

VISIT TO FOOD BANK

Date:14/10/2019

Attendees: Cllr R Arundale, Cllr C Dodds, Cllr C McIntyre, Cllr J Thompson

INTRODUCTION

We have recently looked at the role of foodbanks in our community as a subject for scrutiny. The outcome was that our knowledge about them has increased and also our awareness has been raised.

To gain further insight, a visit to the food bank distribution centre situated on Skippers Lane, Middlesbrough was organised.

During our visit we had discussions with the volunteers and the organisers which were extremely informative. Some of the issues discussed are shown below -

1) VOLUNTEERS

Age of volunteers ranges from 18 to 65 plus, however generally the main volunteers tend to be around the age of retirement as they generally have more time to spare.

Turnover of volunteers is low as they feel it is such a worthwhile cause and that their contribution is meaningful and really makes a difference.

Typical shift of a volunteer is 6 hours however they are free to do less or more hours. Whatever hours they can do is much appreciated.

2) DONATIONS

Much of the food received is donated by supermarkets and churches. This particular time of year is very productive as many churches organise Harvest Festivals and the produce is donated.

What is perhaps not too well known is that food banks are happy to receive toiletry items, soap, shampoo, nappies etc.

Other donations they are in need of are **monetary donations**. The running costs for the site plus their van is approximately £500 per month. Money is not only needed to meet running costs but also to buy food when at certain times of the year the food donations "slow down" or when food banks are used more (ie: school holidays) and therefore food donations do not meet demand.

Food is checked to ensure it is not out-of-date.

3) FOOD BANKS— A PRO-ACTIVE APPROACH

A popular misconception is that food banks are just there to give "hand-outs" to certain members of the community who are struggling. This is not the case. Staff receive training to assess food bank users, to determine the reasons why they have reached this point in their lives and to help them out of the situation they are in so that they do not reach a stage of "**food bank dependency**" but become empowered to change their lives for the better. For instance some have needed food banks as a result of debt or mental health issues. Staff liaise with agencies such as **CAB** and **MIND** when necessary to give vulnerable people extra support, guidance and the confidence to make life-changes.

CONCLUSION:

I was impressed with the hard work and dedication of the staff, they are making a positive contribution to our community. It is sad that families and vulnerable people now, more than ever find themselves struggling but it is heart-warming to know we have such amazing people who are passionate and give up their own time for the benefit of others and provide such a vital service.

Councillor Chris McIntyre- Chair of Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel