

Minutes of the meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held as a Teams Live Events remote meeting on Monday, 30 November 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Chairman: Councillor C D Zosseder

Councillors: M Bates
S H Beer
T A Bond
S C Manion
J Rose
M Rose
R S Walkden
P Walker
H M Williams

Also Present: Noel Beamish (Dover Outreach Centre)
Angela Doggett (BeChange)
Stephanie Hayman (Cinque Ports Community Kitchen)
Deacon Michelle Legumi (Together 4 Dover)
Anita Luckett (Dover Big Local - Food Pantry)
Jonathan Wheeler (Dover Food Bank)

Officers: Head of Community and Digital Services
Community Services Manager
Community Development Officer
Democratic Services Manager

45 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

46 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Democratic Services Manager advised that no notice had been received for the appointment of substitute members.

47 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor M Bates made a Voluntary Announcement of Other Interest (VAOI) on the grounds that he was a volunteer with the Dover Outreach Centre.

Councillor S C Manion made a Voluntary Announcement of Other Interest (VAOI) on the grounds that he was a trustee of the Aylesham and District Workshop Trust for which BeChange was a tenant.

Councillor S H Beer declared a Voluntary Announcement of Other Interest (VAOI) on the grounds that she was a member of the board for Age UK.

Councillor P Walker made a Voluntary Announcement of Other Interest (VAOI) on the grounds that he was a trustee of the Aylesham and District Workshop Trust for which BeChange was a tenant.

48 REVIEW OF FOOD POVERTY IN THE DOVER DISTRICT

The Chairman welcomed the invited attendees to the meeting and thanked them for attending to answer the Committee's questions in respect of the levels of Food Poverty in the Dover District.

Dover Food Bank (Jonathan Wheeler)

The Committee was advised that the Dover Food Bank was set-up by Christians Together in Dover and was part of the Trussell Trust network of food banks. It covered Dover and the surrounding areas such as Lydden, Temple Ewell, Whitfield, Guston and St Margaret's-at-Cliffe.

The services of the food bank were accessed by referral from a wide range of agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Porchlight, the NHS, social services, schools, housing associations and the Dover outreach centre.

The referring agency would provide up to 3 vouchers with each voucher equating to 3 days of emergency food. The 3-voucher limit applied per crisis. The aim was to support people/households through the crisis by helping them access the assistance they needed rather than into food bank dependency. Pre-Covid-19 this would involve meeting with people and assessing their needs and any additional services they required but due to the restrictions around the Covid-19 pandemic this meant that they were only able to deliver the food parcels.

For the 12 months ending October 2020, the Dover Food Bank had:

- Provided 3 days of emergency food to 4,172 people which equated to 36 ¼ tons of food
- Provided 4 ½ tons of food per month
- 38% of those helped were children
- Had seen a 26% increase year-on-year
- Seen a large spike in demand in April 2020
- Maintained food stocks through local donations from people and organisations

The Dover Food Bank was not in receipt of Council grant funding and obtained its food through donations.

Q1. How do you get your referrals?

The majority of referrals to the Dover Food Bank came from the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) although a small number of self-referrals were accepted. This was seen as a good route as the CAB could provide a range of additional support services beyond food vouchers.

In contrast, pre-covid a large number of the referrals came from the Dover Gateway and through work with housing associations and porchlight.

Q2. What were the most common circumstances for referral?

The most common circumstance for people needing to access the food bank since covid-19 was unemployed families or those on furlough for less than

100% income. The impact of switching over from benefits to Universal Credit was also a factor.

In addition, there were also a significant number of people moving into the area with needs.

Q3. How do people choose their food?

Pre-covid it had been more than just about food and there had been a tailored checklist that asked what they liked and needed.

Since covid-19 these questions were asked by the referring agency.

Q4. What if the need goes beyond the voucher provision?

The Dover Food Bank was a crisis support provider rather than an on-going support provider so the 3 voucher limit was useful. However, the provision of food would be extended in circumstances such as when waiting 5 weeks for Universal Credit. The referring agency would provide guidance on the duration of support required.

In some circumstances the Dover Food Bank could provide support to households 2 – 3 times over a 6 month period.

While it was unusual for the Dover Food Bank to end support, it would do so if justified. However, it would also continue supporting for longer if a real need existed.

Q5. How has demand compared to previous years?

The support was provided on a demand basis and donations had always been sufficient to meet the need. The demand for each year was as followed:

2016 – 1,974 people supported

2017 – 2,400 people supported

2018 – 3,042 people supported

2019 – 3,300 people supported

Dover Big Local – Dover Pantry (Anita Luckett)

Dover Big Local was a committee led organization that was funded through a lottery grant and operated in a variety of areas. It was traditionally a grant provider rather than a grant recipient. It operated from a community hub in the Charlton Centre and following a period of temporary closure due covid-19 restrictions provided advice on finances, employment, housing and other areas in a covid safe environment. An online pop-up business school would provide free training in December 2020.

The provision of emergency food supplies by Dover Big Local was a temporary measure that arose from people with short term needs (such as running out of food before their next payment) coming to the hub. It was not intended to be a long-term form of assistance and had been operated with support from Morrisons supermarket.

The Dover Pantry had been created by Dover Big Local initially in conjunction with Southern Housing Group as part of the 'Your Local Pantry' network. Additional funding and support were provided as the project developed by Dover Town Council, Together4Dover and The Raymond Cook Fund. Southern Housing, through Amber Construction, had refurbished unit 16 at the Charlton Centre which was next to the Dover Big Local hub. Dover Big Local had recently formed a Community Interest Company (CIC) which enabled it to seek additional funding streams that were not previously open to Dover Big Local.

The Dover Pantry was not intended as an crisis support provider and instead it offered longer-term support by providing access to reduced cost food for its members for a membership fee of a £5 per week.

The Dover Pantry would also provide food education and budgeting skills to give people the tools to make their own nutritional meals. It would teach 20 – 25 people on its cooking course and they would be able to eat what they made.

The main source of food would be through Fare Share although Morrisons also provided some of the food.

The Dover Pantry had hired a manager with experience in the food sector to set-up the business and as part of the Your Local Pantry network support had been provided with advice on how to work with Fare Share and run the franchise. It had received funding from several sources, including Dover Town Council and was seeking additional match funding.

The Dover Pantry would open in January 2021 and was intended to be financially self-supporting by the end of the year.

Together 4 Dover (Deacon Michelle Legumi)

Together4Dover operated under the umbrella of Dover Big Local. It had been formed during the first lockdown and developed from providing support with shopping and prescription collection into providing hot meals and surplus food.

During the first lockdown (April – July 2020) the group had over 80 volunteers and supplied 800 hot meals to 50 households as well as other forms of support. This included assisting 20 rough sleepers referred by Porchlight.

The food support was provided on a referral only basis through a number of organisations for Dover town centre and the surrounding area.

From the second restriction measures starting in September 2020, the group had only 15 volunteers and provided shopping and prescription collection and fresh free food. The support was again accessed on a referral basis only. It had provided dairy, meat and vegetables to 22 families to supplement food banks.

The support was for 1 month and included one off support for utilities if required. It would continue all the time the group had sufficient volunteers to deliver.

Together4Dover had received £2,000 of funding from Dover District Council under the covid grant scheme as well as a further grant of £7,500.

The Beacon Church provided cooking courses for up to six people with learning needs each year to develop budgeting and cooking skills. Pre-covid a Sunday lunch was provided at footprints for 30 – 40 people.

The intention was to provide a wrap-around support service such as that offered by the Food Pantry or Community Café.

Dover Outreach Centre (Noel Beamish)

The Dover Outreach Centre had been formed as a charity under the umbrella of Christians Together in 2016 in recognition that Dover lacked any form of night shelter. It now operated a drop-in centre weekday mornings and offered facilities for a simple breakfast, laundry, showers, lockers, use as a postal address, general advice and counselling (including mental health) for its users. They also operated the Winter Night Shelter.

The shelter was based in Snargate Street with the 'Drop In' on the ground floor and a suite of rooms (17) on the upper floors that could be used as a stepping stone into permanent accommodation. The majority of the residents were former rough sleepers. A community café was planned for April 2021 and would involve people paying what they could afford to use it. This was to ensure that no one went hungry. There would also be training on cooking and other skills such as a budgeting that would empower people to look after themselves and live better lives. Judith Shilling, the leader of the former Dover Soup Kitchen, was involved with the community café.

The Dover Outreach Centre had received some funding from Dover District Council's covid fund and also from the Kent Community Foundation. However, the aim was to develop in a sustainable manner in the future with less reliance on grants and donations.

