

CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel was held on Thursday 7 April 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors G Wilson (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, S Dean, C Dodds, L Lewis, J Rostron and M Nugent,

PRESENT BY INVITATION:

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: T Godfrey Harrison (Middlesbrough Foodbank)

OFFICERS: Susie Blood, Martin Barker and Janette Savage

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: C McIntyre

21/29 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest received at this point in the meeting.

21/30 **MINUTES - CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL - 10 MARCH 2022**

The minutes of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 10 March 2022 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

21/31 **MIDDLESBROUGH FOODBANK**

The Chair welcome Tracey Godfery- Harrison, Manager of Middlesbrough Foodbanks to the meeting. The Manager had been invited to provide the panel with an update on the foodbank provision since the panel undertook their review in 2019.

The Manager advised that she has been in post for just over 4 months and firstly provide the panel with some statistics.

She advised that in the year 2020/2021
Vouchers fulfilled- 6089
Adults fed- 8246
Children fed- 4074
Total number of fed- 12,320

In date in 2021-22, the foodbanks has issued the following:
Vouchers fulfilled -3595
Adults fed- 5080
Children fed- 3398
Total number fed as of 7 April 2022- 8,478

The Manager advised that this was an shocking figure, however with the impact of covid and the raising utility bills, the foodbank was struggling to keep their shelves stocked at the warehouse. Whilst residents are generous with their monetary gifts and donations, the foodbanks are struggling to keep up with the demand and therefore quite often have to order from supermarkets to replenish their stock. In the 4 months since the Manager started, she has signed up a further 50 referral agencies.

There were 6 distribution centres across Middlesbrough. They recently closed the foodbank at Whinney banks, as it was not busy , however a new foodbank has opened in Berwick Hills and in May another foodbank will be opening at St Thomas Moore RC, Beechwood (the ward council thanked the Manager for her support in establishing this).

The panel were made aware that at 1 foodbank, volunteers may be serving 100 people, however this does not account to the number of adults / children in the household and the

foodbank also act as a signposting service for other services e.g. citizen's advice, mental health services.

During covid, the foodbanks did operate, however the service operated from the door, however now centres are reopening and the centres can now offer refreshments and comfort prior to distributing the food bags.

Following the presentation, a panel member queried whether the manager thought the situation in Ukraine was affecting the volume of donations to the food banks. In response, the manager felt this had not had an effect and Middlesbrough FC were holding a food collection point at their coming home game, so there was ongoing support. The Manager was thanked for her presentation.

AGREED- That the information be noted.

21/32

THE WELFARE SOLUTION

The Chair welcomed Janette Savage, Head of Resident and Business Support and Martin Barker, Strategic Business Manager to the meeting who were in attendance to provide an overview of the Council's welfare solution.

The information would support some of the points raised by the food bank. The Head of Service advised that in 2020, a new service was established – called Resident and Business Support. The service evolved from what was previously Revenues and Benefits.

Having been responsible for distributing most of the Covid 19 support, post Covid would require a something entirely different, Residents and Business Support formed through the migration and centralisation of a number of services. All debt, financial assistance, advice and support were moved into one service area, aligned to the councils welfare solution.

The intended purpose of the service is too provide a single point, addressing a number of welfare related matters, focussing on the much needed support for our residents and businesses.

As a service, one part is responsible for collection of all council debt, e.g. (List is not exclusive):

- **Billing collection & enforcement of**
 - Council Tax
 - Business Rates
 - Housing Benefit Overpayments
- **Collection & Enforcement**
 - Accounts Receivable
 - Adult Social Care – Debt
 - Commercial Rents.
 - Public Space Protection Orders.
 - Car Parking Fines.
 - Environmental Fines.
- **Corporate lead**
 - Stop the Knock.
 - Debt Write Off/Debt Prioritisation Solution.
 - Resident Engagement Solution.
 - Covid 19 grants

- Cost of living grants
- Digital Inclusion

The other part of the service offers Financial Assistance, Advice & Support which includes:- (List is not exhaustive).

There was a package/ menu of support for residents to access.

- **Financial Assistance**

- Administer Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit schemes Provide Crisis Support / Emergency Funds / Furniture and White Goods/Food/Fuel/Clothing. The service can fast track these funds if a need is identified.
- Help with housing costs (shortfalls in rent / storage costs / removal costs etc) through Discretionary Housing Payment scheme
- Administer Children's S17 payments
- Adult Social Care – Financial Assessment

- **Financial Support**

- Responsible for Test and Trace and Household Support schemes (which ended on 6 April 2022)
- Free School Meals and any food provision support (family who are identified as struggling can be provided with free school meals).
- Energy Support Rebate £150.00 (all properties band A-D will receive this). Those households who are on direct debit will received this automatically and others will need to apply. Wards by deprivation will receive this rebate.
- Financial Inclusion – Access to 43 partnering organisations – council lead. The Council has been awarded £1.6 million to assist with food bills and household bills.
- Support into the integrated Care Solution/Public Health.

- **Financial Advice**

- Point of contact with DWP Partnership Manager – immediate case resolution
- Benefit take up (case workers will identify those to assess the correct benefits)
- Welfare Rights/Citizens bureau leave (CAB) lead.

- **Corporate Lead**

- Vulnerability Policy, Food Poverty (how we can provide longer term support for food) and Welfare Strategy.
- Community Bank – provided account access for Ukraine – access funds immediately.

After providing the information, the Manger provided the panel with what the welfare strategy looked like, which put the resident at the heart of the strategy, providing a full scale review of those residents/families who are either on benefits/or slightly outside of entitlement as they are working ensuring they have the correct level of support.

Following the presentation, information would be provided to all panel members for future reference. The panel were pleased that the council was addressing this issue and providing support, even to those not on benefits. The free phone number was: 08081789278.

Once the solution was finalised, information on what the service can provide would be published through the council, community hubs, social media channels and through local councillors.

The officers were thanked for their presentation.

AGREED- That the information be noted

21/33 **CHAIR'S OSB UPDATE**

The Vice-Chair provided a verbal update from the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 23 March 2022.

AGREED- That the information be noted.

21/34 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING- THURSDAY 19 MAY 2022**

The next meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel would take place on Thursday 19 May 2022.

21/35 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

No Items.