Report title and challenge question(s):
Food poverty report: For information and approval

Priority report relates to (where applicable):
Priority - Child Healthy Weight

Report to:
Health and Wellbeing Board 20 March 2019

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1. Purpose of the paper
To inform the Board of contents of the draft Waltham Forest food poverty action plan - key findings, recommendations and to ask the board to approve the draft action plan.

2. Introduction
The food poverty action plan is part of the Mayor of London’s ambition to tackle food poverty in the capital and reduce Londoners’ reliance on food banks. The programme is being delivered in partnership with ‘Sustain’s London Food Poverty Campaign.

The Beyond the Food Bank report\(^1\) published by Sustain in 2017 identifies specific actions which local authorities are recommended to take to reduce food insecurity. These are:

1. Have a comprehensive plan to reduce food poverty which would include these subsequent recommendations.
2. Have a designated Healthy Start coordinator and an integrated programme of activities to reach a minimum local uptake for 80%.
4. Harness the value of children’s centres, using them to deliver concrete actions to tackle food poverty.
5. Ensure there is sufficient and good childcare provision.
6. Work with partners to tackle hunger among children throughout the year.
7. Lead on activities to improve physical access to good food by working with planners, retailers and caterers.
8. Reinvigorate provision of meals on wheels, developing a ‘more than the meal’ approach.
9. Become an accredited London Living Wage employer and contractor, champion the London Living Wage with local employers and become a Friendly Funder.
10. Minimise the burden of Council Tax payments for residents on low-income.

3. Process
The Waltham Forest food poverty action plan has been developed with local partners. We held two workshops in May and June 2018. The two workshops were attended by over 50 people across the borough including residents, community and voluntary organisations, councillors, and NHS and council departments. The first workshop’s focus was identifying the level of food poverty in the borough, community assets, and any existing food poverty interventions. Using the life course approach we reviewed the needs, existing provision and gaps. The second workshop focussed on solutions. Presentations from several organisations helped generate ideas for local action. Literature and data review was also done to gain better understanding of local needs.

4. Key findings
Using national and local data, it is estimated that in Waltham Forest
- 36,500 people over 18 years have skipped a meal because they can’t afford it.
- 20,000 have gone a whole day without eating.
- Household income is lower in Waltham forest than the London average, e.g. 36% of jobs in the borough are low paid compared to 19% in London, and 28% of residents are low paid compared to 21% in London.
- Unemployment in the borough is 5.1% compared to 4.9% in London.
- Nationally it is estimated 36% of children live in poverty this equates to 24,000 children (0-19 years) in the borough. There is variation across the borough, with some wards having 43% of children living in poverty.
- Waltham Forest has a higher percentage of families experiencing fuel poverty (13%) compared to London (10%) and England (11%).

• Waltham Forest is the 35th most deprived local authority nationally and, the 7th most deprived in London.
• Two thirds of the population from a minority ethnic background.
• Family homelessness is higher in the borough compared to national average (8.9 vs. 1.9 per 1,000 households)
• Waltham Forest has higher childhood obesity compared to national average (Reception: 23% vs 22% and Year 6: 39% vs 34% in)

