## 6.1 Free food typologies

This section is based on a detailed review of 17 of the most relevant studies. Models considered include food banks operated by the Trussell Trust, independent food banks (part of the IFAN network) and community fridges.

**Definition – food bank**

*“Food banks are run by charities and are intended to be a temporary provision to supply emergency food. There are no official statistics on food banks, but there are around 1,300 Trussell Trust food banks and 1,034 Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) food banks in the UK.[[1]](#endnote-1)”* (April 2021 estimates, House of Commons Briefing)

*“Food banks are run by volunteers, churches and charities. A food bank is a charitable resource which distributes food to those in need of it at least once a week.’[[2]](#endnote-2)* (House of Commons Briefing)

Food banks source food from public donation at local collection points, surplus food donated by businesses and redistribution community schemes, as well as procurement via their own funds. Food banks largely depend on philanthropy from individuals, local businesses, charitable trusts and foundations, but also raise monies through fundraising initiatives.*[[3]](#endnote-3)*

The term 'food bank' can refer to one of two types of service: a large redistributor of rescued food to smaller charities that provide cooked and/or uncooked food to food insecure populations, or a service that provides grocery items directly to clients. For the purpose of this review, food banks will be referred to as the latter, direct services only, which are sometimes called 'food pantries' or 'food shelves' as the former 'food banks' rarely work directly with community members in need.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Models**

In 2020-21 the Trussell Trust supplied more than 2.5 million three-day emergency food parcels, an increase of 33% on the previous year. Around 40% of these went to children. IFAN, meantime, reported a 126% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed between February 2020 and May 2020.

The Trussell Trust is an anti-poverty charity that operates a network of food banks across the UK while campaigning for the end of their necessity. It is the primary source of data on food bank use in the UK. It provides food parcels to people who meet certain requirements and are referred to it by professionals such as doctors, health visitors, social workers and the Citizens Advice. The Trussell Trust gathers its administrative data from the referrals required to access its support, and generates a wide range of analysis from it, including the numbers of adults and children receiving food aid and their reasons for needing it. The Trussell Trust runs over half of the UK's food banks, and has a long archive of published data, but this data should be considered incomplete as independent food banks have also operated across the whole of the UK.

Similar to The Trussell Trust food bank model, many food banks in IFAN, the Independent Food Aid Network require potential clients to have a referral from a third-party agency. Significantly, 39.5% of food banks did not require referrals from third-party agencies (i.e., accepted self-referrals).[[5]](#endnote-5) IFAN is increasing the amount and range of data and analysis it produces.

The majority of food banks have eligibility criteria to target those most in need – for example claiming benefits like Universal Credit or Free School Meals.[[6]](#endnote-6) Published eligibility criteria were not found, but it is possible to piece together the likely components[[7]](#endnote-7) and insights from the Trussell Trust’s Yorkshire and Humber Regional Manager later in this chapter add further understanding to their approach with people requiring free food aid.

Eligibility for food banks and other approaches such as food pantries are not well understood by those who use or need to use them, creating what is referred to as a ‘messy space’. A contact from Citizens Advice Service describes how eligibility “is dealt with on a case-by-case basis.”

Research from 2020 found there was a significant overlap (94%) between people who met at least one of two criteria to define destitution and those being referred to food banks.

*“People were defined as destitute if they lacked two or more of the following six essentials over the past month because they could not afford them (the ‘destitution on essentials’ criterion), or their income was so low (less than £10 per day for a single person AHC) that they were unable to purchase these essentials for themselves (the ‘destitution on income’ criterion).”[[8]](#endnote-8)*

In the example below, a 2019 survey of independent food banks describe both the approaches taken by Trussell Trust food banks and independent food banks. A key (although not universal) distinction is that working people use independent food banks far more than Trussell Trust alternatives.

*“Some food banks operated quite similarly to Trussell Trust food banks, with regularly scheduled times when clients can pick up food, receiving referrals from local third-sector agencies, and limiting how often food parcels can be received. However, a number of food banks did not resemble the typical Trussell Trust food bank model at all; allowing self-referral or using other intake procedures, not placing any restrictions on the number of times someone could receive food parcels, and/or offering delivery services alongside regular pick-up times.*

*These characteristics might increase accessibility for people who are not connected to referral-type agencies and also amongst people experiencing chronic food insecurity. This may explain why some food banks reported having a large number of clients with characteristics rarely seen in Trussell Trust food banks (e.g., people in work, people with no recourse to public funds).”[[9]](#endnote-9)*

There is greater variation in how independent food banks accept requests for help and the extent to which they use eligibility criteria. The example below provides a pandemic snapshot:

