## Foodbank Use

# In Rushmoor





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## Introduction

This research aims to understand foodbank use in Rushmoor and gain insight into the reasons behind food crisis. The study also looks ahead to planned welfare reform. As an organisation Citizens Advice supports welfare reform and its aim to simplify the benefits system while helping individuals gain secure work. It is important to plan ahead and look to mitigate potential risks and negative impacts of new policy. Anticipating the effects of Universal Credit is key to allow us to adapt our advice service and to allow us to make recommendations to other local organisations. By reviewing local data, we can establish particular problems faced by Rushmoor residents, and make specific local proposals.

Earlier in the year, we released research exploring welfare reform and low income working families in Rushmoor. We raised concerns continued benefit freezes, planned tax credits reductions and full Universal Credit roll out (scheduled in Rushmoor for April 2018), could increase the vulnerability of low income working families in Rushmoor to debt, rent arrears and household deprivation. Risks identified included the ability of families to cope with new systems, gain digital access, adapt to increased budgeting pressures, and cope with income reductions or income shocks caused by delays, sanctions or conditionality.

Full Universal Credit roll out is now taking place across the country. Nationally Citizens

Advice reports many households successfully apply for the new benefit, but that
households without the buffer of savings are being pushed into debt, rent and council tax
arrears and hardship due to the minimum 6-week wait for first payments.<sup>ii</sup>

The Trussell Trust is reporting increased foodbank demand in areas of full Universal Credit roll out.<sup>iii</sup> By 2022, 9000 households in Rushmoor are predicted to be receiving Universal Credit.<sup>iv</sup> A potential greater vulnerability to food crisis is a local concern for Rushmoor residents.

## **Key findings**

- Foodbank referrals are made by a wide range of organisations in Rushmoor. Ninetythree agencies made referrals in 2016/17. Schools, charities, NHS services, churches and Rushmoor Borough Council make significant numbers of referrals.
- Benefit changes and benefit delays are primary reasons identified by many referral agencies.
- Interviews, case studies and client data illuminate the complexity of benefit issues.
- Benefit transitions, sanctions and delays in payments make households vulnerable to food crisis.
- As we move towards Universal Credit, action needs to be taken to help residents avoid food crisis by offering
  - 1) access to quick benefit advice that helps them resolve simper benefit queries and
  - 2) to longer term support to help them confront more complex decisions or outcomes that impact their future, wellbeing and financial security.
- Can more support be offered to parents facing food crisis, for example during school holidays, when children are not able to access free school meals and funding for essentials such as nappies.

## **Research Aims & Methodology**

#### **Aims**

- 1. Understand in more detail foodbank use in Rushmoor
- 2. Explore relationship between food crisis and the benefit system
- 3. Consider ways to support clients and local families facing food crisis

#### Methodology

#### Report combines:

- a) 2016/17 statistics from Farnborough Foodbank Trussell Trust and referral data
- b) Farnborough Foodbank staff and client interviews
- c) Citizens Advice Rushmoor client data and case studies

## **Background**

#### **National Data**

Between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, the Trussell Trust network gave 1,182,954 three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis compared to 1,109,309 in 2015-16. In 2016/17 436,938 of those parcels went to children.  $^{\lor}$ 

The Trussell Trust identifies low income, benefit delays and benefit changes as most frequent primary reasons for foodbank use. vi

Joint research from Oxford University and the Trussell Trust released in June 2017, surveyed 400 households across 18 foodbanks, key findings included:

- Lone parents and their children made up the largest number of people receiving help.
- Single male households were the most common household type.
- Half of households surveyed included someone with a disability (compared to population data, three times the national average for low-income households).
- 2 in 5 foodbank users received ESA.
- 1 in 6 households had someone in work or receiving income from employment work was part-time or insecure.
- Half of households reported unsteady incomes, whether working or on benefits.
- One third were waiting on a benefit application or payment recently applied for, for the majority they had been waiting between 2-6 weeks.
- Households faced extreme financial vulnerability. All food bank users had an income well below the population threshold for low income in the previous month, 16% no income at all.
- 78% of the households were severely food insecure (skipping meals or going without eating in the past 12 months). The majority experienced chronic food insecurity, happening every month or almost every month.
- Food bank users had multiple forms of destitution, 50% had gone without heating for more than 4 days in the past 12 months, 1 in 5 had slept rough in past year.

