

Appendix 2 - Emergency Food Relief in Stockton Borough

1. Introduction

In 2015, Stockton and District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS), with support from Stockton Council, started a project to assess and address the problem of food poverty in Stockton. This included a number of activities:

- survey of emergency food relief service in the borough
- establishment of advice sessions in food bank outlets
- developing systems to collect consistent and reliable information about food bank use
- establishing a steering group to co-ordinate food bank services
- social policy work linked to emergency support

A survey of provision of Emergency Food Relief services in Stockton Borough was carried out in March 2015. A summary of this report was made available to various Council services and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) agencies. The survey found that there were ten organisations providing some services, with nine offering food supplies and five providing hot meals.

2.2 Advice Services

Welfare advice sessions were established at two food bank outlets at Billingham and Stockton (Hebron Church). This involved a trained SDAIS Adviser based at the food bank to provide confidential welfare advice to users. The service was optional for food bank users. In addition, systems at SDAIS main office in Bath Lane were revised so that all clients requesting a food bank referral had an interview with an adviser before a referral voucher was provided.

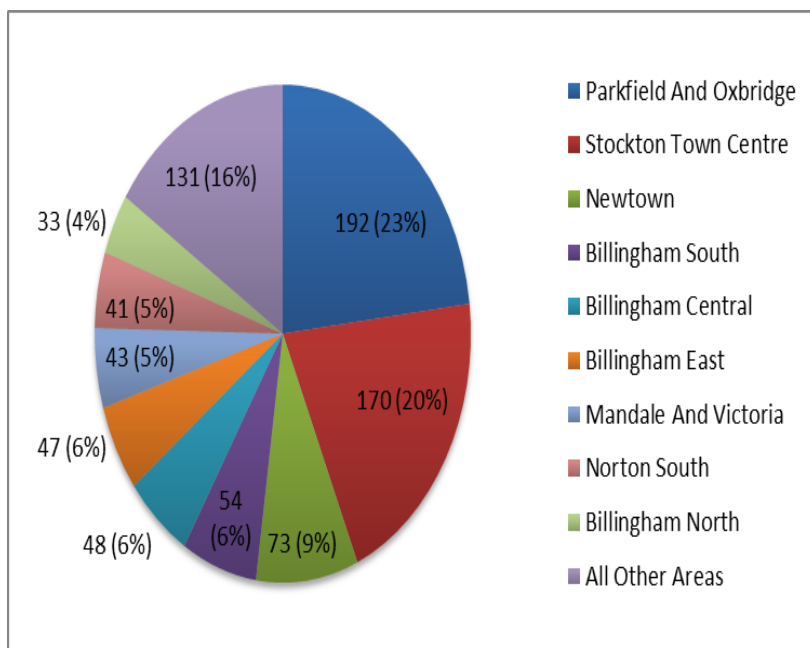
In the period January to November 2015, a total of 1371 people were recorded as having visited one of the three main food banks in Stockton, and 397 (29%) of these received advice from an SDAIS Adviser. The general subject area of advice provided to these 397 clients is shown below.

The largest enquiry areas for food bank clients was welfare benefits, with 50% of enquiries being benefit issues, followed by financial capability (budgeting/banking) with 17% and debt (13%).

Whilst the advice sessions set up at the food banks were intended to provide advice to new clients who were coming direct from referral agencies where welfare advice had not been considered or provided, the appointments have been taken up by an increasing proportion of 'returning' clients – i.e. people who have seen the Adviser at the food bank and who need on-going advice and support to resolve crises or long standing problems. This is because clients either have multiple issues that cannot be resolved within a single appointment with the adviser, or they have a complex issue that requires multiple interventions/inputs of advice and advocacy over a period of time. There are currently 92 agencies or separate teams/departments that can provide food bank vouchers. The majority of referrals are from SDAIS, Bridges and Stockton Council.

