

Food Poverty Report 2016



Looking at foodbank use in the London Borough of Wandsworth in 2015-16, the drivers of food poverty and its impact on people who experience it

KEY FINDINGS

- Food poverty is a significantly growing issue in Wandsworth. In 2015-16 the number of people receiving emergency food increased by 25%, considerably higher than the annual increase reported by Trussell Trust nationally (2% increase).
- In 2015-16, Wandsworth Foodbank provided enough emergency food to feed 4078 people for three days. Four in ten were children.
- 1011 individual households were referred to Wandsworth Foodbank in 2015-16 – up 22% from the year before.
- Frontline care professionals see the foodbank as an increasingly essential part of the safety net, providing a service that does not exist in any other part of the system, and standing between people in crisis and destitution.
- Statutory agencies account for more than one-half of Wandsworth Foodbank's 208 Voucher Partners, including 20 primary and secondary schools, 42 health services (eg GPs), and 15 social services teams.
- Food poverty severely impacts the lives of those who experience it, and was strongly associated by both Voucher Partners and guests with causing poorer mental health (eg stress, anxiety and depression). One-quarter of Voucher Partners reported clients displaying suicidal tendencies in 2015-16 – twice as many as in the previous year.
- Problems with delivery of benefits remain the most common reason for crisis referral to the foodbank, with the number of people receiving emergency food because of benefits problems increasing by 11%, to 1479 people.
- Sudden, unplanned-for interruptions in benefit payments were identified by guests and Voucher Partners as particularly problematic, leaving people with insufficient or no income for food.
- While benefits sanction as a reason for referral declined in 2015-16, more Voucher Partners this year expressed concern over how sanctions are applied, with over half saying sanctions were 'rarely used fairly and proportionately'.

 We distributed enough emergency food to feed
4078 people

 **25% more than last year**

 **4 in 10 were children**



WE HELPED 1011 HOUSEHOLDS

Why were people referred to Wandsworth Foodbank?



208 Voucher Partners

(eg GPs, schools, advice agencies, social workers, children's centres, council teams referring their clients in crisis)

 **295 volunteers gave 9200 hours to help**

KEY FINDINGS

- Three in five Voucher Partners said the current benefits system catered ‘badly’ or ‘very badly’ for their clients with mental health difficulties, and that these clients found it extremely difficult to negotiate the bureaucracy of the welfare system: specifically in meeting DWP requirements in terms of benefits conditionality, and understanding or completing complicated paperwork.
- Voucher Partners expressed concerns about JobCentre Plus, and the quality of service, information, communication and support their clients with mental health needs receive from local advisers.
- Information and access to Short-Term Benefit Advances (STBA) continues to be poor, and subject to the discretion of individual JCP employees. None of the foodbank guests interviewed who were experiencing benefit delay had been informed about or helped to access this emergency provision, leaving them in unnecessary hardship.
- Individuals are more likely to successfully navigate the benefits system and access its emergency financial provision when supported by professionals from outside of the benefits system.
- Debt is an increasing problem for local people, accounting for 11% of all foodbank referrals (8% in 2015-16). Both guests and Voucher Partners reported an increase in use of high-cost credit to pay for food and essentials in the last year.
- One-third of guests were homeless or in temporary accommodation at time of interview, and this is consistent with the finding that one in ten Voucher Partners identified homelessness as a key factor in crisis leading to foodbank referral.
- Voucher Partners reported an increased number of clients in in-work poverty, citing low paid jobs; insecure contracts; and the difficulty of accessing in-work benefits such as working tax credit and free school meals when work hours are variable.
- Guests reported having to make poorer nutritional choices and experiencing poorer physical health as a result of their crisis situation. Voucher Partners also expressed concern regarding poorer nutrition and poor health, including children presenting as hungry and unable to concentrate at school.
- Almost every parent interviewed said that they or their partner had gone without food in the previous twelve months so that their children could eat; and more than twice the number of voucher partners reported parents skipping meals than did in the previous year.
- Both guests and Voucher Partners strongly appreciated the ‘more than food’ aspects of Wandsworth Foodbank provision, particularly in terms of signposting guests to further help; access to a dedicated Citizens Advice Foodbank adviser for foodbank guests¹; and the ability to refer clients in fuel poverty to *fuelbanks and families* for an immediate fuel voucher and specialist advice.
- Voucher Partners and guests were universally positive about the service Wandsworth Foodbank provided, with 100% of both groups rating it ‘excellent’ and ‘good’.
- *“My patients report back that you are kind and non-judgemental. That they were fearful but were made to feel welcome. One man told me that he was given tea and debt advice as well as food, which helped him get a handle on it and consequently his depression. I would like you to know that he is now in employment and I have discharged him at a healthy weight. Thank you for helping me do my job, and helping him.”*
Voucher Partner, April 2016

ABOUT WANDSWORTH FOODBANK

Wandsworth Foodbank is part of the Trussell Trust, the largest national network of foodbanks in the UK. We provide emergency food, support and signposting to local people referred in crisis by local statutory agencies, charities and churches.

