

Committee	Dated:
Community and Children's Services	28.09.2020
Subject: Delivering foodbank support in the City	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter – Director, Community and Children's Services	For Decision
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Summary

During the initial responses to the Covid-19 pandemic a foodbank was established in the City to provide support to residents unable to access or afford food. This report sets out options for longer-term delivery for Members to decide upon a preferred approach. The options are to establish a dedicated City of London foodbank in the Square Mile or seeking delivery of such support by an established partner or partners.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Decide their preferred option for foodbank delivery in the City of London.

Main Report

Background

1. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions resulting from it resulted in some initial food shortages in shops and prevented some individuals from getting to shops to buy food.
2. In response to such needs the Square Mile Foodbank was rapidly established by volunteers and Age UK City of London.
3. The City of London Corporation has provided £16,000 financial support and access to premises to support the Square Mile Foodbank operation.
4. The establishment of a foodbank reflected the emergency nature of the Covid-19 lockdown. Rightly, the focus was on ensuring food was available to those who sought help or who were referred for help.
5. The Square Mile Foodbank has been providing food support to approximately 70 households living in the City – 26 of which had dependent children. Just over 40 of the beneficiary households live on either Mansell Street or Middlesex Street estates, 20 on Golden Lane Estate, and the rest from other City locations.

6. The Square Mile Foodbank is not a registered charity. It is led by volunteers from the community in association with Age UK City of London. Its primary base is the Golden Lane Community Centre, but it is also storing goods in the Lilac Room at the Barbican Estate Office, and makes once weekly use of the Portsoken Health and Community Centre to distribute food in the east of the city.
7. The gradual easing of lockdown restrictions is shaping plans and demands to resume pre-Covid activities. For the Square Mile Foodbank this will impact on their ability to use the Lilac Room and Golden Lane Community Centre. It has also seen pressure on the foodbank's volunteer base - as some return to work – placing increasing reliance on the huge efforts of a small group, which is unsustainable in the longer term.
8. The trustees of Age UK City of London have also said they cannot accept further funding on behalf of the foodbank as the remit of its operation is outside of the charitable objectives of Age UK.
9. In addition to the support available from the Square Mile Foodbank, the City Corporation operates an emergency food voucher scheme through its City Advice service (based on an assessment of needs); provides food vouchers through its social services; and has an Emergency Fund that people in hardship can apply to.
10. Beyond these local interventions, the government has introduced some changes to the welfare system to support people, including a weekly uplift of Universal Credit by £20 until April 2021 and protections to some entitlements.
11. For the City's communities, the period ahead is seeing a transition from the emergency needs associated directly to the Covid-19 restrictions, to one where the economic impacts of the pandemic will shape needs more focussed on financial hardship.
12. The City Corporation is seeking to ensure that food support continues to be available to those in acute need. It should be coupled with advice and advocacy support to ensure a holistic response to financial hardship. This report sets out options to deliver a resilient and longer-term food support offer in the City for Members' consideration.

Food bank support

13. Officers have explored food support provided in other local authorities to better understand the models and focus of delivery. This has included discussion with independent foodbanks, those within the Trussell Trust network (the Trussell Trust supports 1,200 foodbanks nationwide), the Square Mile Food Bank and local authority partners working to tackle deprivation.
14. Foodbanks provide emergency food to local people in a short-term financial crisis. Models are designed to avoid dependency on a foodbank and to help people find solutions to the underlying cause of their crisis. Some will limit

support, and others place no limit on the number of times they support an individual or family, but all described a focus on helping those in a short-term crisis rather than providing indefinite long-term assistance.

15. Financial crisis may relate to debt, sudden job loss, benefit delays and immigration issues. Receipt of income related benefits is not in itself described as reason for needing foodbank support. However, all the established foodbanks spoke of individualised assessment of needs and a flexible approach to identifying those in need of help.
16. Typically, foodbanks have at least two paid members of staff and a large volunteer support network. However, many include accredited advice workers, fundraisers and warehouse staff – of which some roles are met by volunteers. They are usually registered charities, with governance and subject to the regulation of the Charity Commission. They will have a warehouse and foodbank centre – and some operate satellite hubs and delivery services where they cover larger geography.
17. Foodbanks work closely with statutory and voluntary services to ensure the right support to those they work with and meet safeguarding requirements and regulation.