*“During COVID, referrals approaches were adapted. 69 organisations, or 69% of our data set, have seen an increase in the number of self-referrals or have started to accept self-referrals (15%). Although telephone and internet-based systems have replaced some referral services, these are not necessarily accessible to people living with no or low income. Of the 69 organisations reporting to have started to accept self-referrals and an increase in self-referrals, 46% reported supporting people unable to access referral agencies. 19 of these 32 organisations had supported up to 40 households in this situation.[[10]](#endnote-10)”*

Where third party referrals are not required, service users are often required to bring some form of documentation to substantiate their claim; from proof of income or emergency / crisis. People may be required to complete a questionnaire at the food bank before a parcel is provided.[[11]](#endnote-11)

The characteristics of people using Trussell Trust food banks is also changing. By September 2022, one in five (20%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network were in working households.[[12]](#endnote-12) There has also been a greater increase in rural rather than urban areas since the pandemic.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Post pandemic the infrastructure to support food banks has changed. There is very limited evidence of food banks changing their model. In ‘Food vulnerability during COVID-19 (2022)’ one example was cited:

*“We also learned of an existing food bank in Bradford that was transitioning to a low-cost model at the time of data collection. Whilst these developments in low-cost community food retail models were generally perceived to be positive, participants also highlighted that there may always a need for some free food aid: “But I think there's always a need for food banks, free food, as well.”* (Partnership workshop, Bradford).[[14]](#endnote-14)

It is interesting to note that statistics on how many people are referred out of food banks, be it Trussell Trust or independent were not found in the published literature.

**Who uses food banks?**

Free food models such as food banks primarily exist to support people and households experiencing financial barriers to accessing food. This report does not explore food bank usage but there are many published sources of information that reveal who does or is at highest risk of using food banks and the reasons behind their usage. There are useful House of Commons Briefing Papers about this topic and the Trussell Trust produces a range of useful research reports that explore the populations that access their food banks, and how they feel this can be changed over time through shifts in cash-first policies.

**Definition – community fridge**

Community fridges are independent community assets, set up, owned and managed by not for profit and community organisations. All community fridges must register as a food business with their local authority and are responsible for their own food management systems and building relationships with any local businesses. Typically, a publicly accessible fridge is for the use of the whole community. The primary focus is on reducing food waste. In practice, community fridges have become an important source of food, particularly fresh food, for those in need.

**Evidence**

**Hungry? Food Insecurity, Social Stigma and Embarrassment in the UK (2015)**

* It has been argued that the growth in food bank use has been driven simply by the increase in the number of food banks. Lord Freud (2013) said that 'food from a food bank the supply is a free good, and by definition there is an almost infinite demand'. Language used to describe food bank users seems predominantly located in a discourse of blame.

**The role of food banks in addressing food insecurity: a systematic review (2016)**

* While some international literature has identified food banks as a valuable source of food assistance for food insecure populations, because of limited choice, and poor nutritional quality and quantity of donated food, there is some concern relating to the ability of food banks to prevent or remedy food insecurity and hunger.[[15]](#endnote-15)
* This meta review identified 14 studies examining food security, 13 nutritional intake, and 24 considering clients’ needs and choices in relation to food bank use. On effectiveness, Martin and colleagues (2013) used a randomised controlled design to determine the effectiveness of a food bank intervention in promoting food security and found a decrease in food insecurity as a result of case management and food bank choice.[[16]](#endnote-16)
* While food banks may not be able to resolve all client needs, they do have a role to play in reducing the impact of food insecurity. This review found three key reasons that food banks are facing difficulties in resolving these client needs: 1) The number of food bank clients is increasing; 2) Donations are not increasing with demand, or donations received are not appropriate; 3) Food bank staff are not highly enough trained around nutrition to provide advice and education to clients.

**FareShare network; The Wasted Opportunity: The economic and social value of redistributed surplus food; the current and potential cost avoided by the UK public sector resulting from FareShare’s work (2018)**

* An analysis of operational characteristics of food banks in The Trussell Trust network has found that the number of hours they operated and the number of distribution centres giving out food were both associated with volume of food bank usage. These relationships interacted with indicators of need, suggesting that where food bank distribution centres are less available, there is lower use for a given level of need.
* Other factors such as the use of referrals, religious affiliation, and poor transportation may also limit access to food banks.
* Patterns of usage across the country using aggregated area statistics highlighted that food bank usage was higher in areas with higher unemployment, higher numbers of sanctions applied to benefit claimants (these stop benefit payments for a minimum of 4 weeks), and deeper reductions in spending on benefit entitlements under the Coalition Government from 2010[[17]](#endnote-17)

