

## **NEW FOODBANK RESEARCH SHEDS LIGHT ON WHO FACES HUNGER, WHY & FOR HOW LONG**

- **Crisis could hit anyone: food parcels were distributed to people living in all 46 wards**
- **Benefit delays were responsible for one in five referrals while benefit sanctions were responsible for 1 in 12 referrals. The duration of crisis for those sanctioned was considerably longer however**
- **1 in 5 of people affected by benefit sanctions were children**

University of Oxford and University of Chester researchers have today revealed findings from one of the most systematic and detailed studies yet conducted of people receiving emergency food in the UK.

The #stillhungry report draws on two years of detailed statistical data from West Cheshire Foodbank, part of the UK-wide Trussell Trust Foodbank Network, and makes several recommendations for practical ways in which the need for the foodbank could be reduced. Data was gathered from 5,808 household referrals to the foodbank in the 24 months between May 2014 and April 2016.

### **Key Findings:**

#### **Who faces hunger?**

- Although a large proportion of food parcels were concentrated in highly disadvantaged wards of Cheshire West and Chester, food parcels were distributed to people living in all 46 wards
- One-third of those receiving help from West Cheshire Foodbank were children
- Younger adults (aged 17-24) and working-age (aged 25-64) adults were typically referred due to problems with benefits. Older people (aged 65 and older) were more likely to seek emergency food for reasons of debt and low incomes

The report includes qualitative evidence from people referred to the foodbank in the form of short stories. Will's story is one example.

While looking for new work, Will paid to go on a chainsaw license course in Preston. Getting up at 4am to attend meant he was unable to apply for jobs, but this meant he missed the target number of jobs needed for Job Seekers Allowance and his money was stopped for two weeks. Will was then put on a mandatory work programme, but was unable to collect his money from the Post Office until 9am, so couldn't get to the programme for 7am. He was sanctioned for two months.

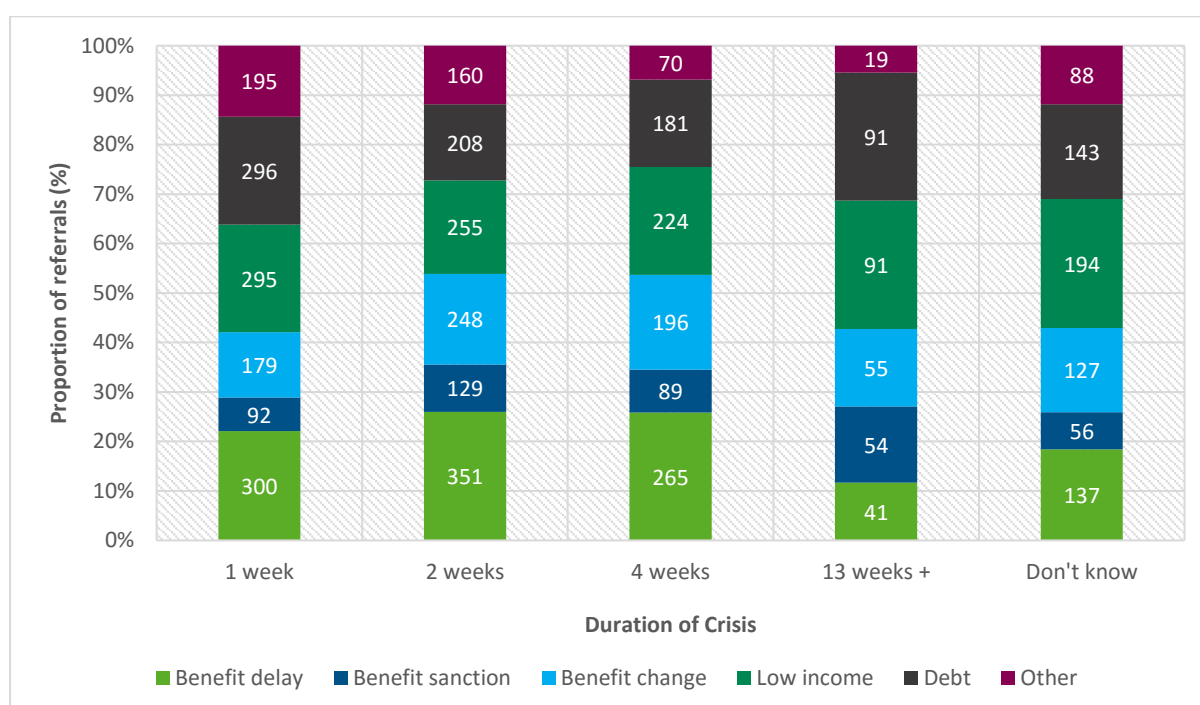
#### **Why do people face hunger?**

- **Benefit sanctions** were responsible for over 7 per cent of referrals. Of people affected by benefit sanctions, more than one in five was a child
- **Benefit changes** accounted for 14 per cent of referrals. These changes were mainly between Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), or benefits that had been reduced or stopped entirely
- One in five referrals reflected **benefit delays**, mainly to ESA and JSA
- Nearly one in five referrals was due to **low income**, and low income became increasingly prevalent over time
- **Debt** accounted for 16 per cent of referrals, often because debt repayments left people without enough money to live on