We are a partnership of five churches who each host one or two foodbank sessions a week, meaning that people in crisis can access emergency help seven days a week. The host churches are St Michael's, Southfields; St Mark's, Battersea Rise; St Paul's, Furzedown; Shaftesbury Christian Centre, Battersea; SW London Vineyard (at The Yard), Putney. We welcome people of all faiths or none.

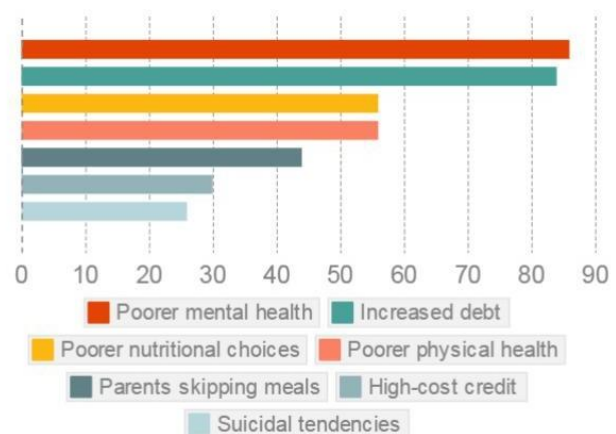
All food and essential toiletries are donated by the generous people of Wandsworth – individuals, schools, churches, businesses and other community groups. We're grateful too to each person who gave financially to Wandsworth Foodbank in the last year: we don't receive any government or local authority funding, so we're reliant on the generosity of people to keep helping local people in crisis. Thank you!

We are also grateful for our advice partnership project with Citizens Advice Wandsworth and to City Bridge Trust for funding it; and to *fuelbanks and families* for providing vital crisis support to foodbank guest families experiencing fuel poverty.

During 2015-16, an amazing 295 volunteers from churches and the wider community gave more than 9000 hours to help their neighbours. Words can't do justice to how thankful we are for each one of you.

Thank you

Impacts of
hunger
& poverty
cited by Voucher Partners



RECOMMENDATIONS

It's a privilege to support local families and individuals who are referred to us in crisis from across Wandsworth Borough. However, we believe that no one in Wandsworth, or in the UK, should be going hungry in 2016. We therefore make the following recommendations to help tackle the underlying causes of food poverty, so that less people, not more, need to turn to Wandsworth Foodbank in the year ahead.

1. We ask that the government commits to making sure the social security system works well for every member of society: fixing the gaps that cause hunger, and protecting the most vulnerable. We call for improvements to benefit delivery; so that benefit payments people rely on are delivered on time, and that the system is as quick to reinstate adjusted benefits as it is to respond to noting a change of circumstance.
2. We ask that Wandsworth JobCentre Plus includes information about Short-Term Benefit Advances as part of the mandatory text in its Jobcentre scripts, in accordance with the Work & Pensions Select Committee's recommendation of September 2015: *"Jobcentre staff should ask every claimant whether they have an urgent financial need rather than wait for the claimant to volunteer that information."*
3. We ask that the DWP provides high-quality mental health training for its JobCentre Plus advisers, so that they are well-placed to understand and support clients with mental health difficulties, and that benefit policy is sensitive to the additional needs of people with learning disabilities and/or mental health needs.
4. We ask local and national government to provide funding for additional advice workers to support vulnerable people to successfully navigate the benefits system, ensuring that they have equal access to social security and emergency financial provision so that they are not left destitute.
5. We ask that Wandsworth Council (including its sub-contractors) and businesses throughout the borough work towards paying their employees a minimum of the London Living Wage, to ensure that work really does pay for people in our community; and that Wandsworth Council considers offering local firms a discount on their business rates if they pay employees the London Living Wage.



wandsworth.foodbank.org.uk



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Registered Charity Number 1149780

