

Appendix 1

ROSSENDALE BOROUGH COUNCIL – COMMUNITIES TEAM PRIMARY SCHOOLS SUMMER HOLIDAY FOOD PILOT PROJECT 2019

EVALUATION REPORT

Introduction and Background

At full Council in September 2018 the following Notice of Motion was tabled:

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.

Rossendale Council decided to convene an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to investigate the issue, with the following terms of reference:

- 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.”

A report was produced in February 2019 by the Task and Finish Group for Overview and Scrutiny which included the following recommendation to Cabinet:

- That a pilot scheme is established within schools and the community network to look at a constant source of fresh food available to those who require it.
- This scheme will address the immediate issue of hunger, and once established, address hunger during the longer six-week holidays.
- 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.

The Council’s Communities Team took this work forward, initially exploring the issue more deeply and identifying interventions which might assist local families facing difficulties in providing sufficient food during the long summer holiday.

Development and research

As a first step the Communities Team carried out research into:

- Successful projects in other areas, regionally and nationally
- Which local schools had the greatest number of pupils entitled to free school meals
- What resources were available locally to deliver a pilot food project

A short questionnaire was devised and sent to the Head-teachers of the 6 schools with the highest numbers of free school meals entitlements and face to face interviews were then arranged. All the Heads recognised going hungry through the school holidays as an issue which also affected performance on the return to school in September. Most Head-teachers were clear that the overall issue was general poverty. Debt was also identified as a significant issue. All agreed to take part in the pilot project by, at the very least, identifying families who would particularly benefit from access to free food during the summer holidays.

Scope of the pilot

It was agreed to pilot different approaches in different areas. A referral form was devised and sent to the schools with a leaflet explaining the scheme. The schools ensured that the relevant families received the literature and were encouraged to complete and return the forms.

The Communities Team developed the project working closely with Raft - the local foodbank, Bacup Family Centre and Haslingden Community Link. The main activities took place in Haslingden and Bacup.

HASLINGDEN – working with St. James and Haslingden Primary schools, a free and healthy packed lunch was available Monday to Friday throughout the holidays from the Neighbourhood Centre at Haslingden Community Link.

BACUP – Each eligible child and their family were able to pick up a weekly food parcel from either St. Joseph's school on a Friday or Central Methodist hall on a Monday throughout the holidays. Both venues also provided play activities and smoothies and snacks were also available at Central Methodist. The schools taking part were St Josephs, St. Saviours and St. Mary's schools. In addition, several families were referred to the scheme by Raft during the course of the summer holidays. The food pack was quite extensive and included a minimum of 2 carrier bags of food with additional bags for each additional eligible child in the family. Subject to availability of food, there was flexibility also to include provision for older or younger children in the packs.

This involved considerable logistics including Raft renting a storage unit at Rossendale Storage in Stacksteads. The project was also supported by many Raft volunteers, CAST (Community Assets Standing Tall), Bacup Family Centre, Communities Team staff and Cllr. Janice Johnson as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny.

Food donations were sought from council staff and via social media and many were received including from 2 local businesses – Interfloor and Flexipol. Financial

donations were also received. The project was also supported by several local supermarkets, via their donations of fresh food to Raft.

We were also able to support the projects below as we became aware of them.

WHITWORTH – Financial support was given to St. Michael and St. Johns school for their summer holiday club and leftover fresh food from the Monday Bacup session was also donated.

WATERFOOT – Financial support was given to St. Anne’s church for their project providing a healthy packed lunch for anyone in the area.

Cost/sources of income

External and grant funding was secured to fund the project. The project was financed by:

- LCC - £1500
- Private donations - £1650
- The Richard Whittaker charity - £3000
- RBC – additional support

The total cost of the project was £6171.50.

Outputs and outcomes

In Haslingden, 20 families registered for the scheme and 30 children benefited, with a total of 675 packed lunches being provided over the 6 week school holiday.

In Bacup and Stacksteads 30 families accessed food parcels during the 6 weeks, with a total of 74 children benefitting from the scheme.

In Whitworth, 20 children attended the holiday club at St John’s and St Michael’s primary school. At St Anne’s Church, Edgeside up to 16 packed lunches were provided daily during the school holidays.

Newground (Together Housing) are going to work with local schools, starting with St Joseph’s and St Mary’s, to provide a regular debt advice service for parents of children at the school. This has often been done informally by staff at the school and will provide a much needed service. The aim is to help families manage their income better and bring in extra income through benefits where appropriate, thus relieving some of the financial pressure on families.

Evaluation

All involved agreed that the Holiday Hunger pilot project was a success and provided vital support for many families who would otherwise have struggled to provide food or activities for their children over the school summer holidays. It was put together at short notice and Rossendale Council is very grateful to the many volunteers and community groups who helped to make it happen and to the people who donated food and provided funding, without which the project would not have been possible.

It was intended as a pilot project and feedback has been collected from parents, volunteers, schools etc, to enable the scheme to be evaluated and to inform any future provision.

Key learning:

- Schools found the process of signing children up fairly straightforward. With more time, they could approach more families to ensure those most in need signed up. There was some confusion initially about which families should be approached to join the scheme, however this was quickly sorted.
- Some families were put off signing up to the project due to stigma.
- Parents who participated in Bacup and Stacksteads gave very positive feedback – they found it stress free, the children loved the activities, staff were friendly and many reported that they don't know what they would have done without the provision.
- All the families involved said that they would like it to happen again. One head teacher reported that 2 families are already worried about Christmas and half term as the children get a free breakfast and lunch at school.
- One school reported that all the children who attended have come back to school happy, not stressed and seem to have had an OK summer – not being hungry has made a huge difference, as has not having stressed parents.
- One school reported that children who took part have looked more relaxed in themselves on return to school.
- It was suggested, in particular in Haslingden, that the project hadn't managed to target many of the families and children who would have particularly benefited from the provision. Involving other agencies in the referral process, e.g. LCC Children and Family Wellbeing Service, would help to address this.
- In both areas, not all the families who had signed up to the project attended to collect the packed lunches or food packs. A variety of reasons for this were given when families were subsequently contacted including forgetting, not being well, difficulty in getting to the centre etc. This resulted in some 'wastage', although in all cases this was redistributed effectively.
- The activities and social element of the project worked well, they provided an opportunity for parents to meet with each other and for the children to take part in activities that they wouldn't otherwise have access to.
- The provision of activities widened the offer so that the project was not just about collecting food parcels, which helped to reduce the stigma for families.
- The smoothies provided at Central Methodist were very popular.
- A benefit of the project was the opportunity to link families to a range of other support and networks e.g. Homestart, who attended some of the sessions.
- Although the project was targeted at primary school age children, there is a need to cater for all the children in a family.
- Working in partnership with other agencies and community, faith and voluntary groups is vital. Logistically it was a challenge to provide weekly food packs for up to 30 families in Bacup and Stacksteads, and packed lunches for up to 30 children in Haslingden for the 6 week school holidays. Working with community groups and organisations made this possible.

Future development

The Communities Team will convene a meeting of organisations involved in the pilot project, and other relevant organisations to look at options for taking the project forward and providing sustainable provision to address holiday hunger and food poverty more generally. The pilot project was resource intensive including in staff time, and funding and resources will be key to any future provision and external funding options will be explored.

It should be noted that there are a number of organisations who continue to provide access to free or reduced price food in the borough, through food banks, food pantry models, breakfast and lunch clubs etc. Many of the schools also provide food and other support to children and families where there is need. Any future Holiday Hunger provision will complement existing provision.