

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL FOOD POVERTY WORKING GROUP

**NOTES of the inaugural meeting of the NCC Food Poverty Working Group held virtually on Friday 04 December 2020 at 1:00 p.m.**

### PRESENT

E. Armstrong	W. Pattison
T. Cessford	L. Rickerby
S. Dickinson	E. Simpson
K. Nisbet	R. Wallace

### OFFICERS

C. McEvoy -Carr	Executive Director of Children and Adult Services
M. Taylor	Director of Business Development and Communities
E. Richardson	Senior Manager Specialist Services
P. Brooks	Head of Northumberland Communities Together
J. Roll	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services

### 01. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

**AGREED** that Councillor W. Pattison and Councillor E. Simpson be appointed Chair and Vice-Chair respectively.

### 02. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

Councillor Wallace declared that he is involved in the Mathew Project in Bedlington.

Councillor Dickinson declared that he is a Managing Director of several service organisations involved with food needs.

### 03. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

**AGREED** that the Membership and Terms of Reference of the Group be approved as detailed below:

## FOOD POVERTY WORKING GROUP

### Membership and Terms of Reference

#### 8 Members

Conservative	Labour	Bedlington Independents	Liberal Democrat	Independents Non-grouped
W. Pattison	S. Dickinson	R. Wallace	L. Rickerby	
E. Armstrong	K. Nisbet			
T. Cessford	E. Simpson			

#### Objective:

To examine the level and implications of food poverty across Northumberland and how the interventions and priorities of various stakeholders can help address the issues.

#### Terms of Reference:

1. To identify and gain an understanding of the level and geographical spread of food poverty across the whole of Northumberland.
2. To examine and assess the national and local interventions currently in place across the County for reducing food poverty. To include:
  - Provision and distribution of food aid;
  - Accessibility and reach of food offers;
  - Identification of any key gaps or shortfalls;
  - Continued assessment of access to food.

and to consider ways that coordinated efforts can minimise dependency of food aid in the longer term.

3. To consider examples of best practice and innovative service provision from the local authority, VCS and other stakeholder groups across the country and any barriers or challenges.
4. To report initial findings and recommendations to Council in January 2021.

#### 04. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed those present and thanked them for taking part in the review. It was noted that Council had asked for a report to their meeting on 6 January however, due to the complexity and range of the topic, it could take a number of months to conclude. Council would be kept informed of progress.

## **05 DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS**

Given the complexity and spread of the problem, the Chair suggested that the Group initially investigate food poverty in the Wansbeck area, focusing on the current landscape regarding the availability of food banks, their usage and whether regular users of foodbanks were followed up. It was pointed out that there were several outlets already operating in the Wansbeck area, but these needed to be coordinated, and access to them reviewed across a wider footprint.

It was agreed that foodbank usage was only a small part of the issue and a strategic approach to the underlying causes of food poverty was required, with sustainable solutions to avoid people being forced into that position in the first place. It was also agreed that food poverty was a county-wide problem with rural areas often facing problems of accessing food rather than food shortages.

Members acknowledged the mental health damage caused by food insecurity and the anxiety and stigma attached to it. There was a myriad of underlying causes to food poverty such as unemployment and deprivation, exacerbated by the pandemic, and several resultant problems such as anti-social behaviour, isolation, drug and alcohol abuse. The Child Poverty Action Group reported that two-thirds of children facing food insecurity were not eligible for school meals. These issues themselves could form a separate part of the review.

Ms Richardson stated that there was a great deal of work already taking place to support families to deal with their wider family problems. Also, the locality co-ordinators were coordinating the many local food offers available across Northumberland.

The Group agreed that the way forward was to collate the wide range of data and information already available in order to map out the level and geographical spread of food poverty across the whole of Northumberland. Then to examine the national and local interventions currently in place, identify gaps and consider innovative ways that coordinated effort and sustainable intervention could minimise dependency on food aid.

Northumberland Communities Together had already started this work with five Partnerships studying data to gain a greater understanding of the problem across Northumberland and find ways to help communities and partnerships to consider inclusive and equitable, sustainable solutions for their communities

Many organisations had carried out valuable work and provided immense support to families over years and the pandemic had highlighted how the Council, VCS and communities can work together to provide excellent support to families. It was important to harness this information and knowledge in order to understand the local position and consider a Northumberland response.

There were welfare benefits available, including the recent Winter Support Grant, but there was a need to understand how available benefits were accessed and the criteria surrounding Grant allocation. NCT was working with Children's Services to

make sure any remaining resource from the Winter Support Grant was targeted to households in need.

The third sector organisations were invaluable in sourcing funding and supporting communities. Data from such organisations regarding referrals, numbers, and any follow up action would help give a more comprehensive picture and add value to the review.

Throughout the pandemic, NCT had helped community groups to support their communities and it was important to work with these groups in partnership without adopting a 'top-down' approach.

Members asked for the following information, reports or best practice referred to during the meeting, to be circulated to aid their understanding:

- The 3 common definitions of Food Poverty; (Emma Richardson)
- The terms of reference of the five Partnerships and their link with Locality co-ordinators; (Paul Brooks)
- The Wansbeck Child Poverty Report (E. Simpson)

## **AGREED**

(1) That officers collate the relevant information, data, innovative best practice and intelligence available from various stakeholders in order to identify and gain an understanding of the level and geographical spread of food poverty across the whole of Northumberland.

(2) This information be presented to the next meeting, together with the National and local interventions currently in place across the County for reducing food poverty and any identified challenges or barriers..

(3) The Group use this information to identify gaps in provision and consider ways that coordinated efforts can minimise dependency of food aid in the longer term.

## **06. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To be agreed once the required information is collated and a mapping process has been completed, likely to be towards the end of January.

**COUNCILLOR WENDY PATTISON**

**CHAIR**