## **Foodbanks and Universal Credit**

The Trussell Trust publication "Early Warning Signs and Universal Credit (2017)" reported in areas of full Universal Credit roll out to single people, couples and families the Trust have seen an 16.85% increase in referrals for emergency food, more than double the national average of 6.64%. They warn that the 6-week waiting period before a first payment can have serious consequences for debt, mental health, rent arrears and eviction as well as food bank demand. They found effects could last after people receive their Universal Credit payments, as bills and debts had piled up. Their research found navigating the online system was difficult for people struggling with computers or unable to afford telephone helplines. They also gave warnings, that while they work hard in areas of roll out to provide food for more than two visits, they are concerned about the extra pressure Universal Credit roll out will put on food donation stocks, volunteer time and emotional welfare.

#### Quotes from foodbanks:

"At the foodbank we have seen a 67% increase in clients since Universal Credit started here in October 2016. The volume of work, hours in time volunteers are having to commit, and the emotional toll of seeing and listening to clients in real distress is hard to express. For foodbanks who struggle to find volunteers, have little warehouse space or unreliable donations of food – we do not know how they are going to cope."

"Due to the demand since the austerity measures came in and more recently with Universal Credit, our local foodbank has had to take on more storage units to support our residents, which the London Borough of Sutton are funding as the council cannot afford this voluntary provision to end, as this would have a severe effect on our local welfare provision."

## **Our Findings**

#### **Farnborough Foodbank Data**

Rushmoor is supported by Farnborough Foodbank. Statistics released for 2016/17 report 3089 three-day emergency food supplies were given to people in crisis by Farnborough Foodbank, an increase from 2,843 in 2015/16. Rushmoor provides more food parcels than neighbouring areas. Farnborough Foodbank referrals represent 14% of emergencies food supplies for Hampshire.

48% of Farnborough Foodbank's three-day emergencies supplies in 2016/17 were given to children.

Table 1. Farnborough Foodbank and neighbouring areas - Number of three-day emergency food supplies in the 2016/17 financial year.

Foodbank	Adults	% of total	Children	% of total	Total
Farnham	709	53%	622	47%	1331
Hart	599	65%	320	35%	919
Farnborough	1606	52%	1483	48%	3089
Alton	366	56%	290	44%	656

From April 2016 to March 2017 - Stats supplied by Trussell Trust 21/07/17

Farnborough Foodbank uses a voucher system and works with local agencies. Referral agencies issue vouchers to those they feel are struggling to put food on the table and offer long-term support.

The data used in the following section is provided by Farnborough Foodbank (run by the Trussell Trust) and refers to the twelve months from April 2016 to April 2017 inclusive.

Food parcels referrals came from 93 agencies. RBC Housing was the single biggest referral agency in 2016/17 – issuing vouchers that fed 276 people, representing 9% of supplies provided. Grouping referrals by body/agency type - schools made referrals for 19% of people fed, charities 18%, NHS 13%, Churches 9%, RBC 9%.

