in particular around pollution and the impacts on the Community
- Integrated CCTV – update since the integration with Hart District Council and any impacts/effects caused by the merger
- Troubled Families – update on the current situation
- Grants – in particular Farnborough and Cove War Memorial Hospital Trust – a visit may be made to the facility
- Community Patrol Team – a background note would be given at the mid cycle meeting
- Meals on Wheels – an update would be given at the mid cycle meeting

Further discussion on the identified items would be held at the next mid cycle meeting.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted the current work programme.

The meeting closed at 8.29 pm.

CLLR BARBARA HURST (CHAIRMAN)