**A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network. (December 2019)[[18]](#endnote-18)**

* 44% of independent food banks imposed no restriction on how often people could receive food parcels, and 17.5% allowed access to food parcels 18 or more times in a year. Over 30% restricted access to food parcels to 6 or fewer times over a year.
* About 45% gave out food parcels with more than 3 days' worth of food per person, and an additional 10% did not restrict food parcel content.
* Almost 60-65% aim to provide fresh fruit or vegetables and/or meet healthy food guidelines, and 45.6% aim to provide Halal goods (if requested).
* 72% reported purchasing foods from their funding sources. Half of food banks received donations of surplus foods from supermarkets or other food enterprises.
* Interestingly, though over half indicated that their food bank was the core or main function of their organisation. Just over 56% were part of a faith group. These figures contrast with the Trussell Trust, which remain mostly church-based projects
* Just over half had paid staff but 47% had no paid staff. Almost 75% relied on five or more volunteers each week, and 21% relied on 20 or more volunteers each week
* Over 60% of food banks offered other services in addition to food parcel distribution. In addition to the provision of food parcels, almost all indicated they provided signposting to other services or assistance, and 60% offered other services in-house. Other services were classified into 6 main groups (affecting the kind of outcomes that might therefore arise in each model observed):

1: Practical services

2: Educational

3: Communal / social activities

4: Social support

5: Pastoral

6: Health/well-being

* Similar to The Trussell Trust food bank model, 15.8% independent food banks always require potential clients to have a referral from a third-party agency while 44.8 will make exceptions. Significantly, 39.5% of food banks did not require referrals from third-party agencies (i.e., accepted self-referrals). The majority of these indicated that referrals were often received from third-party agencies as well, even though formal referrals were not a requirement.

**Hubbub (a community fridge network)[[19]](#endnote-19)**

* Over 3,100 tonnes of surplus food redistributed, equivalent to over 7.5 million meals worth of food saved. Electric vans and cargo bikes created a reliable service taking surplus food directly to organisations who can redistribute it locally.

**Community fridges in the UK: an exploratory study (June 2020)**

* Emphasising the environmental angle was felt to normalise community fridge use.[[20]](#endnote-20)
* Cooking classes or events such as picnics for the whole community increase footfall and value/benefit.
* Investment is needed to enable community-led change: evidence of success of community projects, yet instability in short-term project funding and an over reliance on volunteers and small VCSE organisations that struggle to access appropriate support when required. *The Co-op is investing in the expansion of the fridge network to 2023.*

**Frome Community Fridge Impact Assessment (2019)**

* Records from just one week show that 1,780 individual items plus 134.5 kg of fresh produce collected, saving around 90,000 food items a year from going to waste.
* The impact of the fridge can be quantified in terms of its prevention of greenhouse gas emissions. There are two aspects to this: the prevention of additional emissions through decomposition in landfill; and the avoidance of emissions from additional production (to replace that which was wasted).
* Key is the notion of enfranchisement, ensuring that everyone feels that they 'own' it as a part of the community. By existing in a public space and being open to public use, the fridge breaks down the clear-cut relation between 'business' and 'consumer'. The community fridge is a catalyst - for community, for sharing, and for developing new perspectives. It taps into the instinct for mutual aid that is all too often subverted by the mainstream organising principles of the economy and society.
* It’s clear that the community fridge is more than simply a container for the storage and collection of food, and that it’s positive impact goes beyond the facts of feeding people and avoiding food waste. The fridge is a part of the community - it’s a hub and a meeting place, an event in the day for many people, even something to look forward to. As well as nourishing food it offers the respite that comes with a chat over a cake or a sandwich that some of us take for granted - for some the conversations that occur while waiting for the fridge to be filled may be their only interactions in a day.

**Food Insecurity: Understanding local delivery, impact and innovation in the North East Riding (2021)**

* Community fridge use increased stigma-free access to food; provided some solid volunteering experience for those at some distance from employment
* Success factors: supportive local community; passionate and committed volunteers; strong local partnerships and positive working relationships with stakeholders; sharing data and best practice with others; building on local assets and taking a co-production approach to project design and delivery; communication - with beneficiaries, partners and wider stakeholders.

**Food bank use surged during the pandemic but they can rarely provide all the help people need (2021)**

* A review of the evidence on food banks and other community food programmes in high-income countries found that the services' ability to meet the needs of people experiencing food insecurity was limited. There was little evidence of these services reducing food insecurity. Cash transfers and food subsidies were far more effective.

**The impact of novel and traditional food bank approaches on food insecurity: a longitudinal study in Ottawa (2021)**

* The majority of people who were food insecure at baseline remained food insecure at the 18-month follow-up, although there was a small downward trend in the proportion of people in the severely food insecure category. Conversely, there was a small but significant increase in the mean perceived mental health score at the 18-month follow-up compared to baseline. This study found significant reductions in food insecurity for people who accessed food banks that offered a ‘Choice’ model of food distribution and food banks that were integrated within ‘Community Resource Centres’.
* Perceived physical and mental health scores showed gradients across food insecurity levels, such that health scores decreased as the severity of food insecurity increased.

