

BETWEEN a rock and a hard place?

The Bill Sargent Trust
Research for Action

A research project for the Bill Sargent Trust
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THE WORK OF FOOD
banks in Hampshire 

» BACKGROUND

The Bill Sargent Trust carries out research on homelessness, poverty and related issues in Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton. It seeks to influence policy with the outcomes of the research.

The Trust was established to commemorate one of the founders of Portsmouth Housing Association (now part of First Wessex), the late Reverend Bill Sargent.

» OUR RESEARCH

Our most current research report: The Impact of the Hampshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme 2013-2014 was published in July 2014. This research was funded by Hampshire County Council. Previous research projects have included:

- » The Impact of Welfare Reform in Hampshire, December 2013
- » A Qualitative Review of the First Wessex Employment and Training Advice Service (2013)
- » Counting the Cost: Advice Services and the Public Spending Reductions (2013)
- » Forces for Good: making the most of military land for public benefit (2012)
- » The Impact of Welfare Reform and Public Spending Reductions on Low Income Households in Hampshire (2011)
- » Community Benefits from Ministry of Defence Land Disposals (2010)
- » The role of Housing Associations in supporting their residents to find employment and training (2009)

The Trustees are Mark Mitchell, Nigel Baldwin, Phil Raybould and Kirsty Rowlinson.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Summary	5
Food bank users' experiences	5
How food banks are helping.....	6
Are food banks sustainable?	6
Questions for the future	6
1: Overview of current research and policy issues	8
1.1 The rise of food banks: an emerging evidence base	8
1.2. The politics and policy of food banks.....	11
2: The situation in Hampshire: users' experience of food banks	13
2.1 Summary of main findings.....	13
2.2 About our interviewees.....	14
2.3 What led to food bank users' food crises?	15
2.3.1 <i>Multiple inter-related issues</i>	15
2.3.2 <i>Low incomes</i>	16
2.3.3 <i>Insecure employment</i>	17
2.3.4 <i>Benefits sanctions</i>	18
2.3.5 <i>Delays and other benefit-related problems</i>	20
2.3.6 <i>Inflexibility leading to people slipping through the net</i>	22
2.4 The practical impact of the crisis	24
2.5 The emotional impact of the crisis	26
2.6 What do service users do to avoid food crises?	27
2.7 Giving something back	29
3: How are food banks in Hampshire operating?	31
3.1 The scale of food bank provision.....	31
3.1.1 <i>Trends in use and demand</i>	31
3.1.2 <i>Profile of food bank users</i>	32
3.1.3 <i>Geographical coverage</i>	33
3.1.4 <i>Longevity</i>	34
3.1.5 <i>Governance</i>	34
3.1.6 <i>Income</i>	35
3.2 Distribution, referrals and signposting.....	36
3.2.1 <i>Distribution models</i>	36
3.2.2 <i>Referral systems</i>	38
3.2.3 <i>Relations with jobcentres</i>	39
3.2.4 <i>Informal referrals</i>	40
3.2.5 <i>Signposting</i>	41
4: The effectiveness and limits of food banks in Hampshire	43
4.1 How visiting a food bank affects users	43
4.2 How much help can food banks really offer?.....	44
4.3 Is food bank provision sustainable?	46
5: The future of food banks in Hampshire: the bigger picture.....	49
5.1 Are food banks in Hampshire here to stay?	49
5.2 How do food banks understand the wider social problems they are addressing?	50
5.3 How might food banks engage with wider issues in the long term?.....	52

6: Discussion of findings and questions for the future	55
6.1 Users' experience: multiple problems, limited help	55
6.2 Food is evidence of the crisis, not the cause of the crisis	55
6.3 Living on the edge: what is driving need?	56
6.4 A fragile response - food banks' limitations and vulnerabilities	57
6.5 A qualitatively different response: compassion and discretion	58
6.6 An unsustainable response? Challenges and tensions for the future	59
6.6.1 <i>What role should food banks play within a wider network of social support?</i>	59
6.6.2 <i>Should food banks collect and share more data?</i>	59
6.6.3 <i>Can food banks sustain their existing operations at the current level?</i>	60
6.6.4 <i>Can food banks cope with unexpected demand?</i>	60
6.6.5 <i>Do food banks need a better understanding of the context in which they are operating?</i>	60
References	62
Appendix 1	64
Brief description of food banks visited in the course of this research	64
<i>Andover</i>	64
<i>Basingstoke</i>	64
<i>Borden</i>	64
<i>Fareham and Gosport Basics Bank</i>	64
<i>Farnborough</i>	65
<i>Gosport (FISH Project)</i>	65
<i>Hart</i>	65
<i>Havant (Beacon Food Bank)</i>	65
<i>New Forest Basics Bank</i>	65
<i>Southampton City Mission</i>	66
<i>Winchester Basics Bank</i>	66
Appendix 2	67
Illustrative statistics from independent food banks	67
Appendix 3	70
List of food banks serving Hampshire residents	70

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Summary

Food banks³ are rapidly becoming part of the landscape of crisis support in communities across Britain. In 2014-15 the Trussell Trust, Britain's main provider of emergency food aid, gave out enough food parcels to help more than one million people. Hampshire, despite containing some of the UK's most affluent areas, has also experienced a remarkable rise in food bank provision and use.

Food banks are not confined to deprived areas. There are now at least 20 food banks or similar projects in Hampshire, including some of the wealthiest parts of the county. They cover rural and urban locations, with a mix of projects affiliated to the Trussell Trust and independent schemes.

This research, commissioned by the Bill Sargent Trust, covers 11 food banks across the county. We interviewed 19 food bank workers and volunteers, and 22 food bank users.

Food bank users' experiences

The experiences of food bank users interviewed reinforce the consistent findings of national research.⁴ Users generally go to food banks only when other options have been exhausted, and feel ashamed and embarrassed at having to ask for help. Their personal stories are often traumatic. Our research shows the hidden human costs of a creaking system of social support.

Benefit delays, changes in benefits and jobcentre sanctions are particular triggers of crisis. In addition, a growing number of food bank users simply cannot make ends meet because of their low income. This increasingly includes people who are in work. People are living close to the edge of their resources, and small changes such as a reduction in working hours or a period of illness can trigger an emergency.

Many users have multiple difficulties, including physical disabilities, illnesses, and mental health problems. These may be compounded by insecure housing and employment, relationship breakdowns, or caring responsibilities. Given the resources available to them, many food bank users are not in a position to prevent a crisis recurring.

The need for emergency food aid is evidence of deeper crises faced by families and individuals who are living 'on the edge'. Importantly, a lack of food is not the crisis in itself: it is the consequence of a crisis. Opening more food banks or expanding their services might help households cope with an emergency, but it will not stop the emergencies occurring.

³ A food bank is a voluntary project providing short-term emergency food to people in crisis. Most food banks provide a parcel with around three days' supplies of basic foodstuffs.

⁴ See full report for details.

How food banks are helping

Our research aimed to discover how food banks in Hampshire are responding and whether there are ways in which they can improve the assistance they offer.

All but one of the food banks we visited operated on a referral system. Decisions on a person's need are taken by professionals or people with a degree of expert knowledge, from housing workers and health professionals to advice workers, doctors and school staff. Most food banks apply a limited degree of discretion when deciding whether to offer a user additional emergency help or to relax rules that ration the help available (typically to three or four visits in a year).

Food banks recognise that the help they offer can be little more than a 'sticking plaster' and most try to signpost users to longer term sources of advice and assistance. In one case, a food bank has an arrangement with an advice agency to provide an adviser on site once a week. In general, though, there is no guarantee that a food bank user will receive appropriate long term help or that the signposting will be effective. Food banks are not in a position to gather information about what happens to their clients in the longer term.

What food banks consistently offer, as well as emergency help, is a listening ear and a generous and compassionate response. This is sometimes in stark contrast to users' experiences of statutory services. Food bank users are often surprised and pleased to be treated with respect and sensitivity.

Are food banks sustainable?

It is far from certain that food banks can continue to operate as they currently do in the long term. While sources of food donations appear to be plentiful at present in most areas, funding is ad hoc and many food banks are in temporary premises. There are questions over whether the churches that are the mainstay of Hampshire's food banks can continue to supply the number of volunteers required in the future.

Some food banks have been reluctant to ask for help from statutory organisations, stressing the value of their independence. However, this independence may also limit their ability to offer appropriate assistance to people in crisis.

Questions for the future

The research raises important questions that food bank organisers and volunteers will need to consider. These include:

- What role should food banks in Hampshire play in the wider network of social support? Should relationships with statutory and voluntary agencies become closer?
- Should food banks collect and share more data so that it is possible to understand trends and challenges on a county-wide basis?

- Given the strong view among food bank workers that need will continue and may grow, are Hampshire's food banks equipped to sustain their work?
- Do food banks have the capacity and resources to cope with unexpected demands?
- Do food banks need a better understanding of the context in which they are operating, particularly in terms of the policy climate and the likely challenges that further reductions in welfare spending will pose?

1: Overview of current research and policy issues

1.1 The rise of food banks: an emerging evidence base

The growth in the provision of and need for food banks, especially since the global financial crisis of 2007/08, has occurred in the context of austerity, welfare reform, rising costs of living (including food and fuel) and stagnating incomes.

These circumstances have compounded to mean that food is less affordable in real terms for many people, as incomes have lagged behind increases in the cost of living; and that state provision designed to mitigate the worst effects of unemployment, poverty and ill health (in terms of social security and public services) is increasingly restricted.

From the mid-2000s until very recently there was a continuous rise in food prices which, combined with rising costs of living, has made food 20% less affordable for the poorest 10% (Defra 2014). People have also changed the way they shop and eat in the context of recession and austerity. Strategies include trading down (e.g. buying supermarket own brands), shopping around more, eating smaller meals or skipping meals (Save the Children 2012, Defra 2014, Hossain et al 2011). The rise in food banks therefore appears to have occurred in the context of worsening food security for many people, which in turn has been a symptom of a wider reduction in living standards.

The rise of food banks has occurred since the turn of this century, with a particularly stark proliferation since 2010. The story of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network – the UK's only national network of food banking projects – has epitomised the proliferation of food banking and drawn attention to the work of charitable food initiatives. The foodbank network provides statistics on the growth of provision and the levels of need their projects face in local communities. In 2008/09 the network distributed 25,899 food parcels, in 2010/11 it distributed 61,468 and in 2014/15 it distributed 1,084,604 (Trussell Trust no date). In the last four years the network has grown from 58 (Lambie 2011) to the current total of 445.

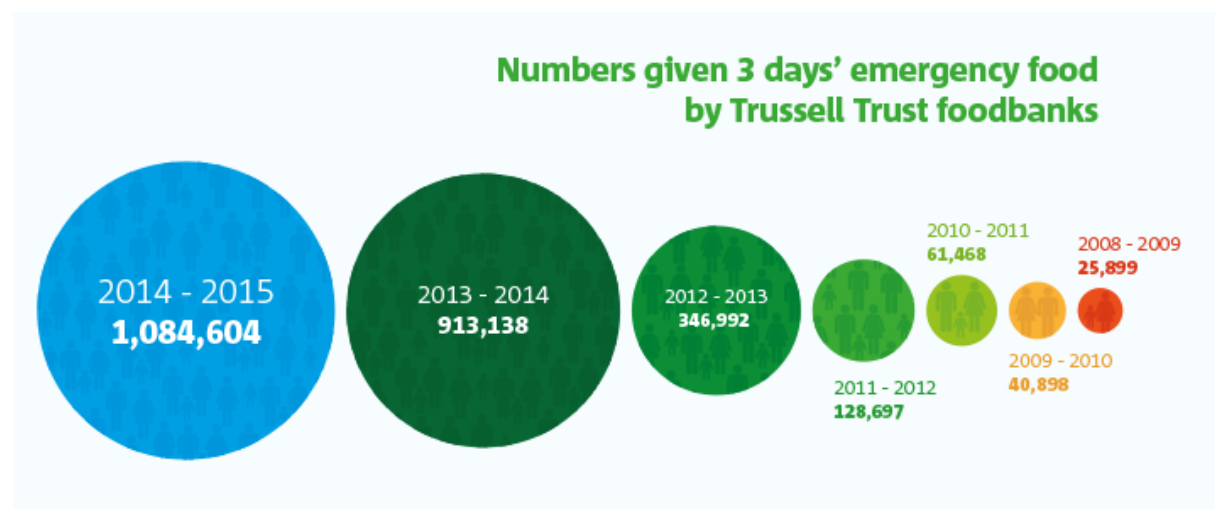


Figure 1: The rise of Trussell Trust food aid (source: trusselltrust.org)

Food banks are one of many kinds of charitable food assistance on offer in local communities in the United Kingdom. The UK government refers to this wider category of projects as ‘food aid’ which is defined as:

‘An umbrella term used to describe any type of aid giving activity which aims to provide relief from the symptoms of food insecurity and poverty. It includes a broad spectrum of activities, from small to large scale, local to national, emergency one-off operations or well established food banks’ (cited in Lambie-Mumford et al 2014).

State and charitable initiatives are both included under the food aid umbrella. Examples of state assistance would include Healthy Start vouchers (Lucas et al 2015). Charitable food aid initiatives would include building based food provision (where food is provided and eaten on site), distribution projects (where food is given and taken elsewhere to be eaten), community care initiatives (such as meals on wheels) and food banks. Food banks in the UK have come to be identified as projects which provide parcels of food for people to take away, prepare and eat (Lambie-Mumford et al 2014).

When food banks started making headlines and gaining attention from policy makers, there was little robust evidence available on what was driving need for this emergency food provision, how widespread this need was and how effective these initiatives were at meeting this need. The lack of UK-based evidence was reflected in the 2013 Defra-commissioned Review of Food Aid (Lambie-Mumford et al 2014).

There was, however, a good body of evidence from other country contexts, including the USA and Canada. This provides valuable insights, particularly on the drivers of food aid use and outcomes in terms of food security. This body of work (see Lambie-Mumford et al 2014 for full review and citations) shows us that people turn for help from food aid projects, including food banks, when they are struggling to eat (i.e. are food insecure). The more food insecure someone is, the more likely they are to use food aid. It also tells us that people will employ many different strategies to try and ‘manage’ before they turn to food aid, which is a strategy of last resort. Further, the evidence tells us that many people who are food insecure do not attend food aid projects. Reasons include issues of access, perception about who food aid projects are there to help, and ideas about how adequate the provision might be. The evidence highlights how hard it is for people to turn to food aid and the negative emotional consequences, including shame and embarrassment.

Existing evidence suggests that the impact of food aid, in terms of enabling people to eat well in the long term, are limited. It does highlight, however, that these projects provide important spaces of care in local communities (Lambie-Mumford 2015). The research shows that where it is adequate and tailored to the needs of users, food aid may provide immediate relief for household members; however it cannot overcome the underlying drivers of food insecurity (Lambie-Mumford et al 2014). The non-food support on offer at many food banks (for example a listening ear or signposting to/providing more formal advice support) has been identified by providers as a key aspect of their work.

This body of research provides an important basis for our knowledge. The findings raise wider questions of ‘solutions’ to food insecurity, and the structural dynamics driving food insecurity. UK-specific publications in the last two years have further fleshed out the evidence, with a particular focus on the drivers of need for food bank provision.

In November 2014, some of the most powerful and high profile voices in anti-poverty and food charity work, including the Church of England, Oxfam UK, Child Poverty Action Group and the Trussell Trust, published a report on understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK – ‘Emergency Use Only’ (Perry et al 2014). Following this, in December 2014, the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty in Britain launched its findings and recommendations (Food Poverty Inquiry 2014). Both reports provide important steps forward in our knowledge about hunger, food aid and food banks in particular. ‘Emergency Use Only’ draws on data from over 1,100 food bank clients and the Parliamentary Inquiry received over 400 pieces of oral and written evidence.

These two reports highlight the importance of the social security system on the one hand, and wider poverty dynamics on the other. ‘Emergency Use Only’ found that *‘for between half and two thirds of people included in this research, the immediate income crisis was linked to the operation of the benefits system (with problems including waiting for benefit payments, sanctions or reduction in disability benefits) or tax credit payments’* (Perry et al 2014 p7). Similarly, the Parliamentary Inquiry stated that *‘benefit-related problems was the single biggest reason given for food bank referrals by almost every food bank that presented evidence to us’* (Food Poverty Inquiry 2014 p34). However, both reports also highlighted the importance of wider structural determinants of food insecurity, including chronic low income and high costs of living, and how food crises often (but not always) sit within a wider context of poverty.

The ‘Emergency Use Only’ and Parliamentary Inquiry reports outline recommendations designed to reduce the need for emergency help to obtain food from projects such as food banks. These include important suggestions around raising incomes and enabling a more effective social security system. The Parliamentary Inquiry report outlines recommendations which seek both long-term and short-term change. It contains numerous measures aimed at improving wage levels and reducing the costs of living (particularly food, fuel and housing) to enable people to afford food and other essential costs. Both reports also dedicate a significant proportion of their recommendations to the social security system. These recommendations are detailed and suggest ways in which continuity of income can be promoted and provision (particularly crisis provision) strengthened.