Over the last four years, the Dover Outreach Centre had seen over 600 people and housed 150 working closely with Dover District Council, Porchlight and other agencies and charities.

BeChange (Angela Doggett)

BeChange were based in Aylesham and had been operating for 23 years. It worked with communities throughout the Dover District, providing support with skills and employment, finance (including help with accessing benefits), housing, families and relationships. It was based in Aylesham and provided support in rural areas in the district such as, but not limited to, Ash, Elvington, Goodnestone and Nonington. The services were accessed through a mixture of referrals from other bodies and self-referrals.

Before the first lockdown, BeChange circulated surplus food to those in need which helped to keep them out of the food bank system. The 'community fridge' idea allowed people to come and collect surplus food and avoided the stigma of going to a food bank. There were currently 40 people collecting surplus food from BeChange every Friday.

Prior to the covid-19 pandemic, BeChange had seen an increase in food and fuel poverty as well as issues linked to the transition from benefits to Universal Credit. Since the start of the pandemic the level of need had increased as had the range of causes behind it.

BeChange had suspended normal operations during the first lockdown but set-up an emergency food programme from 3 April 2020. BeChange provided 10,000 meals during the first lockdown and had continued to provide support after the lockdown had ended. To date it had provided 13,000 meals. During the lockdown it had also received referrals from the council's community hub.

During the first lockdown, those that had received food support from BeChange were on low income and had struggled to shop in a different way as restrictions were imposed. It also provided 150 emergency food parcels.

BeChange worked with Deal Food Bank and during the first lockdown received referrals for 24 food vouchers. Since the lockdown it had received referrals for a further 24 vouchers.

In addition to this through its cooking courses it provided valuable skills for families, adults and teenagers and they got to eat what they cooked.

The funding for its operations was provided from a mix of capital and revenue funding from a number of organisations.

Cinque Ports Community Kitchen (Stephanie Hayman)

The Cinque Ports Community Kitchen operated from a base at the Chequers Inn and was a social business teaching people to cook meals from scratch on a limited budget. The classes were provided in groups of 8 – 10 and the issue of proper nutrition was addressed through cooking with fresh ingredients. Cinque Ports provided classes for approximately 250 people per year – some through open access classes and some through referral. A survey of those who had attended the classes found that approximately 90% would change some habits as a result of what they had learnt such as eating less take away foods and more fresh food. In addition, a number would go on to work in the catering industry as a result. The Cinque Ports Community Kitchen had a strong relationship with Whole School Meals.

In addition to these social business courses, they also offered on a commercial basis recreational cooking classes, dining, etc.

The classes had stopped in March 2020 due to the covid-19 pandemic and a chilled and reheated meals service had been started instead which covered Deal, Sandwich and surrounding areas. It provided 5 meals a week (a £4 main meal to be reheated and a desert) which was subsidised by the Big Lottery to make affordable. This service would be continued until March 2021.

The business model for Cinque Ports meant that it did not have core funding and the closest it had to this was the funding received for specific projects such as its meal delivery service. It also earned income from its commercial courses.

The main users of the service were older people who could not go out and younger people who were shielding for medical reasons due to covid-19. They were not dealing with those in extreme poverty but rather those who had trouble accessing nutritious meals. This was not due to issues with the availability of food (a food desert) but rather people who due to health problems or other reasons were unable to cook for themselves.

Dover District Council Community Services

The Head of Community and Digital Services advised that the Council was a long-term partner of the community and voluntary sector in the district and had invested £225,000 in grant funding for it in the last year. The Council had provided £100,000 in grant funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) which played a vital role in supporting people in need and access the assistance they required. The Council had supported numerous projects over the years that had positively impacted on the community.

The voluntary sector provided hope and inspiration and through multi-agency working could make a real difference to people's lives. There was a need for a strong framework identifying the role of each organisation, its expertise, the potential funding streams available and ensuring that value for money was achieved.

It was recognised that many people were too proud to ask for help they were entitled to receive and that they wanted to maintain their independence. They could be helped to improve their quality of life in a variety of ways by providing the skills they needed to do this.

During the first lockdown, the Dover District Community Hub had operated 24/7 with 120 members of staff and worked closely with other public sector agencies, faith groups, town and parish councils and the voluntary and community sector.

The Chairman thanked everyone who attended for their time, the good work they undertook in the community and their valuable contributions to the Committee's Review of Food Poverty.

The meeting ended at 8.27 pm.