



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

POVERTY

Rochdale Borough Council

Food Poverty – A Community Solution

Context

Rochdale is ranked the 15th most deprived borough in England based on a rank of the average for LSOAs in the area (defined in the Indices of Deprivation). Many of the people in the borough were already significantly disadvantaged when the pandemic struck. Its primary impact was on food and poverty. The initial response saw multi-agency groups coming together to form community hubs. These hubs were reliant upon community groups and volunteers who knew and understood the communities. The hubs met the immediate needs of the most vulnerable.

Development

It became apparent that a long-term focus on food poverty was required. Dignity was to be at the heart of the response. A system was required which could flex to need, prevent a culture of dependency from developing, provide support without judgment, which encouraged individual choice and fostered autonomy.

Implementation

The Food Solutions Network was established via Action Together, a community CIO which supports VCFSE organisations to provide an integral role in local solutions. The network facilitates the VCFSE sector, alongside Rochdale Council and other partners to improve access to food in the borough. It provides food to sustain in crisis situations and provides a pathway to self-management through food pantries and food clubs. Cooking skills and dietary support are also provided and with the ease of restrictions, social eating groups are helping combat isolation. Access to support around debt and emotional support is also available.

A Community Food Warehouse was established to assist food distribution. The warehouse is stocked with food and resources which are redistributed through the food providers to residents in need.

There are thirty two food providers in the network. Many of the organisations are not formal co-operatives but the network is underpinned by an ethos of solidarity and co-operation. By working together the reach and accessibility of food support is increased. Volunteers are at its heart, with many providers relying on high numbers on a regular basis. Working co-operatively and sharing resources has enabled the network to harness the buying power and logistics capabilities of anchor institutions, whilst quickly progressing grassroots ideas into action. It connects food provision to other support, enabling a holistic person centred approach.

Looking forward

There is recognition of a need to reduce reliance on crisis food solutions and eventually on food provision all together. Food support is however, often the gateway to a deeper conversation around economic support needs. The next step will be to work closely with the Food Network's sister network, the Economic Support Network (ESN) to support the co-location of food and advice services by hosting debt advisors, expanding on signposting and advocacy support, enabling residents to move easily between support structures.

For further information contact:

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