**Outcomes**

The outcomes below are derived from the following 17 sources:

1. A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network. (December 2019)
2. Community fridges in the UK: an exploratory study (June 2020)
3. Eating with Friends, Family or Not at All: Young People’s Experiences of Food Poverty in the UK (2018)
4. Evaluation: Pilot Project. Advice and Food Banks making a difference to people in food poverty (2015)
5. FareShare network; The Wasted Opportunity: The economic and social value of redistributed surplus food; the current and potential cost avoided by the UK public sector resulting from FareShare’s work, NEF Consulting (2018)
6. Feeding Hungry Children The Growth of Charitable Breakfast Clubs and Holiday Hunger Projects in the UK (2018)
7. Feeding the food insecure in Britain: learning from the 2020 COVID-19 crisis (May 2020)
8. Food bank use surged during the pandemic but they can rarely provide all the help people need (2021)
9. Food Insecurity: Understanding local delivery, impact and innovation in the North East Riding (2021)
10. Hungry? Food Insecurity, Social Stigma and Embarrassment in the UK (2015)
11. Interventions to address household food insecurity in high-income countries (2018)
12. Life in times of change - health and hardship in North Yorkshire Annual report of the Director of Public Health for North Yorkshire – ‘Want’ (2019)
13. The impact of novel and traditional food bank approaches on food insecurity: a longitudinal study in Ottawa, Canada (2021)
14. The nutritional quality of food parcels provided by food banks and the effectiveness of food banks at reducing food insecurity in developed countries: a mixed-method systematic review (2022)
15. The role of food banks in addressing food insecurity: a systematic review (2016)
16. Walking the breadline (2013)
17. Which types of family are at risk of food poverty in the UK? A relative deprivation approach (2017)

**Food banks**

* Food security at times of crisis
* Improved diet
* Improved physical health
* Improved mental health
* Increased awareness / connection to other types of support
* Volunteers feel sense of purpose
* Social benefits arise from interactions between users and with staff/volunteers
* Reduced household expenditure
* Reduced food waste to landfill
* Reduced greenhouse gas emissions

**Community fridges**

* Reduces stigmatisation by using community fridges
* By providing access to fresh foods, community fridges may provide healthier options and opportunities to try new foods
* Increased sense of community and enfranchisement

**For supermarkets / food providers:**

* Improved CSR for supermarkets
* Reduced cost of food disposal,

**Examples**

**The nutritional quality of food parcels provided by food banks and the effectiveness of food banks at reducing food insecurity in developed countries: a mixed-method systematic review (2022)[[21]](#endnote-21)**

Evaluation evidence on food banks that are taking more innovative and/ or enterprising approaches was not identified in the published literature reviewed. It is too early for example to understand the effectiveness of the new Trussell Trust strategy. This example, albeit generic and not UK-specific, was selected as it recognises that food banks work best as part of a wider system of support. Food banks are a lifeline, which improve dietary intake and food security in times of crisis. However, as a sole intervention, food banks do not eliminate the heightened food insecurity and poor diets of food bank users. Their efficiency is defined as the total weight of food items distributed by a food bank. However, the effectiveness of a food bank is defined by how well the nutritional needs of users are met by the service provided.

Food parcel quality and dietary quality were positively correlated and visiting food banks over once-per-month was associated with significantly higher dietary quality scores, compared with visiting less. Mousa and Freeland-Graves (2019) found over 40% of nutrient and food group intake was attributed to food parcels. Improving the nutritional quality of food parcels by adding fruit and vegetables and removing nutrient-poor snacks, significantly improved fruit and vegetables, vitamin C, and potassium intake. Food banks struggle to meet individual health, social, and cultural dietary needs in socially acceptable ways. Positive outcomes from diabetes-specific food parcels highlight the advantages of tailoring parcels to meet individual needs and preferences.

**Trussell Trust, Yorkshire and Humber and York Foodbank**

Laura Chalmers, Area Manager Yorkshire and Humber and Adam Raffell, York Foodbank Manager

There are 16 foodbank ‘franchises’ across Yorkshire and Humber, in turn comprising 88 foodbank centres. In York, there is one foodbank (managed by Adam) with 6 centres (typically churches). Each franchise includes distinct traits such as all of them using the Trust’s data collection system; and all work on a referral system with referrals coming from social workers, teachers indeed ‘any professional’. There are strong connections to people who refer individuals owing to their mental health difficulties too. Models vary with some being stand-alone foodbank charities, and others having a foodbank element to their wider charity purpose. The York Foodbank is a CIO and has a board of Trustees and 6 centres that between them are open 6 days a week. Interestingly, Adam, as the York Foodbank Manager says there are no criteria for referrers but notes the importance of having referrers / referring agencies they can trust.

