



EXPERIENCES OF FOOD POVERTY IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF WANDSWORTH

April 2013-March 2014

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WANDSWORTH FOOD BANK – THE FIRST YEAR

Introduction

Over the past decade, rising costs of food, fuel and housing in Britain have affected everyone, across all income brackets. However, it is the poorest households in Britain which have witnessed the largest increase in the proportion of their household income spent on housing, food and fuel.¹

Against this background, in March 2012, the Government passed the Welfare Reform Act, which contained a raft of changes to housing, disability and employment-related benefits, as well as changes to tax credits. It is reasonable to assume that even without welfare reform the poorest households would have struggled to purchase a nutritional, healthy diet for themselves and their family. However, in recent public debate about foodbanks, some have argued that the welfare reforms appear to be pushing people towards foodbanks at a faster pace.

This report sets out to examine experiences of food poverty in Wandsworth and the role and service provided by the Wandsworth Foodbank in 2013/14. It was commissioned in an effort to understand how the model is working; if it could be improved; to identify any trends in the data concerning the population being referred and reasons why local people are in crisis.

About Wandsworth Foodbank

Wandsworth Foodbank opened in May 2013 in partnership with the Trussell Trust national network of foodbanks. It is designed to give people – identified to be in crisis and referred by local care professionals – three days' worth of nutritionally balanced food for themselves and any dependents, as well as signposting support to help foodbank guests resolve the underlying issues of the crisis they are in.

Wandsworth Foodbank opened with four church-based foodbank centres in or near areas of high deprivation in the Borough: St Mark's Church near Clapham Junction; Shaftesbury Christian Centre in north Battersea; Furzedown Churches Together in St Paul's, Tooting; and The Yard in Putney, part of Southwest London Vineyard. It has recently opened its fifth foodbank centre at St Michael's Church in Southfields.

All food is donated by the local community – individuals, schools, churches and other community groups – and at supermarket collection days regularly held across the Borough. Wandsworth Foodbank receives no government or local authority funding, and is reliant on the generosity of people's financial donations to keep helping local people in crisis.

By March 2014, 143 local care professional teams – teachers, social workers, housing officers, GPs – were registered with Wandsworth Foodbank as Voucher Partners, meaning they can issue vouchers to their clients in crisis. The referral system is the only way that local people can access emergency food and support from the foodbank.

Number of local people helped

In its first eleven months of operation (May 2013–March 2014), Wandsworth Foodbank fed 1551 individual people, including 652 children. An average of 1.6 vouchers were issued per household, indicating that the majority of guests to the foodbank were not repeat users. Only 36 households had more than 3 vouchers during this time. Approximately 75% of people receiving a voucher are Wandsworth residents.

In this time, 40% of all vouchers were issued for families with children, with nearly two-thirds of these being single-parent families. Nearly half (47.33%) of all vouchers issued were to single people. This latter trend has risen rapidly since January 2014.

¹ Appendix 1: *National Context*

Most common reasons for referral

Issues around benefits, whether due to delay or change and including sanctions, accounted for 42% of all referrals to Wandsworth foodbank.

Eighty-two per cent of Voucher Partners said that benefit sanction was 'often' or 'sometimes' the reason they referred clients to Wandsworth Foodbank².

Vouchers issued for reasons of benefit delay, benefit change and low income saw the highest growth rate over the 11-month period. Since January 2014, benefit delay has become the most frequent reason for individuals being referred to the foodbank, accounting for nearly a quarter of all referrals.

Half of the foodbank's Voucher Partners (local care professionals) felt that there had not been a change in the situations of people needing a foodbank voucher during the year: it was the same group, people with 'benefit delays'. Others noted an increase in single people, EU migrant pensioners and people in employment but on a low income.

Personal impact of poverty

Food poverty was persistent for many guests, who said that in the past 12 months there were several occasions when they had not had enough food to eat. Some reported going without food so their children could eat.

Guests also reported raised levels of stress and depression. Some reported regularly feeling suicidal. Many guests reported feeling ashamed and embarrassed at having to come to the foodbank.

Access to emergency financial help

² As Trussell Trust vouchers do not currently have a 'benefit sanctions' referral category for voucher partners to select (just 'benefit delay' or 'benefit change'), we asked voucher partners about their experience of sanctions in the questionnaire.

Guests had generally low awareness of other sources of emergency financial support. Only a third of guests were aware of Wandsworth Council's Discretionary Social Fund. No guest we spoke to knew of the DWP's Short-Term Benefit Advance provision, even those who were referred because of benefit delay.

Foodbank 'highly valued'

The foodbank is highly valued by both Voucher Partners and guests. Eighty-nine percent of Voucher Partners said that the service provided by the foodbank was excellent, with a further eight percent saying that it was good.

All of the guests interviewed rated the service as either 'excellent' or 'good', and the vast majority rated it 'excellent'. Many commented on how important the warm welcome and support from the foodbank volunteers was to them.

Voucher Partners felt that without Wandsworth Foodbank, people such as their clients would go hungry. Similarly, the majority of guests reported that they would have no other options for support if the foodbank were not there. Some would place further demands on overstretched family and friends, a few others would consider crime.

Voucher Partners also expressed concerns that the foodbank was filling the gaps left by a deficient welfare system. Some were concerned that the DWP could become too reliant on the foodbank.

Strengthening the safety net

Wandsworth Foodbank is pleased to be part of a local community response helping people in crisis, and we are incredibly grateful to everyone who has donated food, money or time to help their neighbours who are struggling to put food on the table.

However we strongly believe that the local and national social security system should be strengthened to continue to ensure it is the primary safety net for all Wandsworth residents, and our recommendations reflect this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We are pleased to be part of a community response that is helping local people in crisis who are facing hunger. However, we strongly believe that the social security system provided by local and national government should be the primary safety net for all Wandsworth residents.

We therefore respectfully make the following recommendations:

- We ask Wandsworth Council and local businesses to become Living Wage employers, so that local people in low-paid work are more able to meet the rising costs of living in London, and are able to be more financially resilient in times of crisis.
- We ask that, as a matter of policy, Wandsworth Job Centre Plus proactively tells every client who is experiencing benefit delay, benefit change or benefit sanction about the relevant DWP provisions available, and that they support people to successfully access these. These provisions include Short-Term Benefit Advance, Hardship Payment and how to appeal a sanction.
- We ask Wandsworth JCP to publish local figures on the number of social security payments that are sanctioned; the reason for, proportion and duration of the sanctions; and how many sanctions were overturned on appeal, to ensure that sanctions are only ever used fairly, proportionately and as a very last resort.
- We ask the DWP to revise its policies and procedures so that, when people are moving from one benefit to another, there is no break in financial provision.
- We ask that Wandsworth Council commit to continuing to provide a Discretionary Social Fund (DSF) for their residents in need, even if national government funding to local authority welfare assistance schemes ends in April 2015.
- We ask that Wandsworth Council revises its DSF criteria so that people in crisis situations, including those whose benefits have been sanctioned who are currently ineligible, can more easily access this fund. We are concerned that only 16% of the £950,000 the Council received for its DSF was spent giving emergency help to low-income residents in crisis in 2013-2014.
- We ask for increased provision for local advice services to support people in crisis, including support to resolve benefit delays, changes and sanctions, help with debt and support to access emergency financial help.

ABOUT WANDSWORTH FOODBANK RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

Wandsworth Foodbank works in partnership with the Trussell Trust – the UK’s largest network of foodbanks. Every Trussell Trust foodbank collects local data, which contribute to the national statistics that Trussell Trust release annually.

In 2013-2014, 913,138 people in the UK were given three days’ emergency food and support by Trussell Trust foodbanks. The Trussell Trust cites rising fuel costs, static incomes, underemployment and changes to benefits as some of the reasons why increasing numbers of people are being referred to foodbanks for emergency food. They estimate that 13 million people in the UK are currently living below the poverty line³.

Data

The Trussell Trust collects data from the vouchers that are issued and fulfilled. The vouchers record name, address, ethnicity, organisation making the referral, number of adults and number of dependent children.

Reasons for referral are also recorded. One of the following categories is selected by the referral agency (Voucher Partner) as the main cause of crisis leading to food poverty: benefit changes; benefit delays; homeless; sickness; debt; domestic violence; low income; child holiday meals; delayed wages; unemployment and other.

We undertook to analyse the data available, from April 2013 to mid-March 2014. There is no baseline data to which comparisons can be made (as Wandsworth Foodbank opened in May 2013), thus where possible we have tried to

present the data here in context where national data sets are available and appropriate.

Methodology

An online questionnaire was designed and sent out to all 143 Voucher Partners.⁴ Areas of investigation included how partner organisations identify people in need of a voucher, how many people they had referred during the year, reasons why they referred people and their views on the role of foodbanks in society as well as their thoughts on the service provided by Wandsworth Foodbank.

A second questionnaire to be conducted with guests to the foodbank was also developed⁵. This questionnaire was conducted on a one-to-one basis with a member of the research team. Once guests had arrived and been seen by a foodbank volunteer, they were approached and asked if they would answer a few questions, anonymously, about their experience of the foodbank. All interviews were anonymous. Everyone who was approached agreed to be interviewed.

³ The key UK government measures take 60 per cent of median income as the poverty line. While this is easy to measure and does provide useful comparisons over time, it is essentially an arbitrary definition and has been much criticised, most recently in the UK in the Field Review.

⁴ Appendix 2: *Guest interviews & Voucher Partner questionnaire*

⁵ Appendix 2: *Guest interviews & Voucher Partner questionnaire*

FINDINGS

Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

In its first eleven months of operation (May 2013- March 2014), Wandsworth Foodbank fed 1551 individual people, including 652 children. An average of 1.6 vouchers were issued per household, indicating that the majority of guests to the foodbank were not repeat users. Only 36 households had more than 3 vouchers during the year. Of these, only 13 households had received more than 6 vouchers.⁶

Who used Wandsworth Foodbank between April 2013-March 2014?

During its first year in operation, vouchers were issued to the following type of households. Just under half of vouchers issued were to single people. The second largest category was to single parents (Table 1 below).

Table 1: Number and % of vouchers issued, by household type, between April 2013 and March 2014 by Wandsworth Foodbank

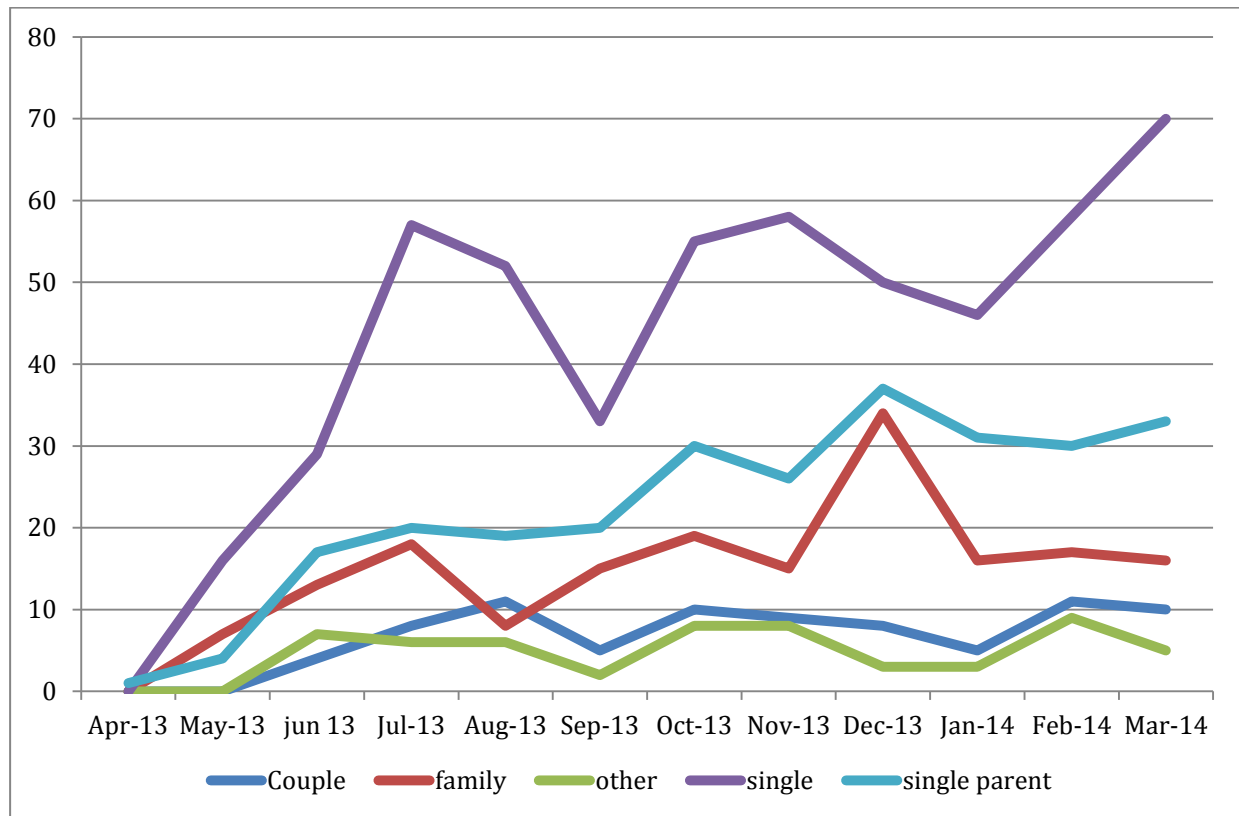
	Number of vouchers issued	%
Couple	79	7.15
Family (two parents)	178	16.11
Other	57	5.16
Single	523	47.33
Family (single parent)	268	24.25

