

<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>Finance and Resources Scrutiny Lead</p> <p>24th April 2023</p>	 <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of: Sharon Godman, Director of Strategy, Improvement and Transformation</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p>Understand the impact of food insecurity on residents and review whether the council and its partners response to tackling food poverty is effective and sustainable.</p>	

Originating Officer(s)	<p>Afazul Hoque, Head of Service, Corporate Strategy and Communities</p> <p>Jaber Khan, Senior Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate Strategy and Communities</p>
Wards affected	All Wards

Executive Summary

This report sets out the findings and recommendations from the scrutiny review on food insecurity in the Borough. The report seeks to understand the impact of food insecurity on residents, and how council and its partners response to food insecurity can be more effective and sustainable. The report makes eleven recommendations for agreement by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the attached scrutiny review session report and agree the recommendations; and
2. Agree to submit the attached report to the Mayor and Cabinet for executive response to the recommendations.

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 This paper submits the report and recommendations of the scrutiny review sessions on the impact of food insecurity on residents, and how council and its partners response to food insecurity can be more effective and sustainable for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Take no action. This is not recommended as the scrutiny review provides evidence based recommendations for improving access to food provision and to reduce food insecurity in the Borough.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1. The rise of cost of living in the country due to unprecedented rise in inflation rates, along with high energy costs, has impacted on many people's ability to buy basic essentials including food. As Tower Hamlets has the highest rate of poverty in the country this has a significant impact on the local population, exacerbating food insecurity already existent in the Borough.
- 3.2. As part of this scrutiny review a session was held on 1st December with key stakeholders including the Overview and Scrutiny members. The session was chaired by Cllr Sabina Khan. There were subsequent sessions in the community hearing the lived experiences of residents facing food insecurity and site visits to a food pantry, food bank and a food redistribution organisation to help with gathering evidence for the review.
- 3.3. The review aimed to:
- understand the extent to which food poverty is affecting local residents and the contributing factors
 - review the current food model provisions, its accessibility and effectiveness
 - examine the sustainability of council's current and future plans to tackle food poverty in the Borough
- 3.4. The review was underpinned by the following areas of enquiry:
- How widespread is food poverty in the Borough? What are the impacts of food poverty on local people? Which groups of people are being affected the most?
 - What are the key challenges the council and its partners face in tackling food poverty in the Borough?
 - What are the key barriers local residents struggling with food insecurities face in accessing appropriate services? How do we ensure there is accessibility to good quality food provisions for all those in need?
- 3.5. How is sustainability being ensured across the different projects and programmes tackling food poverty? How much capacity does the council have to meet the demands of food insecurity in the long run and are any alternative ways being sought?

- 3.6. What is being done to work with partners, voluntary, community and faith groups to develop a strategic and coordinated approach to poverty reduction in the Borough?
- 3.7. The review involved a range of stakeholder witnesses including:
- Cabinet Member for Resources and Cost of Living supported by council officers
 - Representatives from the Youth Council
 - Society Links
 - Bow Food Bank
 - Sustain
 - Felix Project
 - Public Health
 - Tackling Poverty Team from the council
- 3.8. The scrutiny review resulted in the following recommendations:

Communications

Recommendation 1

Effectively communicate information about support provisions to those facing food insecurity and to front-line workers. As part of this Develop an up-to-date directory of services that can be easily accessible and understood by different beneficiary groups, food banks and front line services

Food Aid

Recommendation 2

Provide a longer term commitment to continue funding the LBTH Food Hub so that there is more certainty in delivery of food aid to local food aid organisations and retention of expertise and experience to help with continuity

Recommendation 3

Council to work with food aid providers to grow and sustain an independently run food aid network to ensure better joined up delivery of food aid in the Borough

Recommendation 4

Continue developing dignified approaches to accessing food for those facing food insecurity including increasing the number of food stores to reduce reliance on food banks.

Recommendation 5

Facilitate opening up food aid provisions in the evening or weekend to support those who may not be able access these services in the weekday specially for the 'working poor'

Quality of Food Provisions

Recommendation 6

Improve the quality of secondary school food. As part of rolling out universal free school meals in secondary schools, improve the quality of food provision, ensuring it is healthy, filling and appetising.

Recommendation 7

Work with foodbanks to improve nutritional value provided in foodbanks and engage foodbank users to promote healthy start vouchers, nutritional and health related services to improve health and reduce health issues happening because of poverty.

Recommendation 8

Increase uptake of Healthy Start Cards and expand fruit and vegetable voucher schemes, developing a plan and funding to meet targets.

Maximising income

Recommendation 9

Stipulate within commissioning specifications for information and advice services, that the services need to often operate from foodbanks

Recommendation 10

Council and partner services to work with food banks to provide opportunities for residents in low paid employment to develop their skills and to get into better employment

Sustainability

Recommendation 10

Develop closer collaboration with private sector to unlock financial resources to help tackle food insecurity in Tower Hamlets

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

4.1. The scrutiny review examined the impact of food poverty on residents and how access to food provisions including food with nutritional value can be improved, and how food insecurity can be reduced.. The recommendations arising from the scrutiny review aim to benefit all residents facing food insecurity regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, disability and religion.

5. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

5.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. In considering its response to the recommendations from the scrutiny review on food insecurity in the Borough, Cabinet will need to consider the financial implications of any decisions to increase or expand provision, for example a

separate report is being presented on the roll out of universal Secondary School meals.

6. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 6.1. S.9F of the Local Government Act 2000 requires that a Council's overview and scrutiny comment be allowed to make reports or recommendations to the authority or the executive on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area. Therefore, this report and the recommendations demonstrate compliance with the law.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

6. NONE

Appendices

7. Scrutiny challenge session report on how the council and its partners can increase women and girls access and participation with sport provisions and physical activities in the borough

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of "Background Papers" used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

8. These must be sent to Democratic Services with the report
9. State NONE if none.

Officer contact details for documents:

Jaber Khan, Senior Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate Strategy and Communities.

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