

Norwich City Council
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Item 6

REPORT for meeting to be held on 5 July 2012

Scrutiny Review – Food banks

Purpose To receive a presentation from the co-ordinator of the Norwich food bank network and to ask questions to gain an overview before deciding where to focus any further review

Recommendation - Decide on the next stage of this scrutiny review and consider which organizations to invite to further meetings.

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Boyd Taylor - Financial inclusion manager
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Executive Member - Alan Waters – Deputy leader & resources.

Ward(s) All

Corporate and service priorities – Prosperous city – financial inclusion.

Background documents - None

1. What does Norwich food bank do?

- 1.1 Norwich food bank can be accessed by individuals or families that are in receipt of vouchers that are handed out by various agencies in times of crisis. The food bank provides emergency food boxes that are nutritionally balanced. This can cover the basic needs of those in need, such as in any time gap before the relevant supporting services can assist.
- 1.2 The Norwich food bank works with other local organisations that can identify people in crisis and give them a food voucher and refer them to one of the distribution centres in the city.
- 1.3 Experts are on hand at the centres where the food vouchers are exchanged for food boxes and can listen and help find other professionals who might be able to assist with the underlying problems causing the crisis.

2. Topic for scrutiny

- 2.1 At the 24 May meeting of the scrutiny committee which set the committee's work programme for the coming year it was agreed to take as a topic the issue of Food banks. This topic came about as a result of a member request for scrutiny and was submitted by Councillor Alan Waters.
- 2.2 As the scrutiny committee has the ability to gain overview of cross cutting issues when carrying out reviews it is in a good place to impartially look at an issue and make recommendations to the cabinet (and other decision makers) to assist policy review and development. This gives scrutiny the ability to contribute to service delivery and improvements.
- 2.3 The request made by Councillor Alan Waters is set out below:

"I am requesting scrutiny committee invite the co-ordinator of the Norwich food bank network (nine centres across Norwich) to discuss the reasons why people are using Food banks in increasing numbers. This links directly to a strand in the recently agreed corporate plan – opportunities for all – around financial inclusion.

At the cabinet meeting 14 March 2012 that reviewed the corporate plan, the report noted; the council has continued its financial inclusion programme through a range of activities including looking at how best to address these issues in the future given the changing landscape caused by welfare reform."

3. Allocation of resources and commissioning

- 3.1 Any scrutiny investigation into the use of food banks would need to focus on the areas that the council can influence either through direct service delivery or its leadership role. By talking to relevant people and organisations, it is hoped that the scrutiny committee would be able to help inform the council's thinking in the way it allocates resources and commissions services at a time when the council's activity in this area may become increasingly in demand.

4. Other organisations that scrutiny committee may wish to involve

- 4.1 It is suggested that the exercise to gain an understanding of the operation of food banks in Norwich, and the reasons for why people seem to be using them in increasing numbers, that other organizations may be able to help with further scrutiny work before any final conclusions can be arrived at.

The committee may wish to look at issues around the wider health and well-being agenda.

There are a few suggestions below:

- Department of work and pensions
- City council officers and cabinet
- County council
- Clinical commissioning group
- Other local authorities that may be working closely with food banks

5. Scrutiny questions:

- What is a food bank?
- What is the history of food banks?
- What does a food bank look like?
- Where can people get vouchers from or how are people referred to a food bank?
- What are the criteria for a voucher to be issued to a family or individual?
- How many times and for how long are food vouchers issued to a family or an individual?
- What do people receive?
- How do food banks get the food?
- What is the involvement of the supermarkets?

- Why are people using the food banks in Norwich
- What is the geographical and demographic spread of usage? (A break down of who is using the food banks in Norwich)
- Are the reasons for uptake different in Norwich than in other areas/places in the UK?
- What is the county picture/coverage/future coverage for food banks?
- Do food banks encourage other organisations to get involved?
- What has to happen for the service provided by food banks not to be needed on the current scale?
- How are food banks funded/funding streams?
- What do you think that the key issues and future trends will be moving forward?



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Request form to raise an item for Scrutiny Review

Councillors should be asked to carry out the following scrutiny review:

Investigation into the reasons why people are using Food banks across Norwich.

Please give your reasons (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

I am requesting Scrutiny Committee invite the co-ordinator of the Norwich Food Bank network (nine centres across Norwich) to discuss the reasons why people are using Food Banks in increasing numbers. This links directly to a strand in the recently agreed Corporate Plan – ‘Opportunities for all’ – around financial inclusion. At the Cabinet meeting (14/3/12) reviewing the performance of the Corporate Plan – the report noted:

‘The council has continued its financial inclusion programme through a range of activities including looking at how best to address these issues in the future given the changing landscape caused by welfare reform’.

I believe a scrutiny investigation on the use of Food Banks would help inform our thinking in the way we allocate resources and commission services in this increasingly important area of council activity. It is also likely to demonstrate the inadequacy of welfare provision for a growing number of Norwich residents, including the problem of in-work poverty.

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Signature

Date 11

Please return this form to Steve Goddard, Scrutiny Officer, Norwich City Council, City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich NR2 1NH

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