



Food Banks Consultation 2015

Service Development & Improvement
Leicester City Council Revenues & Benefits



Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Introduction | <i>p3</i> |
| 2. Background | <i>p6</i> |
| 3. Findings: the nature of food banks in Leicester | <i>p9</i> |
| 4. Findings: issues identified | <i>p13</i> |
| 5. Findings: services | <i>p17</i> |
| 6. Findings: client demographic | <i>p20</i> |
| 7. Findings: quantitative user survey | <i>p21</i> |
| 8. Recommendations | <i>p35</i> |
| | |
| References | <i>p37</i> |
| <i>Appendix</i> | <i>p40</i> |



1. Introduction

The vast expansion of food bank use in recent years has created a new dimension to society. Over the past five years, what was previously a marginal and little-documented resource has rapidly become a genuine staple and cornerstone in communities in response to extreme poverty in the UK. Nationally, in 2011-12 Trussell Trust food banks provided 128,697 food parcels. However, by March 2014, this number had increased to 913,138 (Trussell Trust, 2015). In the first half of the 2014-15 financial year, despite the emerging economic recovery 492,641 people were given three days' food and support, including 176,565 children, between April and September 2014, compared to 355,982 during same period in the preceding year.

There is not currently a database which depicts the image of food banks in Leicester in comparison to other cities, but the statistics below demonstrate Leicester's position within the country with regards to deprivation, and indicate a genuine need for an efficient support network.

1.1 Poverty in Leicester

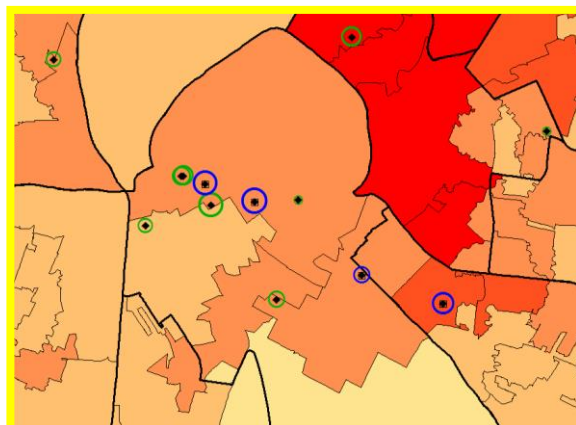
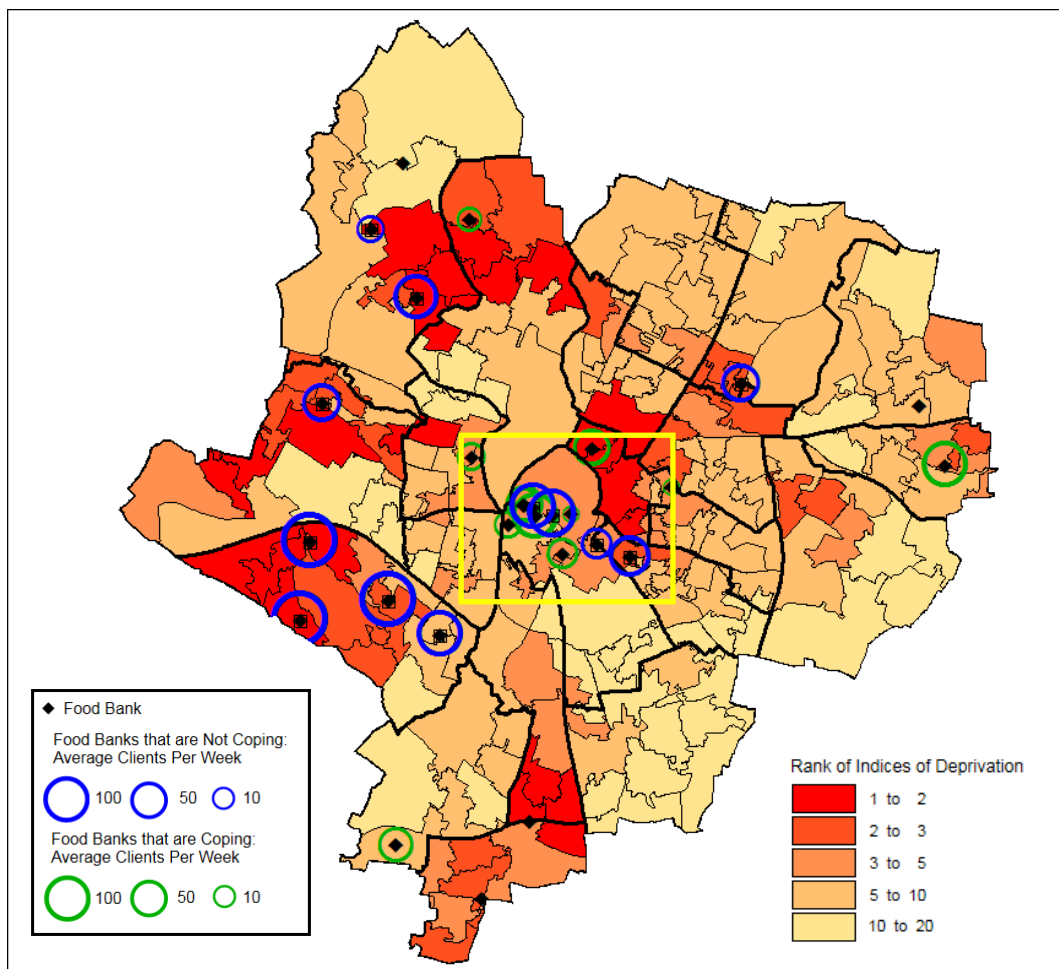
The present study focuses wholly on the residents within the Leicester area. There are 22 wards with vast variations regarding deprivation and poverty. Some areas, such as Knighton and Evington are relatively affluent, whilst areas like Spinney Hills and Charnwood have disproportionately high levels of deprivation (Public Health, 2014; Hirsch et al, 2014). Leicester's wards may be diverse, but collectively, the image of Leicester against National and Regional averages is underprivileged.

- *44% of under-30s in Leicester are living on less than the living wage, and one third of children are growing up in poverty, amongst the highest level in the country with the national average being 27% (Hirsch et al, 2014; Leicester Child Poverty Commission, 2013; End Child Poverty, 2014; Poverty Commission, 2015; Department for Work and Pensions, 2013);*
- *Residents have a life expectancy of 79.4, as opposed to the national average of 81.1;*
- *attainment of good GCSEs is below average, with 54.8% achieving 5 A*-C grades, as opposed to the national average of 60.8%;*
- *16.8% of the adult population is long-term unemployed, close to double the national average of 9.9% (Public Health, 2012; Office for National Statistics, 2010; 2009);*
- *Residents in work earn an average of £399.10 per week, far less than the £510 per week national average (Office for National Statistics, 2011).*



The below map depicts the **25** food banks known to be operating in Leicester – the size of the circle represents the average number of people assisted per week. **Green** circled locations are currently coping – **Blue** circled locations are struggling to meet demand. Across the city, approximately **869** parcels are distributed weekly.

Shaded areas represent relative areas of deprivation – red indicates the most deprived areas.





1.2 Approach to research

The research was comprised of two-stages. The initial aim was to construct an image of the food bank situation in Leicester in order to create a basis from which additional research could be proceeded from, and to ensure there was an accurate database of food bank demographics. The research was a repeat of an exercise from early 2014, in which the known food banks in Leicester were visited and information was collected about their locations and contact details, their date of establishment and opening times. Data were collected to distinguish the sizes of food banks, the nature of their food provision, their ability to cope with demand and any additional services they provide, their target groups and whether they have seen any changes in recent times. With the transient nature of the food bank phenomena, the existing data was in need of an update.

The present research intended to generate the same information as the previous work, although with the prospect of extended research aimed at service users, additional information was sought from food bank representatives. This information relates to how quickly the demand on food banks is rising, whether they anticipate any change in their circumstances or demand in the near future, whether they felt they were missing a service that would be beneficial to users, and some information on lunch clubs. This was also an opportunity to investigate the food bank staffs' knowledge of their ward, and to find out about potential new social food provision projects in the area. This extra information will provide a preliminary foundation for the secondary stage of the project on service users, which looks at their experience of poverty and food bank usage, support services and income. The survey was structured so that it was easy to gauge how far people are travelling to access emergency food. Information on the demographics of food bank users was also contained within the survey.

1.3 Methodology

The present study adopts a mixed-methods research design, which embraces both qualitative and quantitative genres. The study was designed so that the predominant stage was qualitative, and the second quantitative.

For the first part of the study, each operating food bank was approached for inclusion. Every food bank took part, with a few exceptions (some were in a transition period of closing down or were not operating at the time of research). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with food bank staff and the topics discussed were largely co-productive. The food bank staff often offered a tour of the facility, the food storage area and available rooms. Although this data collection was employed for the vast majority of the food banks in Leicester, there were a few that were unwilling or unable to facilitate such a meeting. For these cases we offered an open-ended survey that was emailed out for return.

