

SCRUTINY REVIEW – UNIVERSAL CREDIT – MEETING WITH PILLION TRUST

Present : Councillors : Una O'Halloran, Clare Jeapes, Representatives of Pillion Trust, Islington Libraries, Islington People's Rights, LB.Islington iMAX team

During discussion the following points were made –

- Members met users of the Food Bank
- It was noted that the Trust received food/ provisions from local stores/organisations. In the past it had been difficult to obtain fresh fruit and vegetables with a reasonable shelf life, however a supplier in Highgate now provided this, and therefore users could utilise more healthy food options
- The iMAX team and SHINE assisted users of the food bank with help and to assist in fuel poverty, as some claimants did not have the money for gas/ electric to cook meals
- The Trust saw between 19/24 families per day and the largest family consisted of 7 children
- The Trust has entered into an arrangement to collect food etc. by bicycle and also to deliver to the elderly or disabled, however the greengrocer who supplied the fruit/vegetables is in Highgate so that to use a bicycle for this could be problematic because of the steepness of Highgate Hill
- The Trust also ran a clothing bank for users and this has proved popular
- Food is provided from a number of sources, such as Sainsbury's, Tesco, local bakeries etc. The main problem with getting more provisions is the lack of availability of transport to collect
- The majority of the food bank users were the 'working poor', and families with 3 or more children could now be over £60 per week worse off under UC than before
- The Trust stated that it was gratifying that some users of the food bank, when they had 'got back on their feet', had donated food and other provisions to the Food Bank, in return for the assistance that they had been given to assist others
- It was noted that one of the biggest issues facing users of the food bank is that some of them had no money at all, especially single people living in rented accommodation, and with UC it is difficult to get to know about these people
- The view was expressed that some users of the food bank on UC, had been rehoused by the Council and Housing Associations, and then had realised that they did not have enough money as their rent payments had increased. There needed to be a more holistic approach taken to

dealing with these issues and more engagement with claimants before them being rehoused to inform them that their financial circumstances may change as a result

- Islington's Peoples Rights stated that they dealt with a number of vulnerable clients and were concerned that number of people just gave up on their claims and had problems providing medical evidence and with the habitual residency test. Doctors also sometimes charged patients for providing medical evidence
- All LBI Libraries provided computer access for claimants and had wi-fi and can scan documents, if required, for claimants
- Staff can assist claimants to go 'online' and a number of claimants had been assisted to date. Staff would refer more detailed information and for complex cases to 222 Upper Street for assistance
- It was stated that some people found it very shaming and humiliating to have to come to the food bank and for a number of families cooking was either difficult or something that they did not do. It was stated that cookery lessons/classes needed to be more widely available, especially for the difficult to reach groups
- The view was expressed that it would be useful if the Trust could provide examples of how the numbers of people attending the Food Bank has increased over the past 2/3 years and the Pillion Trust stated that they would provide these figures
- It was noted that work also took place with younger carers and Islington Families First on issues affecting the family
- Work also took place with the iMAX team in order to maximise all benefits available to claimants