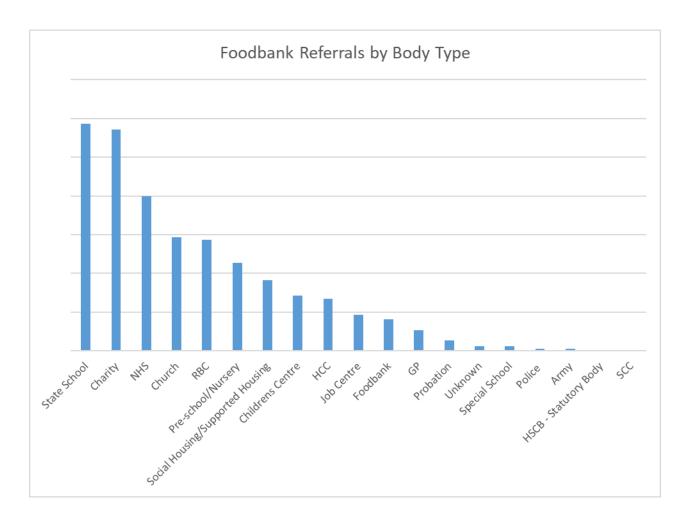


Figure 1. Referral Bodies by Type

#### **Charities - Focus**

The graph below shows the range of charities making foodbank referrals in Rushmoor.

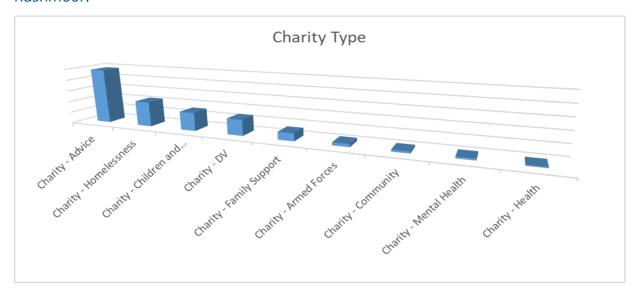


Figure 2. Referrals by Charity Type

#### At the Foodbank

Once a voucher is issued by a referral agency, it needs to be taken to a foodbank collection centre. Centres offer a cafe environment and non-judgemental support from trained volunteers.

Farnborough Foodbank has two collection centres for foodbank clients, running at specified times. <sup>ix</sup> If an emergency food parcel is needed outside of opening hours, referral agencies have a limited supply of parcels they can issue directly.

Farnborough Foodbank records crisis types and identifies the most common crisis type for each referral agency.

Table 2 is a count of the "most common crisis type" for each referral agency (base 90).

Table 3 is a count of the most common crisis type for referral agencies who issued vouchers that fed 10 or more people in year 2016-17 (base 49).

The data is courtesy of the Farnborough foodbank, run by the Trussell Trust.

Table 2. Base 90

Most Common Crisis Type All Referral Agencies	No. of Agencies	%
Benefit changes	28	31%
Benefit delays	22	24%
Low income	19	21%
Sickness / ill health	5	6%
Child holiday meals	5	6%
Homeless	4	4%
Debt	4	4%
Other	2	2%
Delayed wages	1	1%

Table 3. Base 49

Most Common Crisis Type	No of Agencies	%
10+ People Fed Referral Agencies		
Benefit changes	19	39%
Benefit delays	15	31%
Low income	8	16%
Child holiday meals	4	8%
Debt	1	2%
Delayed wages	1	2%

In both tables, benefit changes and benefit delays are the most significant crisis types. Low income is also significant, health and school holiday meals.



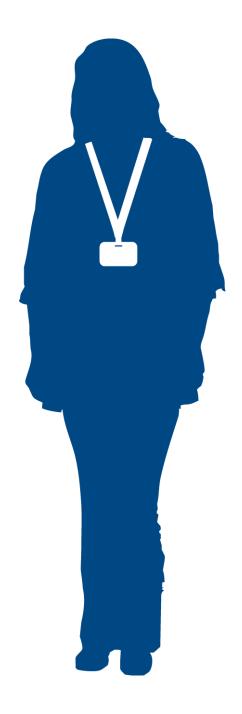
#### **Interviews with Farnborough Foodbank Trussell Trust Staff**

#### Volunteer Interviews

Over a few weeks in August interviews were conducted with foodbank volunteers at the Aldershot and Farnborough distribution centres on the reasons people were using foodbanks and the challenges the foodbanks faced in Rushmoor. This is a summary of their responses:

Almost all volunteers interviewed identified benefit delays as one of the most common reason for foodbank use. Other issues identified were debt, homelessness, and low income.