Needs in the City of London

18. Identifying the scale of need for support with food is difficult. Such support is usually given at times of transition or crisis – and therefore measures of low income can be limited in quantifying need.
19. The 2019 Indices of Deprivation report that overall the City of London is a relatively affluent district; it is 208 in the Rank of the Average Ranks out of the 318 Local Authorities in England. Thus, the City is within the 40% least deprived Local Authorities in England and is the sixth least deprived in Greater London.
20. The average rank identifies Barbican East and Barbican West as being within the 20% least deprived local areas in England. The Mansell Street & Petticoat Lane area is the most deprived in the City falling into the 40% most deprived in England.
21. End Child Poverty (a campaigning organisation) publishes data on children described as living in poverty if their household income is less than 60% of the median. For the City it reports that 9% of children live in poverty before housing costs, and 30% after housing costs. Population levels are too small to accurately estimate at ward level. In neighbouring authorities these figures before and after housing costs are: Westminster 22% and 46%, Tower Hamlets 35% and 57% and Hackney 28% and 48%.
22. The neighbouring authority of Hackney has high levels of deprivation and a population of 280,000: its foodbank has experienced growth in the need for support and reports supporting approximately 500 households.

23. There are approximately 270 households in receipt of unemployment, sickness or income related benefits in the City. This includes 60 recipients of pension credits and 54 claimants with dependent children.

Foodbank delivery options

24. The City Corporation is seeking to ensure foodbank support is available in the coming period to those experiencing financial hardship.

25. Support should combine with accredited advice, advocacy and signposting to enable residents in need to tackle the underlying cause of financial crisis.

26. It is proposed that financial hardship is assessed and defined by the service delivering food support, drawing on their experience and expertise, and that the duration of that support is determined by the service. It is anticipated that this will be consistent with the predominant foodbank models that focus on moving people away from indefinite support or dependence.

27. Officers are working to develop additional support to those whose needs relate to limited mobility and ability to get to shops, rather than poverty alone.

28. Options for future delivery are:

a) Dedicated City foodbank

29. Members may wish to establish a long-term food bank within the City – whether the Square Mile Foodbank or another. A resilient long-term model would be likely to have at least two paid members of staff, and dedicated premises. Operating costs could include a delivery and collection van, utilities, rent and food supplies.

30. To ensure proper accountability and governance the delivery organisation should be a registered charity. This would also unlock access to potential grant funding. While many foodbanks choose not to receive local authority support, if the department were to fund such delivery in full or part, this would need to be funded within existing budgets.

31. Premises within the City may be costly or hard to identify. However, there may be scope within the network of church buildings that could support a provider. Underutilised commercial space may also provide an opportunity to rent or lease space. The department's community assets could provide distribution points, but storage of equipment and food would impact too greatly on other activity – and income - to allow them to provide a permanent base.

32. Local delivery may provide better knowledge of and links to the existing community of recipients and volunteers.

33. It would be reasonable to expect the cost of a dedicated City foodbank to be in excess of £60,000 per annum – possibly significantly so. If funded by the department, this cost could be established by taking a commissioning approach

which allows providers to propose the cost and model of operation but would also require commitment to a recurring budget.