5. Opportunities
1. Increase the current uptake (59%) of the national Healthy Start Vouchers a programme that provides vulnerable families with children under 4 with vouchers to spend on fruit, vegetables and milk to all eligible families.
2. Increase uptake of free school meals to ensure all eligible children have access to the free school meals
3. Increase breakfast club provision by partnering with Magic breakfast who support eligible schools to start and run free breakfast clubs. The majority of primary schools in the borough are eligible for the scheme but only 3 schools (out of 53) are currently in the scheme.
4. Leyton food hub is a new development in one of the most deprived wards. This will offer new opportunities to alleviate food poverty in the borough, e.g. by accepting Healthy Start vouchers (Healthy Start is a national scheme to assist families on benefits) to access fresh fruit and vegetables, hosting ‘cooking on a budget’ sessions, weight management classes, supplying food to tackle holiday hunger, and developing pathways to reduce food waste via redistributions to vulnerable people through ‘community fridge’ and other such schemes.
5. The ‘Connecting Communities’ project provides new opportunities to build communities through food by creating opportunities for people to cook and eat together. The benefits go beyond addressing food poverty to strengthening communities by creating friendships, tackling loneliness and reducing food waste.
6. borough of culture - Food is central in all cultures and as the first borough of culture in London, this creates opportunities to explore the rich culture around food via sharing recipes and cooking skills, cooking together, having food festivals and looking at how we can create a sustainable food culture that reduces food poverty and food waste.
7. Food growing - Waltham Forest has a strong food growing culture and this provides opportunities to produce more food e.g. creating more growing spaces in residential areas to support community food growing. Allotment association can agree pathways to support holiday clubs by supplying their surplus produce to holiday lunch clubs.
8. The council has pledges to reduce sugar consumption and promote healthy food in the borough and this provides opportunity to provide consistent messaging on healthy eating and promotion of its healthy catering commitment to ensure healthier offer in food outlets.
9. Neighbourhood teams provide opportunities to identify vulnerable people in the community, identify local initiatives addressing food poverty and signpost people to local services
10. Waltham Forest is a living wage accredited borough and this provides opportunities to work with other employers and contractors to pay the living wage, thus increasing household income levels.
11. Join national and London wide initiatives addressing food poverty and reducing food waste e.g. the Felix project and food cycle. The Felix project is already working with some charities in the borough like the YMCA to supply surplus food to those in need. There is an opportunity to use community assets like children and families centre, or religious buildings as food hubs where surplus food can be distributed.
6. Gaps
- Robust system to identify and support those at risk of food poverty
- Skills and knowledge around budgeting, cooking, risk factors
- Funding—no new resources attached to this work stream
- Monitoring—no agreed food poverty measures
- No single point of information on local initiatives tackling food poverty
- Partnership working—no agreed structure to coordinate local initiatives addressing food poverty
- Limited numbers of volunteers to support local initiatives e.g. community fridge
- Meals on wheel service or similar to cater for the needs of housebound residents

7. Recommendations

1. Prevention
- Promotion of healthy start vouchers.
- Increasing uptake of free school meals.
- Increasing breakfast clubs provision by linking with Magic Breakfast.
- Increase holiday hunger provision.
- Skill building in both cooking and budgeting.
- Raising awareness across a wide range of frontline service staff of food poverty risk indicators and options to mitigate it.

2. Crisis provision
- Development of a central repository of information to improve signposting and enhance information on local preventative support.
- Ensuring support is delivered in a non-stigmatising and dignified way.
- Develop a local food sharing app or promote established apps like ‘Olio’ to encourage food sharing, signposting those in need and to reduce food waste.

3. Wider approach
- Working with regeneration and planning teams in the council to improve the food offer, e.g. to support community food growing by establishing new food growing spaces, identifying ‘food deserts’ and increasing fruit and vegetable outlets, and limiting the spread of unhealthy fast food outlets (particularly within 400m of schools or other services accessed by children and young people).
- Working with housing teams to ensure stable and affordable housing opportunities are available for individuals and reduce the level of failed tenancies.
- Work with front-line staff across the borough to enable them to identify people at risk of food poverty and sign-post them to relevant local services.
- Embedding food poverty in the council’s strategic approach e.g. ‘connecting communities’, ‘creating futures’, ‘life chances’.
- Measuring and monitoring food poverty in the borough by embedding food poverty questions in residents’ survey and regularly reviewing data on food poverty risk indicators.
- Establish a food partnership that brings together stakeholders in food production all the way to getting it on the plate. Food partnership will own and drive work to ensure sustainable food offer in the borough addressing both food poverty and reducing food waste.