For the second stage, a provisional survey template was constructed which was short and simple, and designed to be as sensitive as possible. This survey was emailed out to various responsive food



banks in a piloting effort. Feedback for the survey was positive, with comments relating to the ease of completion, and the suitability of the language used. The survey distribution method used in the previous study was employed again, whereby surveys were handed out with a food parcel, and participants asked to complete the survey whilst still inside the food bank venue. Measures were taken to improve the reliability of the method, which included a 'handbook', informing food bank staff about the survey and ways in which to help participants. The number of surveys each food bank was required to distribute was relative to the average number of weekly customers they had in order to increase representativeness.

2. *Background*

Existing research suggests that most food bank users in the UK rely on the benefits system. In order to revolutionize the current system and devalue the 'nanny state,' which is thought to deter people from finding work, the Government introduced a series of amendments to the system in operation. The aim was to reduce dependency on welfare and promote autonomy, through the vision of work being the most satisfying, fair and rewarding option. Effectively, the Government wanted life on benefits to be unappealing (Couling, 2013). There are three main areas in which welfare reform has reportedly had an adverse effect on claimants. The limited literature suggests that changes to unemployment benefits, the introduction of a benefit cap and the launch of the robust Employment and Support Allowance are instrumental in the hardship experienced by claimants and the subsequent rise in food bank usage (Perry et al, 2014; Tarasuk and Beaton, 1999; Goodwin, 2008; Oakley, 2014).

2.1 *Jobseeker's Allowance*

Existing research demonstrates that issues with unemployment benefits are by far the most prominent causes of food bank usage. Firstly, Jobseekers have been encouraged to work without payment for specific organisations and businesses, in order to receive their allowances. Secondly, a longer minimum sanction period has been imposed, meaning that the non-payment interval could be anywhere from 4-13 weeks. Finally, a new criterion was introduced, whereby each claimant must abide by their own personal 'claimant commitment', which generically includes a requirement to spend 35 hours per week actively seeking work (Venn, 2012).

There is evidence which suggests that benefit sanctions applied to those on Jobseeker's Allowance are the main reason for food bank access. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation sanctioning rates have more than doubled in the last ten years from 2.5% to 7% of claimants being sanctioned in the average month (Watts, 2014). It has been estimated that just below 100,000 additional claimants will be sanctioned per year under the new punitive regime (Wintour, 2013). In addition to



this, a recent study by Oxford University has revealed that the areas of the UK with the most food banks are also those that have experienced the highest rates of sanctioning (Butler, 2015). Therefore, it is no surprise that 83% of food banks state that they are seeing an increase in sanctioned clients (Trussell Trust, 2015). These statistics clearly indicate not only that sanctioning is increasing, but also that it is a major issue for people, as it is denying them the ability to purchase the most basic of necessities. There is research available that attempts to analyse and uncover the increased act of sanctioning. Research by Watts et al (2014) for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that with the new punitive response to unemployment, there have not been any improvements to the support services offered by the Department of Work and Pensions that might be beneficial to claimants if they are expected to re-enter the workplace. Watts et al found that the increased sanction criterion actually deters access to support services among claimants. This could be because people feel as though they are being abandoned by the safety net that is supposed to provide a sense of security, and as a result have chosen to dismiss any form of authority that they might associate with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Oakley (2014) found that generally, there is a poor comprehension of the new, reformed welfare system and sanctioning procedures, and that this is one of the realistic reasons for sanctioning. People do not thoroughly understand the system, and are therefore unintentionally forfeiting their payments. Goodwin's research (2008) supports this, and found that there are only a tiny proportion of sanctioned claimants that deliberately disregard the rules of the system. This suggests that many of those sanctioned are being punished for something they cannot control.

2.2 Employment and Support Allowance

Considered to be somewhat less problematic than the changes to Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance does still appear amongst the existing research as an issue. As a replacement for Disability Living Allowance, since 2008 claimants have been required to undergo a 'mandatory reconsideration', which involves a medical reassessment of an individual's health and ability to work. With stricter criteria, many claimants have been expected to enter employment and so are transferred onto Jobseeker's Allowance in the meantime. In a study by Mekatoa et al (2014), a variety of obstacles were identified with this new benefit. Aside from disagreements over their ability to work, participants in their study reported switching between ESA and JSA being problematic, confusing and lengthily. In some cases, ESA payments had stopped before the claimant had had a chance to apply for JSA and so were therefore left with no income at all. It was also noted that, similarly to JSA claims mentioned previously, the time periods for application, processing and decisions for ESA were lengthily and delays were common. One participant claimed to have waited three months for her first payment, and this was only after repeated prompting. Consequently, some of these people are turning to food banks for help.



2.3 Benefit Income Cap

Although the exact number is unknown, around 20,000 children are part of households using Trussell Trust food banks in the UK (Trussell Trust, 2015). Similarly, the majority of households affected by the Benefit Income Cap have four or more children (Department for Work and Pensions, 2014a). This reform means that households are no longer entitled to more than £26,000 per year in benefits, regardless of their location or family situation. The benefit cap applies to the majority of benefits, including child benefit and child tax credit. This means that families with relatively large numbers of children, and those in high-rent areas are disproportionately affected. Reductions are taken from housing benefit if the family did receive more than this amount. There are some exemptions to this, such as an entitlement to Working Tax Credit or disability benefits. This would mean that for exemption, one member of the household would be working a considerable number of hours or is not fit to work. Those faced with the cap are therefore encouraged to enter employment. However, a study for the Department for Work and Pensions (2014b) described how the main barriers to employment for people experiencing the benefit cap were a lack of qualifications and caring responsibilities. There are families with capped benefits who are unable to improve their own situation by finding work, because of their difficult circumstances. In addition, some of the participants in the study stated that they were not coping with the sudden drop in income that they had experienced. It is presumed that some of the families using food banks are subject to this benefit cap. The government have also announced plans to introduce new legislation reducing the Benefit Income Cap level to £23,000 later this year.

2.4 Other welfare reform changes

Reductions in other areas affecting those on low incomes also include:

- Reduced allowances for childcare received as part of Child Tax Credits;
- Higher thresholds for qualifying for Working Tax Credits;
- Reductions in Housing Benefit rates for those in both private and social sector housing;
- Additional restrictions and time limits for EEA national claimants.



3. Findings: The nature of food banks in Leicester

There were 25 food banks operating at the beginning of 2015, which represents a large presence of social food provision in the city. There was a notable dispersal of such services across the city, although some areas had more food banks than others. The food bank presence in Leicester is somewhat consistent with neighbouring cities; in the city of Nottingham, there are around 20 food banks (Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service, 2014). Coventry has a central food bank that operates from 17 different locations, with some additional independent outlets (Coventry Telegraph, 2014). However, the situation in Derby is noticeably different. There are 22 food banks in Derbyshire, but as few as seven of these are in the city area of Derby (Derbyshire County Council, 2015).

3.1 Food Bank Changes

As anticipated, the nature of food bank services was dynamic and unstable. In the year since the previous research was complete, there was a dramatic displacement of services. In this time, there were four closures, two re-locations and a variety of intended re-openings or new openings. Interestingly, there was a denial of food bank services from some of the leads supplied by other food banks. Some staff members that were interviewed provided details of organisations providing food parcels which were previously unknown. However, upon approaching these organisations, they denied such services. This could be because of the diversity of social food provision. It was established that some of these services were not actually food banks, but provided essential items on an ad-hoc delivery basis. In these cases, information had been misinterpreted.

Food bank representatives were asked about the date of establishment of their food provision service, and most prominent was that the food bank presence in Leicester has almost doubled in the last two years. Unsurprisingly, this shows that Leicester is consistent with the national picture of poverty, as the need for social food provision has escalated overwhelmingly. In addition to this, almost every food bank reported a present surge in demand. Some reported a desperate need for more food, while others had sufficient stocks. The pattern of these phenomena was dispersed.

Food bank staff were asked about the ratio of new to repeat clients in an attempt to establish a numerical rate of expansion. The average amount of new clients per week was 10% of the total number. This would suggest that the rise is currently at 10%. However, the format of some food banks was such that every client was new, and in some cases there were no new clients in the average week. The number of food banks in Leicester at present has declined compared to the previous study. There have been four closures during this time, although one of these has very recently received some valuable peer support from another food provider, and is in the process of



rejuvenating. There are also several active proposals for new openings, and so there will presumably be a notable recovery from the declining numbers in food banks overall in the near future.

3.2 Provision

The research discovered vast variance in every aspect of food bank operation. There was divergence in the ideology of the food banks, the availability of food, the access criteria, flexibility, the extent of help and support, the management of the food banks and food storage and operations. There appears to be a diverse time-table of the food bank services, with a good provision regarding days and times. However, it is noted that not every food bank is accessible to everyone that potentially needs to use it, as some have specific client groups. In addition to this, it may be difficult for those in need to travel to a location in which they can be catered for. There is also a reduced offer of provision of services at weekends, with only two food banks providing supplies. This is understandable because volunteers and managers may have other priorities at weekends, although the realistic need of food bank service users does not cease at weekends.