Volunteers also pointed out that although often cases involved people in perpetual crises due to factors such as these, many users are also simply those who were leading perfectly normal lives but have lost their job or partner and have "fallen on hard times".



Additionally, the problem of large families living on low incomes was identified as a cause for some users to rely on foodbanks, which may be linked to the introduction of the Benefit Cap and limits on levels of benefit paid to larger families.

When asked about other agencies, volunteers were satisfied that all agencies that made referrals to foodbanks were following the same voucher process, and addressing the problems the clients had before recommending them to the foodbank.

Volunteers were asked if there had been changes in the way the foodbank operated in the recent past. One way volunteers identified in terms of a change was the improved ability and confidence of volunteers to meet the needs of clients since the opening of the foodbanks.

Additionally link days and conferences were mentioned, at which foodbank volunteers shared their experiences and learned from one another. Another change in Rushmoor is that there has been a reduction in the use of foodbanks over the last two years, resulting in Rushmoor donating some of its food to foodbanks in areas where they are short of donations.

When asked what the main challenges were that the foodbank is currently facing, volunteers were quick to identify that the number of volunteers is too low. They also said that although they have faced problems with people abusing the service, they are finding it increasingly easy to identify and deal with these rare cases. Worryingly volunteers also identified a lack of supplies for babies (nappies etc).

When asked about Universal Credit, volunteers identified that few people had come in who were applying for or receiving this benefit. This is to be expected as the roll out has barely begun in Rushmoor. Those people who had come in however, had been experiencing delays and problems receiving benefits.

The problems Universal Credit may cause are a serious future concern for volunteers, due to the minimum 6 week waiting time before payment, alongside sanctions and other issues identified. Volunteers expect a "rush of people" if Universal Credit is rolled out in its current state across Rushmoor.

Volunteers were also asked their views on the welfare system and its impact on foodbanks. Some suggested inviting MPs to foodbanks, while others suggested that legislation was brought in to outlaw food scarcity and prevent the "humiliation" people often feel when relying on charities for support. Ideas such as improvements for "fitness to work" tests, and more frequent benefit payments to help with budgeting.

#### **Client Interviews from Farnborough Foodbank Trussell Trust**

We also interviewed clients at the food bank. Below are some case studies of foodbank clients taken from these interviews.

- 1. White British male, living alone, recovering from a broken back and a brain haemorrhage. Was referred to the foodbank by the Vine Centre in Aldershot. Was his first time at a foodbank, had previously held a well-paying job but had had to quit due to his health problems and lost his partner around the same time. He visited the foodbank due to a delay in his benefit payments. Has missed more than ten meals in the last month and was low on general hygiene products. He stated that he was likely to need the foodbank again and was concerned with staying warm this winter. He also said he would find more budgeting help useful. He stated that he would have found more support useful but had had difficulty accessing mental health support.
- 2. White British male, living alone and suffering from MS. Found out about the foodbank through his church and got a referral from his parole officer. He was at the foodbank due to a delay in his benefit payment. He had missed between 6 and 10 meals in the last month and stated he was low on essentials other than food. He was concerned that he would not be able to afford his bills and the costs he would incur through moving house. He said he would find extra budgeting help useful although he had found the help provided by the probation service useful. When asked what would be most helpful to him in terms of improving his overall situation, he replied that he used to be a plasterer, and nothing would help him more than having a job again.
- 3. White British woman, living alone. She had left her abusive partner and was struggling to find work. Having lost her phone she was unable to reply to a text from the Job Centre and received a sanction, leaving her without income and forcing her to come to the food bank.

#### Citizens Advice Rushmoor Foodbank Client Data

Between April 2016 and March 2017 Citizens Advice Rushmoor recorded 99 foodbank advice codes to 83 different clients. This suggests relatively low rates of clients requesting multiple vouchers.

#### Citizens Advice Rushmoor Foodbank Clients 2016/17 - Profile Data

Clients with food bank advice codes at Citizens Advice Rushmoor were of working age, with highest numbers in 30 – 54 age bracket. 55% of the clients were male. 55% were recorded as either having a long-term health condition or as disabled. White British was the most frequent ethnicity.