*“The referral process is there to start an initial intervention to help. We encourage referrers to use their discretion. If they feel someone they know well, someone they have been working with long-term, who has a need, then the food is there for them. If that person has a need for multiple uses – such as 3 vouchers in a 6-month period – we would regard that as a point, a flag, of escalation and we’d be back in contact with the referrer to see why the person is still having these needs. We recognise that a food parcel doesn’t solve anything in of itself, its part of someone working with families. We want to be part of a holistic package of support. The referrers are so important as they are someone to go back to if an individual has been to a foodbank multiple times. We signpost people back to referral agencies.”*

Adam and Laura also explained that foodbank ‘sessions’ and activities are often available during the opening times such as life skills courses or sharing a hot meal together which can act as a further catalyst to encourage people using the foodbank to other support. Some people are coming because ‘they just need the food’, but even then there is information available about other support re: income, debt and employment. Volunteers at York Foodbank have been trained to ask open-ended questions and take any cues from an individual to identify opportunities to connect them to relevant support. Two of the foodbank centres in York run models with the features of a community hub and a community café too, meaning there is space and the conditions for encouraging conversations between people there – more than a transactional exchange of a voucher for a food parcel.

In a recent development the Trussell Trust has been focusing on financial inclusion, and has made £45,000 per year for three years available for any foodbank to access via its national strategy and funding. This is enabling a local safety net of advice and support to be put in place at each foodbank.

*“All but 2 of the foodbanks in Yorkshire and Humber have a Financial Inclusion Project, mostly enabling them to buy in the time of qualified Citizens Advice staff. This means that there is an advisor either in session when the foodbanks are open, or for some of the more rural foodbanks, a hotline service. The investment has also enabled the Trust to employ Financial Inclusion Managers. This investment started in 2022 and data so far suggests that the model is empowering for those foodbanks taking advantage of the opportunity.”*

Different perspectives about this model would be extremely valuable over time, from foodbanks, volunteers working alongside the advisors, the advisors themselves and of course people using the foodbanks. The Trust has also clearly put a great deal of thought into its training approaches with its volunteers who should each have learned about active listening, god rapport, keeping boundaries and how to manage challenging conversations – similar to the motivational interviewing observed across the North Craven Food Pantries incidentally.

*“We’re clear though that our volunteers don’t give advice – we’re not insured for that” but, we encourage them not to forget the social signposting, that local knowledge they have about parent and toddler groups and those local social activities that help connect people to one another. The Financial Inclusion Project has also developed something called ‘The Step App’ for signposting purposes.”*

The Trust has ensured that Local Area Coordinators (LACs) and Social Prescribers are aware of foodbank operating times and may sometimes do drop-ins as part of the sessions.

*“Whilst we want an end to foodbanks we do foresee a legacy where it’s not about a massive distribution of food, rather it’s about spaces where people connect around food. We want to see community spaces operating in their own right. Our goal is for food provision needs to reduce and more people access the foodbank centres to address problems or causes of insecurity earlier. The reality is that people don’t have enough money – it’s not about not having enough food. Other models, pay as you feel, social supermarkets, they only ever relieve symptoms like foodbanks. We need to focus more on financial inclusion and cash-first policies and support. Someone coming to a charity for food is not dignified however holistic the support on offer.”*

There are a range of outcomes arising from foodbanks Laura observes including:

* Project Managers were previously foodbank users so in these instances their lives have been changed
* The Trust’s model ‘pushes participation’ around food, mental health and suicide prevention
* Some foodbanks – and / or the charities that operate them - are seen as cornerstones of their communities thus providing safe spaces to attend / visit
* Volunteers and foodbank managers are in the front line collecting stories from people using the facilities providing valuable data and insights to help shape the Trust’s strategy

As far as Laura was aware there had not been a published impact report relating to their foodbanks, and it would be interesting to learn if there are any plans to evaluate the Financial Inclusion Project nationally, regionally or locally to inform future food + wrap around support service models.

Looking to the future Laura doesn’t think there will be an increase in foodbanks across Yorkshire and Humber, in fact, only one (franchised model) opened in the last 5 years.

*“Every area has a Trussell Trust or IFAN foodbank so we won’t increases franchise unless IFANs shot down and a gap is left in a place. However, existing foodbanks are having to look carefully at capacity as they have experienced a 90%-100% increase in demand in the past 6 months. To achieve the same experience that foodbanks have been able to offer such as 2 hour sessions, ‘stay as long as you like’ approaches or ‘come and see an advisor’ is a challenge with such high demand. It means longer opening times. It’s worse than COVID. It’s (the system) creaking. We’ve just done a big winter appeal so that we can get £5,000 for each foodbank.”*

Regards funding, Laura explains that the Trust gives grants to each foodbank for strategic projects and their operation relies on local donations and givers and ‘diverse income streams’. The Trust is less inclined to encourage their foodbanks to seek funding from the public sector.

*“Our foodbanks shouldn’t ever rely on local authority funding. Moreover, from a policy standpoint, we want to be able to make local welfare systems better so on that basis it’s hard to advocate for that unless we reject council funding for foodbanks.”*

The emphasis nationally and locally therefore is consistent. In putting an end to foodbanks for emergency food provision there is a need to invest in cash-first approaches instead or as a clear partnership goal for the future as can be seen in this example in Leeds.