3.3 Competition and networking

One major aspect detected from the interviews was that there is a degree of competition between some food banks. There is an acknowledgement that food supplies are limited and a worry that gaining or losing too many clients could impact negatively on their facility. Losing too many clients could result in the closure of their services, and gaining too many could mean an overbearing strain. For this reason, it is suspected that some food banks seemed to be uncomfortable with working together and this could be the reason why some food banks are completely unaware of what else is available in their area. Some units did have some knowledge of other services, but most had no familiarity of the picture of social food provision in their ward at all. Five interviewees had no knowledge of food banks within a five minute walk.

Despite this, there was an approval across almost all food banks, of the development of a 'food bank network'. This idea was concerned with a mutually available database of all the food banks in the city, details on what they each provided and when. The aim of the network initiative is to work co-operatively to increase support and strengthen one another's services. It encourages sharing surplus food and resources and offers intelligence on new opportunities for development, whilst enhancing relationships. There was an acknowledgement that with more awareness of each other's services, that none would become overwhelmed, because the client base could be spread more appropriately, depending on what is easier for the clients. Therefore, some food banks may lose some clients, but gain others. There was a strong desire to evolve from the 'them and us',



individualised mentality of the food banks, into a collaborative effort that benefits the clients overall. This 'food bank network' is in the process of development at present and has so far been well received. One food bank staff member stated that the network had saved their service.

3.4 Food Supply

Research shows FareShare Leicester (FSL) is the majority supplier of their emergency food provision. It was identified in the last survey despite the emergency foods rapid expansion in the city, FSL has struggled to source the long-life food requested by food bank customers. This is because of the nature of FSL resources from the waste food industry. The food they distribute is in date and good to eat, but has become surplus for simple reasons such as over-production, labelling errors or short shelf-life. FSL cannot supply a standard offer of stable products such as bread, rice, pasta, milk, cheese as this is not the nature of their food source. Because of this variance in the type of food distributed some providers stated they struggle to cope with supplying regular stable ingredients in their food bags and need to supplement FSL deliveries. Concerns have been raised by numerous subscribers as to the sporadic nature of provision, the varying nutritional quality of food delivered and the insufficient quantity of staples such as rice and pasta which groups have often had to purchase supplementary stock (or carry out regular food drives) through their own funds where possible.

In 2013 we reported FSL had been increasingly shifting its emphasis towards chilled and fresh food, a resource far more readily available from its wholesale partners. This model was anticipated to roll out as a 60/40 split between ambient and chilled food. It appears that Fareshare Leicester have not managed to achieve this to the extent they aimed for, although slight progress has been made.

It was suggested by numerous interviewees that what suppliers offer is unfair and unpredictable. Some food banks thought this was due to a lack of organisation, but others commented it was deliberate and that there was a 'food bank hierarchy' in existence. One food bank representative recalls arriving at the supply depot and being allocated a crate that was substantially inferior in food variety to that of another food bank representative. It was suggested by one food bank representative that the newer food banks are advantaged in one supplier depot, because they are new to the supplier service and want to present a good impression. Food banks that have been customers to the service for a longer time are seen as loyal, and so are not priorities when creating a good impression. This could be problematic because the needs of some clients are simply not being met and this puts them in further disadvantage, if even social food provision cannot attend to their needs.

Another trend in the research is that the vast majority of food banks have a Fareshare subscription, although their service is perceived by the majority of food providers as not fit for purpose and has a



limited application for the emergency food demand sector. One issue was that Fareshare is not sensitive to cultural and individual needs. The availability of halal, baby and children's foods was scarce, despite some food banks describing a large demand for this. Food banks stated that Muslim clients and families with small children are not being given food with enough nutritional value because of their specific needs. However it should be pointed out that Fareshare Leicester largely met this demand.

3.5 Faith Groups

One part of the community that is helping to alleviate this issue is local faith groups. There was a strong acknowledgement of the variety of groups that offer significant support to food banks with food and money donations. Many food banks stated how vital this support was, and some mentioned that without this, the service would be ineffective. This puts Leicester at a slight advantage nationally, as the city is more religious than England as a whole (Leicester City Council, 2015). The number of people that identify as religious is 3% higher in Leicester than the national average.

Summary

- Food banks remain distinct from one another.
- There is limited provision at weekends across the whole city.
- 80% of food banks have a Fareshare subscription.
- Faith groups are a vital support for food banks all over the city. 68% percent of Leicester food banks receive help from these sources.
- There has been identified a degree of competition between some of the food banks in the city.
- Food banks are keen on establishing a network in which they can work co-productively.
- The food bank presence in Leicester is constantly changing.
- The number of food banks in Leicester has doubled since 2012, even with the closure of some emergency food providers in the city.
- The rate of increase in service users is around 10%



4. Findings: Issues identified

4.1 Multiple use and falsifying need

One concern that featured heavily in the interview stage was that some food bank users were accessing multiple services on a regular basis. These individuals were 'stocking up' on emergency food and this was considered unacceptable to the food providers.

'I usually find out because someone else will tell me. They grass each other up and say he's using a food bank in town you know.'

'I don't know how they do it but they give me a referral form and they've got more forms they are giving to other food banks. I check that the forms I get are real but I don't know if other places do.'

This is not appreciated by emergency food providers because there are people in genuine need that are not accessing food banks. The food providers want to target these people, and feel that a standard referral system, or a stricter regime can help to eliminate those that are not as needy as they suggest. However, the reluctance of some food banks to work co-operatively means that this standardised referral system may take time to establish.

'We've had people coming for a food parcel and then I've seen them in the shop five minutes later buying booze and fags. It makes me angry because I limit what I give out so it will last, and people with no money at all go without.'

'We've seen one family and every single member has got a referral letter. They all live in the same house but come in separately like I won't notice. I'll give them enough food for the whole family but I feel like they're trying to get more.'



'I've had someone get a food parcel from me and then a taxi pulls up to take them home. I don't understand it.'

'I've heard of people getting a food parcel and then selling the food. It's not that uncommon.'

Food providers recognise that there is a need for a more efficient system to avoid people taking advantage. Food bank staff work had to ensure their clients are catered to, and feel betrayed by some that don't respect their efforts. Staff were vocal in their desire for a fool-proof system that can ensure the most needy are provided for. They are keen to work more closely with referring agencies, because it is often here that the need is recognised.

4.2 Cooking and food knowledge

On several occasions, staff members mentioned that their clients often had very little knowledge of fresh produce. The food deliveries from Fareshare and other suppliers do contain some fruits and vegetables, but some clients are not only unaware of how to cook them, but also of what they are.

'We get things like fennel and no one knows what to do with it. I don't even know what to do with it.'

'I gave one lady some carrots and she said 'what am I supposed to do with these?!' She didn't know how to cook them.'

'We do get some produce but no one really wants it so I just give it to the school and they do a lunch club with it.'

It appears that there is a real need for a strategy to help enable people to maximise the produce and food they receive in parcels. Some of the food banks have lunch clubs, which create meals for the clients, or 'take-away' style services, which allow users to take a meal home with them. Some cook and freeze meals and reheat them on demand for clients. These services are very well received by service users, as they are provided with a nutritious meal which they haven't got to worry about cooking, and ensure that the available produce is used.



4.3 Homelessness and addictions

A few interviewees mentioned a recent increase in the amount of homeless clients they are receiving. They consider this to be in direct correlation with the increase in demand, recent hostel closures in the city and recent welfare reform. Homeless clients were described as white British in the north of the city, and eastern European and African migrants in the central area of the city. Numbers of both men and women are increasing in this group.

'A lot of the hostels have closed down and they've got nowhere to go'.

'It's a problem because I'm limited in what I can give them. It's no good me giving them a tin of soup because they can't cook it'.

These vulnerable clients are amongst the most difficult to help because of their unstable and inadequate housing circumstances. It is unlikely that these clients would be able to maintain employment, and if they are in receipt of benefits, it could be difficult for them to comply with the commitments required for some reformed benefits. In addition to this, some do not have cooking facilities or fuel.

Similarly, a number of food bank representatives mentioned an increase in intoxicated clients, or people known to have substance misuse issues.

'We get a lot of drunk people now or people we know are on drugs. I usually turn them away because I don't have much food to give out and I think there are people that need it more. They scare the kids and I don't want to have to deal with that.'

'They've got such chaotic lifestyles and they can't keep appointments and things so they can't conform to the system.'

These statements show some of the problems that those with substance misuse problems face. Their routines are usually not conducive to the requirements of new welfare reform changes and as a result are unable to satisfy the criteria. In addition to this, some of the food banks were reluctant to offer their services and food supplies to people with these issues. This is somewhat understandable, although not necessarily productive. However, there are some food bank sites that offer help with overcoming addictions.



4.4 Universal Credit

Interviewees were questioned about the expected impact of Universal Credit on their services. However, almost all food bank representatives had little or no knowledge of this impending change in the benefit system.

'We don't know anything about it really. What is it?'

'A few clients have asked us about it but we're not sure what to tell them'.

