

Food Bank Provision for families in North Nottinghamshire

EADSON, William <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2158-7205>>, FODEN, Michael and BEATTY, Christina <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0943-9979>>

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Published version

EADSON, William, FODEN, Michael and BEATTY, Christina (2015). Food Bank Provision for families in North Nottinghamshire. Other. Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research.

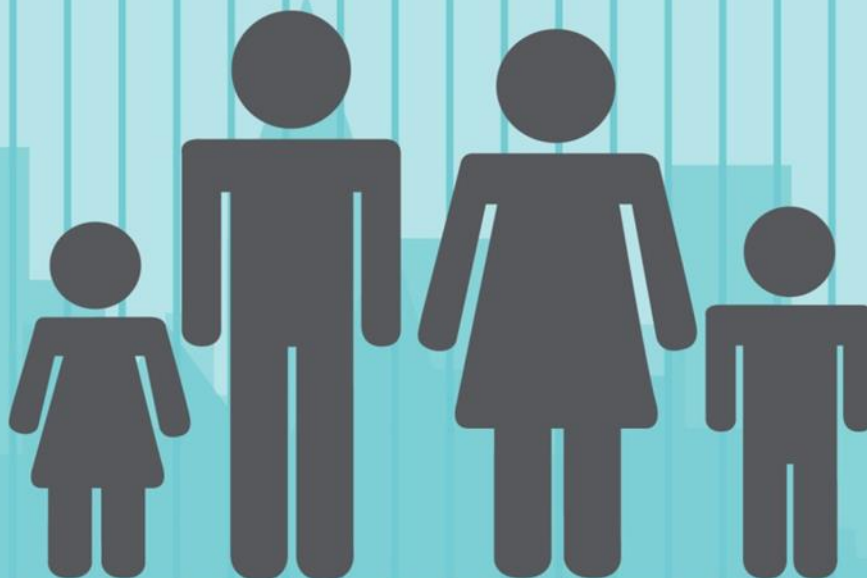
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Christina Beatty
Will Eadson
Mike Foden

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Acknowledgements

This report has been funded by Nottinghamshire County Council. We would like to say thank you to Diane Tinklin at Nottinghamshire County Council for her support in commissioning and facilitating the research undertaken. We would also like to thank the stakeholders who spared us their time to talk to us about food bank provision in the districts of Bassetlaw and Newark and Sherwood. Special thanks goes to the coordinators of the four food banks operating in the area (Bassetlaw Food Bank, Dukeries and District Foodbank, Newark Foodbank, Tuxford Area Foodbank) who not only spared us their time to talk to us in-depth about their food banks, but also provided invaluable data on the level and type of provision in their area. Thanks also goes to Professor Steve Fothergill who worked with a member of the research team on the 'Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest' report and subsequent reports assessing the impacts of welfare reform on households. The methods developed in these reports have been drawn upon for the analysis of local impacts of welfare reform contained within this report.

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Executive Summary

- This report documents food bank provision in the North Locality of Nottinghamshire an area which covers the districts of Newark & Sherwood and Bassetlaw. The research aims to provide an understanding of the numbers and characteristics of those accessing food banks in the area, with a particular focus on the extent of food poverty amongst children.
- Food banks have been a growing phenomenon in Britain in recent years. They are voluntary sector organisations which provide emergency food parcels to individuals and families in times of need when they cannot afford enough food to feed themselves or their family. Reasons for people to be referred to food banks include losing a job, waiting for a benefit claim to be processed, changes in benefit entitlement including benefit sanctions and having to meet an unexpected large bill or unforeseen expense.
- The impacts of welfare reform will be particularly hard on households with dependent children by the time all the reforms have come to fruition. Lone parent households with dependent children can, on average, expect to lose over £2,100 a year in Bassetlaw or £1,900 in Newark and Sherwood. Couples with dependent children on average lose nearly £1,600 a year in Bassetlaw and £1,400 a year in Newark and Sherwood. Taking these figures together for both areas then on average, households with dependent children are estimated to be worse off by £1,600 a year as a result of welfare reform.
- In 2013/14, people were referred to the four local food banks a total of 2,230 times. As a result, emergency food was provided for them and their families amounting to enough to feed 4,860 people over the year. A third of the food provided is for children. Given each food parcel provides three meals a day for three days, this means the provision equates to approximately 14,600 days' worth of food provision or 44,000 meals. This is equivalent to feeding 40 people three meals a day for a full year.
- After repeat visits by some clients are taken into account, the number of individuals fed over the year is 2,800, of whom over 900 will be children. This equates to approximately two per cent of all children in the area will have had support from a food bank at least once over the year.
- The diversity of the client base was a recurring story: those both in and out of paid employment, single people, families, some in specific one-off crisis situations and others living under constant financial strain, surviving from one crisis to the next: *"everybody is usually only a pay cheque away from a financial crisis"* (Food Bank Coordinator, Tuxford).

Introduction

Food banks have been a growing phenomenon in Britain in recent years. They are voluntary sector organisations which provide emergency food parcels to individuals and families in times of need. Food aid can be given to people for a range of reasons and often see people through a particular short term crisis, such as losing a job or awaiting a claim for benefits to be processed. At other times emergency food aid can assist people on low incomes who are unable to make ends meet when an unexpected large bill, or unforeseen expense, means they cannot afford enough food to feed themselves or their family.

Some food banks are affiliated to a national network of food banks supported by the Trussell Trust; others are run independently. To give an idea of the scale of the expansion since the recession in 2008/09, the Trussell Trust network alone has expanded from providing emergency food for 26,000 people to over 913,000 people in 2013/14. Food poverty is therefore being increasingly recognised as an issue amongst low income families in Britain.

The rise in emergency food aid has occurred alongside a post-recession period of limited economic growth, stagnant wage growth and increased living expenses including food prices and household fuel bills. Since 2010, the rapid growth in food banks has happened concurrently to a major overhaul of the welfare system which is resulting in the working age population in Britain being £18 billion a year worse off than they would have been had the changes not taken place. These financial losses affect those in work as well as out-of-work and the impacts are most accentuated in the more deprived parts of the country.

This research has therefore been commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council to gain an understanding of food bank provision in the two districts within its North Locality (Newark and Sherwood, and Bassetlaw). There are currently four food banks operating in the two districts three of which are part of the Trussell Trust network and one of which is independently run. The aim of the research is not only to assess the level of local provision generally, and how the referral system interacts with the providers, but also to specifically focus in on the extent to which children and young people in the area may be exposed to food poverty.

The report brings together a number of strands in the research. First, an overview of the national evidence base is considered. This looks at the growth of food bank provision nationally, what is known about the characteristics of those who access this support, the reasons for attending a food bank and methods of referral. Secondly, this report provides a new analysis on the local impacts of welfare reform on residents in the two districts covered by the North Locality. This updates previous estimates available in *'Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest: The local and regional impact of welfare reform'* which was co-authored by

one of the research team, on how many people will be affected and the financial loss for local working age residents. The analysis also provides new detailed information on how much of these losses will fall on families with children. Thirdly, the report provides an overview of how the local food bank provision operates locally, including a full analysis on the numbers of people accessing these services, how many adults and children are provided for and reasons for referral. Fourthly, as part of the research we conducted in-depth interviews with 10 key stakeholders in North Nottinghamshire. These interviews complement the quantitative data analysis to explore in depth the perceived extent of food poverty, the provision and uptake of emergency food aid and especially how these issues affect families with children. Interview participants included the coordinators of all four local food banks (Bassetlaw, Dukeries, Newark and Tuxford). The remaining six interviews were with stakeholders with particular responsibility for children and young people in the locality:

- Child protection team leader, Bassetlaw
- Children's Centre Coordinator, Bassetlaw
- Children's Centre Coordinator, Newark and Sherwood
- Primary School Assistant Headteacher, Newark and Sherwood
- Secondary School Inclusion Officer, Newark and Sherwood
- Children's Ministry Representative, Southwell Diocese

The final section brings together the range of evidence to provide an assessment of local provision and how the substantial support network which already exists might be enhanced further.

Food poverty: understanding the extent and nature of the problem

The provision of food aid in Britain

There are a number of sources of food aid available for individuals or families who face hardship. Some services, such as food banks, provide emergency food aid direct to individuals who cannot afford to feed themselves or their families. Other organisations provide hot food through soup kitchens, hostels, day centres, breakfast clubs or community cafés. Many of the services provided are organised and run by community-led, voluntary sector organisations or churches. Much of the provision is run locally, but a number of larger umbrella organisations have also sprung up providing a national network of services, including the Trussell Trust,¹ FareShare² and FoodCycle.³ Whilst the Trussell Trust is a national network of food banks, the latter two charities are not and operate a different model of food aid. They collect surplus foods via donations, food manufacturers or retailers and either distribute it to third sector organisations to provide meals, or provide meals themselves using the surplus food and unused kitchen space.⁴

The meals provided through organisations such as day centres and community cafés tend to be given on an on-going basis, whereas food banks provide emergency assistance to people in temporary periods of financial crisis. For example, people who may have lost their job, lost their home, are waiting for benefits to be processed or are managing on low incomes but are unable to cope when faced with an unexpected large bill. Whilst food bank provision in Great Britain has been a relatively new phenomenon over the past decade or so, there has been a longer history of such provision in the USA which goes back to the late 1960s.

The Trussell Trust is the largest provider of food aid across the UK and operates as a social franchise in partnership with local churches. They work in partnership with a range of agencies and health services to refer clients in need to the local food bank. Sources of referrals include Jobcentre Plus, social workers, doctors and health visitors as well as support agencies such as Citizen's Advice Bureau. The expansion of the Trussell Trust has

¹ <http://www.trusselltrust.org/>

² <http://www.fareshare.org.uk/>

³ <http://foodcycle.org.uk/about-us/>

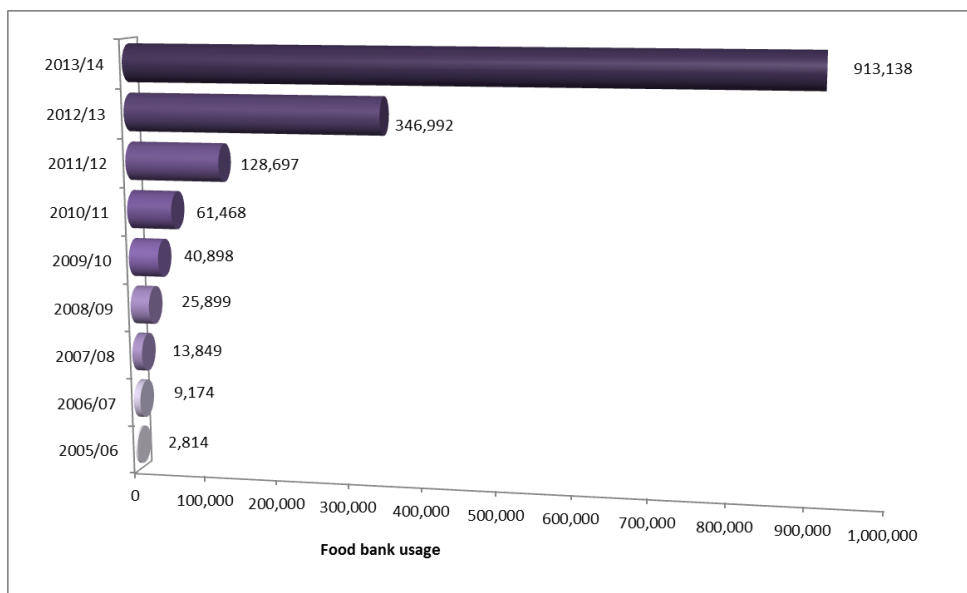
⁴ House of Commons (2014) *Food Banks and Food Poverty*

been rapid; their first food bank opened in 2000, but by the end of 2013/14 the network had extended to 430 food banks. It needs to be remembered that there is also a wide range of community run food banks that work independently of the Trussell Trust, often operating a similar model for referrals. A mapping exercise undertaken by the Guardian in October 2013 found 60 food banks in addition to the 400 which existed within the Trussell Trust network at the time. Taking this ratio as a guide, there might be in the region of at least 500 food banks currently operating in the UK.