The consistent use of a common recording system has provided information about the profile of food bank users and where they come from:

- most food bank users are aged 25-44 (59%), with 16% aged between 16-24 and less than 2% aged over 65
- over half of food bank clients were single (57%) and a further 24% were households with dependent children
- 55% of food bank clients were male
- 7% of food bank clients were from black and minority ethnic communities
- the ward where food bank clients live (shown below)



Home Ward of food bank Clients
- 2015

SDAIS has co-ordinated quarterly meetings for a small number of agencies providing food relief or referrals to food banks. The steering group has enabled better co-ordination of services between different agencies, better sharing of resources and sharing of information about potential new resources. The group has also led to agencies working together to prepare and submit a multi-agency funding bid to develop the welfare support services delivered at food banks.

Survey of Food Bank users.

A survey of food bank clients was carried out by a Teesside University Intern in 2015. The survey found that the primary reason for attending the food bank was linked to changes or delays in Welfare Benefits. Two thirds of survey users (66%) said that advice on money/benefits was needed to prevent them having to use food banks again in the future. There was also 25% of respondents who said that getting paid work was the solution. The survey also collected a number of case studies from interviews with people using the food bank.

Summary

The food bank project has led to some significant developments over the last year however, the project has also identified a number of areas where further work would be of benefit in developing and delivering effective support to people in crisis.

- Welfare Advice sessions at food banks play an important role in identifying and then starting to deal with those matters that have precipitated the “crisis” and subsequent attendance at the food bank. However, these advice sessions at current frequency and duration will, for the majority of cases, not effectively identify and address the underlying problems or issues that have often been present for some time and which are the real reason why people had to access the food bank. These issues include:
 - complex problems about welfare benefits and clients lack of ability or confidence to work with the Welfare Benefit system requirements and to challenge where appropriate
 - long term low income and lack of any financial “cushion”
 - lifestyle and attitude decision and choices, especially about money matters
 - lack of training and employment opportunities and lack of incentive or motivation to progress training or employment
 - lack of financial capability skills or confidence
- The model that’s needs developing is to provide a more individual, long term “case-management” approach.
- There needs to be more work with referral agencies to prevent automatic referral of people to food banks without a fuller assessment of their needs and current support systems

SDAIS Recommendations

1. Maintain and Expand the Steering Group

The establishment of a food bank steering committee has brought benefits from improved information and resource sharing, co-ordination of services, planned developments that avoid duplication and targeted to need, and joint funding applications based on partnership models of working.

The effective co-ordination of emergency support services and integration of services could be further enhanced by including other agencies, particularly Stockton Council Welfare Assistance , Tees Emergency Relief Fund and other food bank providers. This group could also provide more effective social policy evidence and work to identify the causes of crisis and work at a local and national level to instigate change. It is proposed that SDAIS continue to co-ordinate these meetings and expand membership.

This can be achieved through current SDAIS funding/resources.

2. Maintain and expand the Common Data Recording System

This will enable comprehensive data to continue to be collected about who is using emergency food relief services and help with better targeting at those clients who need help the most. The Recording System should also be extended to other food banks and possibly SBC Welfare Assistance team. The proposal is to meet costs through existing

funding/resources but this is dependent on the number of agencies that become part of this initiative.

3. Maintain Welfare Advice Sessions at food bank Outlets

This will enable some people in crisis to continue get the proper assessment of their welfare needs and in some cases to provide the welfare advice they need to tackle the underlying causes of their situation. However, the advice sessions should be targeted to new clients only and repeat clients should be channelled to other SDAIS or Welfare Support agencies. Advice provision of 2 sessions per week could be maintained by SDAIS through existing resources.

4. Review of Referral Systems into food banks

Whilst the wide range of agencies providing referrals to food banks means access is widened, it also creates problems of consistency and the extent to which underlying welfare problems are being addressed. A revised referral system which incorporates a holistic welfare assessment as part of the referral process would ensure that the cause of the problem was identified and acted on. This will have resource implications for referral agencies but can be progressed through the Steering Group.