This is a concern because Universal Credit is to be introduced within the next year in Leicester (January 2016), and there is evidently a lack of preparation. Both support services and customers need to be informed well in advance in order for them to adapt to the extensive changes in a productive way. In order to help alleviate this lack of knowledge, a member of the Revenues and Benefits team at Leicester City Council delivered and distributed a presentation on Universal Credit to the food banks in the city.

After a concise briefing at interview, almost all food bank staff members interviewed stated that they were considerably worried about the impact it could have on their service. Some worried that the strain would be too much and that they would not be able to cope. Some indicated that they would develop plans in the coming months to ease the potential pressure. These plans included attempting to increase their stores of long-life food and possibly establishing new working relationships with businesses that may donate.

'We're already at breaking point, I don't know what we're going to do'.

'We need to start preparing just in case'.

There were a few food banks that said they were not particularly worried about the implementation of Universal Credit. This was because of the nature of their services, as some are concerned with issues that are not directly affected by benefits. For example, some are predominantly focussed on supporting sex workers or newly immigrated individuals, and these issues are often independent from benefits.



Summary

- There has been a recent rise in homeless men and women accessing food bank services in Leicester due to the closure of hostels. This group is difficult to facilitate for.
- People with addictions are sometimes refused entry into food banks. In order for this group to be better equipped to comply with the benefits system, some help with their addictions would be helpful.
- There are food bank clients that use multiple sites, and staff sometimes question their motives.
- Many food bank users lack basic cooking and food knowledge and this affects the types of food and amount of food they receive at the food bank.
- Benefits claimants are largely unaware of what Universal Credit is and what it implies.
- Food bank staff believe that Universal Credit will impact their service significantly.

5. Findings: Services

5.1 Support services

There is a very comprehensive list of support services offered by the emergency food provision sites in Leicester. Many of the sites are primarily aimed at providing services before food provision, and have developed the food bank almost as a side line. Services offered across the city include, but are not exclusive to, advice on money, debt, pregnancy, benefits, domestic violence, housing and immigration. There are also places that offer counselling, training and enrichment activities. The sites all vary in the levels of professionalism and all that offer additional support said that they are well received by clients.

'Yes we offer support services to each client. We want to tackle the underlying issue, not just keep giving out food parcels.'

'I think we are very important to some people. We listen to them and it means a lot to them. Some clients have got nothing else and no one to talk to and so we are very important to them'.

These statements show that there are dedicated teams working to improve the situations of their clients, and how valuable these services are. For many people, these services are life changing in terms of receiving help with mental illness, debt or obtaining additional benefits. The vast majority of food banks were a respected amenity in the community and the friendly and informal nature of



the service meant that service users were comfortable in their company. Food bank staff often had close friendships with their service users, and this seemed to be an advantage as opposed to an authoritarian and formal relationship, which users might have with DWP staff or support workers. Another trend in the interview data was that clients were often completely unaware of the support available to them in the city. In addition to this, some of the food bank staff were not familiar with the help available outside their own facility. Some staff were not sure of other services in their own ward.

'We're often the last resort and people don't know what support is available and where.'

This would suggest that advice and support services are not publicised to the extent that they should be, if their target clients, and support providers, are uninformed. It is also evident that people would benefit significantly from an increased knowledge of support services, because those that already exist at food bank sites are popular. There is clearly a demand for them that in some cases is not being met. However, a good proportion of food banks were reluctant to advertise their services through fear of being overwhelmed. Many are happy with their current arrangements and are not interested in sharing their details with other agencies. On the other hand, some food banks do want to increase their client base, are keen to publicise their services and are willing to share their information in order to attract more clients.

5.2 Form-filling

Almost all of the food banks described form-filling help as an important and appreciated service. These forms ranged substantially and included government, immigration, local authority, medical and passport forms. Letters from the Department for Work and Pensions were among the most commonly misinterpreted by clients.

'We get a lot of people needing help with form-filling. People just don't understand the letters- they're too complicated.'

'We get people that can't read English very well and the letters are so confusing. They need to be more sensitive to the people that they're dealing with.'

'I don't even understand some of them!'



These accounts are consistent with previous studies that considered complicated systems and unclear communications to be a fundamental factor in disengagement and subsequent punishment in the form of a sanction. According to the interviewees, many clients cannot comprehend letters about their benefits and often gain significantly from holistic and sensitive support.

5.3 Benefits advice

The majority of food banks offered benefits advice and many said that this was their most popular service.

'It's mostly benefits advice that people ask for. They don't know what they are and are not entitled to and the Job Centre never help them.'

The food banks that did not offer benefits advice stated that they do receive enquiries about benefits and so they signpost out to other agencies to ensure clients get the help they need. Benefits

and housing advice were by far the absent services most in demand. This suggests that people are struggling with welfare reform.

'We get a lot of people asking for benefits advice and we usually signpost them out. I would love to help them but I don't know enough about it.'

Undoubtedly the most recurrent issue regarding benefits was loss of income from sanctioning, followed by switching benefits and waiting for a new claim to be processed. Sanctioning was repeatedly identified as the main reason for clients accessing food banks, and the food bank staff were very illustrative in their experiences with sanctioning.

'These sanctions need to stop. They're not fair. Everyone is getting sanctioned for things they can't control.'

'I'm sure they're doing it to catch people out.'

'How can they expect people to live on nothing?'

It is clear that those in customer-facing roles are dissatisfied with the sizable effect that sanctioning is having on their clients. The occurrence of a sanction is linked to a reform in Job Seeker's Allowance, and so this should be highlighted as a particularly problematic benefit. Secondary to this, food bank staff stated that transitions from one benefit to another were an area for concern. This



was usually when customers had moved from Disability Living Allowance to Employment and Support Allowance, after they had been found fit to work. However, there were often problems with the migration process, in which there was often a period of time that customers had no income. The third most prominent benefits issue was the period of time waiting for a new claim to be processed. Some food bank representatives mentioned customers waiting weeks and even months for the first payment of a new claim. The Benefit Income Cap was not mentioned in any of the interviews and so was clearly not considered to be a significant issue by participants.

Summary:

- **Support services enhance the offer and are well received and vital in communities.**
- **Food banks and their clients are sometimes unaware of the support services available in the area.**
- **Communications from authority organisations are often too complex and do not inform their customers.**
- **Benefits advice is the most required service among the food bank users.**

6. Findings: Client demographic

Information on clients frequenting food banks could be crucial in establishing the effect of welfare reform on those affected. Finding the demographic of service users can help to determine which areas of welfare reform are particularly detrimental, or which groups are most in need. The vast majority of food bank representatives stated that there was no specific user profile and that there was an unpredictable variety of clients accessing their services. There are no trends in family structures, gender or age of clients, and many food banks said that this has always been the case. Some food banks did have high proportions of clients from ethnic minority backgrounds, although this was because of the type of food bank or the location. Some food banks worked specifically with people from ethnic minority backgrounds or migrants, or were situated in settlements with high proportions of ethnic minority groups.

‘It’s always been very varied; there’s no uniform client. Everyone is different with different issues, which makes it difficult to help’.

‘We never know who’s going to come through the door next. We’ve even had people from quite affluent areas like Queniborough. You never know who you’re going to get.’



This evidently ambiguous client base is problematic as it suggests there are many complicated issues, and no single benefit creating obstacles. From these statements, it appears that there is an abundance of problems and that many benefits are precarious in some way. This will make the identification and implementation of efficient support difficult because of the vast diversity. One issue identified by many of the food banks was that clients are often travelling to food banks that are a significant distance from where they live. This was the case with clients that live within close proximity to another suitable food bank that they were unaware of. This was flagged as an issue mainly because of the inconvenience to the client, and because it meant that some food banks were overwhelmed, while others were quiet. It is noteworthy that this position is contributed too by the providers themselves. The survey each year produces a reference tool of the provision in the city, detailing location, operating hours, referral route and where applicable qualifying criteria. The providers have collectively requested this list is not distributed to the public as they have concerns this will increase demand and 'swamp' them. As we are responsible for this information we have adhered to this request however this does mean the information for the public is not as accessible as it should be and instances of this nature will continue.

Summary

- **Food bank users are very diverse and come from a wide range of backgrounds. It is difficult to pinpoint the most problematic benefits at this point.**

7. Findings: quantitative user survey

7.1 Using food banks

The second stage of the research yielded a reasonable response from food bank users. After food bank staff were given a month in which to get their allocated number of surveys complete, 102 responses were returned. These 102 responses were from nine food banks. There was a decent dispersal in terms of locations across the city and there were responses from people living in all areas of Leicester.

After contacting the food banks regarding the response rate, many food banks reported that it was very difficult to persuade clients to fill in the questionnaire. This was because clients are often uncomfortable with receiving emergency food, do not want to discuss it and are keen to be in and out as quickly as possible. In addition to this, some food banks stated that they had had a recent influx of surveys from different organisations and thought that clients may feel overwhelmed.



Is the respondent using their nearest accessible food bank?