Source: Wandsworth Foodbank data

⁶ Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

Chart 1:

Number of vouchers issued by household size



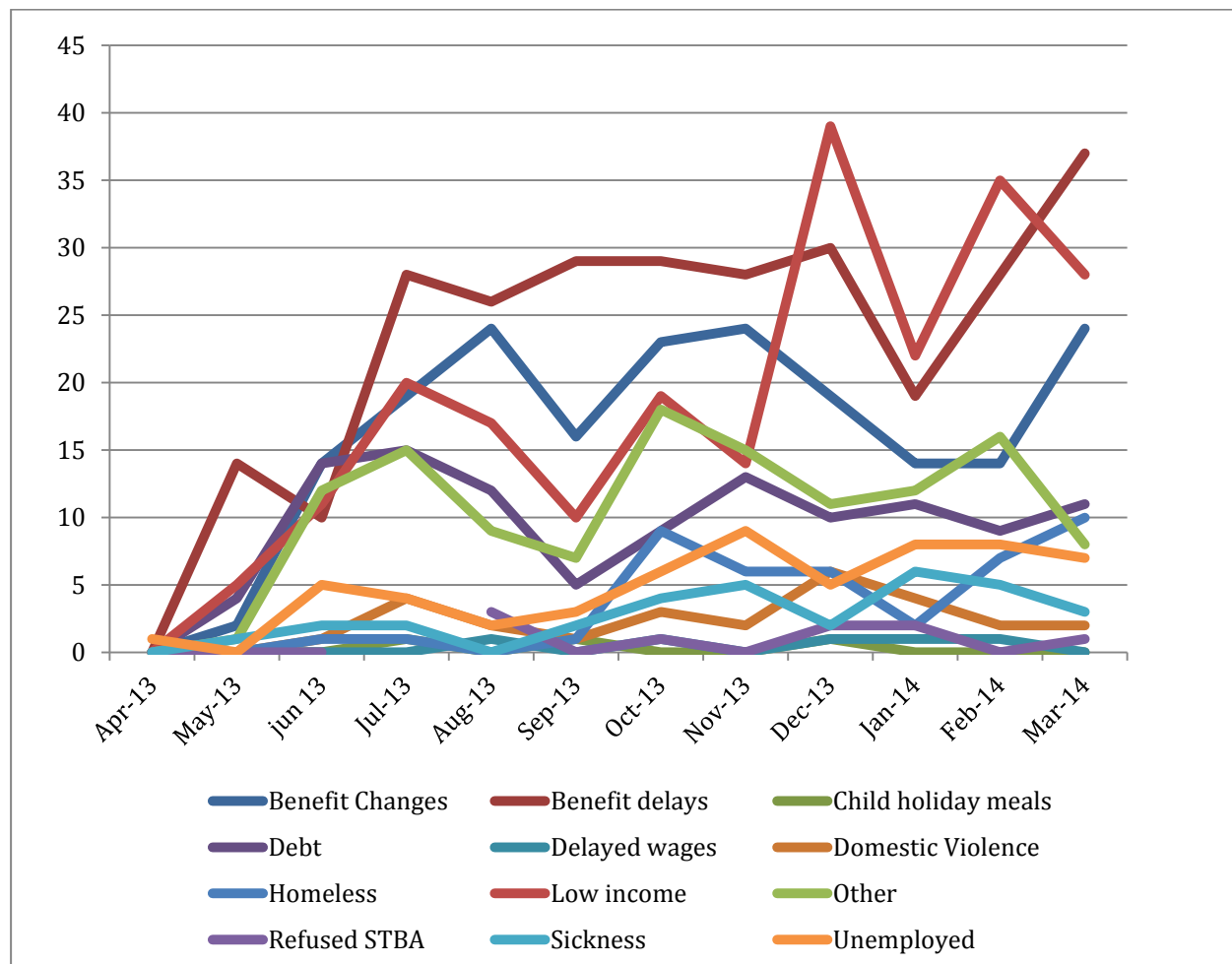
Source: Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

Chart 1 shows the number of vouchers issued by household size, by calendar month. The chart demonstrates the growth in the number

of vouchers issued to both single people without dependents, particularly since 2014, and to single parent households.

Chart 2:

Number of vouchers issued by calendar month, by Crisis Type



Source: Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

Chart 2 shows the number of vouchers issued by crisis type, by month. The three categories benefit delays, benefit change and low income show the highest growth rate over the 10-month period.

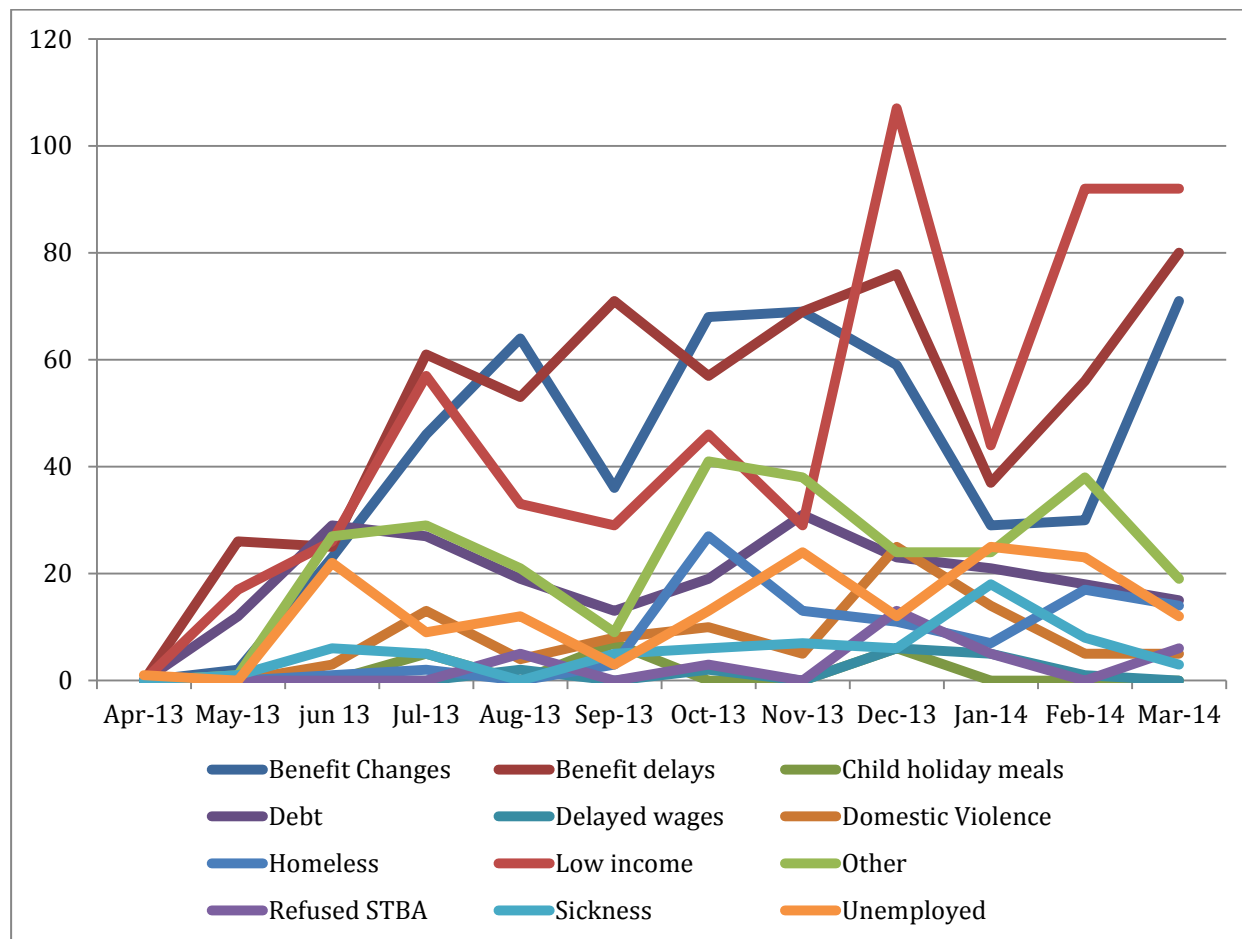
The Trussell Trust sets the categories on the voucher at a national level. There has been

debate over whether an additional category allowing the recording of benefit sanction as a reason for referral should be included.

Without any option to record benefit sanction as a reason for referral, it is likely that such vouchers are being counted in one of the two benefit categories, either delays or changes.

Chart 3:

Number of people affected by Crisis Type, by calendar month



Source: Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

Chart 3 shows the number of people affected by crisis type, by calendar month. The biggest growth was seen in the Low Income category.

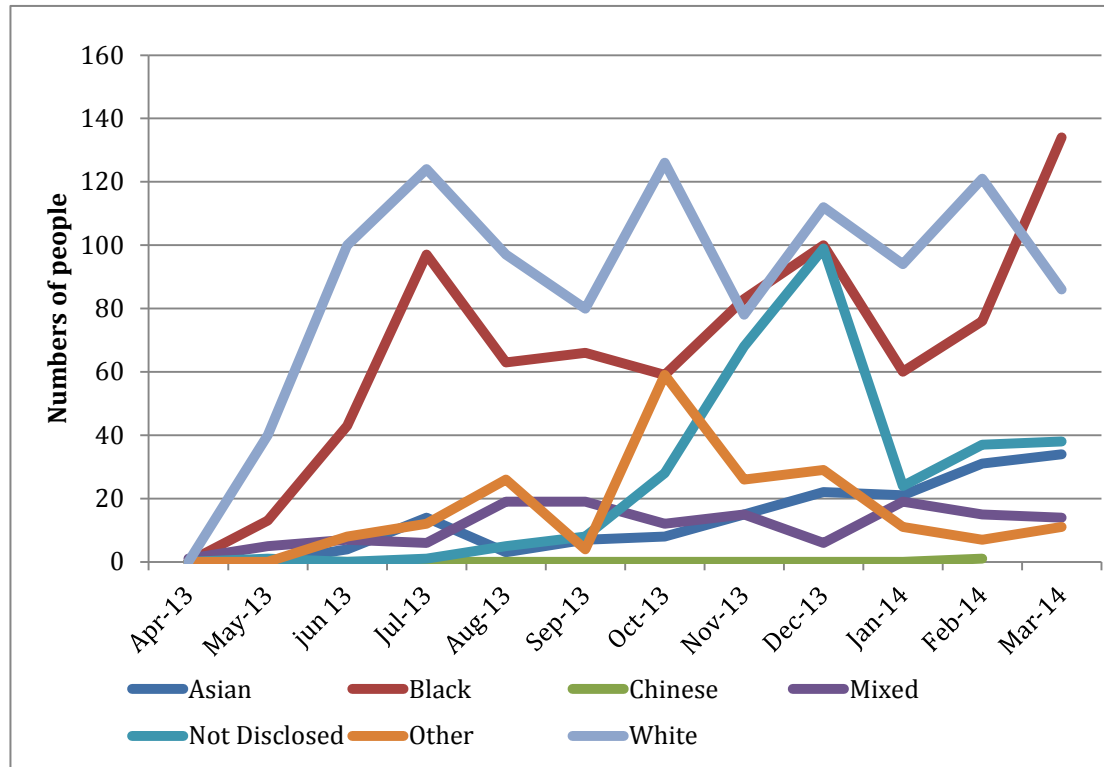
Whilst Chart 2 shows that more vouchers were issued for benefit delays than for low income, Chart 3 shows that more people received help from Wandsworth Foodbank for reasons of low income than any other category. This suggests that people referred for low income are more

likely to be from a household made up of families or a couple than single people.

