

Report to COUNCIL

Welfare Reform: Food Poverty ‘Deep Dive’

Portfolio Holder:

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Reason for Decision

For information

Executive Summary

This report includes the periodic Welfare Reform Dashboard, and a deeper analysis of Food Poverty and Food Banks within Oldham.

The Welfare Reform Dashboard highlights in particular the levelling-off of unemployment after a period of consistent falls.

The Food Poverty Deep Dive highlights the wide-ranging nature of food poverty, estimated to affect over 10% of Oldham’s population, and the actions which can be taken to mitigate it. Food banks are one such action, but only address the immediate crisis, rather than building individual and community resilience. Anecdotally, it appears that our South Asian communities are quite resilient to such crises.

Recommendations

For information only.

Welfare Reform: Food Poverty and Food Banks

1 Background

- 1.1 This report is the latest in a series of Welfare Reform updates, on a broadly quarterly basis. It includes the latest Welfare Reform Dashboard (Appendix A), and a deeper examination of Food Poverty in Oldham (Appendix B).
- 1.2 The Welfare Reform Dashboard shows that
- Unemployment, which was previously falling, has now definitely stopped falling and may be rising- further months' data will be required for this to become clear.
 - ESA numbers, after falling for many years, are now stable and perhaps beginning to rise. ESA sanctions have risen substantially during 2014, but JSA sanctions are reducing (in line with numbers on JSA).
 - Benefit cap numbers, those affected by size criteria ('bedroom tax') and families in rent arrears are all reducing.
- 1.3 The Food Poverty and Food Banks report was commissioned to meet two needs: a 'deep dive' into Food Banks, one of a series supporting Welfare Reform intelligence, and a separate request from EMT for more intelligence on numbers in Food Poverty.
- 1.4 Food poverty can be defined as
The inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.
- 1.5 24,500 people in Oldham are estimated to be in food poverty. This broad estimate is 10.7% of the population. This figure has been rising over time, due to a range of factors including rising real terms food prices and the impacts of welfare reform.
- 1.6 Food poverty will have significant negative impacts on NHS and council services, impacting as it does on heart disease, diabetes, falls, and possibly even ASB.
- 1.7 Examination of intelligence on food banks produced the following key findings
- We estimate that 4,600 people (18.7% of the total number in food poverty) received assistance from Oldham Food Bank last year. 30% of those were children. Other food banks exist, but data is not available.
 - Those supported are more likely than average to be single, less likely to be South Asian, and the majority reach crisis point due to a benefits-related issue. South Asian families appear to have greater resilience to short term food crises, due to bulk buying of staples.
 - After significant rises in food bank support, it appears that this has now leveled off.

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- 1.8 The following issues were identified during the writing of the report
- There is a great deal of support for those at crisis point or in destitution, but less so for actions building community resilience- although the Get Oldham Growing programme could provide an exemplar in this regard.
 - While it is key that food poverty support is community-led, it is unfortunate that there is no clear asset map of the projects in place to mitigate the issue, and therefore no clear co-operative strategy. A planned “Fair Access To Food” workshop will begin to address this.
 - Support for the Oldham food bank voucher scheme appears disparate within Oldham Council, with similar institutions having very different levels of engagement (for example, different children’s centres or social care teams).
 - There appears to be less support in some areas than others. Failsworth is the most notable example, with no food banks or other crisis support evident.

2 **Current Position**

2.1 N/A

3 **Options/Alternatives**

3.1 N/A

4 **Preferred Option**

4.1 N/A

5 **Consultation**

5.1 N/A

6 **Financial Implications**

6.1 N/A

7 **Legal Services Comments**

7.1 N/A

8. **Co-operative Agenda**

8.1 The delivery of actions on food poverty is overwhelmingly led by the third sector, with support and co-ordination in some areas from Oldham Council. It is likely that any future projects would also be delivered co-operatively, indeed given that new actions would be likely to be aimed at community resilience, this would be essential.

9 **Human Resources Comments**

9.1 N/A

10	Risk Assessments
10.1	N/A
11	IT Implications
11.1	None
12	Property Implications
12.1	None
13	Procurement Implications
13.1	None
14	Environmental and Health & Safety Implications
14.1	None
15	Equality, community cohesion and crime implications
15.1	Food poverty, as highlighted in Appendix B, is an issue that particularly impacts on certain groups including those on low incomes, households with children and older people. Any actions to address the issue will therefore have positive equality implications.
16	Equality Impact Assessment Completed?
16.1	N/A
17	Key Decision
17.1	No
18	Key Decision Reference
18.1	N/A
19	Background Papers
19.1	None
20	Appendices
20.1	Appendix A: Welfare Reform Dashboard-May 2015 Appendix B: Welfare Reform: Food Poverty and Food Banks