

Norwich City Council
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Item No 6

REPORT for meeting to be held on 23 March 2017

An investigation into food poverty in Norwich

- Summary:** The enclosed report collates the responses received from committee members on their thoughts of the main drivers of food poverty in Norwich, based on the evidence given at the February scrutiny meeting.
The members agreed at the February meeting that there were three levels apparent when looking at food poverty; structural, organisational, and individual. Therefore, the report categorises the main drivers at these levels.
- Conclusions:** This report provides members with suggestions on the main drivers of food poverty.
- Recommendation:** That the scrutiny committee considers the evidence provided at both the February meeting, and this meeting, to identify possible solutions and to consider any recommendations the committee may wish to make.
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Background

1. On 23 February 2017, the scrutiny committee held the first of two meetings to investigate the issue of food poverty in Norwich. At the February meeting, the committee heard from three key speakers who provided evidence and answered questions asked by the scrutiny members. Further details on the discussion at the February meeting can be found in the minutes with presentations from this meeting also appended.
2. At this meeting, the scrutiny committee will hear from three more speakers, who will discuss a range of topics, from food literacy, to what impact their organisation has had on tackling food poverty. The speakers at this meeting are:
 - Rosie Ogleby – National Director at Feeding Britain. Feeding Britain is a charitable organisation, and was founded out of the all-party parliamentary inquiry into hunger in 2014.
 - Donna Chappell – Head of Children’s Centre at Earlham Early Years. The Children’s Centre offers the local community early year’s education and childcare practice.
 - Caroline Seaman – Founder of Joy of Food. This is a Norfolk County Council funded project to deliver food skills in the community.
3. In this report, members will find a collated list of what was identified by the committee as the main drivers of food poverty in Norwich.

In trying to unpick the drivers of food poverty at the structural, organisational and individual level, it is worth noting that there is no clear distinction to be drawn between these consistently. There is a fundamental interconnectedness between the individual factors and behaviours and the structural and organisational context in which they occur. However, there are some key themes that came out of the discussion and subsequent feedback from committee members that can be broadly ascribed to one of those three levels.

There is also a distinction to be drawn between the drivers of food crises in which people are left without any means of feeding themselves in the short-term, and the drivers of longer-term lack of access to nutritious food. There may sometimes be an overlap between these, with longer-term drivers leaving individuals and families more vulnerable to falling into crisis because of a fluctuation in circumstances.

In terms of **structural** drivers of food poverty, there appears to be a consensus that these are:

- An economic system that causes poverty through insecure work, low pay and income insufficiency
- A welfare system that is not a genuine safety net and does not prevent crises
- The means of distribution, cost and accessibility of nutritious food
- Lack of provision of adequate social welfare advice

Some of the key **organisational** causes of food poverty include:

- The way in which the welfare system is administered through the DWP:
 - Delays to benefit claims (particularly under Universal Credit)
 - Inconsistency and volatility of benefit sanction decisions causing crises
- The advent of the full Universal Credit system (June 2018 in Norwich) seems to increase risks owing to the increased scope and scale of claimants and the issues faced in managing claims online
- The way in which debts are recovered by landlords and others leaving some households with severe short-term income shortfalls

Finally, there are a series of **individual** factors that cause or exacerbate food poverty:

- Low awareness of how to navigate the benefit system (exacerbated by a dearth of social welfare advice)
- Low financial capability and inclusion including:
 - Ability to manage inconsistent budgeting cycles between income and outgoings
 - Lack of savings and access to affordable credit
 - Rational decisions to de-prioritise food over other necessities
- Low food literacy and skills:
 - Choosing food that is affordable but not necessarily nutritious
 - Rational decisions to avoid buying fresh food to minimise waste
 - Approaches to food sourcing e.g. Growing your own, allotments

	Understanding the Causes	Sustainable Response
Structural	Insecure work Low wage Welfare system that does not always prevent crises Distribution/accessibility of nutritious food	
Organisational	Benefit delays Benefit sanctions Universal credit Debt recovery by landlords and others	
Individual	Food literacy/skills Knowledge of navigating benefit system Low financial capability	