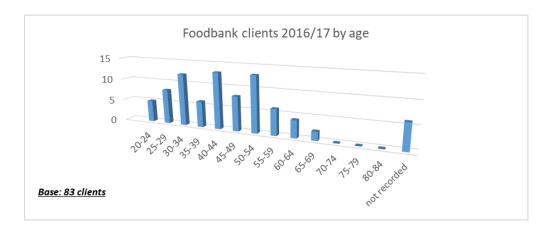


Figure 3. Foodbank Clients by Age

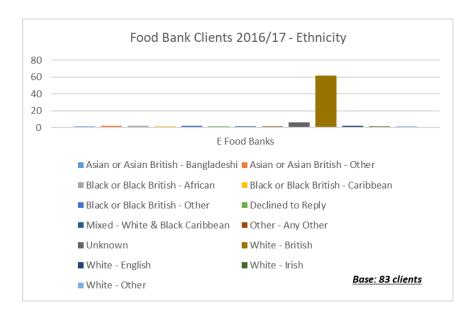


Figure 4. Foodbank Clients by Ethnicity

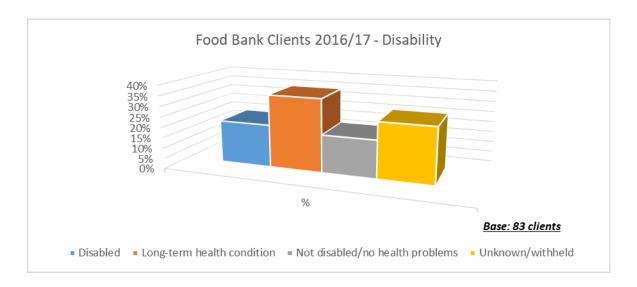


Figure 5. Foodbank Clients by Ability

#### Food Bank Clients - What other issues do they receive advice on?

Database records for clients with food bank advice codes were reviewed over 6 months. In this time period, 40 clients contacted Citizens Advice Rushmoor regarding food bank vouchers. 36 of those clients (90%) received advice on other issues in the surrounding months.

4 in 5 received benefit advice.

1 in 2 received debt advice.

1 in 4 received housing advice.

Clients often had multiple and overlapping issues.

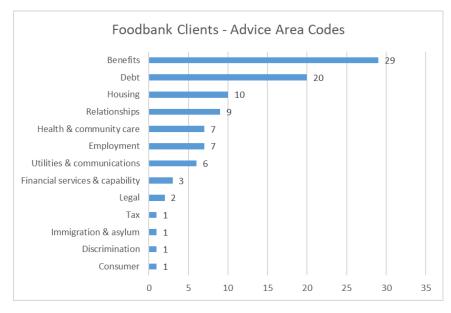


Figure 6. Base 36

#### Breaking advice codes down further:

Benefits - 14 clients visited and received advice on ESA, 9 PIP and 8 housing benefit.

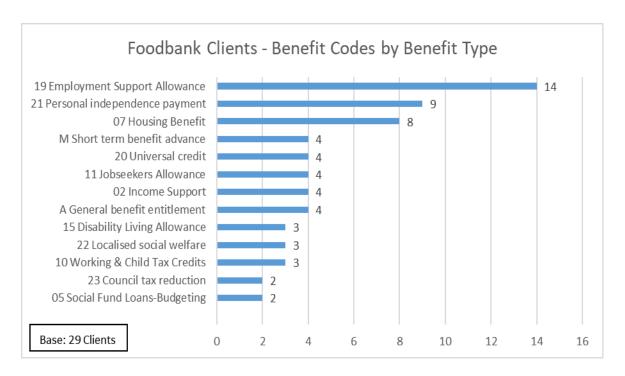


Figure 7. Benefit Codes by Type

10 clients, received advice on challenging a benefit decision. 5 received advice on benefit sanctions.

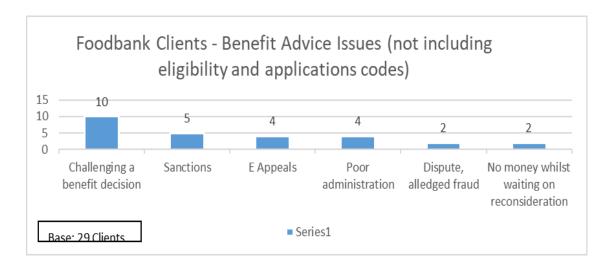


Figure 8. Benefit Advice Issues

#### **Debt & Housing**

Debt advice included rent arrears, fuel, council tax, loans and utility debts. 14 out of 20 debt clients received support on dealing with repayments.



Figure 9. Base 20



Figure 10. Debt L3 Codes

Advice was given to clients on dealing with actual and threatened homelessness.

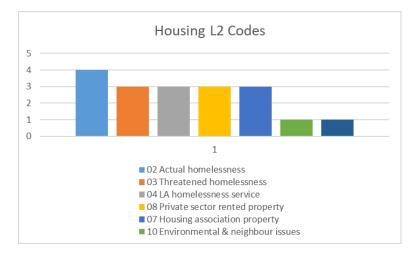


Figure 11. Housing L2 Codes

## **Our Client Stories**

From case notes, we have been able to give details of the reasons why our clients were using the foodbank.

**Client 1 – Low Income/Debt** - Client a single man, receiving ESA and PIP with a chronic health condition. He explained to his adviser he had not visited for a year to request a food parcel, but his bills have risen and they have got on top of him. He accepted future help with budgeting and an appointment was made for him to return. A 3-day emergency supply was given from Citizens Advice supplies, as the foodbank is closed over weekends.

Client 2 – Benefit Change - Client, a single man, suffers with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. He lives in Social Housing. Client received Incapacity Benefit for many years and transitioned to ESA. At his most recent review he was awarded 0 points and his ESA stopped. He has had no income and has no savings. The client said he wanted to try working, although he felt concerned about how many hours he could do and impact on his health. He has spoken to his GP, who was happy to provide client with sicknotes due to his long-term health condition. He had a small overdraft and credit card bill, but was concerned debts could quickly escalate. He is within the time period to appeal his ESA decision.

The client visited Citizens Advice for a food parcel and advice, and asked if he should apply for Universal Credit or Jobseekers Allowance. The Citizens Advice adviser made it very clear to client that if he applies for Universal Credit he will have to wait 6 weeks, with only one advance payment available that will need to be paid back.



[Aside - There was a concern that Universal Credit would not provide a stable income for this client. Over and above the 6-week wait, the client's claimant commitment would need to take into account his health condition, or face long sanction periods. A lack of flexibility or unrealistic claimant commitments, increases risk of sanctions for clients leading to hardship, rent arrears, debt and poor mental health. ESA indicators needed to be carefully reviewed with client, to consider if an appeal and a request for the work related ESA activity group is a better way forward for this client to transition into work.]

Client was issued with a food voucher to take to Farnborough Foodbank.

Client 3 – Benefit Delays - Client and her partner suffer mental health issues and have moved in together. This is a change in their household circumstances. Client and partner both receive ESA, client also receives DLA. Client has poor physical health and is cared for by her new partner. Her partner was recently turned down for PIP. Client had to complete an ESA50 work capability form. Client received help with her form from Citizens Advice, but had initially waited to be helped by her housing association. DWP had to be contacted to explain the reasons for delay. Client was required to provide information on change of circumstances in their household. Due to her lack of confidence, client wanted the paperwork to be checked by the Wellbeing Café. This caused further delays and impacted payments. The changes to their household, assessments and declined applications meant the client and her partner had been experiencing instability in their income for a substantial period of time and already had two food parcels. The foodbank said they could only have one more. The client has digestive problems and had not been able to eat much from the food parcel.

