

## **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**



### **SCRUTINY PANEL 1 – FOOD POVERTY**

#### **CORE QUESTIONS – EXPERT ADVISORS**

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review:

- To examine the extent to which individuals and families are experiencing food poverty, the range of contributing factors and the changes that have been made to the way the Council and partners support residents during hardship.
- To review the impact and concentration of food poverty across the Borough of Northampton

The required outcomes are:

- To make informed recommendations to all relevant parties on the most appropriate approaches to take to mitigate the impact of food poverty in Northampton.
- To make recommendations on how the specific issues in relation to food poverty are dealt with from now until the new Unitary Authority.

#### **CORE QUESTIONS:**

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel:

1. In your opinion, what are the main impacts of food poverty?

Poverty as a whole is complex and multi-faceted, there is no single cause or single solution. Families and individuals facing food poverty have often faced many other types or aspects of poverty, including insecure housing, lack of finance fuel (so no heating/lighting/cooking facilities), adequate clothing and essentials. This has a negative impact on physical and mental health, especially if lived experience for several years (or in some cases for multiple generations). In the same way, food poverty increases this spiral of deprivation.

Those accessing emergency food provision are most often desperate and ashamed, at their lowest point. Re:store offers hope, dignity and solutions to a way forward. This can be practical - addressing housing needs, access to benefits, or building skills to work towards employment or become more self-sufficient. Many have reported that they are isolated and unsupported elsewhere, so Re:store also offers emotional and spiritual support and care, through welcoming into a safe non-judgemental environment, listening, signposting to specialist services such as MIND, offering prayer where appropriate, and building peer support.

2. How widespread do you understand food poverty in the borough to be?

Food poverty covers all areas of our borough, and some are more actively mobilised to address their need through food banks, whereas other areas (cultures, age-groups, communities) may be more self-sufficient or support themselves within their own communities. However we do know that Central Northampton has a significantly higher number of clients accessing Northampton Food Bank and our related services than any other area, with more than double the number in the next postcode area.

This Data has been collected from the Distribution Points of Northampton Food Bank across the town (Duston, Eastfield, Spinney Hill, Kings Heath and Central Northampton).

3. In your opinion does food poverty differ across the borough of Northampton and what are the reasons for this?

Attached table to highlight client location. I have a further breakdown. The highest areas of need are as follows (based on 100-400 clients in this postcode area):

NN1 - ALL Northampton Central

NN2 6 & NN2 7 - Kingsthorpe, Kingsley Park, Semilong, Sunnyside, Whitehills

NN3 2 - Abington (Birchfield Rd area)

NN3 5 & 8 - Lings, Blackthorn, Goldings, Thorplands, Rectory Farm

NN 3 9 - Little Billing

NN4 8 - Briar Hill, Far Cotton & Delapre

NN5 5 - St James

NN5 7 - Kings Heath

#### 4. What strategic approaches are you aware of to tackle food poverty?

Re:store Northampton is part of Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network. Together we seek to work collaboratively to tackle food poverty, joining together services which offer food banks, food co-operatives, zero-waste schemes, and other forms of meal provision. Most of these services area crisis provision, with some services, like Re:store also addressing the reason for food poverty and helping people to make positive changes. The Network also advocates and campaigns for change at a local and national level.

#### 5. What approaches are in existence to reduce people's dependency on food aid, such as Food Banks?

Re:store operates Northampton Food Bank with Distributions Points across the town and across the whole week (Duston, Eastfield, Spinney Hill, Kings Heath and Central Northampton). This is a referral based system, where households can receive 5 parcels a year, if they meet criteria (an interruption to usual income such as loss of job or benefit problems, so not just low income). Whilst around 5000 clients each year access this service, we are aware of thousands of households that are living in food poverty constantly that would not meet this criteria.

Re:store offers a holistic response alongside providing crisis support through the Food Bank and Growbaby. The Distribution Point at Re:store HUB (Thursdays at Re:store) has professionals such as Citizen's Advice and Mind on site to offer advice, support and guidance to deal with the cause or symptoms of the poverty. We have a range of trained volunteers and a lead Support Worker to also support, assist and signpost guests to address issues at hand. There are a range of other skills based opportunities, including supported volunteering, available to assist individuals to move forward from the point of crisis.

Northampton Food Bank has always aimed to offer a hand up not just a hand out. Provision has changed and adapted over the years in response to the need and

other local service provision. For example, from 2017-19 we were offering a free hot meal twice a week, but as numbers increased and support needs were not being addressed as effectively it highlighted a dependency on the “hand out”. Instead now the community cafe (HUB) is coffee & cake and there is an emphasis on support element, whilst still being friendly and welcoming to all.