**Cash-First pilot in Leeds**

Laura reported that after two years of collaboration the Trussell Trust held a launch event of its cash first pilot with Leeds City Council in late 2022 with 245 attendees (including 56 Councillors) and 8 people from DWP. This pilot includes Leeds North and West, Leeds South and East and Wetherby Foodbanks alongside the Trust and Leeds City Council, the latter confirming recently that they have decided to keep the cash-first element of their local welfare scheme long term. Documents about the pilot and a recording of the webinar are found here: [How we’re working with local government - The Trussell Trust](https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/working-with-local-government/)



For further information about the results of this pilot and the learning from its external evaluation please read the ‘Cash-First approaches’ chapter of this report (section 6.6)

**Financial inclusion**

Laura explains: “Our vision is for a UK without the need for food banks. Financial inclusion work can be at the heart of achieving this vision by supporting individuals to move forward with their lives without the need for ongoing reliance on your services. Over time, the benefit system has become increasingly complex, and more and more people find themselves in situations where their benefits have stopped or reduced, or they are not claiming their full entitlements without realising.

In the 2018/19 financial year, it is estimated that a staggering £15 billion went unclaimed , with this being likely to be a significant underestimate of the true figure. Many people are also unaware of the support available to help with managing debts and so find themselves prioritising unsustainable repayments leaving them unable to afford the basics. This is reflected in the fact that, sadly, the number of people requiring support from food banks is on the rise. There were over 2.5 million food parcels distributed in our network during the 2020/2021 financial year , which is a 128% increase to what it was five years ago . According to Trussell Trust research, more than half of those accessing emergency food in early 2020 had experienced a problem with their benefits in the last year. There is hope however, and financial inclusion is part of the solution, helping to address these underlying issues, empowering individuals, enabling people to take control of their finances and move forward with their lives without the need for food banks.”

**Other useful resources**

* Map of Trussell Trust and IFAN foodbanks available from Feeding Britain[[22]](#endnote-22) and useful insights about pilots including ‘[Affordable Food Clubs’](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CChillblast%5CDownloads%5CAffordable%20Food%20Clubs)
* Find out more about The Trussell Trust's Together for Change strategy - [Together for Change - Trussell Trust](https://www.trusselltrust.org/about/our-strategic-plan/our-strategic-goals/)[.](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/blog/cornwall-s-worrying-about-money-leaflet-and-building-momentum-for-change)

**Selby Community Fridge**

Selby Community Fridge opened during the pandemic, and in its first 6 months, distributed 2,435 bags (to June 2021) of surplus food to around 650 local people.

*“Despite COVID-19, the Community Fridge has been a resounding success, allowing those struggling with food insecurity to access free, fresh food, no questions asked.[[23]](#endnote-23)”*

Selby Community Fridge was created as a response to a tangible need in the local community for an accessible source of free, fresh food, without the need for referrals from a local authority or other agency. Developed by Selby Big Local with start-up funding from the Defra Food Projects Fund and support provided by Selby District AVS, Selby Community Fridge was conceptualised through consultations with residents.

This community fridge is now open three afternoons a week. The Fridge is open later on a Wednesday to make it more accessible. Day to day running is largely carried out by a group of 10 passionate volunteers. The Fridge’s social media presence is a vital part of the its continued success, providing an accessible platform to communicate changes in opening times, community events and generally create a space for community engagement. The project has developed useful links with the wider food support ecosystem:

*“We have a positive working relationship with Selby Food Bank, who will often make referrals to us to compensate for a lack of fresh foodstuffs in the food parcels they provide. Links with other agencies, such as Citizens Advice, means that Fridge visitors can be referred to additional support as needed.”*

There is currently a distinct lack of non-perishable goods being donated. That the Fridge is not means tested has led to frustrations where visitors are thought to have taken too much. Feedback from users of the Community Fridge has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the importance of the non-judgemental attitudes of our volunteers and just how critical the service provided by the Fridge is.

**Learning**

**Enablers / barriers**

The literature identifies a range of enabling factors, alongside challenges for these types of food model to address food insecurity.