A delay in their joint ESA payment caused real hardship for the couple, they had totally run out of money and food. They came to Citizens Advice to find out if they could get money to buy food the client could eat. The adviser rang the ESA helpline and confirmed the client would receive their first "joint" payment and back dated money owed on the following Thursday. The adviser requested an advance payment to help couple with their immediate situation. DWP said they would ring the client the next day to tell them the outcome of the request.

#### **Universal Credit and Foodbank Referrals**

There is a concern that the switch to Universal Credit, due for full rollout in Rushmoor in 2018, will substantially increase the demand for food parcels.

Currently only single claimants are placed on Universal Credit in Rushmoor, but already, problems are beginning to manifest themselves.

Client 4 – 6 Week Wait - Client had a 6 week wait for her first Universal Credit payment. She was struggling to repay debts. Client suffers from mental illness, and she became extremely anxious about a debt she owed and spent all the money she had, making a repayment. This left her with no money for food. When the client came into Citizens Advice she had not eaten for 3 days.

Client 5 – Sanctions – Client came to
Citizens Advice as he had received a threemonth sanction on Universal Credit for not
meeting his job search conditions. He had
been declined for a hardship payment.
Client did not know how he was going to
cope. He had no money for food, toiletries
or essentials such as milk or bread.

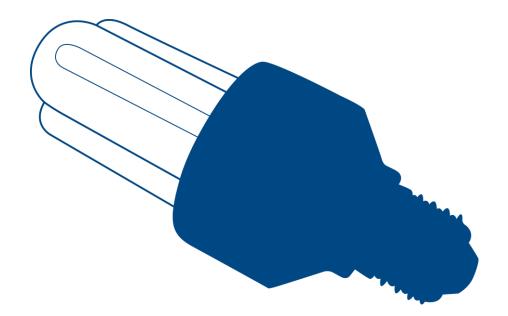


## **Conclusions**

- Foodbank referrals are being made by a wide range of organisations in Rushmoor. 93 different agencies made referrals in 2016/17. Schools, local charities, NHS services (often in Mental Health support), churches and Rushmoor Borough Council make significant numbers of referrals.
- Benefit changes and benefit delays are primary reasons identified by many of these referral agencies. Schools and children services also often identified low income or child holiday meals as a reason for referral.
- Case studies, interviews and client data illuminate the complexity of benefit issues, often heightened when mental health issues are present.
- Transitions between benefits can make households vulnerable to food crisis. This has implications for the transition to Universal Credit. A sudden drop in income can be extremely difficult to recover from. It can be hard for people to understand the options ahead, know if there are grounds for appealing decisions or fully appreciate the future implications of a change of benefit entitlement. Time limits on appeals can make it difficult to go back and resolve an issue action needs to be taken at the time.
- Changes in circumstances, applications for benefits, reviews and sanctions can
  bring great uncertainty and worry to clients as well as real hardship. People
  who lack confidence, skills or resources are at greater risk of not meeting DWP
  requirements, or causing delays to their own applications if they miss deadlines,
  can fail to take action or wait to receive support from advice agencies.
- Disabilities and long-term health conditions are prominent among Citizens
   Advice Rushmoor clients requesting food parcels.

#### A number of questions arise from these findings:

- Are referral agencies able to offer or refer to specialist benefit advice needed to resolve delays or support individuals through transitions?
- Are individuals being supported by agencies to take proactive steps to resolve benefit delays/issues? What might lie behind an individual's "benefit delay"? Is there a lack of communication, resources, missing paperwork? Could this be resolved by a simple phone call and prevent weeks of hardship, anxiety and food deprivation?
- Universal Credit with online claims, how can referral agencies help clients resolve benefit issues quickly and smoothly? Is more online access needed locally?
- When an individual is forced to transition or apply for a new benefit are sufficient mentoring resources available? How are individuals being helped to make important decisions about their future? How are vulnerable adults, people with mental health issues or disabilities being guided through this complex process? With Universal Credit, support will be needed to ensure vulnerable individuals have appropriate conditions and realistic expectations placed upon them in claimant commitments, and to help them to avoid the risk of sanctions.



## Recommendations

Arising from our research, we make a number of recommendations for local action to help avoid the increased destitution and use of foodbanks by our residents in Rushmoor:

- Work with local agencies to establish good practice in "being pro-active with benefits" – if someone mentions a benefit delay or benefit change behind a food crisis – what immediate checks could be carried out? Action taken? Helplines called?
- Be proactive to other forms of crisis if someone is in "food crisis" this is unlikely to
  be a one-off. Explore what other forms of crisis might people be facing, linking to
  Troubled Families, Housing Trailblazer and other multi-agency initiatives. Establish
  best practice in helping people with wider issues, including opportunities to be
  proactive to risks of rent arrears, homelessness, fuel poverty and mental health,
  and building resilience for individuals.
- Produce improved information in easily shared formats, for local agencies and individuals, confirming the range of help available locally, to enable early intervention and prevent ongoing crises.
- Access to independent "mentoring" for more vulnerable clients to help people
  work through more complex benefit issues, especially related to mental and
  physical health, work, employment and realistic expectations for the future.
   Recogntion that benefit transitions are hard for people to manage without specialist
  knowledge and have huge implications for an individual's future and wellbeing.
- More support to low income families facing food crisis for example over school
  holidays and for essentials such as nappies. High numbers of children are receiving
  emergency food if this is related to school holidays, what initiatives could be put in
  place to support parents (e.g. lunch clubs).

# Free, confidential advice. Whoever you are.

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We value diversity, champion equality and challenge discrimination and harassment.

We're here for everyone.



## citizensadvicerushmoor.org.uk

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Company limited by guarantee. Registered number 4354628 England.

Registered office: Elles Hall, Meudon Avenue, Farnborough, Hants, GU14 7LE

## References

"Welfare Reform and Working Families" (2017) (http://citizensadvicerushmoor.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Welfare-Reform-and-Working-Families-Online.pdf)

iv Citizens Advice Rushmoor Constituency Projection – Fixing Universal Credit Campaign last accessed 01/11/17

vi "Primary Reasons for Referral to Trussell Trust Foodbanks" - https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/

vii Early Warnings Universal Credit and Foodbanks https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/04/Early-Warnings-Universal-Credit-and-Foodbanks.pdf

viii Fig. 3 - South East - County breakdown for period 2016/17

County	Adults	Children	Total
Berkshire	6,698	3,896	10,594
East Sussex	13,652	7,965	21,617
Hampshire	13,020	8,728	21,748
Isle of Wight	2,836	1,978	4,814
Kent	10,699	6,932	17,631
Oxfordshire	2,474	2,048	4,522
Surrey	8,652	5,679	14,331
West Sussex	7,429	4,212	11,641
Totals	65,460	41,438	106,898

Stats supplied by Trussell Trust 21/07/17.

ii https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/policy/policy-research-topics/welfare-policy-research-surveys-and-consultation-responses/welfare-policy-research/universal-credit-and-debt/

iii https://www.trusselltrust.org/2017/04/25/uk-foodbank-use-continues-rise/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>v</sup> Trussell Trust (https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/)

### $^{\mathrm{i}\mathrm{x}}$ Trussell Trust Farnborough – Collection Points and Opening times

St Christopher's Church	ADDRESS
Mon 12:00 - 14:30	55 Cove Road,
Wed 12:00 - 14:30	Farnborough,
Fri 12:00 - 14:30	Hants, GU14 0EX
The New Testament Church	ADDRESS
Tue 13:00 - 14:30	83 Victoria Road
Thu 13:00 - 14:30	GU11 1SH
Foodbank Store (Warehouse - only for Organisations collections)	ADDRESS
Mon 09:30 - 14:30	Browning Barracks
Tue 09:30 - 14:30	Alison Road
Wed 09:30 - 14:30	Aldershot
Thu 09:30 - 14:30	GU11 2BU