6. How do you understand food poverty is being addressed?

Local charities and churches are attempting to address food poverty (in terms of emergency help) but actually there are systemic problems which are resulting in food poverty which are not being addressed, so the problem will never actually be resolved unless all parties work together to identify these problems and address them - and those experiencing food poverty need to be involved in this process.

7. How can the Borough Council, together with its partners, can collectively respond to food poverty?

A good start would be to meet with Northamptonshire Food Poverty Network - gathering together all those working with the public, and also inviting those who have experienced food poverty. Hearing the reality first hand, and working out solutions together. It is a problem that the “Big Society” cannot solve alone.

8. In your opinion what are the specific issues relating to food poverty?

Partly answered in the first questions, but our experience (evidenced by Citizen’s Advice on site) is that the main problems that are related would be housing insecurity (threats of eviction, short-term tenancies, lack of access to affordable housing etc) and financial barriers (benefits being interrupted/stopped, unfair sanctions which take time to appeal, zero-hour contracts, job insecurity). Many of those experiencing food poverty have previously worked or are working but lacking job security or the hours ‘promised’ on zero-hour contracts - often not being told that they are not needed until they turn up for work. Being on such contracts prevents access to benefits and lack of work means individuals cannot pay rent/bills/buy food etc.

At a local government level, the lack of community and support services in Northampton has an impact on the most vulnerable in the town. Many adult and family services have been cut, including mental health and elderly care, meaning voluntary services are left to plug the gap. Likewise, the closure of community facilities such as libraries, and lack of investment in local parks, places and activities, means a reduction in community cohesion and peer support. Whilst this seems detached from the issue at hand, actually it has a dramatic impact as so many of those we support are isolated and do not know where to go for support, and certainly lack help from within their local community.

9. Are you aware of the existence of “holiday hunger” and what is its impact?

Yes we have run special lunches though Summer 2019, and the year before, 2018 special food provision through the food bank. Both operated through referrals from local schools, identified by the Family Support Worker. However there was a low uptake to both projects. This does not reflect the lack of need, but the stigma and fear for families that still is attached to community projects addressing food poverty. However we are now engaging 60-80 adults and children each week through our family outreach activities, so feel this may help to overcome this.

10. Please supply details of the support that your organisation or group offers?

Northampton Food Bank

Re:store operates Northampton Food Bank with Distributions Points across the town and across the whole week (Duston, Eastfield, Spinney Hill, Kings Heath and Central Northampton). This is a referral based system, where households can receive 5 parcels a year, if they meet criteria (an interruption to usual income such as loss of job or benefit problems, so not just low income). All food donated by individuals in Northampton, all volunteers from the local community.

Growbaby

Provision of food, clothes, toys and baby equipment (0-5yrs). Referrals from range of family support services, and donations from the local community. Drop-in session with a welcoming play area, free snacks and a more private area where the parent/ caregiver can select the clothing they need for their child as well as talk to our team for further practical or emotional support.

Nest

Award-winning play session with range of support services on site (including health professionals). Range of play activities led by qualified professionals working in voluntary capacity. Free snacks and high quality music time. Open to all, no referral needed. Attracts range of families from all backgrounds, including many with English as Second Language or who are otherwise isolated or vulnerable.

Re:store Hub

Free community cafe, with advice and support services, including Citizens Advice. Access point for Northampton Food Bank. Various courses and opportunities running alongside this including wellbeing classes and money management support.

Allotment

Re:store Allotment is a volunteer led project, that seeks to grow skills and independence through growing fruit and vegetables. Participants are invited for a 4

week course, to learn how to sow, grow and harvest edible plants, and welcomes complete beginners through to those with green fingers!

### Inspire

Supported volunteering and mentoring scheme. Providing training opportunities and support to gain skills for life. It is ideal for those who are either struggling with confidence and self esteem, are out of work, or wanting to develop skills in the workplace. The programme is tailored to each individual, with personal goals being set that are worked towards. Individuals are paired with a suitable mentor from Central Vineyard Church who meet up with them regularly to support them in reaching their goals.

11. Please supply details of your thoughts on suggested solutions regarding food poverty.

Despite Re:store running a town-wide Food Bank, it is not a long term solution to food poverty. 10 Years ago it began as a short-term support, but the extent it is now used highlights it has become part of the expected support network for the town. The local government needs to look at policies that impact the most vulnerable and support services (or the closure of them).

12. Are you aware of the number of people who are registered for pupil premium?  
Please supply details.

No

13. Do you have further information or comments regarding food poverty which you would like to inform the Scrutiny Panel?