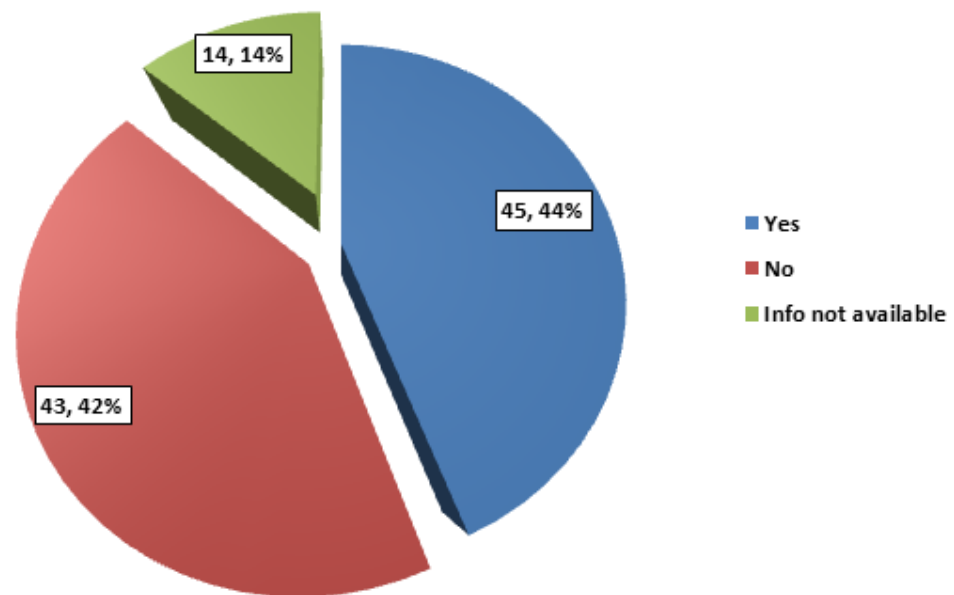


Figure 2

Participants were asked for their post code or their area of residence. This information was compared to the area in which the food bank they had used was, in order to determine how far clients were travelling to get emergency food. Post codes were 'matched up', to see whether clients were using the food bank nearest to them.

The chart shows that 44% of respondents were using the food bank closest to where they live which was accessible. Around half of those that were not using the food bank closest to where they lived were visiting city centre sites. Two of the food banks were specialist and targeted at people affected by HIV and so this could explain why people were travelling further. 40% of those that are not using the food banks closest to them come from the western area of the city, in Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields. Despite this, there is a prominent food bank presence in this area, in which three of the largest facilities in Leicester are located. All three of these facilities were struggling with demand at the time of research, and so this may explain why people in this area are travelling further to access emergency food.



Respondents' location by ward

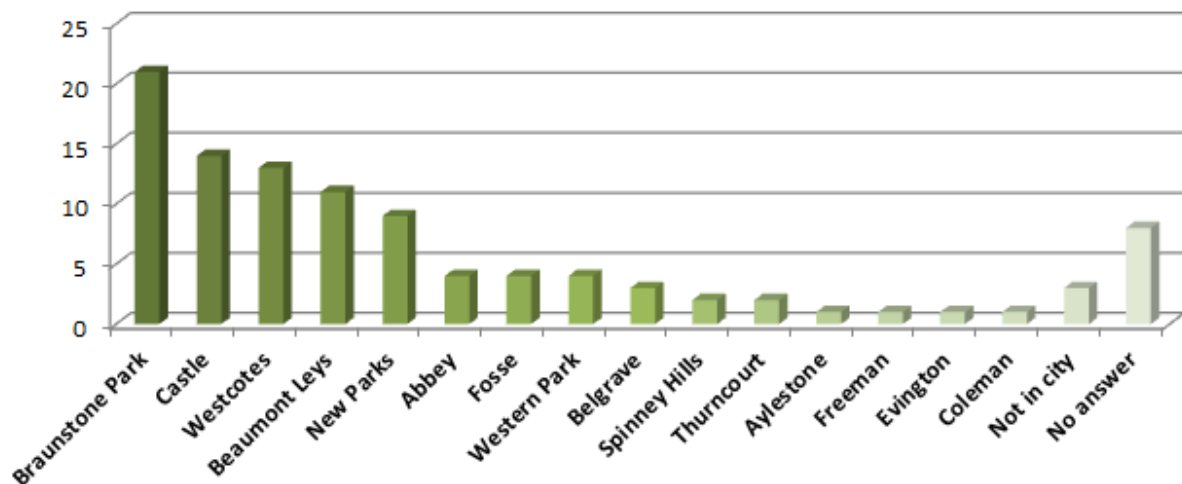


Figure 2

It is also worth noting that people from the Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields area that were not using their closest food bank were typically using a food bank that is reasonably close by. This would suggest that most people do visit a food bank close to their area of residency, even if it isn't the closest food bank to them. This could mean that people are not necessarily aware of the support around them. This could be improved, if people were made more aware of food banks in their area, although some food banks are reluctant to advertise their services.

This data is consistent with previous research and census data, which suggests that the LE3 and LE4 areas are some of the most deprived in Leicester. The New Parks area is considered to be the third most deprived in the city, and Beaumont Leys is the fourth, according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2007). Also considered to be amongst the most deprived is the Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields ward (second), which again reflects the survey data.



Respondents' locations by post code

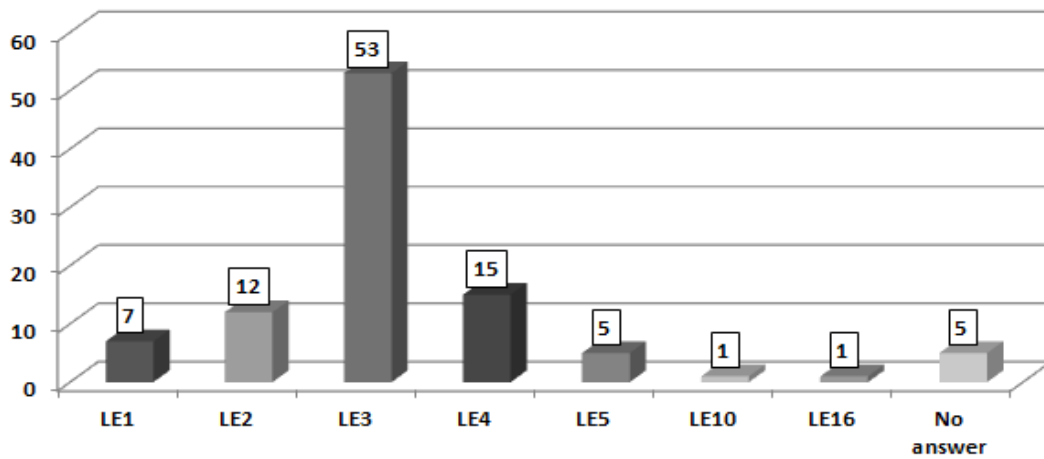


Figure 3

What is the main reason you need to use a food bank?

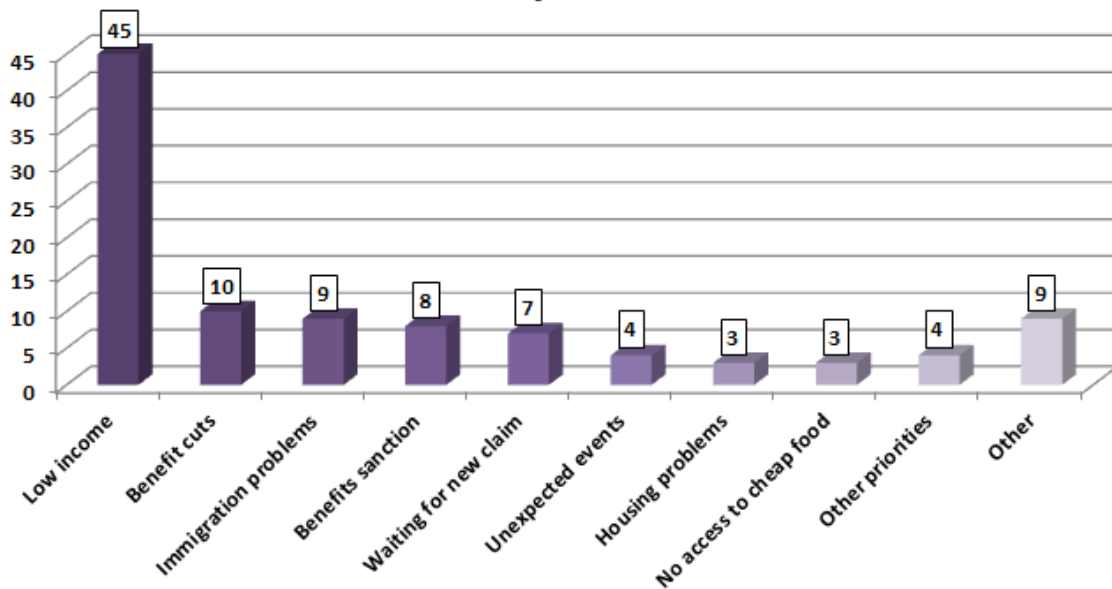


Figure 4



Participants were asked about why they were using a food bank in order to identify problem areas. The graph shows that by far, the main reason people felt they had to use a food bank was because their income was so low, it prevented them from purchasing food themselves (44%). This seems to suggest that helping people to manage their money in a more efficient way could be a response to food poverty, as opposed to other issues which could help with immigration issues or benefits claims. Interestingly, benefit sanctions appeared relatively infrequently, which is not consistent with the findings from the previous research. Food bank staff stated that benefit sanctions were the main reason for the use of their services. However, in more recent conversations, some staff have mentioned that sanctions have become much more uncommon. People are struggling most with insufficient funds and so helping people to maximise their spending power would be beneficial.