Although the national evidence base around food banks has improved significantly, there are still many unknowns. First, we do not have a systematic account of food charity uptake. At present, we still rely on the information some charities make available, so we do not have a reliable account of all food bank usage. More importantly, we do not have a systematic measure of hunger more generally – including the intersection between food bank use and food insecurity. Relying on food charity data, or even focusing data collection through food charities, is problematic because it doesn’t capture hunger in the whole population or the

reasons why someone equally needy might not take up food bank support. Various stakeholder organisations have called for more systematic data collection on food insecurity, including the Faculty of Public Health (Ashton et al 2014) and the Environment Food and Rural Affairs select committee (Efra 2015).

1.2. The politics and policy of food banks

Especially in recent years, the rise of food banks has received coverage from national media, including newspapers, television and radio. Parliamentarians have engaged with the issue through formal debates (Hansard 2013) and parliamentary questions. Food banks have sparked a highly charged political debate, particularly around two key questions: whether welfare reforms have increased the need for food banks; and whether the growth of food banks is driven by supply (i.e. the availability of provision) or demand (i.e. existence of urgent need). The Defra review of food aid found no evidence to support the hypothesis that rising food bank use was driven by the availability of free food (Lambie-Mumford et al 2014). The effects of welfare reform on food bank need are now beginning to be reported (Perry et al 2014, Lambie-Mumford 2014, Sosenko et al 2013).

An important aspect of the publication of (and reaction to) both the ‘Emergency Use Only’ and Parliamentary Inquiry reports was that they symbolised a public acknowledgement of the will to address the issue of hunger. The rise of food banks has been a contested and politically heated issue in the last few years, and these reports make clear the commitment of key stakeholders in the voluntary and community sector and – for the first time – in government too to work towards a ‘zero hunger Britain’. Despite tangible progress, however, it is arguable that so far we have seen political *reaction* rather than a tangible policy *response*.

A key barrier to tangible policy responses is arguably the lack of ‘policy ownership’ of the issues at a national level in the UK. Although food insecurity (including at the household level) is technically the responsibility of Defra, it actually touches on a range of policy spheres and responsibilities across Whitehall including social security (the remit of the Department for Work and Pensions), nutrition and health (Department of Health), and transport and planning (Department for Communities and Local Government). Despite being relevant to so many government responsibilities, the multi-dimensional nature of food insecurity (including the rise of need for food banks) appears have led to the issue falling into the gaps between departments.

At local levels, however, it is easier to identify responsibilities, particularly with the movement of public health departments from Primary Care Trusts into local authorities. At a local authority level it is possible for various dimensions of food insecurity and food bank provision to be assessed and addressed, including food access, local welfare assistance schemes, health inequality and school food policies. Brighton and Hove and Sheffield are examples of councils that have adopted food

strategies.⁵ At this scale it could also be possible to adopt progressive local responses to food poverty through poverty and social justice strategies.

⁵ See <https://www.sheffieldfirst.com/the-partnership/health-and-well-being-partnership/food-plan.html> and <http://bhfood.org.uk/>

2: The situation in Hampshire: users' experience of food banks

This section presents food bank users' experiences, and considers what it is like for people to go without food and to need help from food banks. We have deliberately included a large number of direct quotations in order to bring to the fore the voices of those who have experienced crisis and had to use Hampshire's food banks. In all but two cases, food bank users were interviewed when they arrived to collect a food parcel; the other interviewees were former clients who agreed to share their experiences. All interviews were conducted with a guarantee of anonymity and personal details have been excluded from this report.

In this section food bank users describe the circumstances that led them to be referred to the food bank, their perceptions of the causes of their crisis and their experience of using food banks.

Quotations from interviews are in italics (here and throughout this report). Quotes in this section are from food bank users, except where stated. Quotes attributed to "food bank worker" may come from a volunteer or a paid member of staff.

2.1 Summary of main findings

Of the 22 food bank users we interviewed, 14 had mental health issues, three had learning disabilities and eight had physical health issues. Eleven were providing for people other than themselves. Three had been substance abusers at the time they used the food bank. Around two thirds were using a food bank for at least the second time. None were owner-occupiers.

Our interviews confirmed that food bank users end up in food crises for a combination of reasons. They have usually been dealing with a variety of challenges for some time when a significant change in circumstance tips them over the edge and starts a spiral of descent. People whose income barely covers, or doesn't quite cover, basic outgoings, gradually use up savings and exhaust other sources of support until they have no resilience to unpredictable events.

Food bank users are struggling to get by on their income, despite careful budgeting and frugal living. A significant number of food bank users were in food crisis because, from day to day, their benefits didn't provide enough to meet their basic needs, while a few food bank workers told us that they were increasingly seeing users from households where at least one adult was in employment but where the income from that employment was not enough to cover the household's essential outgoings.

Benefits sanctions emerged as a strong theme. Several interviewees were in crisis because they'd been sanctioned as a result of circumstances that were difficult or impossible to avoid. In addition, at least seven of the food bank users we interviewed needed the support of a food bank because of the length of time it takes for benefits to be agreed and paid.

Others are slipping through the safety net of support altogether, and in some cases falling deeper into debt, due to support agencies' rigid rules and procedures, and a lack of flexibility or tailoring of support to individuals' circumstances.

By the time our interviewees had reached the point at which they approached a food bank for help, they were in dire straits and had gone for some time with very little, or inadequate, food. Some had been unable to feed their children.

Emotionally, they felt ashamed and embarrassed to be using a food bank and were suffering from low self-esteem, anger, frustration, and a sense of helplessness.

While a few service users had come to regard a food bank as part of their regular landscape of support, most had done, and were determined to do, all they could to avoid needing a food parcel. They lived frugally and budgeted carefully, were attempting to clear debts, and those who could were looking hard for employment. Most took a high degree of personal responsibility for their situation and tended to blame themselves for their difficulties even when it was not clear what they could have done to prevent them.

Several service users were volunteering with the food bank or had made a financial donation once they'd got back on their feet.

2.2 About our interviewees

To find out more about the situation facing food banks and their users in Hampshire, we visited eleven food banks across the county, in urban and relatively rural locations.⁶ Food banks in Portsmouth were not included in the research as they were conducting their own research project at the time of our fieldwork and wished to avoid duplication.

We interviewed 19 food bank workers and volunteers, and 22 food bank users - 15 men and seven women. Fourteen had mental health issues, three had learning disabilities and eight had physical health issues.

Nine had caring responsibilities and a further two were contributing to financial support for someone else.

Three were substance abusers (or had been at the time they used the food bank).

Fourteen had used a food bank on a previous occasion.

Thirteen were in social housing or a refuge/shelter. Five were in privately rented accommodation, at least four of them with state financial support. One was in insecure accommodation. One was living with their parents. Two were sleeping rough.

None were in employment although two were living with employed partners (one of these had work only for eight to ten hours per week).

In this section, to help the reader understand the extent to which experiences were common across users or food banks, we've occasionally stated how many interviewees told us about specific issues. However, care should be taken in drawing

⁶ For a full list see Appendix 1

quantitative conclusions from a qualitative study. The figures should not be extrapolated to suggest that proportions are representative of all Hampshire food bank users and/or food banks.

2.3 What led to food bank users' food crises?

2.3.1 Multiple inter-related issues

It is, of course, artificial to identify a single reason why a food bank user needs a food bank's support. People don't end up without the means to eat as the result of a single incident. Our interviews confirmed findings from previous research (Perry et al 2014) that users have been living 'on the edge' and dealing with a variety of challenges for some time when something tips them over that edge.

A significant change in circumstance, such as losing a job, can start a spiral of descent. Two food bank users, for example, explained how they'd ended up sleeping rough after losing their jobs and going into rent arrears. One of them subsequently had their benefits sanctioned because they didn't have a permanent address, so couldn't easily access mail and sometimes did not pick it up in time to find out when they were required to attend the jobcentre.

As workers and volunteers explained:

'It's generally not an instant thing. It's something that's built up and they get to a point most of them when they think, I don't know what [or] who to turn to.' (Food bank worker)

'I've seen a lot of people with mental health issues and that is a very complicated area because you find that most people have multiple issues. So they maybe have a benefit problem, they're also in debt. They may also be depressed but they also have mental health issues. They may also be disabled.' (Food bank worker)

'A difficulty with any one thing tends to trigger others.' (Food bank worker)

Food bank workers and volunteers highlighted examples of vulnerable people battling a range of complex and interlocking difficulties.

'We get a lot of single men who've come out of the forces. [They] come back from somewhere awful like Afghanistan and they haven't been able to fit in and their partners have ended up splitting from them and they've ended up in some room somewhere with all sorts of other issues as well, maybe mental health issues, maybe drug and alcohol issues.' (Southampton worker)

'If you've been homeless a long time, especially if you have an addiction, it's hard to get settled. People get accommodation but fail to meet the terms and conditions of their tenancy and end up back on the street.' (Food bank worker)

Case study: how an initial setback can spiral out of control

'My [employment] contract ran out and obviously I knew it was gonna run out, but I thought I would find something in time [...] Savings began to dwindle [...] As money started running out with no new work in sight, I had to look into, you know, signing on and it just so happened that everything went wrong at the same time. The place

that I was staying decided that they were selling and I had to move out and I didn't have enough money to get a deposit to move into anywhere else. The jobseekers allowance, admittedly in my negligence and ignorance, didn't realise it was gonna take two weeks, two and a half weeks to actually get money from the day that you applied for it. So it basically just rolled into the pot where, OK, I have to leave where I live tomorrow, I don't actually see any money for another two weeks. I don't know anyone around here. I don't have family that I can go stay with. I guess I have to go sleep on a bench.'

2.3.2 Low incomes

Food bank users, volunteers and workers described how people were struggling to get by on their income, despite careful budgeting and frugal living. A significant number of food bank users were in food crisis because, from day to day, their benefits didn't provide enough to meet their basic needs.

'Quite a few debts that I can't pay off right now and it's affecting our ability to run the house [...] Not only that, we're in debt as well with our credit card and overdraft. We're having a tough time. It's kind of got worse. When we were both working it was just about managing. Now we're not working, we're just under water.'

'I was only getting a pension of £430 a month, by time I paid my bills out of that we were only living on something like £150.' ... 'Not even that sometimes.' (Couple interviewed together)

'I just about scrape through [...] once you've done your gas, your electric and you've bought enough to last you. My boys are quite big boys, they're not little children and they eat man-size dinners and you know it's catering for three of us, which is just to keep us in warmth and food, and then I don't even get the chance half the time to actually clothe them as well. So it's very difficult.'

'I think a lot more we are seeing people who we would class as living in relative poverty as well. So because obviously gas and electric has gone up, the majority of people who are on benefits have to have meters in their homes which then costs them more to run [...] So we have people who come in desperate because they have paid all their bills, they've paid the gas and electric and they have nothing for food.' (Food bank worker)

A few food bank workers told us that this didn't just apply to people on benefits: they were increasingly seeing users from households where at least one adult was in employment but where the income from that employment was not enough to cover the household's essential outgoings.

'When the food bank first opened we had a lot of single homeless or vulnerably housed men [...] and now we see very few of those and we're seeing more and more [...] families where one of the adults is actually in work but is on a low income and they're just struggling to make ends meet really.' (Food bank worker)

'Sometimes it's been okay and we've met the bills and then other times I've had to ask my Nan for financial assistance and then other times we've been so low we've had to come here.' (User on benefits whose partner is in employment)

In addition, when people can barely make ends meet each week, an unexpected bill, a period of unemployment or some other change in circumstance can be enough to tip them into crisis. People whose income barely covers, or doesn't quite cover, basic outgoings, gradually use up savings and exhaust other sources of support until they have no resilience to unpredictable events.

'I think people are running through their savings, if they've got any. They're running through every last piggy bank and so, when the bills come in [...] I don't think people have got the backup anymore. We had a gentleman who had been made redundant - and from a good job in a local company - and he just hadn't expected to not be able to find a job quickly and he came in a dreadful state because [...] he hadn't been able to sign on obviously 'cos he'd got savings and everything and then he'd ran through all his savings and everything and just was in shock.' (Food bank worker)

'Most people who are working will cope. In fact most people generally will cope until something else happens and it's that final crisis trigger that pushes them into that extra need where they've been trying so hard to keep their head above water, and then maybe they have an extra child come to stay or their marriage breaks up or they need to replace a large household item, something like that [...] There's no contingency, these people are living right on the edge.' (Food bank worker)

While it could be argued that some 'unexpected' bills might have been anticipated (one user talked of having to suddenly pay TV licence and water bills), others are unpredictable. For example, one food bank user's mother had been admitted to hospital in another city so the food bank user was spending money on fares to visit her. Another food bank user told us that their bank had deducted £100 of charges without notification, relating to an incident from several months previously. This emptied the user's account, taking the money they had for gas, electricity and the week's food. The food bank user was disputing the charges and had been told that they would be partially refunded. However, the refund was not immediate.

A few food bank users we interviewed argued that they already budget sensibly and carefully. They were frustrated by an implication that they could have avoided getting into crisis by managing their money more effectively.

'The CAB said, "We'll have to give you a voucher but you'll have to come in here next week for a budgeting plan". And, I thought, "Well, I budget my money!" I know I've got what I've got to pay out. I went to the budgeting meeting, and the guy said, "It seems as if we're wasting your time and you're wasting our time because you've already budgeted your money. You can't budget any more". There's just not enough money coming in. In this weather, I have to put £20 a fortnight on the gas, and I have to put £30 a fortnight on my electric so that's £50 there. Then £38 for the rent and I've got my TV licence on top of that and so...'

2.3.3 Insecure employment

Several food bank users (none of whom were currently in employment) told us how challenging it had been for them when they were in insecure work. They were continually at risk of their hours being reduced, or their employment ending

altogether, with little or no notice, with serious implications for their income and ability to meet their basic outgoings. It's easy to see how difficult this is to cope with particularly given how long it can take to get benefits in place (see section 2.3.5).

One had been working under a short-term employment contract which was renewed every few months. Eventually, the agency didn't renew the contract because they had too many staff. As the user had only worked for them for one year, they weren't entitled to any redundancy pay.

Another had been in and out of work for some time, having a job for a few months at a time before being let go either '*because they didn't need me or I wasn't up to the skill levels they required*', or without even being aware of the reason.

A third user commented, '*I had a job at Tesco that had a "one minute you're there and the next minute you're not" clause and, 'cos I was on zero hours, they could do what they wanted. One minute, I would get a wage and then, the next month, I wouldn't get a wage.*'

A food bank worker told us, '*We had a single parent in not so long ago who was on a zero hours contract and she'd, I think, only had her hours cut by half an hour a day but it had made a massive difference to her. You know it didn't seem much in terms of time for the employer but it made a massive difference to her circumstances.*'

2.3.4 Benefits sanctions

Benefits sanctions emerged strongly as a theme within our interviews. While it is perhaps not surprising that those who'd been sanctioned felt unfairly treated, their stories did suggest that people are ending up in crisis having been sanctioned as a result of unavoidable circumstances, or at least circumstances that were difficult to avoid. For example:

- One food bank user on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) had been unconscious in hospital for 13 weeks as a result of an assault. During this period, his medical certificate lapsed so his ESA was stopped. JobcentrePlus wrote to him but no one had access to his house so the mail wasn't collected.
- One user's claim had been closed on the grounds of non-attendance because they didn't receive notification of an appointment, although JobcentrePlus said it had been sent. This occurred over the Christmas period so it was a month before the person in question discovered their claim had been closed. Their request for their reclaim to be backdated was turned down due to the amount of time elapsed (although this was due to JobcentrePlus being closed over the Christmas period). The user was challenging this decision and had been awaiting the outcome for two weeks at the time of the interview.
- Another food bank user had their benefits stopped for non-attendance because someone who lived in their shared house had been stealing mail and so they were unaware of the date of an appointment.
- A food bank user had been repeatedly sanctioned for non-attendance because, as a rough sleeper, they could only access their mail at a support centre three

days per week and the amount of notice the jobcentre was giving for meetings meant that the user didn't find out about them in time.

