

# **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT**

## **HOLIDAY HUNGER**

February 2019

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At Full Council in September 2018 Councillor Neal tabled a Notice of Motion which was seconded by Councillor Aldred as follows:-

We wish to express our concerns that during the recent six weeks school holidays there has been contact from a number of families who have been struggling to feed their children since the introduction of Universal Credit.

We are concerned that if this is a problem with Whitworth, then there are implications for the whole of Rossendale, and a wider impact across the whole of Lancashire.

Given LCC are the Education Authority and will have information with regards to the number of children who are receiving free school meals, could we seek their help and advice with regards to this matter.

- 1.2 Rossendale Borough Council decided to convene an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to investigate this matter.
- 1.3 The Scrutiny in a Day method was agreed for this Task and Finish Group.

## 2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 2.1 The Terms of Reference of the Group were agreed:-

“The Holiday Hunger Task and Finish Group will:-

- Investigate the impact of Holiday Hunger on Rossendale
- Look at the issues that have led to holiday hunger
- Focus on primary and secondary age school children
- Consult with relevant stakeholders
- Utilise the ‘Scrutiny in a day’ method
- If a problem is identified, ask what Rossendale Borough Council and its partners can do to help address it.”

### 3. SCRUTINY DAY INVESTIGATION AND FINDINGS

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Day took place on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019. This took the form of open discussion in the morning between all parties.
- 3.2 Following the discussion, the Task and Finish Group members reconvened to finalise this report and the recommendations.

#### 3.3 Attendance

The Scrutiny Day was attended by the following:-

##### Task & Finish Group Members

Councillor Adrian Lythgoe (Chair)

Councillor Janice Johnson

Councillor Christine Gill (substituting for Councillor Amanda Robertson)

##### Officers

Sam Plum, Director of Communities

Alison Wilkins, Communities Team

Jackie Flynn, Communities Team

Jenni Cook, Committee and Member Services

##### Other attendees

Councillor Alan Neal

Deanne Marsh, St Saviour's Community Primary School

Lynn Elder, St Joseph's RC Primary School

Christine Goodman, East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group (ELCCG)

Barry Hyde, Rossendale Community Support Network

Rachel Ferguson, Children and Families Wellbeing Service

Tricia Brindle, New Ground at Together Housing

Jo Shakeel, Positive Start

Apologies had been noted for Councillors Eaton and Roberts. Apologies had also been noted from Councillor Ashworth, Debbie Omerod (LCC), Dr O'Malley (Irwell Medical Centre) and Andy Laverty (ELCCG).

#### 3.4 National Situation

**The following information contains extracts from national research.**

All Party Parliamentary Group Report 'Hungry Holidays' Extract:

"The extent of hunger amongst children during school holidays:

- Up to an estimated three million children risk being hungry in the school holidays. This group comprises over a million children growing up in poverty who receive free school meals during term time, as well as an

estimated two million who are disqualified from free school meals because their parents work for their poverty.

- The increase in the number of families with children relying on food banks during the school holidays, compared with other parts of the year, demonstrates that there are particular difficulties that arise at those times of the year which restrict families' abilities to afford food.
- The survey data submitted to the inquiry suggests that a significant proportion of teachers and school staff notice children returning to school hungry on the first day after the holidays.
- Hunger amongst children during school holidays is one of Britain's hidden costs of poverty. It is a cost paid by children. Those individuals and organisations who are actively trying to address the problem report it to be a significant one that affects growing numbers of children.

The different forms of hunger amongst children during school holidays:

The hunger that sneaks up on children and, in many cases, their parents during school holidays shows itself in four different forms:

- There is, for some children, the occasional or persistent hunger that results from a total absence of meals when the cupboards at home are bare and there is no money for them to buy food.
- There is also the hunger that some parents put themselves through in a last ditch attempt to ensure their children can eat something, anything, each day.
- For those families that are managing to scrape together enough money for a filling, stodgy diet to stave off immediate hunger, the poor quality of the food that has been bought to fill hungry stomachs often brings malnutrition into play.
- The daily struggle with hunger, for some families, rules out any chance they might otherwise have of going out and enjoying themselves, or even sticking to any kind of routine, in the holidays. Hunger and malnutrition seem to thrive in those families that have been softened up by inactivity, isolation and loneliness.

The impact of holiday hunger on children's life chances:

- We are concerned that hunger amongst children during school holidays serves to exacerbate the inequalities in life chances that already exist between children from wealthier and poorer backgrounds.
- The evidence we have received on the impact of hunger on children during school holidays is deeply troubling. It reveals how those children who exist on an impoverished diet, whilst taking part in little or no activity, return to school malnourished, sluggish and dreary – some even lose' significant amounts of weight, whilst others gain a lot of weight.
- Moreover, it suggests that this group of children start the term several weeks, if not months, intellectually behind their more fortunate peers

who have enjoyed a more wholesome diet and lots of activity during school holidays.”

The NE Child Poverty Commission: Holiday Hunger Report states:

“Holiday hunger is a real problem for families who normally receive free school meals. Providing those extra meals during school holidays can be a real struggle for many families. At this time, social security changes are reducing income, unemployment remains high and there are major cuts to youth work and holiday provision. So there is real concern that some families will struggle to meet the costs of feeding their children during the holidays. There is evidence that food banks experience a peak in demand during school holidays.”

### **3.5 Local Situation**

The Council’s Communities Team have undertaken some research and have found that there is no Rossendale-wide, or more local provision for holiday meals.

Most school holiday provisions is activity based, with morning and afternoon sessions. Almost all is paid for and we are not aware of any that provides a meal as part of the day’s activity.