Estimating demand for emergency food provision nationally

At present there are no official statistics on the number of people accessing food banks in the UK, nor on the numbers living in, or at risk of falling into, food poverty. It is therefore, as is well-attested in existing research, extremely difficult to provide accurate estimates of the scale of the problem and the demand for assistance.⁵ The main source of regular published national and regional data available is from the Trussell Trust. The data they provide is collected systematically from across their network of food banks. It includes information on the numbers seeking assistance, the types of households affected and the reasons why they are seeking help.

Figure 2.1: Trussell Trust food bank usage, UK, 2005/06 to 2013/14



Source: The Trussell Trust

Trussell Trust figures suggest a dramatic rise in the uptake of emergency food provision over recent years (Figure 2.1). Nationally, 913,100 people (including 330,200 children) were fed by their food banks in 2013/14, each given enough food for three days⁶. This represents a 163 per cent increase from the 2012/13 total of 347,000. The number of food banks operated via the franchise increased from 345 to 430 over the same period representing an increase of 25 per cent. Hence, the increase in provision cannot be explained in terms of the expansion of the network alone. The latest evidence points towards a continuation of

⁵ Lambie-Mumford et al (2014) *Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid*; Downing and Kennedy (2014) *Food Banks and Food Poverty*; Perry et al (2014) *Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK*

⁶ Source: <http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats>; rounded to nearest 100

this upward trend, albeit less dramatically so. In the six months up to September 2014, 493,000 people received food parcels, compared with 356,000 during the same period in 2013.⁷

These figures are based on the number of vouchers redeemed at Trussell Trust food banks rather than the number of unique individuals who have received support. This means that the number of individuals who have accessed support is lower as some users are likely to have accessed emergency food support at more than one point in the year. However, there is an operational policy for Trussell Trust food banks to only allow for up to three consecutive referrals. This ensures the main usage is for emergency provision of food in result of a crisis, rather than longer-term support for problems associated with living on a low income.

These national figures only capture beneficiaries of food banks affiliated to the Trussell Trust network. Access of other forms of provision, often run by smaller independent providers, is more difficult to quantify. Research undertaken by Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty in 2013 estimates that '*at least half as many people again are provided with food parcels or other forms of food aid by non-Trussell Trust food banks and other emergency food aid projects*'.⁸ If this is an accurate estimate, then there may have been closer to 1.4 million instances where emergency food was provided by food banks in the UK in 2013/14.

A recent evidence review for the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) therefore advises a degree of caution in interpreting the figures available on food bank usage.⁹ Citing research from a North American context, where food banks are a comparatively longstanding and institutionalised phenomenon,¹⁰ the review authors question whether increased provision of food aid necessarily implies increased need or merely makes such need more visible. More specifically, given the absence of any robust data, they question the number of people fed historically by ad hoc, informal or independent providers, raising the possibility that some of the increased use of Trussell Trust food banks might be accounted for by a formalisation of existing provision. Despite this note of caution, the authors conclude that recent growth in uptake is a genuine trend: '*What is almost certainly the case is that there are now more providers, and more clients/recipients, at each provision point*'.¹¹

The national evidence discussed here clearly shows that the recorded growth in both the supply and demand for emergency food aid in Britain has been particularly strong in recent years. This occurred alongside a world financial crisis at the tail end of 2008 which resulted in a sustained period of recession and limited economic growth in Britain. In addition to the financial crash, the government has also embarked upon a major overhaul of the welfare system since 2010. This policy agenda has resulted in large scale financial losses to many low income families reliant in part, or in totality, on financial support from the benefits and tax credits systems. It needs to be remembered that both families in work and out-of-work have been affected by these changes to the welfare system. The following chapter examines the extent of the financial losses incurred by low income families as a consequence of the main

⁷ Source: <http://www.trusselltrust.org/mid-year-stats-2014-2015>

⁸ Cooper and Dumpleton (2013) *Walking the Breadline: The scandal of food poverty in 21st century Britain*, p.3

⁹ Lambie-Mumford et al (2014)

¹⁰ Tarasuk (2001) *A Critical Examination of Community-Based Responses to Household Food Insecurity in Canada*

¹¹ Lambie-Mumford et al (2014), pp.40-41; see also Lambie (2011) *The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network: Exploring the Growth of Foodbanks Across the UK*

changes to the welfare system underway. Potentially these may be a contributory factor to the increase in food poverty observed both nationally and within North Nottinghamshire. The scale of local food bank provision and usage is then considered in the subsequent chapter.

3

The impacts of welfare reform on families with children

Introduction

The government is currently implementing a raft of welfare reforms which affect both those who are out-of-work and those who are in work and on low-incomes. The reforms impact very unevenly on different places and different people. This section of the report builds on the foundations of two previous studies undertaken at CRESR which estimate the impacts of the reforms on both places and people across Britain. The first, *'Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest'* published in April 2013, looked at the financial losses arising from the reforms across Britain as a whole and in each of its 380 constituent local authorities.¹² The analysis presented here also draws on methods that were first developed in a study for Sheffield City Council published in November 2014¹³ which explored the distribution of the financial impacts of welfare reform on different types of households.

The estimates provided here have not been previously published elsewhere. All the figures presented in the report are estimates but in every case they are firmly rooted in official statistics – for example in the Treasury's own estimates of the financial savings, the Westminster Government's *Impact Assessments*, and benefit claimant data. The figures here have also been comprehensively revised to take account of the Treasury's most recent estimates of the financial savings, the level of inflation relative to that originally forecast and, in some cases, of outturn data.

The analysis presented here looks at the cumulative impact of the welfare reforms on different types of households in the districts of Newark and Sherwood, and Bassetlaw. This is the first time that evidence has been available for these districts which allows the cumulative impact of welfare reform on different types of households, including those with dependent children, to be understood. It is not the aim of this report to establish a causal link between the impacts of welfare reform and the rising use of food banks, however the analysis does help shed light on the number of low income families with children that are likely to be impacted upon by the reforms. Cutting back on essentials, such as food and

¹² C Beatty and S Fothergill (2013) *Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest; the local and regional impact of welfare reform*, CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University.

¹³ C Beatty and S Fothergill (2014) *The Impact of Welfare Reform on Communities and Households in Sheffield*, CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University.

heating, can be a key response of low-income families when having to cope with a reduction in an already limited income.

An overview of welfare reforms

The figures in this section of the report cover the major welfare reforms that have been underway since 2010.¹⁴ Many of these reforms were announced in the 2010 Emergency Budget, 2010 Spending Review or subsequent Budgets and Autumn Statements. Some of the reforms had previously been announced by the former government and are also included in the estimates, as they have only been implemented in the post 2010 period. Many of the reforms are now fully in place. Others are still being implemented and a small number still have a long way to run before coming to full fruition.¹⁵ The reforms covered are:

Housing Benefit – Local Housing Allowance

Changes to the rules governing assistance with the cost of housing for low-income households in the private rented sector. The new rules apply to rent levels, 'excess' payments, property size, age limits for sole occupancy, and indexation for inflation.

Housing Benefit – Under-occupation

New rules governing the size of properties for which payments are made to working age claimants in the social rented sector (widely known as the 'bedroom tax')

Non-dependant deductions

Increases in the deductions from Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and other income-based benefits to reflect the contribution that non-dependant household members are expected to make towards the household's housing costs

Household benefit cap

New ceiling on total payments per household, applying to the sum of a wide range of benefits for working age claimants

Council Tax Benefit

Reductions in entitlement of working age claimants arising from 10 per cent reduction in total payments to local authorities

Disability Living Allowance

Replacement of DLA by Personal Independence Payments (PIP), including more stringent and frequent medical tests, as the basis for financial support to help offset the additional costs faced by individuals with disabilities

¹⁴ The analysis does not include the changes underway due to the roll out of Universal Credit.

¹⁵ For many of the reforms (to Housing Benefit for example) the figures are the expected losses in the 2014-15 financial year. Due to the slower implementation of other measures, such as the replacement of Disability Living Allowance with the Personal Independence Payment, the full impact of the package as a whole cannot be expected before 2018.

Incapacity benefits

Replacement of Incapacity Benefit and related benefits by Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), with more stringent medical tests, greater conditionality and time-limiting of non-means tested entitlement for all but the most severely ill or disabled

Child Benefit

Three-year freeze, and withdrawal of benefit from households including a higher earner

Tax Credits

Reductions in payment rates and eligibility for Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit, paid to lower and middle income households

1 per cent up-rating

Reduction in annual up-rating of value of most working-age benefits, which would normally have been increased with inflation

A fuller description of each of these reforms, including the timing of implementation and the expected savings to the Exchequer, is contained in the appendices of the two previous reports mentioned.¹⁶ When fully implemented, the welfare reforms are expected to save the UK Treasury around £18bn a year. Taking the welfare reform package as a whole, in the spring of 2015 around 30 per cent of the overall financial loss to claimants still lies ahead. In estimating the impact of the welfare reforms the analysis *holds all other factors constant*. What this means in practice is that it makes no assumptions about the growth of the UK economy, or about future levels of employment and unemployment.

The local impact of welfare reform

Table 3.1 shows the estimated impact of the welfare reforms when they have been fully implemented. They can be expected to take around £35m a year out of the economy in Bassetlaw and approaching £31m a year in Newark and Sherwood. Given that the two districts have very similar sized populations (population in Bassetlaw 113,700 in 2013 compared to 116,800 in Newark and Sherwood) this would seem to confirm the pattern seen in the previous *Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest* report, that there is a strong correlation between the financial loss per adult of working age arising from welfare reform and the Index Multiple of Deprivation. The correlation applies at the level of local authority districts and at the level of electoral wards. Therefore, families within the more deprived of the two districts¹⁷ are likely to face the biggest financial hit as a consequence of the reforms.

Table 3.2 presents the figures in another way, relative to every working age adult in the area whether or not they claim welfare benefits. This is a good metric to use as nearly all the impact of welfare reform falls on working age adults and allows the local figures to be compared to the national picture. The financial loss is equivalent to an average of £490 a

¹⁶ C Beatty and S Fothergill (2013) and (2014) op.cit.

¹⁷ Bassetlaw District is ranked 82nd out of 326 English local authorities (top 25%) on the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation, where one is the most deprived and 326 is the least deprived. Newark and Sherwood is ranked 147 out of 326 (top 45%).

Table 3.1: Overall financial loss arising from welfare reform

	Estimated loss £m p.a.	
	Bassetlaw	Newark and Sherwood
Tax Credits	8.4	7.2
Disability Living Allowance	6.4	5.6
Incapacity benefits	6.2	4.9
Child Benefit	5.3	5.2
1 per cent uprating	5.0	4.3
Housing Benefit: LHA	2.1	1.4
Bedroom Tax	0.7	0.5
Council Tax Benefit	0.4	1.1
Non-dependant deductions	0.4	0.3
Household benefit cap	0.1	0.1
Total	35.0	30.6

Source: Sheffield Hallam estimates based on official data

Table 3.2: Overall financial loss arising from welfare reform, per working age adult

	Loss per working age adult £ p.a.		
	Bassetlaw	Newark and Sherwood	Great Britain
Tax Credits	115	100	105
Disability Living Allowance	90	80	70
Incapacity benefits	85	70	60
Child Benefit	75	70	75
1 per cent uprating	70	60	70
Housing Benefit: LHA	30	20	40
Bedroom Tax	10	5	10
Council Tax Benefit	5	15	10
Non-dependant deductions	5	5	5
Household benefit cap	1	1	5
Total	490	425	450

Source: Sheffield Hallam estimates based on official data

year for every adult of working age in Bassetlaw, compared to an average of £425 in Newark and Sherwood and £450 in Great Britain.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 also show that due to the changes to DLA and incapacity benefits¹⁸, the average financial loss for households with a working age claimant of benefits related to long term illness or disabilities are also substantial. As with any of the impacts of welfare reform, it needs to be remembered that these benefit groups are not mutually exclusive, so some families may be affected by more than one measure at the same time. For example, it is not hard to imagine that a household impacted on by changes to eligibility for incapacity benefits may also be affected by the changes to DLA, or indeed changes to their Housing Benefit entitlement if they are affected by the bedroom tax or changes to the Local Housing Allowance system of how Housing Benefit is calculated for tenants in the private rented sector.

The impact of welfare reform on households

The individual welfare reforms vary greatly in the scale of their impact. The welfare reforms impact on a wide range of households and individuals, and not just on those on out-of-work benefits. The biggest financial hit is for those receiving Tax Credits, of which nearly three-quarters are in work and approaching nine out of ten of these households have dependent children. The numbers of families affected are substantial (Table 3.3) as there are 9,000 households receiving tax credits in Bassetlaw and 7,700 households in Newark and Sherwood, all of who will have been affected by one or more of the multitude of changes which took place to the Tax Credits system. The three year freeze on increasing Child Benefit will also have affected 13,900 families in Bassetlaw and 14,100 families in Newark and Sherwood.

Table 3.3: Number of households affected by welfare reform

	number of households	
	Bassetlaw	Newark and Sherwood
1 per cent uprating	17,700	18,000
Child Benefit - freeze	13,900	14,100
Tax Credits	9,000	7,700
Council Tax Benefit	5,600	4,900
Incapacity benefits ⁽¹⁾	3,200	2,500
Disability Living Allowance ⁽¹⁾	2,500	2,200
Housing Benefit: LHA	2,300	1,700
Child Benefit - higher earners	2,000	1,900
Bedroom Tax	1,100	800
Non-dependant deductions	500	500
Household benefit cap	10	10

⁽¹⁾ Individuals affected; all other data refers to households
Source: Sheffield Hallam estimates based on official data

¹⁸ Includes the time-limiting of Employment and Support Allowance to one year, after which it becomes means tested.

It is also worth bearing in mind that the figures here on the number of households or individuals affected are a ‘snapshot’ at a single point in time. Over time, as people move on or off benefit – there is always turnover – the numbers who will at some point feel the financial impact of the reforms will be substantially larger.

Figures on how the impacts of the reforms vary across different households types are also presented below. These figures are created by combining data from the 2011 Census of Population for a range of household types in each local authority (Table 3.4) with national proportions of each household type receiving each welfare benefit from DWP data and from the *Family Resources Survey*. This method was successfully piloted in a November 2014 report on Sheffield.¹⁹ The resulting figures on the impact of the reforms on different types of households are *estimates* and all subject to a margin of error. Nevertheless, the figures provide a more reliable assessment of the numbers affected and the financial losses than previously available.

Table 3.4: Total households by type, 2011

	Bassetlaw	Newark and Sherwood
Pensioner couple	4,670	4,990
Single pensioner	6,190	6,480
Couple – no children	10,130	10,270
Couple – one dependent child	4,100	4,100
Couple – two or more dependent children	5,360	5,670
Couple – all children non-dependent	3,190	3,070
Lone parent – one dependent child	1,670	1,650
Lone parent – two or more dependent children	1,360	1,400
Lone parent – all children non-dependent	1,530	1,520
Single person household	7,180	7,370
Other – with one dependent child	480	440
Other – with two or more dependent children	440	400
Other – all full-time students	0	50
Other – all aged 65+	120	120
Other	1,250	1,270
Total	47,670	48,770

Sources: Census of Population

Table 3.5 indicates that two groups of households are relatively unaffected by welfare reform. One is student households reflecting the fact that hardly any students are entitled to benefits. The other much more substantial group that escapes lightly are pensioner households which is not surprising given the focus of welfare reform has been primarily aimed at those of working age. The impact on households with dependent children is substantial with two thirds of the loss falling on families with dependent children; families in Bassetlaw will be nearly £23m a year worse off and in Newark and Sherwood will be just over £20m a year worse off by the time the reforms have been fully implemented.

¹⁹ C Beatty and S Fothergill (2014) op.cit.

Table 3.5: Overall impact of welfare reform by household type

	Estimated loss £m per year		
	Bassetlaw	Newark and Sherwood	Total
Pensioner couple	0.2	0.1	0.3
Single pensioner	0.3	0.2	0.5
Couple no children	4.3	3.7	8.0
Couple 1 child	6.3	5.5	11.9
Couple 2 or more children	8.7	8.0	16.6
Couple all children non-dependent	1.4	1.2	2.6
Lone parent 1 child	3.5	3.0	6.4
Lone parent 2 or more children	2.9	2.7	5.6
Lone Parent all children non-dependent	1.0	0.8	1.8
Single person household	4.3	3.7	8.0
Other - with one dependent child	0.8	0.6	1.4
Other - with two or more dependent children	0.7	0.6	1.3
Other- all full-time students	-	-	-
Other - all aged 65+	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Other	0.7	0.6	1.3
Total	35.0	30.6	65.6

All impacts by 2014-15 except DLA by 2017/18, incapacity benefits and 1% up-rating by 2015/16
Sources: Census of Population and Sheffield Hallam estimates based on official data

Table 3.6: Average impact of welfare reform by household type

	Average financial loss £ p.a.	
	Bassetlaw	Newark and Sherwood
Pensioner couple	30	30
Single pensioner	50	30
Couple – no children	430	360
Couple – one dependent child	1,540	1,350
Couple – two or more dependent children	1,610	1,410
Couple – all children non-dependent	440	380
Lone parent – one dependent child	2,080	1,800
Lone parent – two or more dependent children	2,160	1,920
Lone parent – all children non-dependent	630	530
Single person household	600	500
Other – with one dependent child	1,580	1,340
Other – with two or more dependent children	1,660	1,440
Other – all full-time students	-	-
Other – all aged 65+	10	-
Other	570	470

All impacts by 2014-15 except DLA by 2017/18, incapacity benefits and 1% up-rating by 2015/16
Sources: Census of Population and Sheffield Hallam estimates based on official data

Table 3.6 shows the average financial loss to each of these household types in Bassetlaw and Newark and Sherwood.²⁰ It is important to underline that these are averages across the whole stock of households of each type, not just those hit by the welfare reforms. Thus the modest average loss for couples with no children, for example, averages substantial losses to some households together with large numbers of other couples who are entirely unaffected by the welfare reforms.

The impact of welfare reform on households with children

Table 3.4 earlier shows that **families with children make up 28 per cent of all households** in Newark and Sherwood, and Bassetlaw. Adding together couples, lone parents and others with dependent children, there are 13,410 households in Bassetlaw and a further 13,650 households with dependent children in Newark and Sherwood, just over 27,000 households in all. Using a conservative estimate of two children for each household with at least two children then this means there are at least 41,700 dependent children in these two areas. This is in line with the data available from the 2013 ONS Mid-Year Population estimates which indicate there are 41,000 children aged 0-15 and 52,200 children and young people aged 0-19 across the two districts.

The significant observation from Table 3.6 is that households with dependent children are hit particularly hard. This is especially true of lone parent households with dependent children who on average can expect to lose around £2,110 a year in Bassetlaw when all the reforms have come to fruition or £1,850 in Newark and Sherwood. Couples with dependent children on average lose nearly £1,580 a year in Bassetlaw and £1,390 a year in Newark and Sherwood. Taking these figures together for both areas then, **households with dependent children are estimated to lose £1,600 a year on average** as a result of welfare reform.

By contrast, households without dependent children, including single-person households as well as couples, escape more lightly – the average loss is between £430 and £630 a year in Bassetlaw and between £360 and £530 a year in Newark and Sherwood. Around all these averages there will be a large spread both in terms of the sums lost and the make-up of the loss as some of these households will be affected by none of the changes whereas others will be affected by multiple impacts.

That households with dependent children are on average hit so hard by welfare reform is not something that has been widely recognised. As the figures show, the financial losses are rooted in a whole raft of changes rather than a single reform to the benefits system. Reductions in Tax Credits, drawn on heavily by low and middle income households with children, are a key part of the explanation but reforms to Housing Benefit, disability and incapacity benefits, Child Benefit and the 1 per cent uprating all compound the losses. Conversely, substantial numbers of in-work households without children draw little if at all on the benefits system.

It is also a popular misconception that the reforms to welfare benefits impact only on those who are out-of-work. The changes are extensive, and some impact more on in-work households. Working out the precise split between, on the one hand, households where

²⁰ The average financial loss is calculated by multiplying the number of households of each type affected by each reform by the average financial loss arising from each reform, and then dividing by the total number of households of each type in the area (Source: Census of Population)

someone is in work and, on the other, households where no-one is employed is not straightforward because some benefits are claimed by both groups – Housing Benefit is a good example. A further complication is that some out-of-work benefits – incapacity benefits for example – can be claimed by individuals who live in households where others are in work. As a guide, the 2014 Beatty and Fothergill report for Sheffield estimated that approximately 45 per cent of the cuts will fall on in-work households.

What the figures demonstrate is that the welfare reforms impact very unevenly and some households are far more exposed to the changes than the rest. On average, families with dependent children face substantial financial losses. This is particularly true of lone parents. That families with dependent children lose so much is not something that has usually been noted, perhaps because the financial losses do not arise from a single element of the reforms. The *cumulative* impact of the reforms – adding together all the changes underway over the last four or five years – nevertheless exposes the full impact.

Average losses can of course still hide a great deal. Even within a group that is hit hard (lone parents for example) some households will escape lightly if they draw little on benefits. Others face above-average losses. The withdrawal of Child Benefit from higher earners is unusual because it hits the better-off, but in general it is likely to be the less well-off, both in and out of work, that lose the most. As households deal with shortfalls in income, and if they are not able to make ends meet, then families may have to make difficult choices about prioritising what to spend their income on. Unexpected large expenses like a broken washing machine, large bills such as winter fuel bills or issues with rent arrears or debt can also compound issues of living on low incomes. For some families this can mean needing to cut back on essentials, as well as non-essentials. In turn this can lead to an increase in the incidence of food poverty amongst some low income families.

Local emergency food provision

An overview of existing provision

Having established the nature and extent of food poverty nationally, and the substantial impacts of welfare reform on families with children, this chapter documents the work already being done in Bassetlaw and Newark & Sherwood to alleviate the symptoms of food poverty, specifically that done by the area's four food banks. It also reflects on the experiences to date of the food banks and some of the issues that they face in delivering emergency food provision.

At present there are four food banks operating within the districts of Bassetlaw and Newark and Sherwood, all of which formed in 2013. Each has a geographically defined remit, albeit with some degree of overlap between them:

- Bassetlaw Food Bank (covering the whole Bassetlaw District)
- Newark Foodbank (Newark, Southwell and surrounding villages)
- Tuxford Area Foodbank (Tuxford and nearby villages, occasionally north towards Gainsborough or south towards Newark)
- Dukeries and District Foodbank (Ollerton and nearby villages, including Boughton and Edwinstowe)

Three of these (Newark, Tuxford and Dukeries) are affiliated to the Trussell Trust, a Christian network of more than 400 food banks across the UK. In return for a financial contribution, member organisations are provided with a manual, initial training and ongoing support (on issues ranging from data protection to stock management), IT and data services, and networking opportunities, as well as the accountability of being part of a large, formal organisation. In addition to the more tangible benefits of affiliation, food bank coordinators appreciated the assurance that came from belonging to an established network. As one put it, *"we're not working in isolation"* (Food Bank Coordinator, Tuxford). Three of these are affiliated to the Trussell Trust,

Bassetlaw Food Bank, meanwhile, is not affiliated to any wider network. Although membership of the Trussell Trust was initially considered, it was decided to remain independent, partly due to the explicitly Christian ethos of Trussell Trust. While the food bank retains important ties to local faith communities, there was a concern that explicitly affiliating with a faith-based organisation might lead to some potential clients or volunteers feeling excluded. Furthermore, given a wealth of existing skills and experience involved in

establishing the food bank – the steering group included senior representatives of the local CVS, Citizens Advice Bureau and a well-established homeless hostel – it was decided that in this instance the money required to join Trussell Trust could be better spent elsewhere.