## Duration of crises:

- Crises due to benefit changes and delays typically lasted one to four weeks, while longer delays of 13 weeks or longer were less common
- The duration of crisis for people experiencing a sanction was noticeably longer than other referral reasons; the largest proportion of sanctions lasted 13 weeks or longer, while fewer sanctions lasted one week
- Debt was commonly both a long-term problem and was also responsible for crises lasting one week. This may reflect different causes of debt, where people may face long-term problems paying household bills, or alternatively experience acute problems due to debt repayments or short-term payday loans
- Many crises due to low income were short-term in nature

## Reasons for referral by estimated duration of crisis, May 2014 to April 2016



The report gives several recommendations for practical ways in which the need for a foodbank in West Cheshire can be reduced, many of which are relevant nationally. These include improved Job Centre Plus administration and service, reformed benefit sanctions policy and practice, and improved access to the local welfare assistance schemes available.

### David McAuley, CEO at The Trussell Trust said:

*“The work of The Trussell Trust’s foodbank network and sustained commitment from its volunteers has provided much-needed support for people in crisis; yet this alone will not solve the problem of hunger. Charities can be part of the solution but they cannot be the sole solution.*

*We are at a pivotal point in British politics post the EU referendum, with a new Prime Minister soon to take a seat who has an opportunity to make social justice the centrepiece of what they do. Now more than ever we must work together to ensure fewer families face poverty. There’s an opportunity for all of us to look at the body of evidence in the report, particularly on sanctions, where an alternative approach would help tackle the underlying causes of hunger.”*

**Dr Elisabeth Garratt, report author and postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Social Investigation, based at Nuffield College, Oxford University, said:**

*"Our research demonstrates the persistence of hunger in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Referrals have risen in 2016 and there is every indication that foodbanks are here to stay. One in three people receiving emergency food from West Cheshire Foodbank is a child, indicating shocking levels of poverty that are unacceptable in a country as wealthy as ours. Despite enormous commitment on the part of volunteers, the provision of emergency food cannot address the underlying and long-term causes of food poverty. We call upon the Government to take effective steps to ensure that foodbanks do not become an established part of our society."*

**Rev. Christine Jones, Chair of Trustees at West Cheshire Foodbank said:**

*"In a prosperous country, it is completely unacceptable that national policy consistently fails to respond effectively to the evidence that on-going hunger remains a reality for increasing numbers of people. In order to avoid food banks becoming a permanent part of the welfare furniture, it is critical that we all understand and act on the drivers of food poverty together."*

*Ends*

#### **Notes to Editor:**

#stillhungry report:

- Download the report here:  
<https://westcheshire.foodbank.org.uk/about/ourresearch/stillhungry/>
- Published by an authoritative coalition of academic institutions and frontline charities including The University of Oxford, The University of Chester, The Trussell Trust, Cheshire West Citizens Advice Bureau, DIAL West Cheshire (DIAL House), Chester Aid to The Homeless, The Debt Advice Network and West Cheshire Foodbank, the #stillhungry report draws on over two years of detailed statistical data, gathered from 5,808 household referrals to West Cheshire Foodbank in the 24 months between May 2014 and April 2016
- The report identifies the characteristics of people accessing emergency food in West Cheshire, their reasons for referral to food banks, how long people expected their income crisis to last and gives insight into the exact reasons that people are accessing emergency food, and how long these effects are expected to last
- It allows us to answer questions including the number of children affected by benefit sanctions, the impact of the shift to Universal Credit, types of debt that prompt people to seek emergency food, and how the length of crises varies between different reasons for referral. The researchers worked collaboratively with local advice services to put together a detailed coding system, producing findings that mirrored The Trussell Trust's statistics at a headline level but were able to provide much more information about why people required food
- Mike Steenkamp, Specialist Adviser at The Debt Advice Network said:  
*"Although local agencies are undertaking excellent work in partnership with foodbank, we urgently require the support of government if we are to begin reversing the growing demand for emergency food."*

About West Cheshire Foodbank:

- West Cheshire Foodbank is a community-run project that provides three days' emergency food supplies to people referred in crisis
- Everyone who comes to the foodbank is referred by a frontline professional, such as a Citizens' Advice worker, a children's centre or a health visitor
- In 2015-16, West Cheshire Foodbank provided 2,878 three day emergency food supplies to local people in crisis. Food supplies were received by 3,680 adults and 1,729 children
- West Cheshire Foodbank is part of the UK-wide Trussell Trust Foodbank Network. Find out more at <https://westcheshire.foodbank.org.uk/about/>

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