### **3.6 Child Poverty Data – Rossendale**

Data regarding child poverty in Rossendale is available at [Appendix 1](#). This outlines that percentage of children living in poverty as defined by the ‘Indices of Deprivation 2015’ with the England average being 19.9%. It should be noted that of the 14 wards listed within Rossendale, 7 are above the national average.

Data regarding the percentage of school pupils (primary and secondary) eligible for free school meals was studied. The national average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 17%. Of the 41 schools listed, 17 are above the national average.

### **3.7 Discussion**

3.7.1 The discussion was open and each attendee outlined their experiences with holiday hunger within their school or organisation. Discussion raised the following points:-

#### **3.7.2 Schools**

- The schools felt that holiday hunger was an issue during term time as well. Anecdotal evidence was given of children eating more on a Friday at school as they would not get adequate food at home.
- Some homes were unable to utilise food parcels as they either had no cooker or electricity to cook on.

- Some schools provided extra fruit and knew children were taking more than their allocation to take home and share.
- Some schools provided extra food out of the school budget, by staff, or by donations.
- Families on the 'borderline' were a concern as their income was not low enough to qualify them for free school meals.
- Some schools did carry out home visits, which could reveal issues such as no electricity or cooking facilities. The problem was that some parents were ashamed and embarrassed and were fearful of intervention. Referrals for help and involvement required consent.
- Schools were providing extra food at lunchtimes to top up children who were hungry and this often came from the school budget

### 3.7.3 New Ground/Maden Centre/Voluntary Sector

- Cooking facilities and electricity supplies were confirmed anecdotally as an issue.
- New Ground had carried out holiday hunger support in Blackburn with Darwen over the past few years.
- Online signposting could be effective, however if someone had no money for food or electricity, they were unlikely to be able to access the internet or activate their mobile phone or IT equipment. Isolation was an issue.
- The Maden Centre dealt with targeted support and could refer to foodbanks, however there was often a restriction on the number of visits. There were funding streams to tap into to access cooking equipment, however, engagement was key.
- An easily accessible base in each town would be very useful.
- Positive Start used their building each Friday morning and worked with Fareshare. Food was provided either free of charge or for a small, manageable donation.
- Stigma and shame were huge issues when engaging with and trying to help people affected.
- The Positive Start initiative at Accrington and Rossendale College in the holidays was well used.
- The Positive Start building could be put to more use, depending on planning issues.

### 3.7.4 Health Sector

- Referrals were carried out, however it was a complex, tiered process with responsibility for public health lying with LCC. School nurses and health visitors did carry out referrals.
- The role of the health visitor was clarified.

### 3.7.5 High Schools

- Council officers had spoken with some high schools and had some anecdotal evidence – hunger had a detrimental impact on behaviour and was often resolved with a drink and a nutritious snack.

### 3.7.6 Other Discussions

- Support was available from companies such as Warburtons, Magic Breakfast and Greggs. It was noted that the Greggs' schemes were means-tested and hard to access.
- Locations were discussed and Councillor Neal outlined the 515 Centre and the Daycare Centre in Whitworth and the issues around this.
- Stigmas should be removed and no child should be going hungry in this day and age.
- The discussion had been informative and eye-opening.

## 4. **WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

4.1 The problems above had been identified and discussed and the meeting moved towards potential ideas and solutions:-

- Help could be focussed on the primary schools most in need.
- A scheme to help schools feed their hungry children without impacting on school budgets was needed.
- The Council could speak to local headteachers.
- Churches and faith groups could be involved.
- Although holiday hunger was the main focus of the group, it was clear that term-time hunger was a good place to start.
- Good, accessible locations across the Borough were needed.
- Although schools were a good option, they were not always able to open during the holidays.
- Food provisions should be for children to eat there and then, not to take home to cook (as some homes did not have this facility).
- The Leisure Trust may have some provisions for activities with food, which could be based in schools, during the school holidays. These sessions would be open to all to avoid any stigma.

4.2 A pilot scheme to engage emerged as an idea. The scheme would:-

- Engage 5-6 schools in the areas of most need.
- Seek to work with schools and the community network to ensure children in need are fed, and that this additional food is not purchased out of the school budget.
- That the scheme would have the short-term aim of providing food to children during the school week initially, with the aim of addressing holiday hunger during the 6-week holidays.

## 5. **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CABINET**

5.1 The Task and Finish Group recommends the following to Cabinet:-

- 5.1.1 That a pilot scheme is established within schools and the community network to look at constant source of fresh food available to those who require it.

- 5.1.2 This scheme will address the immediate issue of hunger, and once established, address hunger during the longer six-week holidays.
- 5.1.3 That although the council is not responsible for this service, it is agreed that officers are able to provide co-ordinating assistance to enable the schools and the networks to work together.

## 6. MEMBERSHIP

- 6.1 Membership of the Task and Finish Group was established in December 2018 as Councillor Lythgoe (Chair), Councillor Robertson, Councillor Johnson, Councillor Janet Eaton and Councillor Roberts. Members who could not attend the meetings were kept up to date via email.

## 7. FINAL WORD FROM THE CHAIR

I would like to thank everyone who has worked on and participated in this Task and Finish Group.

## 8. GLOSSARY & USEFUL LINKS

ELCCG	East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group <a href="https://eastlancscg.nhs.uk/">https://eastlancscg.nhs.uk/</a>
LCC	Lancashire County Council <a href="http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/">http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/</a>
RBC	Rossendale Borough Council <a href="https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/">https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/</a>