Having a diverse and highly skilled team is a common feature of all four food banks, which rely heavily on the contributions of volunteers both in coordinating and delivering their services. Newark, Tuxford and Dukeries are staffed entirely by volunteers, whereas Bassetlaw employs one paid member of staff on a part-time basis in a coordinating role. Helping to run a food bank is an intensive, time-consuming undertaking, especially for the coordinators who carry a significant burden of responsibility.

In addition to the work of the four food banks, numerous other forms of food aid exist in the area. In, for example, there are several providers of hot meals to people in need, while the Salvation Army also provide emergency food parcels on an ad hoc basis. However, these other forms of provision are less available in the more rural parts of North Nottinghamshire. For older people there are a number of lunch clubs where they can have a hot meal and socialise with peers.

Core business: collection and distribution of food aid

The main purpose of food banks is to provide parcels containing three days' emergency food to people in a crisis situation. Parcels may also include other essentials such as toiletries, and if applicable, pet food or specific items for small children (e.g. nappies). Giving these additional items, which might be interpreted by some as 'luxuries', is seen as an important part of treating visitors to the food bank with dignity, regardless of their circumstances:

"Yes, they're in a crisis, but it still doesn't mean they shouldn't be treated with care and consideration and respect. And that's where we're coming from" (Food Bank Coordinator, Newark).

Goods are donated from a range of different sources, but especially from private individuals and community groups. Permanent collection points are stationed at supermarkets, where shoppers are encouraged to buy extra items to donate, especially when taking advantage of 'buy one get one free' offers. Further collection boxes can be found at schools, workplaces, pubs, churches, and other community venues. In order to manage the types of food received and ensure there are sufficient stocks of essentials, food banks use social media to regularly publicise lists of goods which are particularly needed at that moment in time. In addition to ongoing collection, there are seasonal gluts at certain times of year, especially in the autumn when many churches and schools donate the food they collect for Harvest Festival.

As part of a coordinated national campaign, Trussell Trust food banks run two annual collection events at Tesco stores throughout the country. Teams of volunteers attend to drum up support and distribute 'shopping lists' detailing the items currently needed by the local food bank. As part of the arrangement, Tesco agrees to 'top up' whatever customers donate, by 30 per cent. Conversely there are other times of year when relatively few donations are received, for instance the months following Christmas.

Another, smaller source of food donations is directly from businesses, with manufacturers and retailers contributing goods that would otherwise go to waste. For example, Newark

Foodbank receives leftover cakes and bread from two local businesses in the town. While food banks in our study area suggested that this currently happens mainly on an ad hoc basis, organisations such as Fareshare are working to formalise these connections, building relationships with commercial organisations and distributing their excess food to charities who can use it. Furthering this work, systematically matching up need with (surplus) supply is a key recommendation of the recently completed All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger.²¹

As well as goods, food banks are also reliant on monetary donations. First, cash is needed to cover overheads and running costs, for example to meet the rent and energy costs of premises for storing and giving out food. In addition, money is also needed to buy in essential items to supplement what has been donated – especially in the case of certain items that are less likely to be given – and to make sure all food parcels contain a healthy balance of produce. As one food bank coordinator explained, fundraising can often be both more pressing and more difficult than getting sufficient food donations, with grant funding difficult to secure:

"My biggest concern at the moment is not food; it's actually some money to keep the food bank running" (Food Bank Coordinator, Tuxford).

Referrals

Having collected donations of food and other goods the remaining task is of course to distribute them to people who need them. Goods are sorted into different types of parcel according to household sizes and types: for single people, couples, families with children, and so on. All four food banks operate a referral system for allocating food parcels; they are explicitly not 'drop-in' services, although in some cases food bank coordinators said they would exercise discretion and make a referral themselves. First, clients are referred by one of a number of local partner agencies. Referrers might include health visitors, family support workers, school staff, debt advisers, housing officers and so on. These professionals act as the main gatekeepers to emergency food provision and are responsible for determining eligibility for a food parcel, often being more intimately aware of their clients' ongoing circumstances than a food bank volunteer would be. Trussell Trust use a standardised voucher for this process, which must be completed with the client's details and reason for referral. This doubles as the Trust's main method of systematic data collection, as discussed above in Chapter 2.

Once referred, the next step is for people to go to pick up their food parcel from the food bank, although in some cases – for mobility reasons or due to living in a remote location – parcels can be collected by the professional giving the referral on their behalf, or occasionally delivered by the food bank. Bassetlaw food bank has two dedicated distribution centres, one in Worksop and one in Retford, provided by the district council on a peppercorn rent. These are open Monday to Friday, 10am-2pm, staffed by volunteers working in shifts. The remaining three food banks operate from their respective local church buildings, and are open one day (Tuxford) or two days (Newark and Dukeries) per week for clients to come and collect their food parcels. The food banks also have 'satellite stations', for instance local children's centres or council offices, which keep a supply of food parcels to give to people

²¹ APPG on Hunger and Food Poverty (2014), p.22.

out of hours, or in more rural locations, in order to ensure that availability of emergency assistance is not limited to those living more centrally. This is a crucial adaptation to the specific geography of North Nottinghamshire, which is widely dispersed with small, localised pockets of deprivation. After all:

"if people haven't got money for food, they haven't got money for petrol or taxis or buses" (Food Bank Coordinator, Bassetlaw).

People using food banks are restricted in the number of parcels they are entitled to over a given period of time, with three parcels in six months the typical rule of thumb. This is to some extent consistent across the four food banks, although the extent to which it is enforced varies and is often negotiated on a case-by-case basis, reflecting the particular circumstances of the client. Two rationales are given for limiting the number of parcels: to discourage reliance on food aid as a regular source of food – it is intended as a response to a short term crisis and not a substitute or supplement for mainstream forms of welfare assistance or support in improving their long term financial position – and because there would be insufficient food to give out. Bassetlaw Food Bank tends to stick to the three parcel limit, with an option of a discretionary fourth parcel, especially if the client is being actively supported to change their circumstances by the agency that referred them. Some clients with ongoing or serial crises return to the food bank after six months, aware of

"exactly when they're due for another parcel. You wonder sometimes how they survive in the meantime" (Food Bank Coordinator, Bassetlaw).

It is difficult for food banks to refuse assistance to people in such circumstances. One option is to signpost to other services providing different forms of food aid, where these exist, especially in the more urban parts of the area where they are more commonly available:

"We are fortunate in Worksop ... that everyday there is somewhere, through a drop-in facility or a church, where someone can get a hot meal. But other areas of Bassetlaw aren't as fortunate as that." (Food Bank Coordinator, Bassetlaw)

Another food bank coordinator, in the more rural location of Tuxford, reflected on this same situation from the perspective of an area without comprehensive provision of alternatives. Here it is not always possible to stick to strict limits on the number of food parcels, since the food bank may well be the only possible source of food:

"Having said that, that's not always realistic ... If you're struggling, waiting for benefits to come through, three weeks is no time at all. What are people supposed to do? Live on fresh air? It just doesn't work like that ... There's nothing else out here." (Food Bank Coordinator, Tuxford)

Initially the Dukeries Foodbank in Ollerton operated with a three parcel limit, but has since relaxed this policy, due to the length of time that many clients have to go without a main source of income, particularly due to delays in benefit payments. As a result discretion is used in relation to the client's situation:

"When they first started, the Trussell Trust thought that three vouchers, which is nine days in theory would be long enough to sort it out. But benefits are taking anything from 8 to 12 weeks to sort it out. So how can you tell someone in that situation that they can only have three, and their benefits are still not in place? How can they manage? So

what we now do is we work from crisis to crisis. If the crisis takes six weeks we help them for six weeks. If it takes two weeks we help them for two weeks. (Food Bank Coordinator, Ollerton)

A profile of clients of local food banks

As part of this research study we have been given access to the local data collated by each of these four food banks. The data from the three Trussell Trust food banks is collected as part of their ongoing reporting procedures and comparable to the nationally available data. This includes data on the following:

- number of times people have received support, including numbers of adults and children
- people supported by 'crisis type'
- people supported by ward
- family 'type'
- age groups

The data compiled from the Bassetlaw Food Bank also includes some comparable information on the number of clients supported, however, it is unable to easily provide a breakdown in service provision in for all the sub-groups considered. They are, however, able to provide data on referral agencies and anonymised individual level data which is useful for looking at repeat users of the service.

All of the food banks provided data for the full 2013/14 year²² and two of the food banks also provided partial data for the first nine months of 2014/15 (April to December). This makes comparison of data over time difficult; the figures for provision for the first three quarters of 2014/15 are therefore included within the text for purely indicative purposes. We include data for all four food banks where available, or just for the three Trussell Trust food banks where comparable data for Bassetlaw Food Bank is not available.

Table 4.1 shows the number referrals and number of people provided with emergency food aid in the area via each of the four food banks in the financial year 2013/14²³. In total, 2,230 referrals were made to the food banks resulting in **emergency food provided 4,860 times to people over the year**. It also needs to be remembered that these figures relate to the food parcels handed out each of which provide three meals a day for three days. This means the provision equates to approximately 14,600 days' worth of food provision or 44,000 meals. This is equivalent to feeding 40 people three meals a day for a full year. Bassetlaw Food Bank, which is the largest of the four providers, accounted for just over 40 per cent of the total provision. However, given that Bassetlaw district is more deprived than Newark and Sherwood, it is perhaps surprising that there is actually less emergency food aid provided within this district.

²² This covers the period from April 2013 to March 2014.

²³ The data for the number of people provided for by the Bassetlaw Food Bank in 2013/14 is based on combining referral data for that year with data on how many adults and children were fed relative to referrals for the whole 2013 to 2015 period. There were 966 referrals from 2013/14; in the entire 2013 to 2015 period they had 1,499 referrals which provided food for 1,366 adults and 606 children. The ratio of referrals to people fed is then applied to the 2013/14 referrals figure. This is consistent with patterns seen in other food banks in the area and regional data available from the Trussell Trust.

Table 4.1: Emergency food aid in North Nottinghamshire, 2013/14

	Number of vouchers	Number of people
Bassetlaw Food Bank	970	1,970
Newark Foodbank	810	1,620
Dukeries and District Foodbank	360	1,060
Tuxford Foodbank	100	210
Total in Bassetlaw district	1,070	2,190
Total in Newark and Sherwood district	1,160	2,680
Total	2,230	4,860

Source: Data provided from the four food banks

Note: columns may not sum due to rounding

The data above is not recorded on the basis of unique individuals who access the food banks and includes people to whom emergency food aid has been provided on more than one occasion. In order to reduce dependency on the food banks, all four have a policy of allowing up to three referrals during a six month period, but further access is then at the manager's discretion. One manager stated that they accept there is a need, which they fulfil, to provide food after three referrals depending on the circumstances. For example, those who have been sanctioned and have had their benefits removed can be left destitute for significant periods of time. They do however enforce the three referrals in six months rule if they think repeat visits are too frequent.

Table 4.2: Repeat referrals at Bassetlaw Food Bank

	Number of clients	Percentage of clients
One referral	320	58
Two referrals	110	19
Three referrals	80	15
Four referrals	30	5
Five referrals	10	2
Six referrals	10	1
Total	550	100

Source: Bassetlaw Food Bank

Note: columns may not sum due to rounding

The anonymised individual level data from Bassetlaw Food Bank is very useful to gain an understanding of the patterns of repeat use. Table 4.1 above shows emergency food was provided in response to 970 referrals which fed 1,970 people during 2013/14. Table 4.2 shows the proportion of clients referred who had one or more food parcels during the 2013/14 period. The 970 referrals were made for 550 individuals (and their families) of whom 58 per cent only received assistance once. Conversely, only one per cent of clients had accessed the food bank six times in the year. The vast majority (92 per cent) of clients had visited the food bank three times or less in the year. If a similar pattern of repeat use was seen in all the food banks in the area, then approximately 1,300 individuals would have

been referred across the two districts. If the ratios for each food bank of the number of people fed relative to referrals are used to include children and partners in this estimate then the number of individuals fed increases to 2,800, of whom over 900 will be children. If these figures are used in conjunction with ONS mid-year population estimates for Newark and Sherwood, and Bassetlaw, then this equates to approximately one per cent of the population having accessed a food bank at least once in 2013/14. If the estimate of the number of individual children helped is given as a proportion of the local population aged 19 or under, then approximately two per cent of all children will have had support from a food bank at least once over the year.