How long have you been using food banks?

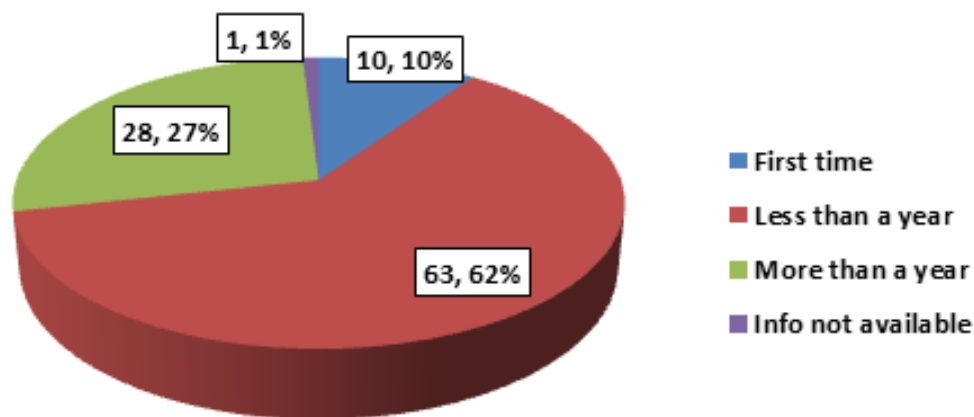


Figure 5

In order to gauge the extent of food bank use, people were asked about their length of use, whether they use more than one food bank and if they think they will need to use a food bank in the future. The chart shows that the majority of respondents had been using the food bank for less than a year, but had visited more than once. Ten people were using a food bank for the first time, and 28 people had been using them for more than a year. This shows that just over a quarter had been using emergency food provision for more than a year, meaning that their situation had not improved in this time. 10% of respondents were using the food bank for the first time, which is consistent with the findings from the previous stage of research. On average, the amount of new clients the food banks reported seeing on a weekly basis was 10%. This is not necessarily a good thing, as it shows that 90% had used a food bank before and so their circumstances were not improving.



Do you use more than one food bank?

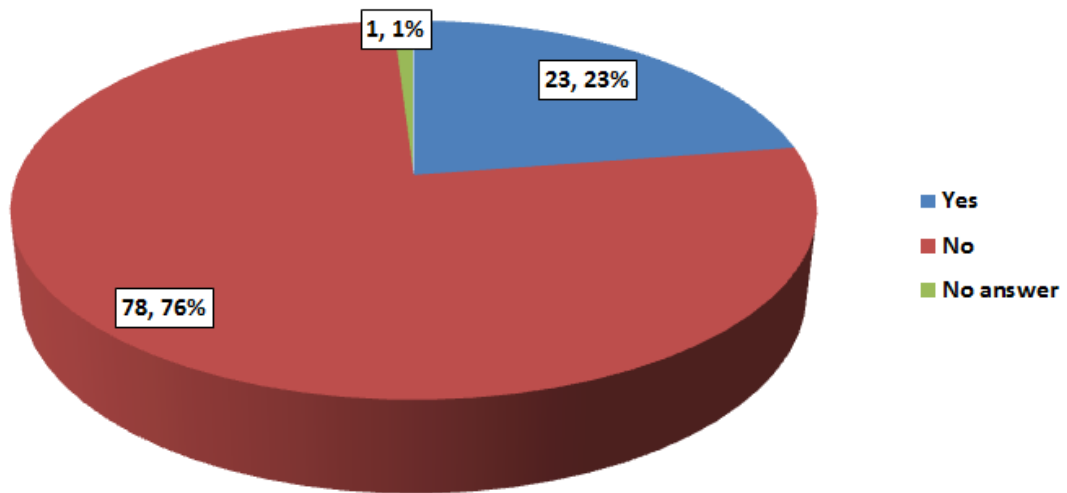


Figure 6

The question on whether clients were using multiple food banks derived from conversations with food bank staff. They were concerned that people were either more needy than they originally appeared to be, or that people were taking advantage of the system. The survey suggests that just under a quarter of food bank users had accessed more than one food bank. These respondents were dispersed across the city with no particular pattern or similarities. The issue of multiple use is not too much of a problem, as these users make up a small proportion of the sample.

Interestingly, a large majority (86%) of respondents felt that they would have to use a food bank again in the future. This shows that people have little security and feel that their financial future is uncertain. Again, money management help could improve this statistic and make people feel more able to manage. Most of the twelve people that felt they would not need to use a food bank again stated that their main reasons for using the food bank were housing issues, immigration problems and a benefit sanction. This seems to make sense, as these issues are typically temporary.



Do you think you will need to use a food bank in the future?

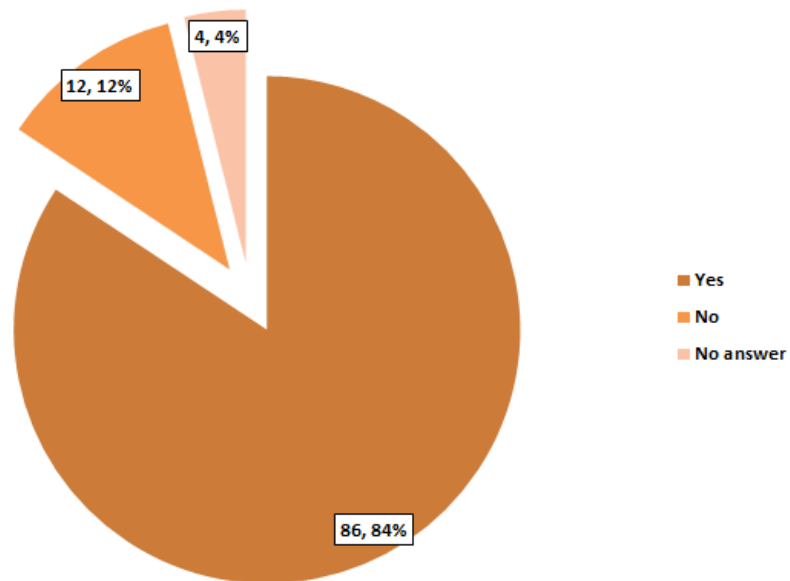


Figure 7

Summary:

- Most of the sample was from Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields, which is consistent with the Deprivation of Multiple Index ranking.
- People are generally not travelling far to visit a food bank.
- Low income is the primary reason for use. Money management help could have the biggest impact on the sample.
- People are uncertain about their financial futures and again, money management help could have a positive impact.



Findings: Support Services

The survey included questions about support services that they had accessed and whether they were helpful. Support services in this context refer to many different types of help. There are a wide variety of services available throughout the city, which range from intensive holistic support from independent voluntary organisations, to informal and basic discussions with food bank staff. There was no stratification of the support services available, because this would have over-complicated the survey by adding length and detail, which the respondents may not have understood. Therefore any references to support services in this section are purely generic. Information gathered from this section could be used as a base on which further research could be developed if required. This section was an attempt to identify which services in the city were the most accessible, which were the most useful and which could be improved.

The graph shows that by far, the most accessed services (and presumably the most accessible), are those related to housing and benefits. This is consistent with the first part of the research, in which food bank staff claimed that benefits advice was the most sought after. Despite this, not all service users considered these services to be useful. 33% of people that accessed housing advice did not find this service useful and 44% did not find benefits advice useful. These proportions of

Support Services - access & usefulness

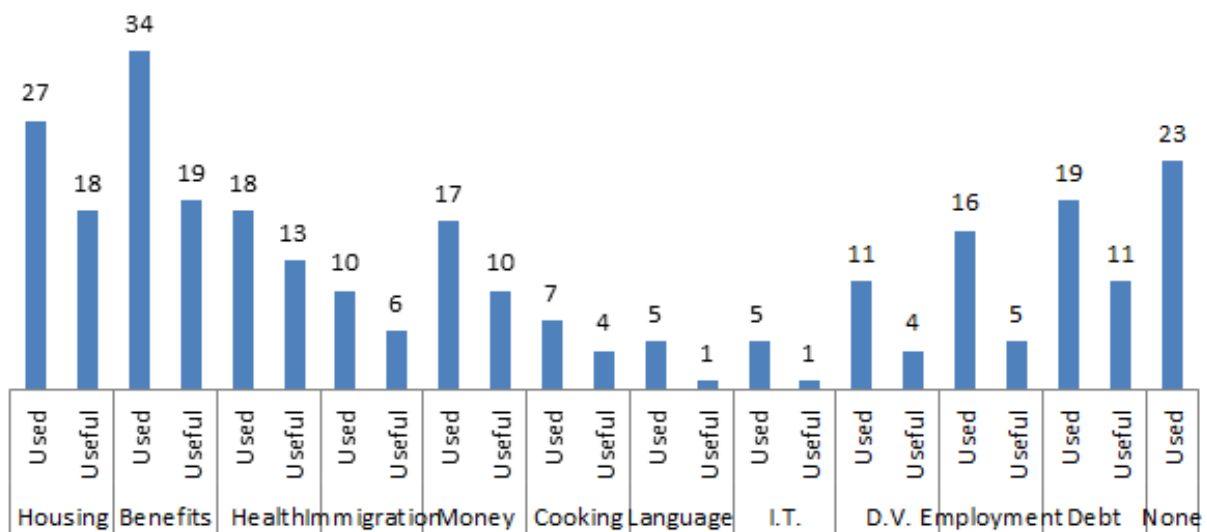


Figure 8



dissatisfaction are quite high and so these could be areas to address.