Chart 3 suggests that people in low paid employment are struggling to meet the rising costs of living in London. Competing demands on a low salary such as food, rent and transport for example, may result in food taking a lower priority than other demands.

Chart 4:

Number of people accessing Wandsworth Foodbank by ethnicity



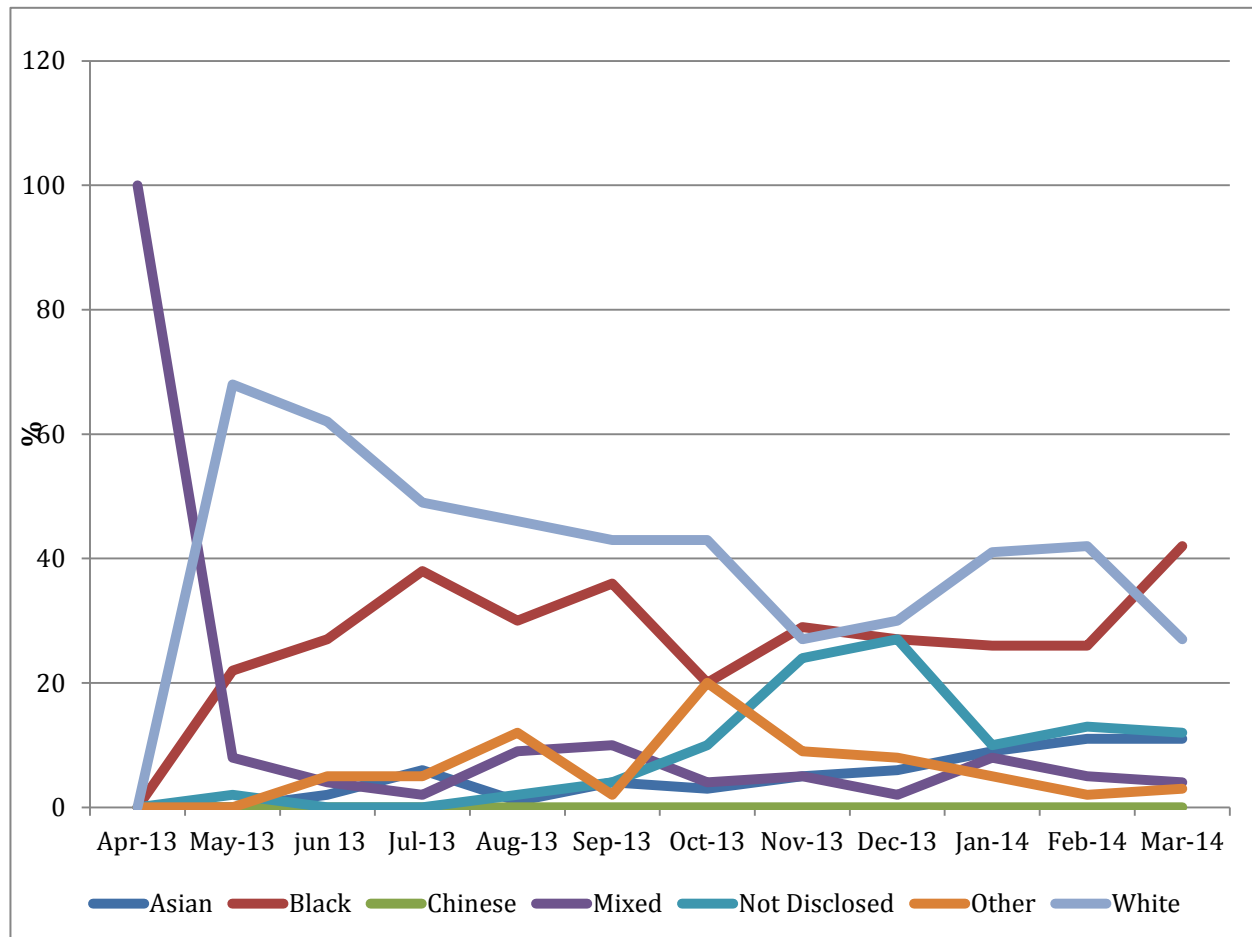
Source: Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

Chart 4 shows the ethnicity of people using the foodbank by calendar month. The White category experienced the largest growth, until

February 2014. The Black category begins to rise after January 2014 until it overtakes the White category by March 2014.

Chart 5:

Ethnicity as a proportion of total numbers of people being helped by Wandsworth Foodbank



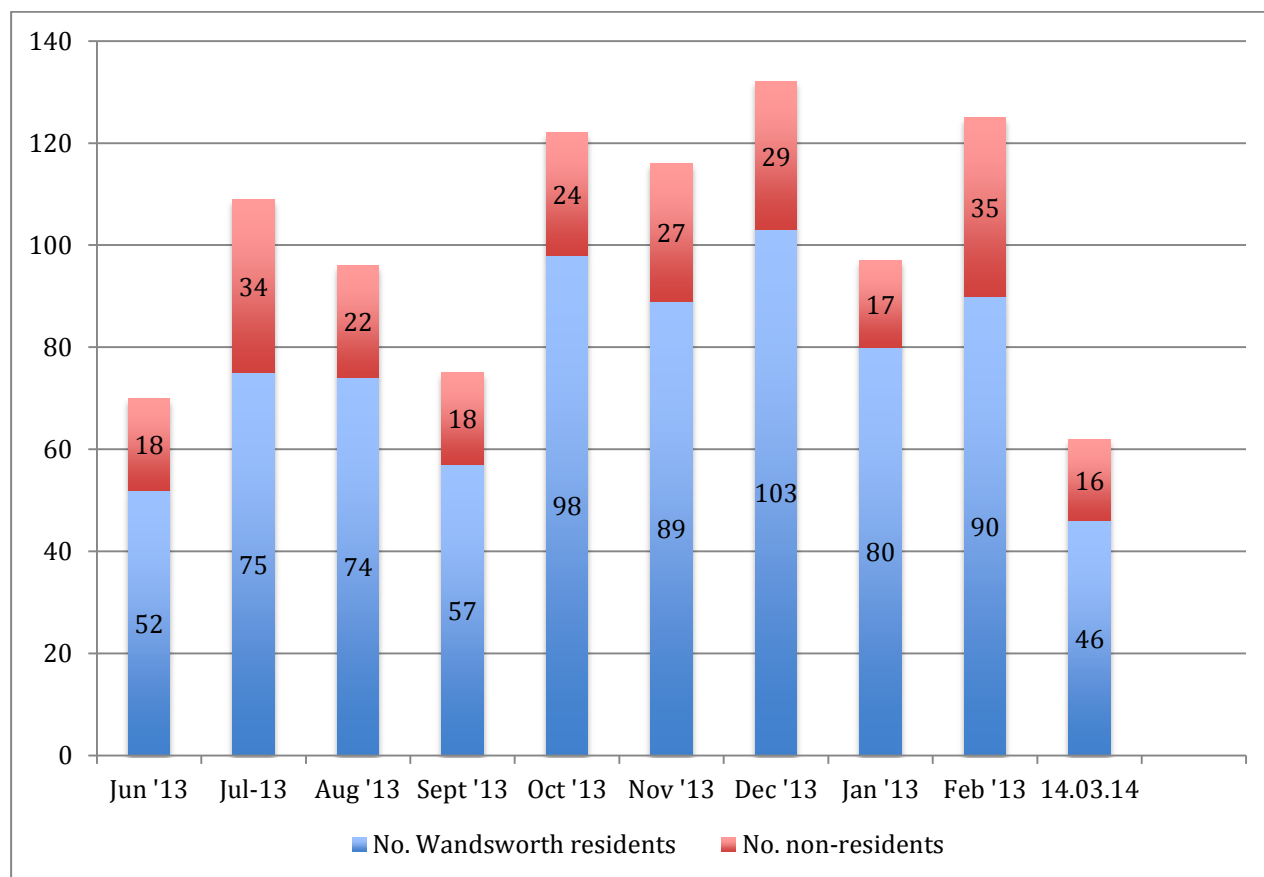
Source: Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

Chart 5 shows the ethnicity of people accessing Wandsworth Foodbank. The White population constituted 68% of those helped in May 2013 and has steadily fallen until reaching 27% of total people helped in March 2014.

The second largest group receiving help from the foodbank is the Black population. The proportion of people categorising themselves as Black and receiving help from the foodbank has risen throughout the year, until March 2014, when 42% of people receiving help from Wandsworth Foodbank were Black.

Chart 6:

Number of individuals receiving a foodbank voucher who are Wandsworth residents by calendar month.



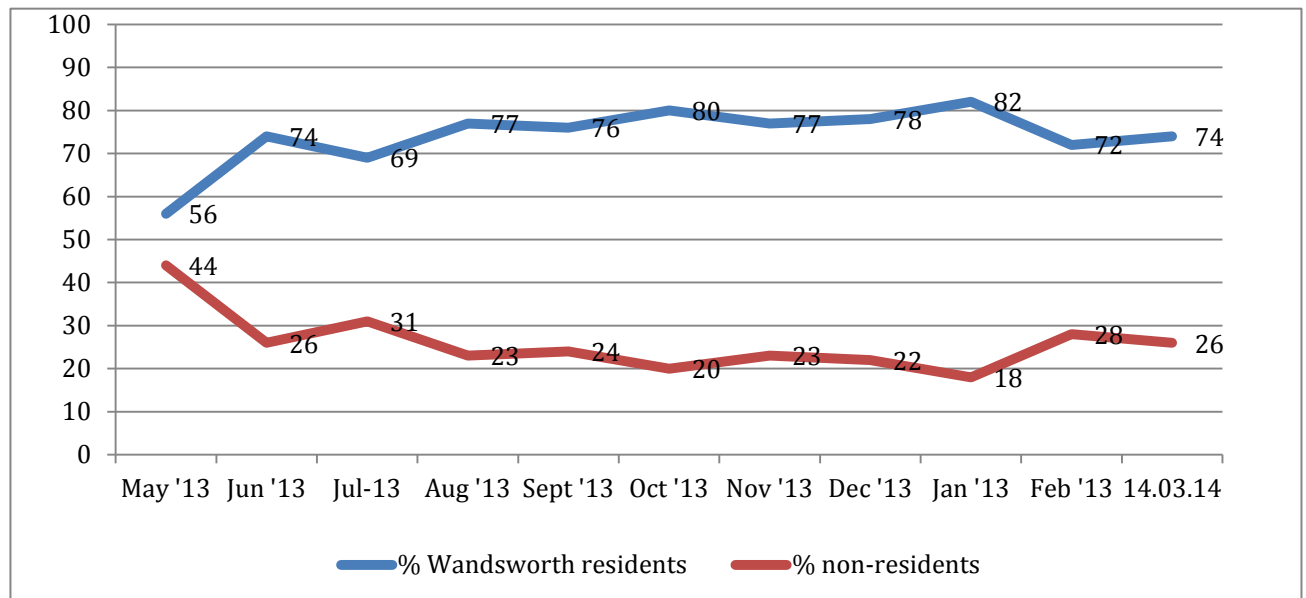
Source: Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

The above chart shows that between June 2013–February 2014 the majority of people who received a Wandsworth Foodbank

voucher were Wandsworth residents. The chart only shows data for the first two weeks of March 2014.

Chart 7:

Percentage of individuals receiving a foodbank voucher who are Wandsworth residents by calendar month.



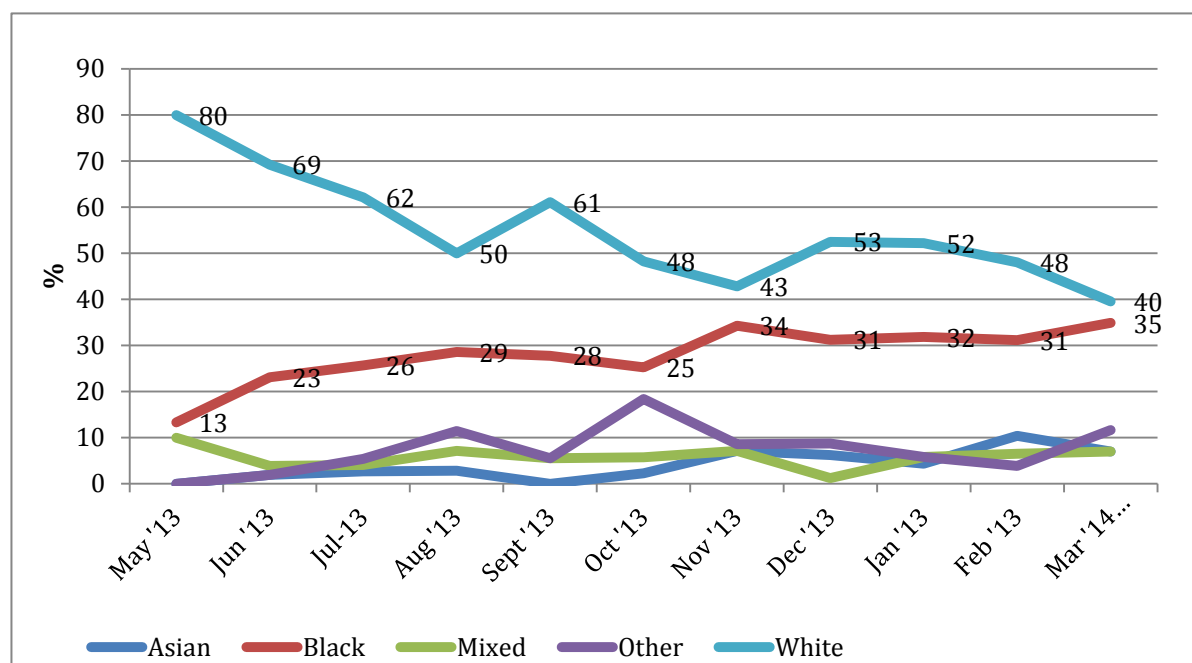
Source: Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

Chart 7 shows the same data as Chart 6 but as a trend. When the foodbank first opened in Wandsworth the split between residents and non-residents was almost equal. However, as the year progressed the trend for non-

residents has fallen whilst the trend for residents has increased. By the end of its first year, Wandsworth Foodbank can be confident that approximately 75% of the people receiving help are Wandsworth residents.

Chart 8:

Percentage of Wandsworth residents receiving a foodbank voucher by calendar month and ethnicity



Source: Wandsworth Foodbank voucher data

Chart 8 shows Wandsworth residents who received a voucher by ethnicity as a proportion of total Wandsworth residents helped by the foodbank. The chart shows the increase in the Black population receiving help, whilst the trend amongst the White population receiving a voucher is declining. Figures for February 2014 show that of all Wandsworth residents who received a foodbank voucher, 31% were Black.

Such a finding is of concern when compared to the 2011 Census ethnicity profile of Wandsworth, which reports that eleven percent of residents classified themselves as Black (see Table 2, right).⁷ This indicates a disproportionate need for foodbank support amongst the resident Black population in Wandsworth – almost two times more than would be expected when using Census 2011 data. Asian, Mixed and Other categories have remained steadily under 20% throughout the year. Whilst Wandsworth Foodbank helps

residents and non-residents alike, the majority of people receiving help are Wandsworth residents.

Table 2: Ethnic Group as Proportion of total Wandsworth resident population, 2011

	Total (%)
White: Total	71
Mixed/multiple ethnic group: Total	5
Asian/Asian British: Total	11
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: Total	11
Other ethnic group: Total	2
Other ethnic group: Arab	1
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	1

Source: 2011 Census Data, Crown Copyright

⁷ 2011 Census Data, Crown Copyright

Summary of Trussell Trust data

The data taken from the Trussell Trust database shows that between April 2013-March 2014:

- 47.33% of all vouchers issued were to single people. This trend has risen rapidly since January 2014.
- 40% of all vouchers were issued for families with children, with nearly two-thirds of these being single-parent families.
- Vouchers issued for reasons of benefit delay, benefit change and low income saw the highest growth rate over the 12-month period. Since January 2014, benefit delay has become the most frequent reason for individuals being referred to the foodbank, accounting for nearly a quarter of all referrals during the year
- Issues around benefits, whether due to delay or change, accounted for 42% of all referrals to Wandsworth Foodbank.
- More individual people have been referred to the foodbank as a result of low income than any other category. This trend continues to increase.
- Throughout the 12-month period, people from the White population were the most frequent receivers of foodbank vouchers.
- In January 2014, the proportion of Black people who had received a foodbank voucher began to rise until by the first half of March 2014, this category represented the largest ethnic group receiving foodbank help.
- Approximately 75% of people receiving a voucher are Wandsworth residents.
- Of Wandsworth residents receiving help, the proportion of Black people referred to the foodbank is increasing, whilst the proportion of the White population referred for crisis help is decreasing.
- Wandsworth residents who self-classify as Black are over-represented at attendance at the foodbank.

FINDINGS

Voucher Partners and guest interviews

1. Referral Circumstances

Reasons for attending the foodbank (guests)

Around half of the guests attending the foodbank attributed their situation to the difficulty of making their benefits stretch to meet the demands of food, rent and utility costs. There was a variety of reasons behind this, including people needing to repay debts (such as a Social Fund loan) alongside other costs, the impact of additional costs such as travel (to receive essential treatment), the high cost of housing (one guest receives £1300 per month in housing benefit, but their rent is £1500 per month), the demands of providing for a family, and in a couple of cases their money being used or taken by chaotic partners. Some found that they were just about able to make ends meet, but events such as a quarterly utilities bill or a lost purse were enough to tip them into crisis.

"I get a certain amount but by the time I've paid for nappies, milk and essentials, it's hard."

"Everything is going up but the money stays the same."

"It's hard on £112 per week for a family of five people."

Around a quarter of the guests interviewed were in crisis due to benefit changes, delays or sanctions. Three guests had had their benefits sanctioned, one for being absent from their designated hostel while hospitalised, and another apparently for not complying with all the Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) requirements (although he strongly disputes this and his

appeal has gone to Tribunal). The third did not use the term 'sanction' but described a situation where her benefits had been suspended while potential benefit fraud (using their name) was being investigated. Two others were experiencing benefits delay, one in moving onto JSA from low paid work, and one in moving from Employment Support Allowance (ESA) to JSA following a work capability assessment:

"When you're counting on 'x' amount of money and it hasn't arrived, it puts you in a spin."

For two others, even without a delay, being moved from one type of benefit to another had led to a significant drop in income. One guest's income had dropped by £300 per month being moved from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to ESA (after a medical assessment); another had been receiving ESA but had seen his income drop to £12 per week on being moved onto a pension, because he was not eligible for a full British state pension.

"There are times when I cannot move, and I depend on a walking stick and painkillers. But at the medical they asked me to touch my toes and, because I could on that day, they said I didn't need DLA."

For two guests, immigration restrictions were part of the cause: they were either not entitled to work, to receive sickness benefit, or to receive a pension, and as a result were receiving very little – or no – money. One was a skilled carpenter, rarely out of work until a recent accident prevented him from working. The other was a family, with parents keen to

work but not eligible to do so until Indefinite Leave to Remain has been granted. For one further guest, immigration status appeared to be a factor in his significant drop in benefit, described above, in not being eligible for a full British state pension.

Two mentioned the lack of support from family or friends, either because relationships had broken down (e.g. the 17-year-old mother now living in council accommodation for young mothers) or because they do not have the money to pay to contact them by phone or travel. This was implicit in a number of the stories told, however.

Despite many guests reporting that it was their first visit to a foodbank, all of the guests reported that to at least some extent this was not the first time that they had not had enough food. For around a quarter, having little food was a recent situation – either since their benefits had stopped, since they had been unable to work or to find work, or since the onset of a recent crisis (leading to homelessness). Several, however, said that it was a perennial or regular situation:

“Yes, literally every week”

“It’s always hard to put food on the table”

As with the responses to several of the questions, the cost of living was a factor. Some have to prioritise rent or utilities. Two of the guests said that they ran out of food before their next benefit payments were due, i.e. every fortnight:

“I used to be able to go shopping and buy decent meals for every day. I’m trying my hardest but by the time I’ve paid the gas and electric to keep the house warm, which I need to do because of my arthritis, I can’t manage. And if I run out of electric, the food in the fridge goes off anyway.”

“I just drink water or eat ice cubes”

“My housing benefit comes every two weeks, but I’ve been using it for food, I’ve not paid rent this month. Now I’m waiting for the next payment.”

Three others had experienced food poverty in a specific previous crisis: on leaving an abusive relationship, when drinking, and when homeless. Another recalled the birth of her son as a particular pressure point:

“When my son was first born I had milk for him, but nothing for me.”

Several reported living on the basics (*“I’m not eating a full range. Lots of bread”*), and relying on family and friends for help. For one couple, their situation meant prioritising the children:

“We go without food once or twice a week so that the kids can eat.”

Guests were asked how they felt about their situations and responses were consistent with the fact that the foodbank is intended to help people in crisis. Many talked about their embarrassment and anger at needing to ask for help. There was some frustration and bewilderment that they could be in the positions that they were in.

“It’s embarrassing to have to ask for a voucher. I’d rather go without. I’ve worked all my life, paid my taxes, and not been on benefits for years.”

“I feel let down by the system and by people. I’ve been here 16 years, I’ve paid tax and worked hard, now I don’t get anything.”

“I tried to commit suicide four months ago. I’m suffering in silence because I feel like I’m not being heard or listened to. It’s degrading, it makes you feel you haven’t got control of your own life. It’s demoralising. I’m embarrassed when the

grandchildren come round and say 'How come you haven't ever got nothing?'. "

Several, however, said that despite their embarrassment at needing to ask for help, their reception by foodbank staff had put them at ease and had been a positive experience.

"Knowing that there's a place like this, it lifts you up, it's beautiful."

"People at the foodbank treated me with respect."

Reasons people are referred (Voucher Partners)

Voucher Partners were asked how they identify someone in need of a voucher. Twenty-one percent said that they referred someone to the foodbank if they were not in receipt of any benefits or any other funds.

"I offer them a voucher if they are at crisis point and have no food in the house and no means of getting any in the near future." R.18

"If they have not eaten for some time and they have no access to money." R.30

Sixteen percent reported that benefit change/delay was the main cause of referral. Fifteen percent cited the rising cost of living. Thirteen percent referred families with children on a low income.

"When they have no money to buy food for the children and they come into school for help."

"Dire need. We see the children and they are the ones who alert us to the problem." R.57

Ten percent said they referred someone if they had experienced a benefit sanction. Other

issues raised by a minority of partners were debt, someone with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) or self-reported need by guest.

"I am usually approached by the customer. Sometimes it is when I am discussing rent arrears and I go through the income & expenditure. They often tell me they have not been able to eat for a couple of days as money is tight." R.51

In addition, Voucher Partners were asked to reflect on the situations of people they have referred throughout the year and whether there had been any changes. Fifty percent said that there had not been any change. Thirteen percent said they were too new to Wandsworth Foodbank to be able to respond. Six percent said they had seen an increase in the number of people in work.

"Although many of our referrals are people on benefits and not working, we have found that there are more people coming through our centre and in need of foodbank help that are in work but are on low incomes and struggling to make ends meet." R.4

"Yes, people from different social and financial backgrounds are coming for vouchers, the general consensus is food is not seen as a priority to most families who are struggling to pay other bills such as rent." R.6

A handful (three percent) each said that there had been an increase in the numbers of people being referred due to benefit delay, an increase in people who were chronically ill but had been deemed fit to work in a Work Capability Assessment but were not eligible for JSA, and an increase due to greater awareness of foodbanks.

"The major change appears to be the delay in processing people's benefit claims." R.59

"Not really, it's been the same "type" of persons, people who have benefit delays."
R.60

Two percent of Voucher Partners reported increases amongst those experiencing benefit cuts due to the bedroom tax; to food being a lower priority than rent; and an increase in European Union (EU) migrant pensioners turned down for Pensions Credit on the habitual residence test.

"Not really. We have a mixture of EU migrants who are struggling with benefit claims or delays, private tenants who struggle to pay the shortfall between rent and Housing Benefit and also older home owners who are still paying high housing costs well into their retirement and living in poor housing conditions. We also see people with serious chronic illnesses who need to have a good diet but can't afford it. The foodbank helps in the short term while we try to sort out the benefits which can actually take several weeks." R.28

"Not a change as such, but I have seen more single people than families. I didn't expect that." R.46

Voucher Partners were asked if they had experienced people deliberately trying to misuse the foodbank. The majority (84%) responded that they had not. Ten partners (16%) responded positively to this question. The two most frequent examples given were of people requesting a voucher for a non-crisis event and trying to gain multiple vouchers from different agencies and boroughs.

They were also asked what they did when faced with a client who has accessed the foodbank the maximum number of times (i.e., three). Just over half (51%) responded that they had not yet experienced this problem. Of those remaining, sixteen percent said they would speak with Wandsworth Foodbank to explain the need for another voucher. Others responded that they would seek another source of loan or refer to another agency that offered budgeting advice or offer it in-house themselves if possible.

"We have only had one client request 3 food vouchers and this is because he is adjusting to living independently. Previously, he has been homeless and has spent time in prison. He has issues with budgeting which are now being addressed." R. 59

Some responded that they would give their own money whilst others said their agency/charity would offer in-house supplies.

"This is difficult, as there are times when I simply cannot resolve an issue in such a time period. I typically buy gift vouchers for supermarkets from my own income."
R.16

Six percent of partners said they would 'absolutely refuse' to help the client.

"Unless it is an absolute crisis I will not refer them again." R.21

Referral Circumstances Summary

- Guest and Voucher Partner responses were consistent with the Trussell Trust data: meeting the costs of living on a low income was the key pressure and reason for using Wandsworth Foodbank, along with benefit changes, delays and sanctions.
- Data from the vouchers gives 'low income' as one of the main reasons for referral. Guest interviews suggest that for a significant proportion of this category, 'low income' refers to income derived from benefits, and that they face a real challenge making benefits stretch to the costs of living in London.
- Partners are referring people who have no food at home and no safe means of getting food. This includes families with children who have no way of feeding them.
- Partners felt that reasons people needed the foodbank included welfare reform, static or low wages and the rising cost of living.
- Half of partners felt that there had not been a change in the situations of people needing a foodbank voucher during the year, it was the same group, people with 'benefit delays'. Others noted an increase in single people, EU migrant pensioners and people in employment but on a low income.
- Food poverty was persistent for many guests, who said that in the past 12 months there were several occasions when they had not had enough food to eat, and some reported going without food so their children could eat.
- Despite this, over half of partners had not experienced someone who had accessed the foodbank the maximum number of times (3).
- Guests reported raised levels of stress and depression. Some reported regularly feeling suicidal.
- Many guests reported feeling ashamed and embarrassed at having to come to the foodbank.
- The majority of voucher partners had not had experience of people trying to misuse the foodbank system.

2. Employment and Benefit Experience

Employment

None of the guests we interviewed were currently working. This may be due to the interviews having been carried out at weekday foodbank sessions, and it is possible that weekend foodbank sessions are more likely to be attended by people who are in food poverty despite being in work. A third of the guests were able to work, and of these, most either said that they were looking for work or were applying for JSA (and therefore required to demonstrate that they were seeking work). Some were relying on friends for help (*"A friend will help me to start working"*) in addition to the Job Centre. One had been passed fit to work at an ESA assessment, but did not regard himself as able to work due to shoulder problems, the effects of a heart bypass, and diabetes.

Of the two-thirds unable to work, mental or physical health issues were the primary reason given (including arthritis, back problems, depression, and alcohol dependency). One was a pensioner, another was the primary carer for young children alongside having a mental health diagnosis, and another guest and her husband were unable to work due to their immigration status.

Benefits

Around two-thirds of the guests interviewed were receiving benefits at the time of their visit. The most common benefits received were ESA (ten people) and housing benefit (nine people); of these, six were receiving both ESA and housing benefit (and of those, three had council tax benefit in addition). Three were receiving JSA (two in combination with housing benefit). Two were receiving Income Support and child tax credit (along with child benefit).

One was positive about the effect of the JSA arrangements: *"It motivates me to get off benefits: I want to work and contribute."* For most, however, benefits were more of a

struggle. Several guests mentioned the cost of housing, mostly in relation to the contribution they made towards housing costs from their benefits or the amount they needed to top up. The differential between housing benefit received and the cost of rent was mentioned again, by a different guest who was receiving £71 per week in ESA but paying £81 in rent.

One guest had recently graduated from ESA to a pension, and had experienced a significant drop in income – to just £12 per week – because his immigration status meant that he was not eligible for a British state pension. A few Voucher Partners raised this as an area of concern in their online questionnaire when responding to a question asking them if they had seen any changes in the situations of people they were referring to the foodbank over the 12-month period.

"I am very worried about older clients who are EU migrants who reach pension age who are being turned down for PC [Pensions Credit] due to the habitual residence test. The appeals process takes so long and during that time they have no money to live on. We are seeing an increasing number of pensioners in this position." R.29

Of those guests who were not receiving benefits at the time of their visit, four had benefits applications in progress. For one, this was a new experience (*"I've never been on benefits before now"*), another was applying for JSA following the termination of ESA and housing benefit consequent on a medical assessment which passed him fit to work (*"I applied for Jobseeker's Allowance yesterday, I don't know how long it takes"*). A fifth would have liked to have had an application in progress (for a Personal Independence Payment (PIP), following termination of DLA), but was unable to apply while homeless because of the requirement for a home address.

Two guests had no recourse to public funds because they were immigrants without Indefinite Leave to Remain, though both had ILR applications in progress and were hopeful that they would be able to work or would receive appropriate sickness benefit once their immigration status changed. One guest had had their Income Support suspended: they were not able to describe the detail of the reasons given in the letter (language barrier was a factor) but it appeared to be triggered by investigation of a potential identity fraud.

Benefit delay

Two-fifths of the guests had experienced some delay in receiving their benefits in the last twelve months, and for virtually all of them the problems occurred in the switch-over between different types of benefit or (to a lesser extent) on a new JSA application.

Three guests were experiencing delays at the time of their visit, two with their PIP applications and a third with a switch from JSA to ESA.

"I applied for a PIP two weeks ago. Now I've been told there is a 26 week delay."

In relation to PIPs, one further guest had fallen into a different type of trap in the transition between DLA and PIP: he was unable to apply for a PIP to replace his DLA because he was homeless at the time, and the PIP application requires a home address.

The remainder had experienced delays in the past twelve months, and most seemed to involve applications for ESA. These may not technically be delays in terms of the expected processing times for new benefit applications, however they are regarded as delays by guests, particularly where they are switching between different types of benefit, where the cut-off of one benefit type is swift but the application for a new one takes longer.

"Every change over [from ESA to JSA to ESA, following medical assessment then appeal]

had a delay of 4-6 weeks when I got nothing. I got into debt from borrowing, bank charges and arrears."

Others reported periods of longer than a month to receive ESA: one guest had no financial support for two months after applying for ESA on leaving a violent relationship; another said *"it's supposed to take 4 weeks, it took 3 months. I had to chase it up"*. In one case, Housing Benefit had erroneously been stopped during a transition from ESA to JSA.

Another guest was receiving DLA for ten years due to diabetes and arthritis, but the benefit was stopped and other benefits (Attendance Allowance) significantly reduced, while waiting for a medical assessment. It took her a year, and help from the Disability and Social Care Advice Service (DASCAS), to switch to ESA: this appeared to be not so much a delay in processing the claim, but a lack of immediate help for her to make the new application.

Similarly, for some the reported JSA delay is not necessarily a delay in terms of promised levels of service within the benefits system, but is illustrative of the difficulties that those processing times can cause:

"When you start a new JSA claim, they don't pay you for a few days. That few extra quid would have kept my head above water – I could have had gas/electric for cooking and hot water at friend's place (I don't put heating on) as well as food, rather than one or the other."

Another guest, though, did report problems with the timeliness of ESA and Housing Benefit payments:

"They're always delayed two or three days."

Benefit sanction (guests)

Three of the guests had had their benefits sanctioned at the time of their visit to the foodbank. For one, the sanction had been in place for three months and was regarded as permanent (JSA file closed), subject to a Tribunal. He was enormously frustrated and reported that he believed he had done everything required, and carried with him copies of his job search and relevant job application emails. However, his appeal had been refused and had gone to Tribunal (with the help of the Citizens' Advice Bureau).

"From 16 January to 16 April I have been sanctioned – I was applying for six jobs per week and as far as I knew I was doing everything I should."

Two other guests reported situations that sounded like benefits sanction, but had not had any form of notification described in terms of a sanction. One guest's benefits were stopped because he was no longer at his designated hostel. Again, he reported receiving no notification and only discovered when he went to withdraw money. At the time of the interview he was into his fourth week without income. The other's benefits were suspended while an investigation was carried out into potential abuse of the benefit, which she thought may have been due to someone else using her name. She had received a letter notifying her, but did not remember the word 'sanction'.

Another guest had had her benefits sanctioned in the past, after an anonymous tip-off claimed that she had been working while claiming ESA. She was able to prove that she had been in hospital at the time the report had alleged that she was working, but the ESA was not back-paid, *"That was £336 just gone"*. She felt that the system incentivises untrue allegations (*"people get paid £50 to grass someone up"*), while the onus is on her to prove them wrong, requiring a letter from her GP and hospital neurologist to prove that she was not in fact working. She only discovered the sanction when she went to withdraw money, and then spoke to the Job Centre (*"There was no letter or anything"*).

Benefit sanction (Voucher Partners)

The Trussell Trust vouchers currently have a referral category for 'benefit delay' and 'benefit change' but not for benefit sanction. It is probable that clients who are in crisis due to benefits sanction are recorded within either 'benefit changes' or 'benefit delay'. The Voucher Partners were therefore asked how often benefits sanction was a reason for referral.

Nearly half (48%) stated that benefit sanction was 'often' a reason for referring a client to the foodbank. Thirty four percent reported that benefit sanction is 'sometimes' the reason for referral, while eight percent and ten percent respectively reported that it is 'rarely' and 'never' a reason for referral.

Summary: Employment and Benefits Experience

- None of the guests interviewed were currently in employment. This contrasts with data from the Voucher Partners, a few of whom mentioned seeing an increase in people in low-paid work needing the foodbank, but may be explained by the fact that guest interviews were conducted on a weekday. It is reasonable to assume people in employment needing a foodbank voucher would be more likely to attend at weekends.
- From May 2014, Trussell Trust foodbanks will ask referral agencies to answer yes or no to the following new question that will be printed on all foodbank vouchers: *'Is anyone in this household in paid employment?'*. This will provide valuable data to enable them to provide more analysis to policy makers and others through their national statistics.
- The majority of guests were either receiving benefits or had applications in progress. Two had no recourse to public funds, and two were subject to a benefits suspension or sanction at the time of interview.
- The benefits most commonly received were Employment Support Allowance and housing benefit.
- Experience of benefits delay, or a gap in income while changing between different benefits, was common. There was a particular problem at the time of interview with applications for Personal Independence Payments (PIPs), though others cited ESA and JSA delays.
- The role of benefits sanctions warrants further investigation: 82% of Voucher Partners said that they 'often' or 'sometimes' referred clients to the foodbank due to benefits sanction. The voucher currently has no referral code for sanctions. Four guests interviewed also reported experience of benefits sanction.

3. Signposting, crisis loans and other support

Benefits advice for guests

Signposting foodbank guests to find help in resolving the underlying causes of their crisis is an integral part of the work of Wandsworth Foodbank's and Trussell Trust. However our research here only relates to advice given by agencies outside of Wandsworth Foodbank.

Two-thirds of guests had received some advice about benefits and income. These guests were largely those already engaged with one or more statutory service, and those services provided some level of help and advice around benefits. Three guests cited the Job Centre (*'help with form-filling'*), two mentioned mental health teams, while for others it was probation, drug and alcohol service, hostel key worker, the council Family Service, housing officer, social services, and DASCAS. Advice included details of how and why to apply for PIP (in place of DLA). Guests were mostly positive about this advice.

"[The Council Family Service] was very helpful, she tried lots of places but had no luck, because we don't have recourse to public funds."

The mental health team, for example, was helping to chase benefit delays. Social services persuaded a wary teenage mother that they were not *"here to take my child, they were here to help me and my child"*, and helped her to access supported housing, vouchers for nappies and milk: *"They helped us a lot"*. DASCAS helped another guest recover from the loss of DLA: *"I lost money for a year until I got ESA."*

Others had sought advice from third sector organisations: Roehampton CAB, and Putney Refugee Centre.

"The lady was very good, very professional, she's given me the form for ILR."

"They helped with my application for Jobseeker's Allowance"

Some advice was clearly more informal: one simply cited friends as the source of advice, and another was unable to remember or describe the source.

Emergency financial support

Guests who had experienced benefit delay or sanction were asked whether they had been told about Short-Term Benefit Advance provision, or Hardship Payment. None of those who had experienced benefit delay remembered being told about Short-Term Benefit Advance provision.

"Never heard of it... The Job Centre told me that there is no need for Crisis Loans because of foodbanks' existence."

Three of the four guests who had experienced benefits sanction could not recall being told about a hardship payment. The fourth, a father of four whose sanction was of long standing and had gone to appeal, had applied once for a Hardship Payment but was refused because at that point he had some money in his bank account (which was wholly earmarked for rent and about to be taken by Direct Debit). He did not yet know the outcome of his second application.

Guests were asked whether they had been signposted to Wandsworth Council's Discretionary Social Fund, regardless of their benefits experience. The majority had not heard about the Discretionary Social Fund, which can make a maximum of two awards per person in a 52-week period. Five guests, however, had made successful applications for a Discretionary Social Fund award within the last fourteen months. They reported receiving Sainsbury's vouchers, ranging from £16 to £80

in value, to help with food and clothes (e.g. one guest had few clothes after 16 years in prison). Two also reported receiving Social Fund loans of between £300 and £400, which they were paying back.

One guest was awaiting the outcome of a second DSF application, having been turned down the first time as a result of having one non-dependent (working) child.

Three further guests had heard of the fund but decided not to apply. For one this was because the requirements were too stringent – having left an abusive relationship, she did not have access to the six months of bank statements needed:

“Isn’t being clinically diagnosed with PTSD and proof of domestic violence enough evidence?”

Two were still paying back previous loans (from around two years previously):

“I haven’t done it again because I know I’ll have to pay it back and I can’t afford to.”

Referral to other sources by Voucher Partners

Voucher Partners were asked about other sources of emergency financial support to which they refer people when making a foodbank referral.

Twenty-one reported that they refer people to Wandsworth Discretionary Social Fund. Seventeen Voucher Partners said they referred people to the Hardship Fund. Twenty-three Voucher Partners reported that they did not make any other referrals for emergency financial assistance. Fifteen partners said they would refer clients to the Short-Term Benefit Advance loan.

In relation to these referrals to other emergency financial support, twenty-six

percent of the Voucher Partners said that the applications for help were ‘*not very*’ successful. Twenty-four percent said that they did not know. Ten percent said that the applications were ‘*not at all*’ successful. Five percent said that the applications had been ‘*very successful*’.

Wider signposting/sources of help

Guests were asked whether they had ever sought help and been refused. Over half could recall such an experience, mostly through not meeting the thresholds for services to offer help. Five had applied to the council (one to Merton, the rest to Wandsworth) for housing but had been turned down because they did not qualify. They reported that this was because they were a single person, because they had to prove that they were homeless and did not know how, or because they needed a mental health referral. One, however, had re-applied sometime later when he had children and had a much more positive experience (compared with the ‘overwhelming’ experience of being refused help):

“I’ve always had good support and welcome.”

Three guests had applied to social services for help, and were said not to have met the thresholds for help, for example one did not meet the criteria to be judged destitute.

“[I applied for home care help on] bad days when I can’t walk or am on crutches, to get some help around the home when I even can’t wash. They told me I was too young for their services.”

“From when [my daughter] was 8, they kept fobbing me off until she was diagnosed with autism one month ago. She gets violent with me, the police have come, I’ve been hospitalised. She saw CAMS but then refused to, and because of that, they gave up... [Social Services] chat and then leave me.”

Only one guest mentioned having approached a charity (a charity in Tooting), who also said that they did not meet the criteria for help. Despite a number of positive reports about Citizens Advice Bureau, one guest that she was turned away by CAB, *“I was told they don’t have time.”*

Three guests felt that the Job Centre had not been helpful. One recognised that they might be hoping for more than the Centre was designed to deliver, while another guest experienced inadequate signposting.

“They are really only there to signpost to other services. They just tell people to go online, but nothing else.”

“I was bounced around like a pingpong ball from the Job Centre, who said go to the Council for a crisis loan, who sent me back to the Job Centre. No one told me about any Short-Term Benefit Advance.”

Two guests recalled situations in which there was a suicide risk and the response did not meet their expectations. One reported that the police refused to help when she rang 999, telling them that she felt suicidal due to her financial situation. Another called the Samaritans from a payphone just before he attempted suicide:

“I only had 60p for the phone and it ran out – I asked them to ring me back but they said they were not allowed to do that.”

Summary: signposting, crisis loans and other support

- Voucher Partners reported referring people to the Hardship Fund, Short-Term Benefit Advance, and Discretionary Social Fund (around a third had referred to the Social Fund). However, more than a third did not refer to any emergency financial assistance other than the foodbank. Some reported that they did not how, or where, to refer people for further financial assistance.
- Guests had generally low awareness of other sources of emergency financial support. A third of guests were aware of the Discretionary Social Fund. This may be partly due to a change in terminology: crisis loans were replaced the Discretionary Social Fund in 2013/14, when the centrally-managed funds were devolved to local councils to manage distribute. The lack of awareness may also be related to the fact that in the first ten months of the financial year (2013/14) only 16% of Wandsworth's local assistance budget had been spent, leaving £798,500 unspent (according to reporting by *The Guardian* in April 2014, based on a Freedom of Information Request).
- Both guests and voucher partners reported mixed success in applying for the Discretionary Social Fund (and other assistance). This warrants further investigation, given the underspend in Wandsworth's local welfare assistance budget. (Butler, 2014 *The Guardian*)
- Two thirds of those interviewed received benefits advice from the statutory service with which they are already engaged. For others, benefits advice came from informal networks such as friends and families.

4. Attitudes towards foodbanks and Wandsworth Foodbank

National increase in foodbanks

Voucher Partners were asked to offer their views on why, at a national level, use of foodbanks has increased over the past year. Forty-eight percent said that changes in the benefits system/reduction in eligibility and welfare cuts were causing the rise in demand.

"We've seen the spare room subsidy and adjustments to council tax benefit have an extensive impact on those already in financial strain. It means a much greater percentage of benefits is having to be spent on housing and this means other essentials, such as food, are out of reach within the weekly budget." R.4

Forty-two percent of partners reported that the rising cost of living was responsible for driving up demand.

"When the reforms mean housing costs rise by 14% or 25% for the under-occupied, Council tax support changes mean liability of up to 21% in some areas, whilst benefits rise by 1% and wages by average 1.3%, there is more pressure on the poorest households and something has to give." R.16

Nineteen percent cited low income, people living on the minimum wage and static salaries as causative factors.

"The general economic situation. The welfare reform changes do have a large impact but people in work are struggling too, in some cases more than people on benefits." R.46

"Heating costs and wider general living costs - it costs a lot to live in this country, London especially." R.17

Eighteen percent cited job losses and recession-related factors; fifteen percent thought that greater awareness of foodbanks was lessening the social stigma of using them; thirteen percent reported poor budgeting skills; eleven percent cited more homelessness and poverty in general; ten percent thought that 'unreasonable' benefits sanctions were behind the rise and ten percent thought that the new bedroom tax was contributing to increasing need for foodbanks.

"The rising cost of fuel, gas and electricity, has had a major impact. Parents are sometimes having to make a choice about buying food or keeping their homes warm and having electricity." R.54

Role of foodbanks

Voucher Partners were asked if they had any concerns about the role of foodbanks in this country. Twenty-one percent said that they did not have any concerns and that they were essential. Eighteen percent said that they show the extent of need and that they are the result of a broken system.

"Although they fill a vital role at the moment I am worried that they are replacing statutory provision and allowing the government to get away with not providing the help that they should." R.9

Thirteen percent said that foodbanks are an example of government responsibility being devolved to charity and that they are replacing statutory provision. Partners expressed concerns that statutory services will become dependent on them:

"That the DWP know that you exist and so they know there is a stop gap if they do not process people's claims. In other words, I

fear that The DWP will abuse the fact that your organisation exists.” R.59

Three percent said that foodbanks were ‘masking’ government inefficiency and gaps in service provision.

“Foodbanks offer a life line of support to families living in poverty. My only concern would be how families would be supported if there were no food banks. The issues relating to why families need food banks need to be addressed as no child living in their country should go to bed hungry cold or scared at night.” R.54

“It shows that the cost of living exceeds the amount of money people are expected to live on. The fact that it is limited to 3 visits means it does not really create dependency.” R.29

Two percent of partners mentioned other concerns such as difficulty in meeting increasing demand; concern that people in work need them; concern that foodbanks are ‘making up’ for the lack of crisis loans. Other concerns expressed by two percent of partners were that those most in need were still not accessing the foodbank, two percent said that they had no concerns at all about the foodbanks and that they reflected well on the community.

Impact of foodbank locally

Voucher Partners were asked what would be the impact on their clients if the Wandsworth Foodbank did not exist. Forty-seven percent said their clients would not have any food, that they would starve and they would ‘go hungry’.

“Our families would not have enough food for their children.” R.6

“We would supply them with food vouchers but we are already stretched to capacity so I’m not sure if we would be able to feed all who need it. I feel confident that the

school/school staff would see that hungry children would be fed at least while on the premises.” R.18

Ten percent said their clients would have nowhere else to turn.

“There are limited funds to apply to at the local council. We have started our own mini food bank in our office but even we are struggling to stock it from our own pockets.” R.51

Eight percent said that ‘children would go hungry’. Eight percent thought that their clients would take out payday loans and get themselves into more debt.

“There is such a lack of provision for the homeless and vulnerable in Wandsworth that the impact of no foodbank on our clients would be widely felt.” R.45

“I wonder what would happen without them as in Wandsworth there are no crisis fund loans anymore.” R.36

Five percent of Voucher Partners reported that their clients would steal or commit crimes; would be referred to social services and that they would suffer deterioration in their mental or physical health.

“For some families this may lead to them and their children going without a daily healthy balanced meal. This could increase the number of families referred to Children's Specialist Services if they are unable to provide for their children.” R.54

Two percent thought that their clients would leave secure accommodation or would miss the human interaction.

“One word – nightmare.” R 40

Guests were asked a similar question: where would they go for help if there was no foodbank? Most said that they would have nowhere else to turn (*"There is nowhere else, literally"*), or simply did not know where else they would go for help.

"To be honest, nowhere, I don't have friends or family that I could ask, I don't want to ask them."

"Nowhere. I have already put my tools into Cash Converter, and my iPhone."

Many would ask family and friends for help, though one said that even this was difficult because it required funds to travel, and several were conscious that there is a limit to how often they could ask. Family also have their own pressures,

"Only my kids...but they have their own children and money is tight."

Five guests were open in talking about the temptation or pressure to commit some type of acquisitive crime or fraud, particularly if family and friends were unable to help.

"My last resort would be shoplifting"

"What are you going to push yourself to do that you don't want to do? Commit crime just to survive? You can't get more desperate than that. If you don't know where to sleep because you're homeless, people try to exploit you to say 'you can stay here if you a,b,c' – like thief or associate with drug dealers. I've got a better moral compass than some, but the expectation is that you'll do this stuff."

"Don't know what I'd have done because of my old behaviour – I've been in and out of prison all my life since I was 15"

Two said that they would try the Catholic church or the mosque, and two simply said that they would not eat.

An open question at the end of the interview elicited primarily gratitude for the facility, and in particular for the warm welcome.

"It's all excellent"

"It's good. You don't feel on your own".

"Better than expected. Foodbank people are very welcoming. My stress and depression have gone – just talking to somebody else."

Rating Wandsworth Foodbank service (Voucher Partners)

Eighty-nine percent of Voucher Partners said that the service provided by the foodbank was excellent. A further eight percent said that it was good. Three percent said that it was neither good nor bad.

Voucher Partners were invited to offer any other comments about their experience of working with Wandsworth Foodbank. Thirty-one percent of Voucher Partners reiterated previous positive comments, that the service is excellent, important and highly valued. Ten percent thought that the staff were great and friendly. Eight percent simply said 'thank you'. Two percent said that it was well organised, that staff were well trained and that they were generous.

Suggestions to improve included three percent who would like to see more signposting to other services; three percent thought the foodbank should provide more budgeting support; two percent thought it should be clear that it is not a permanent addition to state welfare; two percent would like to see a central record of all foodbank opening times in the borough, which may refer to non-Trussell

Trust foodbanks in Wandsworth, as the opening times of the Trussell Trust foodbanks are well-advertised on the website, vouchers and leaflets.

Voucher Partners were invited to offer any other comments about their experience of working with Wandsworth Foodbank.

"I do find it astonishing that foodbanks are necessary. This is a wealthy country and that our citizens need foodbanks for the most basic of human needs is appalling."
R.46

"...impressed at the way you are raising the profile of the effect of Government policy on people on low incomes or benefits. Keep up the campaigning. I hope one day we won't need foodbanks anymore." R.28

"I think it is a great service but wish it wasn't necessary." R.50

Rating Wandsworth Foodbank service (guests)

Guests were asked about ease of obtaining food from the foodbank, and about the quality of the service provided. All but three guests felt that it had been easy or very easy (4 or 5 out of 5) to obtain food from Wandsworth Foodbank.

Guests were positive about the speed of access and the ease of getting the voucher. The role of Voucher Partners in encouraging and motivating guests is clearly important. For example, one guest was grateful her social worker brought a voucher to her at home.

"IDAS let me know and encouraged me to overcome my shyness and proudness."

"The school gave me the voucher as soon as I told them about my situation."

"They're very practical. You explain to the Citizen's Advice Bureau, they give you the voucher, you come here and they're very welcoming and listen to what you say."

The Voucher Partners had not been universally positive, however: the only guest to give a negative rating on this question did so because the Voucher Partner 'made such a big deal' about the voucher but did not listen to the guest's concerns about travel costs (to the foodbank, and to the partner themselves to receive this and further vouchers).

Others spoke of the warm welcome at the foodbank itself as a key factor:

"I always get help, and a warm welcome, the doors are always open"

"There's no discrimination, you're not made to feel ashamed, people welcome you."

Obtaining a voucher and the process once in the foodbank were generally seen as straightforward and positive; factors such as travel, however, made access less easy for some (hence ratings of 4 rather than 5). Two gave neutral ratings (3), due to emotional barriers rather than practical issues:

"I felt embarrassed coming here".

"It's embarrassing to ask for help. You feel like you're a failure because you can't support yourself. Even though I've come here before, you wonder what people will think. It's so hard. I'm grateful that these places exist, to be honest."

In terms of the service, all of the guests rated the service as either 'excellent' or 'good', and the vast majority rated it 'excellent'. The welcome provided is key to this: guests were very positive about the friendly welcome.

The non-judgmental nature of the support was also important to them, particularly given that many felt embarrassed or hesitant.

"It's friendly, people chat to you, they are welcoming"

"I get food, coffee, welcome. The service is very good."

"You make everybody feel welcome no matter what your background, no matter what your needs."

"I felt a bit hesitant but I came here to get food and I've got food: I wasn't put through the mill."

"Every time we've come here you've been brilliant. Over Christmas I don't know what we'd have done, with the kids off school. We even got Christmas crackers and nice biscuits. We couldn't afford presents but there were even little presents we could wrap up and give to the children."

Summary: attitudes towards the foodbank

- Partners felt strongly that Wandsworth Foodbank did a great job and provided an excellent service.
- The foodbank is highly valued by the guests. Many commented on how important the warm welcome and support from the foodbank volunteers is to them.
- Voucher Partners have an important role in encouraging guests to visit the foodbank, particularly in overcoming feelings of stigma or embarrassment.
- Most guests found the foodbank easy to use, although some reported that travel was a difficulty.
- Voucher Partners felt that without the foodbank people such as their clients would go hungry. Similarly, the majority of guests reported that they would have no other options for support if the foodbank were not there. Some would place further demands on overstretched family and friends; a few others would consider crime.
- Voucher Partners expressed concerns that the foodbank was filling the gaps left by a deficient system. Some were concerned that the DWP would become too reliant on the foodbank.

CASE STUDIES (all names have been changed)

Abi

Abi is a 17 year old mum of a baby boy and is bringing him up on her own. When her son was first born, she was living with her mother, but that relationship broke down and her mother asked her to leave: *"My mum kicked me out just before Christmas."*

Abi is now living in local authority accommodation for young mums and is in receipt of Child Tax Credit, Child Benefit and Income Support. She has appreciated the help received from her social worker, although at first she was wary of social service involvement:

"She's helped us a lot, once it was clear they were here to help me and my child, not to take my child."

In fact it was Abi's social worker who gave her the foodbank voucher, when she lost her purse which contained her money for a fortnight. While this is the cause of the immediate crisis, Abi says there are times in the previous 12 months where she has not had enough to eat:

"When my son was first born, I had milk for him, but nothing for me. I get a certain amount, but I'm on my own, with no family support, and by the time I've bought nappies, milk and essentials, it's hard. I was struggling before I lost my purse."

Abi said she was grateful for the three days' worth of emergency food she received for her and her son, but said she particularly enjoyed the opportunity to talk with volunteers:

"There should be more places like this, not just for food, but where you can sit and talk because otherwise sometimes it can feel overwhelming."

Brenda

Brenda is in her 50s and was referred to Wandsworth Foodbank by one of Wandsworth Borough Council's support teams.

A mother and grandmother, Brenda had been receiving Disability Living Allowance for ten years due to diabetes and arthritis (she is registered disabled as a result of arthritis). She takes 12 daily medications, including painkillers and sleeping tablets. She is the main carer for her daughter, 20, who is autistic.

In 2013, Brenda's DLA benefit payment was stopped while she was waiting for a DWP medical assessment. After a year waiting to be assessed, she was found fit to work and was moved onto Employment Support Allowance.

"There are times when I cannot move, and I depend on a walking stick and painkillers. But at the medical they asked me to touch my toes and, because I could on that day, they said I didn't need DLA."

She was also moved to the lowest rate of Attendance Allowance (£21 per week), and her total income has fallen by £300 per month.

"I used to be able to go shopping and buy decent meals for every day. I'm trying my hardest but by the time I've paid the gas and electric to keep the house warm, which I need to do because of my arthritis, I can't manage. And if I run out of electric, the food in the fridge goes off anyway."

For Brenda, the emotional impact of her experience in the last year has taken its toll. Four months before this interview, Brenda tried to commit suicide and was hospitalised for several weeks:

"I tried to commit suicide four months ago. I'm suffering in silence because I feel like I'm not being heard or listened to. It's

degrading, it makes you feel you haven't got control of your own life. It's demoralising. I'm embarrassed when the grandchildren come round and say 'How come you haven't ever got nothing?'. "

Charis

Charis recently moved to London to escape domestic violence, which she had experienced throughout her marriage. She was referred to Wandsworth Foodbank by the Domestic Violence Unit as she was struggling to meet both the cost of food and the cost of travel to receive treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder at a specialist centre.

Having previously worked and not had to rely on benefits, Charis is shocked how difficult she has found it to access material help, and says she often has not had enough food, particularly in the first few weeks after moving:

"There was a delay of two months from applying for benefits to receiving support – in the meantime, I had no financial support at all. I scraped together what I could, or sometimes friends paid for meals. If I didn't have friends and brother it would be impossible."

Charis applied to Wandsworth Social Discretionary Fund for support, but says they asked for six months' of bank statements, to which she didn't have access as they were at the family home she had fled:

"It felt like it was designed to be almost impossible," says Charis. 'I thought, isn't clinically-diagnosed PTSD and proof of domestic violence enough evidence? It all feels very difficult, every week is a huge hurdle. I'm very anxious."

Dylan

Dylan is in his 30s. After the relationship with the mother of his children broke down, he was street homeless for two years until he was housed by Wandsworth Council five months previously.

Dylan receives Employment Support Allowance and Housing Benefit, but says that all his money *"goes straight to bills and rent"*. On the day he was interviewed, Dylan had just *"one tin of soup and one tin of baked beans left"* in his cupboard.

Dylan is receiving mental health and social services support, and was referred to Wandsworth Foodbank by his keyworker so that he would have enough food to feed his children, who he looks after at his home every other weekend: *"I'd like them to have enough"*.

Dylan said he appreciated the support and the welcome he received at the foodbank centre, as well as the food:

"It's depressing, sitting there with nothing. But knowing that there's a place like this, it lifts you up."

Edward

Edward is currently unemployed and homeless. He moves between four different friends' addresses but has been street homeless twice in the last year. He is struggling to get into his own accommodation because, he says *"Everyone wants deposits and rent in advance"*.

He has been moving in and out of low-paid temporary contract catering jobs and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in between contracts:

"It's very difficult to hold down a job when you're homeless. When you start a new JSA claim, they don't pay you for a few days. It puts you in a spin and you have to pinch from Peter to pay Paul."

"That few extra quid would have kept my head above water. I could have had gas and electric for cooking and hot water at my

friend's place – I don't put the heating on – as well as food, rather than one or the other.'

"It doesn't make you feel great. I'm pretty resilient – I haven't got any issues about getting up and looking for work – but it's just hard."

Edward was referred to Wandsworth Foodbank by Ingeus, the employment and training provider. He was nervous about coming to the foodbank but said the way volunteers had treated him with dignity and respect had put him at ease:

"I felt a bit hesitant but I came here to get food and I've got food: I wasn't put through the mill. Everyone has been tremendous, even allowing me to bring my bike inside."

Like other guests and Voucher Partners we interviewed, Edward said he thought that being able to receive emergency food and support from the Foodbank could stop people from committing crime:

"What are you going to push yourself to do that you don't want to do? Commit crime just to survive? You can't get more desperate than that."

"At the end of the day, this foodbank is what's preventing people from taking measures. Man is going to do whatever he's got to do and someone's going to suffer – be it individuals or businesses."

DISCUSSION

Social stigma of using foodbanks

Evidence from guest interviews, Trussell Trust data and Voucher Partner responses shows that Wandsworth Foodbank is servicing Wandsworth residents in crisis.

There is a very small number of people who have accessed the service more than three times. The large majority of guests have used it once or twice, indicating that the model is working and that frontline care professionals are referring appropriately into the system.

Data from the guest interviews supports this finding. Many guests were visiting the foodbank for the first time. However, when asked if they had ever not had enough food in the past twelve months the majority of them said yes. This suggests that the social stigma of needing to visit a foodbank remains high and acts as a deterrent until people become so desperate they have nowhere else to turn.

Access to emergency financial help

Voucher Partner responses around knowledge of how to refer to other sources of emergency financial assistance suggest there is some confusion over how and where to refer clients and which funds are appropriate. Training offering accurate and up to date information on this issue may be beneficial for partner organisations, allowing them to signpost clients efficiently.

Twenty-one Voucher Partners said they would refer clients to the Social Fund. In April 2013, Government-provided crisis loans were replaced by the Local Welfare Assistance Fund (LWAF), to be administered by Local Authorities to provide emergency and financial help to people facing crisis situations. In Wandsworth, this is known as the Discretionary Social Fund (DSF). It is the responsibility of the local authority to publicise access criteria to the fund.

It has not been possible to find out how many applications were made to the Discretionary Social Fund in Wandsworth and how many were successful. Many Voucher Partners reported that they felt these applications were 'not very successful'. Many foodbank guests were unaware of the changes and were confused about what they were entitled to apply for.

Data from a Freedom of Information enquiry conducted by The Guardian shows that Wandsworth Council received a budget from central Government of £950,000 for its Discretionary Social Fund. In the first ten months of the financial year, only £151,500 (16%) had been spent.

Impact on health and Healthcare services

The impact on a person's health, physical and mental, of recession-related worries can be immense. Diagnosed conditions may become more severe under increased financial pressure, whilst one guest reported having to choose between buying food which would aid recovery from an operation, or heating their home. Four guests reported that they or their partner had been suicidal in the previous year.

The recession and its impact on primary healthcare services has been documented in research published in 2012⁸. The report sought to establish what effect the recession is having on GPs in the UK.

GPs who participated in the survey reported that financial worries, coupled with longer working hours, have increased stress levels amongst their patients. This has led to an increase in various mental disorders and has affected other areas of people's lives from family planning to levels of exercise taken.

⁸ The Austerity Britain Report, the Impact of the recession on the UK's Health, according to GPs, Insight Research Group, Richard Kunzmann

Fifty nine percent of GPs surveyed in the report reported struggling to refer patients with mental health conditions to services better placed to treat them, resorting to prescribing medication instead. Seventy five percent of GPs surveyed agreed with the statement that the economic downturn has had a negative impact on their patient's health.