Of particular relevance to this study is the numbers of children receiving support through food banks. We can look at this in two ways: by looking at the numbers of children supported by food banks; and by looking at the numbers of families with children supported by food banks. Table 4.3 below shows the numbers of times children were provided with support from each of the local food banks in 2013/14; 1,660 times in total. This is equivalent to a third of all the food provided. The proportion is similar to that seen nationally with the Trussell Trust recording that between 36 and 37 per cent of all provision for each of the years between 2011/12 and 2013/14 was to children; for the East Midlands region the figure ranged from 36 to 38 per cent over the same period. Of the four local food banks, Dukeries and District had the largest proportion of children supported at 43 per cent of all people helped.

Table 4.3: Numbers of times children have received support from food banks, 2013/14

	Adults	Children	Percentage children
Bassetlaw	1,370	610	31%
Newark	1,100	520	32%
Dukeries and District	600	460	43%
Tuxford	140	80	37%
Total	3,200	1,660	34%

Source: Data provided from the four food banks

Note: columns may not sum due to rounding

Table 4.4 shows the data in terms of families supported by food banks for the two food banks that provided this data. This table combines referral data provided for both 2013/14 and 2014/15. It shows that, families with children accounted for 42 per cent of those referred.

Table 4.4: Referrals by family ‘type’

	Percentage of all referrals
Family	23
Single Parent	19
Couple	12
Single	39
Other	7
Total	100

Source: Data provided from the Newark Food Bank (2014/15) and Dukeries and District Food Banks (2013/14 and 2014/15)

The data also gives an indication of the geography of food bank use for the three Trussell Trust food banks. Those supported by food banks are spread across the two districts, but there are a number of wards that stand out as particular ‘hot spots’ for food bank use. Those wards where emergency food has been provided over 100 times are shown in Table 4.5, below. These nine wards account for 70 per cent of the total provision from these three food banks. A further 10 per cent of provision is given to people with no fixed address. When data for all nine wards is combined it shows that 37 per cent of all provision in these wards was for children. This does vary though by place with the highest proportion of provision going to children in Boughton, Bridge and Ollerton.

Table 4.5: Food bank provision by ward in 2013-14

Ward	No. Vouchers	Numbers provided for			Percentage children
		Adults	Children	Total	
Devon	200	270	160	430	37%
Boughton	90	140	150	280	51%
Bridge	110	160	120	280	42%
Ollerton	90	140	100	240	40%
Magnus	130	160	60	210	27%
Castle	110	160	50	210	25%
Beadon	80	120	60	170	33%
Tuxford and Trent	60	70	30	100	31%
Farnsfield and Bilsthorpe	30	70	40	100	35%

Source: Data provided from the Newark, Dukeries and District, and Tuxford Food Banks

Devon ward in Newark and Sherwood was the source of most referrals by quite a large margin. This is perhaps unsurprising given that it has the highest levels of claimants of out-of-work benefits across the two districts; 21 per cent of working age residents in Devon ward compared to 9.8 per cent in England²⁴. Similarly, Boughton, Ollerton and Magnus wards feature among the top 10 wards for out-of-work benefit claimants across the two districts. The ward with the second highest rates of out-of-work benefit claimants, South East Worksop, is not well represented in the data. However, this area would be covered by the Bassetlaw Food Bank, which was unable to provide ward level data.

²⁴ NOMIS: DWP working age out-of-work benefit claimants as a percentage of residents aged 16-64, May 2014. This includes those claiming JSA, ESA, IB or IS for lone parents.

Who uses food banks and what issues do they face?

Reasons for visiting a food bank

Beyond estimating the numbers of adults and children currently turning to emergency food aid, it is important to establish the key groups affected. Who currently uses food banks and for what reasons? Better understanding this existing demand is crucial for beginning to think about who is likely to be in need of ongoing provision. In answering this question we draw on our in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in Bassetlaw and Newark & Sherwood, as well as the data gathered by food banks and existing published evidence from across the UK.

The first point to make, as underlined by food bank coordinators throughout the research area, is that there is no 'typical' food bank user. They were keen to emphasise that financial crises of the types experienced by their clients can potentially happen to anyone, or as one manager put it: *"everybody is usually only a pay cheque away from a financial crisis"* (Food Bank Coordinator, Tuxford). The diversity of the client base was a recurring story: those both in and out of paid employment, single people, families, some in specific one-off crisis situations and others living under constant financial strain, surviving from one crisis to the next. The food bank in Newark, for example, had given assistance to young families who are *"maybe second or third generations of people who have never worked"*, to others who are very vulnerable for whom 'managing life' can be a struggle, and to others still *"who have had very nice jobs and nice houses, and then they lost their job, they lost their homes"* (Food Bank Coordinator, Newark). Perhaps more revealing are the groups seemingly less represented, including older people and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

While food bank users cannot be reduced to a single type of person, there is evidence to suggest that people in certain sets of circumstances are more vulnerable than others to a crisis situation and, as a result, to the potential need for emergency food provision. In general, 'those who are more food insecure are more likely to turn to food aid'.²⁵ One way to identify particular 'at-risk' groups is by looking at the characteristics of people who have already accessed food banks, the circumstances they faced and the reasons they were referred. Again, the Trussell Trust food bank data is a helpful starting point in this regard. Each client, when referred for emergency food by a partner agency, is given a voucher that he or she then hands to the food bank in exchange for a food parcel. Amongst other information the voucher includes the primary reason for their referral, which is then recorded

²⁵ Lambie-Mumford et al (2014), p.28

by the food bank and collated at the regional and national level. Most strikingly this reveals problems with benefits to be a particularly prevalent set of triggers for food bank use. In 2013/14, 31 per cent of all UK referrals were attributed to 'benefit delays' and a further 17 per cent to 'benefit changes' (Table 5.1). This finding is echoed by the recent All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger, which reports benefit-related problems to be 'the single biggest reason given for food bank referrals by almost every food bank that presented evidence to us'.²⁶ Benefit-related problems cover a variety of distinct issues, which we will return to in more detail shortly.

Table 5.1: Primary referral reasons to Trussell Trust food banks, UK and North Nottinghamshire, 2013/14

	Percentage of all referrals	
	UK	North Nottinghamshire
Benefit delays	31	36
Low income	20	18
Benefit changes	17	19
Debt	8	6
Unemployment	4	3
Homelessness	3	5
Domestic violence	2	1
Sickness	2	2
Delayed wages	1	1
Child holiday meals	1	<1
Refused short-term benefit advance (STBA)	1	0
Refused crisis loan	1	<1
Other	11	7
Total	100	100

Source: Trussell Trust; Data provided from the Newark, Dukeries and District, and Tuxford Food Banks

Data collected in North Nottinghamshire allows us to undertake similar analysis for the three Trussell Trust food banks in our research area, as shown in Table 5.1. This shows that, on the whole, trends for Trussell Trust food banks in North Nottinghamshire are in line with the national picture. There are small levels of variation – for instance benefit related referrals account for 55 per cent of North Nottinghamshire referrals, compared to 48 per cent across the UK – but nothing that suggests a marked difference between the area and the UK as a whole.

The data available from Bassetlaw Food Bank for reason of referral is recorded on a different basis, but it does allow some insights into the finer details of reasons as to why some people have visited the food bank. In some cases, more than one reason was recorded as the reason for referral, but for the purposes of the analysis here the first or main reason has been taken. It is then possible to collapse the reasons for referral into similar groupings as the Trussell Trust classification. Table 5.2 compares the Bassetlaw figures with the national picture. The proportion of people who have had issues with their benefits;

²⁶ All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger and Food Poverty (2014) *Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*

are homeless; have problems with debt, budget difference or low income; or have experienced domestic violence or have health issues; are all of a similar magnitude in Bassetlaw Food Bank as nationally. The category which Bassetlaw records as 'sudden loss of income' which may include people who have lost their job or have lost their benefit income due to a change of circumstances or a sanction accounts for nearly one in ten of the clients they see. A further one in ten people who seek help have had an immediate crisis due to an unforeseen expense or unexpected emergency. Individual reasons in this category included a broken fridge freezer, needing travel expenses due to a child in hospital, moving expenses and having to find deposits for new tenancies. The Bassetlaw Food Bank data also specifically mentions Benefit sanctions as being the reason for referral for five per cent of all cases they see (included within the Benefits delays and changes category). The referral data also shows that by far the largest referral agency signposting their services is Jobcentre Plus.

Table 5.1: Primary referral reasons to Bassetlaw Food Bank, 2013/14

	Percentage of all referrals	
	Bassetlaw	UK
Benefit delays and changes	49	48
Budget difference/debt/low income	27	29
Unexpected /emergency expense	10	N/A
Sudden loss of income	9	N/A
Homeless	1	2
Domestic violence	2	2
Sickness	1	2
Other	1	17
Total	100	100

Source: Trussell Trust; Data provided from the Bassetlaw Food Bank

The data gathered systematically by food banks is a valuable indicator of the types of crisis situation typically facing individuals and families that turn to food banks for assistance. However, these summary statistics can only be expected to tell part of the story. Since vouchers record the primary reason for referral, as assessed by the referring organisation, they are not designed to capture the multiple issues that clients may face. The categories are not mutually exclusive and it is feasible that any one person might suffer from several of the problems listed. Furthermore, some of the categories appear to represent short-term triggers of crisis, while others represent ongoing issues of financial insecurity. It is likely that in many cases both short- and long-term factors play an important role.²⁷ More specifically, as noted in the report of the All-Party Inquiry, the categories do not distinguish between different types of benefit delays and changes, which might include 'delays in the processing of a new or existing claim, changes in entitlement, sanctions and loss of benefit during a Mandatory Reconsideration Period, being made to transfer from one benefit to another, and payments made to cover debt'.²⁸ It is helpful then to look at other complementary sources,

²⁷ Perry et al (2014)

²⁸ APPG on Hunger and Food Poverty (2014), p.34. Note that one of the recommendations of the Inquiry is for food banks to include more detailed reporting categories for different types of benefit-related problems. This may, however, represent an unrealistic administrative burden on food aid providers and/or referral organisations. See Sosenko et al (2013) *Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland*, p.30.

including qualitative evidence, to better understand the circumstances and experiences associated with risk of food poverty.

Immediate crises and ongoing issues

Before going on to discuss in more depth some of the key reasons people access emergency food provision, it is worth reflecting on a distinction made in research for the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) between an *'immediate income crisis'* – a particular event or incident leaving someone with insufficient funds to feed themselves and their families – and *'a complex life story'*, in which several other factors had combined to leave people vulnerable and less able to cope with dramatic changes'.²⁹ Drawing on in-depth interviews with food bank clients across the UK, the CPAG research found that in many cases an immediate crisis was the *'last straw'*, following a sustained period of living with barely enough income. Many participants *'had simply reached the end of their ability to cope'*.³⁰ Similarly, Defra's review of the international literature consistently found food aid to be a *'strategy of last resort'* after other ways of dealing with low income (budgeting, cutting back, seeking help from family and friends) had been exhausted.³¹

The same is true of food bank users in North Nottinghamshire, many of whom have reached a point of desperation when they access the service:

"They don't come to a food bank unless it's the end of the line; they really don't" (Food Bank Coordinator, Tuxford).

