

Food bank usage

Commentary

The Surrey County Council Public Health team are currently undertaking a Food Access Needs Assessment which aims to understand the wider landscape of food bank and food aid provision across the county. The needs assessment is not yet completed, the following provides an update on the interim report findings.

The report has highlighted that there are 34 food banks in operation across Surrey. 26 of these are independently run whilst the remaining eight are part of the national Trussel Trust (TT) programme, operating the TT franchise model.

The role of food banks is rapidly evolving; this poses a challenge to the monitoring and evaluation of the use of food banks. At present there is no shared method of data collection or central reporting system, operating across both TT and independent food banks. Therefore, it is not possible to provide statistics on the number of food parcels provided or the nature of the crisis leading to a referral. It is hoped that the needs assessment will be able to report the number of food parcels provided during 2013/2014, and the reason for use, from wider range of food banks.

The TT franchise model does provide an online monitoring system which collates data across the Surrey TT food banks. During 2013/2014 6,787 people were fed by TT food banks, a 227% increase from 2012/2013 when 2,073 people were fed.

It is important to remember when analysing these results, these figures include repeat access and therefore it is likely a food parcel will have been received by an individual on a number of occasions. Even food banks overseen by the TT operating within the franchise model operate in very different ways. Each food bank is able to set their own referral criteria and make decisions on the amount of times a food parcel can be received by any one client.

Impact/Key Messages

- Both independent and TT food banks are rapidly increasing in numbers, not only through the creation of entirely new food banks but also through the expansion of existing food banks.
- There is a range of different food banks, many of which are expanding the range of support offered
- Many of the food banks consulted to date are looking to offer the service across multiple locations.
- TT statistics from 2013/2014 show:
 - The majority of people (2268) were fed by the Epsom and Ewell Food bank which was 33 per cent of the total people fed by the Trussel Trust Network in Surrey.
 - Three food banks based in Elmbridge Borough (Cobham area, East Elmbridge and Walton & Hersham) have fed a total of 1674 people.

- Benefit related issues were the primary reasons why people had accessed the Trussel Trust food banks, as 'Benefit delay' (26 per cent) and 'Benefit changes' (15 per cent) combined together accounted for 2772 people (41 per cent) accessing the food banks.
- 'Low income' was the second highest reason given of why people accessed the Trussel Trust Food banks with 1442 people (21 per cent).

Gaps and Response

There are many gaps which need to be considered when interpreting the data mentioned here. These include:

- Why has there has been such a sudden increase in the number of food banks across Surrey and if they are being developed in areas of need or for other reasons?
- How long food banks have been running and is there a relationship between the time running and number of food parcels given?
- Which referral agencies are referring individuals to food banks?
- What support is being provided to an individual when using a food bank?
- How common is it for an individual to receive more than three food parcels?

In response to these gaps the Public Health Team are carrying out a Food Access Needs Assessment with the following aims:

- To map existing activities to tackle food poverty in Surrey such as food banks, 'soup kitchens', etc.
- To explore the reasons why people are driven to access food banks and other food poverty activities
- To find out how people find out about/are referred to food banks e.g. which agencies refer, voucher schemes, etc.
- To examine what information people are given by food banks e.g. signposting to relevant services and further support
- To explore what additional services people attending food banks feel would be useful to support them to eat well on a low income e.g. cooking skills training, budgeting skills, etc.
- To provide recommendations on how people on low income can be better supported to enable them and their families/dependents to eat well

Predictions

It is thought that the use, expansion and development of new and existing food banks will continue to rise across Surrey as it is nationally.

The Food Access Needs Assessment recommendations will provide direction on how stakeholders can work together to ensure that clients are supported by alternative interventions so they do not become dependent on food banks.

Food Banks Needs Assessment - Next Steps

Completion by mid August

- Carry out focus group with BME groups
- Complete Survey with Food banks managers
- Complete Survey with food bank volunteers

Completion by end of August

- Analyse results and complete report.
- Send report out for consultation (welfare reform group)

Ongoing after August

Disseminate report and consider how to take forward recommendations.

Number of people given 3 days worth of emergency food by Trussell Trust foodbanks in Surrey

Foodbank	Adults	Children	Total
Caterham	62	34	96
Cobham Area	108	60	168
East Elmbridge	266	249	515
Epsom & Ewell	1289	979	2268
Farnham	781	566	1347
Runnymede	815	418	1233
Walton & Hersham	517	420	991
Woking	112	57	169
Total	4004	2783	6787

Data provided by Trussell Trust correct for 1/4/2013 – 31/3/2014

Type of crisis	Numbers Fed by type of crisis	% fed by type of crisis
Benefit changes	998	14.7
Benefit delay	1774	26.1
Child Hols Meals	204	3
Debt	595	8.7
Delayed Wages	151	2.2
Domestic Violence	165	2.4
Homeless	189	2.8
Low Income	1442	21.3
Other	466	6.9
Refused Crisis Loan	12	0.2
Refused SBTA	10	0.2
Sickness	240	3.5
Unemployment	541	8