b) Support by partner provider – Tower Hamlets: First Love Foundation

34. The First Love Foundation has been established since 2010 and has provided help to thousands of people in Tower Hamlets. The organisation has said it would be willing in principle to deliver their service to the whole of the City. It has five staff members and dedicated premises in Poplar. Before lockdown it operated a number of satellite hubs including one in Aldgate. They currently support around 150 households a week – although during lockdown demand was higher and they were able to help 400 at the peak in May. All food is currently delivered to individuals.
35. Their core offer is the “Enabling Lives Programme” which provides instant access to advice, support and food at the point of need. Individuals are referred for help by one of a range of referring partners – housing, advice services, social services, GP etc. Needs are assessed by the service. There are no fixed criteria beyond “no money, no food”. The focus is to support people through a crisis to “help restore dignity and build resilience to individuals and families”. No time limit is placed on support, but it aims to be transitional and not permanent.
36. All recipients are supported by a project worker who supports them until the need for food support ends. They would expect to work closely with the City’s statutory, commissioned and voluntary services to support those they work with and would require the necessary Data Sharing Agreement to enable this.
37. In the current period they are delivering all food and assessing people by telephone. Some complex advice work may require attendance at their main site in Poplar which is directly accessible by the number 15 bus from St Pauls, Bank and Aldgate.
38. Were they to deliver services in the City they are willing for all current recipients of help by the Square Mile Foodbank to be referred to them for assessment. We have suggested supporting this process by training a local voluntary sector officer to aid assessment.
39. Officers have further proposed that if the First Love Foundation were to deliver in the City, that there is the opportunity for financial support (subject to Member approval) from the Stronger Communities Grants programme. The Foundation is aware that the maximum award is £20,000. The Foundation would also welcome the support of local volunteers, donations and food collections.

c) Support by partner provider – St Luke’s Community Centre

40. The St Luke’s Community Centre is situated just north of the City in Islington. Its offer to the local community includes activities, advice and support, employment services and a café among many other services.

41. During the Covid lock down period the centre set up and operated the St Luke's Food Hub – to support those without food. In the latter period of operation, the centre observed that the hub was providing food to those not experiencing food poverty and not restricted from accessing local shops. In response it has written to all recipients informing that food hub will close from 9 September.
42. In order to tackle continued food poverty, St Luke's is launching on the same day a new service called Food Connections for anyone living within their "Area of Benefit". The service will be by appointment for people who are experiencing the following: no recourse to public funds; awaiting Universal Credit; reduced income due to Furlough or loss of income due to Covid-19; or those referred from partnership agencies.
43. Golden Lane estate falls within the St Luke's Area of Benefit – and therefore the service (along with their other services) is already available to residents who live on the estate and who are experiencing food poverty. An assessment is made by the Centre's officers, and St Luke's is willing to assess anyone on Golden Lane who currently receives the support of the Square Mile Foodbank. Individuals can self refer by contacting the Centre.
44. St Luke's is aware of the City's grants programme and will apply if demand for their support warrants that.

Additional support for older households

45. Officers are discussing with Age UK a further initiative to identify and support the needs of older people in the community who may experience food poverty, or who need support with shopping. The project is being scoped with Adult Social Care support to ensure residents in need of care and support by the City – and who may need domiciliary care or personalised budgets - are identified. The aim is to develop a project to support those who may fall below the threshold for formal care services, but would benefit from some help.

Proposals

46. It is proposed that the delivery of foodbank support in the City of London transitions to the First Love Foundation. The service will be available to all City residents who are assessed as needing help from the First Love Foundation. It is noted that residents of Golden Lane can also choose to seek help from the St Luke's Food Connections service.
47. If a transition is supported work will be undertaken to ensure awareness among referring partners such as housing, social services, City Advice, GP services and the Jobcentre. All existing clients will be offered referral to the new service for an assessment of their support needs.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

48. The ability to support those who cannot afford food at a point of crisis is consistent with the Corporate Plan objective to contribute to a flourishing society and the strategic aims of the department.

Implications

49. The delivery of a dedicated City of London foodbank may have significant budgetary implications for the department if such a service was unable to secure sufficient independent funding to support its operation.

Health Implications

50. Tackling food poverty is critical to securing better health and addressing wider health inequalities.

Conclusion

51. It is vital that those who cannot buy food have access to emergency support. Securing a long-term foodbank service for City residents will complement other services and responses to help communities through the uncertain period ahead.

Appendices

- None

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