Stakeholders frequently talked about an enduring stigma attached to being reliant on 'charity', to not being able to manage or to provide for one's family. Some clients had delayed accessing help through fear of being humiliated or judged:

"People tell us that they've sat outside in their friend's car for half an hour because they're too embarrassed to come in. They don't know how they're going to be treated, if they're going to be judged. But then, it's good for us to hear that we've made them feel welcome, we've made them feel human." (Food Bank Coordinator, Bassetlaw)

Often individuals or families, whether in or out of work, are adept at managing on a limited budget on a long term basis, with incomings and outgoings finely balanced. However, with a lack of surplus they have little capacity to absorb an unexpected financial shock – the immediate crisis which becomes the 'last straw' or signals the 'end of the line' – whether that be additional costs (e.g. expensive repairs or incurring charges for a late payment) or reduced or delayed income from work or benefits.³² For example:

"They're on a low income, and they're managing their income, but say their washing machine blew up, then they've got a crisis. Because that income does that much; it doesn't do that much and a washing machine." (Food Bank Coordinator, Newark)

²⁹ Perry et al (2014), p.14

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.22

³¹ Lambie-Mumford et al (2014), p.34

³² See also Perry et al (2014), p.49

The benefits system

As discussed above, problems with benefits – broadly speaking – represent the single biggest set of reasons for referral to food banks, both nationally and in North Nottinghamshire, and affecting people both in and out of employment. Looking more closely these issues can be divided into two groups:

- **delays or gaps** in receiving benefit payments, for instance when making a transition on or off benefits, moving from one benefit type to another, or if a sanction is applied as part of benefit conditionality;
- **changes in the amount** of benefit received, due to a change of circumstances or to the impacts of welfare reforms

It is worth considering each of these groupings in turn. First, recent research at a national level has repeatedly drawn attention to (a) delays in benefit payments starting (or gaps while changes in benefit amount or type are processed) and (b) benefit sanctions as two of the major recurring issues associated with food bank use. The All-Party Inquiry, for instance, *'heard extensive evidence suggesting that lengthy delays in the administration, and subsequent receipt, of benefit payments is causing severe hardship for new claimants'*.³³ The authors refer to *'avoidable problems'* in the way social security is administered and call for urgent reforms to deliver initial payment within five working days. The present target of 16 days, even when met, may be 'far too long to wait, especially for someone who has no other access to money'; when this target is not met 'the wait could be dangerously long'.³⁴

All four food bank coordinators and coordinators in Bassetlaw and Newark & Sherwood reported that the wait between losing work, applying for benefits and receiving payments was one of the leading causes of short term food crisis and a frequent reason that clients sought emergency food assistance. Both Ollerton and Newark food banks observed that in some cases benefit claims were taking *"anything from 8 to 12 weeks"* to process, potentially leaving households without a main source of income for up to three months.

Benefit sanctions have also been an increasing issue nationally. In 2010, the incoming Coalition Government pressed ahead with plans set in train by the previous administration for a programme of welfare reform that placed conditionality and responsibility at the heart of welfare policy. In March 2012, increased conditionality and a harsher sanctions regime were introduced via the *Welfare Reform Act 2012*, and subsequently implemented from the autumn of 2012. Whereas there had always been a system in place of sanctions for JSA claimants, new conditionality requirements and sanctions were also introduced in the winter of 2012 for Employment and Support Allowance claimants within the Work Related Activity Group. A key change has been **increased severity and length of sanctions**: a claimant can now have their benefit withheld for up to three years if they have had three 'higher' level sanctions within a year and do not meet the stringent requirements now placed upon them. Since the introduction of the new regime in 2012 over 1.44m JSA claimants have been sanctioned and the numbers have continued to rise even in the context of falling unemployment.

³³ APPG on Hunger and Food Poverty (2014), p.35.

³⁴ Perry et al (2014), p.38.

Benefit sanctions appear to be a growing reason for turning to food aid. According to research for Oxfam, Church Action on Poverty and the Trussell Trust, 83 per cent of food banks surveyed in spring 2014 reported that *'sanctions to social security have caused more people to be referred to them for emergency food in the last year'*.³⁵ Again, this experience was echoed in our study area with all four food bank coordinators and coordinators seeing sanctions as a key reason that people accessed their service; one commented that sanctions were becoming more of an issue on a daily or weekly basis. Sometimes decisions were seen as fair given the client's understanding of their requirements and their reasons for failing to comply, although as one manager stressed, *"it's not for us to judge"* (Food Bank Coordinator, Bassetlaw). However, there were frequent stories of sanctions that had been imposed on subsequent food bank users harshly, unfairly or in error. One had been late for a medical assessment due to being '43 pence short' for the bus fare: *"He got off at the [earlier] stop and walked the rest of the way, was late for his appointment so he missed it. So he had a sanction."* (Food Bank Coordinator, Newark). And in another case:

"...a young lad, 18, applied for 20 jobs in one week, but because he missed a deadline for one that they recommended, they've sanctioned him for three months. I can't understand it at all." (Food Bank Coordinator, Bassetlaw)

In the case of both sanctions and delays in benefit payments, there are emergency forms of financial assistance that can be applied for via the DWP: hardship payments and short-term benefit advances. However, as national research attests claimants are often unaware of these forms of support, the application procedure or the eligibility criteria, with evidence suggesting that claimants are only given information if they proactively ask or read the online regulations.³⁶

Second, as shown earlier in Table 5.1, 17 per cent of referrals made to food banks nationally and 19 per cent locally were due to 'benefit changes'. These were less widely discussed in our interviews than were delays and sanctions, but still featured as important reasons for food bank use and formed part of the backdrop to people's ongoing low levels of income. On the one hand, entitlements to means-tested benefits may fluctuate due to changes in other sources of income or changes in a family or household composition. When combined with the unpredictability of insecure or irregular work (see below) this can make managing a budget especially difficult, while also increasing the risk of delays and errors in processing changes of circumstances mentioned above. On the other hand, some benefit entitlements have reduced as a result of recent reforms to welfare provision, for example in the introduction of size criteria to Housing Benefit allowances for those in the social rented sector, commonly known as the 'bedroom tax'. As Chapter three showed earlier, the scale of the financial losses for some can be significant and affects those in work as well as those out-of-work. Again, even the smallest of changes in regular incomings can have a serious impact on ability to balance an already tight budget, enough of an impact to require emergency assistance with food.

Low-pay, insecure and irregular work

Alongside problems related to receipt of benefits, a second major set of issues concerns the nature of people's employment situations and especially the amount and consistency of their

³⁵ Cooper et al (2014) *Below the Breadline: The Relentless Rise of Food Poverty in Britain*, p.17.

³⁶ APPG on Hunger and Food Poverty (2014), p.36. See also Perry et al (2014), pp.39-42 for detailed examples

earnings. First, many families and individuals simply have very low pay. As one interviewee noted,

"it's quite surprising ... the majority of people that use the food bank are on low income, not unemployed" (Food Bank Coordinator, Tuxford).

The All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry found that rates of pay at the bottom of the income scale – including the National Minimum Wage – have fallen in real terms, while the costs of essentials such as food, energy and housing have risen:

'Too many of the submissions we received, in written form, from food bank workers and clients themselves testify that the National Minimum Wage is too low to provide a failsafe system against hunger, even with the substantial subsidies taxpayers make to those wage levels through tax credits'.³⁷

Furthermore, as already discussed, but worth reiterating, a knock-on effect of living on low pay is the need to very carefully balance incomings and outgoings, with little capacity to put money aside for emergencies. As a result, people with low levels of income (whether from work or benefits) are especially vulnerable to financial shocks, for example those resulting from illness, pay cuts, reduced or terminated employment, unexpected bills or repairs.

Second, just as the transition from a period of employment to out-of-work benefits can be marked by a delay in receiving payments, the same can be true for moving from benefits into work, often paid monthly and in arrears. In some cases, the transition is marked by an acute but temporary financial crisis where immediate support is needed to survive a very real period without income, but where reliance on such support is unlikely to continue:

"Some crises are just temporary and usually you know how that's going to play out. For example, say somebody's come off benefits 'cos they've started a job but they're not paid for eight weeks. They're stuck. There's no money, they've stopped their benefits, but they've no wage and there's nothing... It's a crisis; that's what we're there for. Here's your food, here's your food, here's your food. You've got paid: good." (Food Bank Coordinator, Newark)

However, transitions between employment and unemployment can happen repeatedly and in quick succession, especially in low-skilled occupations as people enter a 'low-pay/no pay' cycle.³⁸ This raises a third employment-related issue impacting on food bank use, one that can lead to sudden and sometimes recurring financial shocks. As recent national research has found, 'in common with many low-income households, food bank users have a dynamic and sometimes unclear work status, including unstable or temporary work, part-time work (in the formal or informal economy) or insecure self-employment'.³⁹ Food bank coordinators and coordinators in North Nottinghamshire raised insecure and irregular work as a particularly prevalent issue given the nature of local employment opportunities. In Ollerton for example, increasing numbers of people work under these conditions for large distribution centres and more casual agricultural work. This work is variable and precarious, resulting in sudden drops or complete loss of income. Similarly, in Bassetlaw:

³⁷ APPG on Hunger and Food Poverty (2014), p.33

³⁸ Perry et al (2014), p.30

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.50

"While we are lucky to be in the hub of an industrial area, quite a few of our businesses offer zero or low hour contracts.... You might have your wage one week, and then nothing for two weeks, and then half a wage the following week, and people have still got rent and mortgages to pay." (Food Bank Coordinator, Bassetlaw)

The manager of Newark food bank reflected that households are easily 'caught out' by zero hour contracts – *"they're promised 37 hours a week ... and they get two or three"* – making budgeting impossible, which she felt was particularly problematic for families with children. And in the absence of sick pay, workers on zero hour contracts are especially vulnerable to losing earnings through a period of illness.

Living with debt

One further prominent set of issues contributing to food poverty and the demand for emergency assistance relates to problematic levels of debt. According to food bank data in Table 5.1, debt is the primary reason for eight per cent of referrals nationally and six per cent locally. It may be a contributing factor in many other cases, as when mentioned by interviewees it tended to be discussed in conjunction with different forms of crisis.

Debt can arise in a number of ways. Existing research has shown that loans are taken out by households with limited resources as a way of coping with specific financial problems, tiding them over for a given period or even as a way of paying for essentials on an ongoing basis.⁴⁰ Of course, what begins as a reaction to crisis can in turn be a cause of future crisis as loans have to be repaid, often with high rates of interest. Our research suggests that debt can also result unwittingly from one or more of the other financial shocks already discussed, for instance reduced or delayed income. In Newark, one family had gradually accrued bank charges of between £200 and £300 following an initial late payment into their account and being repeatedly overdrawn as a result. This demonstrates once again the fine margins involved in managing on a limited budget, and how easily an unexpected disruption to this balance can have serious repercussions. It also exemplifies a key role played by food banks, 'signposting' to more sustained and/or specialised forms of support, alongside their core business of responding to immediate hunger: *"I said 'Go to Citizen's Advice; please go there now!' They did and I think it was eventually sorted out"* (Food Bank Coordinator, Newark). Another story from the same food bank involved a delay in processing a young family's housing benefit claim; as a result the family *"spiralled into debt"*, again incurring bank charges. While they were confident that the claim would be backdated, this would not meet the additional burden of covering the charges. Again, the family were signposted to Citizen's Advice.

⁴⁰ APPG on Hunger and Food Poverty (2014), p.10; Perry et al (2014), p.49

Food poverty amongst children

So far discussion has focused on the issues faced by people accessing food banks in general. Of course this in itself also provides a great deal of insight into the experiences of families with children. To add to this, however, this chapter reflects on some concerns and issues specifically relevant to children and young people. It draws on interviews with a range of stakeholders responsible for delivering services for children in Bassetlaw and Newark & Sherwood, as well as the views of food bank coordinators in the area.

General concerns: children in food poverty?

At the most general level, we asked local stakeholders to what extent they felt food poverty was a problem affecting children in North Nottinghamshire. The first message was that children, for the most part, were not seen as being at risk of starvation, but that in some cases the quantity and quality of food available to families was problematic. Bassetlaw Child Protection Team, for instance, reported working with only one family for whom food poverty was a critical concern. This family were experiencing severe difficulties having fled domestic violence and were accessing emergency support from the food bank while waiting for their benefit claim to be processed. However, there were further cases where families did have food available, but no gas or electricity to cook the food, highlighting severe budget limitations. In these circumstances financial assistance was provided under the obligations of Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, by topping up households' prepayment meters.