These findings are supported by our interviews with guests of Wandsworth Foodbank. Of the 26 guests interviewed, all but one were registered with a GP. In the past twelve months all but one had visited their GP. Most guests reported visiting their GP for 'depression', suicide attempts and 'stress and worry'. One guest reported visiting their GP 'every day' for depression. Three visited their GP once or twice per week, two visited once a month whilst others reported visiting their GP 'lots' and 'frequently'.

Ten guests had visited A&E departments in the past 12 months. Two guests attended A&E every week due to suicide attempts. Guests

were asked about their current state of health: being in financial crisis was having a negative effect on mental and emotional wellbeing for almost all of the guests interviewed. Around two-thirds described some level of worry, stress, depression, upset or feelings of vulnerability and being overwhelmed.

For some this was extreme: four said that they or their partner had been suicidal recently. Two or three others talked about the impact on their physical health, in particular that choosing between adequate food and heating was a problem for their underlying health problems. Two guests mentioned either that they had relapsed into previous harmful behaviour (drinking), or that they were worried that ongoing stress would cause them to do so.

Such findings illustrate the wider consequences of food poverty and recession-related health issues on the NHS and mental health teams. Primary care is struggling to meet increased demand whilst people in crisis are presenting at A&E with mental health issues exacerbated by financial stress.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This report attempts to present a set of baseline data by which future research can be measured.

Further research investigating the effect of benefit sanctions on the use of foodbanks would be a helpful contribution to this debate. Research into the gender of foodbank guests would also inform the debate.

Such data would be easy to obtain by making a simple adjustment to the Trussell Trust vouchers.

The report has been written without the following data, which would have been helpful in presenting a full analysis of the drivers of food poverty in Wandsworth:

- Number of benefit sanctions given in Wandsworth in past twelve months; why they were given; what proportion of benefit payment was sanctioned; and for how long the sanction was imposed.
- Number of benefit sanction decisions that were reversed on appeal in Wandsworth in past twelve months.
- Number of applications made to Wandsworth Discretionary Social Fund during past twelve months.
- Number of DSF applications that have been successful during the past twelve months.
- Number of people experiencing benefit delay in the last twelve months.
- Number of Short-Term Benefit Advances issued in this same period.
- Gender of Wandsworth Foodbank Guests

APPENDIX 1

NATIONAL CONTEXT

The Trussell Trust (the UK's main foodbank network) started its foodbank network in 2004, based on the successful model of their first foodbank which was established in Salisbury in 2000. Since 2004, more than 420 foodbanks nationwide have been launched in partnership with local churches and communities,⁹ and in 2013-14 foodbanks fed 913,138 people nationwide (over 330,000 of whom were children)¹⁰. There are also other foodbank networks and a number of independent foodbanks in the UK. The foodbanks provide a minimum of three days' worth of nutritionally balanced, emergency food and support to people in crisis in the UK.

The Trussell Trust cites rising fuel costs, static incomes, underemployment and changes to benefits as some of the reasons why increasing numbers of people are being referred to foodbanks for emergency food. They estimate that 13 million people in the UK live below the poverty line¹¹.

Food poverty should certainly be understood in the context of the rise in the wider cost of living. Rising costs of food, fuel and housing over the past decade in Britain has affected everyone, across all income brackets. This is a recent trend, reversing the long-term fall during the second half of the twentieth century. Between 1953 and 2003, the overall combined proportion of household income spent on housing, fuel and food declined from 47.3% to 36% (mostly driven by decreasing fuel and food costs, since housing costs rose during this period). However, since 2005 the proportion of household income spent on

these areas began to rise and has continued to do so every year since.

It is the poorest households in Britain which have witnessed the largest increase in the proportion of their household income spent on housing, food and fuel. Data from the Office of National Statistics (Table 3 overleaf) shows that households in the lowest income decile spent 31% of household income on housing, fuel and food in 2003¹². This had increased to 40% in 2012 – an increase of nine percentage points, more than double the increase for the richest households.

The nine percentage point increase spend on housing, food and fuel experienced by those at the bottom of the pile is due entirely to rising costs of energy and housing. The proportion of income spent on food has remained stable over the past decade. In 2003, the poorest household spent sixteen percent of their income on housing and fuels and fifteen percent on food.

Chart 9 shows how over the following decade housing and energy costs accounted for an ever increasing proportion of household budgets whilst spend on food remained the same. Since food costs have also been rising, this means that the poorest households are compromising either on quality or quantity (or both) when purchasing food.

⁹ Trussell Trust website

¹⁰ www.trusselltrust.org/foodbank-projects accessed on 18th May 2014.

¹¹ The key UK government measures take 60 per cent of median income as the poverty line. While this is easy to measure and does provide useful comparisons over time, it is essentially an arbitrary definition and has been much criticised, most recently in the UK in the Field Review.

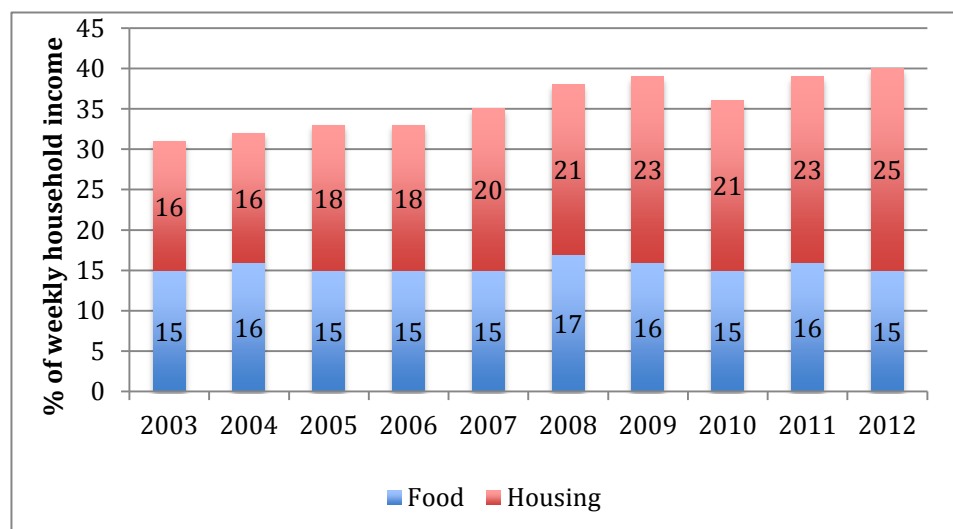
¹² Family Spending, 2013 edition, Office of National Statistics, released 11 December 2013, www.ons.gov.uk

Table 3: Combined weekly spending on housing, fuel and food by income decile, 2003-2012

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Percentage point aggregate increase
Lowest 10%	31	32	33	33	35	28	39	36	39	40	9
2nd decile	32	32	33	33	34	24	37	36	36	39	7
3rd decile	29	28	26	27	30	33	33	32	32	35	6
4th decile	24	25	25	25	28	28	31	30	32	31	7
5th decile	24	23	24	22	25	27	28	28	28	29	5
6th decile	22	21	22	22	22	23	26	26	27	27	5
7th decile	19	19	19	20	20	21	23	24	25	25	6
8th decile	17	18	17	18	20	18	22	22	23	23	6
9th decile	17	16	16	17	16	16	19	19	19	20	3
Highest 10%	13	14	14	14	13	15	16	16	16	17	4

Source: Evidence Paper 2 on Expenditure, All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty in Britain, 2014

Chart 9: Household expenditure as a proportion of income in the poorest 10% of households



Source: Evidence Paper 2 on Expenditure, All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty in Britain, 2014

In Britain, food prices (including non-alcoholic drinks) rose by 11% in real terms between 2007 and 2013. Evidence from The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) reports that during this period,

households in the lowest income group bought less butter, fruit, vegetables and soft drinks but bought more pork, bacon and cheese. According to DEFRA, on average households in

the UK bought 4.7% less food in 2012 than in 2007 but spent 17% more.¹³

This is a worrying trend in terms of nutritional intake for the poorest households in the UK. The October 2013 report of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013: social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain*, summarises the findings of the DEFRA Family Food report 2011:

*"In particular, diets of poor families in the UK appear to have worsened in recent years, particularly since 2007 when food prices began to rise significantly. For example, between 2007 and 2011, fresh fruit purchases by the poorest ten percent of households fell by nineteen percent, fresh vegetable purchases (excluding potatoes) fell by fourteen percent and unprocessed meat purchases fell by eighteen percent; at the same time purchases of meat pies, burgers and meat-based ready meals increased by thirty two percent and purchases of chips increased by nineteen percent."*¹⁴

Against this background, in March 2012, the Government passed the Welfare Reform Act, which contained a raft of changes to housing, disability and employment related benefits, as well as changes to tax credits. It is reasonable to assume that even without welfare reform the poorest households would still have struggled to purchase a nutritional, healthy diet for themselves and their family. However, in recent public debate about foodbanks, some have argued that the welfare reforms appear to be pushing people towards foodbanks at a faster pace.

The rise in the use of foodbanks has become a subject of widespread interest and comment, and the complex issues involved are currently the subject of an All Party Parliamentary Inquiry. Reporting at the end of 2014, its considerations include the extent and causes of

food poverty, circumstance of people using foodbanks, the nature and effectiveness of emergency food provision, and approaches to improving the food model and household food security.

We have submitted this research report on experiences of food poverty in Wandsworth Borough to the APPG.

¹³ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, *Family Food 2012*, December 2013, p.V

¹⁴ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, *State of the Nation 2013: social mobility and child poverty in Great Britain*, October 2013, p.88

APPENDIX 2

GUEST INTERVIEWS & VOUCHER PARTNER QUESTIONNAIRE

Guest Interviews

25 interviews were conducted with guests to Wandsworth Foodbank during a two-week period in March 2014. Interviews were conducted at foodbank sessions at St Mark's Church, Battersea, The Yard in Putney/Roehampton and at St Paul's Church in Furzedown.

The interview was designed to elicit information about how many times a person had visited the foodbank, reasons why they had been referred, their general state of health, their financial situation, their knowledge and experience of the benefits system as well as their experience of the foodbank and how they thought it might be improved.

Sample

All but one of the guests lived in Wandsworth (the remaining guest was from Lambeth). Around two-fifths of the guests had dependents, and the sample was therefore similar to the overall profile of Wandsworth Foodbank users as shown by the Trussell Trust data (40% of vouchers in 13/14 were given to families or single parents¹⁵).

Most had between three and five children, ranging from pre-school to late teens. One had a 20-year-old daughter with autism who was dependent on her. Another also cited a 20-year-old son as a dependent. One guest had nine children, who were all either non-dependent, fostered, in care or adopted. The youngest has Down's syndrome and lives with her father.

Again, the ethnicity of the interview cohort was similar to the profile of all those receiving vouchers in Wandsworth during the year: two-fifths of the sample were black, and two-fifths

were white, just under a fifth were Asian, and one was 'other'.

All but two of the guests had recourse to public funds. One was a recent immigrant, along with her family, the other had lived and worked in the UK for 16 years but had never applied for residency. Both were in the process of applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR).

In terms of referral routes, slightly more had been referred from statutory providers compared with the third sector (including church) – three-fifths vs two-fifths, respectively. A quarter of referrals came from healthcare sources (GPs and mental health services), and a third from other statutory providers (probation, social worker, Domestic Violence centre, school, welfare-to-work company, Wandsworth Council). Three guests had been referred by churches, and seven by other third sector providers (e.g. Age UK, Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), Refugee Service, Christians Against Poverty debt counsellors).

Three-fifths of guests had visited a foodbank before. Most had only used a foodbank once or twice before, although three had made four or five previous visits (over the course of a year, with intervals between visits).

Voucher Partner Questionnaires

143 email questionnaires were sent to key contacts in Voucher Partner organisations. They were asked to complete it, and forward it to colleagues who also made referrals to the foodbank. We asked for responses to be returned within one week. We received 62 completed questionnaires within the timeframe.

Most Voucher Partners had referred relatively few people: the large majority (90%) had referred between 0-20 people since the foodbank had been open. This suggests that the foodbank is, as envisaged, used as a

¹⁵ See p6

resource for true crisis situations. It may also be because several organisations became partners later in the year, and greater familiarity may increase referrals in the future.

Forty percent of Voucher Partners said that since Wandsworth Foodbank had been open

they had referred between 0-5 people; thirty one percent said they had referred between 6-10 people and nineteen percent had referred between 11-20 people. Only one Voucher Partner had referred more than fifty people.

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