- Both users and workers told us about claimants being sanctioned for being just a few minutes late for an appointment (even when they'd phoned to say they would be late – the message apparently having not got through).
- One food bank worker told us that the risk of sanctions put people in a catch-22 situation where they had to miss job interviews in order to avoid being sanctioned saying, *'even if you tell [...] the jobcentre that you've got a job interview for a job, "This is why I'm not turning up for my interview", they will still sanction you.'*

This led some food bank workers to conclude that the system was unduly harsh. One told us, *'From my experience, the benefits system actually has a lot to answer for [...] With mental health clients, for example, they might have been in hospital for two weeks and their money stops and they come out and they have nothing and yet they've still got a rent to pay and food to buy and bills to pay but their money's stopped and, for no actual fault of their own, they've ended up in hospital and everything stops. And so then their support worker is having to [...] help them restart things.'*

Another said, *'The system seems almost savage. We get people in, obviously we're only hearing their side of the story, but they've rung up because they're ill and they've been told, "Right, sorry, you're sanctioned. Missed your appointment".'* (Food bank worker)

A user said, *'[Another food bank user] has told me that they've been in the jobcentre and there have been people crying their eyes out 'cos they've been sanctioned and they've lost all their money [...] There are people getting messed over for, I mean it might be at the heart that they are at fault but for the smallest discrepancy. You know, for a two minute late appointment or even a fifteen minute late appointment or for not understanding a form - because not everybody is competent. It's hard to say, it sounds really offensive in a way but there are some people that are signing on who aren't that there in the head. They're not very, incredibly intellectual. They can't use computers. Some of them can't read or write [...] I've been thrown forms and it's like, "Do this": 20 pages long and the question doesn't make sense [...] And these people have kids, these people have bills to pay you know. I think, okay, even if they are at fault, you need to have some logic in the sense that, okay, penalise them somehow but don't make them worse than they already are because then you're only gonna have to clean up that mess in some other form later on. And you know then it falls to places like food banks just to feed people you know. And [the food bank] doesn't have to be here. This isn't a government run thing. It's not a local council run thing. This is a church.'*

Several users whose benefits had been sanctioned had passed a work capability assessment although they argued they were not fit for work.

'I couldn't work so I went onto the sick and, for some unknown reason, I didn't get enough points to receive the sick benefit. They said I was fit for work. And in myself I knew I wasn't [...] I fell short of about two points [...] They turned round and said [...],

“You’re fit for work and you have go back to the jobcentre”. But I weren’t fit for work.’ (Later a housing association supported the user to reapply and they were granted a Personal Independence Payment and now have enough to live on).

‘I had a blackout at the medical two years ago and they’re still saying I’m fit enough for work [...] We appealed against it two years ago and we were still appealing against it last year to say, because the medical board who did my assessment, she said I went on my own but my friend came with me. I nearly passed out in the medical and she didn’t even put that in the notes’ (This food bank user’s Employment Support Allowance was reduced from £120 to £60 per week four months before the interview).

‘I was hounded. Medicals. They stopped my money. I had nothing, absolutely nothing, when I came here [about two years ago]. Bearing in mind I was just coming back from a [nervous] breakdown, they then take my benefits away from me and I was six to eight weeks without benefits. Not only that but I had a spare bedroom so they took my house away from me. I had a council house and my daughter had moved out. [...] That’s where the debt came from because I wasn’t able to keep meeting the shortfall in the housing benefit.’

A worker at a referring agency told us of a client they’d accompanied to a review of his Disability Living Allowance. Because the client had made himself presentable, the reviewer sneered that he didn’t look as if there was anything wrong with him. *“You look like you’re off to play bowls!” It was disgusting. Because he’d got someone to help make him presentable, he got turned down.’*

Both service users and workers and volunteers felt that statutory services, particularly jobcentres, should show more compassion when dealing with clients.

‘The only thing that really needs to be done to the system is more interaction between the decision-making team and the jobseeker themselves. Because, what they’re seeing of us is either a handwritten letter or a computer email. They don’t know us from Adam, they don’t know our circumstances, what we have done through that particular period to get the sanction or miss an appointment. They’re just making a decision on what they see. They need to have more in-depth words with either the jobcentre or the jobseekers themselves in order to make a more fair decision but the problem is the amount of jobseekers out there and the amount of decision maker team - they’d get swamped. They’d have fun!’

‘[The] benefits system could be more accessible and they need to be trained better than they are to give more help instead of hassling in front of people all the time.’

‘The lack of hope that people come away with having dealt with the housing department and the jobcentre is huge. Huge lack of hope [...] We’ve had some people who have been suicidal.’ (Food bank worker)

2.3.5 Delays and other benefit-related problems

At least seven of the food bank users we interviewed needed the support of a food bank because of the length of time it takes for benefits to be agreed and paid. One told us their Pension Credit award took four months from the date of their

application. An applicant for jobseekers' allowance had to wait a month while their immigration status was checked. Another user said:

'It's a week wait until they sort it [JSA] out and after that you start getting paid so you don't get paid for a whole week and then, if they still ain't sorted out your benefits by then, they start, obviously you get paid but it's back pay.'

A food bank worker told us of someone who'd waited 12 months for their Disability Living Allowance to be reassessed. Such stories were echoed by other workers and volunteers.

'The big issue is not only benefit sanctions but dysfunctionality in the benefit system. Delays in payments. One of the classic ones is that if you are on Jobseekers and you get a job, the minute you get a job [...] they stop the benefits immediately and, if you're on monthly paid [you have to manage]. We've had quite a few people who've turned up because that's happened. The benefits stop immediately ...' (Food bank worker)

'Well it's people who've suddenly been out of work, the benefits haven't come in. Then, if you've got a bill to pay and everything and children -.' (Food bank worker)

'I know [the jobcentre's] got so many people to see but I'm sure there must be a way they can speed up a bit.' (Food bank worker)

One food bank user told us their benefits had been delayed due to errors made by statutory agencies. He'd recently come out of prison had to make a new claim for benefits through the jobcentre staff at the prison and they made mistakes on the form. The jobcentre also lost the medical certificate he'd sent confirming the claimant was unfit to work, so they had to send a replacement. The jobcentre staff at the prison put the prison as the claimant's current address, so they had to provide proof there were no longer at the prison, and then JobcentrePlus contacted the prison to confirm. By the time of the interview, it had taken two weeks to assess the claim and the user expected it to take another week. *'It's getting to the point that I've just had it up to here with the jobcentre. I've been on the phone nearly every day for two weeks.'*

Another was subject to the under-occupancy penalty or 'bedroom tax', despite disagreement between social services and the local housing department as to whether they were entitled to receive support for their additional bedroom because their granddaughter frequently stays.

Case study: delays in arranging benefits

A worker at a referring agency told us of a man who had always worked full-time but because of ill-health couldn't work for a while. He was to start a new, permanent job once he'd returned to fitness but had no income until then. By the time he came to the referring agency's attention, he'd had no income for six weeks. It took a week to arrange housing and Council Tax benefit because this involved someone visiting. Employment and Support Allowance took even longer because of the need for a

medical certificate. He had to wait several weeks for a doctor's appointment to get a certificate (which only covers two weeks), and then JobcentrePlus said they hadn't received the medical certificate. In the meantime, the local authority engaged bailiffs to recover his Council Tax.

2.3.6 Inflexibility leading to people slipping through the net

In addition to people having their benefits sanctioned, or struggling due to benefits delays, we were told about people slipping through the safety net of support altogether due to support agencies' rigid rules and procedures, and a lack of flexibility or tailoring of support to individuals' circumstances.

While support may exist on paper, in practice it is often inflexible, not tailored to individual circumstances and creates arrears which put people deeper in debt. People fall through the net because they don't know what support they're entitled to, and support agencies don't become aware of the difficulties they're in. For example, we were told that, if JobcentrePlus realises it has overpaid someone, it simply reduces benefits to recoup the money, although the claimant cannot manage on a reduced income. A referring agency worker said, *'People in ivory towers have no idea!'*

Case study: inflexibility of support services

A referring agency worker told us about someone who was forced to move because the local authority was closing their accommodation. The tenant was given notice to move close to Christmas and couldn't find a moving company that was willing to work at that time. In fact, they struggled to find one at all because it was such a small job. As a result, they went into rent arrears because they had not given back the keys on time. The worker in question expressed incredulity that the local authority couldn't be flexible, given that it was Christmas and that no one was waiting to move into the accommodation as it was being closed down. Further, while the local authority would pay the removal costs, it would only do so on a reimbursement basis and the tenant didn't have enough money to pay in advance. Then, when they'd moved, they needed a cooker. Again, the local authority was prepared to fund this but wanted the supplier to invoice them and the supplier refused to work that way. There was money left over from the budget for removal costs but the local authority would not allow the tenant to use it to settle their rent arrears. The referrer estimated that it would take a year to clear the debt *'which has only built up because of the stupidity of the system'*.

Case study: slipping through the net partly due to dyslexia

'We're dyslexic. We kind of got lost somewhere in the system, if you understand what I mean. Nobody seemed to want to help you [...] Went back to the jobcentre but there were so much hassle if you understand what I mean and they don't really help you at the jobcentre.'

'They just say, they give you a bit of paper [...] Go and sit over there and read the board. Well I said, "We can't read the board: we're both dyslexic".' (Couple interviewed together)

Case study: slipping through the net partly due to mental health issues

'There was a particular gentleman who we had in a while back who had serious, very serious mental health issues and had been on the streets for a very long time and somehow you wonder how on earth he slipped through the net. And as I got to know him and we provided food for him probably every couple of days and often he would just come up and sleep in the lounge. He drank coffee in the lounge and I [...] was getting frustrated because I was seeing this man needed mental health help and there was nobody looking after him out there.' (Food bank worker)

Case study: ineligibility for support leading to homelessness (1)

'I went to the local council. They were as helpful as they could be to a point. They basically told me, because I was young, 'cos I was healthy, 'cos I was male, 'cos I didn't have any kids, they couldn't house me immediately you know 'cos I wasn't a drug addict or anything like that sort of thing 'cos I didn't need insulin, I didn't need a fridge sort of thing. They did however, they put me in touch with a charity called Two Saints which I understand have hostels or some sort of accommodation for gentlemen that are younger than myself. So they did say that they couldn't house me in there but then one of their outreach workers actually then came to meet me in person at the council and he said that he would try to help me find a private landlord or whatever and expedite getting me housing benefit and he even, all the technicalities I can't remember but he was basically like, "I can even make it, arrange it so your deposit can be paid or it can be waived or something".

The advice I got from the council which I must admit from everyone who did help was the least help of anyone else. They basically just said, because of the demographic you fit into, the only advice we can give you is to look on Gumtree, spareroom.com and maybe three or four other suggestions and that meant obviously coming [to a homeless drop-in centre] [...] which is not too inconvenient but it's a big inconvenience as compared to getting up in your own house or your own flat and logging onto your own internet connection.

Another thing: there is a selection box where - it's still listed as DSS on one of the websites 'cos it's so outdated - but it means housing benefit. There are boxes you can tick [to select landlords who will take people on housing benefit] and it will go from hundreds of suggestions to maybe three you know and even then you'll call them and they might not want you there or it was never supposed to be listed as that in the first place or it's already been taken ...

I only found four places in the entire time I was homeless listed on the internet that matched my age that they were willing to take, my gender 'cos obviously some are only able to take women, willing to take housing benefit, still available according to

the internet and within the budget of the money that the council said they would give me.

Then when I actually called them up, one was already taken two months before: they just hadn't taken it down. The other, she hadn't filled it for such a long time so she said she'd decided to do some work on the place so it was gonna be available in like three weeks from now which obviously was way too long for me. The other guy said it shouldn't have even been listed as housing benefit etc, etc.

So I was coming [to a homeless drop-in centre] basically saying, you know 'I can't find anywhere on the internet'. If I untick housing benefit, a thousand show up but you know I have to get housing benefit and going back to the council and telling them that. I mean you can't say they don't care but they can't do anything about it.'

Case study: ineligibility for support leading to homelessness (2)

A food bank user had been living with his mother in her council house until she moved away, 'abandoning' him, 18 months previously, and the council evicted him, making him homeless. He approached the council for support but *'there was nothing they could do about it. They kept fobbing me off for a year and a half. They basically gave me the middle finger and told me to fuck off. It's disgusting. Fucking wrong'.*

Food bank workers and volunteers reinforced this perception of a lack of support for vulnerable people:

'I've been struck by the number of people who come in because they've got a problem, it might be a housing problem or a debt problem or even a benefits problem. They are not quite bright enough to help themselves so they need some help. There are a lot of people who come that haven't had the education to understand how to go about things. That might be form filling or finding agencies or whatever.' (Food bank worker)

2.4 The practical impact of the crisis

By the time our interviewees had reached the point at which they approached a food bank for help, they were in dire straits and had gone for some time with very little, or inadequate, food. We met a couple in their early 60s who'd been living on packet noodles and breakfast cereal until their housing association signposted them to a food bank.

'I wouldn't have no food for a week now. That's why I was in a bit of a panic. I hadn't heard [back from their mental health support worker] and I didn't have any minutes on my phone.'

An interviewee who'd been sleeping rough until food bank workers helped him find lodgings *'was basically spending the day in [town] keeping myself clean and, because it was for such a short period of time [a few days], you know, I didn't look too rough, if you know what I mean. If I'd had a job and was going to the office every day, those people would have noticed but I didn't really look homeless. And then I was getting*

up at half six, seven a.m. and, because it was winter, it was dark so there was not that many people around. I was probably only found by about two or three people the entire time and that was one group of guys that came down on a Friday night, and they were drunk and just wanted to throw stones in the sea, and then I think the other group was probably the same guy walking his dog and one time I completely lied to him and said I was a photo student taking photos. So like I mean, he didn't even seem to care but I didn't want to be like, "Oh I'm homeless and sleeping here" in case I was gonna get moved on or something.'

Another interviewee was sleeping rough: '[Before I obtained a tent] was literally in a shirt and shorts, on the streets for a year and a half. Not sleeping every day. Not eating. Just non-stop walking because that's how I kept warm.'

'I'm actually going without meals. 'Cos for the last month I've been living on either beans on toast or boiled egg sandwiches 'cos it's cheap [...] But I'm just lifeless [...] I can't do it 'cos I'm so drained all the time you know because I haven't got no energy to actually do anything...'

'We've had several people say that they've rummaged in bins for food, somebody said that last week – they had been sanctioned since 5 December and they were eating out of bins, got food poisoning.' (Food bank worker)

'We had somebody die last week. Not here thankfully. He died in hospital I think. They get pneumonia when they're sleeping rough.' (Food bank worker)

Those with children prioritised feeding their children over feeding themselves but some couldn't even manage this in the school holidays.

'I will go without so my children can have.'

'I intend to give my son most of the meals [from my food parcel] anyway you know because he's growing. He's gotta be at school, got to have that energy.'

'Just feels like an unending battle. Every two weeks it's like, "What am I gonna get now? And how am I gonna feed my child? How am I gonna keep my child warm and safe?"'

'So many times, my children would eat and there wouldn't be enough for me so, I'd have a cup of tea and a glass of water and was grateful that my children were healthy.'

'[A service user said], I don't know what I would have done without you. I've only got one child but she has breakfast at school, lunch at school. All I can afford to do is give her a sandwich of an evening but, during the school holidays, I can't feed her.' (Food bank worker)

Several food bank users told us they would have starved without food bank support.

'If it wasn't about, I would have been absolutely buggedred [...] It kept me alive, in truth and honesty. I owe them quite a big thanks.'

'[Without the food bank], I think I would have to go back to what I was doing when I lived on the street, which is living off sweets that I stole from shops. It must have been for almost a year in 2007-2008, I was living on M&Ms, Minions and chocolate and things like that, out of Woolworths, WH Smith.'

'If it wasn't for these sort of places I think we would starve...'

2.5 The emotional impact of the crisis

Low self-esteem, anger, frustration, and a sense of helplessness were evident in many of our interviews with food bank users.

'I was obviously in a complete distraught state because of my children...Oh my God, it's devastating.'

'This is why my depression's really, really bad, you know what I mean, at the moment because I don't know what's gonna happen. Every day I think to myself, "Why did I wake up?" you know because you've got the same problem again. How do I make ends meet to feed my child?'

This was reinforced by food bank workers.

'I've never seen so many grown men cry [as I have about having their benefits sanctioned]' (Food bank worker)

'They may often feel overburdened, powerless, confused, or vulnerable, and need above all a friendly face and practical help.' (Food bank worker)

Some food bank users had no personal support network other than the food bank and described feeling isolated and lonely (*'I had no one to turn to, nobody at all.'*) Food bank workers and volunteers also talked about the isolation they witnessed.

Service users talked about how distressing it was to need the support of a food bank. Shame and embarrassment were themes within numerous interviews with food bank users.

'When you can't go to your friends or your family and all your resources have run out. It's unbelievable really [...] It's a bit embarrassing. You shouldn't have to do things like this. I shouldn't. I shouldn't, really but it ends up, I've got no other choice really.'

'I just want to support myself but, at the moment, I haven't got that... When I've come to [the food bank], it's really embarrassing. I take pride and I hate asking for help. But, when I do need help, it took my parents nearly an hour and half to persuade me to phone these people. I don't like using charity - it's horrible - but I've had to 'cos I wouldn't use them if it wasn't an emergency.'

'I felt a bit embarrassed [...] because I'm quite independent [...] I looked around and see other people that obviously you get different situations and people that have a lot more problems.'

'I was quite terrified in the sense that I've never had to really ask for charity whatsoever. I absolutely despise the fact that I have to sign on in the first place. [...] I just hated the fact that I was showing up here as someone that they kind of knew was getting £20 worth of food for nothing you know just 'cos I needed it and it was weighing up the fact that do I wanna starve or do I wanna eat? [...] Even at the time when they've brought out the food and I'm actually looking at the food that I'm gonna eat that night and my stomach's not gonna be going crazy. We're just talking in general and having a normal conversation. Still feel nervous. Still feel awkward.'

Happy 'cos you're getting food but still horrible on the inside [...] For 28 years I've never had any charity. Like people never even lent me like 10p for a bus or anything.'

Food bank workers also told us that food bank users often felt ashamed and/or embarrassed to be using a food bank.

'Most of them, shame's not the right word but the majority of them are purely embarrassed to be here perhaps. Some of them kind of arrive very upset.' (Food bank worker)

'The thing about all the people who walk through the door is that none of them really wants to be here. There is a high level of embarrassment about having to press that bell and walk through that door [...] People come in tears, people come with high levels of embarrassment that they have to come and receive a hand, what's effectively a hand out, a few tins to help them through. It's not easy to walk through that door.' (Food bank worker)

'When the people come through here to us, they are very embarrassed in coming and they don't want to be here and because they're waiting for their money to come through and then they're still having to come to us. I find that they find that extremely difficult. They're in tears sometimes when they come in.' (Food bank worker)

2.6 What do service users do to avoid food crises?

A few service users had come to regard a food bank as part of their regular landscape of support but most had done, and were determined to do, all they could to avoid needing a food parcel. Being dependent on charity was not their lifestyle choice.

Several told us how they lived frugally and budgeted carefully.

'I only use what I can afford to use and what is in my account. I never go over [...] I will go without so my children can have. So I always just about scrape through. [When I got into crisis] I had no one to turn to, nobody at all and, if you borrow, if you can manage to borrow then you've got to pay back so you're still putting yourself back into that predicament.'

'We've had to cut down drastically and we're using a charity called Step Change and they're helping us going to a debt management programme with our personal loans. Step Change have temporarily come up with a six month plan. We're only paying a pound a month on our loans.'

'It's not like I go out and spend loads of money on myself or you know very frivolous, I've been very, very savvy and I've located a place where I can pick up clothes for free and you know and I go down the tip a lot. If there's something I need, like my bin's just broken and so I'll go down the tip, the recycling centre and locate a bin that you know will cost me a couple of quid and a smile you know. Yeah I've managed to find you know ways of sorting everything out and making sure that the kids have presents on their birthday [...] Long term, if I can learn to budget properly [...] and hopefully my husband will receive a pay rise at some point.'

One was considering declaring bankruptcy.

The small number who were fit for work were looking hard for employment.

'I had enough money 'cos I'd been saving it [but] I've ran out so I had to sign on. I wasn't even gonna sign on 'cos I didn't wanna go back to benefits, I really do not like it [...] Moneywise you only get a little amount [...] [You're supposed to] look for [...] at least 8-12 jobs but I look for at least 16-20 'cos I want a job ASAP and I don't wanna be sat around doing nothing 'cos it's boring. So I'm just trying to prove everyone wrong as well. Everyone's saying I'm gonna be here for the rest of my life, a bum, but I'm not. I don't wanna. I wanna work. I'll take any job, as long as you show me what to do I'll do it [...] I have to provide, I've got a kid on the way so I need to get money to provide for my kid. So I want a job ASAP and I wanna work, get money and provide [...] I'm not getting a loan, I ain't going through all debt and that.'

'Those three days [being assessed for a job] were, yes! I've got something to do instead of sitting there on my backside or trying to go out and find a job, I had something for three days and I felt, yes! I felt proud of myself. I didn't get paid for it but...'

One food bank user who previously had drug and alcohol problems had opened a bank account to save money once he starts working again, in the hope that he'll be able to provide for his daughter at some point. He plans to ask his employer to take a sum out of his pay packet each week and put it straight in this account. He had also attended the CAB for help with debt management.

The service user who'd been subject to the under-occupancy charge (see section 2.3.5) was hoping to move to a smaller property to save £18 per week. They were having trouble finding someone to swap with them because the council tax is high on their current property. In addition, their son was about to attend a job interview and, if he got the job, would help them out financially. This user also received small amounts of food from their parents. They had applied for PIP but a decision wasn't due for two more months. They were planning to ask the jobcentre how it would affect their benefits if they took in a lodger.

Another spoke of how they were working to manage their own behaviour:

'I've had some bad years. I've been sectioned. The police has threw away the key. But I dragged myself out and I wanted to change. My life's got better. I've still got a drug problem [...] With my landlords and the hostels, I've never had any debt. I learned this. All these people that helping me: landlords; hostels; the church. Don't piss them off. Because one day I might need these people. I have annoyed the police at the hostel greatly. I've been in a lot of trouble with the hostel people and I've been in court a few times over my behaviour but I've learned, in this city, you've got to look after some people. Keep your landlord sweet. Don't owe any money. Pay your debts. And all the church people, that are kind, be nice to them. I can't complain. It's taken me seven years to do it, but I've got there. I have damaged my health. I am in serious trouble with that but, on the plus side, I've got a lovely flat, stable life.'

Those in debt were generally committed to clearing the debt:

'We're in about two and a half grand debt with the council but they know that if we falter one week, we're not meant to falter at all, but they know that, if we do, they sort of give us a bit of grace 'cos they know we'll go short to pay it next time.'

'Yes, it was hard to start off with but, eventually, I got into a rhythm where you say, "Right, that's what you've got. That's what you've got to pay". And you can't knock it. If I need any help, I go to see my support worker, which I get once a month now. I'm starting to build myself up. That brick wall is coming down, bit by bit, piece by piece. All I've got to do is keep chipping it away, chipping it away, chipping it away. Every time I get a spare pound, I pay an extra pound onto my bill. I've got 13 bills at the moment, that I'm paying away, and each one is coming down that little bit. I pay 50p on one, a pound on another and I just make sure I've got enough food.' (This user needed to clear rent arrears before they could join the housing register).

'This is gonna take me quite a lot of months now to be able to put things right if you see what I mean 'cos obviously, if you have anything direct debit wise or anything - Because, once you've got a property, obviously there's overheads and there's things you do, then that'll obviously be put aside then you've got to double them on the next payment.'

While a few service users were frustrated and angry with the benefits system, most took a high degree of personal responsibility for their situation and tended to blame themselves for their difficulties.

'[I need] to be better with money, sometimes. Sometimes, I gamble all my money away, stupidly, drink too much or whatever, waste money.'

'I've been trying to get back on my feet slowly and surely and, every time I get a little bit of help in the right direction, I then fuck it up or something comes a cropper and I don't actually get the help that is supposed to be given, and I end up going back a step as opposed to forward a step. I've been going backwards for the last three or four steps.'

'I thought I could sort it out myself and it backfired [...] It wasn't 'til it was too late that I decided to have help and then, all of sudden, I got evicted [...] Whose fault was it? Mine. Nobody else's. I ignored the help. Ignored it. Big time [...] If I listened to people. Seek the help that they advised me. [...] I feel, why? Why didn't I do things differently? I know hindsight's a wonderful thing. You can't go back. You've always got to look forward [...] I had my redundancy pay. Two holidays later and an amount of bills. I should have gone to the bank, to the council, to the housing association, to the rent people and they could have sorted it out but I left it 'til I got kicked out. I've got to admit, I was the fool. I didn't look to anybody. I was 150 per cent sure that I could get a job tomorrow. Click my fingers and – all of a sudden the recession come along. Bosh! I left it too late to do anything about it. I'm the fool!'

2.7 Giving something back

Several service users were volunteering with the food bank or had made a financial donation once they'd got back on their feet.

'We gave them a donation of £50 and they said, we don't want all that [...] I said, "You've helped us out and [...] we would like to help you out" [...] We wanna give something back to people in the same situation we were in. That's the way I see it.'

'[I started volunteering for the food bank] pretty much from the day that I first received my first bag of food 'cos they basically turned round and went, here you go, and I was like, I have no money. I need to give you some money for this. As soon as I get my first jobseekers allowance I'll donate some money, and they were like, no you can't do that 'cos you can't afford it and blah, blah, blah. I was like, well, I need to do something. I will give you my time.'

'I did some volunteer work here for a while, as well. They said, well, you can put back in for what you get, and so the one that I thought was the best thing around that people were doing, and doing it for free, was here so I volunteered for a while [...] I just thought I should be doing something to give back for what I'd received.'

'I enjoy [volunteering here]. It's really good. It gets me out my flat. [The manager] and [their] colleagues are nice to me.'

3: How are food banks in Hampshire operating?

3.1 The scale of food bank provision

3.1.1 Trends in use and demand

In an ideal world from a research perspective, it should be possible to collect and aggregate statistics from all food banks. The Trussell Trust endeavours to do this for its network, providing an insight into trends of use and some of the reasons for referral. However, the nature of food bank provision is too fragmented, with too many informal projects with limited resources, for it to be viable to collect comparable statistics across Hampshire. Different food banks have their own methods of gathering and presenting data.

However, a few examples of the statistics that are collected provide an insight into the headline trends.

<i>Table 1 Basingstoke Foodbank statistics for October 2013 – October 2014</i>			
Numbers of people fed	2569		
Increase since 2012/13	21%		
Vouchers issued	1359		
Types of crisis experienced			
Benefit delays	40%	National Trussell Trust figures	30%
Low income	22%		22%
Benefit changes	12%		15%
Age groups			
16-24	16%		
25-64	83%		
Family size			
Single people	61%		
Families with children	27%		
Couples	11%		

Monthly figures from Beacon Food Bank in Havant (Table 2) illustrate the seasonal fluctuations in demand and the types of assistance offered, geared to users' varying needs and circumstances:

<i>Table 2: Hampers given out per month, Beacon Food Bank, April 2013 - March 2014</i>	
April	46
May	26
June	50
July	66
August	77
September	73
October	68
November	73
December	170
January	77
February	93
March	96
Types of hampers given out (over 12 months)	
Large	263
Small	596
Top-up	20
Rough sleeper	34
Sofa surfer	16
Total	929
<i>note: three clients received both a large and a small hamper, due to family size</i>	

While Trussell Trust food banks collect information on food bank users that is shared nationally and re-presented as national statistics, independent food banks do not collect data in a comparable way. However, figures supplied to us by independent food banks indicate the importance of looking beyond Trussell Trust data to understand the full story of food bank use in the UK. In Hampshire, where there are a large number of independent food banks, we estimate that at least 10,000 referrals each year are not included within Trussell Trust statistics. Winchester Basics Bank, for example, has kept statistics from 2004 to 2014.⁷ Their figures show a steady increase in demand, with growing numbers of children and families requiring assistance and the total number of clients rising from 822 in 2004 to 3032 in 2014.

3.1.2 Profile of food bank users

Demand for food banks has been increasing steadily in recent years, particularly since the onset of recession. However four of the eleven food banks visited reported that after a period of rapid increase, levels of demand were stabilising. Interviewees

⁷ See Appendix 2 for these and figures from other independent food banks.

were not in a position to analyse this data or give more than anecdotal reasons for it; however it should be noted that if demand is stabilising, it is at a historically high level.

Many food banks reported a change in the kind of users who were seeking help. Families with children and people on low incomes who are in work are forming a growing proportion of food banks' caseload. Projects that had previously helped people who were street homeless or who had chaotic lifestyles were now seeing more people from what they termed 'ordinary' backgrounds, as the following comments by food bank workers and volunteers illustrate:

'It's quite common that the working poor can't afford to put their heating on. We're feeding more people in that bracket than people on benefits.'

'The majority of the families I support that request food are actually working.'

'We are getting an awful lot more families and [the number of] children that we're feeding now has leapt massively.'

Benefit delays when people are moving in and out of work, or between different types of benefit, were frequently cited as a reason for increased demand (see Part 2). Housing benefit problems were mentioned specifically by workers at Basingstoke. In Andover, Farnborough, Havant and New Forest, workers and volunteers expressed concern that the introduction of Universal Credit would trigger another increase in demand.

3.1.3 Geographical coverage

Every local authority and major town in Hampshire is now served by a food bank or by a similar project that collects donated food and distributes it to people in severe need. Through an analysis of existing data, we identified more than 30 projects with a long-term presence and regular hours of operation, either based within Hampshire or potentially serving Hampshire residents from locations a short distance across county boundaries in Surrey, Wiltshire or Dorset.⁸

Our analysis did not include small, informal food distribution projects or 'soup runs' for homeless people. It has been suggested to us that such projects are proliferating, but the informal (and often temporary) nature of such initiatives makes them difficult to track. There is strong evidence, however, that an increasing number of informal projects are becoming established on a formal basis and growing in scale, extending their opening hours, and often enlarging the variety of services they provide.

Southampton, for example, now has a network of food banks operating under the auspices of Southampton City Mission. In rural Test Valley, the food bank based at Andover covers five towns within a 20 mile radius. Basingstoke's food bank aims to cover the whole borough of Basingstoke and Deane, while Winchester's food bank is also seeking to extend its coverage to outlying areas and is considering setting up a

⁸ See table in Appendix 3

distribution centre in Alresford in partnership with local churches. Several food banks operate at a number of locations.

3.1.4 Longevity

While the scale of national publicity would suggest that food banks are a recent phenomenon, our research paints a more nuanced picture. The food bank provision we see today has evolved from a variety of small-scale, independent projects but is clearly growing into a more coordinated and better-resourced network. This is true both on the national scale (Perry et al 2014) and within Hampshire.

Friends of the Homeless in Fareham, for example, which runs Fareham and Gosport Basics Bank, began in 1993 as a soup run for street homeless people. The Bridge Community Centre in Andover set up a food project in 1997. Some, such as Andover Food Bank, New Forest Basics and Winchester Basics Bank, have been in existence for a decade or more. However, more have been set up in recent years and existing services have expanded. In Basingstoke, a food bank was set up in 2012 by local churches at the request of the local authority.

3.1.5 Governance

Of the 35 food projects we identified across Hampshire and on its borders, ten were associated with the Trussell Trust while the remainder were independent projects. Almost all of them are closely associated with Christian churches.

The 'social franchise' model developed by the Trussell Trust, in which (usually) church-based charities adopt the trust's branding, distribution model and rules of access, has a clear appeal both in terms of providing a ready-made model and a clearly recognised national brand. However, it was striking that a number of well-established food banks felt strongly that the Trussell Trust model was not for them.

In some cases this was because the food projects predated the Trussell Trust's prominence, but other reasons were also cited, including the need to remain independent and the costs of belonging to the Trussell Trust network. For small projects in particular, the perceived administrative burden and the referral requirements of being a Trussell Trust partner were offputting:

'It's too strict. But maybe we're too soft! But sometimes it's better to be too soft than have people fall through because we're too rigid.' (Food bank worker, rural area)

Among the non-Trussell projects, some (such as Southampton City Mission and Friends of the Homeless in Fareham) are set up as independent charities. Others, such as Beacon Food Bank in Havant, come under the umbrella of a sponsoring church. A few projects, such as Bordon Food Bank and FISH in Lee-on-Solent, are informal, without any trustees but existing under the wing of a church. For smaller projects this is perceived to offer freedom and flexibility, although it may limit the extent to which they can develop close relationships with other service providers.

While the food bank workers and volunteers we spoke to made no secret of their Christian ethos, many were keen to stress that they did not see their role as one of

advancing their faith or gaining converts. At Fareham the food bank is also supported by the local Muslim community. While most of the volunteers we spoke to were recruited through church congregations and networks, others had approached food banks because they were looking for opportunities to volunteer, and several volunteers were previous service users who wanted to give something back to organisations that had helped them (see 2.7).

Some food bank workers and volunteers felt that their Christian faith and connections added an extra dimension to their work: they were able, for example, to offer isolated people the chance to join in church-based activities, including childcare groups and 'messy church' activities for children. One worker commented:

'...because we are a Christian charity we do say to people, where appropriate, you know, would you like us to pray for you [...] - pray that my debt will get sorted, that somebody will help me get it sorted out or that my benefits will come through.'

Another said:

'We are totally inclusive but the ethos of the organisation stems from an understanding of the Christian faith that says people matter, vulnerable people really matter and a concern that there are people in difficult situations and circumstances who need help.'

A third worker suggested that this ethos made a difference to their responses to people who might turn up without a voucher:

'We operate on Christian principles so we wouldn't turn them away without food. My instructions, as the project manager, are "Don't turn them away. Just give them a packet of pasta, either a tin of tomatoes or some pasta sauce, probably a tin of tuna, so that at least they can cook some food until they can go and get a voucher". Some of them we don't see again.'

3.1.6 Income

One sign that Hampshire's food banks are beginning to become part of the voluntary sector establishment, albeit reluctantly, is the growth in staffing and infrastructure. In many cases food banks are no longer informal projects run from back rooms in church buildings. Several have administrative and management staff, large teams of volunteers and significant overheads including transport and accommodation. This requires financial support as well as the in-kind donations of food that are the mainstay of their operation.

Generally speaking, food banks in Hampshire do not struggle to find enough food to give out to their clients (the FISH project in Gosport was an exception). This may be due to increased public awareness of their work. Several reported a seasonal rise and fall in the scale of food donations, with a surge in donations from churches and schools at harvest time and Christmas. Stocks tend to be highest in winter and lowest in late summer.

Most food banks have a regular presence at local supermarkets, typically in the form of a trolley into which customers can place donated food. Some have been inventive

in arranging additional forms of food donation: Beacon Food Bank receives damaged packets of cereal from Aldi, while Winchester Basics Bank has an arrangement with the organic food supplier Abel and Cole to provide fresh food that is nearing its use-by date.

'I find an amazing capacity in the public to give. There's more there than we need really, people want to give more than we can give away.' (Food bank worker)

Financial donations have proved more challenging for many, particularly as staffing and accommodation costs increase. Nearly half the food banks contacted for this research employ staff: Andover, Basingstoke, Beacon, Southampton and Winchester food banks each have at least one part-time worker. While most look first of all to church congregations for financial support, there is evidence of increasing reliance on external sources of funding. This in turn is forcing food banks to devote more attention to fundraising:

'We've had two successful applications to Comic Relief and that has funded the co-ordinator, and that has really made things a lot easier because it got beyond myself and my assistant in the office to be able to cover the phone calls. We couldn't have carried on at that level.' (Food bank worker)

'People in the church often give us money. I mean this sounds crazy but to finance the petrol we sell cakes on a Sunday morning and I always get about £10 a week.' (Volunteer)

At Andover, a volunteer works on fundraising to cover the costs of warehouse storage. Farnborough and Beacon food banks have both received grants from commercial businesses; Southampton has had grants from the city council to support its work. Reliance on grants for day-to-day running costs, however, presents challenges:

'We needed to buy equipment and such like and so the larger charities who are making funds were able to give us a thousand pounds here and there [when the food bank was being established] but this year, because we're set up, our fundraiser has found it quite difficult because [...] the larger donors and grant making funds want us to have a project.' (Food bank worker).

3.2 Distribution, referrals and signposting

3.2.1 Distribution models

Of the eleven food banks visited, all but two use a similar model of a drop-in centre where food is stored and clients are able to pick it up at specified times. Trussell and non-Trussell food banks are broadly similar in their approach: clients are referred by a range of agencies and given vouchers that can be exchanged for a food parcel.

There were two exceptions to this general model. Andover Food Bank, which serves a large number of dispersed rural communities, acts as a central hub with 11 distribution points, each of which operates independently (although the basic model of a pick-up point is similar). The manager told us that this was the original Trussell

Trust model. FISH, which operates in Gosport, is very different: its approach is to deliver food directly to people in need. Rather than serving people in crisis who are referred by local agencies, FISH has a list of around 230 people in need of relatively long-term support who generally receive a food delivery once a month. It views its mission as 'pastoral' rather than purely as a crisis support agency:

'Well, we stand for Food, Information, Support and Hope. So obviously delivering the food, but we also like to support people. I mean there are people who are lonely, isn't there?' (Volunteer)

Variations in the drop-in model are mostly due to the constraints of accommodation and staffing. Friends of the Homeless in Fareham operates from a storage building owned by a funeral company, with a very small front room where clients can pick up deliveries. Winchester Basics Bank, similarly, is constrained by space although it does have a small seating area for clients. By contrast, Beacon Food Bank has a bright and well-furnished café with comfortable chairs, which is attached to but distinct from the accommodation used for church services. Unusually, the church is based in a centrally located purpose-built shopping centre. Most of the other food banks we visited are located away from town centres.

Beacon's central location and café-style approach creates a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, and a 'suspended coffee' scheme allows Beacon to serve coffee to food bank users which has been paid for by other visitors. There are also café facilities at the Bordon and Basingstoke food banks.

In the more rural areas in particular food banks will also deliver some food parcels to clients who cannot travel in to pick them up, although arrangements seem to be largely ad hoc. Basingstoke, Bordon, Farnborough and Hart all operate a limited delivery service.

'We've got links with Churches Together in Alresford which is a good way out and they've [...] organised a trolley at the local Co-Op so they collect food there and they bring it in, but they've also organised the Rotary members locally to provide a delivery service. So if there's somebody in Alresford who has a voucher but can't get in to us or would find it difficult they can contact somebody off this list who will bring the voucher and collect the food for them.' (Worker, Winchester Basics Bank)

There are sometimes informal arrangements between food banks and other charities. Friends of the Homeless in Fareham passes on surplus donated food to the FISH project; at Farnborough, surplus food is passed on to the Salvation Army.

Several food banks stressed their concern to ensure clients received good quality food and a variety of produce to meet their needs and tastes, rather than simply having the basics. Some have made an effort to secure fresh produce to supplement the typical offer of pasta and tinned food:

'We do our best to give them some food, you know to help out, whether it be five days' worth of food, that's our maximum we do as you know, but obviously these days we're giving far more because of the extra vegetables we give, the dairy products we give, meat...' (Food bank worker)

'Why should they be treated in a different [way], just because their money's a bit low, they're coming to us, why should they have to have the rubbishy food? We try to mix all the food we give [...] so they've got something of every brand you know, so they're not just living off the cheaper brands.' (Food bank worker)

3.2.2 Referral systems

Generally, food banks in Hampshire operate on a voucher system, with few differences between Trussell Trust and independent food banks (Beacon Food Bank at Havant operates a telephone referral system, but in other respects referrals are similar to other food banks). Most food banks have arrangements with a range of referral agencies who check that clients are in genuine need and then refer them to the local food bank for a food parcel. There are usually limits on the number of parcels permitted in a given period - three in six months at Basingstoke, for example, and four a year at Fareham. The FISH project, which provides continuing monthly support for its client list, is an exception.

'Some areas we have almost the whole street in Gosport. One particular area we have, we just go almost up and down the whole street and they'll say, oh my neighbour's in need, and you can tell they are in need, can't you?' (Volunteer, FISH)

More typical is the following comment from a food bank worker at another project:

'You can't just turn up outside the door, knock on the door and take another bag of food. You can't, you've got to get a referral. If you turn up without a voucher, our first response will be, you need a voucher.'

Some workers and volunteers said their limits were to make sure the food banks did not 'create dependency'. There is a high degree of sensitivity to any suggestion that handouts are being provided for people who are not really in need.

'We're not here to create dependency. Success for us is if someone comes, well if no-one comes at all, that's success, but if someone comes they come once or twice and thereafter don't have to use us.' (Food bank worker)

'I mean one thing we don't want is dependency. We've had a situation this week of a client who clearly has just become dependent on vouchers and has misused the system and has been getting the vouchers from more than one agency and we identified it a couple of weeks or so ago and the agencies know not to give him further vouchers and yet he turned up to his original agency saying, can I have food? [...] and they said, no you've got all your benefits in place, you are okay. You have a home now, you are not in crisis, and he couldn't get it. Didn't get it.' (Food bank worker)

Food bank staff were generally clear in their minds that the referral systems meant that needs were being assessed by appropriate experts, meaning that everyone arriving to pick up a parcel was assumed to be in genuine need. Several stressed that they did not have the knowledge to make such decisions themselves.

Referral agencies range from statutory agencies such as local authority housing departments and social services to Citizens' Advice Bureaux and debt advice

agencies. Andover Food Bank has a total of 100 different agencies who refer clients; Basingstoke has a list of 65. As awareness of food banks grows, the number of referral agencies has increased. Probation services, GPs, health visitors and school staff were all mentioned as relatively recent additions to the lists of referrers. Many food banks will also take referrals directly from churches.

‘...increasingly our primary schools are becoming involved [...] because they have a good handle on family circumstances, you know and there will be people who are in private accommodation and may even be homeowners who for whatever reason will have some kind of a crisis.’ (Food bank worker)

There is no consistent pattern of referrals, which appear to be dependent to a large extent on the local relationships built up with food bank staff. In Winchester the main referring agency is the city council housing department, accounting for more than 500 out of 1,390 referrals in 2014. In Hart the Citizens’ Advice Bureau is the main referrer; at the Beacon Food Bank it is the jobcentre. New Forest Basics commented on the need to rebuild connections with referral agencies whenever key staff changed jobs or left. Table 3 shows the range of referral agencies used in Winchester.

Table 3: Referral trends: Winchester Basics Bank

Winchester Basics Bank – Top 10 Referral Agents, 2013 and 2014

Agency	2013 Referrals	2014 Referrals
WCC Housing	607	532
Trinity (for homeless and vulnerably housed)	458	250
A2 Dominion (housing association)	131	97
Westview (homeless hostel)	82	76
Solent CRI (substance misuse service)	67	52
CAB Winchester	66	50
Together (community mental health support)	40	
You Trust (support and advice service)	34	38
Stonham 2 (women’s refuge)	31	18
Milford House (supported housing)	19	57
Alleyne House (supported housing)		21

3.2.3 Relations with jobcentres

Jobcentres illustrate the ad hoc and inconsistent nature of referral arrangements. This is significant because, clearly, food banks can only meet the needs of those whose need has been recognised by an approved gatekeeper (although there are exceptions, which will be discussed below). If an agency, for whatever reason, decides not to refer clients to food banks then there is no guarantee that they will access help via another route.

There is a particular tension in the role of jobcentres because they are seen in many quarters as one of the main causes of need as well as a potential referral agency. Sanctions (for being late for jobcentre appointments, for example) and benefit delays were frequently mentioned to us as significant reasons for increases in food bank use in recent years (see section 2.3.4). In Andover the jobcentre holds vouchers, but will not give vouchers to people who have been sanctioned. Jobcentres in Southampton and Winchester have refused to refer clients. But Fareham and Gosport Basics Bank receives nearly 18% of referrals from local jobcentres. Havant's jobcentre has been a regular referrer since a member of staff received help from the foodbank because of their low income:

'The main referrer at the moment is the jobcentre 'cos we have an excellent working relationship with them, and that came about by one of them actually receiving a hamper themselves when they were in need.' (Food bank worker)

Such a positive relationship seems the exception rather than the rule:

'The jobcentre holds [its] own vouchers and will only issue to those who've had a change in their benefits, not in response to sanctions. People who've been sanctioned have to get a voucher somewhere else.' (Food bank worker)

One worker said:

*'The local jobcentre stopped sending us people because they had a directive from Iain Duncan-Smith, the work and pensions minister, because the Department for Work and Pensions felt the Trussell Trust was becoming too political and they therefore said, "Don't give out vouchers again". We've lost the support of [another] jobcentre because the person in charge there is sticking to the letter of the law: "We've been told not to give out vouchers". I used to deliver very frequently to many of the people going into the jobcentre [there] and that doesn't happen now. The need, we know is out there but if people don't refer them to us, we can't help.'*⁹

3.2.4 Informal referrals

Despite the apparent rigidity of the voucher system, our interviews revealed a degree of flexibility. When food bank staff felt someone had slipped through the net or would not be able to get to a referral agency in time, they would make exceptions to their rules. One food bank said it would 'never turn anyone away' - although the number of vouchers issued directly by volunteers was less than 3% of the total. Staff and volunteers almost all said they tried not to be judgemental, even though it was apparent that sometimes food parcels were handed out when workers suspected they were not merited. There was occasionally a tension between a near-universal stance of not being judgemental and the views of individual staff on whether or not some clients deserved help.

A strong strand of empathy is evident in many of the comments we heard:

⁹ Relations between jobcentres and food banks across the UK have a troubled history. See, for example: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/patrick-butler-cuts-blog/2013/sep/06/welfare-cuts-trussell-trust-tale-of-two-food-banks-jobcentres>

'There was four of them and no income. With the mother having cancer, there was no short term solution. It was going to be ongoing and the only way round it was to say to the medical centre, "I know you operate under this guideline [no more than three food parcels in a set period of time] but it's not strictly practical", and that, in this instance, you have no option but to keep issuing them. And, in fact, they'd already talked about it amongst themselves and they said they couldn't stop issuing these and the actual issue of the food was down to us and I think, you know, we're a Christian organisation, and we do the right thing.' (Food bank worker)

'Occasionally you have somebody who's been given the number to ring me so they ring off their own back and ask and then I'll usually chat to them about their situation and if they do have somebody who could refer them. We've never turned anybody away as far as I can remember unless you know, you sort of talk to somebody and you just get the feeling that [...] it would be in both parties' interests that there is a support worker somewhere who can do the referring.'

At the same time, some workers are sensitive to the possibility that users might be taking advantage of their goodwill:

'I think over the last 15 months there might have been a couple of occasions when I've sat with a person, it's very hard not to be judgmental. I sat with a person and thought, you know if you kind of got up off your backside, pardon the expression, you could sort yourself out...' (Food bank worker)

'I'm concerned that they get off their backsides and come to collect something. As you'll be well aware, many people on benefits have the benefit culture. Not all but probably 50% of them have this benefit culture where they think the country owes them and they just feel that we're part of the government.' (Food bank worker)

3.2.5 Signposting

A growing aspect of food banks' role is to 'signpost' clients to other agencies that might be able to help them resolve long-term issues such as housing, debt or health problems. Several said they would refer clients to debt advice agencies, with Christians Against Poverty mentioned on a number of occasions. Links were often informal and dependent on contacts and information garnered by food bank staff and volunteers. Although we were not able to collect data on this, there was evidence that some volunteers already had knowledge of local welfare and support agencies from their professional lives. Some have strong links with individuals from particular agencies: Friends of the Homeless in Fareham has a link with a homelessness outreach worker, for example. Southampton City Mission provides a booklet listing sources of support clients can call on. Beacon Food Bank has close connections with housing advisers from Guinness Care and Support.

'...we find with Guinness Care & Support it's great to be able to refer someone to them, because they actually make a difference. It's the feeling of helplessness you know, just sticking a sticking plaster on is frustrating. It's really good to be able to refer somebody on.' (Food bank worker, Beacon)

At Basingstoke staff from First Point, a local advice agency, are on-hand once a week at the food bank to provide advice and support to clients. This was the only integration of services we witnessed on-site, although we were told this arrangement was an experiment.

There are concerns that signposting can be ad hoc and at least one food bank worker said they were 'not confident in how well it works'. Most food bank workers and volunteers were clear that they were not equipped to deal with clients' long-term problems and could only point them towards sources of help.

'...none of us are trained counsellors or experts in the benefit system or anything like that, we just don't have that knowledge.' (Food bank worker)

'...one of the issues I think that a lot of food banks face is this networking thing. We're not in a sense that well placed in terms of knowing where to refer people on to.' (Food bank worker)

This raises the question of whether there is a risk of a circular process developing, in which clients go to advice agencies such as CABs, are given a voucher for a food parcel, and then signposted by the food bank to another advice agency that begins the process again. Food bank workers were not able to tell us what happened to clients in the long term, although our interviews with users suggest that a single food parcel is seldom enough to see a person through a period of crisis. We found no evidence of any attempts to monitor clients' progress through a period of crisis and it is unlikely that food banks as currently constituted would have the capacity to do so.

'...we've identified agencies in our area, people that we know and have talked to and we can trust those agencies that we can perhaps refer people to. Sometimes it's a matter of giving them a phone number for them to take away or a leaflet, and on occasions we've rung up agencies as well.' (Food bank worker)

Despite the lack of continuing support, the individual attention users receive at the time of their visit is clearly appreciated and often contrasts starkly with users' experience at the hands of statutory agencies:

'You're being treated as an individual. You're given respect. You're heard. Very often people, they feel like they've been shunted from pillar to post. They're not listened to. They have to conform to somebody else's rules that they don't understand. They feel like they're not being given the whole picture. All of a sudden, someone has treated them as individuals. We've had loads of tears, we've had hugs, you know, we've had shouting. And people are so frustrated with the system, occasionally they take it out on us, but very rarely and they've always apologised afterwards.' (Food bank worker)

4: The effectiveness and limits of food banks in Hampshire

4.1 How visiting a food bank affects users

In section 2.5 we recounted the emotional impact of a crisis on food bank users and discussed their experiences of visiting food banks. These traumatic experiences are often mitigated by the welcome and acceptance users receive on visiting a food bank, and their words are among the most powerful testimonies to the impact of emergency food initiatives.

The emergency nature of food bank provision means that it is not possible within the scope of this research project to quantify users' satisfaction with the help they receive. But several spoke in glowing terms of the attitude of food bank volunteers and staff and some contrasted the humanity of the food banks' response to the impersonal attitude of some officials they had dealt with.

'If it [the food bank] wasn't about, I would have been absolutely buggered ... It kept me alive, in truth and honesty. I owe them quite a big thanks.' (Food bank user)

'I felt so ashamed of having, of finding myself in this situation ... I walked in the door crying with shame and I walked out the door crying with happiness because I knew that, not only could my children eat but I could eat.' (Food bank user)

One homeless food bank user said they had received little help from their local council's housing department and could only find accommodation after starting to help at the food bank:

'It's purely down to the fact that the two main women [at the food bank] have seen me coming in [...] needing help and receiving help. It just so happened that my landlady came in here one day to say hi to them all [...] she has taken lodgers in the past and they were like, "Do you have a spare room right now?" and she said, "Well I do", and we got introduced and I basically moved in there on a weekly trial 'cos she has had some pretty terrible lodgers in the past, and it went well and then she formally invited me to stay and she was like, "I know you can't pay your deposit at the moment". Like she's just been incredibly understanding. So I mean I know it's a rare case, completely rare case... I can't imagine what it would have been like if I'd basically had to go through the normal way of doing this. You know I couldn't see any results finding a place that was suitable for me on the internet which is what the council were telling me to do.' (Food bank user)

Some food bank workers spoke of clients' joy at being treated with sympathy and respect:

'When they go away with their carrier bags full they are just so [...] from tears of sadness to tears of joy, that really, that gets me right here.' (Food bank worker)

This contrast between the impersonal nature of officialdom and the humanity of food bank staff and volunteers was a recurring theme:

'The lack of hope that people come away with having dealt with the housing department and the jobcentre is huge, huge lack of hope. One of the things that we do in our café is try and encourage people to give them a sense that it's actually worth carrying on, it's worth going back, it's worth asking questions, it's worth persevering, applying for jobs, looking for housing, you know just to keep them going. We've had some people who have been suicidal.' (Food bank worker)

4.2 How much help can food banks really offer?

While food banks can offer a lifeline in times of crisis, the help that can be offered is limited. There is little capacity to enable service users to resolve entrenched and long-term problems, either in terms of the facilities available at food bank premises, the skills and expertise of staff and volunteers, or through clear procedures to refer clients on to appropriate agencies after they have received a food parcel. Most food bank staff we spoke to are aware of these limitations and have set clear boundaries around what they can and cannot do.

In particular, staff and volunteers were clear that they offered a limited emergency service. In two interviews they commented that they were 'not social workers' and did not have the necessary skills to offer appropriate advice to address the causes rather than the symptoms of crisis. One volunteer told us:

'At the end of the day, we're good at sorting tins and giving them out to people. We're not here as an advice service.' (Volunteer)

The same interviewee said: *'We stick plasters on where people hurt. We're not treating the disease if you like.'*

At another food bank a worker told us: *'We don't deal with causes. We can only signpost to agencies that can help.'*

When food bank workers or volunteers feel able to point users in the direction of help and support, though, they do so. Many have developed systems of signposting users to additional sources of longer-term support (see section 3.2.5). Others look to use their church contacts to offer isolated people friendship and advice:

'We're not social workers, but we are trying to work more closely and identify with the churches people who work in the community, or in some sort of a pastoral role with the churches in the area, and we want to connect with them and ask them if we can refer a client to them if the client obviously wants that sort of help, so that there's a church near to them where there's a pastoral worker who can perhaps pop in and visit.' (Food bank worker)

One food bank worker summed up their role as:

'A stop-gap for hard times, when things happen that you haven't planned for. When people have hit rock bottom and don't know where to turn or what to do, this will give them a little bit of hope that somebody is willing to listen and cares enough'.

Another commented:

'Well, we're an emergency service really. Because you know there are people who fall through the net sometimes and there are some people who are having a very temporary blip and don't actually get covered by the support network really...'

This stopgap role inevitably carries with it a risk that some people in crisis will not be offered help at the right time, and that others who do receive immediate help in the form of a food parcel will not go on to receive the long-term support they may require. Several food bank workers we interviewed were aware of this risk but saw this as a situation beyond their control or capacity to assist:

'There are lots of issues personally I'd like to help people with, but I know I'm not an expert and it's very dangerous to give advice which may well be wrong. We're quite strict on that. People come in and talk about their debt problems and what they've done and what they haven't done and it's very difficult not to advise them!'
(Volunteer)

At one third of the food banks visited (four out of eleven), workers or volunteers commented on the fact that they were not providing many food parcels for older people. The common view was that this was because older people were more reluctant to ask for help from a food bank and not that pensioners were less likely to face an emergency.

'We rarely get referrals for older people, who comprise a large part of the local population. Our personal observations and anecdotal evidence suggest that there are likely to be many in the community who might well need food parcels, but who seem to escape notice by social work agencies.' (Food bank worker)

One worker said older people were keen not to be 'a burden' in asking for help. Another commented: *'Some of them are quite independent and yet you know they need care...'*

Food banks have two main approaches to dealing with unmet need. The first is to look at expanding the range of services on offer (Basingstoke, for example, has an arrangement with the Shaw Trust, a charity that provides second-hand clothes for food bank clients; at Farnborough and Winchester the food banks accept donated clothes and provide a rack where clients can take clothes if they need them). The second is to expand the number of referring agencies. Some food banks told us they do not wish to offer additional services, either because their premises are inadequate or because they do not feel they have the skills to take on additional work. Andover and Basingstoke have been proactive in expanding their referral networks, seeking to make the food banks known to a wide range of agencies dealing with vulnerable people.

This, however, presents its own administrative challenges:

'I find my time is taken up chasing situations where clients, perhaps one client is receiving vouchers from a number of agencies. So it's the managing, almost the, I wouldn't want to call it policing, I don't want to use that word, but it's the managing of the correct use of vouchers and agencies. So making sure that the clients use the agencies in the way that they should and the agencies themselves are giving out vouchers in the way that they should. So I mean it's quite a challenge to keep on top of.' (Food bank worker)

At another food bank, staff defended the informal nature of current arrangements:

'As we see it, food banks are just one current example of people in their local communities voluntarily working together in a spirit of compassion and to offer mutual and spontaneous help for others who are in need. [...] We work with colleagues in the public sector and other charities and voluntary organisations. The arrangements are informal and loose. We believe we are best able to achieve our aims because we are responsive, rooted in the local community, independent and adaptable.' (Food bank worker)

The same organisation commented that there was 'no evidence' to support any call for more formal relationships within an integrated service framework, 'which would be the opposite of everything we stand for'.

For most food banks the trade-off seems to be governed mainly by practicalities: food banks will do what they can as well as they practically can, but with the understanding that this will happen without a complete knowledge of the scale of need or close integration with other service providers.

4.3 Is food bank provision sustainable?

We asked food bank workers and volunteers how sustainable they thought their projects were and what challenges they faced. These questions covered everything from the external political environment to issues of funding and administration.

By far the most frequently mentioned issue was that of accommodation for food bank activities. Eight of the eleven food banks visited mentioned accommodation issues. Two of the projects were storing food in shipping containers; several were renting office, storage or drop-in space; and one of the largest, Beacon Food Bank, was relying on a temporary lease of vacant shopping centre premises. One food bank reported problems with rodent infestation.

'It would be a nightmare if we had to move somewhere else. We've no idea what we would do [...] we very much work from year to year. It's a work of faith.' (Food bank worker)

Several workers and volunteers commented on the limitations of the accommodation they were using:

'The bit that's missing [is a] drop-in centre where the network of support services that can be made available is a lot clearer and it's a lot easier to signpost people.' (Volunteer)

'Having the right premises in the right area. This one is freezing cold [...] one [distribution point] has a rodent issue so has to put rat poison down and keep food in sealed containers.' (Volunteer)

'... one thing we would really like is a nice room where we can keep all the food with a fridge and freezer in the same place. I mean our church hasn't got premises, we work from a community centre. This is our offices but this isn't suitable for storing the food because of the stairs.' (Volunteer)

Food banks felt more confident about the provision of food donations and finance to cover their current running costs. In each case just over a quarter of the projects visited mentioned this as a challenge. FISH in Gosport relies on donations of surplus food from Fareham and Gosport Basics Bank; two of the larger projects were concerned that food donations were not always appropriate to clients' needs. Finance was seen as a potential future challenge rather than an immediate concern. One project expressed worries about 'donor fatigue' in the long term.

'[Funding is] just from six months to six months, it depends on the rent. That's the big thing for us and the ability to fund our co-ordinator. Without her, it would not happen...' (Food bank worker)

A similar number were worried that public awareness and support might not continue at current levels. One food bank said that delivering to rural areas was a particular challenge; two others commented on the need to keep recruiting volunteers. One of these relied mainly on retired people and highlighted the need to recruit younger volunteers; the other, in an urban location, commented on the danger of 'burnout' and the stress of dealing at times with aggressive clients.

'It's been very hard, physically and mentally, to meet the demand. It's not just the physical demand; it's the mental demand as well.' (Food bank worker)

Given the patchwork nature of the 'signposting' offered by food banks and the ad hoc character of some of the networks developed by food bank workers, it might seem surprising that only three projects mentioned this as a particular challenge. One worker said:

'[The main challenge is] keeping on top of the work with our agencies. It's mainly continuing to manage the relationship of agencies so that the referrals are good referrals made by people within the agency who know what they're doing.'

A food bank worker in a rural area commented:

'The main point is establishing a reliable network of personal contacts, and keeping up-to-date with constant changes.'

Although several food banks visited reported some levelling-off of demand in recent months, many interviewees were aware of the risks posed by new policies and government initiatives. There was particular concern about the roll-out of Universal Credit: four of the eleven food banks highlighted the challenge this was expected to pose, with benefit claimants moving from weekly to monthly payments and at risk of running out of money before the end of the month.

'Hampshire hasn't yet had the full impact of Universal Credit and [we] expect that to cause a blip caused by people not understanding the new system.' (Food bank worker)

'We absolutely dread Universal Credit because, when they have to go a month without, because they're paying in arrears, we just dread it for the poor souls. In this area, from April, all new people going on benefits are going on Universal Credit so, straightaway, they're going to incur debt.' (Food bank worker)

More generally, three of the eleven food banks expressed concern about continuing problems with the benefits system, including delays in payments and the loss of

benefits for people taking up work. Ironically, more people entering employment can trigger increased use of food banks as new employees find their benefits stopped immediately but often have to wait four weeks for their first pay packet.

5: The future of food banks in Hampshire: the bigger picture

5.1 Are food banks in Hampshire here to stay?

At nearly every food bank visited, workers and volunteers believed food banks would be required in Hampshire (and, by implication, nationwide) for many years to come - if not permanently. A form of support that was relatively unknown a decade ago is now viewed as a fixture. Nine of the eleven food banks we visited shared this view.

Only one of the workers and volunteers we spoke to appeared to object in principle to the fact that food banks were needed, describing their existence as 'a blot on the landscape of our society'. More typical was a resignation to the situation. One volunteer told us:

'I would love to live in a world where food banks weren't necessary but I think I'm old enough and wise enough now to know that's very difficult to get to that stage.'

Others said there would 'always be poverty' or would 'always be unmet need'. This was sometimes expressed in more disapproving tones: there would 'always be people who get into trouble' or 'people will always mismanage money'. Debt, housing, and the cost of living were cited as reasons why food banks would continue to be required. One worker commented that 'everyone's closer to the edge than they know'; another said that 'the cost of living goes up but income doesn't'. Another said that advice and support agencies would not know what to do if they could not refer people to food banks.

'[Users] just say we cannot do without you. We don't know what we would do without you.' (Food bank worker)

Several interviewees repeated earlier comments that they were not in a position to address social causes: all they can do is to respond to the individual emergencies that arise. 'As long as there's need we should do it,' one said.

'I think no matter what you changed, what you improved to make better, that there'll be something else that would turn up that would [...] come to the top of the list. [...] for instance, the benefits, if that was all sorted and they didn't have to wait, you know, and we didn't see those people any more, then further down the line, something else not so obvious now would be brought more to our attention I think.' (Food bank worker)

Others said their particular locations suffered persistent deprivation:

'[Our town] always had quite a need, it's always been known as having quiet pockets of deprivation I think. [...] So yeah, I think there's always been a need there and I can't really see things changing.'

Given the issues outlined in section 4.3 concerning the fragility of some food bank operations, their insecure accommodation and the challenges of funding, staffing and recruiting volunteers, this raises the question of what might have to change in order to meet continuing demand.

Some interviewees felt that this was a question of improving links with other voluntary and statutory agencies:

'If we can keep going, they will know that we're there like health visitors, social services, CAB, if they all keep knowing that we're there and passing it on 'cos they do move on, don't they... Yeah. Keep remembering that we're there and we remember that they're there.' (Volunteer)

5.2 How do food banks understand the wider social problems they are addressing?

If food banks are becoming a permanent feature of society, how do the people running them understand the social context that is giving rise to this? This question is not simply an academic one: it helps to illuminate the way in which food bank workers and volunteers are thinking about the issues they face.

At more than two-thirds of the food banks visited, when asked why they thought food banks were necessary, interviewees suggested some form of social breakdown may be to blame. It is important to understand that these views are volunteers' and workers' general perceptions, not the result of any detailed assessment of their clients' circumstances.

Interviews variously referred to a breakdown in community and social networks, a fragmenting of family life and traditional roles, a loss of voluntary support and the disappearance of basic skills such as cooking and budgeting. A few interviewees commented on clients' use of illegal drugs and alcohol. At three food banks there were comments about a 'benefits culture' or a consumer culture leading to choices that were viewed as inappropriate.

The apparent breakdown of family life was a particular concern for several workers and volunteers, perhaps reflecting traditional Christian views on social norms. One food bank specifically linked the 'collapse of marriage' to the growth of poverty. Others expressed similar concerns in less normative terms:

'When you look at the bigger picture families are breaking up [...] So there's been a breakdown of family, there's a breakdown in society in general so years ago you would have that generational thing of passing down [skills]. In fact it would be so much so that the mum didn't go to work because the husband would be the main one who went to work and so the family unit was mother, father, father working, mother bringing up children and teaching skills to the children as they grew up. But then I think now the generation is such that father and mother have to work, children are put into care from 7 o'clock in the morning 'til 5 o'clock at night, get them into school, once they're in school you're in that same thing, drop them early for breakfast club, pick them up after school. Parents are under more pressure. Parents aren't even together.' (Food bank worker)

'There have always been people in need. Change in family and society means that people are not supported by family as much as they used to be. Communities are not as strong as they used to be. People in towns often don't know their neighbours.'

Many rural communities no longer have shops, post offices, pubs, bus services etc.'
(Food bank worker)

Linked to this was a loss of confidence in family ties:

'One of my first questions quite often is, is there anybody else in your family who can help you? Do they know your state of affairs? "Oh no, I couldn't tell them that".'
(Food bank worker)

Alongside (and perhaps as a consequence of) this perceived loss of traditional family and community, at five food banks interviewees argued that clients did not know how to look after themselves properly:

'So many people nowadays don't know how to cook. They're coming to the food bank, and it's no good to them because we don't do takeaway or pre-packed, pop-in-the-microwave oven food. But that's a trend all over, isn't it?' (Food bank worker)

'Lots of people that do come in don't even know how to cook. So lots of the stuff that's on the shelf, this shelf, they wouldn't even know what to do unless it was a ready meal or in a tin that you could just put in a bowl, so I do think that lots of young people do need like home economics lessons to try and teach them how to live cheaper.' (Volunteer)

'Wouldn't it be great if we could do this sort of teaching somebody how to live on a shoestring you know, this is what you could do with your furniture, this is what you could do with your clothes, this is what you could do and physically almost taking the place of that generation that's kind of lost somehow. That handing down of information to the next generation.' (Food bank worker)

One worker at a referral agency commented that many clients 'haven't got a clue when it comes to budgeting' and could not cope when they were paid monthly instead of fortnightly. This may become a particular issue in the switch from weekly to monthly benefit payments with Universal Credit.

In three interviews, the mobile phone appeared as a symbol of consumer culture and mistaken choices. For some interviewees mobile phones were seen as a luxury item:

'It's all part of the benefits culture which has gone mad. They're too ready to depend on benefits and their priorities, when they get benefits, are flash phones.' (Food bank worker)

'In today's society, it's a throwaway, consumer society and you are encouraged to buy things solely because they're there. Things like mobile phones and televisions. Drink, cigarettes. The sort of people who turn up to the food bank, they haven't got money for food but they've got money to run the car. You can't judge. You have to take everything on its merit as it comes in.' (Food bank worker)

In some cases clients were unable to overcome addictions:

'I was thinking we had three last year who died, didn't we, with the drug problems and they knew the help was there didn't they? One of them particularly had been to rehab. He'd tried all that...' (Volunteer)

It is important to bear in mind that these are food bank workers' and volunteers' perceptions of the situations they are dealing with, rather than empirical evidence. But these perceptions are worth noting because they draw on and reinforce the 'cultural toolkits' that inform workers' and volunteers' thinking (Emerson, Smith and Sikkink 1999). Such discourses may be drawn from public media or from shared beliefs (within the context of a church, for example) that focus heavily on individual responsibility and choice.

While food bank workers and volunteers expressed general views on various forms of apparent social breakdown, this contrasted with their understanding of the particular issues that triggered a referral to a food bank (see section 2). They were clear that in many cases users' crises were triggered by problems with the benefits system (see section 2.3.4 and 2.3.5). At five of the eleven food banks the operation of the benefits system was seen as a major factor in causing rising demand.

It is noteworthy that this was viewed not simply in terms of bureaucracy and inefficiency. There was a strong belief, shared across food banks in different locations and of different types, that the system was punitive rather than fair.

'I would say the benefit system in its current manifestation totally lacks compassion and any understanding of the reality of people's lives and the circumstances that they face. Totally unsympathetic.' (Volunteer)

Some workers expressed particular concern about the sanctions handed out by jobcentre staff, while others were worried about wider cuts in social support:

'I think they're being harsh on benefits by making big changes and [...] I think they've reduced the money so much for social care that it's taking away options that people have to get help [...] more and more people either go to hospital or come to food banks and so on.' (Food bank worker)

5.3 How might food banks engage with wider issues in the long term?

Given the strong sense expressed by many food bank workers of a breakdown in society and of specific problems within systems of social support, it is perhaps surprising that there was little enthusiasm among those interviewed for any role beyond the provision of emergency support. Food bank workers seemed resigned to the idea that food banks would always be necessary, but reluctant to see a role for their projects in addressing the causes of need.

Just as food banks tend to defer judgement on users' needs to referring agencies, they often defer opinions on solutions to food poverty to politicians. One worker commented:

'I'd rather leave the politicians and the local councils to work that one out. I'm not a politician and I'm not well versed in how to change systems.'

At the same time few expressed any faith in politicians' ability to address underlying problems. One volunteer recalled a meeting with the local MP:

'We got invited to the House of Commons. We did go up there for the day, didn't we, but to be honest it was a reception that [the MP] puts on for volunteers and she was

very nice but she said to us, well I've got no power and only a tiny bit of influence, and that was about it really. We didn't hear any more.'

One worker commented that the Trussell Trust deals with national issues, and there is evidence that over the last few years the Trust has become more forthright in expressing its concerns at national level, leading to some well-reported clashes with government ministers.¹⁰ But given that the majority of Hampshire food banks are not affiliated to the Trussell Trust, most have limited means of influencing political decisions. One volunteer at a non-Trussell Trust food bank said he gave talks to local councillors and churches, but this appeared to be an exception.

Several commented that the benefits system should be more compassionate and better targeted, but there were few suggestions about how that should happen. One said a 'living wage' should be introduced; two thought there should be an end to zero-hours contracts. One said there should be more help for people sleeping rough; another thought clients needed access to cheaper food.

'If you think about the benefit issue, a more sympathetic and compassionate benefit system would help. A system that targeted the real mickey takers. No one has a problem with the mickey takers, it's just, to me what appears to have happened is that they've develop a system that hits the genuine rather than the mickey takers or it's not targeted effectively.' (Volunteer)

The same volunteer commented on the need to remove delays in the benefits system:

'Well I think if people go to the jobcentre and they're going to be put on benefits, they can't wait two weeks, they need emergency money straight away or [...] maybe food given to them so they don't abuse the money and spend it on something else.'

Very few interviewees suggested that churches or faith groups should play a bigger role in addressing the causes or long-term consequences of food poverty. An exception was one food bank worker, who put current projects in the context of churches' traditional social welfare role:

'There will always be an element of society that will need it because of their situation, their social situation [...] before the welfare state the church helped and this is just the current manifestation of what the church is doing to fill the need that is obviously there. If that need becomes no longer relevant then the church will help in alternative fashion. I personally think the church ought to be building houses.'

At least three food banks expressed a concern that food banks should be perceived as independent and non-political. Such comments tended to come from independent food banks rather than Trussell Trust affiliates. Nationally, the Trussell Trust similarly asserts its independence and non-political character.¹¹ One worker feared that food banks would lose their freedom if they accepted government

¹⁰ See, for example, The Independent, 22 December 2013: 'Iain Duncan Smith accuses food bank charity the Trussell Trust of scaremongering' [online] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/iain-duncan-smith-accuses-food-bank-charity-the-trussell-trust-of-scaremongering-9021150.html>

¹¹ The Trussell Trust has been careful to rebut suggestions of political bias. See: <http://www.trusselltrust.org/rumour-response>

finance - 'if you're part of the system you're not a safety net'. Another said that integration with other agencies in the public or voluntary sector would be 'the opposite of everything we stand for'.

At another food bank, a volunteer commented:

'I think we would defend our independence quite fiercely. [...] Because we are free to do what we want, say what we want, engage with whomsoever we want to engage and [...] I don't think we'd want that to change 'cos I think that would contradict our ethos really.'

Such comments might indicate that some non-Trussell food banks may be reluctant either to get involved in debates about national policy, or to become more closely integrated with local service provision, in order to preserve their sense of independence. Why closer ties with the public or voluntary sectors might pose a risk to food banks is a question we were not able to explore sufficiently in our interviews to draw any firm conclusions, but the question may merit further investigation.

6: Discussion of findings and questions for the future

6.1 Users' experience: multiple problems, limited help

Our interviews with food bank users and workers painted a vivid picture of life on the edge for a growing section of society. People are 'on the edge' because of the accumulation of a multiplicity of difficulties. Mental health problems, sickness, housing issues and a hostile or ineffective benefits system were strong themes running through our interviews (see Part 2). Many blamed themselves for their situation and some expressed a degree of hopelessness that anything would change.

Job insecurity and low pay were seen as increasing problems, with suggestions that a growing number of food bank users are in work rather than reliant on out-of-work benefits; this trend is confirmed by the most recent national statistics from the Trussell Trust.¹² Evidence from our interviews reinforces national findings that financial insecurity is driving people who would not have expected to need social support in the past to food banks (Perry et al 2014, Parliamentary Inquiry 2014).

Our research shows the hidden human costs of a creaking system of social support. Low self-esteem, anger, frustration, and a sense of helplessness were evident in many of our interviews with food bank users. Vulnerable people are often not getting help until their problems are in danger of spiralling out of control. At the same time there was a widespread appreciation of the acceptance and warmth that they experienced at food banks, an acceptance that for many stood in stark contrast to their treatment at jobcentres (findings comparable with Perry et al 2014).

Most users felt shame and embarrassment when approaching a food bank for the first time. Most were surprised and some were overwhelmed by the generosity of the response they received, and some said they felt more confident on a second visit. This often contrasted sharply with their experience of dealing with statutory agencies.

Many users were clear that food banks would not solve their underlying problems. Often these were issues outside their control: benefit delays and sanctions, insecure or low paid employment, housing problems, sickness or domestic abuse.

Two thirds of the users we interviewed had made two or more visits to food banks, suggesting that many live lives in which a crisis is a continual danger. Others found themselves surprised and embarrassed to be in a position where they have had to use a food bank at all.

6.2 Food is evidence of the crisis, not the cause of the crisis

Our research has indicated that food is usually only the most urgent and basic of multiple needs. A referral to the food bank is frequently a sign that other needs are not being met. Some food banks reported an increasing number of people with housing problems. Loss of work continues to be a significant trigger for a crisis; but

¹² See <http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats>

our interviews suggest also that mental and physical health problems are a major factor.

This finding is important because a food parcel (or series of food parcels) cannot address complex needs, although it will clearly enable people to survive from one week to the next. It was not possible from our research to discover whether the support available for people with physical or mental health problems is diminishing. It does appear, though, to be getting harder to access sickness-related benefits. Some individuals who consider themselves ill or disabled have been found 'fit for work', leading to a drawn-out appeals process and lengthy delays in benefit payments.

Interviews with food bank workers, combined with the frequency of repeat visits, suggest that a high proportion of users have long-term needs and remain highly vulnerable to future crises. Frequently their difficulties suggest the existence of systemic problems (such as low-paid work or an inadequate benefits system) rather than issues the individual clients could be expected to deal with themselves. Yet much of the signposting on offer (e.g. to debt and money management advice) places the emphasis on improving individuals' coping strategies.

6.3 Living on the edge: what is driving need?

A growing number of statutory and voluntary agencies are turning to food banks (or being approached by food banks) to help clients in need. The pattern of referrals varies widely between food banks and appears dependent on the relationships developed between individual food banks and referral agencies. In Basingstoke, for example, most referrals come from the Citizens' Advice Bureau, in Havant from the jobcentre, and in Winchester from the local authority's housing department. Doctors and school staff are increasingly referring people to food banks. Although government ministers have argued that foodbank use is increasing because jobcentres are referring people in need, relationships with jobcentres are often problematic and some refuse to refer clients to food banks. This echoes the Trussell Trust's complaint in September 2013 that the DWP had 'privately reneged on the agreement' that jobcentres could refer clients to foodbanks.¹³

There appears to be no distinction between urban and rural areas, or between deprived and affluent areas, in terms of the existence of need - though clearly the levels of demand are higher in deprived urban areas. Urban areas reported more interaction with highly vulnerable clients with multiple needs, but issues such as drug use and street homelessness were evident in rural areas too. Interviewees suggested there may be hidden needs in some rural areas where individuals have more difficulty in accessing services. There was particular concern that older people were not asking for help.

¹³ Trussell Trust (2013). 'DWP has broken agreement between jobcentres and foodbanks' says Trussell Trust after yesterday's PMQs'. [online] <http://www.trusselltrust.org/resources/documents/DWP-has-broken-agreement-between-jobcentres-and-foodbanks.pdf> (accessed 24 April 2015)

Data from our interviews and visits would suggest that three main factors are intersecting. First, the numbers of people needing help has been growing, fuelled by a range of issues including benefit delays and sanctions, low pay and job insecurity, and housing and health problems. Although we heard evidence of some levelling off in demand in recent months, this is at a historically high level. Second, users' accounts and food bank workers' interviews indicate that many users' needs are complex and require long-term support: a crisis is often a combination of factors, not a single event. A third factor is that the support available from public and voluntary sector agencies is under increasing strain; in at least one instance, a food bank was set up in response to a request from the local authority.

Very few users described their experience mainly in terms of an absence or failure of support from family and friends, or saw the breakup of relationships as a root cause (although see section 2.5 on the lack of support networks). Physical and mental health problems, a shortage of money (either from benefits or paid work) and housing difficulties were cited most frequently by users. This contrasts with some of the general statements made by food bank workers and volunteers about a breakdown in traditional society. However, worker interviewees often made these comments about the wider social context at the same time as relaying more specific observations, or sharing their projects' data, about immediate triggers to food bank use (including benefit changes, sanctions and delays).

While a number of food bank workers or volunteers said clients did not know how to cook, for example, none of the food bank users interviewed mentioned this as an aspect of their difficulties. There was a degree of agreement between workers and users on the need for better budgeting and money management skills. However, some users resented the fact that they were being accused of not managing their money well when they felt they were doing their best in difficult circumstances.

6.4 A fragile response - food banks' limitations and vulnerabilities

Food banks appear to be a fragile and limited response to the growing vulnerabilities within society at large (including the vulnerability of public and voluntary services). Food bank workers and volunteers were clear in their own minds that they could not resolve users' long-term problems; some referred to their work as 'sticking plasters'.

Our research highlighted the fragmented nature of the service offered by food banks. There is limited coordination between them, a strong reliance on informal networks and connections with other charities and service providers, and limited cross-boundary working.

The popularity of café-style facilities at some food banks and users' gratitude for friendship and a listening ear demonstrates the value of the empathy and acceptance food banks can provide. In some cases food banks have been able to offer connections with church organisations that may be able to offer friendship and support where users are feeling isolated.

For the most pressing problems of debt, housing and health, however, food banks are dependent on effective referral systems both to and from public and voluntary agencies. Such systems have often been pieced together by food bank staff, with

little evidence of proactive coordination by other service providers, and are dependent on the compilation and regular updating of lists of contacts.

The limitations evidenced within referral systems are even more striking when food banks seek to signpost clients to longer-term help. Most food banks operate some sort of signposting system, often to debt advice or housing agencies. However, they have no way of ensuring that this signposting works or of monitoring the results. Relationships with other service providers have often been built from the ground up with little coordination with statutory agencies.

The absence of follow-up information presents a challenge in understanding food banks' impact. Food bank workers and volunteers have no knowledge of what happens to people who don't get referred, and limited knowledge of what happens to their clients once immediate contact ceases. It thus becomes impossible to tell, other than from anecdotal evidence, what the long-term effects of their intervention might be.

While in most cases there appears to be no shortage of donated food, the food banks are often in short-term premises and some need financial support to function effectively. Their ability to cope with sudden surges in demand is limited; so too is their capacity to sustain their operations for the long term. Given the view expressed at the vast majority of projects that food banks are here to stay, this suggests some tough choices will need to be taken in future about either rationing the help on offer in line with food banks' own capacity, or becoming more closely integrated with other statutory and voluntary service providers but with a risk of losing a degree of independence.

6.5 A qualitatively different response: compassion and discretion

Another significant finding from our research is that food banks, despite their limitations, offer a degree of empathy and generosity that appears to be absent elsewhere, particularly within the benefits system and at jobcentres. Numerous users spoke of the warmth and friendliness of the staff and volunteers at food banks; food bank workers spoke of users' gratitude and delight at being treated with dignity and respect. Food bank workers and volunteers associated this attitude strongly with their Christian ethos. People who are vulnerable and under stress clearly welcome such empathy; users and workers alike commented on its absence within statutory services.

While it is impossible to quantify the impact of a smile, a friendly face and a listening ear, it evidently makes a noticeable difference to the experience of food bank clients. This empathy was also illustrated by workers' and volunteers' willingness to 'bend the rules' where they felt users were in need but had not got a voucher, or needed more assistance than their voucher strictly entitled them to. Food banks were aware that such generosity left them vulnerable to potential abuse, but tended to work on the principle that it was better to give too much than too little.

This flexibility is not without its challenges. While staff and volunteers say they do not make judgements about clients, a process of making judgements about need and merit must be operative in order to show generosity. We also heard many

comments that would suggest disapproval of users' choices or lifestyles, even if this disapproval was set aside at the time of handing over a food parcel.

6.6 An unsustainable response? Challenges and tensions for the future

Our research raises a number of questions for the emerging food bank movement in Hampshire. We present these as issues for further consideration rather than as recommendations, because they will require reflection and discussion among food banks and their partners over a period of time.

6.6.1 What role should food banks play within a wider network of social support?

Food banks in Hampshire have generally limited themselves to providing immediate relief rather than addressing the causes of crisis. They have developed effective ways of collecting and distributing food, and most have developed good relationships with a range of referral agencies. In some cases they have developed a strong understanding of the types of crisis that are causing people to rely on food banks.

However, there is less evidence of a shared understanding of why these crises are occurring or what could or should be done to stop them happening in future. Some of the issues identified by interviewees can only be addressed at national or local government level: a less punitive benefits system, more affordable housing, higher minimum wages and more secure employment contracts, for example. Others are to do with putting in place adequate care for people who have long-term health problems or vulnerabilities. Some relate to individuals' coping skills, values and choices.

The question for food banks is what role they should play in the discussion and planning of social support to address these issues at a broader level. The current default position of Hampshire food banks appears to be to leave these debates to others. But given that food banks are dealing with the consequences of systemic failings or shortcomings, and of broader societal changes, they should arguably be more engaged in debates on social policy and inform such debates with their knowledge and experience, both in their localities and at a wider level.

6.6.2 Should food banks collect and share more data?

The lack of comparable data, both on reasons for referral to food banks and on what happens to food bank clients after their visit, makes it difficult to assess how effective food banks are in terms of supporting people in crisis. We know from our interviews that their work in providing emergency food assistance is necessary and is appreciated. What we cannot know is what difference it makes in the longer term.

This question links back to the level of coordination with other social support agencies. We cannot know from existing data what areas of need are not being met; food banks keep limited data on repeat visits; and data collection is not comparable between food banks (apart from those run under the Trussell Trust banner). Given

food banks' high public and political profile, the provision of accurate and comparable data could help to inform the policy process and local decisions on service provision. Food banks need to consider whether the administrative burden of data collection and coordination outweighs the potential benefits of more detailed knowledge. Ethical considerations will also need to be taken into account if more detailed information is going to be required from clients.

6.6.3 Can food banks sustain their existing operations at the current level?

Food banks have arisen as a compassionate response to a crisis of poverty that has become increasingly visible in recent years, both in Hampshire and nationwide. They have grown in response to demand, and have been inventive in securing premises and funding. Yet their operations are dependent on a high degree of goodwill in terms of volunteer time, relationships with food donors and provision of premises.

Evidence from North America suggests that in the absence of government action to address the causes of food poverty, food banks have become increasingly institutionalised. Food banks in the UK operate on a more ad hoc basis, with a risk that donations or volunteer support could dry up at short notice. If food banks are likely to be a permanent fixture - as suggested by workers in many of our interviews - what action should they take to minimise their own vulnerability?

6.6.4 Can food banks cope with unexpected demand?

A related question is whether food banks are capable of adapting to unexpected (or even expected) changes in circumstances. The introduction of Universal Credit was seen as a risk by several interviewees. The knock-on effects of further austerity measures and any future changes to local government or health service funding, or the impact of any economic shocks, are less predictable and likely to affect the level of demand for food banks. If food banks see themselves playing a continuing role in crisis support, do they need a greater understanding of potential risks and shocks?

6.6.5 Do food banks need a better understanding of the context in which they are operating?

Finally, there is the question of how food bank workers and volunteers in Hampshire understand the nature of the social issues they are dealing with (see Part 1 and section 5.2). If they are to have a long-term presence in Hampshire's towns (and beyond), what training do staff and volunteers need to enable them to provide the most appropriate help and support to clients? Do they need to be better informed about housing or mental health problems, for example, so that they can signpost people more effectively to sources of longer-term support?

There is also the question of whether food banks should become involved in lobbying for change. While there are clear legal restrictions on charities' campaigning activities, there is still scope for food banks to be more active both in identifying the reasons for their clients' crises and in arguing for local or national

policies that could mitigate such crises. Does the aversion to 'politics' evident among many food banks help to perpetuate the problems that food banks have been set up to alleviate?

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Appendix 1

Brief description of food banks visited in the course of this research

Andover

Andover is a Trussell Trust Food Distribution Centre, i.e. a centre where food boxes are made up for distribution to Food Distribution Points, which are independent of the Food Distribution Centre. Food Distribution Centres are not members of the Trussell Trust themselves and don't tend to refer to themselves as 'food banks' as distributing emergency food is just one of the services they provide. Andover Food Distribution Centre distributes food parcels to 11 Food Distribution Points across Test Valley. We also visited one of the Food Distribution Points, The Bridge, a support service for homeless people, including a drop-in day centre which is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from which approximately food parcels are distributed to people with vouchers issued by support agencies. The Bridge can also issue vouchers. The number of food parcels issued per month varies. Sometimes none are issued. 20 were issued in December 2014, 16 in January 2015.

Basingstoke

Trussell Trust-affiliated food bank established by local churches at the request of Basingstoke and Deane Council in 2012. The food bank distributes food to people with vouchers issued by referral agencies. It is open for two hours on Mondays and four hours on Wednesdays and Fridays. It also offers toiletries, pet food and second-hand clothes. The food bank has a café area where visitors can sit and talk to staff or volunteers, and an advice worker from First Point attends the food bank once a week to advise clients about sources of longer-term support. In 2013/14 the food bank distributed enough parcels to feed 2,569 people, an increase of 21% on the previous year.

Borden

Church run food bank, independent of the Trussell Trust distributing food to people with vouchers issued by support agencies. Open Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10:00 – 12:00. The number of users varies, up to a peak of half a dozen per session.

Fareham and Gosport Basics Bank

Established by Friends of the Homeless, an independent charity originally established by local churches in 1993 to help rough sleepers. It now operates as a food distribution centre, providing food to people referred by local statutory and

voluntary agencies. The food bank is open from 13:00 to 15:00 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. In 2014 it received 2,319 referrals, feeding a total of 4,371 people, split broadly evenly between Fareham and Gosport. The number of referrals increased by 4.37% compared with 2013, and by 84.78% compared with 2012.

Farnborough

Church-run, Trussell Trust affiliated food bank distributing food to people with vouchers issued by support agencies, open 12:00 – 14:30 Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays. In 2014, Farnborough Food Bank helped 3,300 families (10 per cent more than the previous year).

Gosport (FISH Project)

Independent project run under the umbrella of Lee Community Church. FISH distributes regular food parcels to a list of clients in the Lee-on-Solent and Gosport areas. In January 2015 it was distributing parcels to a total of 230 people once a month. Referrals are made by social services and advice agencies, but FISH also accepts informal referrals from friends and neighbours. Unlike other food banks, FISH will deliver to a person as long as they are in need of support.

Hart

Church-run, Trussell Trust affiliated food bank with three sites (Fleet, Darby Green and Hook), each open Mondays and Thursdays 13:30 – 15:30, distributing food to people with vouchers issued by support agencies. We visited the Fleet site where the number of users varies up to five per session. When the food bank is closed, users can phone an emergency number and have a food parcel delivered. Approximately two thirds of parcels are distributed this way.

Havant (Beacon Food Bank)

Independent church-run project in central shopping centre. Distributes food to people referred by support agencies through a telephone referral system; it also provides a café which operates a 'suspended coffee' scheme to provide free drinks to clients. The food bank is open every weekday from 10:00 to 12:30. Between April 2014 and March 2015 Beacon Food Bank gave out a total of 1,047 hampers (an increase of 14.4% over 2013/14), helping a total of 2,238 individuals.

New Forest Basics Bank

Independent charity established by Churches Together in Lymington and Pennington, distributing food to people with vouchers issued by support agencies. Open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10:00 to 12:00. In 2011/12, New

Forest Basics Bank distributed 2,050 parcels for 8,890 people, including 3,840 children. Since then, numbers have dropped a little and are now steady, although referrals for Christmas parcels have increased (150 in 2011, 300 in 2014).

Southampton City Mission

Independent charity, mostly funded by churches, with five sites (Sholing, Swaythling, Bitterne and two in Southampton itself), distributing food to people with vouchers issued by support agencies. We visited Swaythling, which is open on Thursdays from 10:00 – 15:00. The day before we visited, the Swaythling site provided 12-15 food parcels, with food for 58 people. In the last few weeks of 2014, it provided food for between 42 and 64 people per week. The city centre site, which is open on Mondays, is the busiest. In 2012 more than 6,000 food parcels were given out in total.

Winchester Basics Bank

Independent charity run by Churches Together in Winchester, with the support of Winchester City Council and a range of local 'caring organisations'. Provides second-hand clothes as well as food. In addition to tinned and dried food it also provides fresh organic food donated by Abel & Cole. Clients are referred by support agencies and provided with a voucher. The main distribution point in Winchester is open on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10:00 to 15:00; a distribution point at a church in Weeke is open from 10:00 until 13:00 on Thursdays. In 2014 Winchester Basics Bank helped 3,302 clients (up from 2,936 in 2013 and 822 in 2004), providing 14,887 days' worth of food; 1,296 people also received clothes.

Appendix 2

Illustrative statistics from independent food banks

While Trussell Trust food banks collect information on food bank users that is aggregated at a national level, independent food banks do not collect data in a comparable way. However, figures supplied to us by independent food banks indicate that we must go beyond the Trussell Trust data to understand the full story of food bank use in the UK. In Hampshire, where there are a large number of independent food banks, we estimate that there are at least 10,000 referrals each year in addition to the statistics collected by the Trussell Trust.

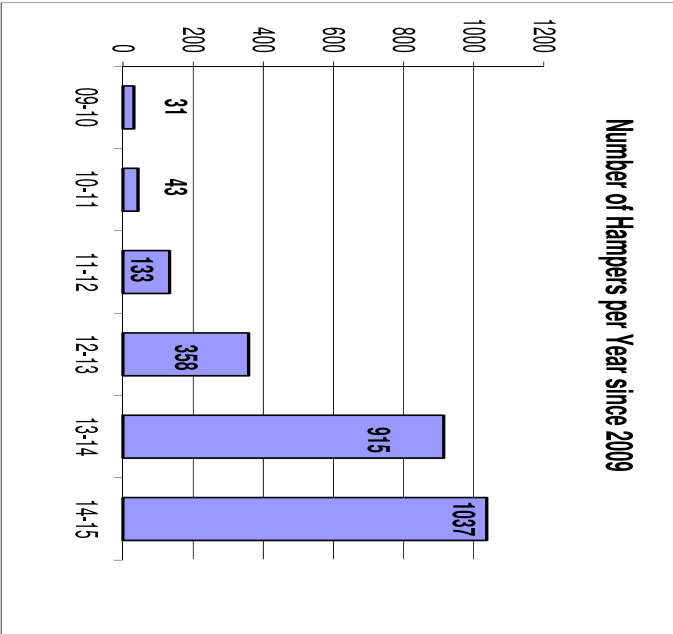
These figures are drawn from five of the independent food banks visited (Beacon Food Bank, Fareham and Gosport Basics Bank, New Forest, Southampton City Mission and Winchester Basics Bank). While the figures are not directly comparable by date, they illustrate that national discussions on food bank use that rely only on Trussell Trust figures may significantly underestimate the scale of the issue.

Further detail is provided in the figures from Fareham, Havant and Winchester below.

Winchester Basics Bank: Trends 2004-2014

	Men	Women	Children	Families	Vouchers	Total clients	Days of food	People given clothing
2004	504	178	140		750	822		
2005	679	235	267		855	1182		
2006	686	306	324		930	1316		
2007	669	266	274		812	1214		
2008	628	316	315		1001	1259		
2009	777	492	608		1134	1877		
2010	744	520	597		990	1861		
2011	847	554	749		1394	2150		
2012	919	660	867	520	1548	2446	11859	1068
2013	1051	818	1067	613	1807	2936	14330	1415
2014	1040	839	1153	660	1390	3032	14887	1296

Beacon Food Bank, Havant: Trends 2009-2015



Fareham and Gosport Basics Bank: Trends 2012-2014



Fareham and Gosport Basics Bank

Monthly Figures

	referrals	people		referrals	people		referrals	people
Dec-14	230	503	Dec-13	230	493	Dec-12	105	249
Nov-14	136	236	Nov-13	204	410	Nov-12	108	228
Oct-14	161	267	Oct-13	204	441	Oct-12	107	201
Sep-14	205	386	Sep-13	189	370	Sep-12	116	225
Aug-14	173	316	Aug-13	224	409	Aug-12	99	214
Jul-14	172	367	Jul-13	166	289	Jul-12	97	206
Jun-14	177	315	Jun-13	171	312	Jun-12	102	226
May-14	183	338	May-13	179	317	May-12	106	228
Apr-14	194	374	Apr-13	179	333	Apr-12	88	169
Mar-14	228	421	Mar-13	148	290	Mar-12	97	236
Feb-14	228	374	Feb-13	173	338	Feb-12	112	219
Jan-14	232	474	Jan-13	155	325	Jan-12	118	267
Total >	2319	4371	Total >	2222	4327	Total >	1255	2668

12 month change > 4.37% 1.02%

77.05% 62.18%

24 month change > 84.78% 63.83%

Notes -

Approximately one third of total fed are children

3 month trend			6 month trend		
	Referrals	People		Referrals	People
Oct to Dec 2014 >	527	1006	Jul to Dec 2014 >	1077	2075
Oct to Dec 2013 >	638	1344	Jul to Dec 2013 >	1158	2231
Variance >	-111	-338		-81	-156
Variance 2013 to 2014 >	-17.40%	-25.15%		-6.99%	-6.99%
Oct to Dec 2014 >	527	1006	Jul to Dec 2014 >	1077	2075
Oct to Dec 2012 >	320	678	Jul to Dec 2012 >	632	1323
Variance >	207	328		445	752
Variance 2012 to 2014 >	64.69%	48.38%		70.41%	56.84%

Appendix 3

List of food banks serving Hampshire residents

This list includes food banks in neighbouring counties that may serve some Hampshire residents. Information is correct to the best of our knowledge in spring 2015, but is subject to change.

Alton Foodbank

Overseen by: Trussell Trust

Number of drop-in sessions per week: 2

Local authority: Alton

Website: alton.foodbank.org.uk

Andover Foodbank

Overseen by: Trussell Trust

Number of sessions per week: 5 (various locations)

Local authority: Andover

Website: andover.foodbank.org.uk

Basingstoke Foodbank

Overseen by: Trussell Trust

Number of sessions per week: 3

Local authority: Basingstoke and Deane

Website: basingstoke.foodbank.org.uk

Beacon Food Bank

Overseen by: Portsdown Community Church, Havant

Number of sessions per week: 5

Local authority: Havant

Website: portsdowncc.org.uk/index.php/in-the-community/beacon-food-bank

Bordon

Overseen by: KC21 church

Number of sessions per week: 1

Local authority: East Hampshire

Website: n/a

The Bridge Church

Overseen by: Churches Together in Hayling Island

Number of sessions per week: n/a

Local authority: Havant

Website:

bridgechurchhayling.co.uk/bridgechurch1/Feeding_local_People_in_Crisis.html

Caring Hands

Overseen by: Family Church, Portsmouth

Number of sessions per week: 1

Local authority: Portsmouth

Website: family-church.org.uk/portsmouth-central/what-we-do

Christchurch Food Bank

Overseen by: Faithworks Wessex (independent charity)

Number of sessions per week: 3

Local authority: Christchurch

Website: faithworkswessex.org.uk/christchurchfoodbank.htm

Eastleigh Basics Bank

Overseen by: Independent charity, founded by local churches

Number of sessions per week: 2

Local authority: Eastleigh

Website: eastleighbasicsbank.co.uk

Fareham and Gosport Basics Bank

Overseen by: Friends of the Homeless (independent Christian charity)

Number of sessions per week: 3 each at Fareham and Gosport

Local authorities: Fareham, Gosport

Website: friendsofthehomeless.org.uk

Farnborough Foodbank

Overseen by: Trussell Trust

Number of sessions per week: 3

Local authority: Rushmoor

Website: farnborough.foodbank.org.uk

Farnham Foodbank

Overseen by: Trussell Trust

Number of sessions per week: 4

Local authority: Farnham

Website: farnham.foodbank.org.uk

FISH Project

Overseen by: Lee Community Church, Lee-on-the-Solent

Number of sessions per week: delivery scheme

Local authority: Gosport

Website: n/a

Hart Foodbank

Overseen by: Trussell Trust

Number of sessions per week: 2

Local authority: Hart

Website: hart.foodbank.org.uk

Haven Community Centre
Overseen by: Salvation Army, Portsmouth
Number of sessions per week: 5
Local authority: Portsmouth
Website: portsmouthsa.org.uk/havencommunitycentre

Hedge End Food Centre
Overseen by: Kings Community Church
Number of sessions per week: 1
Local authority: Eastleigh
Website: kccsouthampton.org/foodcentre

Hound Basics
Overseen by: Netley Christian Fellowship
Number of sessions per week: n/a
Local authority: Southampton
Website: n/a

The Larder
Overseen by: Holy Trinity Church, Aldershot
Number of sessions per week: delivery service
Local authority: Rushmoor
Website: htca.org.uk/gettinghelp.php

The Larder (Church of the Good Shepherd)
Overseen by: Church of the Good Shepherd, Farnborough
Number of sessions per week: n/a
Local authority: Rushmoor
Website: goodshepherdchurch.org.uk/community/larder

Leigh Park Baptist Church
Overseen by: Leigh Park Baptist Church
Number of sessions per week: 3
Local authority: Havant
Website: n/a

New Forest Basics Bank
Overseen by: Independent charity established by churches in Lymington
Number of sessions per week: 3
Local authority: New Forest
Website: basicsbank.org.uk

Petersfield Food Bank
Overseen by: Petersfield Area Churches Together
Number of sessions per week: 5
Local authority: Petersfield

Website: alton.foodbank.org.uk

Poitiers Care

Overseen by: Holy Family Catholic Church, Southampton

Number of sessions per week: delivery service

Local authority: Southampton

Website: holyfamilysouthampton.org.uk/2011/tab-test

Portsmouth Foodbank

Overseen by: Trussell Trust

Number of sessions per week: 5

Local authority: Portsmouth

Website: portsmouth.foodbank.org.uk

Ringwood Food Bank

Overseen by: Trussell Trust

Number of sessions per week: 3

Local authority: New Forest

Website: ringwood.foodbank.org.uk

Salisbury Food Bank

Overseen by: Trussell Trust

Number of sessions per week: 5

Local authority: Salisbury

Website: salisbury.foodbank.org.uk

Southampton Basics Bank

Overseen by: Southampton City Mission

Number of sessions per week: 5

Local authority: Southampton

Website: www.southamptoncitymission.co.uk/basics-bank

The Storehouse

Overseen by: KC21 church network

Number of sessions per week: 2

Local authority: Rushmoor

Website: kc21.net/the-churches/kc21-central

Testwood Basics Bank

Overseen by: Testwood Baptist Church and Southampton City Mission

Number of sessions per week: n/a

Local authority: New Forest

Website: testwoodbaptist.org/page.php?id=36

Waterlooville Food Bank

Overseen by: Living Waters Fellowship Wecock
and Waterlooville Baptist Church

Number of sessions per week: 2
Local authority: Havant
Website: waterloovillefoodbank.co.uk

Waterside Foodbank
Overseen by: Trussell Trust
Number of sessions per week: 3
Local authority: Southampton
Website: waterside.foodbank.org.uk

Winchester Basics Bank
Overseen by: Independent charity supported by local churches
Number of sessions per week: 3
Local authority: Winchester
Website: winchesterbasicsbank.co.uk

» WHO WE ARE

The trust was established to commemorate one of the founders of Portsmouth Housing Association, the late Reverend Bill Sargent.

The Portsmouth Housing Association is now part of First Wessex which continues to support our work on research into poverty and homelessness.

For information about Bill and his inspirational work go to **www.bstrust.org.uk/uploads/bill_sargent_bio_summary.pdf** for a short summary of his biography – a full version is available cost £5.00 contact us for details

The Bill Sargent Trust is a charity that sponsors research on housing and related issues across Hampshire (including Portsmouth and Southampton).

It has a particular focus on issues of poverty and homelessness. It seeks to influence policy with the outcomes of the research.

We are currently sponsoring research on the impact of public sector spending reductions and benefit changes for those living on low incomes and in housing need in Hampshire.





supported by

First Wessex 

The Bill Sargent Trust

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Tel: 023 9289 6716

www.bstrust.org.uk

Charity number: 1042611