The services accessed the least include language support and IT. This is not surprising, as previous research has suggested that language and IT skills are often barriers to employment, and so their lack of accessibility could explain why very few of the sample is employed, but most claim Jobseeker's Allowance. People that did access these services did not find them useful. If these two services were to be made more accessible and valuable, then it could be beneficial to people in finding employment.

The service considered most useful were those related to health (mental and physical). These services were found to be useful in 72% of cases. This could be because there are a number of food banks that are specifically aimed at people with ill health, and have comprehensive support available. The first stage of research included visits to some of these establishments and both staff members and service users described the importance of the services to clients. These services were described as genuine life-lines for people in need of the specific help and so this could account for the high opinion of these services. These services potentially do not need to be improved or expanded.

Previously identified as a potential solution, money management services had been accessed by 17% of the sample. However, of this group, over half said they did not find their experience of money management services useful. The services accessed which refer to money management were diverse and ranged from independent voluntary organisations dedicated only to this topic to more informal, non-professional discussions with food bank staff. This is one area that could be developed, as the data suggests that the main issue facing food bank users is that they are on a low income and just cannot manage on the funds they receive. In addition, the people that answered the survey tended to be uncertain about their financial future. These people could benefit from effective money management advice, and so improvements to the accessibility and effectiveness of these services in Leicester could be a consideration.

One notable feature of the support services data is that more than a fifth had not accessed any support services at all. This is potentially concerning because many people in the survey did find advice beneficial, and so this group absent from support services could be easily assisted, although they have not been signposted and could be unaware of what is available to them. This reflects data from the first part of the study, in which food bank staff said that many food bank users are unaware of what is available to them. This could mean that an effort to increase knowledge of support services and to signpost more often may be constructive.



Summary:

- Benefits and housing advice are the most accessed services, although around of third of people did not find them useful.
- IT support and language skills are the least accessed services. A development of these services could benefit the sample.
- Health services were the most useful.
- Money management services are being accessed, but over half did not find them useful.
- Over a fifth of the sample had not accessed any support services.

Findings: About you

Data was collected on the demographics of the food banks users, in terms of their income, their household type, their gender, age and ethnicity. This was an attempt to understand which groups of people are most at risk of food poverty.

Regarding income, the majority of respondents were in receipt of benefits (60%). Thirteen people stated that their income was from another source not mentioned, and fifteen people said they had no income at all. One participant was in full time employment, and six were in part time employment. The most frequent benefit in the survey was Jobseeker's Allowance (31%), which is consistent with previous studies, and the findings from the first part of the research. This could suggest that employment support could benefit the sample, because most of them are considered fit for work and are living on an income too low to afford necessities.



What is your main income?

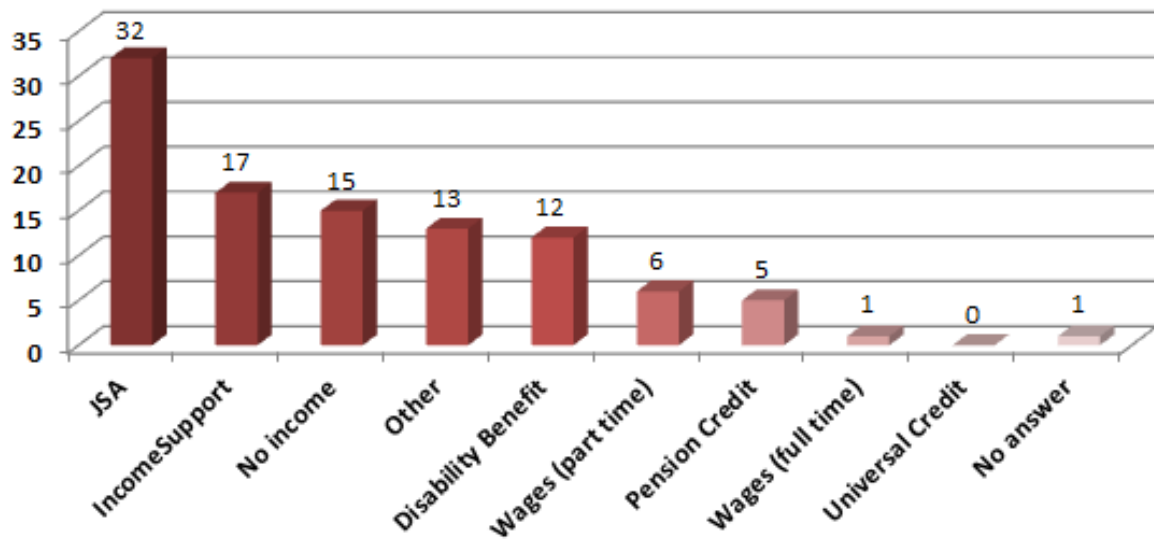


Figure 9

Do you care for children?

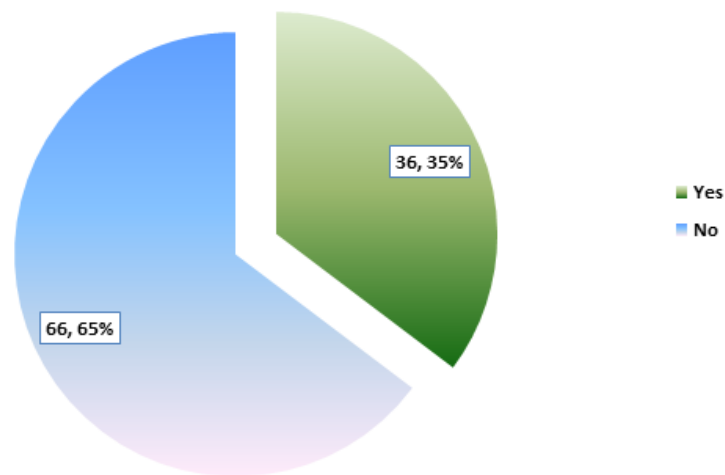


Figure 10

Most of the sample did not have children living in their household (65%). Of those that did, most of the families were relatively small. Nine households had only one child, ten had two children, five had three children, four had four children and one family contained five children. Five stated that they did have children but did not specify how many. This shows that few households in the study contained four or more children and that the families in the sample are not particularly large. Nineteen respondents (19%) were identified as lone parents, while 71% overall were single. This



could explain their low income, as there is only one member of the household that is economically active.

How many children do you care for?

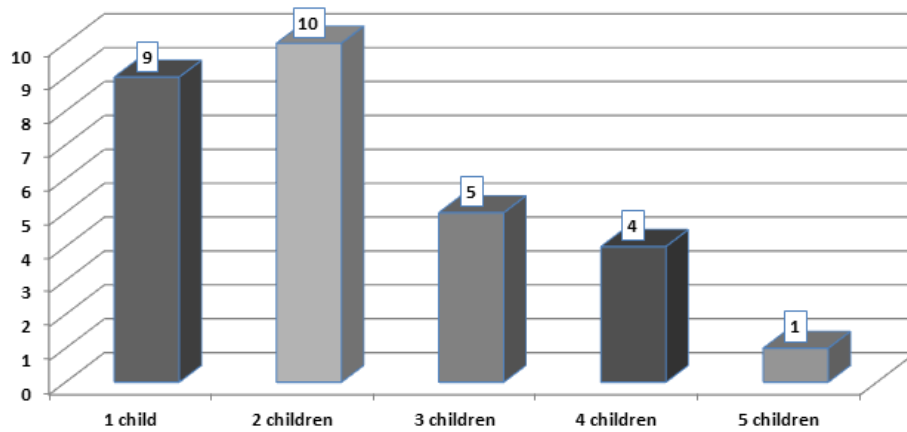


Figure 11

What is your age?

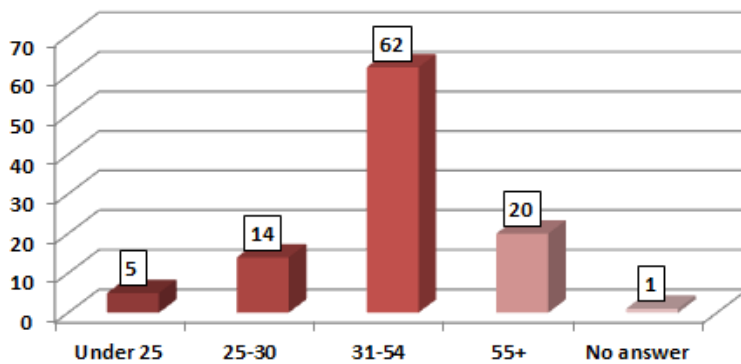


Figure 12

What is your relationship status?

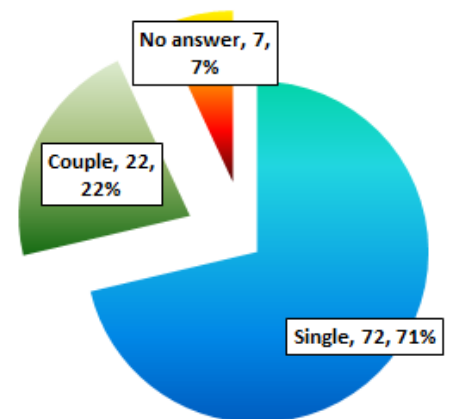


Figure 13

Most of the sample were aged 31-54 (61%) and there were only five participants under 25. This prominent age group is not typically disadvantaged in society, as opposed to younger and older



groups and so this is somewhat unusual. An attempt to identify why this is and aiming support services at this group could be beneficial.

In terms of gender, the sample was split quite equally, which suggests the issues related to food bank use have little to do with gender.

What is your gender?

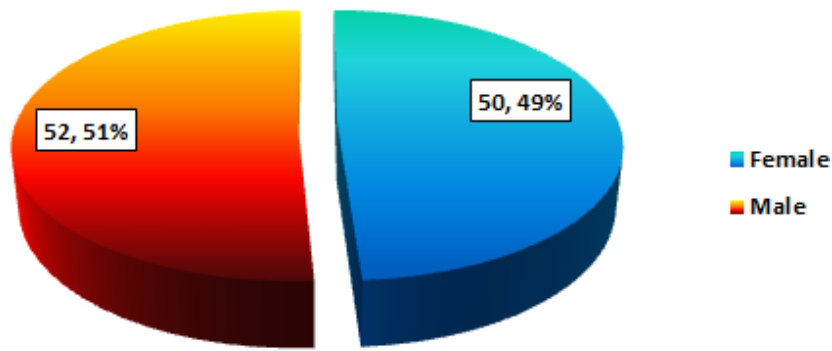


Figure 14

The ethnic group that appeared most frequently in the sample was white (72%). This is interesting, considering the sample was well dispersed across the city and included areas that were diverse in culture and ethnic backgrounds. This seems to suggest that more support services should be aimed towards white communities. There was only two Asian respondent and nineteen people from a black background. This is not consistent with recent conversations with food bank staff, in which it was stated that they have seen an increase in black African migrants in recent weeks.



What is your ethnicity?

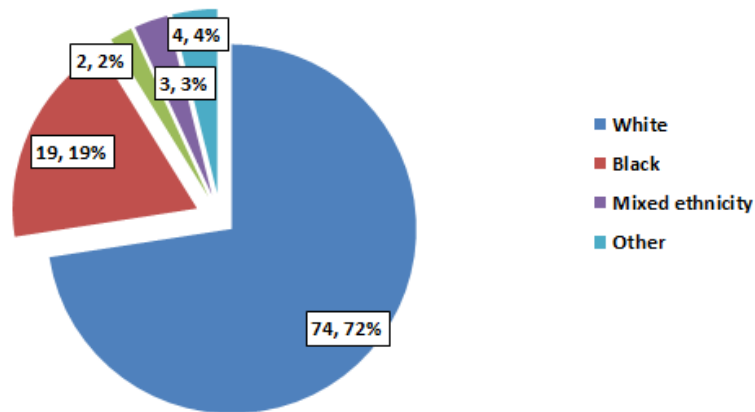


Figure 15

Refugees and asylum seekers made up approximately 14% of the sample, which suggests there is an issue with these groups in terms of food poverty. Support aimed at helping to alleviate the issues that these groups face could be helpful to reduce food poverty overall in the city. There are a number of support services aimed at immigration in Leicester, although only 10% of the sample had accessed these. Perhaps signposting could be increased to attempt to increase use of these services and potentially reach out to the 14% of the sample that identify as an asylum seeker or refugee. The 9% of the sample that preferred not to specify whether they are an asylum seeker or refugee is also significant, as it is quite a high proportion regarding the subject matter.

Are you a refugee or asylum seeker?

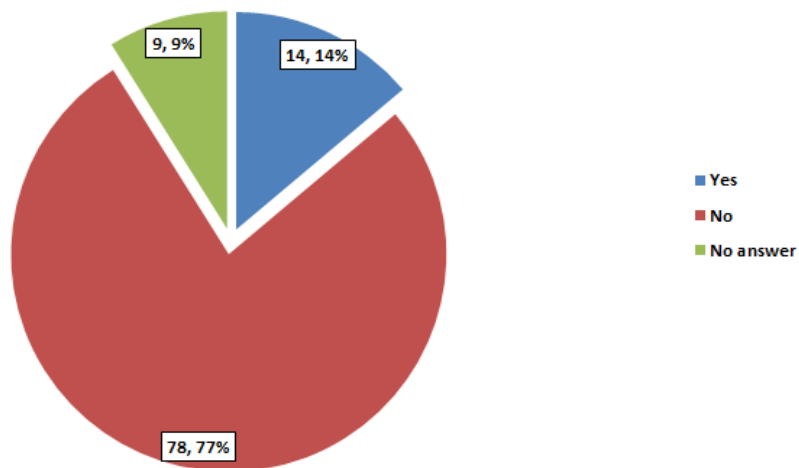


Figure 16



Summary:

- Jobseeker's Allowance was the most common form of income for food bank users (31%) - more employment support could benefit this group.
- Only a small number of households have four or more children (5%).
- There was a high number of respondents aged 31-54 (61%). This age group must be disadvantaged in some way.
- Respondents were mostly white (72%), although refugees and asylum seekers were represented disproportionately.

Recommendations

Objective 1: Leicester City Council to continue to survey and monitor the emergency food demand and provision in the city.

Objective 2: Leicester City council to continue to monitor the emergency food demand and provision in the city for the weekend/bank holiday periods. Where there is fluctuation consider what action may be necessary.

Objective 3: Leicester City council to continue to offer support and facilitate the network achieve collaboration and partnership working across the provision.

Objective 4: To develop effective solutions to support this group with their emergency food needs and support inter scheme sharing and re-distribution of surplus food through the Food Network Support Group (FNSG).

Objective 5: The Food Network Support Group (FNSG) to plan, develop, implement and monitor a robust referral scheme between providers and referral agencies.

Objective 6: To survey and review user cooking skills, cooking facilities and affordable fuel to inform FNSG to plan, develop, implement and monitor a training and support package to assist and enable this client group to understand western food, develop their cooking skills, provide recipes to cook the food they receive thus reducing food waste and developing the household skills making the food provided sustainable.

Objective 7: To facilitate the FNSG understand the client group and their specific needs through awareness training.



Objective 8: To develop effective solutions to support this group with their emergency food needs.

Objective 9: To explore and develop the opportunity for food providers to formally refer clients on to support groups where applicable.

Objective 10: To develop and deliver an effective awareness and communication programme for claiming and understanding Universal Credit with particular focus in the sector around advice and support available in the city.

Objective 11: To develop and deliver an effective awareness and communication programme advice and support available in the city.

Objective 12: To raise awareness of emergency food support in the city for the public whilst providing reassurance to the sector around demand.



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Food banks in operation 2013-15:



 Food banks operating early 2015

1. Mowmacre Hill TARA
2. Christ the King Church
3. Barley Croft Community Centre
4. Northfields TARA
5. Peace Centre
6. Contact Project
7. Highfields Food Bank
8. Leicester Charity Link
9. Welcome Project
10. Open Hands Trust
11. Faith in People
12. The Centre Project
13. Leicester Aids Support Service (LASS)
14. New Futures Project
15. Gilmorton Development Group
16. Mosaic Church
17. Women's Welcome Project
18. B Connected
19. B Connected
20. B Connected
21. Vineyard Storehouse
22. New Parks STAR
23. Zinthiya Trust

 Food banks ceased operation since 2013

1. Beaumont Lodge Neighbourhood CIC
2. Beaumont Leys STAR
3. Healthy Living Centre
4. Emerald Centre
5. Leicester Progressive Spiritualist Church
6. Saffron Lane Resource Centre
7. Saffron Lane Children, Young People and Families Centre
8. The Linwood Centre
9. Eyres Monsell STAR
10. Eyres Monsell Community Centre
11. Eyres Monsell Children, Young People and Families Centre