Enabling ingredients

* Located in areas of high deprivation with access to food distribution centres.
* Offer more than simply food[[24]](#endnote-24)
* Food banks that exist within a wider system of support are likely to be more effective e.g. working alongside other partners e.g., developing the cash-first response pilot in Leeds
* Entrepreneurial and ethical[[25]](#endnote-25)
* Motivated volunteers

Challenges

* There is criticism that food banks can be stigmatising with the effect being that many who are very food insecure do not use them despite needing them most
* Resilience of smaller, independent food banks – thereby reducing the efficacy and reach of the food support system overall.[[26]](#endnote-26)
* Variability of approach and models may result in different effects (positive / negative)
* Insufficient quality food, funding, adequate refrigeration and storage
* Take up: while services such as food banks provide marginal help, they are ultimately limited in scope often leaving people still in dire situations. Food banks are still only used by a minority of low-income families, largely due to difficulties accessing the services, e.g., Trussell Trust food banks are typically only open for short periods of time during weekday working hours. Many people facing hardship avoid using these services because of stigma related to seeking this kind of support, as well as issues with fulfilling people's desired food needs.
* Evidence on the value of UK food banks is judged to be ‘scarce’ by academics.
* Associated, additional support linked to food banks require clear aims that are understood by staff and volunteers.
* The use of eligibility criteria raises a number of questions, and can undermine the dignity of users and act as a barrier to take up.
* Families participating in research for the Child Poverty Action Group charity "overwhelmingly" thought direct payments were better options than vouchers or food packages.
* Stronger networks, funding and policies to support food assistance programmes were suggested to support the development of needs-driven models.

[[27]](#endnote-27)

A potential enabler for the future are campaigns to raise public awareness / change minds and reduce stigma about food poverty.[[28]](#endnote-28) The policy landscape suggests that there is a ‘need to end food banks’ and to focus on more upstream (social security / cash-based) responses in order to address the causes rather than the symptoms of food insecurity.

**The case for free food typologies?**

*‘Everyone’s experience of poverty is different, and it’s vital that people receive tailored, dignified support.’[[29]](#endnote-29)*

While the pressing need from both non-working and working families for free food persists until mid-2023 at least[[30]](#endnote-30), then there is a case for food banks / free food model to continue to make a positive contribution to the support ecosystem in place. An inclusive food support ecosystem will, however, ideally include a blend of interventions, adapted for the communities they work in.

While cash-first approaches should have primacy, those with a responsibility for food systems and communities should consider how best to involve food banks / community fridges as part of a wider objective to *“promote and embed a wide approach to support household food insecurity focusing on inequalities.[[31]](#endnote-31)”*

Rather than viewing this type of provision in isolation, there is an opportunity for partners to more effectively use their expertise and to develop stronger links to provide pathways out of food bank usage – which implies a systems approach to tackling insecurity as a whole, recognising that this is at the root of many social issues.

It is too early to tell if the Trussell Trust’s new strategy – aiming to remove the need for foodbanks – is showing any evidence of progress. However, while the profile of the Trussell Trust has both advantages and disadvantages, their entrepreneurial spirit is one which should be supported and adapted by others. In particular, partners may wish to work with the Trussell Trust to encourage food banks to evolve and change their provision where this is considered in the best interests of those communities.

**Questions arising**

* Rather than reducing their role, to what extent can partners make better use of the expertise from the Trussell Trust and independent food banks to enhance provision[[32]](#endnote-32), *better still, to develop person-centred ways of tackling the root causes of food insecurity*?
* Partners may wish to commission further research to first identify, then consider in detail whether outcomes in areas without food banks are different from where this type of support is in place?
* How to explore the efficacy of the Trussell Trust’s new Financial Inclusion Strategy approach which has seen national investment to enable advice work to be more formally connected to the food bank centres (i.e. evaluation of any pilots in York and North Yorkshire?)
* How to understand, and support, any food bank to be connected into a wider system of support in York and North Yorkshire places, resulting in better preventative and wrap around interventions that help individuals towards a pathway of ‘good help’.
* The extent to which the sponsorship model that the Trussell Trust uses, and which has both admirers and detractors, is one that other food models could include.
* What is the role, if any, of local authorities in supporting any further expansion of community fridges in communities of York and North Yorkshire given Co-op’s planned investment with Hubbub - how can we identify what these plans mean for Y&NY?
1. Food poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals, House of Commons Briefing Paper, April 2021 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Food banks in the UK, July 2021, House of Commons Library [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Source: Feeding the food insecure in Britain: learning from the 2020 COVID-19 crisis - May 2020 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Source: The role of food banks in addressing food insecurity: a systematic review. 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network. December 2019 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. ‘Almost half (47%) of people referred to Trussell Trust food banks are in debt to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)’. Trussell Trust, Emergency food parcel distribution in the United Kingdom: April – September 2022 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The main reasons for food bank use (in descending order), from the 2019 review of independent food banks cited: Awaiting outcome of a benefit application (i.e. payment or decision), Benefit payment interrupted or reduced due to re-assessment, loan repayment, or other reason, High rates of debt meaning income insufficient to cover basic needs, Benefits currently stopped due to a sanction, Regular income insufficient to meet basic needs (e.g. food, housing, utilities), Inability to manage money due to issues such as gambling, addiction, or other problems, Unexpected outgoings (e.g. repairs, accident, funeral, relocation, help for family member), No recourse to public funds and ‘Other reasons’. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. ‘State of Hunger’ Building the evidence on poverty, destitution, and food insecurity in the UK Year two main report May 2021 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. ‘71% of food banks reported people in part-time work made up a large proportion of their clients; 62% reported people on zero-hour contracts made up a large proportion of their clients; and 36% even reported having a large proportion of people in full-time work. Among Trussell Trust food banks, only 14% of households using food banks include someone with employment, and this is very rarely full-time employment.’ A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network. December 2019 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Independent Food Bank Emergency Food Parcel Distribution. Comparing February – May 2019 with February – May 2020 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Other requirements for food bank use (instead of a third party referral) were: Completion of a registration form, Questionnaire/interview to assess need(s) conducted by food bank volunteer or staff, Required to present, Required to present proof of address, Required to meet with an on-site advice worker, Proof of income or income source or Proof of emergency/crisis (e.g. homelessness, redundancy, benefit delay, contact with other service agency etc.) [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Trussell Trust, Emergency food parcel distribution in the United Kingdom: April – September 2022 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Food banks in England in rural communities distributed 76% more parcels to September 2022 than pre-pandemic in 2019/20. Urban areas in England saw a 34% increase since the same period last year, and a 61% increase from pre-pandemic levels in 2019/20. Trussell Trust, Emergency food parcel distribution in the United Kingdom: April – September 2022 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Food vulnerability during COVID-19. Local responses to household food insecurity across the UK during COVID-19 (September 2020 – September 2021) An analysis of experiences from 14 local areas from around the UK and recommendations for future policy and practice appendix Katy Gordon, Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Simon Shaw and Rachel Loopstra [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Two examples are cited in: 1) Gentilini U. Banking on Food: The State of Food Banks in High‐income Countries. IDS Working Papers. 2013 2) Lindberg R, Whelan J, Lawrence M, Gold L, Friel S. Still serving hot soup? Two hundred years of a charitable food sector in Australia: a narrative review. Australian and New Zealand journal of public health. 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Martin KS, Wu R, Wolff M, Colantonio AG, Grady J. A Novel Food Pantry Program: Food Security, Self-Sufficiency, and Diet-Quality Outcomes. American journal of preventive medicine. 2013;45(5):569-75 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Loopstra et al. 2015b). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Based on a representative survey of 114 independent food banks providing food parcel distribution outside of the Trussell Trust's network across England. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. https://www.hubbub.org.uk/the-community-fridge [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. The primacy of community fridges is to reduce food waste – with supermarkets the prime focus. Despite the huge quantities of food that pass through community fridges it is useful to be aware that the level of food waste from retailers - which makes up most of the fridge's contents - only counts for 2% of the total food waste figure for the UK. The majority of food that is wasted in the UK (69%) is wasted by households, who make up only around 5% of fridge donations across the network. Source: Feeding the food insecure in Britain: learning from the 2020 COVID-19 crisis - May 2020 [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Based on a review of 21 studies and meta studies. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Feeding Britain is a charity with a vision of a UK where no one goes hungry. It supports a national network of 66 regional anti-hunger partnerships comprising more than 600 local organisations ranging from community centres and schools, to local authorities and social enterprises. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Food Insecurity: Understanding local delivery, impact and innovation in the North East Riding (2021) [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Over 6 in 10 independent foodbanks operate a ‘food plus’ model whereby other support is also available. Some Trussell Trust food banks also offer this extended service. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. The Trussell Trust made headlines in 2022 thanks to a deal with Deliveroo. Customers were able to donate to the charity by rounding up their bills. However, due to Deliveroo’s own payment practices, the deal was controversial. https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/20081956.trussell-trust-slammed-deal-deliveroo/ [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. The exception to this is where the level of need in a community has reduced to such an extent that this (and likely other) types of provision are no longer required, or required on a reduced scale. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. IFAN, Isle of Wight Food Waste and Food Poverty Conference, 18th November 2022, The growing need for charitable food aid and a cash first approach to food insecurity [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. https://www.trusselltrust.org/getinvolved/campaigns/ [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Source: https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/more-than-food/ [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. https://www.rsmuk.com/real-economy/economic-voice/cost-of-living-crisis-likely-to-last-until-second-half-of-2023 [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. A recommendation in Food vulnerability during COVID-19. Local responses to household food insecurity across the UK during COVID-19 (September 2020 – September 2021) An analysis of experiences from 14 local areas from around the UK and recommendations for future policy and practice appendix Katy Gordon, Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Simon Shaw and Rachel Loopstra [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Inspired by the Craven Food Partnership. Source Stronger Communities Shaping the Future part 2 (2020). “Importantly, the manager of the Foodbank is very knowledgeable about the causes of food insecurity, and once the initial emergency food provision channels were established and working well, she helped us to appreciate the underlying causes of food insecurity and connected us to the established organisations and networks on this topic, out of which Craven Food Partnership was born.” [↑](#endnote-ref-32)