5. Provision of Long Term Welfare Advice and Advocacy to people in Crisis

The project has identified a need for longer term advice and advocacy support for people in crisis. One proposal is to create a team of trained volunteers who can provide this support on a one-to-one long term basis with individuals and families in crises. The proposal is to recruit and train 30 Volunteer Advocates who will combine welfare benefit and financial capability advice with on-going advocacy support. These advocates will be linked to those vulnerable people who have long term welfare issues that need to be addressed before they will no longer need to use the food bank or other emergency welfare services. The detailed proposal is at appendix ?

Emergency Food Relief – Advice and Advocacy Support Proposal

Objective

To provide welfare advice and advocacy support to people in crises who have repeatedly accessed emergency food relief in order to address the underlying problems and remove the need for them to access crises support in future.

Need

In the period January to November 2015, 1,371 people visited a food bank in Stockton.

Of these, 225 (16%) made more than 3 visits to the food bank during this period.

Evaluation and interviews with food bank users have identified key reasons why people are in crisis and have had to attend food banks, including:

- unstable income due to welfare benefit problems and changes (including sanctions, delays in payment and benefit refusals)
- unstable income due to poor financial management
- debt
- lack of employment and training

Welfare advice service provision at the food bank cannot provide the on-going support and advocacy required to address the above on a long term basis due to the need to provide crisis support for new users.

Proposal

The proposal is to recruit, train, support and supervise a team of Volunteer Advocates who will provide long term welfare advice and advocacy support to those clients who are repeatedly accessing a food bank (3+ visits). The volunteers will:

- provide welfare advice on benefits, debt, housing and associated matters
- provide financial capability advice and support
- provide practical advice and advocacy support to ensure individual welfare is developed and sustained. This will include:
 - assisting clients to understand and engage with the welfare benefit system and to resolve welfare benefit problems, including attending with clients to progress claims, resolve disputes and helping client to understand and meet benefit requirements. This is particularly important as current and future welfare reforms are likely to increase the numbers or people who fall into crisis because they are not effectively engaging with the Benefits system
 - home based support to develop and integrate financial capability within the individuals lifestyle and needs.
- Provide support to access existing training and employment support services

The Volunteers will complete the following nationally recognised or accredited training:

- Level 3 Legal Advice Studies or equivalent NACAB Certificate Programme
- Financial Capability Training (Level 1 or 2)
- Advocacy Training (Level 1)
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The project will recruit and train 30 volunteers, who will then be matched with a client who has accessed food bank support on at least 3 occasions. The volunteer will draw up an Action Plan with clients to address the underlying problems that have caused them to have to access the food bank. The clients will agree to work with the advocate/project and future food bank support will be dependent upon active client involvement.

The volunteers will be:

- screened using existing SDAIS procedure, including DBS and references
- supported and supervised by experienced SDAIS Manager
- regularly updated and trained to ensure advice is accurate and correct

Outputs

- 30 Volunteers recruited and trained (this model would allow for volunteers to operate in a more holistic and flexible manner compared to current SDAIS Volunteer Advisers, and will also enable existing volunteers from a variety of agencies to develop their skills and knowledge and encourage cross- agency working.)
- 120 individuals or families receive long term advice and advocacy support to address the welfare problems that have led to crises
- 120 families receive financial capability training and support
- on-going monitoring evaluation of outcomes, including:
 - future use of food banks and other crises support services
 - number who start training or employment
 - skills and confidence in financial management

Outcomes

- 90 families report not having to access food bank in future due to improved welfare circumstances
- 30 individuals start training or employment
- 90 families report improved financial wellbeing/skill/confidence
- Increased evidence of the barriers to effective client engagement with benefit agencies and 2 reports on proposed policy or administration improvements at local or national level

Cost

1 Full Time Training/Co-ordinator	£25,151
Management & Supervision Costs	£ to be met from existing funding
Office Overheads	£ to be met from existing funding
Travel/ Volunteer costs	£2,880
Additional Training Costs	<u>£1,800</u>
	£29,831