Similarly, schools in the area did not consider hunger to be a widespread issue affecting large numbers of children, but regularly experienced isolated cases where families with acute financial difficulties needed support. There was a strong feeling amongst school representatives that the true extent of the problem was unknown and that other cases may remain hidden. In most instances need for food assistance was uncovered as a result of a meeting with a child's family in relation to another (usually related) issue, alerted by behavioural problems or appearance; it is extremely rare for parents to approach the school requesting help with food.

One concern raised in stakeholder interviews was that families with low income were unable to afford healthy food, instead turning to 'stodgy' food that was comparatively cheap and filling. A major challenge for children's centres is fulfilling their remit to deliver 'healthy eating' messages while also being realistic and acknowledging parents' severely limited buying power:

"I think when you look at this particular area and the health profile, some of the things that are high priority for us are trying to put out good messages about the right sort of food. Equally for families around here, if that means more expensive food then sometimes that's a no-no. So you're very much trying to deliver healthy eating messages, but about healthy eating on a budget." (Children's Centre Coordinator, Bassetlaw)

The same coordinator also raised a concern about 'poverty of experience', whereby some of the skills and knowhow needed for cooking affordable but nutritious meals were, in some cases, missing: *"If your mum and dad never told you how to, you know, make a veg stew or something out of vegetables, then why would they know?"*. However, she put this in the context of many other families for whom cooking good food was very much a priority, citing *"some very traditional parents who still believe in cooked meals and filling children up with good things"*.

Another major concern was that, while children were not necessarily going hungry, parents were cutting down on food for themselves in order to ensure their children had enough to eat, potentially leading to health problems of their own. Bassetlaw Food Bank, for example, regularly sees parents going without food to make sure their children are fed. Once again, this is consistent with recurring stories coming from research at a national level⁴¹.

Young mothers "say they haven't eaten in days to be able to feed their children. I think it's quite clear that some are suffering medical conditions as a result of that, not least depression" (Food Bank Coordinator, Bassetlaw).

Feeding children in school holidays

Previous research in other locations has found that food aid providers experience *'increased demand during periods when families with children are unable to obtain free school meals'*,⁴² the summer holidays being the main extended period when this is the case. As one mother visiting a food bank in Coventry made clear, *'school holidays are the hardest time because you have to feed your children three times a day. That's why I am coming here now'*.⁴³ Research for Barnado's found that parents of children entitled to free school meals face increased financial pressures during holidays, that the additional cost of feeding children was *'the most significant reason'* for this increased financial burden and that children eat lower quality, less nutritious food as a result.⁴⁴ A particular area of interest for the present research was the extent to which this was the case in our study area.

In practice the experience was very mixed from one locality to another. Bassetlaw Food Bank saw a steady increase in the number of parcels given out during the summer holidays – *"where we'd [usually] see 10 a day, we had 15 a day"* (Food Bank Coordinator, Bassetlaw) – followed by a bigger spike, including many families with children, in September immediately following the holidays. Newark Foodbank had anticipated seeing a dramatic

⁴¹ Dowler et al (2011) *Thinking about 'food security': engaging with UK consumers*, p.408; Whitham (2012) *Child Poverty in 2012: It shouldn't happen here*, p.8; Cooper and Dumpleton (2013), p.9; Main and Bradshaw (2014) *Child poverty and social exclusion: Final report of 2012 PSE study*, p.16

⁴² Lambie-Mumford et al (2014), p.49; McCarthy (2012) *Food Banks in Hampshire*, p.8

⁴³ Harrison (2014) 'The Foodbank Dilemma', *New Statesman*

⁴⁴ Gill and Sharma (2004), *Food poverty in the school holidays* p.12

increase in uptake over summer, but so far this hasn't materialised: *"This is an enigma. You'd have expected so, but we don't really"* (Food Bank Coordinator, Newark). However, on a more informal basis they did experience children visiting the premises while the food bank was open, where they could get free cake, biscuits and a drink. Dukeries Foodbank in Ollerton actually saw a decrease in parcels issued over the school holidays, but interestingly in a similar fashion to Bassetlaw there was a spike before and after the holidays:

"We looked at this, and we found that the month prior to the school holidays is absolutely mad, all the parents preparing, getting in their food. And then it goes very quiet during the holidays, but then the week after they go back to school it goes very hectic again." (Food Bank Coordinator, Ollerton)

Like Ollerton, Tuxford Foodbank was said to be *"very quiet in the summer"*. (Food Bank Coordinator, Tuxford). One explanation for this could be the relatively small amount families spend on energy (both light and heating) in summer, due to the longer days and warmer weather, in comparison to what is usually a much busier time in the winter:

"I think one of our biggest factors pushing people into coming to the food bank is the winter fuels, the electricity. The fuel bills are unbelievable and people struggle to pay them. To keep warm has to be a priority and that's where the food side goes. But certainly in the summer we are quiet." (Food Bank Coordinator, Tuxford)

This chimes with the experience of one children's centre coordinator, and voucher holder for the local food bank:

"There seems to be an increase in people wanting the vouchers around winter time, but I've not really noticed it so much around the summer holidays" (Children's Centre Coordinator, Newark and Sherwood).

In this case the peak in the winter was attributed both to increased energy costs, as raised by Tuxford food bank, but also a pressure to spend large sums of money during the Christmas period. There appears to be evidence, then, that while food banks in North Nottinghamshire were not consistently more busy during the summer holidays – and in some cases were less busy – the absence of free school meals during school holidays has an impact on families' ability to afford food, mitigated to some extent by lower energy costs in the summer, but showing up in increased demand before and after the holiday period.

In response to this issue, the County Council and Bassetlaw Food Bank piloted a **'Snack Pack'** project in Worksop during August 2014, giving free lunches to children who would normally be entitled to a free school meal. A commercial food producer with a locally based factory (Greencore) provided free sandwiches, while fruit was provided by Morrison's supermarket via a voucher scheme. Every weekday Snack Packs were made available for collection by qualifying families from the food bank itself and from a number of children's centres around Worksop. The scheme was well received by families and both the food bank and the children's centres involved saw it as a success. In addition, the Snack Pack project was seen as raising the profile of the food bank, leading directly to the recruitment of new volunteers. Feedback from beneficiaries was positive, with both parents and children expressing a desire to see the scheme run again in future:

"The families that used it all said 'Oh God, I hope they do this again next year!'" (Children's Centre Coordinator, Bassetlaw).

Going to school hungry

One issue which has gained particular prominence in the media has been the prevalence of children going to school without eating breakfast and the negative effects of this on behaviour, concentration and learning.

According to a recent survey of teachers across England and Wales, commissioned by Kellogg's, 38 per cent of teachers saw children arriving at school hungry every day and 30 per cent had personally brought in food to give to 'students they suspected hadn't eaten anything in the morning'.⁴⁵ Teachers involved in the same study reported that, in their experience, hunger made children unable to concentrate (83 per cent of teachers), lethargic (75 per cent), less able to learn (62 per cent) and more likely to be disruptive (48 per cent).

While it was not specifically a major point of discussion in the interviews conducted as part of our study, stakeholders in the area did raise concerns about children starting the day hungry. One children's centre coordinator had become aware that in her area in general *"there's quite a lot of children that don't have breakfast"*. More specifically, when delivering the Snack Pack project during school holidays, she noted that some were arriving very early asking for their free lunch, before they had been delivered to the Centre:

"we'd got children turning up at quarter past ten in the morning and we thought that might be because quite a few of them weren't having a proper breakfast" (Children's Centre Coordinator, Bassetlaw).

As already noted, the schools covered by this research had not encountered a widespread problem of children suffering from food poverty, but were aware of particular instances, typically flagged up when responding to other issues. Both schools that participated in interviews have either considered taking action or already taken action in relation to children arriving at school hungry. In the secondary school, a small number of students are provided with breakfasts, free of charge, as part of a wider programme of support targeted at students in particular need. The primary school has a large proportion of children in receipt of the Pupil Premium and the school has considered using this to fund provision of free breakfasts to all those children. However, they became concerned that this could be seen as unfair: those pupils that were not eligible for the Pupil Premium were not necessarily from families with significantly greater incomes than those who were eligible. There was a worry that this would also result in alienating those families whose pupils did not receive the free breakfast. As a result they chose not to take the idea forward.

Uptake of support

Food banks in North Nottinghamshire have differed in the number of families with children accessing their services. Both Tuxford and Ollerton food banks said that their biggest client group were single people without children. This had also been the case in Newark, but it was acknowledged that families with children represented a growing proportion: "When we first opened a lot of single people came, but there's more families coming in now" (Food

⁴⁵ Kellogg's press release, 9 January 2015: <http://pressoffice.kelloggs.co.uk/2015-01-09-Family-money-woes-see-more-children-arriving-at-school-hungry-disruptive-and-unable-to-learn>. Similarly, as reported in previous research for Kellogg's, 62 per cent of school staff saw children arriving at school hungry every week: Kellogg's (2014) *An audit of school Breakfast Club provision in the UK*, p.4

Bank Coordinator, Newark). This was a particularly notable trend for larger families with several children.

Previously in this report instances where there was felt to be stigma around accessing food assistance was discussed. Talking to representatives from local schools suggested that stigma might be particularly acute when relating to parents of children. On the one hand this reflects the social norm of being a 'good provider', being independent, and being a responsible parent. On the other hand parents might have been reluctant to approach school staff for a referral to food banks due to a fear of appearing not to be coping and the possible consequences, for instance being referred to child protection services.

One respondent explained the difficulties they faced in getting families to come forward to ask for support on food provision. The respondent, an inclusion officer at a secondary school, saw at least one family per week that was facing financial difficulties. But families rarely asked about the food bank. Rather, it was the school that signposted them to the food bank when they found out that the family was in difficulty. Sometimes this did not come to light until a member of staff from the school made a home visit, but even then it would often take persistent persuasion:

"I only know what people tell me. Usually the only way I get to know is I do a home visit and you get the feeling that there is poverty in that household. And so I ask the question, 'would a food voucher make any difference'? And a lot of people are very proud, even those that need it most ... in fact last year I had one guy, I knew he was in dire straits. I kept asking him before Christmas, 'are you okay', because I knew he wasn't in work, and he kept saying 'yeah, yeah, yeah', and I ended up on the last day of term, I said, 'right I'm giving you one of these vouchers, get yourself down there. You're having a voucher whether you like it or not and if you don't use it that's up to you.'"
(Secondary School respondent, Newark and Sherwood)

A secondary issue was that schools did not always have regular contact with parents unless their child was already receiving additional support from the school. This presented a challenge for engaging parents and publicising food banks as an emergency support provider. One option was to put up posters around the school, particularly in areas where parents might visit when dropping-off and picking-up children. But promotion of food banks also sat within a wider challenge of engaging parents and members of the community more generally with the school. With this in mind one primary school in Bassetlaw had started running a community café at the school, to operate as a 'bridge' between school and community.

Similarly, although staff were always asked to be aware of any student who might be facing problems at home, knowledge of specific support options may be limited to those with a specific remit for inclusion or safeguarding. As such, it was important that those that came into most regular contact with children and their parents (for instance, form tutors) were made aware of the availability of food banks and understood how they operated.

An assessment

In this chapter we draw together the evidence to reflect on both the good work that food banks and partners are already doing in response to issues of food poverty in North Nottinghamshire, and the further action and support that might be required to continue and improve this provision.

An initial point to emphasise is that the role played by emergency food aid in combating food poverty needs to be properly understood: what is emergency provision intended to achieve and what is beyond its scope? Research at a national level for Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty answers this question in no uncertain terms:

*'Food banks and charities are currently meeting the essential needs of many families and individuals in crisis; they are feeding adults and children who otherwise would not have food on the table ... However, it is important that we view food aid only as a short-term emergency response to the problem of food poverty. The root causes need to be tackled in order for the situation to be resolved.'*⁴⁶

Similarly, a major review of international evidence undertaken for Defra concludes:

*'When the food provided and the means of distribution are adequate and appropriate, they may provide immediate relief for household members. However, food aid necessarily cannot address underlying causes of household food insecurity.'*⁴⁷

The food bank coordinators we interviewed were unanimous in saying that they provide a short-term, immediate response to crisis situations. This provision should not be seen as a replacement or an ongoing supplement for either (a) mainstream forms of assistance via the welfare state or (b) professional advice and support to help people improve their long term financial position.

