



Communities
Overview Committee

24th February 2020

11.30am

Item

Public

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 25
NOVEMBER 2019
2.00 - 3.30 PM**

Responsible Officer: Julie Fildes
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Present

Councillor Cecilia Motley (Leader)
Councillors Nick Hignett (Vice Chairman), Ted Clarke, Roger Hughes, Vivienne Parry,
Keith Roberts and Leslie Winwood

18 Apologies for absence and substitutions

Apologies were received from Councillor Tina Woodward, Councillor Roy Aldcroft attended as substitute.

19 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None were declared.

20 Minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2019 were confirmed as a correct record.

21 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

22 Member Question Time

No questions were received from Members.

23 Food Poverty

The Committee received the report of Chris Westwood, Customer Services and Welfare Support Manager – copy attached the signed Minutes – which was prepared on behalf of Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance, which set out the situation in Shropshire in relation to food crisis and food poverty.

The Customer Services and Welfare Support Manager explained that food poverty was a national issue and its causes were complex and a combination of factors.

Food crisis could be short term and caused by unexpected events and resolved by short term intervention through the provision of food through a food bank, but food poverty was an indication of deeper problems of chronic poverty and tended to be long term and needed a wider solution. Food banks alone were effective for food crises but not food poverty. Supporting people in food poverty required funding which was not secure. Where food poverty was not addressed it often led to more problems such as homelessness.

In response to a Member's question the Customer Services and Welfare Support Manager explained that there were several definitions of food poverty but in this context, it could be defined as an individual's or family's inability to access a nutritional diet.

Members noted that the Social Metrics Commission were exploring new ways of measuring both relative and absolute poverty. The levels of poverty in Shropshire varied according to area with the poor in rural areas having problems accessing cheap nutritious food due to lack of appropriate shops and lack of transport. Shrewsbury and North Shropshire were found to have a greater choice of cheaper stores.

In response to a Members question, Emily Faye, the Food Alliances Co-ordinator advised that 18 supermarkets distributed food to food banks and communities in Shrewsbury, and it was anticipated that the scheme would be extended to East Shropshire.

The Customer Services and Welfare Support Manager explained that the new Universal Credit system had initially increased the number of families using food banks but changes to the system were now in place which assisted claimants through the problematic new claim period.

Members discussed the steps that could be taken to address the issue of food poverty, such as debt advice, the role of housing associations, allotment provision and the availability of schemes to help people learn basic cookery skills to enable them to make the most of cheaper raw ingredients. The Customer Services and Welfare Support Manager explained that this was where the Food Bank Plus model was of benefit. In this model as well as providing food, the foodbanks were equipped to provide advice and training. This model was restricted by budgetary constraints and access to appropriate premises. The Food Bank Plus model put the food bank at the centre of a community resource which was available to the whole community and destigmatised the use of food banks. They could also provide a hub for mental health professionals and social workers.

The Food Alliances Co-ordinator confirmed that three food banks in the north of the county were members of the Trussell Trust, all others were independent organisations. Independent organisations often struggled to provide their volunteers with the support and training that was needed to deal with the often-harrowing situations they were exposed to. It was recognised that more support for food bank managers and volunteers was needed.

Members noted that the Shropshire Food Alliance was a partnership organisation of a variety of organisations who had an interest in addressing food poverty but struggle to maintain funding to continue its work and continue financing the co-ordinator role.

Members commented that the Welfare Task and Finish Group final report had found that available resources were not always strategically directed. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer was asked to circulate a copy the Welfare Task and Finish Group final report to Members of the Communities Overview Committee.

RESOLVED:

- i) The report be noted;
- ii) That Food Poverty be added to the work programme and further information be received in the summer 2020; and
- iii) That Shropshire Council's Property Services Department be approached to explore the possibility of providing suitable vacant accommodation to host Food Bank Alliance events and training

24 Working with Shropshire Communities

The Committee received the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Officer – copy attached to the signed Minutes which set out the draft terms of reference for a review of working with Shropshire Communities.

Members noted that the request to undertake this work had originated from a motion supported by Council at its meeting on 20th September 2018. The Committee had previously agreed to add the item to the work programme, and the establishment of a task and finish group to undertake the work was approved. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer explained that there had been insufficient interest in joining the group from members and so the task and finish group had not been able to form.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer suggested that the Rural Strategy Group might be approached to add this work to its work programme and that he should be authorised to raise the matter with the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services on behalf of the Committee and report back to a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the item be considered at future meetings as outlined in terms of reference..

25 Future Work Programme

Members agreed the future work programme of the Committee.

26 Date/Time of next meeting

It was confirmed that the next meeting would be held at 2pm on Monday 27th January 2020.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: