

Briefing Notes

Committee name: Cabinet

Date: 14 May 2020

Responsible officer: Richard Gibson

This note contains information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Cabinet or a committee but where no decisions from Members are needed.

If Members have questions relating to matters shown, they are asked to contact the Officer indicated.

Food Distribution Report Cheltenham

People's ability to access food during the crisis has been one of the most significant risks that the town has had to address.

As a result, we have seen an unprecedented response from our community. Existing food projects, such as the Cheltenham Food Bank and The Big Local Project have tailored their offer to meet increased demand. We have seen the creation of new food projects such as Springbank Food Project and the Long Table to fill gaps in food provision, plus we have seen an army of friends, neighbours and volunteers helping out those most vulnerable in our communities.

Just from our own work on the help hub, we have worked with TCT to issue 750 food parcels and 150 bespoke food shops to vulnerable people.

Volunteers from one of Cheltenham's largest employers offered their expertise to help build a map of the current food support being offered to local residents to help us understand where there might be gaps in coverage or organisational resilience risks.

As part of the process, volunteers contacted the seven community food providers, the five parish councils, plus three of the larger mutual aid community groups to carry out a short survey to build a picture of how well the current process of food distribution is working and to ascertain what needs to happen to address gaps and risks.

The report is attached as appendix 1 to this report and includes 8 recommendations: CBC's initial draft response is included with each recommendation.

1) Greater clarity on the types of services and schemes in place would help as the process for donations, via vouchers, meals, food items, can be confusing.

CBC would support better coordination of information about community food projects – this could be a CBC web-page in the interim. But CBC recognises the need to engage with the food projects to develop this resource.

CBC would also support more sharing and co-ordination among the food projects and also how we link food projects with sources of support. This could also include a continued conversation with the projects about capturing and sharing data so that there is collective understanding about trends etc

CBC could also play a role in effective joined-up communications / branding across the food projects whilst also building on the many acts of kindness shown during the crisis to create a wide-spread campaign of kindness and compassion that encourages continued donations and mutual support.

2) A central place for this information to be amalgamated so people know where they can donate, either locally or online, could go some way to assist the longevity of food donations.

CBC would support better strategic coordination of food and with the view to ensuring equality of access and fair distribution of food. The report authors did not find any obvious geographic gaps but did raise the issue of digital exclusion.

CBC also supports linking access to food with our wider safeguarding responsibilities and how we work on a multi-agency basis to understand wider vulnerabilities within our communities that we need to respond to as part of our recovery planning.

3) Coordination with respect to approaching supermarkets could help take full advantage of what they are each offering by way of monetary funding, food donations or special access hours etc. For example, Tesco have released another £15m of funding across the UK, information on how groups can get access to this could assist in this.

CBC would support creating better links with supermarkets, particularly via their community coordinators - to foster a collective and joined-up response to food distribution.

4) Increased publicity for the services offered in the communities within Cheltenham which is accessible to all.

As above, CBC supports better coordination of information about community food projects, both in terms of accessing their services, but also about the best way to support them.

5) A method for central communication or a forum for groups to come together would benefit the agencies. This would increase understanding of different groups and their actions within the community and also help coordinate the food distribution efforts. This would likely assist in the sustainability of the services.

CBC supports the principle of organising an online conference for food providers, supermarkets and other stakeholders to help build better understanding and coordination.

6) There are seemingly limited possibilities to request support via post, there was a strong uptake in one area where this was implemented, this could go some way to supporting vulnerable groups without access to technology if implemented on a wider basis.

7) Localised letters with key information on local support was voiced could also assist with this gap.

If CBC issues future letters to vulnerable people, it will include information about community food projects, if this can be tailored by post-code, CBC will also issue more specific letters to improve the connection between vulnerable people and local groups and support.

8) Several parishes and some distributors have suggested building on the local hubs concept, managed by each local community with central support. Fits with #FeedCheltenham model, and also the concept of local food pantry memberships.

CBC supports exploring this model, again possibly through the proposed online conference. But CBC recognises the need to engage with the food projects to develop this proposal. .

Summary

There are four other areas emerging from the report that CBC would like to focus on:

- How we can use the relationships that the community food projects have built up with vulnerable people to provide longer-term support eg mental health and wellbeing support, access to housing, financial and benefits advice, and support for families.
- How we use the funds from our community resilience fund to support the findings from this report
- How we work collectively to address the shortages in PPE that were captured in the report.
- How we build the findings from this report into our recovery plans.

CBC would like to put on record its heartfelt thanks to the work of the seven community food providers, the five parish councils, plus three of the larger mutual aid community groups in supporting those made vulnerable by the current crisis.

CBC would also like to thank the volunteers who have pulled the report together, the analysis and findings. Their work has been invaluable in bring the issues to our attention and we look forward to working with them to implement actions arising from the report. .

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