With this in mind, discussion here falls into two broad and complementary areas: meeting the immediate needs of people that find themselves in a crisis situation; and working to reduce the incidence of such situations. In terms of recommendations, these might translate to, on the one hand, increasing uptake of emergency food by making sure it is available and accessible to all who need it and, on the other, decreasing uptake of emergency food by addressing the ongoing issues that lead to demand.

⁴⁶ Cooper and Dumbleton (2013), p.15.

⁴⁷ Lambie-Mumford et al (2014), p.63.

Improving access to existing provision

As national data shows, provision of emergency assistance via food banks, as well as uptake of that provision, has increased dramatically over recent years. In Bassetlaw and Newark & Sherwood, four food banks have emerged in the last two years, continuing and formalising the work carried out previously on a smaller scale and a more fragmented basis. In the process these four food banks have fed large numbers of individuals and families. We estimate that between them they gave out enough food for 44,000 meals in 2013/14 alone, equivalent to feeding 40 people three meals a day for a year.

In keeping with much of the previous research nationally and internationally, food banks in North Nottinghamshire told us that their clients typically accessed their support as a matter of last resort, having exhausted other possibilities and delayed seeking this form of help for as long as possible. At face value this is entirely in keeping with the nature of the support: it is emergency provision for crisis situations.

However, as the local food bank coordinators also observed, the delay in accessing emergency food provision was often connected to feelings of embarrassment, shame, guilt or perceived stigma on the part of the eventual food bank users. This might imply that further, as-yet unknown demand is still going unmet: people in a crisis situation which could be significantly improved by visiting a food bank, but yet to reach the level of extremity necessary to force them to do so. This implication is supported by the international evidence, showing that only a minority of 'food insecure' households turn to food banks, for reasons including 'lack of access or information, different perceptions of food aid (who is it for and what it will provide) or household need (feeling that one was not in extreme need)'.

Given the 'spread out' geography of Bassetlaw and Newark & Sherwood, which is largely rural with pockets of deprivation, another factor that could restrict uptake of emergency food provision is one of access. Food banks have already gone a considerable way to addressing this issue through the use of 'satellite stations' for both collection and distribution of food, in addition to their more central bases. Professionals such as social workers and health visitors have been allowed to collect food on behalf of their referred clients, while on a more ad hoc basis some food banks have delivered parcels directly to recipients. Newark Foodbank, for example has considered formalising this delivery service. However, as the manager noted, before deciding to invest in this it would be necessary to carry out further research in their locality, highlighting precisely what the demand for such a service might be, including the numbers currently unable to access the food bank due to their location or mobility issues.

Of particular relevance to the present research, interviews with local schools and children's centres suggested that feelings of stigma, and the resulting reluctance to seek help from food banks, might be especially acute amongst families with children. Two particular issues were raised by school staff. First, staff might only become aware of a family's difficulty in affording food as a result of making contact over a separate concern, for instance in relation to the child's behaviour. Parents were unlikely to contact the school requesting a referral to the food bank. Second, both school and children's centre staff reported that some parents were initially reluctant to accept a referral when offered.

These issues suggest a need to raise awareness and increase the visibility of food banks and the service that they provide. The food banks we spoke to already see education as a core part of their mission alongside the direct provision of food, and this includes informing children and adults about their work and the need for it. This could be complemented by publicity campaigns aimed at 'mythbusting': challenging inaccurate perceptions about the circumstances of individuals and families turning to food banks for support and emphasising the message that anyone can fall into a crisis situation. Food banks reported that a significant proportion of their volunteers and donors have themselves first encountered the food bank as a client. These particular volunteers might be in a unique position to empathise with potential new clients and contribute to campaigns to raise awareness and reduce stigma.

In addition, efforts should be made to ensure that professionals potentially responsible for making referrals are fully informed about the existence of food banks, how they operate, who they're there for, and so on. This might include supporting food banks to provide dedicated training for frontline workers in referral agencies, or incorporating the option of food bank referral into standard processes and procedures.

The research has highlighted other forms of food aid that have already been available to families with children in the locality, beyond the food banks' core business of providing food parcels. For instance, during the 2014 summer holidays, Nottinghamshire County Council and Bassetlaw Food Bank worked together in the delivery of a Snack Pack project, providing lunches for children who would normally receive free school meals. Some schools have provided breakfast clubs during term time, addressing a concern that children were coming to school hungry and that this had an adverse effect on attainment and behaviour, a notion supported by evidence emerging nationally.

The County Council, food banks, schools and other partners will need to assess whether further roll out of summer holiday food and breakfast clubs are financially viable options. The Snack Pack project benefited from a partnership with a locally-based sandwich company (Greencore), providing sandwiches free of charge, as well as fruit from Morrison's supermarket. Similar arrangements may help facilitate future delivery. Meanwhile, in delivering term-time breakfast clubs, potential relationships could be explored with Magic Breakfast, a charity that 'delivers free, nutritious breakfasts to schools where over 35 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals' or with Fareshare, which diverts food from the waste stream for use in a number of settings, including breakfast clubs. Another route to explore would be the viability of subsidising breakfasts using the Pupil Premium.

Alongside the direct impacts of providing food to children, additional provision along these lines – with obvious parallels to other, more established forms of provision such as free school meals, healthy start vouchers and so on – might have a further benefit of raising the profile of food banks and changing existing perceptions about the work they do. A children's centre coordinator in Bassetlaw, for instance, felt that involvement in delivering the Snack Pack project – which she felt had been highly successful and well received in the local neighbourhood – had also introduced some harder to reach local residents both to the work of the children's centre and that of the food bank for the first time.

Reducing the need for emergency food provision

Recent research for CPAG and the final report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry on Hunger have both sought to provide a better understanding of the reasons for food poverty and to recommend ways of responding to the root causes of these issues. In common with our own research, recurring issues in other research have included: people managing in the long term on extremely tight budgets with little room for unexpected increases in expenditure or decreases in income; the impact of short term financial shocks, such as losing work or an expensive household repair; and specific problems relating to the benefits system, including sanctions, delays in payment and reductions due to welfare reforms.

Many of the recommendations of these reports require strategic or coordinated action at a national scale, for example:

- improvements to the administration of benefits to drastically reduce waiting times and make interim payments/advances easier to access
- changes to sanction regimes to be more realistic of what can be expected of claimants, to be less punitive, to make fewer mistakes and to simplify the appeal process
- increasing the minimum wage and encouraging the adoption of the living wage
- tackling insecure or unpredictable working arrangements, e.g. zero hour contracts
- addressing the cost and complexity of gas and electric tariffs
- more systematically diverting what would otherwise be food waste into consumption

The research team, along with many of our research participants, would agree with these higher level recommendations, seeing them as the ways that would impact greatest on people's material circumstances and, by extension, on the number of people requiring assistance via food banks and similar mechanisms. This report provides an important evidence base as to the picture locally and highlights the impacts of welfare reforms on families with children which may contribute to further pressures on household budgets. That said, here we focus attention on what can be achieved locally to improve the circumstances behind food poverty, beyond the meeting of their immediate food needs.

Another strand of existing recommendations relating to reducing demand for food aid is what the CPAG report terms 'strengthening coping mechanisms', including improving access to other forms of advice and support. Similarly, the evidence review commissioned by Defra drew attention to the importance of the 'non-food related support' or 'food plus' that food aid initiatives provide. This might include: personal contact, emotional support and space and time to chat; providing specialist advice and guidance; and referring to other agencies providing professional support.

All of the food banks in North Nottinghamshire stress the importance of these forms of provision to their ongoing work. A central part of the service initially is in welcoming people who might be experiencing severe levels of emotional stress, helping them to feel at ease and providing an opportunity to talk. For instance, Newark Foodbank saw this as a key feature of their delivery model:

"people come in, are offered a cup of coffee, a chance to chat, a chance to just offload whilst they get their food" (Food Bank Coordinator, Newark).

Equally important to this welcome was how clients are sent away after picking up their food parcel. Food banks put a major emphasis on not only providing food for three days, but ensuring that people are receiving ongoing support from relevant agencies. For example, if someone came to the food bank with problems relating to debt, the food bank would signpost to debt advisors within Citizens Advice, whereas someone facing a housing related crisis might be referred to Framework, a charity specialising in homelessness. It is crucial that this work continues and that regular two-way communication with partner agencies is developed and maintained, both around the referral of clients to the food bank and vice versa.

The food banks we spoke to have also explored opportunities to deliver education, the further development of which could be supported in the future. Bassetlaw Food Bank has a good relationship with local schools, delivering assemblies and hosting regular visits of children to their distribution centres. The aim of this work is to raise awareness from a young age of issues relating to the existence of food poverty and potential responses to it, healthy eating, food safety, debt and budget management. In 2014 Tuxford hosted a high profile Community Cook-off event, to increase the visibility of the food bank and its concerns. The event also served as a launch for a series of 'cooking on a budget' courses that were held in Tuxford, Newark and Ollerton in late 2014. It is important to learn from these events – what did participants find helpful, what (if anything) enabled them to apply the learning to their own lives and what barriers were faced, what ongoing assistance was required in addition to attendance at courses – and tailor future provision of education and training accordingly.

Further research and analysis

At present there are no official data sources on levels of food poverty or provision of emergency assistance from food banks or other sources. Nationally the best estimates are based on monitoring information collected systematically by food banks in the Trussell Trust network.

Similarly, our research has relied on data gathered by the four local food banks. This has been an invaluable source of information and allows us to estimate the number of people being fed, both adults and children. The data differs between that gathered by the three Trussell Trust food banks (Newark, Ollerton, Tuxford) and the independent food bank in Bassetlaw, each with its own advantages. The standard Trussell Trust reporting template routinely gathers information on the primary reason for referral, the age group and household composition of the client, and the area that the client lives in, down to electoral ward level. By comparison the Bassetlaw data provided included a wider array of categories including whether a client had been sanctioned and also indicated the referral agency and allowed for analysis for each individual client of the number of repeat referrals. Both sets of data made an important contribution to our analysis.

From a research perspective it would be hugely beneficial if all four food banks collected data for each of the above variables. Further potential refinements could be made to the way that referral reasons are categorised. In particular it would be helpful to record benefit sanctions separately, given their consistent prominence as a cause of financial shock in qualitative evidence. Another useful, albeit more labour intensive, refinement might be to include multiple reasons for referral, in order to capture not just the primary issue affecting families but also the complexity of their situations. One suggestion might be to pilot a

consistent reporting template across all four food banks in Bassetlaw and Newark & Sherwood, or more broadly within Nottinghamshire. Of course, the obvious disadvantage of this would be to create an extra layer of administrative work for busy volunteers who are already contributing a great deal. The main advantages would be in: (1) providing a more complete source of information for local agencies and service providers, not least the County Council, in understanding need and coordinating and providing future support; and (2) enhancing the evidence base for food banks and campaigning organisations, valuable both in supporting funding bids and drawing public attention to the nature and extent of the problem. It is up to the food banks to weigh these disadvantages and advantages. Potentially, support from the County Council could facilitate comparable data to be collected across the four food banks and others operating across the county. In addition, potentially the County Council could provide support to undertake an analysis of the data on a regular basis which would help provide an understanding of how provision evolves over time. It would also be beneficial to have an event which brings together key stakeholders, referral agencies and food bank providers to share knowledge of the wider issues of food poverty, the provision of services locally and identify what works well and why.

Beyond the analysis of monitoring and administrative data, and interviews with key stakeholders, as we have undertaken here, there remains a need for further in-depth research with users of food banks. Recent research by CPAG has begun to contribute a more detailed and nuanced understanding of why people access food aid, their personal stories and the circumstances that they live in. There remains a need to further develop a varied and insightful evidence base of the actual experiences of individuals and families facing food poverty in 21st century Britain.

Sheffield Hallam University
Unit 10, Science Park
City Campus
Howard Street
Sheffield S1 1WB

+44 (0)114 225 3073
e: cresr@shu.ac.uk
w: shu.ac.uk/cresr

ISBN: 978-1-84387-380-8